

PROPHET OF WISDOM

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 25:1-10

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 2 Kings 22

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: 2 Kings 22:14-20

I. A Word Sought

2 Kings 22:14

14 So Hilkiyah 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.

14a. Here we see the forming of a delegation. This is the first action taken as a result of King Josiah's order in 2 Kings 22:12-13. *Hilkiyah* was not only a *priest*, but was "the high priest" (22:4, 8).

Ahikam was a son of the secretary *Shaphan* (2 Kings 22:12). Members of this family seem to have been devout followers of the Lord. *Akbor*, another official in his court, was the father of Elnathan, who became an official in the court of King Jehoiakim, Josiah's son (Jeremiah 26:22; 36:11-12, 24-25). *Asaiah* was earlier designated as "the king's attendant" (2 Kings 22:12).

14b. *Huldah the prophetess* appears in 2 Chronicles 34:22-28. Jewish tradition holds that she and Jehoiada were both buried in Jerusalem, an honor reserved for those of King David's family. The delegation felt no hesitation in consulting Huldah.

Although female prophets in Israel were rare, Huldah's role is not without precedent in the Old Testament. Miriam (Ex-

odus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), and the unnamed wife of Isaiah (Isaiah 8:3) precede her in being designated *prophetess*.

Huldah's husband, *Shallum*, may have been Jeremiah's uncle (Jeremiah 32:7). The dwelling of this husband and wife is uncertain in location, but it likely indicates a particular area of Jerusalem.

II. A Word for Jerusalem

2 Kings 22:15-17

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.

15. Huldah begins her response with the prophetic formula *thus saith the Lord*. Her use of this phrase, marks her as a true prophet. Adding *God of Israel* emphasized the Lord's sovereignty over the nation and His relationship to it. God chose to associ-

ate himself with Israel specifically. Though this fact should have had implications for how the people behaved, this did not often play out in reality.

Huldah's referring to King Josiah as *the man that sent you to me* created space between the king and herself. Though he was powerful, she was the one who had heard a true word from God to share. Her words reminded the delegation that Josiah was merely a man who, like all people, was subject to God's reign.

16. By using the prophetic formula *thus saith the Lord* a second time, Huldah re-emphasized that her words came from the Lord. What she is about to say is also her own conviction, but it does not originate with her.

The first part of Huldah's oracle (continued in 2 Kings 22:17) concerned *Judah* in general plus Jerusalem and/or its temple (*this place*) in particular. In the context at hand, it most likely indicates Jerusalem in general since the destruction of the temple without concurrent destruction of the city wouldn't make sense.

As great as King Josiah's desire was to spare his nation, he could not save Judah from coming judgment. Thus, Huldah indicated that Josiah's worst fears were justified (2 Kings 22:13). Moses had warned that destruction would come if the Israelites were disobedient to the Lord. Later prophets based their judgment oracles on warnings found in the Law of Moses. Josiah may have heard these calamities read straight out of Deuteronomy 28:15-68. Even if he heard some other text, the curses would be very similar to those of Deuteronomy 28.

Older versions of the Bible translate the Lord's intent to *bring evil*. But the underlying Hebrew does not refer to moral evil. Instead, it should be understood as physical harm or affliction (Genesis 31:52; Psalm 34:19) or similar. This announcement of coming judgment through calamity echoes

earlier announcements against the dynasties of the wicked kings Jeroboam and Ahab. It also parallels the indictment in 2 Kings 21:10-15 that was delivered by prophets in the days of Josiah's grandfather Manasseh.

17. Judah's having *forsaken* God for idols would result in punishment. What Moses had warned about (Deuteronomy 28:20; 29:25; 31:16-17), Huldah recognized as forthcoming reality in Judah. Jeremiah also cited Judah's having *burned incense unto other gods* as evidence of their idolatry; that was the means by which the nation provoked the Lord's *anger* (Jeremiah 1:16; 19:4; 44:3, 8). Both the idols and the sacrifices offered to the idols were *works of their hands*. Tragically humorous is Isaiah 44:19:

None considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree?

God's anger was abundantly justified since it had been provoked by intentional human rebellion; this had happened so often that the limits of the Lord's patience were exceeded. Zephaniah indicated that Judah was rotten to the core (Zephaniah 3:6-8). The fire of God's judgment was *kindled*, and it would *not be quenched*.

III. A Word for the King

2 Kings 22:18-20

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.

18a. Huldah's message of judgment against Judah was not the final word. Whereas she had previously identified Josiah simply as "the man that sent you to me" (2 Kings 22:15), she here identified him specifically as *the king of Judah*. This description highlighted Josiah's leadership role. The Hebrew behind the phrase *enquire of the Lord* occurs only six times in the Old Testament, always in context of great seriousness.

18b. The prophetess once again used the prophetic formula *thus saith the Lord God* (2 Kings 22:16) to reinforce that her words came from God. This repetition emphasized the Lord's special relationship with all of *Israel*.

19. When Shaphan read the law to Josiah, the king was shaken to his core. He had torn his *clothes* to signify his grief (2 Kings 22:11). That was an appropriate response to the words of the scroll that announced that Jerusalem would *become a desolation and a curse*. God had heard Josiah and had seen his weeping and the state of his *heart*. So God had decided to honor the king's humble and contrite response.

Moses had described such repentance as a prerequisite for the Lord's restoring Israel after it fell under His judgment (Leviticus 26:40-42). Such humble repentance had led God to delay the demise of Ahab's dynasty (1 Kings 21:29), to postpone judgment in the days of Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 32:26), and to restore Josiah's grandfather

Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33:10-13). The New Testament highlights the centrality of humility and repentance before God.

The prophetic formula *saith the Lord* underscores that God has honored the king's contrition. Its repetition throughout Huldah's prophecy does more than just legitimize her as a spokesperson for God. It also gave the king's delegation confidence to repeat to the king what they had learned, knowing that the prophecy was reliable.

20a. The Lord would honor the king by protecting him from the punishment coming against Judah. The phrase *I will gather thee unto thy fathers* is a variation on the formula "[name] slept with his fathers" as used throughout 1 and 2 Kings. The king would not experience *the evil* (2 Kings 22:16) that God would bring on the temple, Jerusalem, and Judah.

The phrase *thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace* may seem to contradict what we know about Josiah's death in battle. Josiah would die at peace with God. He would not personally witness what the words of the book anticipated and what Huldah confirmed: the devastating destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple at the hands of the Babylonians in 586 BC (2 Kings 25).

The message of God through Huldah confirmed His righteousness, faithfulness, and mercy. God would be faithful to the word He had uttered centuries before when He warned Israel of the penalties that would result from unfaithfulness to the covenant.

20b. The message of the prophetess and the words of the book resulted in Josiah's convening the nation for a covenant renewal ceremony. He also enacted further measures to cleanse the temple and the land from elements of idolatry.

Judah was spared while Josiah was alive. After his death, Judah returned to evil ways and experienced the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar as well as the exile in Babylon.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

PROPHET OF WISDOM

Into the Lesson

What is suspicious about the following attribution?

The problem with quotes on the internet is that it is hard to verify their authenticity.
—Abraham Lincoln

What news sources and information outlets do you trust?

Everyone realizes that some sources are more reliable than others in accuracy, which today's lesson brings home to the twenty-first century Christian.

Into the Word

2 Kings 22:14-20 . . . and a Bit More

Read 2 Kings 22:14-20 and answer the following questions:

1. Who were the direct participants?

2. What action occurred?

3. Where did it take place?

4. When did the action of the text occur?

5. Why did the action of the text occur?

Into Life

Create a list that features the names of seven church leaders (mixture of your church's leaders and national luminaries).

Create a list that features the names of even political leaders (mixture of national, state, and local).

Pray for one person in each category in the seven days leading up to the next week's lesson.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

God hears those who humbly seek Him.