

“THE GIRL IN THE KNOW”**Rev. Becky Stephens****Text: 2 Chronicles 34:14-32 NLT****God’s Word: 2 Chronicles 34:1-13 NLT**

In order to understand the story of Huldah, we have to understand the story of Israel at this point in their history. You see, we are now long past the “golden days” of King David’s reign and King Solomon after him. The twelve tribes have been divided into two different kingdoms; ten of the tribes are joined into what’s called the Kingdom of Israel in the north, and the other two tribes are called the Kingdom of Judah in the south. The Northern Kingdom had been conquered years before by the Assyrians, and the Southern Kingdom was suffering under poor leadership. King Manasseh had ruled for 55 years, the longest of any king in Judah’s history. And the Bible tells us, *“He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.”* King Manasseh’s son, Amon, followed right in his father’s footsteps. Amon was so evil, in fact, that his servants conspired to assassinate him only two years after Amon became King.

The immediate heir to the throne was an eight-year-old boy named Josiah. Now, we balk at the thought of any eight-year-old ruling a kingdom. But in the ancient world of kings and queens, this sort of thing didn’t seem to cause the kind of havoc we would expect. While a king’s power was certainly absolute, most of the day-by-day administration was in the hands of a variety of royal servants. The real question was how the young king would use his extensive power once he was old enough to figure out that he had it.

The good news is that, in Josiah’s case, it was a happy story. Here’s how the Bible puts it: *“During the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young,”* (at this point, a boy of sixteen) *“Josiah began to seek the God of his ancestor David. Then in the twelfth year he began to purify Judah and Jerusalem...”* through a series of vigorous reforms. Josiah cleared away many of the pagan altars and practices that had come to dominate Judah’s worship. And eventually, he began *“to repair the house of the Lord his God.”*

You know how buildings deteriorate overtime; paint begins peeling, walls may crumble, the roof needs replacing. As the Kingdom of Judah had ignored the Temple over time, it had fallen into disrepair, and so Josiah has decided to get things spruced up. So Josiah sends in teams of workers. They begin to get things cleaned up and start making some of the necessary repairs, when suddenly, word comes from the priest, Hilkiah that he has found the book of the law of the Lord given through Moses. Most likely, this is what we know as the book of Deuteronomy. How they had managed to lose the book of the Law is another question entirely, but I think it just goes to show the extreme waywardness in the Kingdom of Judah at this time.

Here these words...the continuation of chapter 34.

¹⁴ While they were bringing out the money collected at the LORD's Temple, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the LORD that was written by Moses. ¹⁵ Hilkiah said to Shaphan the court secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the LORD's Temple!" Then Hilkiah gave the scroll to Shaphan. ¹⁶ Shaphan took the scroll to the king and reported, "Your officials are doing everything they were assigned to do. ¹⁷ The money that was collected at the Temple of the LORD has been turned over to the supervisors and workmen." ¹⁸ Shaphan also told the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a scroll." So Shaphan read it to the king.

¹⁹ When the king heard what was written in the Law, he tore his clothes in despair. ²⁰ Then he gave these orders to Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the court secretary, and Asaiah the king's personal adviser: ²¹ "Go to the Temple and speak to the LORD for me and for all the remnant of Israel and Judah. Inquire about the words written in the scroll that has been found. For the LORD's great anger has been poured out on us because our ancestors have not obeyed the word of the LORD. We have not been doing everything this scroll says we must do."

²² So Hilkiah and the other men 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.

²³ She said to them, "The LORD, the God of Israel, has spoken! Go back and tell the man who sent you, ²⁴ 'This is what the LORD says: I am going to bring disaster on this city and its people. All the curses written in the scroll that was read to the king of Judah will come true. ²⁵ 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 be poured out on this place, and it will not be quenched.'

²⁶ "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: ²⁷ You were sorry and humbled yourself before God when you heard his words against this city and its people. You humbled yourself and tore your clothing in despair and wept before me in repentance. And I have indeed heard you, says the LORD. ²⁸ So I will not send the promised disaster until after you have died and been buried in peace. You yourself will not see the disaster I am going to bring on this city and its people.'" So they took her message back to the king.

²⁹ Then the king summoned all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. ³⁰ And the king went up to the Temple of the LORD with all the people of Judah and Jerusalem, along with the priests and the Levites—all the people from the greatest to the least. There the king read to them the entire Book of the Covenant that had been found in the LORD's Temple. ³¹ The king took his place of authority beside the pillar and renewed the covenant in the LORD's presence. He pledged to obey the LORD by keeping all his commands, laws, and decrees with all his heart and soul. He promised to obey all the terms of the covenant that were written in the scroll. ³² And he required everyone in Jerusalem and the people of Benjamin to make a similar pledge. The people of Jerusalem did so, renewing their covenant with God, the God of their ancestors. **(2 Chronicles 34:14-32)**

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So, when the book was brought to King Josiah, he did what I think any of us would do with a great ancient book found buried like a treasure beneath years of discarded goods; he read it. And it wouldn't have taken a genius to understand that the Israelites were living way off base. So as soon as Josiah finished the reading of the scroll, he tore his clothes in extreme distress. Josiah was so serious about following God that he realized how far short he and his nation were from living according to the will of God, and he was terribly upset.

Now Josiah had already been at work trying to reform his kingdom and get them back on track, but now he realized just how much more needed to be done. And it seems that King Josiah was not fully comfortable proceeding on his own without the advice of a spiritual "insider," so to speak. So he decides to call on a prophet who can give him the word of God and tell him what will happen to his kingdom because of their waywardness. At this time in Judah's history, there were two prophets working in the land. One of those prophets was a man named Jeremiah. The other prophet was a woman named Huldah.

Josiah gives his servants instructions, they are to *"Go and ask the LORD on my behalf, and on behalf of those who still remain in Israel and Judah, concerning the contents of this scroll that has been found."* So, the Bible tells us, Hilkiah and the royal officials went to the prophetess, Huldah. The Bible doesn't tell us much about Huldah at all; she was married to Shallum and lived in Jerusalem's second district. But this was clearly a critical point in Israel's history, and it's worth noting that as the Kingdom of Judah was seeking a way forward in following God, they chose to go to Huldah for advice. And that's where I want to go to glean our message this morning.

I don't think I have to remind you that women weren't really called upon to do much of anything in the ancient world. They birthed and raised the children, fetched the water, cooked the meals, and kept the house clean. They weren't found in the royal court or teaching in the synagogues; that was the man's place. And there was, in fact, a male prophet available to King Josiah; he could have called upon Jeremiah. But Josiah and his royal servants didn't choose Jeremiah, they chose Huldah. At this major turning point in Judah's history, Huldah was the "go-to gal" or the "Girl in the Know."

That kind of thing only happens when we have a good reputation in our community, doesn't it? So, I think we can fairly conclude that Huldah had a great reputation in Jerusalem, as both a person and a prophet. Now, certainly, the Bible doesn't explain to us exactly how Huldah developed such a tremendous reputation, but I think we can do a bit of speculating. Because, here's the thing, as Christians, we need to have that same sort of tremendous reputation in our communities as well. We are not bringing glory to God if we do not.

So what was it that made Huldah great? Perhaps most obviously, Huldah had a clear connection with God and people knew it. We don't know how the people knew it; maybe it was because she had been warning the people in Jerusalem for years, or maybe it was something more subtle, like a certain glow in her appearance. We don't know, but the people did. And if you have a strong connection with God, that can only mean that you are a faithful person. So we can conclude that even as all the folks around her were following pagan ways and worshipping pagan gods, Huldah remained faithful to the

one true God. She was not swayed by popular practice, nor, it would seem, by any promptings or urgings from neighbors or friends. And finally, I think it's fair to say that Huldah was trustworthy. Kings and royal councils don't approach just anyone for advice. In fact, these days, you have to have an extensive background check and security clearance just to meet the leaders of countries. So, for the leaders of the kingdom of Judah to approach Huldah, and even further to seek her advice, they had to trust her.

I think there is one further thing we can say about Huldah, and it stems directly from her gender. Most of us are aware that women tend to be at least a little bit more compassionate than men. It may be a mothering instinct, or it may be something else, but it is generally true. Think about a child that falls and skins his knee. Daddy says, "Shake it off, you're alright." Mommy cradles the child in a hug, wipes the tears away, kisses the wound and covers it with a band-aid. Josiah knew that they had pulled the scab off a big wound, and it's entirely possible that he was feeling the need for a little compassion as they faced the pain that would most certainly result. So Huldah was connected to God, faithful, trustworthy, and compassionate. She was just the Prophet God's people needed at just that time in their history. And they didn't hesitate to call upon her.

We Christians have a reputation as lots of different things, and most of them aren't all that great. We are called judgmental and hypocritical. Some say we are insensitive and not accepting of others and their opinions. The direct result of such a reputation is that we are not sought out when people are lost and in need. The indirect, and far worse, result of such a reputation is that people think poorly of God, too. But people who are lost and broken need to know God above all else, don't they? And what Christ has told us is that the only way that will happen is through us; the people of Christ being Christ's body at work in the world.

And that means we have to be more like Huldah. Certainly, we may never have the president of the United States calling us up for advice, but we have friends who need guidance, don't we? Perhaps they need someone trustworthy to listen to them. Or maybe they need some compassion after a horrible sin is committed. We have to be those people; people with an unquestionable character, people who are not swayed by the ways of the world, but remain true to God in all things. People who are faithful to God in all things and aren't afraid to show it. People who are trustworthy to a fault. And people who show compassion to our neighbors above all else. If we aren't the "go-to" folks, then who is? If we don't share God with people, then who will? We may be the only Bible someone will ever read.

For the most part, the world has forgotten Huldah. But Huldah was as great as any apostle, or any prophet, or any king because Huldah showed us God. Let's be like Huldah. Let's live our lives so that others see God's life in us and seek God because of us. That's the greatest work any disciple of Christ could ever do, and it's what we all should do!