

**THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE
PROPHET HULDAH'S PROPHECY –
A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON
2 KINGS 22: 14-20**

Melany Marildia Adonis



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Supervisor: Professor Hendrik Bosman

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Declaration

I, the undersigned , hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

SUMMARY

The question I am attempting to answer, is "What is the theological significance of the prophecy of Huldah, the prophet? Why is Huldah there?" Scholars have offered different reasons for the presence of Huldah in 2 Kings 22. Why Huldah and not one of the other male prophets, has been approached to "enquire from the Lord". The explanations offered, can all be challenged. It does not supply us with convincing theories which can be used to examine the theological significance of the prophecy of Huldah.

I would therefore argue, that the text itself, supply us with clues which can be used to discuss the theological significance of the prophecy of Huldah. Seeing that the text is part of the Deuteronomistic History, clues (to help with the understanding of Huldah), would therefore also be found within this history. In other words, the literary context as well as the Deuteronomistic background of 2 Kings 22, provide us with clues for the theological significance of Huldah as a prophet. Furthermore, I would like to argue that the interpretations made from the clues could be enriched by the fact that I am a woman. A feminist approach could introduce a different perspective.

I therefore did a close reading of the text, 2 Kings 22:1-20 with specific focus on 2 Kings 22:14-20. Special attention is given to the language used, the characters included in the story as well as the context of the story. In order to try and get a better understanding of the language, the Hebrew text was used as point of departure and a translation to English was made to use in my discussion.

Through my journey with Huldah, I have been inspired. The inclusion of Huldah, highlights the presence of female prophets in the history of Israel. God calls women as well as men. Huldah can be used as a different model for

women. In her patriarchal society, she was a married woman who was also a prophet. A prophet who was respected by her people. The king sent his "trusted attendants" (five males) to "enquire from the Lord" and they went to Huldah, the prophet. Therefore, the story of Huldah emphasises the fact that women also played important roles in the history of Israel.

OPSOMMING

Die vraag wat ek probeer beantwoord is, "Wat is die teologiese belang van die profeet Guldah ? Waarom is Guldah daar." Talle geleerdes het verskillende redes vir die teenwoordigheid van Guldah in 2 Konings 22 verskaf. Redes waarom Guldah, en nie een van die manlike profete nie, genader is om " die Here te raadpleeg" nie. Al die verduidelikings wat aan die hand gedoen word, kan egter bevraagteken word. Dit verskaf nie oortuigende teorieë wat gebruik kan word om die teologiese waarde van Guldah te ondersoek nie.

Ek wil dus argumenteer dat die teks self leidrade verskaf wat gebruik kan word ten einde die teologiese belang van die profesie van Guldah te bespreek. Aangesien die teks deel is van die Deuteronomistiese Geskiedenis sal leidrade, om te help met die verstaan van Guldah, dus ook in hierdie geskiedenis gevind word. In ander woorde, die literêre konteks sowel as die Deuteronomistiese agtergrond van 2 Konings 22, verskaf ons met leidrade vir die teologiese belang van Guldah as profeet. Verder sou ek graag wou argumenteer dat die interpretasies gemaak vanuit dié leidrade, verryk kan word deur die feit dat ek 'n vrou is. 'n Feministiese benadering kan 'n ander perspektief inlei.

Ek het dus die teks, 2 Konings 22:1-20 krities gelees met spesifieke fokus op 2 Konings 22:14-20. Spesiale aandag is gegee aan die taalgebruik, die karakters wat ingesluit is in die storie, sowel as die konteks van die storie. Ten einde die taalgebruik beter te verstaan, is die Hebreeuse teks as vertrekpunt gebruik en 'n vertaling in Engels gedoen, wat in die bespreking gebruik is.

Die reis met Guldah, het my geïnspireer. Die teenwoordigheid van vroulike profete word deur die insluiting van Guldah uitgelig. God roep vroue sowel

as mans. Guldah verskaf dus 'n ander 'radikale' model vir vroue van haar tyd en daag ook sodoende vroue van vandag uit. In haar patriargale samelewing, was Guldah 'n getroude vrou, sowel as 'n profeet. 'n Profeet wat deur haar mense gerespekteer was. Die koning het sy "getroue volgelinge" (vyf mans) gestuur om "die Here te raadpleeg", en hulle het na Guldah die profeet gegaan. Die storie van Guldah beklemtoon dus die feit dat vroue ook belangrike rolle in die geskiedenis van Israel gespeel het.

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God has blessed me by surrounding me with caring, gifted people who strengthen and inspire me, and that is why I can “soar like an eagle.”

(Is 40:31)

Thanks be to God.

PREFACE

I have heard people say, that a text chooses you, but had not had this experience till 2001. The text of Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20), has caught my attention, intrigued me and eventually ‘grabbed’ me. There has been an interaction between us. The choice was the end result of a long process.

I needed to choose a text and had been introduced to different texts by different people. None of the texts got me interested – none of the texts ‘chose me’, until I met Huldah.

My journey with Huldah began when I first heard the Revd Mary-Ann Plaatjies, from the Uniting Reformed Church, preach on Huldah. This passage (2 Kings 22:1-20) is not preached on regularly – if ever, neither is it read in services.

If the text is read, the focus is not on Huldah, but rather on Josiah. With the focus on the reign of Josiah (2 Kings 22-23), this text “has become one of the most discussed passages in the OT. Not only is it important for an understanding of the story of the monarchy in the books of Kings, but it is also regarded as a crucial passage for the dating of the Pentateuch.” (Watts 1985:315) It is therefore not only interesting but rather mind-boggling that almost in the middle of this very important text – at its core, a story of a woman is found – not just any woman, but a prophet. Huldah is a woman, not many people know about.

Not only did I choose Huldah, because she is a woman, but also because she is “the prophet”. I was confronted by the question, “What is a prophet ?” head on when I was described by somebody as ‘a prophet’.

On a different occasion, within a group discussion, I had the opportunity to share part of my story with a group. Prof Elna Mouton, afterwards described me and my actions as that of a prophet. This was strange to me as it was the very first time that I have been described as ‘a prophet’. What have I done, that triggered the image of “prophet”? Through my sharing, I (unconsciously) made things clear. I explained the situation of women who struggle to be acknowledged as different human beings who do things differently and I helped people in the group to ‘see’.

This incident caused me to think about the term prophet again, and look at the images of a prophet we have and those images, which are given to us through texts. I therefore choose the text about Huldah, because it is about a woman firstly and secondly because it is about a woman who is a prophet. The text had however chosen me much earlier. The circle is complete.

This paper is therefore a journey to discover more about the prophet, Huldah. The prophet, the person, her language used, the community she came from, her interaction with the characters in the story as well as her interaction with the broader story of 2 Kings.

This journey would never have started without two important women, Mary-Ann Plaatjies, who introduced me to Huldah and Elna Mouton, who called me a prophet. I thank them and embrace them as we start this journey together.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The reign of Josiah is no new topic. As I have mentioned, this text has become one of the most discussed passages in the Old Testament, because of its importance in trying to understand the story of the monarchy in the books of Kings as well as the fact that this passage is seen as important in trying to date the Pentateuch.

My interest is however not so much in Josiah, but rather in Huldah, *the prophet*. Huldah's story can however not be read in isolation. It is part of the story on the reign of King Josiah and therefore part of the Deuteronomistic History. I need therefore also to look at the reign of king Josiah as well as take into account the fact that this story is part of a specific history – the Deuteronomistic History.

Although I will be looking at the whole passage of 2 Kings 22, my focus and therefore my question will be directed towards the passage 2 Kings 22: 14-20 - Huldah, *the prophet*.

Both the Hebrew text as well as the New Revised Standard Version (the English translation I am using) use the word “prophetess” to describe Huldah. I however prefer “prophet”. Firstly, Huldah is introduced as “the prophetess” and not as “a prophetess”. The use of the definite article implies that Huldah was ‘respected’ as “the prophetess” and was not just any prophetess. The use of “prophet” rather than “prophetess”, gives weight to this assumption. In cases where a ‘female’ title as well as a ‘male’ title for the same occupation are used, the ‘male’ title tend to carry more weight and be seen as ‘superior’ to the ‘female’ title. The word “prophet” therefore supplies Huldah with the same ‘credibility’ as her male counter parts. Furthermore, my first reaction to Huldah was, that she could just as well have been male, as there is nothing

striking in her prophecy which indicates that she is female. The most important reason for using “prophet” rather than “prophetess”, especially in the title, is to get a reaction from the reader. To focus attention and invite the reader from the beginning, to start asking questions.

The words “prophet” and “prophetess” are however both used in my discussion.

1.1 What is the question?

I will be looking at the reign of Josiah, but focusing on the role of Huldah in this very important story. What is the role of Huldah as a prophet who needs to “inquire from the Lord”? Is Huldah a prophet - can she through the little information we have about her, be described as a prophet? Connected to these questions can very importantly also be asked, “What is the role of Huldah as a prophetess – as a woman?”

This story is described as important, because it is the story about the discovering of “the book of the law”. The “book of the law” is connected with the book, Deuteronomy. Bandstra (1995:175) refers to De Wette (1806) who argued that “the book of the law” could be brought in correlation with the book Deuteronomy: “The similarities between Josiah’s reform (told in 2 Kings 22-23) and the prescriptions of Deuteronomy are too close to being coincidental. Both involved centralizing worship in one place, celebrating Passover in a particular way, and prohibiting certain specific pagan practices. Furthermore, the phrase “book of the Torah,” found in 2 Kings 22:8, is found in other places where it can only refer to Deuteronomy (for example, Deuteronomy 30:10, Joshua 1:8 and 8:31-35)”

This discovering of the “book of the law”, leads to king Josiah, together with the people of Jerusalem, making a covenant to obey the word of “the book of

the law” (2 Kings 23:1-3), as well as to the implementation of the reforms of Josiah (2 Kings 23:4-24). Huldah, the prophet, [as the person who was approached to “inquire of the Lord concerning the words of the book that has been found” (2 Kings 22:13)], is therefore center to the story about Josiah – the king who is described in 2 Kings 23:25, “Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after Moses.”

Why is Huldah there? This question has been posed in different ways already and different explanations for the presence of Huldah had been offered:

Honeycutt (1970:286) observes that the word ‘prophetess’ occurs six times in the Old Testament (cf. also Exodus 15:20; Judge 4:4; 2 Kgs 22:14; 2Chr 34:22; Neh 6:14) as a designation for Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and Noadiah. Of these prophetesses, all but Noadiah are portrayed positively. This can be attributed to the fact that she is seen as part of the opponents of Nehemiah. Why she opposed him, is not recorded. We can however establish through the little information about Noadiah, that “a woman could be a prophet and thus serve in a role of inspired leadership as a recognized spokesperson for the divine”(Eskenazi 2000:132). Therefore, House (1995:385) argues “although less common than male prophets, a female prophet is not unique to this situation.”

It is true that female prophets do occur, but in relation to the males, they are very few. It is therefore quite a unique situation, that a female prophet (one of the six found in the whole of the Old Testament) plays the part of mediator between God and Josiah. The king of who is written, “Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him.” (2 Kings 23:25)

Hobbs (1985:327) argues that “two other prophets are known to have been active at this time, Jeremiah and Zephaniah, but they are not mentioned nor even involved in the reform. (However) in the light of Jeremiah’s vicious attacks on Jerusalem and Judean society in general and his origin from the Levitic town of Anathoth, his absence from these incidents is not unusual.”

Jeremiah came from Anathoth, a town in Bethlehem, which was also associated with Abiathar, the high priest of David. Just before the death of David, Adonijah decided that he would be king soon, and started to make plans. He organized a big party, but did not invite Nathan, the prophet or Benaiah or the warriors or his brother Solomon. They did not support him. Nathan talked to David and Bethseba and David made a promise to Bethseba that Solomon would be king after him.

After the death of David, Solomon became king and had Adonijah killed. He then dismissed Abiathar as his priest and sent him to Anathoth. Zadok became the high priest of Solomon.

It is therefore understandable that there was not a very good relationship between the Davidic dynasty and the descendants of Abiathar. Seeing that Anathoth was not a very big town, it is not impossible that Jeremiah would have been related to Abiathar. Jeremiah might therefore have not been such a keen supporter of the Davidic dynasty because of his ties with Anathoth. This however is only an assumption, as the people of Anathoth also turned against Jeremiah, because of his prophesy and tried to kill him. (Jer 11: 21-23).

From the prophecies of Jeremiah, it however seems that he was very much a follower of the Mosaic tradition and questioned the unconditional election of Judah and Jerusalem. His prophecies also challenged this way of thinking, as God promised to destroy , “I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a lair of

jackals; and I will make the towns of Judah a desolation without inhabitant.”
(Jer 9:11)

This incident would however have been an opportunity for Jeremiah to once again voice the message of God. This incident would have given weight to his message of doom for Judah. Also the fact that he had a Levitic background, does not mean that he did not go to Jerusalem. In Jeremiah 29, he writes a letter from Jerusalem, although this is after the exile. ‘His absence from this incident’, is therefore not as usual as it is made to be. It is rather unusual that Jeremiah, who was respected as the prophet of the God of Israel, is absent from these incidents.

“Rabbinic savants considered ‘women to be merciful’, so that Huldah could be expected to deliver a lenient oracle, more so than the doom-speaking men of her age (cf. b. Meg. 14b; Qimhi; and for a modern echo, Sanda).” (Cogan & Tadmor, 1988 :283)

The oracle of Huldah did not give a different message from the message of Jeremiah. She said, “Thus says the LORD, I will indeed bring disaster on this place and on its inhabitants “ (2 Kings 22:16) This was also a message of doom for the people of Judah. A different person, Huldah, now repeated what Jeremiah had been saying for the past five years.

Branch (2000:614) highlights another reason, “Some speculate the male prophets were away.” The fact that prophets were not present at a specific location, has not prevented people from travelling long distances in order to hear what they had to say. The fact that the male prophets were not present, does not supply us with an acceptable reason why Huldah, and not one of the male prophets, was approached. “She was asked, because she was near ?” I do not think so.

Is she there because no other male prophet was available ? Or because she would be more ‘merciful’? Is Huldah there because Jeremiah stayed away from Jerusalem in fear of vicious attacks on him ? These explanations are offered as explanations why Huldah was asked to “inquire of the Lord” and not another prophet. However, all of these explanations could be questioned as indicated above. Rather I would like to argue that Huldah was chosen by the king’s confidants to fulfill the role of facilitator and mediator, because the people respected her function as prophet. Huldah is not just there by accident, neither is her being there not of importance. The prophet, Huldah, is at the core of the discovering of the “book of the law”. She is at the core of the story of Josiah.

The question asked is therefore, “Why is Huldah there? What is the theological significance of the prophecy of Huldah, the prophet ? “

1.2 The Hypothesis

The text itself, - the written story of Huldah, supply the reader with information about Huldah, as well as the other characters who form part of this story. Although this is the first and only time mention is made of Huldah in the Old Testament, some information is supplied about her, by the writer. The fact that a prophetess is found at the core of a very patriarchal story – a story about a king of Israel, is surprising. The fact that she has a name and more information about her family and address is being supplied, is astonishing. “The Israelite woman is largely unseen in the pages of the Hebrew Bible. The women we glimpse in the Hebrew Bible, are almost to a woman, exceptional. They are women who rose to positions of prominence.” (Meyers 1988:5). Following this argument of Meyers, Huldah is therefore no ordinary woman. She must have been an extra-ordinary woman to have been included in the Old Testament. The question Meyers is asking in connection to this statement, is ‘whether we can assume to see nameless women in the

activities of the named women ?” Can we ‘see’ other prophetesses in the activities? Can we assume that because there was a Huldah who was respected as a prophet, there must also have been other women who were prophets. They were just not included in the Old Testament.

This story about Huldah, the prophetess, is part of the Deuteronomistic History. The fact that it is part of the Deuteronomistic History, supplies the readers with even more information. Information about the reason for the text, information about the society and even clues to date the history written about as well as clues about the date of the text itself.

These clues supplied through the Deuteronomistic background as well as clues from the text itself, could be used to identify the theological significance of the prophet, Huldah’s prophecy.

I see the fact that I am a woman, as a very positive contribution. Huldah was a woman, just as I am. I cannot fully understand the circumstances of Huldah as well as the environment she lived in, but the story interests me as a woman is ‘telling’ part of a story. I can identify with another woman, and ask different questions – look from a different angle. I can make a contribution, which can be different. A contribution, which hopefully could be enriching.

Having its origin in a patriarchal society and being told and written from a male perspective, the text is enriched by a female reading. It brings a different perspective - a feminist perspective. Women see and understand differently from men and our experiences are therefore different which brings a different dimension to the text and can be a valuable contribution to one’s understanding of the text.

This feminist perspective is therefore not an attempt to replace other approaches. It is not an attempt to show that all other approaches or

perspectives from males should be wiped out, and there should be a radical movement in only one direction. Rather, it is an attempt to show how both perspectives (male as well as female) could be enriched by each other.

My hypothesis is therefore: The literary context as well as the Deuteronomistic background of 2 Kings 22, provide us with clues for the theological significance of Huldah as a prophet, as well as clues for different perspectives opened by a feministic approach.

1.3 Methodology

In trying to answer the question, “What is the theological significance of the prophecy of Huldah, the prophet?”, I would be doing a close reading of the text, 2 Kings 22:1-20, with specific focus on 2 Kings 22:14-20. Through a close reading of the text, I will be doing a “careful scrutiny of the language, style, images, characters, and ‘silences’” (Rogerson 1983:33).

The close reading would therefore entail a critical look at the characters included, the context of the story and especially the language. In order to have a look at the language used in the text, I need to go back to the Hebrew text. I will however be making my own translation from Hebrew into English in order to have a translation to use in my discussion. The text will therefore be used as point of departure.

Through looking at the language, the choice of words, phrases and images will be challenged and information about the narrator might be identified.

This story has quite a few characters that are introduced as the story progresses. By looking at the different characters, what information about them and their role in the story is available, one would hopefully get a

clearer picture of the circumstances of the characters, but also the circumstances of the society of the day.

The story of Huldah was written in a certain style and choices were made about what to include and what to leave out. This encourages a specific way of reading the story. There is also certain information, which if included in the story, would have been very helpful. Information about characters, especially Huldah.

Very little is known about the prophet, Huldah. She is never mentioned as one of the well-known prophets. It is therefore interesting that she is introduced specifically here. The reasons why it was decided to go to Huldah and not to one of the other better-known prophets like Jeremiah, for example, is not revealed. After the prophecy of Huldah, there is no further mention of her. It is therefore clear that there are ‘silences’ within the text, apart from characters in the text that sometimes know more than another character as well as the readers, but choose to reveal the information at a later stage. These ‘silences’ can then be interpreted and translated.

Since the biblical text forms such an important part of this essay, the original Hebrew text is used as point of departure and is an important part of the discussion. There are therefore quite a few quotations from the Hebrew text present, but I have however tried to supply an acceptable translation with the Hebrew quotations. The NRSV will be used as my choice of English translation, but I have also made my own translation using the NRSV as basis. This gave rise to notes and comments arising from the close reading of the Hebrew text, which are explained in detail. The notes and comments are then used as basis for my discussion.

Seeing that Huldah is described as a prophet in the text, attention needs also to be given to “prophecy and prophets”. Attention needs to be given to

exactly who a prophet was. Firstly in the wider ANE, and secondly in Israel – which would mean the Old Testament. Trying to find a definition for the word ‘prophet’ would help to identify whether Huldah could be defined as a prophet or not.

2 Kings 22 is part of the Deuteronomistic History. It is therefore necessary to have a clear understanding of the Deuteronomistic History. Exactly what is the Deuteronomistic History and what are the basic themes. Understanding the theology of the Deuteronomistic History, would help with the general understanding of the story of Huldah as well as the main reasons why the story of Huldah – the story of Josiah and then ultimately the Deuteronomistic History, had been written. This would then lead up to how 2 Kings 22 fits into the Deuteronomistic History. This will then lead into the text of 2 Kings 22, with specific focus on 2 Kings 22:14-20.

My methodology is therefore a close reading of 2 Kings 22:1-20, with an exegetical hermeneutical analysis from a feminist perspective, using a deductive approach. My focus will have to be 2 Kings 22: 14-20, as this is where the story of Huldah is found.

CHAPTER 2

THE TEXT OF 2 KINGS 22:1-20

2.1 Introductory remarks

In order to try and get a better understanding of the language used in 2 Kings 22, the Hebrew text will be used as point of departure. Seeing that my discussion is in English, an English translation is however needed.

I prefer the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), because it is quite near to the Hebrew text. In the translation of the Revised Standard (RSV), which appeared before the NRSV, translators tried “to allow the text to talk for itself and not the theology of the translators.” (Van der Merwe 2001:5) Furthermore, in the translation of the NRSV, translators attempted to be as inclusive as possible in the use of language, when it comes to human beings in the text.

Although I prefer the NRSV translation, there are some instances where I do not agree with the translation, and therefore I have attempted to make my own translation based on the NRSV. Differences from the NRSV, are indicated in *italics*.

The different format is one, which was introduced to me by Christo van der Merwe. The intension is that it would allow the reader to see what the parts of the story is where the narrator speaks, and where characters address each other. Also which parts can be seen as the ‘main parts’ of the story. There are also blank spaces between verses or parts of verses, which indicate a different paragraph. The main goal of this format, is to help the reader to understand the story better.

2.2 Translation

1. *The boy, Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned for thirty-one years in Jerusalem.*

His mother's name was Jedidah daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath.

²*And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and walked in all the way of his father David; and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.*

³*And it happened in the eighteenth year of King Josiah. The king sent Shaphan son of Azaliah, son of Meshullam, the secretary, to the house of the LORD, saying,*

⁴*“Go up to the high priest Hilkiah, and have him count the entire sum of the money that has been brought to the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the threshold have collected from the people;*

⁵*and be given into the hand of the workers who have been made overseers of the house of the LORD;*

and they must give it to the workers who are doing the work at the house of the LORD, to repair the fissure of the house -

⁶*to the craftsmen,*

and to the builders,

and to the masons;

and let them use it to buy timber and quarried stone to repair the house.

⁷But

no accounting shall be asked from them for the money that is delivered into their hand, for they are trustworthy in their doings.”

⁸And the high priest Hilkiah said to Shaphan the secretary,

“I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD.”

And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan,

And he read it aloud.

⁹ Then Shaphan the secretary came to the king,

and reported to the king, *and he said,*

“Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of the workers who *have been made overseers of the house of the LORD.*”

¹⁰ Shaphan the secretary *declared to the king,*

“The priest Hilkiyah has given me a book.”

Shaphan then read it aloud to the king.

¹¹ *And it happened that as the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes.*

¹² Then the king commanded the priest Hilkiyah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary, and the king’s servant Asaiah, saying,

¹³ “Go, inquire of the LORD for me,

for the people,

and for all Judah,

concerning the words of this book that has been found;

for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us,

because our ancestors did not listen to the words of this book,

to do according to all that is written concerning us.”

¹⁴ So the priest Hilkiyah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah

the prophetess the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe;

she resided in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter,
where they consulted her.

¹⁵ She declared to them,

“Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel:

Tell the man who sent you to me,

¹⁶ Thus says the LORD, *Beware !*

*I will cause disaster to come to this place
and it shall remain on its inhabitants—*

all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read.

¹⁷ *Instead (of their being)*, 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.

¹⁸ But

as to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD,
thus shall you say to him,

Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel:

Regarding the words that you have heard,

¹⁹ because your heart was penitent,

and you humbled yourself before the LORD,

when you heard how I spoke against this place,

and against its inhabitants,

that they should become a desolation and a curse,

and because you have torn your clothes and wept before me,

I also have heard you, says the LORD.

²⁰ 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.”

They took the message back to the king.

2.2 The discussion of the text

Seeing that the focus of my discussion will be the story of Huldah, I treat Huldah’s prophecy (2 Kings 22: 14-20) as a unit. The discussion of the text 2 Kings 22, will therefore be divided into two parts. The first part is verses one to thirteen and the second is verses fourteen to twenty. The two parts 2 Kings 22:1-13 and 2 Kings 22:14-20, will be discussed under two separate chapters in order to emphasize my division, but also to highlight the story of Huldah as a story within the story of Josiah.

Through the close reading of the text, background information will also be introduced. Seeing that the text is divided into two sections, the more historical information including information on the Deuteronomistic History, will be introduced in Chapter 3. Background information about prophecy, will be included in Chapter 4, with the introduction of the story of Huldah – the prophet.

Although the two sections are discussed in different chapters, it is however important to see the two chapters as ‘one’. Therefore the translation of verses one to twenty in chapter 2.

CHAPTER 3

COMMENTS ON 2 KINGS 22:1-13 - THE INTRODUCTION

The first two verses of 2 Kings 22, are treated as an introduction to the rest of the chapter by the NRSV. In these first two verses, information is supplied about Josiah, the king of Judah. The NRSV indicates the introduction – verses one and two, by writing it as a separate paragraph with the heading, "Josiah Reigns over Judah".

The rest of the chapter in the NRSV, is written under the separate heading, "Hilkiah Finds the Book of the Law". The story of Huldah, is therefore written under this same heading. Her story is seen as part of the story on 'Hilkiah finding the Book of the Law'. The focus is therefore on the finding of the Book of the Law – the circumstances which lead up to the Book of the Law being found, as well as the circumstances which followed the finding of the Book of the Law. Everything is read through the 'lenses of the Book of the Law' being found. This then leads up to the making of a covenant before God by Josiah, which then emphasises that Josiah was indeed a wonderful king who 'did what was right in the sight of the Lord'. It is therefore easy to read the story about 'Hilkiah finding the Book of the Law' and not be aware of the fact that there is another story there – the story about 'Huldah the prophet'.

As my intension is to focus on the story about Huldah, I have not used the paragraphing of the NRSV in my translation, but have used different division of paragraphs. In my discussion, I will treat the whole section before the Huldah story (2 Kings 22:1-13) as the introduction to the story on Huldah, the prophetess. I therefore choose to discuss only the first thirteen verses in this chapter and the rest of the verses (14-20), in Chapter 4. In this way, 'The story of Huldah' would be separated from the 'Finding of the book of the law', although they are connected. I would hopefully be able to focus on the

prophet Huldah, and try and answer the question, “Why is Huldah there ? What is the theological significance of the prophecy of Huldah, the prophet?”

3.1 Background information

The introduction section (2 Kings 22: 1-13) starts with king Josiah. Josiah is introduced as the king of Judah. Before I can get to the story of Huldah, I need to start with the story of Josiah, as this story would supply us with information about the circumstances within Judah as well as with information about the wider world. The countries, which surrounded Judah, as well as the position of Judah in relation to the surrounding countries. Through this indirect way, one would then be able to get information to fill the gaps and silences within the story of Huldah.

Josiah was a king and reigned for thirty-one years in Jerusalem. It is therefore easier to find information about him than it is to find information about Huldah, a female prophet. As king of Judah, mention needs to be made of him. Further more he is remembered for his reforms and therefore described as one of the best kings of Judah. Within books about the history of Israel, mention is always made of king Josiah and information about him is therefore found easily.

Huldah on the other hand, is a prophet. This should not cause her to be excluded from the history of Israel, on the contrary, she should be included as prophets played important roles in the history of Israel as well as in the society. They were often seen as ‘mediators’ between God and the rest of the people, often between God and the kings especially. This is then also the role Huldah plays in the story - that of ‘mediator’ between God and the king, as well as the people of Judah and then specifically - the people of Jerusalem.

One would expect Huldah to be more 'visible' in the history of Israel, seeing that she is part of this very important story - the story about Hilkiah finding the Book of the Law. However the fact that she is a female prophet, cannot be seen as being to her advantage. Huldah is only mentioned twice in the whole Old Testament - the story in 2 Kings 22 and the Chronicler's version of the same story in 2 Chronicle 34.

Meyers (1988:12), however, highlights and emphasizes the fact that "virtually all of the historical writings – the so-called Deuteronomistic history- were probably based on court records or traditions circulating in royal circles. A largely male group, based in the precincts of the royal palace in Jerusalem, was responsible for formulating the narrative of Israel's national existence. The second narrative account of Israel's existence, 1-2 Chronicles through Ezra and Nehemiah, echoes the Deuteronomistic account and follow it into the postexilic, post-monarchic period. It also can be located, with respect to authorship in the male leadership circles of Jerusalem in the post-exilic period." It is therefore important to note, according to Meyers, that the portions of the Hebrew Bible, which contain fragments of information about women, come from sources, which are totally removed (both hierarchically and demographically) from the lives of ordinary women in the Israelite society. Very little information if any information about the lives of the people, especially women, would be able to be gathered from the story of Huldah.

By looking at the context of the story of Josiah, one would hopefully find information about the society in Jerusalem as well as information about the situation of Judah in relation to the other countries surrounding it at that particular time in history, as this information cannot be drawn from the story of Huldah.

3.1.1 The story of Josiah

The story of Josiah is part of a whole range of stories about the kings of Judah. These kings, Hosea (2 Kings 17), Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:1-20:21), Manasseh (2 Kings 21:1-18) and Amon (2 Kings 21:19-26) all did "what was evil in the sight of the Lord." (NRSV). Except Hezekiah, who is acknowledged as "one who trusted the Lord, (but he) endangered the well-being of his people by unduly trusting the Babylonians (2 Kings 20:12-15)." Up to this point in Kings, the history that the narrator presents is a history of failure. Then comes Josiah, the ideal king, according to the standards of Deuteronomic law, the paragon of kingly righteousness (2 Kings 22:1-23:30). There has never been and never will be a king like him, the narrator says (23:25) " (Seow 1999:278)

The story on Josiah can be dated to 640-609 B.C.E. according to Kaiser (1998:391) During this time the three great powers in the Near East were Assyria, Babylon and Egypt. Assyria's influence was however declining and Egypt seemed to grow stronger. Judah was therefore no longer under the rule of Assyria so much, but rather "moved into a position where they were more in a position of subservience to Egypt" (Miller and Hayes 1986:391). It is therefore clear that the international climate was favourable for the reforms of Josiah.

Furthermore, Assyria was experiencing internal problems which contributed to create a climate favorable for reforms in Judah. "Ashurbanipal (king of Assyria) became more and more involved with pressures in the north and east, (and) Egypt became more dominant in Syria-Palestine." (Miller & Hayes 1986:383). Ashurbanipal's brother Shamash-shum-ukin (king of Babylon), revolted against him and this war lasted four years. Kaiser (1998:394) argues that "a desperate call from Aahur-uballit II of Assyria went out to Pharaoh Necho II in 609 B.C. to come to his aid and join him in

fighting off the Babylonians.” Campaigns were fought against the Arabs who supported the revolt of Babylon. Ashurbanipal was therefore constantly at war with some other ruler or nation. He eventually died in 627 BCE. “Thus began a four-year period of civil strife (627-623 BCE) which, when combined with external pressures upon the empire, proved to be overwhelming” (Miller & Hayes 1986:382). Circumstances on the political front were therefore favourable for reforms to take place within Judah.

What was the position within Judah like? Why was it necessary for reforms to take place? According to the author of 2 Kings, Manasseh’s actions were the reason why there needed to be reforms and the finding of the Book of the Law also encouraged reforms. It is however interesting to note, that Josiah was not the only king who initiated reform. King Hezekiah, the father of king Manasseh, also initiated reforms. “He removed the high places, broke down the pillars, and cut down the sacred pole. He broke into pieces the serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it; it was called Nehushtan.” (NRSV 2 Kings 18:4). King Hezekiah is described as someone who “trusted in the Lord the God of Israel; so that there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah after him, or among those who were before him” (NRSV 2 Kings 18:5).

It seems therefore that there was a tension between following only the God of Israel and following some of the practices of Baal and Asherah. Blenkinsopp (1995:81) argues that the cult of Asherah “was a normal part of worship under the monarchy and that, in terms of responding to basic needs, it worked.” Jeremiah 44 :16-18 is an example of the worship of Asherah. “As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we are not going to listen to you. Instead, we will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the queen of heaven and pour out libations to her, just as we and our ancestors, our kings and our officials, used to do in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. We used to have plenty of food, and

prospered, and saw no misfortune. But from the time we stopped making offerings to the queen of heaven and pouring out libations to her, we have lacked everything and have perished by the sword and by famine.” (NRSV). It seems that there were kings who favoured the God of Israel (like Josiah) and there were kings who favoured Baal and Asherah, like Manasseh for example.

The circumstances in Assyria as well as the circumstances in Judah were therefore favourable for reforms at the time of the reign of Josiah, and helped him in his reforms.

The fact that Assyria was not such an important force in Judah at that stage helped and Egypt established the Twenty-sixth Dynasty. This led to better co-operation between Assyria and Egypt. Assyria’s influence was declining and Egypt became more dominant in Syria-Palestine. “Egyptian policy in Syria-Palestine was far more politically laissez-faire in nature than had been Assyrian policy and was primarily commercial in operation. Egypt did not seem to have had any plans or desire to annex or subjugate completely Syria-Palestinian states. This means that Egypt was probably little concerned with internal Syria-Palestinian affairs, such as religious practices and developments.” (Miller and Hayes 1986: 391).

Furthermore, the Book of the Law was found and this reminded people once again of God’s love and care for them and encouraged them to repent.

3.2 The Deuteronomistic History

The history based on external non-biblical sources indicate clearly that circumstances were favourable for reforms to take place within Judah during the time of Josiah’s reign. This then explains why Josiah was able to achieve all he did. The author of 2 Kings does however not share this argument.

The passage 2 Kings 22, forms part of the section of the Bible, which is seen as a unit and called the Deuteronomistic History. Mayes (1999:268) highlights five points in the work of Noth (*Deuteronomistic History* [1943, ET 1981]), which makes the unity of the Deuteronomistic History clear :

(1) The language, which is used, is recognizable and consistent. (2) There are speeches or narratives in deuteronomistic style, which appear at critical points in the history to review the history. (3) The chronology creates a unifying framework. (4) The work has a theological consistency- the relationship between God and Israel depends on obedience to covenant law rather than on sacrifice and other cultic practice. (5) The history explains the course of the history of Israel and the definite end to which Israel came with the destruction of Jerusalem.

This unit comprises Deuteronomy, Joshua, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings. “ It tells the story of the nation from the theological perspective that Israel prospered or suffered in relation to how obedient or disobedient they were to the covenant. As went their faith, so went their national standard of living.” (Bandstra 1995:181). This definition of Bandstra is questionable if one uses the argument of Amit (1999:100) on retribution. If the story of the Deuteronomistic Historian shows how Israel suffered or prospered in relation to their obedience or disobedience to God, what distractions could one then make from Manasseh’s reign of fifty-five years? How should the reforms Hezekiah as well as Josiah made be understood? They did ‘what was right in the eyes of the Lord’, which would mean that the people also did during their reigns, but still at the end the people of Judah were punished. Manasseh, ‘did what was wrong in the eyes of God’, but continued to reign for fifty-five years.

The writer of Kings – the Deuteronomistic Historian, sees “Josiah’s actions (as) a reaction to the decadent age of Manasseh.” (Cogan & Tadmor 1988 :293) Manasseh was king in Jerusalem for fifty-five years, but “did what

was evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the abominable practices of the nations that the Lord drove out before the people of Israel.” (NRSV 2 Kings 21:2). Thompson (1996: 724) describes the reign of Manasseh as “bloody and reactionary, and notorious for the introduction of illegal altars into the Temple courts and ‘the passing of his sons through the fire’ in the valley of Hinnom.” It is therefore understandable that Josiah needs to be portrayed in a very positive light. The narrator of 2 Kings does exactly that. It is therefore clear that the narrator of 2 Kings had a specific goal. This might have caused the narrator to neglect other factors, which could be seen as playing a role – other factors, which could be supplied as a reason, or reasons why there have been reforms in Judah during this time in history.

This is then also the argument of Yairah Amit. Amit (1999:100) challenges the idea that the reform of Josiah was in reaction to the ‘bloody and reactionary’ reign of Manasseh. She argues that the rules of retribution, which is endorsed by the writer of Kings, are not followed: “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse; the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn away that I am commanding you today, to follow other gods that you have not known” (NRSV Deuteronomy 11:26-28).

“Manasseh sinned and led others to sin, (but he) reigned for 55 years (698-642 BCE); and yet, according to the book of Kings, there were no national catastrophes during his reign. The author of the book of Kings, did not stick to the principle of immediate and direct retribution, and was not therefore obliged to describe Manasseh’s punishment for all his sins, being evidently unimpressed by the fact that this sinner enjoyed a long life and an especially long reign. According to his philosophy, Manasseh’s sins sealed the fate of Jerusalem and caused its destruction at the hands of the Babylonians in the reign of Zedekiah. This account suited the author of the book of Kings, as it

could explain why Josiah's piety and virtuous deeds failed to prevent the downfall." (Amit 1999:100).

Josiah reigned for thirty-one years. "Unfortunately neither II Kings nor II Chronicles provides extensive details about his reign or about international affairs generally, except with regard to his religious reforms." (Miller & Hayes 1986: 391). Although he was the king for so many years, and he is described as one of the greatest kings, very little is known about these thirty-one years.

He is remembered for his religious reforms, but the religious reforms take up a small portion of the history on his life. Josiah's whole reign of thirty-one years, is summarized in two chapters. It covers the discovering of "the book of the law" (2 Kings 22:1-20), Josiah making a covenant to obey the words of the book (2 Kings 23:1-3), the purging of the Judean cult (2 Kings 23:4-14) the destruction of shrines and the temple at Bethel (2 Kings 23:15-20), the Passover (2 Kings 23:21-23) and Josiah's death (2 Kings 23:29-30). Short can however not be equated with unimportant. Cogan and Todmar (1988 :293) explains the shortness of the reign of Josiah as, "The historian has set Josiah in center stage, but since the main subject of the present account was to be the 'Book of Teaching' and the king's reaction to its discovery, the repair story is given in very brief form." It is therefore, understandable that the story of Huldah is as short as it is. The fact that the story of Huldah, the prophet is included, emphasizes the importance of it. It was necessary to include it, because without Huldah, the history would not be complete.

The king who is described as one of the kings of Judah, who reigned for thirty-one years, and is remembered for his reformation – this king's story is reported in two chapters. This needs to be seen against the goal of the writer of Kings as explained. The historical evidence shows that different reasons for the reforms of Josiah could be argued. Importantly - the climate was

favourable for reform in Judah, because of what was happening in the rest of the world.

The writer of Kings however had a very specific goal in mind and reported the stories of the book of Kings in such a way to reach that goal. The focus is not so much on individual people in the story – on Josiah the wonderful king, but rather on the broader story. The writer was focusing on the history of the formation of a nation - the formation of the Israelites through the guidance of God. More specifically, however, “the Deuteronomistic Historian really set out to answer significant questions concerning Israel’s national destiny. First, by writing theological history he attempted to answer the question, ‘Why did Israel, the Northern Kingdom, fall to Assyrians?’ Second, he attempted to shed light on the question, ‘Why is Josiah trying to reform the religious practices of Judah?’” (Bandstra 1995:181).

It is however also important to note that the story of Josiah, and therefore also the story of Huldah, is also found in the book of Chronicles – 2 Chronicles 34. Amit (1999: 83) agrees with other scholars that the book of Chronicles was written under Persian rule, because of the reference to ‘the rise of the Persian kingdom’ (Chron. 36:20) which “shows that the author knew about the end of the Babylonian exile and the reign of Cyrus king of Persia. (2 Chron. 36:22) “

According to Amit (1999:83), “a comparison between the book of Chronicles and its sources reveals that the author relied extensively on the sources we are familiar with, namely, Genesis through to 2 Kings, especially 2 Samuel and Kings, which served as the frame and main infrastructure for his work.” Although 2 Kings had been used as a source for the writing of the book of Chronicles, there are important differences. The historical description of both the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms differ. Amit (1999:87) argues that the “author used his sources as he saw fit.” The author had a different

ideology from the author of 2 Kings. One could argue that the fact that 2 Kings had been used as source in the writing of the book of Chronicles, that 2 Kings would be a more reliable source. However, the differences also highlight the fact that although both accounts (Kings and Chronicles) are historical descriptions, neither is 'objective'. Both Kings and Chronicles were written to encourage a certain theology.

The same argument of Amit (1999:100), which has been used to identify the problem with retribution, can also be used as explanation for the difference between the account of Kings and that of Chronicles. "The Chronicler's historical description adheres to the strict doctrine of direct and immediate retribution. That is why he had to create a correlation between the events and the retribution that promptly followed. If a certain king sinned, he had to be punished in his own lifetime, and not his son's; and vice versa, if he behaved virtuously, he had to be rewarded directly. For example, Manasseh, who sinned and led others to sin, reigned for 55 years (698-642 BCE); and yet, according to the book of Kings, there were no national catastrophes during his reign."

Scholars have been debating the identity of the Deuteronomist and the content of Deuteronomistic theology for almost sixty years. The debate about the Deuteronomistic History, is therefore nothing new. M. Noth (1949) argued in his thesis (*Deuteronomistic History*) that a single author living in the exilic period composed the entire corpus. Von Rad, FM Cross, Wolff, TC Römer and others have done a lot of work since Noth. It is however not the intention of this thesis to go further into the matter.

3.3 Comments on the text (2 Kings 22:1-13)

In commenting on the text, I will be looking at the introductory remarks supplied by the narrator. The 'introductory remarks' are the first two verses

with the heading, “Josiah Reigns over Judah” in the NRSV. I have chosen to call it introductory remarks as it is rather an introduction of the ‘main character of the NRSV story’, king Josiah.

I will specifically be looking at the words chosen by the narrator and which connotations could be made by using words, names, titles, phrases and word-order. After the ‘introductory remarks’ on the first two verses of the text, I will be looking at the different characters as they are introduced by the narrator, which will then lead us into the main part of the introduction – the reason why Huldah’s help was needed – ‘The Finding of the Book of the Law’.

3.3.1 Introductory Remarks

In the introduction, the main character, Josiah is introduced in the similar manner of Manasseh and Amon. It is interesting to note that before Manasseh, a different way of introduction was used. Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18 was for example introduced in the following way : “In the third year of King Hoshea son of Elah of Israel, Hezekiah son of King Ahaz of Judah began to reign. ² He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Abi daughter of Zechariah.” (NRSV).

This is the way Ahaz (2 Kings 15:32-33) as well as Jotham (2 Kings 16:1-2a) are introduced. Jotham’s introduction is slightly different, as the name of his mother is omitted. He is also described as somebody who “did not do what was right in the sight of the LORD his God, as his ancestor David had done”. The basic form is however there.

It is also important to note that before Manasseh, there were two kingdoms. It is understandable that mention would be made of Israel, the Northern Kingdom in the introduction. Manasseh became king after the fall of

Samaria (722 B.C.E.) . The fact that there was now only one kingdom – Judah, can be seen for the difference in the introduction of the kings from Manasseh onwards. There is however a difference between the introductions of Manasseh, Amon and Josiah. Josiah “did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.” (NRSV 2 Kings 22:2). Manasseh as well as Amon “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.” (NRSV 2 Kings 21:2, 20) Josiah was clearly not like Manasseh and neither like Amon, his father.

In the first verse of the story, Josiah's name, and age is supplied first. The fact that one is chosen to become king at such an early age, is extra-ordinary. Manasseh was young (twelve years old), but this boy is even younger. However **בְּמִלְכוֹ** can be translated as 'reigned' (as used by the NRSV) as well as 'became king' . The verb 'reign' however implies that the person is able to make informed decisions and carry the responsibilities which go with 'to reign'. Cogan & Tadmor (1988 :281) argues that "because of Josiah's young age upon the throne, it is likely that Judah's policies were set by regents, who reared the king during his minority." He 'became king', but the country was 'reigned' with the help of a council. This would then mean that Josiah's reign in the true sense of the word, could have been much shorter.

Then information about the length of Josiah's reign - thirty-one years - is supplied. This is shorter than Manasseh's fifty-five years, which might be seen as indication of the success or failure of the king. If it is taken into account that Josiah was younger than Manasseh when he became king, his reign might even have been shorter in relation to Manasseh. This would trigger even more questions about the reign of Manasseh and the account of history through the eyes of the Deuteronomistic historian. Was Manasseh indeed such a 'bad king' as the Deuteronomist would like the readers to believe ? Why was he then able to reign for so long ?

Josiah's mother is then introduced. She came from **בִּזְכָּת** Bozkath was a town in Shephelah in Judah. Jos 15:39 also mentions it.

יְדִידָה, the name of Josiah's mother, "Jedidah" is the feminine form of the name **יְדִידָה** which Nathan, the prophet gave to Solomon in 2 Sam 12:25. The name means 'beloved of Yah' - 'beloved of God'. Solomon is the son of David who was conceived after he and Bethseba's first child (who was conceived under adulterous circumstances – 2 Samuel 11) died. The birth of Solomon can be 'read' as a sign of God's forgiveness of David. Jedidah – "beloved of God" – and who's name has the connotation of the proof of God's forgiveness of David, gave birth to Josiah. A very special woman, chosen by God, to be the mother of Josiah. The introduction of the mother of Josiah, already gives a clue that this king is different.

Solomon has also always been associated with wisdom, and through his mother, there is therefore a close connotation between Josiah and wisdom.

Although the difference as well as the wisdom of Josiah were hinted at in the first verse of the text, in the rest of the introduction it is stated. Josiah is not like the other kings before him. He is differentiated from Manasseh as well as Amon even further. Of them it is written, " He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord" (NRSV 2 Kings 20:2, 20) , but of Josiah is written, "He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left." (2 Kings 22:2) The connection with David is made with all kings who, 'did what was right in the sight of the Lord'. This is also said of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:3). It is however interesting that in the introduction of Amon, who 'did what was evil in the sight of the Lord', mention is made of the fact that Manasseh was his father, but in the case of Josiah, no mention is made of the fact that Amon

was his father. He is rather directly connected with David – “(he) walked in all the way of his father David;” (2 Kings 22:2).

Josiah is however distinguished from the rest of the ‘good kings’ even further through the last phrase which is added, **וְלֹא־סָר יָמִין וְשְׂמֹאל:** “this verse is the first part of the Dtr. formula of evaluation, completed in 23:25, which frames the history of Josiah and describes him in terms unparalleled for any other king of Judah. The climax of Deuteronomistic presentations of righteous and sinful kings has unmistakably been reached.” (Cogan & Tadmor 1988:281) This is emphasised through the connection with king, David - “the standard of royal piety” (Watts 1985:323). “he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.” He is therefore like David, who “did what was right in the sight of the Lord”, but not exactly like David, for he “did not turn aside”.

Furthermore, with the inclusion of ‘Jerusalem’- the city of David , a further connection is made with David. He is from the line of David. He is like David - after David received forgiveness for his sins from God. (This is symbolized through the name of his mother.) And he reigned in Jerusalem – ‘City of David.’

The story then starts, in the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah. Although the NRSV calls these first two verses "Josiah Reigns over Judah", we know nothing about the seventeen years before the eighteenth year.

3.3.2 The people surrounding Josiah

Josiah sends a whole group of people to ‘inquire from the Lord about the book.’ It is however not strange, if the example of Hezekiah is kept in mind. King Hezekiah also sent four or five people (the number of senior priests is not stated) to Isaiah, to ‘inquire from the Lord.’ This is also in line with what

happened in other societies in the Ancient Near East. Evidence have been found in texts from Syria-Palestine, Anatolia, Mesopotamia and Egypt of prophets who existed and prophesied. They responded in times of crisis, when a message of reassurance was needed, or at a treaty ceremony, or when a dream needed to be interpreted. It seems as if their activities were centered around the royal court. Schmitt (1992 :486) agrees and he argues that throughout the ANE, prophecy was often connected with kings and rulers.

House (1995 :380-381) has a different argument and highlights the fact that Josiah does not 'work' alone, but has a 'circle' of people surrounding him: "Josiah leads a tremendous reform based on a prophetic interpretation of God's Word. Josiah also manages to help Judah steer an independent political course during a turbulent time in international politics. He does not achieve all these things alone, however, for these are also the days of Huldah – who interprets the covenant for Josiah – of Jeremiah – who like Josiah is a young reformer – and of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, each of whom contributes significantly to the climate of reform in the land." House's circle refer to the prophets of the day, but it highlights the fact that Josiah is indeed surrounded by 'a circle' of people.

The completion of the 'circle' is a process, which is found throughout the story. Hilkiyah is the first character in the story to know about the book that was found. He must have read it, although the readers are not told about it, because he knows what the content of the book is – 'a book of the law'. He then gives the book to Shaphan, who reads it, but still the readers are not told what the content of the book is. Shaphan then reads it to the king, who is very upset by the reading. The readers are still not told what the full content of the book is, apart from what is already known – it is a book of the law. The circle is then made even bigger, as more characters are included. Ahikam, Achbor, and Asaiah are sent with Hilkiyah and Shaphan to ask Huldah, the prophet about the content of the book as well as its implications for the

people and the king. Huldah then, includes the readers and inform us what the implications for the people of Judah as well as the king is.

The fact that Josiah has a group of people helping him to find answers about the book found in the temple, strengthens the idea of House that Josiah does not work alone. This might be because he was used to always have people surrounding him, as he was very young when he became king. He was used to asking for help and assistance, as according to Cogan and Tadmor (1988:281), Josiah was "reared during his minority by regents, who set the policies for Judah." It might be that he adopted this way of working and therefore still had a group of people nearby to help and guide him.

The questions are, "Why these particular people?" "Who were they?" Hobbs (1985:320) argues that the inclusion of these people is "another item of plot development – the development of the circle of those involved in the action. In verse 3 the king is the first actor and sends Shaphan to the temple. Shaphan meets the priest Hilkiyah and returns to the king with the book. The next mission of Shaphan involves not only himself, but also Hilkiyah, Ahikam, Achbor, and Asaiah (v 14). The circle is extended from one, to two, to three, and now to five. A sixth person is involved in the figure of Huldah the prophetess. This step- by- step enlargement of the actors in the drama gives to the narrative an increasing sense of business, and therefore urgency."

The introduction of the different characters in a almost selective way, also emphasizes the importance of their mission. Five men needed to go to the prophet. One could argue that these people were chosen to go to Huldah, as they were the people who surrounded the king – those people who he trusted. The question is then, whether Huldah was also one of these trusted group – those who supported him and helped him. I would argue that Huldah was indeed one of the group. She was regularly asked for guidance and her word was trusted.

Who were the rest of the trusted group ?

3.3.2.1 *Shaphan*

The narrator then introduces Shaphan, **שָׁפָן** He was the royal secretary.

The secretary was one of the officials of the king. "An edict of Joas, king of Judah, entrusted to the royal secretary the duty of collecting the contributions given for the repair of the Temple (2 K 12:11;cf. 2Ch 24:11) " (De Vaux , 1980:131) This explains why he was asked by Josiah to go to the temple to collect the money and see that the repairs to the temple were done.

Shaphan is also described as the father of Ahikam in 2 Kings 22:12. Claissé-Walford (2000:1197) argues that this Shaphan (father of Ahikam) is the same person as Shaphan the royal secretary. Graham (1992:1159) argues however that it cannot be the same person, as Ahikam, the son of Shaphan is mentioned before Shaphan the royal secretary. This is seen as an argument against a father-son relationship, as the father then needs to be mentioned first.

Shaphan is totally trusted by the king, and this must have caused him to be a very important and powerful person. He seems to be 'second in command', as reports are made to him and he then reports back to the king (verses 8 and 9). He ranked below the master of the palace (who according to De Vaux had the same responsibilities as the master of the palace in Egypt – basically being only responsible to the Pharaoh) and the fate of the kingdom hung on the mission they performed together." (De Vaux 1980: 131) The secretary was therefore indeed an important person and played an important role in public affairs.

As royal secretary, Shaphan was both the personal secretary of the king as well as the the secretary of state. "He was responsible for all the correspondence, internal and external, and for the Temple collections (2 Kings 12:11).

The narrator supplies the reader with the complete message of Josiah to Shaphan and does it by using the first person. The message shows what a thorough job the king did with the restoration of the temple – although he was only following the instructions of Jo(ho)ash. It also encourages the reader to make a judgement about the king. He does not want the people to report back to him, about the spending of money, "as they deal honestly." (NRSV 2 Kings 22:7). The readers are not reminded that Josiah is using almost the same words of Joash in 2 Kings 12. This was the way things needed to be done, and Josiah actually only followed instructions .

Shaphan needed to get the money from the keepers of the threshold, as they were the people who collected the money from the people who visited the temple. שְׁמֹרֵי הַסֶּף keepers of the threshold were part of the officials of the temple. According to 2 Kings 25:18, there were only three keepers of the threshold – this is before the exile. "Joas placed them (the three keepers) in charge of the collections from the people." (De Vaux, 1980:379).

The conversation between Josiah and Shaphan highlights the important position of Shaphan as secretary. The order to collect the money and see that the reparations were done, is given to Shaphan, which places the responsibility for seeing that it is carried out with him.

Through the order of Josiah to Shaphan, another character in the story is introduced- Hilkiyah, הַכֹּהֵן הַגָּדוֹל the high priest. Hilkiyah is referred to as the high priest as well as the priest. In verses 4 and 8 he is the 'high priest'

and in verses 10, 12 and 14, he is 'the priest'. De Vaux (1980:398) argues that "the term 'high priest' (*hakkohen haggadol*) is found only four times in pre-exilic texts (2 K 12:11; 22:4,8; 23:4). However in the parallels to these texts (2 Ch 24:11; 2 Ch 34:14,18), only *kohen* is used. The Greek version of 2 Kings 23:4 also uses *kohen*." De Vaux (1980:398) therefore argues that these four references are modifications.

3.3.2.2 *Hilkiah*

There is not a lot of information about Hilkiah, the high priest. The name Hilkiah, is a name which was quite popular. It seems however that it was only used for a priest. Ruffin (2000:591) identifies thirteen different people who's name was Hilkiah. Uitti (1992:201) identifies eleven people who had the name Hilkiah. The question is, which of these named by Ruffin and Uitti was the one mentioned in 2 Kings 22? It is not clear whether Hilkiah mentioned in 2 Kings 18:37 and described as 'the father of Eliakim', who was in charge of the palace, is the same Hilkiah of 2 Kings 22. He and family seem also to have had close relations with the king. Uitti (1992:201) makes a differentiation between Hilkiah, father of Eliakim of 2 Kings 18 and Hilkiah, son of Shallum and father of Azariah of 2 Kings 22. Ruffin (2000:591) does not identify the father or son of Hilkiah the high priest at the time of Josiah, but identifies another Hilkiah, father of Eliakim (2 Kings 18).

Hilkiah is however also the same name of the father of Jeremiah, the prophet, who most probably was also a priest "officiating to the rural community at Anathoth." (Norman 1996:474-475). They were most probably descendents from Abiathar, the high priest of David. The fact that this priest is also named Hilkiah, just like the father of Jeremiah, could most probably be only coincidence or a play on words by the narrator.

"According to the genealogical lists of the high priesthood, Hilkiah was the son of Shallum of the family of Zadok (cf. 1 Chr 5:38-39, 9:10-11; Ezra 7:1;

Neh 11:11). The gap in these lists reaching back from the reign of Josiah to the days of Solomon suggested to B. Mazar that the Zadokite priests were rehabilitated by Josiah” (Cogan & Tadmor 1988:281).

3.3.2.3 *Ahikam*

Ahikam is described as the son of Shaphan. This does not seem to be the same Shaphan as Shaphan the secretary, as there is a clear distinction made between Shaphan the secretary and Ahikam son of Shaphan. Berridge (1992:112-113) however argues that Ahikam was indeed the son of Shaphan the secretary. He therefore identifies the whole family as one who held government office. He argues that Ahikam’s brothers were Elasah (Jer 29:3) and Gemariah (Jer 36:10-12, 25) Both Elasah and Gemariah as well as the son of Gemariah are identified as court officials by Berridge. Ahikam is a ‘high-ranking officer’ according to Berridge.

In Jeremiah 26:24 however, Ahikam, son of Shaphan, is described as the protector of the prophet Jeremiah. After the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah was handed over to Gedaljah, the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan. There is therefore definitely a close relationship between Ahikam’s family and Jeremiah. They obviously admired him as prophet and must have had great respect for the prophet, Jeremiah.

3.3.2.4 *Achbor*

Achbor is not so well known as Ahikam, apart from the fact that he was a courtier of king Josiah. Ash (2000:13) as well as Fretz (1992:54) identify Achbor as the son of Micaiah. Both Ash and Fretz identify another person with the name of Achbor, but he is described as the father of the Edomite king Baal-hanan in Genesis 36:38-39 and 1Chronicles 1:49

In 2 Chronicles 34:20, where the same story can be found, Achbor's name is Abdon. About Abdon, more information is available – he came from the tribe of Benjamin (1 Chr 8:23). Whether Abdon of 1 Chronicles 8 and Achbor of 2 Kings 22 were the same person, is not certain.

However, the prophet Jeremiah came from Anathoth in Benjamin and was from the tribe of Benjamin. If Abdon and Achbor is indeed the same person, Jeremiah and he came from the same tribe. Again, this might then point towards a connection with the prophet Jeremiah.

3.3.2.5 Asaiah

Asaiah, is the one character of who there is the least known. Both Williams (2000:108) and Dillard (1992:471) identifies four people with the name Asaiah. The only information supplied about Asaiah in 2 Kings 22, is that he was a “royal servant” and one of the dignitaries who were sent to Huldah. The narrator gives us the same information - that he was a servant of Josiah. In 1Chronicles 6:30, mention is made of an Asaiah under the list of Levites.

These are the people king Josiah worked with – the ‘circle’ who surrounded him. These are the men he trusted and therefore included in the inner circle. They were told about the ‘book of the law’ and they are the people who’s help he asked for and relied on.

It is however very strange, that men who all in one way or another had a connection with the prophet, Jeremiah or who’s sympathies were towards him, would not go to him when they are sent to “inquire from the Lord” Surely they all knew about the messages of doom, which the prophet, Jeremiah had been prophesying. This was then therefore another occasion to be able to speak to the king personally.

3.3.3 Finding the book of the law

This book was found in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign and seeing that this reign was from 639-609 B.C.E. (Miller & Hayes, 1986:221), it more or less would have been 621 B.C.E. Jeremiah started his ministry more or less in 627 B.C.E. which means six years before 'the book of the law' was found and twelve years into the reign of Josiah. Prophecies like the following from the prophet Jeremiah would have been well-known :

"The LORD said to me in the days of King Josiah: Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and played the whore there? ⁷ And I thought, "After she has done all this she will return to me"; but she did not return, and her false sister Judah saw it. ⁸ She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce; yet her false sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore. ⁹ Because she took her whoredom so lightly, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree. ¹⁰ Yet for all this her false sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but only in pretense, says the LORD."

(NRSV Jer 2:6-10)

When the 'book of the law' is found. It is Hilkiyah, who informs Shaphan, that he has found the book.

When one looks at the hierarchy present at the temple, it seems very unlikely that Hilkiyah, himself, found the book. He is only associated with counting the money, which are brought into the temple- after it had been collected by the keepers of the threshold from the ordinary people. There are then other workers who did the actual repairing. It is logical that the workers would

have a greater possibility of finding the book, than the high priest who only supervised from a distance.

The narrator allows Hilkiyah to speak in the first person and say, I have found the 'book of the law'. The reader is allowed to judge for herself whether this might be true or not. Although the narrator has told us through the words of Josiah, that Hilkiyah is trustworthy: כִּי בְאֱמוּנָה הֵם עֹשִׂים: lit. It means, "for trustworthy are they in their doings" The narrator is supplying the reader with a value judgment of the king. He trusts the workers, but it also creates a space for the reader to make a character judgment of the king and see him as having a good relationship with the workers - Josiah was a king who trusted people. By introducing this information about the way the king values the workers, proof about his character is supplied for the reader. Josiah was indeed a different type of king.

However, the king is only following the instruction given by king, Joash in 2 Kings 12:4-15. He followed it to the letter and Josiah uses exactly the same words as the instruction of Joash. It could easily have been a copy: "They did not ask for an account from those into whose hand they delivered the money to pay out to the workers, for they dealt honestly." (NRSV: 2 Kings 12:15). Therefore, one would rather describe Josiah as a very reliable follower of tradition and teaching. He is therefore rightfully described in the introduction in verse 2 as somebody who was a great follower, "He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and walked in all the way of his father David; and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left."

סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה although this phrase is translated as 'the book of the law', it literally means 'a writing/book of the law'. The use of the definite article 'the' implies that a specific book was found, but this is not what the

Hebrew indicates. This also connects with the indefinite article 'a' of verse 10: 'The priest Hilkiah has given me a book'.

The Deuteronomist was, however writing this story with a definite goal in mind – to record the history of Israel in a very positive way (for Judah especially), and in that way also to supply explanations for certain events. The reformations of Josiah which follows in chapter 23, therefore might not have happened if it was just 'a writing', but because it was 'the Writing of the Law' it caused Josiah to bring about the reforms he did.

There are scholars who argue very strongly that these 'writings' found in the temple, were indeed part of the book Deuteronomy. Bandstra (1995:181) refers to the fact that De Wette, a nineteenth-century scholar of the Pentateuch, was the first to recognize that Deuteronomy fits the description of Josiah's reform program in 2 Kings. It is therefore not 'a writing', but *the* writing – *the* book of the law'. The author of Kings makes sure that the readers would know that it is not just 'writing' but rather 'the writing'.

Hilkiah also knows that it is 'the book of the law', which implies that he has read it. He then hands it over to Shaphan. Whether it was his intention to show it to the king or not, we do not know. Shaphan is given the task of deciding what should be done with the book. There is no direction from Hilkiah, the high priest, no verbal communication between Shaphan and Hilkiah.

Shaphan then takes the book, and he reads it. וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו "and he read it aloud". This same word is used in verse 10, where Shaphan is reading the 'writings' they have found, to the king. Seeing that the same word is used in both cases, one could assume that both readings were done aloud. The first time in the presence of Hilkiah and the second time in the presence of the king.

In Deuteronomy 31:9, Moses commands the priests, sons of Levi and all the elders, that they should “read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people—men, women, and children, as well as the aliens residing in your towns—so that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God and to observe diligently all the words of this law.” (NRSV) Is the reading of ‘the book’ found by Hilkiyah, an indication that Shaphan is one of those named by Moses ? Maybe a Levite ?

However, one of the duties of the secretary, who was both the private secretary of the king as well as the state secretary, was to look after all correspondence. He might therefore have read the book found in the temple, before he would show it to the king, in order to decide whether the king needed to see it or not.

The scene now changes to the palace with the king. Shaphan reports back to the king. The most important item on his agenda, is the orders, which were given about the temple’s restoration, as this was the instruction, which Josiah gave to him. He reports that the money had been counted and given to the workers who would see to the restoration of the temple.

He then reports about the ‘book of the law’, which was found. The narrator informs us that this information was given in a different manner through the usage of the word **אָמַר** this word comes from the root **אָמַר** which does not have the same meaning as "tell". NRSV has however translated it as "inform", which is (in my opinion) just a formal way of telling. Shaphan was rather declaring – he was making something known which was up till that moment concealed to the king, and only known by himself and Hilkiyah. Up to this point only Shaphan and Hilkiyah knew about the book (this is however not sure, but no other people are mentioned) and only the two of them knew what was written in the book.

Shaphan then declares to the king, סֵפֶר נָתַן לִי חִלְקִיָּה הַכֹּהֵן. The word order in the sentence, literally, 'a book was given to me by Hilkiah, the high priest', puts the focus on the book, which is introduced. It also shows how surprising it must have been for Shaphan that Hilkiah brought a book to him. It is also something totally new which is introduced into the story.

Shaphan declared to the king. He was not only telling – reporting, but also revealing something, which the king was unaware of. This puts him and the king in an almost confidant relationship.

It is also interesting that the narrator feels the need to once again remind us, that Shaphan is the secretary, before he gives report of the 'book of the law'. Shaphan, the secretary, then reads the 'book of the law' to the king. Would this be an indication, that he is not supposed to read it, or that he may read 'the book', because he is the secretary? Or it might only be to prevent any confusion, as another Shaphan is introduced to the readers in verse 12 - Shaphan the father of Ahikam.

The readers are still kept in the dark about the detail of the content of the book. The reaction of the king after listening to the book being read to him, indicates, that it must be something really bad, because he tears his clothes once he has heard what is written in the book. House (1985:384) explains his reaction to the reading by looking at the content of the book. He argues that it might be that Deuteronomy 27-28 was read to Josiah, "since his response stresses God's wrath over the nation's disobedience." He understood what this meant for Judah and therefore "he admits the nation's sin, fears its results, and hopes it is not too late to change. He seems to reason that God may yet be merciful to an undeserving people." (House 1985:384). This is House's explanation as to why after he knew what was written in the book, Josiah still chooses to ask Huldah to 'inquire from the Lord'.

Nelson (1987:256) argues that Josiah sending the five men to ‘inquire from the Lord’ was not a “question about the authenticity of the book (but rather he wanted to know) about his fate and the fate of the nation.” It seems therefore that House and Nelson agree that after Josiah had heard the content of the book, he knew it was ‘real’. He only needed to know what this meant for himself, and the people of Judah. The tearing of his clothes can then easily be interpreted as not only an admission of his own sins, but also the nation’s and an act of repentance.

Josiah then sends five men to inquire from God what the content of the book meant for himself as well as for the people of Judah. It is interesting that Josiah sends the men to inquire from God, as his character is portrayed as one who already knows what the content means. “for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our ancestors did not obey the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.” (2 Kings 22 :13) The character of Josiah is wise. His wisdom, which had been hinted at when Josiah was introduced, is now shown.

King Josiah is also once again shown as a follower, as he follows in the ways of Hezekiah and does what Hezekiah did in 2 Kings 19:1-2. “When King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord. And he sent Eliakim, who was in charge of the palace, and Shebna the secretary, and the senior priests, covered with sackcloth to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz.” Josiah sends his five “trusted attendants” to ‘inquire of the Lord for (him)’.

CHAPTER 4

COMMENTS ON 2 KINGS 22:14-20

The five men, who were sent to Huldah, are once again named, and this emphasizes the fact that all of them went to Huldah. A whole group of people was sent to Huldah. Further more the fact that such a 'large' group of people, a committee, was sent to Huldah, emphasizes the seriousness of the situation according to Nelson (1987 :255). The king realized that the finding of the book of the law, but more importantly, the reaction to the finding, has important repercussions for him as well as for the whole Judah. It is therefore important that he knows what God is saying.

The king sending people to 'inquire of the Lord for (him)', leads us into the story of Huldah.

There is however a difference between the first time these characters were introduced as a group in verse 12 and this time (in verse 14) when the group is named. The title of Shaphan, the secretary as well as the title of Asaiah, the king's servant are left out. Only the title of Hilkiyah, the priest, is kept. This emphasizes the fact that there was a priest included in the group who went to see Huldah. The priest went to the prophet, as the title of Huldah is also included: "the prophetess Huldah".

This fact seems to be an important one, as Hezekiah included "senior priests" – more than one 'senior' priest to 'inquire from the Lord.' Blenkinsopp (1995:80-83) highlights the role of the priest. He argues that "the most basic social function of cult, priesthood, and religion in general is to assure survival and material well-being." It is therefore necessary for the priest to be part of the group who is going to find out from the Lord what was going to happen to the people. How would the finding of the book of the law, influence their well-being.

As teacher of the law, it is also important for the priest to be part of the process of getting information about the book of the law.

Blenkinsopp (1995:98) furthermore argues that “it should be added that (Levites) occupied an intermediate position in the Temple hierarchy.” Seeing that the priest played different roles in the society and Temple, he needs to be included in the group going to Huldah. The inclusion of a priest, even more if he is the high priest, emphasizes the importance of the task, but it also gives the group more authority. A group like this one, would therefore not go to any prophet, but only to one in whom they had confidence - somebody respected as a prophet by the society.

The fact that the five men went to Huldah, leads to the introduction of Huldah.

4.1 Huldah’s story

4.1.1 Introductory Remarks

Just like king Josiah was introduced in one verse and information given about his family, specifically, his mother, Huldah is now introduced. Information about her family is supplied and in this way information is supplied which can help with building an identity for Huldah. It tells us a little bit about the person, Huldah. It also emphasizes that “Huldah was a person who lived in Jerusalem and was known by those who lived near her. She had a family and is not a fictitious character” (Nelson 1987 :256).

Huldah was married to Shallum. Very little is known about Shallum the husband of Huldah apart from the fact that he was “the son of Tikvah”, who is named Tokhath in 2 Chronicles 34:22. Bartelt (2000:1195) has identified

fifteen people with the name Shallum and Althan (1992:1154) has identified fourteen people with the same name. The other references to Shallum are found in 2 Kings 15:10,13; 1 Chronicles 2:40-41; 1 Chronicles 3:15; 1 Chronicles 4:24-25; 1 Chronicles 6:12-13, 5:38-39; 1 Chronicles 7:13; 1 Chronicles 9:17-19; 2 Chronicles 28:12; Ezra 10:24; Ezra 10:42; Nehemiah 3:12; Nehemiah 3:15; Jeremiah 5:4 and Jeremiah 32:7.

Huldah's husband's occupation is described as "the keeper of the wardrobe". Huldah was married to a person who might have been associated with the royal court or the temple. As "keeper of the wardrobe", it is not specified who's 'wardrobe' Shallum kept. "A similar title was held by one of the staff of the Baal Temple in Samaria: 'in charge of vestments'. (Cogan & Tadmor 1988 :283) "He said to the keeper of the wardrobe, 'bring out the vestments for all the worshippers of Baal'. So he brought out the vestments." (NRSV 2 Kings 10:22) De Vaux (1980:382) therefore argues that 'the keeper of the wardrobe' was an employee of the temple.

It is however also possible that Shallum might have been "keeper of the wardrobe of the king" – in charge of the vestments of the king. He would then have been part of the king's attendants. "It should (also) be noted that in the seventh century B.C.E. in particular, at the court of the Assyrian kings, women prophets (*raggintu*, lit 'caller') often delivered messages concerning the safety of the king and the granting of divine protection against his enemies." (Cogan & Tadmor 1988 :284) Based on this argument, Cogan and Tadmor argue that Huldah was a court prophet. This would then have meant that both Shallum as well as Huldah were attendants of the king. It is therefore quite possible that her husband, Shallum, could have been 'a keeper of the wardrobe of the king', while Huldah was a court prophet.

The narrator also tells us that Huldah lived in Jerusalem. More specifically "in the Misneh" - בֵּירֹוֹשֶׁלַם בַּמִּשְׁנֶה About the location of 'the Mishneh',

Hobbs (1985:327) writes and describes it as "the northern part of the city – hence the name 'Second Quarter' . In post-exilic times the Mishneh became an official administrative division of the city (see Zech 1:10; Neh 11:9,17) ." " Mazar identifies the Mishneh as the suburbs of the City of David which developed on the Western Hill of Jerusalem during the monarchic period (EAEHL 2.591) " (Cogan & Tadmor 1988 :283) This would mean that "the Mishneh" would be quite near to the palace.

Seeing that Huldah as well as her husband were most probably working for the king, it makes sense that they might have been living near to the palace.

4.1.2 Huldah

The prophet, Huldah is then introduced - חֻלְדָּה . Swidler (2000:96) argues that the meaning of the name of Huldah is uncertain, as two meanings can be deducted from the Hebrew. The name could stem from the Hebrew word *heled* meaning 'duration' or the Hebrew word *holed* meaning 'weasel'. The rabbis however call Huldah 'arrogant' and thus her name ('weasel') is descriptive (Branch, 2000: 614).

It is because of the connotation of 'weasel' that Branch (2000:614) writes, "The rabbis call Shallum a godly and compassionate man, for which God rewarded him by letting his wife become a prophetess." This interpretation is questionable, as prophets were not appointed by the people but rather 'called by God'. It is doubtful whether people called by God would first need the permission of another person. There is no other examples of permission asked to become a prophet. It is therefore questionable that Huldah would have asked Shallum's permission to become a prophet. It was not his decision to make, but she had been 'called by God'. Furthermore, Eskenazi (1994:253) argues that, women were much more equal during the "olden days".

There is however no evidence which could be used as reason why the connotation of weasel should be made to Huldah, and therefore I would choose the connotation 'duration', as Huldah only appears once in the history of Judah, but she made an impression for the 'duration' of its history.

Very little is known about Huldah - only the information that is provided by the writer of 2 Kings. She was a prophet and recognized as one by the people around her, or else she would not have been approached. She was married and she lived in Jerusalem.

The fact that Huldah is prophesying from Jerusalem, is important. The area of origin usually places the prophet in a specific school of thought. Seeing that Huldah came from Jerusalem, it would not be far off to assume that she believed in the royal Zion theology, which emerged in Jerusalem, "and claimed that Yahweh had granted the exclusive right to rule his people to a Judean dynasty founded by David and centered in Jerusalem." (Miller & Hayes 1986: 235).

This theology was based on a prophecy of Nathan, the prophet to David in 2 Samuel 7:8-16 : "Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; ⁹ and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰ And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹ from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. ¹² When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish

his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. ¹⁵ But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶ Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever. ¹⁷ In accordance with all these words and with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.” (NRSV).

Huldah, however surprises her audience. In her prophecy, she condemns Jerusalem and Judah.

Huldah is introduced, but at the same time she is identified as a prophet. One would argue, that the title – ‘prophet’ given to Huldah, supplies the reader with extra information about this woman, however, it is no easy task to define exactly what a prophet did or what prophecy entailed. The problem of defining prophecy or a prophet is a problem that has been with us for some time.

4.1.3 What is a prophet ?

We still call individuals ‘prophets’ today. The problem is that we are not always confident that we know exactly what this term entails.

The word, prophet, is used today to refer to people who seem to have insight in the present as well as to refer to people who challenge us to look beyond the present towards the future. That is why it is possible (in South Africa) to call individuals in the community and church, who ‘predict’ the future of people who come to them for help, as well as leaders in the community and church who challenge the government of the country about the present and the future of the country, prophets. It is however important to realize, that

one's context influences one's understanding of a prophet. Our prophets of today, would therefore look very different from those of the Ancient Near East. Furthermore the prophets of the more traditional Africa, 'look therefore very different' from the prophets from the more westernized Africa. The role they play – their function, determines how we define them.

Dictionaries supply popular definitions to try and be of assistance.

Encyclopedia Britannica supplies the following definition, “ In its narrower sense, the term prophet (Greek prophētēs, ‘forth teller’) refers to an inspired person who believes that he has been sent by his god with a message to tell. He is, in this sense, the mouthpiece of his god. In a broader sense, the word can refer to anybody who utters the will of a deity, often ascertained through visions, dreams or the casting of lots, the will of the deity also might be spoken in a liturgical setting. The prophet, thus, is often associated with the priest, the shaman (a religious figure in primitive societies who functions as a healer, diviner and possessor of psychic powers), the diviner (foreteller) and the mystic. In a much broader sense, the term prophet has been used in connection with social and religio-political reformers and leaders” (Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol 15: 62).

The Oxford Dictionary defines a prophet as “(1) a person (esp in the Christian, Jewish and Muslim religions) who teaches religion and is, or claims to be, inspired by God; (2) a person who says, or claims to be able to say, what will happen in the future; (3) a person who speaks for or tries to spread a new belief, cause, theory, etc.” (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 1997: 929).

I am however not convinced that readers would read these definitions and know exactly what or who a prophet is.

Wilson (1987:1) writes, “Prophets have always been surrounded by an aura of mystery. Because they are intermediaries between the human and divine worlds, prophets appear to their hearers as terrifying yet magnetic fascinating figures. Throughout the history of Western civilization, wherever these divinely inspired individuals have appeared, attempts have been made to penetrate the mystery that surrounds them.”

Overholt (1989:1) says that “in current usage *prophet* carries some relatively well-known connotations. Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other prophets of the Hebrew scriptures (known by Christians as the Old Testament); Jesus (see Mark 8:28); and Mohammad. On the other hand we habitually refer to persons who predict the course of future events – from relatively trivial matters such as the score of a game to things as complex as international economic trends – as *prophets*, and call *prophetic* those statements or warnings that turn out to have been correct. The common denominator of these two connotations is the element of prediction, usually with some emphasis on its accuracy. Also as part of the term seems to be a sense that the person who prophesies has some source of information or insight unavailable to the majority of the audience. The predictions are, in other words, not only a matter of luck.”

According to the arguments of Wilson and Overholt, the predictions which prophets make cause them to be surrounded by an aura of mystery, as the predictions are not seen as ‘a bit of good luck’.

The following extract was used as the introduction paragraph to a course, “Prophecy, Politics and Religion” offered by a theological college :

Popular imagination often depicts the prophets as somewhat whimsical bearded, shabby clad preachers of God’s wrath upon sinful mankind. It envelops them in a mysterious, supranormal, ecstatic, otherworldly cloud of unreality. Popular imagination also thinks of them as men who spoke with the force of immeasurable conviction bordering on the

irrational. It visualizes them as charismatic foretellers of future events. In other words, it makes them the specialist 'fortune teller'.

(The staff of the Theological Education by Extension College, Course 303, Introduction to lectures 1-12, 1993: 1).

According to this paragraph, there is a clear 'popular' understanding of who a prophet is, which leads to a definition, as well as a description of what this person would look like. It is however only males who can fit into this description of a prophet, which makes it invalid, as there is evidence in the Bible of specific women who are called a prophetess. According to Hayes, "it is argued that there were forty-eight prophets (including seven female prophets – Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Abigail, Huldah, and Ester) representing all the tribes (*b. Meg.* 14a; *b. Sukk.* 27b)." (Hayes 1999: 311)

The 'popular' description of a prophet is even more alarming when one realizes that it is attributed to the 'popular imagination'. This 'popular imagination' will definitely be made up out of males as well as females. This description, disempowers women, but empowers men.

It is important to realize that it seems as if it is widely accepted that the office of prophet is male, as the language of other quotations about prophets is also male. The fact that scripture indicates that both males and females were prophets are ignored and the assumption that prophets are only male (not mostly male) is accepted as the norm.

From the quotations above, it is clear that a single definition for a prophet need to be put in such a way to cover quite a wide field. It would move from the mystical other to the 'inspired' messenger, to the 'foreteller', to the healer and teacher, to the reformer and leader. This could include many people – males and females – Christians as well as other religions.

However, the question is firstly, ‘Who was a prophet in the time of Huldah?’ Koch (1982:15) argues “in ancient times, impending events could be explored in many different ways – in dreams, visions, auditions, and in other ways too. Premonitions could overtake people unexpectedly, evoked by music, dance and ecstasy. The presage of what was to come might fall upon an isolated individual or be the shared experience of a group. In one case the message was of importance only for the recipient. In another case it had nothing to do with him individually, but only affected the people around him. Soothsaying and prophecy could be carried on professionally; they were skills which could be trained by the appropriate techniques, such as incubation – sleep in a sacred place for the purpose of inducing an oracle. Ordinary people without any preparation could also experience them at all. These differences make it understandable why there is no single name for divination and the mantic in Hebrew.”

It is clear that the term ‘prophet’ is problematic. It is not easy to define exactly what a prophet was, and therefore have a model against which we can ‘measure’ Huldah. It is therefore difficult to highlight exactly how people of the community viewed Huldah. Although we cannot exactly define who a prophet is, as they seem to differ depending on the circumstances, we have a broad definition of a prophet. It is however very important to highlight the fact that this title is attributed to Huldah. People referred to her as a prophet. The narrator introduces Huldah as the prophetess. Not “a prophetess”, but “the prophet”. This title carries weight - even today !

The fact that Huldah is a female prophet, makes it even more difficult, as there are not many prophetesses known in the Old Testament. Prophets and prophecy was however not only confined to Israel and to stories from the Old Testament, but it was common practice in the wider Ancient Near East. In order to try and find more information about female prophets specifically, we

need to look at prophecy in the Ancient Near East and see whether information other than that found in the Bible could be helpful.

4.1.3.1 Prophecy in the Ancient Near East

Prophecy and prophets was not confined to Israel only, but “can rather be understood as a concept and an activity that Israel shared with other cultures and peoples among whom the Israelites lived and experienced God.” (Schmitt 1992:482) According to Huffmon, (1981:697) different types of material from the Ancient Near East have been called "prophetic". This includes inspired messages transmitted from a deity, predictions, eschatological or apocalyptic texts and social criticism.

I will be looking at the occurrence of prophecy in the different countries of the Ancient Near East individually and see whether female prophecy specifically was present.

Egypt

"Based upon the Greek rendering of the title of a class of Egyptian priests, modern scholars often speak of priestly 'prophets'. The Egyptian title means merely 'servant of God'. " (Huffmon 1981:697). The priests had the job of putting together questions which could be used in oracles as well as in the response. "The term prophecy is also used to describe a type of Egyptian literature. For example the purports to contain predictions made in the Fourth Dynasty of a future great king, Ameny, whereas the text is generally regarded as a literary fiction composed in the reign of Amen-em-het I of the twelve Dynasty." (Huffmon 1981:697).

No mention is made of female prophets in Egypt by Huffmon, but it does not mean that the phenomenon did not exist .

Anatolia

"The 'Plague Players of Mursilis', which date from the latter part of the fourteenth century B.C. refer to various means by which the king hoped to learn the reason for the plague which was killing off the people. One of the means was through an inspired speaker: 'Let a prophet (literally, man of god) declare it' or 'Let a prophet rise and declare it. This means of revelation was distinguished from dreams and omens. Some kind of inspired speaking was therefore known on Anatolia. "(Huffmon 1981:697).

No mention is made of whether the inspired speaking was only made by males or females as well.

Canaan

"The Bible refers to prophets of Baal and of Asherah (1 Kings 18:19), though very little is said about these prophets. Since the same term is used for them as for Israelite prophets, viz., nabhi, the Israelite writers saw some similarity. The Baal prophets are not associated with spoken oracles, but are described as supporters by the crown and as engaging in ritual dance and selfwounding. The texts from Ugarit that have been connected with prophecy (in the wide sense) either refer to technical divination or are so unclear that no conclusions can be drawn. (Huffmon 1981: 697).

Syria

"One of the few texts from Syria, the stele of Zakir, king of Hamath and Lu'ash in central Syria during the early eighth century B.C. reports prophetic activity. While under siege, Zakir relates that 'I lifted up my hands to Baal – Sha[may]n and Baal-Shamay[n] answered me [and spoke] to me by means of visionaries (hzyn) and ...('ddn). Baal-Shamayn [said} to me, 'Fear not, for I have made [you kin]g [and I will st]ay with you and rescue you.' Although it

does not say how the speakers received, the text seems to represent prophecy in response to prayer." (Huffmon 1981:698).

Mesopotamia

i.) Akkadian 'prophecies'

"Some texts have been called prophecies because they contain predictions of coming events, although these predictions at least in part are written after the fact. In form some of the texts resemble the apodoses of omen texts; in some instances the protases are even preserved. There are differences from standard omen texts, nevertheless, and the content may be classified as more like apocalyptic literature, in the sense that there is a general description of future events. One of these texts has turned out to be a speech by the god Marduk that tells the god's history and refers to future conditions of political and natural prosperity." (Huffmon H.B 1981:698). This might however rather be classified under apocalyptic literature rather than prophecy.

ii) The Uruk oracle

"This text dates from the nineteenth century and is somewhat unusual; unfortunately it is not fully preserved. A deity visits a man in an unspecified fashion and converses with him concerning Uruk and the establishment of a faithful ruler. The meaning of the message is contained in the damaged portion of the tablet and is therefore unclear. The man considered it important enough, however, to report to the king. The text may be an example of inspired speaking, but much of the desired information is lacking." (Huffmon 1981:698).

iii) Prophecy in the Mari texts

"The mixed cultural milieu of the Mari texts has many ties with the Hebrew patriarchs and with early Israel. One of the most striking ties is the increasing evidence in the Mari texts (eighteenth century B.C.) for prophetic activity.

The geographical range of the activity extends at least from Mari as far west as Aleppo.

Speakers with titles

The title *apilu/apiltu* is found with both men and women. It occurs only in the Mari texts and apparently in learned lexical lists. The title was presumably understood by the Mari scribes as an Akkadian designation, ‘answerer’. One indication of the official status of these persons is an administrative text listing distributions from the royal stores to various persons-agricultural, commercial and ship workers – including a certain *apilu*, who receives a garment. The ‘answerer’ is often described as related to a specific deity. At times the ‘answerers’ seem to operate as a group.

Another title is *assinmu*. At a later time this title becomes well known; it refers to a *member of the cultic staff of the goddess Ishtar*, associated especially with singing. Also, the *assinmu* may have been a eunuch.

The third title is *muhhu/muhutu*, ‘ecstatic’, found with *both men and women*. The title is known from other Akkadian texts of this period, but not in connection with oracle speaking. The form cannot be separated from the later title, *mahhu/mahutu*, ‘ecstatic’ which perhaps by accident of discovery is not specifically associated with oracular speaking. It is clear from both the older and later texts that the ‘ecstatic’ had an official role in the cult. A text from Ugarit, dating toward the middle of the second millennium B.C. says that ‘my brothers bathe with their own blood, like *mahhu* (pl),’ which is reminiscent of the activities of the Baal prophets in I Kings 18.

Another possible title, *qabbatu*, which would mean *(female) speaker*, is probably to be understood as a personal name.

Speakers without titles

Many of the persons who transmit messages from a deity are not give any special designation. It seems clear that these persons, some of whom are well-known, were of private or lay status.

The setting of the oracles

It is fortunate that the letters about prophetic activity often indicate something of the circumstances of the message. On occasion the oracle seem to be a response to a previous inquiry. The oracle may also be a response to a sacrificial offering. A number of oracles were delivered in the temple but without any specific indication of a cultic impetus. Revelation by dream, especially associated with private persons, either to take place in the temple or to involve a dream visits to a temple. Dream revelations have many parallels in Mesopotamian literature. Some oracles seem to have a profane setting, even though they may concern cultic affairs, in that the speaker seeks out the king's representative in order to transmit a message for the king.

The content of the oracles

As illustrated above, the oracles may either be favorable or unfavorable to the king, the recipient of the overwhelming majority of the oracles. The speaker identifies with the deity, speaking in the first person. Use is often made of the messenger form, 'thus says the god so-and-so,' and there are also references to being 'sent' by the deity.

Most of the oracles are oracles of assurance, relating to the varied circumstances of the king. When the god expresses anger against the king's enemy, the king is indirectly assured. A variation on assurance is an oracle warning the king, e.g., about a coming revolt.

The acceptability of the oracles

That these oracles represent a departure from the proper practice in an outpost of Mesopotamian culture is indicated by the activity in response to

them by the king's officials. They often acquire a lock of the hair and a snip of the hem of the speaker and send them on together with their report, presumably for some kind of technical divination practice. Sometimes the reliability of the speaker was tested before reporting to the king.

Prophecy in the Neo-Assyrian period

In the seventh century, during the reigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, there seem to have been an unusual degree of interest in a variety of types of communication with the divine world. In this period at least, Assyrian culture, which was somewhat provincial and which had a strong Aramean element, seems to have been receptive to prophetic oracle speakers.

Speakers with titles

None of the titles used for oracular speakers in the Mari texts recur in connection with such activity in the Neo-Assyrian period. The most common title, *raggimu raggintu*, 'proclaimer, announcer' borne by both *men and women*, does occur in texts from the latter half of the second millennium, but not in association with oracles. There are various indications that the 'proclaimer' had a cultic role, although the evidence is not decisive. It is clear that the 'proclaimer' might play a role in the substitute-king ritual.

Another title, *sabru sabratu*, apparently 'revealer', is equated with *raggimu* in one lexical text. This title occurs primarily in texts of Ashurbanipal. Again, there are indications that the 'revealer' had a cultic role.

A third title, *selutu*, '(female) votary', is used to identify one of the speakers in a long collection of oracles for Esarhaddon as a 'votary of the king'. Some dedicatory contracts make it clear that the 'votary of the king' is someone dedicated by the king to the service of a deity. The nature of that service, however, is not known.

Speakers without titles.

Some collections identify the oracles as ‘from the mouth of so-and-so from such-and-such a city’. The absence of a title in connection with these persons allows for the possibility that they had no official position that involved giving oracles. Unlike the information in Mari texts, however, there is no further information about these speakers and their status. The speakers are both *men and women* in roughly equal proportion regardless of status.

The setting of the oracles.

The texts often point to some of the circumstances of the oracle. The oracle might be in response to an inquiry. Some oracles include a summary of the occasion, like a crisis, complaint, or divine reassurance. One oracle (although not fully preserved) includes a treaty ceremony as its setting. Two letters to Esarhaddon that mention the substitute-king ritual refer to activities of a female ‘proclaimer’ in connection with the rites, but whether the activities were by design or by special (divine) initiative, is unclear.

The content of the oracles.

The Neo-Assyrian oracles mostly represent direct address by a deity through the speaker, though they lack an explicit reference to commissioning. The oracles may begin with a divine self-description such as ‘I am Ishtar of Arbela’. The vast majority of the oracles express assurance to the king (or to the queen mother) in regard to domestic or external trouble and feature phrases such as ‘fear not’. The kind of criticism of the king seems restricted to modest scolding. Perhaps this is why the oracles seem to be more readily accepted than those in the Mari texts.” (Huffman 1981:697-700).

The information about prophecy in Mesopotamia and especially the Mari texts are the most helpful. The other countries all have traces of what could be described as prophecy but it is very scanty. No information about female

prophets is therefore available apart from Mesopotamia. Although it is clear that female prophets were not in abundance in the Ancient Near East (*see highlighted italics*), they were found and respected as prophets.

From the work of Huffmon, it is clear that from the Mari texts (in Mesopotamia) especially there are examples of prophets with titles as well as prophets without titles in the ANE. The title derives from the function the prophet performed, for example, a 'proclaimer' or 'revealer' or 'answerer'. For example, the 'proclaimer' or *Raggimu/raggimtu* was the one who delivered a prophetic message. This person "plays a role, whether by agreement or by presumption, in connection with the substitute king ritual. Presumably the 'proclaimer' had status within the cult, though there is no specific information concerning this." (Huffmon H.B, 1992 :480).

The 'revealer' or *Sabru* – "One lexical text identifies this title with that of the 'proclaimer'. To be separated from the homonym referring to an administrative officer." (Huffmon 1992 :480).

Therefore some of the titles given to speakers, were different titles meaning more or less the same, but also the same title (homonym), referring to different functions. For example, Huffmon identifies a 'revealer' as well as a 'proclaimer', but also highlights the fact that these two titles are also identified with each other. This makes sense as the two titles, 'revealer' and 'proclaimer', are two different words with the same meanings. To proclaim means "to make known publicly or officially; to announce" and to reveal means "to make facts known". (Hornby 1995:1005) There was however a difference between the two, as the one prophet (the 'revealer') was also an administrative officer. This means that the two titles cannot be used as synonyms. Prophets in the ANE were therefore 'revealers' as well as 'proclaimers', but not all 'proclaimers' were 'revealers'. Would it therefore mean that only 'revealers' were recognized as prophets by the king? This is

not clear. It is therefore clear that the problem of defining a prophet was not only a problem of Israel.

Prophecy and prophets in the Ancient Near East has broaden the picture and included Egypt, Anatolia, Canaan, Syria as well as Mesopotamia. Texts from all of these countries indicate the presence of 'inspired speakers' although they might have different titles. The Mari texts highlighted the fact that the cultures of the Ancient Near East were mixed. Another important insight which from the Mari texts is the fact that the reliability of the speakers were sometimes tested before they reported back to the king. This could be another explanation why there were a whole group of men sent to Huldah, including a priest. They needed to test the reliability of her prophecy.

Now that enough background information about prophecy in the Ancient Near East had been established, a closer look at prophecy in the Old Testament is possible.

4.1.3.2 Prophecy in the Old Testament

"The historical and cultural context of OT prophecy is the period of the Israelite and Judean monarchies, continuing through the Exile into early postexilic period. This context affects the functioning and message of the biblical prophets." (Overholt 2000:1086).

There is agreement amongst scholars that it is difficult to define exactly what a prophet in the Old Testament is. This basically all that scholars agree about when it comes to prophets. "There is still no scholarly consensus on the questions of the nature and social functions of Israelite prophecy, and each new generation tends to reinterpret the message of the prophets." (Wilson 1987:1).

Even the words used for a prophet differ. This gives an indication of how difficult a task it is to define exactly what a prophet is. If one can name something, it already supplies one with a clue of what was intended, if more than one name or title for the same 'object' is given, it makes things more complicated. These people were all seen as being mediators between God and the people, but were given different names in the Old Testament. By implication, this would mean that they then had different functions, which would then mean that they were not the same. This was however not the case. They were all viewed as "prophets".

נְבִיאִים "the prophet", which comes from the root which means 'to bubble forth as from a fountain' – 'to utter'.

רֹאֵה "seer", which is usually used in connection to Samuel. In 1 Sam 9:9 The "seer" רֹאֵה is equated with the "prophet" נְבִיאִים. "Formerly in Israel, anyone who went to inquire of God would say, "Come, let us go to the seer"; for the one who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer.)" (NRSV).

גִּדְיָהוּ "the seer". The same English translation is used for two different Hebrew words, because this "seer" is also equated to "the prophet". In 2 Samuel 24:11 this is found, "When David rose in the morning, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying," (NRSV).

The process of trying to define what a 'prophet' in the Old Testament is, is made more difficult by the fact that "no general statements or discussions of the nature and function of prophecy appear in the Hebrew Bible." (Hayes 1999:310) There is a wide diversity of character and functions, which can be attributed to a prophet. Prophets are described as people who do predictions,

who criticize social or religious orders as well as people who deliver commissioned messages from deities and acting as a mediator between the people and the deity. The function would therefore influence the definition of a prophet - different definitions of a prophet is therefore possible, depending on the function, which would then lead to different 'titles'.

Information about the prophets is scarce and diverse as already noted earlier, but from the texts available, it seems that there were two main 'types' of prophets in the Old Testament :

It seems that there were prophets who 'worked' as individuals and who were called upon to appear to confront the king when necessary, like Elisha (1 Kings 18, 21: 17-24). Under the individual prophets one was able to make a distinction between the seer and the prophet. The distinction is not clear, as 1 Sam 9:9 describes the prophet also as a seer.

There were then also the prophets who formed groups and lived in communities under a leader. (2 Kings 4:38-41; 6:1-7) "The prophetic groups, 'the sons of the prophets', led lives of asceticism and probably partial seclusion. They function somehow as intermediaries with the divine and seem to use physical means, as slashing of oneself and the chanting of songs, to produce an ecstatic trance (1Kings 20:35)." (Schmitt 1992:483). Under the groups of prophets were also the groups, which were maintained at the royal courts. (Whybray 1993:621)

It is therefore clear from the discussion that it is not possible to put together one single definition for a prophet, as it is too diverse a function performed within the societies of the ANE. However, "in general, prophets were religious intermediaries who functioned at the national level. It was understood that the prophet's activity and message were grounded in some type of communication from Yahweh." (Overholt 2000:1086) Huldah would

fit into this broad definition of a prophet, as she was asked to function as an ‘intermediary’ between God and the people of Judah.

4.1.3.3 The calling of a prophet

How did a person become a prophet? “There seems to have been no standard prerequisite for a person to become a prophet in Israel. Divine inspiration was what made a person a prophet, and what caused the prophet to speak out, and what made others to listen to the prophet as a legitimate spokesperson for the divine.” (Schmitt 1992:482) There are therefore stories in the Old Testament where the calling of prophets are told, and show divine inspiration.

Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

⁵“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

⁶Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.”⁷ But the LORD said to me,

“Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’;
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.

⁸Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you.
says the LORD.”

⁹Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me,
“Now I have put my words in your mouth. (NRSV Jeremiah 1:4-9)

“God is the author of the words which (God) conveys to the prophet and through him to the people. “ (Motyer1996:966). This is however a very personal experience and would result in a very subjective report of it. It is therefore understandable that the people would have accepted not all reports.

It is however unfortunate that only some of the ‘callings’ of the prophet have been recorded. Nothing is known about the ‘calling’ of the prophet, Huldah for example.

The prophets saw themselves to be inspired by God to therefore speak the word of God. Their prophecy would therefore be introduced by : אָמַר יְהוָה; Thus says the Lord. "This is the form which the prophets used more frequently than any other to deliver their messages. It was common custom in the ancient world for a messenger with some announcement to make to discharge his errand when he came into the recipient's presence, by speaking in the first person, the form in which the message had been given to himself; that is to say, he completely submerged his own ego and spoke as if he were his master himself speaking to the other. They saw themselves as ambassadors, as messengers of Yahweh." (Von Rad G, 1968:18-19). However before this message formule, the prophets used a different format of words to get the recipient's attention. This different format, von Rad calls, "the prefaced clause".

"How did the prophet receive the message which *he* was commissioned to convey to *his fellows* ? The answer given in the vast majority of cases is perfectly clear and yet tantalizingly vague: 'The word of the Lord came...', literally, the verb being the verb 'to be', 'the word of the Lord became actively present to ...' It is a statement of direct personal awareness. This is the statement of the prophet." (Motyer 1996:966) *The italics are my own.*

It is also important to realise that the prophets "were not simply one-way channels of information from Yahweh to the people. Like all communication, prophetic speech involved a dynamic interaction between speaker and audience. " (Overholt 2000 : 1086). The people either accepted what was said or they rejected it. In Jeremiah 5:12-13, the people choose not to believe what Jeremiah was prophesying, and God answered them through the prophet (5: 14-17) :

" They have spoken falsely of the LORD,
and have said, "He will do nothing.

No evil will come upon us,
and we shall not see sword or famine.”

¹³The prophets are nothing but wind,
for the word is not in them.
Thus shall it be done to them!

¹⁴Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of hosts:
Because they have spoken this word,
I am now making my words in your mouth a fire,
and this people wood, and the fire shall devour them.

¹⁵I am going to bring upon you
a nation from far away, O house of Israel,
says the LORD.
It is an enduring nation,
it is an ancient nation,
a nation whose language you do not know,
nor can you understand what they say.

¹⁶Their quiver is like an open tomb;
all of them are mighty warriors.

¹⁷They shall eat up your harvest and your food;
they shall eat up your sons and your daughters;
they shall eat up your flocks and your herds;
they shall eat up your vines and your fig trees;
they shall destroy with the sword

your fortified cities in which you trust. “ (NRSV)

4.1.3.4 False and true prophecy

How did the Old Testament distinguish between false and true prophecy ?

In order to decide whether Huldah's prophecy was true or false prophecy, the different criteria which were used as indication that a prophet is a true prophet or not needs to be looked at.

One external characteristic which was used to indicate that a person was a false prophet, was the **prophetic ecstasy**. This ecstasy seems to have been

either spontaneous or induced by music or dance. (1 Sam 10:5; 1Kings 18:28) Motyer (1996:969) argues however that "it is easy, and indeed almost inevitable, that we should look with suspicion on a phenomenon such as this; it is alien to our taste, and it is known as a feature of Baalism, and of Canaan in general. But these are not sufficient grounds for a plain identification between ecstatic and false. There is no indication that the ecstasy was in any way frowned upon either by the people at large or by the best of their religious leaders."

Also we need to remember that prophecy and prophets were not only confined to Israel, but it was shared with other cultures and peoples among whom they lived. There would therefore definitely have been interchanging of characteristics and functions of prophets. Some of the actions of the group of prophets or the 'sons of the prophets' might have seemed "alien", but it still was not used as indication of false prophecy, as the men of Jehu described the emissary of Elisha as "mad". The prophecy which he delivered to Jehu was however not false.

Professionalism was also seen as a criteria to indicate that a prophecy was false. It was argued that if the king paid a prophet, it would be in their best interest to say only what pleased the king. Motyer (1996:969) argues that this is not an argument, which would stand, as Samuel was a professional prophet, but challenged Saul when needed (1 Sam 13:13). Also Nathan could have been a court official of David, but he also challenged David about his life and the choices he made. Nathan confronted David with the punishment of God. (2 Sam 12) Amos may also have been a professional, but "Amaziah urges upon him that the living is better in Judah for a prophet like him (Am 7:10ff)".

The **message**, which the prophet brings as well as the **lifestyle of the prophet**, can also be used as criteria for indicating true prophecy or not.

Jeremiah argues that a false prophet is a person of immoral life (23:10-14), but a true prophet calls people to holiness (23:22). A true prophet would therefore have a message against sin which would lead to judgment, where a false prophet is a prophet of peace. This does not mean that the true prophet cannot have a message of peace according to Motyer, but rather “when peace is the message of God, it will always be in Exodus terms, that peace can only come when holiness is satisfied concerning sin. And this is exactly what Jeremiah is urging: the voice of the true prophet is always the voice of the law of God, once for all declared through Moses.” (Motyer 1996:970).

The biggest proof of true prophecy was in **fulfillment**. “What does not come to pass was not spoken by the Lord.” (Motyer 1996:969). This is based on Deuteronomy 18:22. This is also what the prophet, Jeremiah, used against Hananiah, the false prophet in Jeremiah 28:6. It is however not as simple as that. Deuteronomy 13:1-3 warns “If prophets or those who divine by dreams appear among you and promise you omens or portents,² and the omens or the portents declared by them take place, and they say, “Let us follow other gods” (whom you have not known) “and let us serve them,”³ you must not heed the words of those prophets or those who divine by dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you indeed love the LORD your God with all your heart and soul” A sign might be given which comes true, and the prophet might still be a false prophet. The test is then whether the prophet calls the people after other gods or not – if so, the prophet is a false prophet. “A prophet might allege that he spoke in the name of Yahweh, but if he did not acknowledge the authority of Moses and subscribe to the doctrines of the Exodus he was a false prophet.” (Motyer 1996:970)

4.1.4 Huldah’s Prophecy

2 Kings 22:15-20

The language the prophets (also Huldah) used is what is striking today. They used poetry. It is interesting to note, that “the poetry that the prophets speak

borrowed much from the literary tradition found also in the Ugaritic poetry of half a millennium before the biblical prophets and only a few hundred miles to the north. They also used the same kind of word pairs that their Ugaritic predecessors had used." (Schmitt 1992 : 484). The literary tradition from which prophecy stems, is therefore very old.

Huldah's prophecy starts with כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל This is the format of the prophetic speech. "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel". It is in typical Deuteronomistic style. This line not only describes that what=ever follows is divinely inspired, but it also identifies the deity as the 'the God of Israel' – the God of the covenant – the one and only God. The fact that Huldah identifies the God, on who's behalf she is speaking as "the God of Israel", implies that she knows this God and is living according to the way of "the God of Israel". אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל is not always part of the oracle, and is only used thirty- two times.

Huldah uses the typical messenger formula in her prophecy, "Thus says the Lord". Westermann (1967:103) argues that this formula gives the messenger authority, as it authorizes the message. No explanation needs to be given after this introduction. Everybody knows that a prophet is about to speak.

Westermann highlights the fact that the format of the prophecy stems from the format of ordinary messages used by different messengers. He identifies three events which can be identified within the message, which can also be identified in the prophecy : (1) the commissioning, (2) the transmission, (3) the delivery. According to Westermann, 'the transmission' – the middle part of the prophecy, is the most important stage of the prophecy. This is stage during which distance needs to be bridged. The distance between the 'commissioning' and the 'transmission'. That which was asked from the prophet by the people and that which was told by God to the prophet. The prophet is a 'messenger from God' and the message needs to be transmitted –

given to the people (through the mouth of the prophet) "The real problem of the prophets is to bridge the distance with each of their speeches. That those who transmitted the prophetic speeches were conscious of this as the real task of prophetic speech is seen in the formulation of the commissioning, which is almost always: 'Go and say ...!' Each time the prophet has to bridge this distance *anew* with his word." (Westermann 1967: 103).

Huldah transmits her prophecy not by using the words, 'Go and say ...!', but rather by addressing the king personally at first, "Tell the man who sent you to me".

She then addresses the people of Judah, "Beware!" **הִנְנִי** this word is translated as 'indeed' in the NRSV. It has however been given a different place in the order of words in the sentence in order to fit in with the sentence construction of the English language. In Hebrew **הִנְנִי** is put at the beginning to focus attention for what is to follow. This function of focussing- getting the reader's attention, is however lost. I therefore rather choose the translation 'beware'

These two different commissionings of the messengers is Huldah's own way of bridging the distance.

Each of these commissionings is introduced by the words, "Thus says the Lord," The repetition of the words, "Thus says the Lord", with an instruction between the repetitions is not common. The same version is only found in 2 Chronicles 34 which is the same story. Usually the messenger is commissioned ("Tell the man ...")and this is then followed by the introduction, "Thus says the Lord,..."

In Huldah's case, the prophecy starts with an introduction, "Thus says the Lord," is followed by the commissioning, "Tell the man,..." and then followed by another introduction, "Thus says the Lord." This is interesting to note. Between the repetition of "Thus says the Lord", the words "Tell the man who sent you" is therefore found. This is not a usual format of a message form. This is an addition from Huldah, which gives the prophecy her personal 'style'.

כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה "Thus says the Lord" is repeated. This repetition emphasizes the fact that it is indeed Yhwh who is speaking.

Josiah was very specific in his instruction to the men, "Go, inquire of the Lord for me, for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found;" In her reply, Huldah is therefore also very specific and addresses Josiah first and then the people – all of Judah. It is however only in her introduction where Josiah is addressed first. In the rest of the prophecy, the people – all of Judah, is addressed first and then the king, Josiah. There is therefore two definite parts which can be identified within the prophecy. One part in which the people are addressed and another part in which the king is addressed.

4.1.4.1 The first part of the prophecy

The first part of the prophecy of Huldah is an announcement of judgement against Israel. "The ideal form of the prophecy is 'Because you have done this evil, therefore, thus says the Lord, disaster will come upon you. The analysis of this form shows that, regardless of the way in which the prophet receives the word of God, the prophet does contribute personal reflections and reasoning, which the prophet speaks before giving the divine decision of judgement. " (Schmitt 1992 :484). This is exactly what Huldah does. She

says, "Beware! I will cause disaster to come to this place and it shall remain on its inhabitants - ..." (verse 16)

Westermann has developed a structure through which this type of prophecy can be identified. A specific order is argued for. There is an *Introduction*, followed by a *Reason* (accusation and development) and then the *Announcement* (intervention of God and the results of the intervention). The *Reason* and the *Announcement* is then separated by the messenger formula. Put differently – the *Announcement* is introduced by the messenger formula, "Thus says the Lord". Huldah's prophecy does not follow this structure however. The *Reason* and the *Announcement* are reversed :

The prophecy starts with the *Announcement*,

"I will cause disaster to come to this place
and it shall remain on its inhabitants-"

The *Reason* then follows : " 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 interchanging of the sequence of the two parts of the prophecy, is however not only found with the prophecy of Huldah, but different other examples are found throughout the Old Testament. Isaiah 7:18-25; 17:1-11; Hos 9:7-9 are a few of the examples found.

An explanation needs also to be given for the choice of translation of this first part of Huldah's prophecy. מְבִיא רָעָה אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם the word מְבִיא is a hiphil participle and could be translated as "cause to come".

This is a very literal translation, but supplies us with a better understanding

of the Hebrew word. This word is translated as "will bring" in the NRSV. Cause to come is a better translation in my opinion, as it implies that God will be using some disaster outside God self. This idea then connects well with the rest of the phrase – "to this place". **אֶל** preposition translated as "to". This indicates movement – a movement of the disaster from one place to another. The NRSV translates **אֶל** as "on". There is therefore no difference between **אֶל** and **וְעַל** which is also translated as "on". I choose not to use "on" for both prepositions, as "to" is able to demonstrate the movement of the disaster (Babylonian forces) better. The disaster will be a force moving from another location to "this place".

וְעַל-יֹשְׁבָיו the NRSV does not translate **יֹשְׁבָיו**, but uses only one verb, "bring" – "I will bring disaster on this place and on the inhabitants". There is however a development through the use of the verbs. First "I will cause to come" and then "it will remain". The use of the preposition "on", then makes sense – the "disaster will come to the place" and then "it will remain on the inhabitants". This is the yoke Jeremiah was carrying. (Jer 28:10) The oppression of Babylon was heavy on the people of Judah.

וְתַחַת אֲשֶׁר the two words, (a preposition and conjunction) takes the function of a conjunction when used together in this fashion. Different translation possibilities are offered – "because" of the NRSV as well, but I choose "Instead (of there being)", as this translation also offers a reason for God's 'disappointment'.

"of their being", is added by me, to make the choice clearer. They are behaving contrary to their 'being' – instead of being who God created them to be, they are following other practices, which are foreign to them. It is also

placed right at the beginning of the verse – at the beginning of the sentence and in this way the reason for God's anger is introduced and emphasised.

4.1.4.2 The second part of the prophecy

The second part of the prophecy is addressed to Josiah, the king. The same structure as the Announcement against Israel is used.

There is an *Introduction* , "to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus you shall say to him,"

Then follows the *Messenger Format* : "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel". The *Reason*: follows then,

"because your heart was penitent,
and you humbled yourself before the Lord,
when you heard how I spoke against this place,
and against its inhabitants,
that they should become a desolation and a curse,
and because you have torn your clothes and wept
before me,
I have heard you, says the Lord."

Then follows the *Announcement* :

"Therefore, I will gather you to your ancestors,
and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace;
your eyes shall not see the disaster that I will bring on this
place."

Huldah's prophecy can therefore be divided into two parts – two prophecies. One towards the people – all of Judah, and one towards the king, Josiah. The only question which still needs to be answered about Huldah's prophecy, is whether it can be seen as true prophecy or not.

4.1.4.3 Huldah's Prophecy – false or true ?

The prophecy of Huldah is only six verses long and we do not know for a fact that Huldah was indeed a prophet in service of the king. However, what Huldah is saying is not 'pleasing the king'. She is bringing a message of doom, although it might be possible to argue that the king would not be part of this disaster. Furthermore, little is known about Huldah's lifestyle, but her message does indeed 'call the people to holiness' and is a message 'against sin'. It is not easy to try and use prophetic ecstasy as a criteria as very little information about the prophecy of Huldah is supplied to us. We therefore do not know whether she used prophetic ecstasy, but this is not such an important criteria, as it was often associated with Baal as well. By using the criteria professionalism and the message and lifestyle of the prophet, it seems as if one could argue that the prophecy of Huldah is true.

The one test which was accepted as showing whether a prophecy was true or not, was waiting to see if the prophecy came true. See whether that which was predicted, happened. This criteria is also the one which is the most debated by scholars when looking at the prophecy of Huldah.

Huldah prophesied that 'disaster would come', and Jerusalem was indeed attacked and the temple destroyed. Baruch (1998:497) argues that the 'disaster' Huldah predicted, was indeed the events of 587 B.C.E. when the temple was destroyed. That which Huldah prophesied about, did happen.

The problem is however with the second part of her prophecy – the prophecy about Josiah. Huldah prophesied that Josiah would be "gathered to (his) grave in peace: (his) eyes will not see all the disaster that (God) will bring to (that) place". It came true that Josiah did not 'see the disaster', but he was killed in battle at the plain of Megiddo. (NRSV 2 Kings 23: 29-30a) Different scholars argue that the prophecy of Huldah was therefore not true, as Josiah

did not have a peaceful death. The events of 2 Kings 23:29-30a cannot be seen as the fulfilment of Huldah's prophecy.

The question is however whether the 'peace' refer to his death or to his burial. Scholars like Cross, Nelson, Rose and McKenzie argue that Huldah's prophecy is promising Josiah a "peaceful death". Other scholars like Dietrich, Hoffman, Mayes and Provan argue that there is rather a reference to the burial of Josiah. P.S.F. van Keulen has put together a strong argument in favour of a "peaceful burial" rather than a "peaceful death", which I agree with.

Van Keulen (1996:257) argues that there is reference to 'being gathered' twice.

אֶסְפֶּךָ עַל-אַבְתֵּיךָ וְנִאֲסַפְתָּ אֶל-קְבֻרֹתֶיךָ בְּשָׁלוֹם

The first time, "I will gather you to your ancestors", refers to the death of Josiah, and the second "you shall be gathered to your grave in peace", refer to his burial. Alfrink rightly pointed to a few passages in Samuel, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, where *'sp* occurs in connection with interment and is followed by the root *qbr* ([n.3], p.120). In these passages *'sp* refers to the gathering of the bones of the deceased, as preceding the burial. Whereas 2 Sam. Xxi 13 and Jer. Viii 1,2 make explicit reference to the *'smwt*, Jer.xxv 33 and Ezek. Xxix 5 have only *n'sp*, 'one is gathered', which may be elliptical for: the various parts of the body, the *'smwt*, are gathered. *Wn'spt* in 2 Kings xxii 20 way likewise be understood as a concise reference to the gathering of the bones. An argument in favour of this interpretation of *wn'spt* lies in the fact that three of the four instances mentioned, i.e. in 2 Sam. Xxi 13, Jer xxv 33 and Ezek. Xxix 5, references to the gathering of the body occur in connection with violent death. It can be concluded from these texts that in case of violent death it is by no means a matter of course that the body is integrally buried. Thus in Jer. Xxv 33 Jeremiah announces that those who will be slain by YHWH will remain ungathered and unburied." (van Keulen 1996:257). It is

against this background that van Keulen argues that Josiah will suffer a violent death, but will not be left unburied. "To sum up, the expression **וְנִאֲסַפְתָּ אֶל-קִבְרֹתֶיךָ בְּשָׁלוֹם** states that Josiah will be buried in peaceful circumstances, but it also implies that he will die in a violent way." Van Keulen (1996:257). Following the argument of van Keulen, the death and burial of Josiah in 2 Kings 23: 29-30a, can be taken as fulfilment of Huldah's prophecy .

Whether Josiah's death was indeed a violent one, is also debatable as, Talshir (1996:213)) argues that there is not only one account of the death of Josiah, but rather three different accounts. The circumstances surrounding the death of Josiah are different. "Both Kings and Chronicles make it clear that Josiah eventually met his death as a result of his encounter with Necho at Megiddo. The specific circumstances, however are quite different in the two accounts." (Talshir 1996:213)

These accounts are even more coloured by an apocryphal book, 1 Esdras. "In Kings Josiah is killed at Megiddo and his body taken by chariot to Jerusalem, where he is buried in his tomb. (2 Kgs. Xxiii 29-30a) Chronicles offers a more elaborate description: 'And the archers shot King Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Take me away, for I am badly wounded. So his servants took him out ... and brought him to Jerusalem. And he was buried in the tombs of his fathers.' (2 Ch. xxxv 22-3). The whole incident is not as abrupt as in Kings; Josiah is shot on the battlefield but does not die there. Instead, it is expressly stated that he dies in Jerusalem. In 1 Esdras Josiah is neither wounded nor killed in battle. A weakness overcomes him and he leaves the battlefield assisted by his men. He then mounts his chariot and leaves for Jerusalem where he dies. The harsh description of Josiah's death in Kings gives way to a much more moderate picture in Chronicles. The colours are even softer in 1 Edras." (Talshir 1996:220)

With these different accounts of the death and circumstances surrounding the death of Josiah, the account of 2 Kings cannot be used as proof that Huldah's prophecy is false, as there are other accounts which supply the reader with different pictures. The other accounts (Chronicles and 1 Esdras) do indeed indicate that Josiah had a peaceful death in Jerusalem. Seeing that the last two accounts where Josiah has a peaceful death are the youngest – 2 Kings is an older source, it is possible that more information had been found about the death of Josiah after the account of 2 Kings had been written down. Which one of the accounts would one therefore use ?

Talshir argues that Josiah's death could be looked at from three different angles (2 Kings, 2 Chronicles and 1 Esdras), each one showing a more moderate picture than the previous account. Van Keulen argues that one should rather look at "a peaceful burial" than "a peaceful death." Both these arguments of Talshir and van Keulen supply ground for arguments in favour of a true prophecy. Huldah's prophecy was fulfilled which by implication means that Huldah was a true prophet.

CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSION

When the passage 2 Kings 22 is read, it is amazing, how easily the story of Huldah gets lost and is just seen as part of the history of Josiah. During a contextual reading of 2 Kings 22 by a group of women, there were women who did not even 'see' that there was a story about a woman in 2 Kings 22.

One summarized the story as 'a story about money' another saw it as "a story about the book of the law found". None of these interpretations can be discarded as irrelevant, as it is indeed a story about the book of the law being found. It is also a story about the way the money was collected at the temple and had been used to repair the building of the temple. It is however very interesting, that women read the whole chapter (2 Kings 22), but none identified the story of Huldah as a story within the bigger story.

This at first astonished me, but through another reading of the passage, I realized that the reason why I had been able to 'see' the story of Huldah, was because I was particularly conscious to read the stories of women. If this is not the case, it is easy to read over the story of Huldah and not 'see' it. There was nothing out of the ordinary, which would catch one's attention and warn the reader that here was a story with a difference – a story about a prophetess. The language used, is no different from that of Jeremiah, for example. Huldah could easily have been a man. We also need to keep in mind that the writers of the Deuteronomistic History were most probably male. It is therefore a male who is telling the story about a female – it should therefore not be surprising that Huldah 'sounds like a male'.

Whether she sounds like a male or not, the question is, "Why is Huldah there?" Different reasons offered by scholars have been examined, in trying to answer this question. "What is the theological significance of Huldah, the prophet?" Scholars try and explain why Huldah and not one of the male

prophets have been approached to "enquire from the Lord". The reasons scholars offer for the presence of Huldah, has however all be challenged and do not supply convincing arguments to explain the theological significance of the prophecy of Huldah.

Explanations from an argument that the male prophets were not available, to explanations focussing on the fact that women are regarded as more emotional beings and therefore more merciful have been offered.

I have therefore used the text itself to supply us with clues to understand the theological significance of Huldah's prophecy. Through the close reading of 2 Kings 22, special attention was given to the characters included but more importantly to the language. There is however nothing in the language or the style in which the passage had been written which gives it a different structure. There is nothing that would cause the reader to sit up and realize that here was something different. Here was a prophetess and not a prophet talking.

Different explanations for the format and language used in the oracle can be found. Diana Edelman has made an interesting study of the language used in the oracle of Huldah, especially the last section of the oracle – 2 Kings 22:16-20. Edelman (1994:233) proposes that the style and language of the prophet Jeremiah was used in writing the oracle of Huldah. The oracle of Huldah is therefore 'copied' or rather 'imitated' from Jeremiah according to Edelman. She is not the only scholar who follows this argument, but follows the line of thinking of Horst and Levin.

Edelman (1994:233) argues that the prophetic announcement is framed by the idea of Yahweh 'bringing evil' upon Jerusalem and its inhabitants. In v.16 the idea is expressed by the statement, 'I will cause evil (disaster) to enter this place and its inhabitants', while in v.20 it appears in the variant formulation,

‘all the evil (disaster) that I shall cause to enter this place’. She highlights all the places in Jeremiah where the same phrase ‘[Yahweh] causing evil to enter (*mēbî` rā`â*) Jerusalem’ can be found. In Jeremiah 19:3, 15 and 44:2, it is found in the past tense. A Variant formulation is found in Jeremiah 39:16 and in Jeremiah 35:17 evil is to enter “all of Judah”. Yahweh’s ‘causing evil to befall the inhabitants of the city’ appears in Jeremiah 6:9; 32:42; 35:17; 36:31. In Jeremiah 42:17 the expression is applied to Jerusalemites who flee to Egypt in the face of the neo-Babylonian attacks on Jerusalem, while in 23:12 it is used in connection with Judahite prophets and in 45:5 with all flesh. Otherwise, the references to Yahweh doing or causing evil in the prophetic literature are phrased as *qr`hr`h* (Jeremiah 32:23) and *zmm lhr`l* (Zechariah 8:14). The expression *qr`hr`h* also appears in Deut. 31:29.

The words of verse 17 in the oracle of Huldah, “Instead (of their being), 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” is similar to the words of Jeremiah 1:16. The idiom for idolatry is found four times in Jeremiah, once in Hosea 14:4, three times in Isaiah (2:8; 17:8; 37:19) twice in Deuteronomy (27:15 and 31:29) three times in Kings (1 Kgs 16:7; 2 Kgs 19:18; 2 Kgs 22:17 with its quotation in 2 Chron. 32:19) and twice in Psalms (115:4 and 135:15).

In verse 19 the phrase “I have spoken against this place and its inhabitants that they should become a desolation and a curse” resonates with expressions in Deuteronomy, Isaiah and Jeremiah, but is especially close to Jeremiah 25:18; 42:18; 44:12,22 in their combination of the terms ‘desolation’ (*šammâ*) and ‘curse’ (*qlâlâ*) to describe the fate of Jerusalem or its inhabitants.

Although none of the language in Huldah’s prophecy in 2 Kings 22:16-20 is found only in the book of Jeremiah, the data above suggest that the

combination of phrasing and ideas in the five verses closely resembles and echoes the style and thought in that book. The cumulative evidence points to a reflection or imitation of sections of that book more than to a reflection or imitation of Deuteronomistic style and thought, with which it is commonly associated. The Deuteronomistic History constitutes the second closest body of literature to the language and ideas expressed in 2 Kings 22:16-20, but the closer parallels to the book of Jeremiah need to be acknowledged and weighed accordingly. (Edelman 1994: 232-236).

There is quite a number of comparisons which can be made between Huldah's oracle and the oracles of Jeremiah, the prophet. It is therefore understandable that Huldah could easily be mistaken for a man. Huldah 'sounds' just like a man, because she 'speaks' like a man – specifically like Jeremiah who lived at the same time she did.

Apart from Huldah, no mention is made of another female prophet who prophesied during this time in history. The only 'role model' she had, was therefore the male prophets. It seems that the choice to follow the example of the male prophets, was a wise one, as this might have helped to make Huldah more acceptable.

Pamela Dickey Young (1990:54) identifies "women's socialized experience" as one way of talking about women's experiences. Women's socialized experience is the ways our culture teaches us as women to behave – what we are taught about being a woman. There are unwritten 'laws' which need to be followed in order to be 'accepted' as a woman. There are therefore also 'rules' for men. In order to be accepted within the 'world of men', women therefore teach themselves the 'rules' of men. They 'give up their identity as women' and do things the way men do it. In that way women then have a 'men's socialized experience'. They blend in easier and become 'one of the boys'. Women today still choose to make the same choice Huldah did and

‘become like men’. Talk like men and even dress like men, in order to be accepted.

In the case of Huldah, it is however important to remember, that a specific formula had been used in prophesies. The messenger formula was widely used, not only in Israel, but also in the wider Ancient Near East. Huldah therefore needed to stick to the messenger formula used by all prophets. Although at first reading Huldah might sound just like any other male prophet, a closer look at the format of the prophecy and the language used indicate that in her own way Huldah introduced differences to make the prophecy her own.

She did make her prophecy her own, by using her personal way of introducing the two parts of her prophecy. In the first part of the prophecy, Huldah declared, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Tell the man who sent you to me” and she does not use the usual words, “Go and tell”. She then repeats the words, “Thus says the Lord,” and introduces the prophecy with one word, “Beware!”. By steering clear of the usual “Go and tell”, Huldah gave the prophecy her personal identity.

The story of Huldah, can therefore also be used to challenge women of today to be different, in what ever ‘small way’ we can. Women are challenged to celebrate their differences and use it to supplement their male counterparts. In that way, females and males will be able to supplement each other and accomplish so much more.

Huldah's prophecy, which also becomes Huldah's story, is recorded in 2 Kings 22. Apart from the same story in 2 Chronicles 34, there is no other reference to her. Huldah's prophecy, therefore introduces the person, Huldah to us. Everything we know about the person, Huldah, comes these six verses. The story of Huldah, can therefore not be taken lightly.

As a prophet, she has a role to play in the history of Israel. Huldah was a prophet who was respected by her people. The kings sent his attendants – five males- to go and "enquire from the Lord" and they went to no other than the prophet Huldah. The inclusion of the story of Huldah, the female prophet, emphasises the fact that there were female prophets active in the history of Israel. If it was not the case, Huldah would not have been included. Reference to prophecy in the Ancient near East, showed that female prophets were definately present. Their oracles might not have been recorded as frequently as their male counterparts, but that does not mean that they were not part of the society.

As a female, married prophet, Huldah had a very important role to play in the the lives of the original readers, but most importantly, in the lives of readers today. She provided a very different and even 'radical' model for women of her time. According to "women's socialized experience, women's sphere is the home and family" (Young 1990:54). This was the case much more for a woman in the First Century B.C.E. than for a woman today, in the Twenty – first Century . Women are socialized to see themselves according to Young (1990:55) as "nurturers, helpers, supporters of their mates and children; they should expect to be taken care of financially in return for taking care of realms of morals and emotional support. " Young (1990:55) argues that 'women's socialized experience' could cause a response with women which is then "women's feminist experience". Women need "to claim the power of naming for themselves (and ask what it means) to be whole human beings, unrestricted by stereotyped roles of gender identity and to seek wholeness for themselves and others."

Huldah, shows a model of a woman, who strived to be a "whole human being and not be restricted by stereotyped roles of gender identity". She was not only the wife of Shallum and therefore had the home and family as her

'sphere', but she was also a prophet and moved in the "sphere of the 'real world' (men's sphere)." (Young 1990:54). This is why I argue that Huldah's model is a different but 'radical' one for her time.

The inclusion of Huldah's story in the history of Israel, supplies women of today also with a role model. A different model to the one we are used to reading about, where the women are in the background and play the supportive role to the extent where they become almost invisible. In our society today, women are struggling to get rid of traditions which are restricting them. Unwritten rules which hold women down.

Patriarchy is alive and well in the society I come from. We have internalised it to the extent that we are not aware of it any more. We believe that the wife has a role to play in society, but always as the spouse. What ever she does, is not for her, but for her husband or family. The moment you get married, you loose your identity as an individual and become 'one with your husband'. In this way women often loose their identity as an individual. We are very much 'people of the Old Testament'.

The Bible is still used to keep women 'in their place'. There are enough stories, especially in the Old Testament, which portray women as being subservient. The creation stories of Genesis 1 and 2 are still used at weddings to instruct couples about 'the order ' which is found everywhere in creation. The story of Huldah, shows a different angle. Here is a married woman, who is also a prophet. Somebody who 'works outside the home' and who is respected by other men (people) . She is looked up to. Huldah' story shows that there were women who did things differently, and did not fall in with the unwritten rules of the society.

This is also an important story for the church. The ordination of women is still not accepted by many denominations. The women are the support

system and do the ground work. They form the prayer groups and are responsible for the soup kitchens, but the leadership of the church should be male. The story of Huldah show a woman, 'called by God' to be a prophet. Women can be called. Not only is Huldah shown as a woman called to prophecy, but she is also shown as a prophet who is accepted and respected by the group of men who visit her. They came to consult with her and ask her to 'inquire of the Lord'. If Huldah was a court prophet, she would indeed be part of the attendants of the king, who included everybody who helped and supported the king.

Huldah was part of a society, which was very much patriarchal, and the fact that information about this female prophet is supplied, is extra-ordinary in relation to what is supplied about other women who are described as prophets.

Huldah is one of five females who are called prophets in the Hebrew Bible. The others are Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), Noadiah (Nehemia 6:14), the wife of Isaiah and Huldah. Although they are all given the title prophet, not a lot is known about them. Of some only one verse is written.

The *wife of Isaiah* does not have a name. This means that her identification is received solely through her marriage with Isaiah. She is not given her own identity and it is not clear whether she is called 'the prophet' because this was her occupation or because she was the wife of Isaiah, the prophet.

Noadiah is not seen in a very positive light and is treated as a false prophet. She is associated with Tibijah and Sanballat who were bribing people to stop Nehemiah from rebuilding the wall of the city. (Neh 6:14) There is also one verse attributed to her and no reference to her work as a prophet.

Deborah is not called 'the prophet', but 'a prophet' only once in Judges 4:4, but it is not clear that she is indeed performing the duties of a prophet. "In that scene her work is described as that of a judge or ruler." (Schmitt J.J, 1992 :483).

"*Miriam*, the sister of Moses, gets the title 'prophetess', but she performs actions that exhibit a character that is more cultic than prophetic (Ex 15:20; Num 12:1-15)." (Schmitt J.J, 1992 :482).

As indicated earlier, Huldah was indeed no ordinary woman. Carol Meyers (1988:5) argues that "the Israelite woman is largely unseen in the pages of the Hebrew Bible. The women we glimpse in the Hebrew Bible are, almost to a woman, exceptional. They are women who rose to positions of prominence." Meyers (1988:5) does however not think that these women can be seen as representing the 'ordinary' women of Israel. Huldah is therefore indeed one of the few women who could be seen as an encouragement to 'ordinary' Israelite women.

Apart from the fact that Huldah was a prophet, other information is supplied about her. Huldah is named and she lives with her family in the 'second quarter' of Jerusalem. Furthermore, it is stated that she was married, and the name of her husband as well as his ancestors are mentioned. Huldah now becomes a real person with a family. Nelson (1987 :256) argues that "Huldah's careful identification undergirds the authenticity of the message she delivers. It emphasizes that she was a real person in real time. The original readers would have known her neighbourhood, if not her husband's family."

The story of Huldah also shows a different model of family life. Both Huldah and Shallum worked outside the home. Both worked for the king, if we follow the argument that Shallum was a 'keeper of the king's wardrobe' and

Huldah a court prophet. Shallum had to see to the vestments of the king, and this could easily have been done by another person. A prophet, on the other hand being 'called by God', was seen as a person with authority and this would change the way Huldah was treated. Huldah is not just described as a prophet, but is actually treated as one. Her status as a prophet is confirmed by the words, **דָּרַשׁ אֶת־יְהוָה**. These words are usually used and means "to seek a divine oracle that will be spoken through a human agent. In all but one instance, the agent is a prophet (1 Sam 9:9; 1 Kgs 14:5; 22:8, 18); in 1 Sam. 28:7 the agent is a (female) medium." (Edelman1994:232) The fact that Hilkiyah , Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan and Asaiah went to Huldah, affirms her status as a prophet in the community of Jerusalem.

This would have changed the dynamics of the family of Huldah, as she would not have been able to stay 'hidden'. Because of her position in society as a prophet, Huldah would have been right next to Shallum and it might be that he needed to play the supportive role sometimes.

This is an important story for husbands and wives who's traditional roles have been changed. Circumstances where the husband needs to play the supportive role in the family in order for the wife to fulfill her 'calling' in life.

A woman may work outside the home today, but all the responsibilities of the household and family rest firmly on their shoulders. This prevent women from 'soaring like eagles', as they are not capable to cope with the stress and responsibilities of two full-time jobs. The Huldah story shows a model where a woman and a man are able to work together (as husband and wife), side by side and share the roles of leading and supporting alternatively.

Whether it was the intension of the writer or not, but it also shows a true woman – a person with more than one role to fulfill. She was a woman, a wife with a household to look after, maybe even a mother and most

importantly, she was a prophet. She must therefore have lived a very busy life, but a balanced life. In order to lead such a life, she must have been a good 'manager'. If she was a prophet, it is also most possible, that she could have been a teacher. "According to Jewish tradition, Huldah had an academy or schoolhouse in Jerusalem. She and Jeremiah were kinsfolk and divided prophetic functions between them, Jeremiah preaching to the men and Huldah to the women." (Branch 2000 : 614).

After being introduced to Huldah the woman, wife and prophet, it is not possible to argue that prophecy of the prophet, Huldah has no theological significance.

No ! Huldah, the prophet's story is not there by accident. Huldah was 'called by God' to be a prophet. She was chosen to be at the core of one of the most important parts of the Deuteronomistic History – "the Finding of the Book of the Law". Not Jeremiah, but Huldah. By being there and speaking so powerfully in six verses, Huldah shows what impact a few sentences can have if uttered at the most appropriate time in history. She is an example to other women and most certainly an inspiration to all.

May the spirit of Huldah awaken us

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