

**HULDAH THE PROPHETESS – 2 Kings 22:1-20 – Andrea M. Rodgers**  
**Main Points with Discussion Questions**

*“Huldah? Who’s Huldah?”* Andrea’s church secretary wants to know? *“Are you sure you want to choose her?”* Andrea explains that Huldah is a female prophet in the Bible. However, just as Andrea begins to doubt her choice, a *real present-day Huldah* comes into the office where she is working! Is this just a coincidence or a sign from God? Regardless, meeting a modern Huldah convinces Andrea to introduce us to our ancient biblical sister, Huldah the prophetess.

Huldah was a prophetess. What exactly does that mean?

- Prophet/Prophetess - a biblical prophet is a person who is recognized by others as having spiritual authority to speak in the name of God. Clothed with God’s *shekinah* [the glory of divine presence], prophets deliver God’s word *for the present situation*. Of course, the divine word often has future implications. Nevertheless, prophets are not fortune-tellers; what they tell is God’s message for a specific time and place.
- *“Prophetesses serve as a mouthpiece for God,”* writes Tonya Ezra, *“quite apart from their husbands. More important than marital status or political status is the prophetess’ obedience to God’s command.”*
- Prophets in the Hebrew Bible often speak truth to power – to kings and other leaders. Huldah’s prophetic words are given to us twice in the Hebrew scriptures--2 Kings 22:15-20 and 2 Chronicles 34:22-28.

What does the Bible tell us about Huldah?

- Huldah is married to Shallum, “keeper of the wardrobe.” Was Shallum in charge of the king’s wardrobe or the vestments of the Temple priests? We can’t be sure, but either way, she would be connected to political and religious life. She resides in the newer, affluent section in the city of David [Jerusalem].
- Huldah was consulted by the High Priest, Hilkiah, and the officials of King Josiah’s court after a “book of the law” was discovered during Temple renovations. She was the authority they looked to (not the Temple’s High Priest!) in order to validate whether the scroll they found was authentically part of the Law of Moses. This means she was literate and recognized as an expert biblical scholar.
- Based on Huldah’s judgment, the recovered scroll (part of Deuteronomy) is now accepted as authoritative – as a genuine part of the Bible accepted by Jews, Christians and Muslims.
- Huldah is not alone in terms of being a biblical prophetess, though she is the only female prophet mentioned in 1 and 2 Kings. Andrea mentions other women prophets in Hebrew scripture including Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, and Esther. A New Testament example is the prophetess Anna.

### Questions for discussion

- Prior to listening to this *Pioneering Women* video, had you ever heard of Huldah? If so, what did you know? What strikes you about Huldah's story? Have you ever known a woman named Huldah?
- When we use the word "prophet" today, what is usually meant? How does the definition of a biblical prophet differ? Are there modern prophets? If so, name a person who is recognized as speaking for God.
- King Josiah reigned from 640-609 B.C.E. How hard do you think it might have been to trust a woman to authenticate a crucial religious document? Does the biblical account show reluctance to accept Huldah's authority? How do you imagine Huldah learned to read? to become what we would call a "biblical scholar?" What might this tell you about Huldah?
- Andrea mentions other women prophets in Hebrew scripture including Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, and Esther. A New Testament example is the prophetess Anna. How hard is it for women to be recognized as spiritual authorities today? Why?

### Back to the text – 2 Kings 22:1-20 – A summary

After his father's murder, Josiah became King of Judah at the advanced age of 8. He reigned for 31 years (640-609 B.C.E.). He is described as being a good and righteous king (in contrast to many previous kings who had permitted foreign cults, child sacrifice and idolatry). When he was 26, Josiah decided to make some repairs to the Temple. It was during those renovations that Hilkiah, the High Priest, found "the book of the Law." Shaphan, the King's secretary, reads it to Josiah, who tears his clothes, signaling his distress about the state of Yahweh worship in Judah. He orders members of his court to "go and inquire of the Lord" concerning the words of judgment written in the book. Huldah is consulted rather than her male prophetic contemporaries, Jeremiah and Zephaniah.

The news for Judah is dire. *Thus says the Lord, I will indeed bring disaster on this place and on its inhabitants...Because they have abandoned me and have made offerings to other gods, so that they have provoked me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched.*

The news for Josiah is a little better. *But as to the king of Judah... because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the Lord... and because you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, says the Lord. Therefore, I will gather you to your ancestors, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring on this place.*

### Imagine what it was like to be Huldah

Andrea muses, "Huldah is probably sitting out in an area near the Temple not far from her home...She is a larger-than-life personality in scripture because she has God's anointing to be a prophetess. In addition, she's probably extraordinarily familiar with the Torah and knows her

people's history from the oral tradition. Known for being outside of the Temple courtyard, quietly, peacefully, prayerfully, and in the presence of God, is Huldah....With my public relations lens and a little 21st century whimsey, it's rather like Huldah is getting ready to hold a gaggle by the south gate of the Temple with some high-ranking officials who are desperately hoping she will misspeak, or at the least disqualify herself in a gotcha moment, so they don't have to be convicted by the truth - in this case, the truth of God's word. Specifically, how they have missed the mark, big time...Huldah is very direct in her pronouncement to the King's special envoy....The law has been broken--other gods have been worshipped, angering God. So, yes, destruction is coming. But because Josiah has been humbled and faithful, he will be spared the agony of witnessing God's wrath. He will depart in peace. **But destruction is still coming.** Strong declarations from the prophetess. She doesn't spin it, but she does offer mercy to Josiah."

### Questions for discussion

- Josiah, upon hearing words of judgment, institutes a thorough-going religious reform. How hard is it for national leaders to "repent" and admit that things are not as they should be? What prevents public apologies in our time?
- Imagine that you are Huldah and you are expected to tell your King horrible news. How much courage do you think it took for her to tell what she knew to be the truth? Why is truth such a hard thing to hear sometimes? Why are some people penalized or punished for truth-telling? When has telling the truth hurt you or someone you know?
- What do you make of the fact that despite Josiah's show of humility and repentance, destruction was still in the future for Judah. When you express deep regret, how do you expect things to change?
- "Authority happens," as Phyllis Trible has said, "when the reader engages the text." What do you think this means? When have you been engaged by a biblical text? What happened as a result?

### Honoring Huldah today

Andrea shares, "I don't know if I would consider myself a prophet, but I do believe I was called and anointed by the Divine to speak for God... Early on I worked for real estate developers in mall management, but always central in my life was worship, Bible study and choir. I was often chided by my business partners for my devotion to my faith. But on those days when the business ownership was challenged, they would sit, look over, and say to me, "you're praying, right?" Sometimes a quiet, peaceful witness has more impact than any of us realize....I am convinced Huldah had a spiritual poise about her as a prophetess. Imagine her just sitting still, **mindful** about Yahweh, fully dressed with the shekinah [Holy Spirit]...I think quietly still, Huldah beckons all of us to return to the Hebrew scriptures to seek God's word, God's wisdom and direction.... And what about us? As faithful women and men, endeavoring to serve God... how does 2 Kings 22 impact us? ...My hope would be that...God's shekinah refreshes, and renews us to build up the greater community and our faith community....remember the words from the Prophet Joel, "I

*will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy...*" The Prophetess Huldah adding, *"Thus says the Lord, the God Israel."* Thanks be to God.

### **Questions for discussion**

- Who is a Huldah that you know? What characteristics make you think of this person?
- If you named your daughter Huldah, what would you tell her about her biblical namesake?