

21.6.93

Honegger: Judith. Sect 5 done

Hello again — and welcome again to a series of these programmes where I'm inviting you to listen to the word of God, in one of the books of the Bible, in a continuous reading spread over a number of weeks. If you're a long-term listener to these "Morning prayer" programmes, you may remember I've done this kind of thing before, as an attempt to provide you as a listener, with an opportunity to hear & listen to the Word of God, as distinct from reading it for yourself. For, as I've often noted before, hearing something read is quite a different experience from your own reading of it: are the word of God ever largely a spoken text before it got written down at all, or at least was communicated and passed on in speech long before reading & writing became ordinary, common skills. Of course we now use the familiar word "scripture", and even "bible": both of them indicating written materials, but with the emphasis on the writing rather than on the reading of them: that's more properly "lecture". But as befits radio, what I'm on about is "auditure" (if there is such a word): hearing and listening. Mostly we only hear the scriptures in short phrases or not too long bits read or proclaimed in religious worship services or study sessions: seldom, I think, in any kind of continuous reading. And that's why, from time to time, I've presented in these programmes, a 'read-through' of a number of biblical books: to give you a chance to hear & listen, and thereby (hopefully) to deepen your understanding & appreciation of these inspired words, and help you to pray from the word of God. | This time it's not a whole book that I'm going to read for you: but I don't suppose the music I began with would've been much

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of a cue — it's not much known, but it's from a 'biblical music drama' as its composer called it, first presented in 1926 in Switzerland, Honegger's home: its title, "Judith". Actually, the story of Judith, the heroine of the Old Testament book that bears her name, seems to have attracted a number of composers, according to my little reference book. In the 18th C., Vivaldi in Italy in 1716 and Thomas Arne in London in 1761 both wrote oratorios about Judith: also in England, Hubert Parry wrote an oratorio first performed in 1888 from which came the English hymn-tune known as "Repton": are there seem to've been at least two operas called after Judith^(and I think a rock-opera too). So her story must've been well-enough known: are maybe there are other dramas & musical compositions about her that have different titles: unfortunately, I haven't been able to find recordings of any of them, ... only the Honegger "Judith", which is also quite old now. But neither does it lend itself to dividing into short sections which might serve as a prayerful music-interlude in these programmes, so instead I'll be using a series of favourite English hymns for the "prayer-in-music" breaks during our reading-through of Judith, from the moment (it's in ch 8) Judith herself appears on the scene. The previous chapters of the book described Nebucadnezzar's expansion plans, and how his chief general Holofernes set about conquering the nations, ^{how Israel became frustrated for its future, with Holofernes} eventually laying siege to Bethulia where he cut off the water-supply: are how some of the leaders in Bethulia began to favour appeasement & giving in to Holofernes' forces. "The town was full of despondency". ch 7 ends. So, before the entry of Judith, let's hear ^{& pray with} this

Praise Lord
#14 3'52"

hymn "Dear Lord & Father of mankind", with the tune from Parry's 'Judith' MUSIC

From the Bk of Judith, ch 8: "Judith was informed at the time of what had happened. She was the daughter of Merari son of Ozi, son of Joseph, son of Oziel, son of Elkiab, son of Ananias, son of Sisleon, son of Raplaim, son of Ahitub, son of Elijah, son of Hilkiab, son of Eliab, son of Nathanael, son of Salerniel, son of Sarasadai, son of Israel. Her husband Manasseh, of her own tribe and family, had died at the time of the barley harvest. He was supervising the men as they bound up the sheaves in the field when he caught sunstroke and had to take to his bed. He died in Bethulia, his home town, and was buried with his ancestors in the field that lies between Dathan and Belerion. As a widow, Judith stayed inside her home for 3 yrs & 4 months. She had had an upper room built for herself on the roof. She wore sackcloth next to the skin and dressed in widow's weeds. She fasted every day of her widowhood except for the Sabbath eve, the Sabbath itself, the eve of New Moon, the feast of New Moon and the joyful festivals of the House of Israel. Now she was very beautiful, charming to see. Her husband Manasseh had left her gold & silver, menservants & maidservants, herds & land: and she lived among all her possessions without anyone finding a word to say against her, so devoutly did she fear God. Hearing how the water-shortage had demoralised the people and how they had complained bitterly to the headmen of the town, and being also told what Uzziah had said to them & how he'd given them his oath to surrender the town to the Assyrians in 5 days'

time. Judith immediately sent the serving women who ran her household to summon Chabnis and Charnis, two elders of the town. When these came in she said: "Listen to me, leaders of the people of Bethulia". MUSIC up

--- and for that,
listen again to next Monday's
"Morning Prayer"