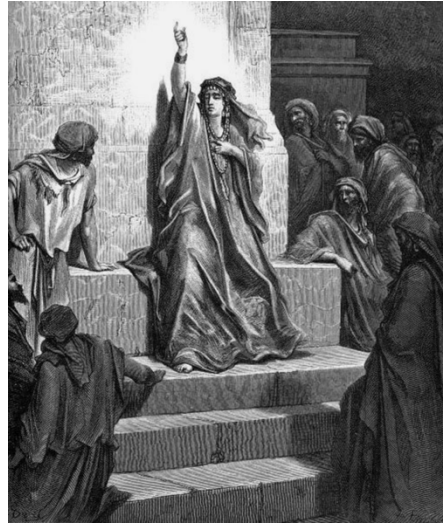


Huldah / חִלְדָּה

Biblical Text

The scribe Shaphan also told the king, “The priest Hilkiah has given me a scroll”; and Shaphan read from it to the king. When the king heard the words of the Teaching, he tore his clothes. The king gave orders to Hilkiah, and Ahikam son of Shaphan, and Abdon son of Micah, and the scribe Shaphan, and Asaiah the king’s minister, saying, “Go, inquire of Adonai on my behalf and on behalf of those who remain in Israel and Judah concerning the words of the scroll that has been found, for great indeed must be the wrath of Adonai that has been poured down upon us because our fathers did not obey the word of Adonai and do all that is written in this scroll.” Hilkiah and those whom the king [had ordered] went to the prophetess Huldah, wife of Shallum son of Tokhath son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe, who was living in Jerusalem *in the Mishneh*, and spoke to her accordingly.



She responded to them: “Thus said Adonai God of Israel: Say to the man who sent you to Me, ‘Thus said Adonai: I am going to bring disaster upon this place and its inhabitants—all the curses that are written in the scroll that was read to the king of Judah—because they forsook Me and made offerings to other gods in order to vex Me with all the works of their hands; My wrath shall be poured out against this place and not be quenched.’ But say this to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of Adonai: ‘Thus said Adonai God of Israel: As for the words which you have heard, since your heart was softened and you humbled yourself before God when you heard God’s words concerning this place and its inhabitants, and you humbled yourself before Me and tore your clothes and wept before Me, I for My part have listened, declares Adonai. Assuredly, I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be laid in your grave in peace; your eyes shall see nothing of the disaster that I will bring upon this place and its inhabitants.’” They reported this back to the king.

- II Chronicles 34:18-28

So the priest Hilkiah, and Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to the prophetess Huldah—the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah son of Harhas, the keeper of the wardrobe—who was living in Jerusalem *in the Mishneh*, and they spoke to her. She responded: “Thus said Adonai, the God of Israel: Say to the man who sent you to me: Thus said Adonai: I am going to bring disaster upon this place and its inhabitants, in accordance with all the words of the scroll which the king of Judah has read. Because they have forsaken Me and have made offerings to other gods and vexed Me with all their deeds, My wrath is kindled against this place and it shall not be quenched. But say this to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of Adonai: Thus said Adonai, the God of Israel: As for the words which you have heard— because your heart was softened and you humbled yourself before Adonai when you heard what I decreed against this place and its inhabitants—that it will become a desolation and a curse—and because you rent your clothes and wept before Me, I for My part have listened—declares Adonai. Assuredly, I will gather you to your fathers and you will be laid in your tomb in peace. Your eyes shall not see all the disaster which I will bring upon this place.” So they brought back the reply to the king. - II Kings 22:14-20

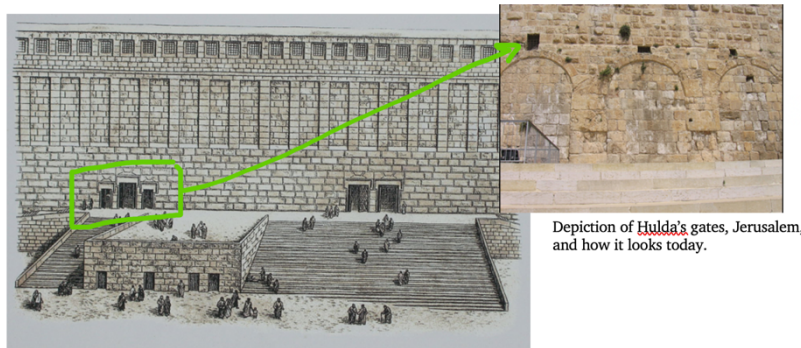
חִלְדָּה

burrowing animal
(weasel, rat, marten)



Classical Midrash

There were five gates to the Temple Mount: The two **Huldah gates** on the south were used both for entrance and exit; The Kiponus gate on the west was used both for entrance and exit. The Taddi gate on the north was not used at all. The Eastern gate over which was a representation of the palace of Shushan and through which the high priest who burned the red heifer and all who assisted with it would go out to the Mount of Olives.



Depiction of Huldah's gates, Jerusalem, and how it looks today.

- Mishna Middot 1:3

IN THE MISHNEH [she sat] in the house of study (*Aramaic translation*). There is a gate in the Temple courtyard, named **Huldah's Gate** [as stated] in masechet Middot 1:3. According to that Mishnah, the two Gates of Huldah led to the Temple Mount. Others interpret “במשנה” as “outside the wall” i.e., between the two walls, which are double (משנה), as in “a double portion” Exodus 16:22), around the city. She was teaching the Oral Law (Mishna) to the elders of the generation, in the study house. Rabbi Akiva annotates it this way: “she expounded on the Book of *D'varim* which is known as Mishneh Torah, because it reiterates many topics from the other books....she expounded on [it] in public, and she revealed the punishments and the exiles which were doubled for those who transgress the secrets and the allusions of the Torah.

- Rashi on II Kings 22

Rabbi Azariah said: We will now learn of the efficacy of charity: come and see from the instance of *Shallum*, son of *Tikvah*, (Peace, son of Hope) who was one of the important men of his generation, giving charity every day. What did he do? He filled the bottle with water, and sat at the entrance of the city, and he would give water to every person who came on the way, restoring his soul to him. On account of the charity which he did, the Holy Spirit rested upon his wife Huldah, as it is said, “So Hilkiyah the priest... went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of *Shallum*, the son of *Tikvah*” – Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 33:9

The Gemara asks with regard to the prophetesses recorded in the *baraita*: Who were the seven prophetesses? The Gemara answers: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, **Huldah**, and Esther.

- Talmud Megillah 14b

Following this pronouncement is a long Talmudic discussion about each of the women enumerated here. In Huldah's case, the Rabbis discuss at length her name, her title, her parentage, and how she was qualified for her job. Here are some highlights:

The Gemara asks: But how could Josiah himself ignore Jeremiah and send emissaries to Huldah? The Sages of the school of Rabbi Sh'elah say: Because women are more compassionate, and he hoped that what she would tell them would not be overly harsh. Furthermore, Rav Nahman said: Huldah was a descendant of Joshua.

Rav Eina the Elder raised an objection from a *baraita* that indicates Huldah as, in fact, a descendant of Rahab, and seemingly not of Joshua...

Rav Nahman responded to Eina the Elder - some say that he said to him: “Blackened pot!” (i.e. my colleague in Torah, who has toiled in Torah study!) “From me and from you the matter may be concluded!” (i.e. the explanation lies in a combination of our two

statements!) "...for Rahab converted and married Joshua, and therefore Huldah descended from both Joshua and Rahab.

The Gemara raises a difficulty: But did Joshua have any descendants? But isn't it written in the genealogical list of the tribe of Ephraim: "Nun his son, Joshua his son" (I Chronicles 7:27)? The listing does not continue any further, implying that Joshua had no sons. The Gemara answers: Indeed, he did not have sons, but he did have daughters.

An additional point is mentioned with regard to the prophetesses. Rav Nahman said: Haughtiness is not befitting a woman. And a proof to this is that there were two haughty women, whose names were identical to the names of loathsome creatures. One, Deborah, was called a hornet, as her Hebrew name, Devorah, means hornet; and one, Huldah, was called a marten [similar to a weasel], as her name is the Hebrew term for that creature. From where is it known that they were haughty? With regard to Deborah, the hornet, it is written: "And she sent and called Barak" (Judges 4:6), but she herself did not go to him. And with regard to Huldah, the marten, it is written: "Say to the man that sent you to me" (II Kings 22:15), but she did not say: "say to the King." – Talmud Megillah 14b

Contemporary Midrash

I suggest another answer to the Rabbis' question [namely, why did Josiah approach Huldah and not Jeremiah?] It is of some interest to note that the Prophet Jeremiah himself is nowhere mentioned in the Book of Kings. Perhaps the author of the book preferred Huldah to him. Since he was definitely a Deuteronomist writer, we may assume that the two prophets represented competing sources of authority for members of this school. The Rabbis' answer that Huldah was Jeremiah's relative seems unlikely - that she was of a like mind is more convincing. That Jeremiah was not the author of the Book of Kings' first choice for representing the authoritative voice of the Deuteronomist is extremely interesting....all [the] rabbinic speculations [about Huldah's qualifications for her job] that we have seen up to this point are, in my opinion, an interesting attempt [by the Rabbis] to provide the prophetess with a biography, in accordance with their understanding of the biblical past, and of women's position within it. My speculations are based on other premises. The Rabbis assume that women should not be in positions of power - that if they are, it is an accident of circumstances, usually based on good family ties. I agree with the Rabbis that pedigree was important at the time that Huldah prophesied, but I claim that, in her case, it was probably not the decisive factor that made her important....

Let me conclude – I identify Huldah as the most powerful Deuteronomic prophet of her days. The author of the Book of Kings certainly thought so. And when she died, unlike any other prophet, she left her mark on the urban landscape of Second Temple Jerusalem, many hundreds of years after her demise, and a memory of her prominence continued and pervaded the consciousness of the Rabbis even after Jerusalem itself was destroyed. – Dr. Tal Ilan, *Huldah, the Deuteronomic Prophetess of the Book of Kings* (2010)

The Biblical scholar Dr. Tikva Frymer-Kensky also refers to Huldah as an "oracle" in addition to a prophet, and sets her within a continuum of female oracles throughout the "Historical books" - Rahav, Devorah, Hannah, Avigail, Huldah and the Witch of Endor:

Together these women outline the history of Israel, punctuating it with the reminder that this history was shaped and foretold by God. The Pentateuch too knows of a connection between women and oracles, for the matriarchs Sarah and Rivka are privy to divine knowledge....The oracles do not preach, castigate or reprove. That is the job of the court prophets who admonish the Israelite kings, and of the classical literary prophets, who concentrate on the sins or fallings of Israel....they are not prophets in that fuller sense of the word, but they convey the will of God. The oracles appear at all Israel's turning points, presenting by their existence and by their messages the direction in which Israel will move.

– *Reading the Women of the Bible*, p. 327