

Huldah: Prophet of Wisdom

Bible Background • 2 KINGS 22

Printed Text • 2 KINGS 22:14-20 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 25:1-10

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will ANALYZE the prophetess Huldah's message from God for King Josiah, REFLECT on Josiah's behavior after hearing the words of the book of the law, and SEEK godly advice about their future.

In Focus

When Marta's father-in-law moved in with her family, she knew it was going to be a change, but she certainly wasn't expecting it to take the mental and physical toll on her that it did. She ended up moving her transcribing desk into the living room to keep an eye on him; he got anxious if he were left alone for more than fifteen minutes at a time. Marta took care of him and, when she wasn't shuttling the kids around, spent all her time with him. He never voiced his thanks, but sometimes Marta could see sparks of gratefulness in his clouded eyes. As his illness worsened, he needed more and more care; and Marta would often rest against the door frame and pray for strength to serve him with love.

He lived with them for nearly half a year before quietly passing away in his sleep. Marta finally had time to rest and catch up with her old friends. "It's funny," she told Angelica, a college friend,

"I was never comfortable with seniors before. But now I understand them better. There was an older grandfather at the kid's soccer game last night, just standing there, and I was able to help him find a seat and some water. I wouldn't have even felt comfortable offering him anything, before." "That's wonderful," said Angelica, genuinely impressed. "I never know how to help without sounding awkward." "Exactly!" exclaimed Marta. "But it's because God let me help my father-in-law for so long that I'm able to help others."

What lessons has God has taught you that you would share with others?

Keep in Mind

"You were sorry and humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I said against this city and its people—that this land would be cursed and become desolate. You tore your clothing in despair and wept before me in repentance. And I have indeed heard you, says the LORD" (2 Kings 22:19, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Provoke to anger (2 Kings 22:17) *ka'as* (Heb.)—To cause someone growing vexation; used almost always to describe God's anger against injustice and unrighteousness

B. Tender (v. 19) *rakak* (Heb.)—Soft, fearful

Say It Correctly

Achbor. AK-bohr

Ahikam. ah-HI-kuhm

Asaiah. ah-zuh-HI-uh

Hilkiah. hil-KI-uh

Huldah. HUL-duh

Shallum. SHAL-uhm

Shaphan. SHAY-fuhn

Tikvah. TEEK-vah

Zephaniah. ZEF-uh-NI-ah

KJV

2 Kings 22:14 So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they communed with her.

15 And she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me,

16 Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read:

17 Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched.

18 But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard;

19 Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD.

20 Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.

NLT

2 Kings 22:14 So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to the New Quarter of Jerusalem to consult with the prophet Huldah. She was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, the keeper of the Temple wardrobe.

15 She said to them, "The LORD, the God of Israel, has spoken! Go back and tell the man who sent you,

16 'This is what the LORD says: I am going to bring disaster on this city and its people. All the words written in the scroll that the king of Judah has read will come true.

17 For my people have abandoned me and offered sacrifices to pagan gods, and I am very angry with them for everything they have done. My anger will burn against this place, and it will not be quenched.'

18 But go to the king of Judah who sent you to seek the LORD and tell him: 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the message you have just heard:

19 You were sorry and humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I said against this city and its people—that this land would be cursed and become desolate. You tore your clothing in despair and wept before me in repentance. And I have indeed heard you, says the LORD.

20 So I will not send the promised disaster until after you have died and been buried in peace. You will not see the disaster I am going to bring on this city.'" So they took her message back to the king.

The People, Places, and Times

Josiah's Revival. The three decades of Josiah's reign were among the happiest years experienced by Judah. They were characterized by peace, prosperity, and reform. King Josiah dedicated himself to pleasing God and led Israel in their renewed observance of the Mosaic Law. It is a testimony to the grace of God that a wicked king like Amon could have such a godly son and successor. At the age of 16, in the eighth year of his reign, Josiah personally "began to seek after the God of David his father" (2 Chronicles 34:3). It was at this point that he began to purify Judah and Jerusalem from idolatry by destroying whatever he recognized as not belonging to the worship of the true God (2 Kings 22:1–2). The spiritual reform brought about by Josiah climaxes with renovating the Temple, and, in the process, he rediscovered the Book of the Law in the eighteenth year of his

reign and the celebration of the Passover (2 Kings 22:8–23; 23). Josiah’s aim to turn his people back to true worship was so intense that he and the entire kingdom renewed their covenant with God.

Background

Following Hezekiah’s death (2 Kings 20:21) several kings succeeded him. Among them were: Manasseh (2 Kings 21:1); Amon (2 Kings 21:19); and Josiah (2 Kings 22:1). Josiah was eight years old when he became king of Judah. He reigned 31 years. The Bible affirms that he was one of Judah’s best kings (see 2 Kings 22:19). Peace, prosperity, and political reform highlighted his reign. In Judah, the Temple had fallen into disrepair (see 2 Kings 21:4-5, 7, 21). So, Josiah gave consent to repair the Temple by sending Shaphan, a scribe to oversee the renovations (see 2 Kings 22:3-4). While the renovation was going on Hilkiah, the high priest, found a copy of the book of the Law in the Temple (v. 8). Shaphan read the book of the Law to Josiah, who tore his clothes after hearing the scribe’s reading (v. 11). The king was distressed because he realized that the nation of Judah was far from God in their morality, obedience, and spirituality. Therefore, Josiah called Hilkiah the priest, Shaphan, Ahikam, Shaphan’s son, and Asaiah, a servant of the king to inquire of God what the people should do to get right with Him.

At-A-Glance

1. God’s Prophetess (2 Kings 22:14)
2. God’s Condemnation (vv. 15-17)
3. God’s Affirmation (vv. 18-20)

In Depth

1. God’s Prophetess (2 Kings 22:14) Huldah was the wife of Shallum, the wardrobe keeper (either of priestly vestments or royal robes). She lived in Jerusalem, in what was called the second district (not college as in KJV). Apparently, this was in a lower or southern section of Jerusalem. She was consulted on behalf of King Josiah, by Hilkiah the chief priest, Shaphan the scribe and others, following the discovery of “the book of the law in the house of the LORD” (2 Kings 22:8; 2 Chronicles 34:15). Although it is only recorded a few times, God spoke to His people through prophetesses prominently. Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), and Isaiah’s wife (Isaiah 8:3) are all described as prophetesses. Huldah accepted the book as the Word of Yahweh, and with His authority prophesied judgment against Jerusalem and Judah after Josiah’s death. It is noteworthy that, although both Jeremiah and Zephaniah were prophesying at this time, it is she who was approached on this matter.

Why do you go to different advisors at different times?

2. God’s Condemnation (vv. 15-17) When Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah arrived at Huldah’s, she gives them a message from the Lord God of Israel to take back to Josiah. However, the message was not an encouraging one. As Josiah had anticipated, Huldah’s prophecy was that of judgment. Jerusalem and its inhabitants would taste evil days, even as the Book of the Law prescribed. The reason for this impending disaster was clear. The Lord God would not tolerate open violations of His law. Ignorance of the law is no excuse. In 586 BC, destruction did come to Judah when Babylonia brought Judah to its knees. Huldah told the kings’ men that God would bring disaster on the land and the people because they had forsaken Him. God wants us to keep our eyes on Him so we won’t fall prey to the “gods” of this world. So often we shift our focus away from God onto ourselves, other people, and other things. Let’s make sure we are tuned to what the Lord wants to do so we won’t be condemned like Judah.

What daily practices help you remember to worship God alone rather than modern idols of work, or comfort, or success?

3. God's Affirmation (vv. 18-20) As is so often the case, God's prophecy of doom concludes with a glimmer of hope. The prophetess Huldah speaks another word to the messengers for the king (v. 18). Josiah would experience God's mercy and grace because he humbled himself before the Lord and had a tender heart. Josiah humbled himself when he tore his clothes and wept (v. 11) over what he read in the book of the Law. In God's tender mercies, He indicated through Huldah, King Josiah himself would die before these days of horror appeared. Indeed, Josiah's death occurred in 609 BC, four years before Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem. Just one good leader can put off destruction, and give the organization they lead (whether a family, a department, a church, or a country) a little bit more time to turn back to God.

Where are you a leader? How should leaders use their position of power to influence those who follow them?

Search the Scriptures

1. Whom did the Israelites consult to learn God's will? (2 Kings 22:14)
2. What warning did the people of Israel have for the coming disaster? (v. 16)
3. How does God show Josiah mercy? (vv. 19-20)

Discuss the Meaning

1. How do we know when we are out of God's will? Discuss.
2. What should we do when God confronts us with our sin? Is it right for us to confront others about their sins? Why or why not?
3. What are the "idols" that destroy our spiritual lives?
4. How can we convince unbelievers that the Bible is God's authoritative word?

Liberating Lesson

You may feel overwhelmed and inundated by the amount of information from the 24/7/365 news cycle. From those sources, it seems culture is on the wrong track. We look for reliable commentators and analysts to help us understand the events of the day. We know there must be some absolute moral standards but are not always sure where to look for them. The biblical teaching in this area is fairly straightforward. Yet surprisingly, Christians allow the world to steal their affections and compromise their values. Too many church leaders have forsaken the awesome task of making the Word of God known in the world today. Thank God for those Christian leaders who faithfully teach, preach, and live the Word in our urban society today.

Application for Activation

When was the last time you "consulted" with the Lord by way of His Word? It is so important that we study and meditate on God's Word daily. The Bible tells us to "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). One of the most important ways we commune with God is through His Word. If we don't have a consistent Bible study time we can get "rusty" in our study habits. This week make a consistent effort to spend at least 15 minutes a day studying the Bible. Write down any questions that might arise in your study. Share your questions with your teacher and others during the week.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

2 Kings 22:14-20 Two questions about Huldah arise: Why a woman? And, why Huldah in particular? The prophetess Huldah had an important share in the great spiritual revival of the Jewish people under the reign of King Josiah, through her prophecy and influence. Huldah is a unique female prophet in the Old Testament because she is the only woman prophet whose oracle has been preserved in the Bible. Miriam and Deborah are remembered as prophetesses because of the songs that bear their names. Huldah is remembered because of the words she spoke to Josiah. In the light of the contemporary discussion about the role of women in ministry, the story of Huldah the prophetess is significant and is worth examining. One may begin with the question of why the priest and others went to Huldah in the first instance. Just as Hezekiah's representatives once sought Isaiah's advice, so now Josiah's men approach Huldah, God's representative.

14 So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they communed with her.

Nothing is known about Huldah apart from the information offered here concerning her husband and their residence. Her husband Shallum is the "keeper of the wardrobe," likely referring to the special garments of the priests or the king and the royal family. They live in Jerusalem "in the college" (Heb. mishneh, meesh-NEH) which is rendered as "the second quarter" by other translations. The word mishneh can mean "second," but it also can refer to the oral traditions of the Jewish rabbis, the Mishnah. It was learned "second" after the Torah and actual Scriptures. Although the full tradition of Mishnah writings were not organized at this point in Jewish history, the word could already be in use in Huldah's day to refer to such traditional teachings. To live "in the mishneh" would be to live in the area of town where leading scholars gathered to study these teachings, like a college. Furthermore, little is known about the tradition of female prophets in the society of ancient Israel. Huldah joins the ranks of Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), Isaiah's wife (Isaiah 8:2), and Anna (Luke 2:36) who are also called "prophetesses." Huldah is the only woman prophet mentioned in the history of the Northern (Israel) and Southern (Judah) kingdoms. Other prophets at or very near the time were Jeremiah, whose mission had commenced in Josiah's thirteenth year (Jeremiah 1:2) and Zephaniah, the son of Cushi. Zephaniah's prophecy appears to have belonged to the earliest part of Josiah's reign. One might expect that either of these two prophets would be consulted. Instead, the king sent the high priest, the scribe, and others to Huldah to inquire of God. Even though this is a unique example in Scripture, the writer uses no literary tools to emphasize Huldah's gender. The Scripture text does not provide any indication that consulting a female prophet was unusual for a king and high priest. There is no discernible difference between male and female prophets concerning their prophetic function. God spoke to Huldah and she delivered His words as instructed.

15 And she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me, 16 Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read:

Huldah's oracle mentions events that would happen in the future. Although many false prophets claimed to speak for God, Huldah spoke concerning what God was about to do to Judah. She knew the character of God, the nature of sin, and the rebellion of the people of Judah. As a prophet, she proclaimed the judgment of God because of the wickedness of the people and their worship of false gods. Huldah has full prophetic insight and inspiration and delivers God's words, just as Isaiah and Jeremiah do. She spoke a direct message to the king's

messengers, confirming the worst fears of Josiah. Her response to Josiah was given in somber tones: God will bring evil upon Judah and its inhabitants thereof, “even all the words,” or curses, that are written in the book which they have read before the King of Judah.

17 Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched.

God here speaks in personal terms: the people “provoke [him] to anger” (Heb. ka’as, kaw-OSS; almost always God’s anger against injustice and unrighteousness) with their behavior, so He will execute His wrath on them. He accuses them of the same deeds attributed to Manasseh (2 Kings 21:6), and He confirmed in the same words that His wrath against “this place”—that is, Jerusalem—and shall not be quenched. Here is the gist of their offense, the thing that provoked God’s anger. They neglected all the warnings in the Law (Deuteronomy 12:19; 29:25–28; 31:16, 17; 32:15, etc.). It was not a casual breaking of God’s commandments but they turned from God altogether and forsaking him. God’s answer provides some important lessons. First, sin has consequences. It is not possible to forsake God and escape the judgment that attends it. Second, God, in the midst of His wrath offers some hope. God’s threats against nations are for the most part conditional and may be escaped, or at least their fulfillment may be deferred indefinitely, by repentance, as the example of Nineveh shows (Jonah 3:1–10). But if a nation and individuals persist in sin and wickedness, there comes a time when the sentence can no longer be averted. Real repentance has become impossible, and a pretentious one would only provoke God all the more. For such a state of things, there is “no remedy” (2 Chronicles 36:16), and this was the state of things reached by the nation of Judah. God’s anger against them could not be quenched. The prophet’s words make effective use of fire imagery. In response to the Israelites burning offerings to other gods, God kindles His wrath, letting it burn in response. This word for wrath (Heb. chemah, kheh-MAW) is itself related to a word for “heat.” The Israelites’ unholy fire for idols has sparked a conflagration of God’s righteous wrath that will burn down their nation.

18 But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard; 19 Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD.

The second portion of God’s oracle through Huldah concerns Josiah himself. The events of judgment would occur after he died in peace because he was responsive and humble (v. 19) regarding the words of the Lord. This moves the burning anger of the Lord against Judah farther into the future, at least until after Josiah died. God notes Josiah’s motivation (v. 19). Josiah’s heart was tender in two ways. First, it was tender to the word of God and was able to receive the convicting voice of the Holy Spirit. Second, it was tender to the message of judgment from Huldah in the previous verses. The word used here for “tender” (Heb. rakak, raw-KOK) is also used for skin softening when medicine is applied to a wound (Isaiah 1:6), giving the image of Josiah’s heart responding to the balm of God’s word. The word is also used in contexts of a soft and fearful heart. Indeed Josiah does fear the Lord’s judgment for his sinful nation. Rending the garments (v. 11) was an outward act of humiliation. Josiah accompanied this with inward repentance and self-abasement. He had even been moved to tears. A genuine conviction leads to action, and such was the case of Josiah. The reading of God’s word, as it always does, spoke to the heart of the young king and stirred his spirit to conviction and repentance. Josiah feared God in every sense. He was truly afraid of God and what could happen to people who did not fear God enough to keep His commandments. He respected God and His priests. He valued God’s house to the extent that he refurbished it, which led to finding the Book of the Law. He did not expect God to pass over the failures and sins of Judah, but he sought God’s word from a prophet concerning his situation. Josiah was a model of a true Godfearer who put that awe and respect to work, to bring Judah back into a covenant relationship. Today, leaders assume they have little power to change the ways of their contemporaries who walk outside of God’s

ways, so they do not try. But God calls all of us to model righteousness, to warn others against sin, to encourage salvation and opportunities to know Jesus and His Father in heaven (John 17:3).

20 Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.

There is a seeming contradiction between these words and the fact of Josiah's violent death in battle against Pharaoh Nechoh (2 Kings 23:29). But the contradiction is not a real one. Huldah assured Josiah that, though the destruction of his kingdom and the desolation of Judah and Jerusalem threatened in the Law were at hand, yet they would not come in his day. He would not see the evil time. Before it came he would be "gathered to his fathers," meaning he would die. The promise given him was fulfilled. He died in battle; but he was buried in peace (2 Chronicles 35:24, 25). The enemy who was to destroy Jerusalem and carry the nation into captivity did not make any attack upon the land until three years later when the throne was occupied by Jehoiakim (see 2 Kings 24:1). "The evil which I will bring upon this place" includes the three sieges of Nebuchadnezzar, the destruction of the Temple and city by Nebuzaradan (2 Kings 25:8–10), the deportation of the bulk of the inhabitants (2 Kings 25:11), and the calamities which happened to the remnant left (2 Kings 25:22–26). Josiah did not witness any of this. He was taken away from the evil to come. Hilkiah, Shaphan, and their companions (v. 14) reported to Josiah Huldah's message.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God Loves Covenant Keepers
(Psalm 25:1-10)

TUESDAY

Entering God's Promised Rest
(Hebrews 4:1-11)

WEDNESDAY

New Covenant Made with the Israelites
(Deuteronomy 29:1-6)

THURSDAY

Josiah Prepares to Repair the Temple
(2 Kings 22:1-7)

FRIDAY

Josiah Seeks Guidance to Confront Disobedience
(2 Kings 22 8-13)

SATURDAY

Josiah Leads in Covenant Renewal
(2 Kings 23:1-3)

SUNDAY

Huldah Confirms Coming Judgment; Josiah Spared
(2 Kings 22:14-20)