1

New Techniques Highlight Huldah

THIS BOOK SEEKS TO measure—for the first time ever—the extraordinary impact of Huldah the prophetess upon Hebrew Scripture. The book will cite entire chapters of Scripture that Huldah wrote. In difficult times, she overcame high barriers to women. She helped shape Israel's history and was a principle author of Hebrew Scripture. As such, she added to God's Word a feminine aspect that has inspired numberless believers—men and women alike. After reading these pages, many readers will be able to affirm that Huldah is among the most influential women in human history.

This text will rely upon athbash, anagrams, probabilities, and coded spellings to reason that Huldah first became the wife of Judah's King Jehoiakim and then queen mother to Jehoiachin, her son, who succeeded his father, Jehoiakim, on the throne. After 597 BCE, when the Babylonians exiled her and young Jehoiachin, Huldah served as elder, author, advisor, merchant, prophet, priestess, and commanding general. As queen mother—even in exile—Huldah became head of the Asherah cult, something that deeply offended former colleagues who were exclusively monotheistic (twenty years before, Huldah's prophesies had helped accomplish the Josiah-era reforms. These centralized Yahweh's worship at Jerusalem, excluded other deities from Solomon's temple, and destroyed older worship sites).

Huldah's Asherah relationship, and particularly her leadership in a disastrous military adventure drew savage criticism. Anagrams and coding were basic tools employed by those who wrote Scripture. Using these, her more extreme opponents equated her with Jezebel and the "loose

1

woman" of Proverbs. In the books of Kings alone, they fashioned twenty-one demeaning Huldah anagrams from "caused to sin." Ezekiel matched that total of Huldah insults with variants of "whoring" in just *two* of his chapters (16 and 23). In Judges 9, critics reached the depths when they attached the name Huldah to the raping of the Levite's concubine and the grisly dismembering of her body. Given the tenor of this criticism, one must conclude that another of Huldah's faults was that her gender was female. Understanding the totality of this animus helps us to grasp the life setting of the scores of OT chapters that conceal significant numbers of Huldah signatures.[1]

Huldah was an extraordinary writer—arguably she ranks with Second Isaiah as the best in Hebrew Scripture. For example, she probably penned: "How the mighty have fallen!," "I have escaped by the skin of my teeth," and "Let us make humankind in our image."[2] Other verses by her that kindle the spirit are: "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God"; "As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpets, they raised a great shout, and the wall fell down flat"; and "After the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence."[3] Also, Huldah is both the personified Wisdom and the Good Wife of the book of Proverbs.[4] Further, what appear to be her own writings about Deborah, Abigail, Bathsheba, Tamar, and Rebecca almost certainly conceal autobiographical elements.[5] Later chapters will consider these.

Scripture-wide computer searches indicate that Huldah had astounding versatility. She is represented in the Pentateuch, Prophets, and Writings. Numbers, Joshua, Ezekiel, Daniel, Psalms, and Proverbs each contain unusual (i.e., statistically significant) masses of coded names like Huldah-the-prophetess and Huldah-the-queen-mother. Still, coding does not guarantee authorship. Others could and did write about or against her. We know already, for example, that Ezekiel filled several of his own chapters with Huldah anagrams simply to target his attacks. Those chapters were not written *by* Huldah but rather *about* her. Also, a book like Proverbs, which is favorable to Huldah, might not have been written during

---

1. See appendix 1 for a list of 1,773 Huldah anagrams.

2. 2 Sam 1:19; Job 19:20; Gen 1:26.

3. Ruth 1:16; Josh 6:20; 1 Kgs 19:24.

4. The references for Wisdom are Prov 1:20–33 and Proverbs 8; the reference for the Good Wife is Prov 31:10–31.

5. The reference for Deborah is Judges 5. References for Abigail are 1 Sam 25:14, 18; 27:3; 30:15; 2 Sam 2:2; and 1 Chr 2:16 and 17. The reference for Bathsheba is 1 Kings 1. For Tamar, it is Genesis 38, and for Rebecca, Genesis 24.

her lifetime. Instead, it might have consisted of remembrances by Huldah's followers or word-of-mouth traditions passed between generations.[6] A further word of caution: a previous study of coded names shows that Huldah worked with a group of fourteen others. They were led by Shaphan, King Josiah's Secretary.[7] A majority of Shaphan-group members seem to have collaborated on composing much of the Psaltery, though psalm-by-psalm coding shows that Huldah frequently participated. The same pattern appears in the books of Joshua and Proverbs and, to a lesser extent, in Numbers and Daniel. Though biblical authors apparently worked in teams, we still shall be able to link Huldah herself to specific words, verses, passages, and often whole chapters of Scripture. This book devotes itself to chronicling those achievements.

And what can this mean to feminist scholars? They need a champion and Huldah provides a superb one. Moreover, in years ahead scholars quite possibly will place Huldah the Hebrew prophet alongside the very greatest women of antiquity.

NEW TIMES, NEW DISCOVERIES, ACTUAL FACTS

Readers may wonder why the accomplishments of this extraordinary woman are, after twenty-five centuries, suddenly coming to light. The answers lie in the fields of archaeology, biblical studies, computers, and probability. The Dead Sea Scrolls prove that one can rely, in good measure, upon the wording of the MT. Cumulative scholarly advances now lead biblical students to ask better-informed questions of that text. Computers prodigiously collect answers to those questions. And modern probabilities allow one to wade through the answers.

Here is how this writer, for one, has benefitted from these advances. Though seminary-trained, I had worked for years at a large utility company, and in 1985 happened upon the likely identity of Second Isaiah. Deciding to switch careers, I arranged early retirement, bought a computer, brushed up on Hebrew, and commissioned a search program. For the past quarter century, working almost every day, I have sought to identify the authors of Scripture. Mostly, I did the tedious labor that seems always and everywhere to consume the scholar's day. But as the years passed, I did find things. In rough sequence of discovery, they are:

6. However, massive coding of Shaphan-group names proves that Proverbs was written during Huldah's lifetime. See Kavanagh, *The Shaphan Group*, 120–21.

7. Ibid., 111.

Huldah

- Second Isaiah's name was Jacob.
- Scripture teems with coded spellings.
- Athbash generates added ways to spell an encoded name.
- Ezra's proper era is the Exile rather than the Restoration.
- Word Links is a simplified word association technique.
- Babylon executed Judah's leaders as substitute kings.
- Ezekiel, who was the Suffering Servant, perished as a substitute king.
- The synoptic gospels portray Jesus as a substitute king.
- King Jehoiachin died in Babylon as a substitute king.
- The Priestly Benediction is about Jehoiachin.
- Daniel was a real biblical person, not a mythical figure.
- Biblical writers extensively used anagrams.
- A catastrophic Cyrus-led revolt marked the nadir of the Exile.
- Asaiah helped to lead that revolt.
- The rebels took Jerusalem and held it for a time.
- The author of the P Source was Ezra.
- The brothers Ezra and Jozadak contended for the chief priesthood.
- The Shaphan group authored hundreds of chapters of Scripture.
- Huldah was a dominant figure during the late monarchy and early Exile.
- Daniel, Jacob, Asaiah, Micaiah, Azariah, and Huldah led the Dtr group.

Among all these discoveries, the most significant findings may be how Scripture's authors identified themselves. They used two methods. The first is the anagram. To form anagrams, biblical writers used some or all the letters within a single text word to spell a hidden name. Letter sequence was ignored.[8] An example in English is carthorse, which is an anagram of "orchestra." In Hebrew, an anagram of חלד, Huldah, is contained within החלד, "weasel" (Lev 11:29), which could not have been a compliment. Any literate teenager in ancient Israel could have quickly mastered anagram composition.

8. For more on anagrams, see Kavanagh, *Secrets of the Jewish Exile*, 207; *The Exilic Code*, 21–27; and *The Shaphan Group*, 23–26.

The second method of identification, while also simple, required more of both art and training. This is termed "coded spellings." Coded spellings require one—and only one—letter from consecutive text words to spell a name. A five-letter name would draw upon five Hebrew text words in a row. Again, letters could fall in any sequence.[9]

Finally, the ancients applied a letter-exchange system called athbash, which generated twenty-two ways to spell each name.[10] This greatly expanded the vocabulary available to biblical authors when they encoded spellings and anagrams. Take Huldah anagrams, for example. Without athbash, Hebrew Scripture produces only nineteen Huldah anagrams. But after applying athbash, the total jumps to 1,773. As we shall see, Huldah, her allies, and her enemies frequently used anagrams to convey information. Readers can use a standard commercial search program to locate anagrams within Scripture.[11] The process, while simple, requires perseverance.

Now to coded spellings. Over the years, consultants have written and revised for this writer a computer program that searches Scripture for coded spellings. Using probabilities to sort the data, the program is calibrated to retain only the strongest one-half percent of coded spellings—a level that surely excludes most coincidental findings. For comparison, a five-percent retention level is common in both the social sciences and large-scale medical studies. Readers can assume that conservative applications of probabilities underlie the whole effort set forth in this book.[12]

9. Coded spellings are more fully explained in Kavanagh, *Secrets*, 207–8; *The Exilic Code*, 6–13; and *The Shaphan Group*, 1–5.

10. Athbash is discussed more fully in Kavanagh, *Secrets*, 198–205; *The Exilic Code*, 27–31; and *The Shaphan Group*, 12–17. Jeremiah 51:41 revealed the key to the athbash code when it used Babylon (l bb) and Sheshach (K##) interchangeably. Huldah herself probably wrote the words that enabled us to break the athbash code. Coded spellings of her name run through vv 39–40 and 42–43 of Jeremiah 51, which flank v 41, the key verse. Athbash first divides the Hebrew alphabet in half to form facing rows of letters. Eleven of the letters run right-to-left; the other eleven run left-to-right (Babylon thus becomes Sheshach). Then tractor-tread rotation changes the interfaces, allowing the parallel rows of letters eventually to generate twenty-one other ways to spell the chosen name. Since a final adjustment is not described here, those who wish to duplicate this should first consult one of the references for a fuller explanation.

11. Kavanagh, *The Exilic Code*, 22 n. 1, describes how to use BibleWorks to search for anagrams. It might take two days of work to locate all anagrams for a single name.

12. Here are two other safeguards. The probability of coincidence of any spellings result cannot be higher than .001, or one in a thousand. A second conservative measure involves a large, randomly picked set of dummy words. The assumption is that the results from running these dummy words against Scripture established the norm for

Fortunately, anagrams and—to a slightly lesser extent—coded spellings resist alterations in the biblical text.

Biblical scholars have repeatedly expressed to this writer that coding could not have survived the centuries of textual changes that the Masoretic Text has undergone. This study, like those of most other scholars of Hebrew Scripture, relies upon the Leningrad Codex of the Masoretic Text. The MT has a better than 95 percent letter-for-letter congruence with the Qumran Isaiah scrolls, which date to about 150 BCE. This sort of fidelity in copying bodes well for what might have happened prior to 150 BCE. In that period, ideological battles could have pushed coding losses higher—while, at the same time, posting coding gains. The reason for positing gain is that those who edited earlier writings also knew coding. They would have substituted or added their own encodings to whatever text they amended.

This happens often. For example, vv. 2–3 and 6–7 of Isaiah chapter 9, which is the Wonderful Counselor / Prince of Peace passage, teem with Huldah encodings. These suggest that Huldah was either the mother or the grandmother of the new child. Well and good, but there is more. Editors have doctored the passage, adding verses 8 through 11. These are also densely coded with Huldah, but the language is hostile to her. In all, Isa 9:2–11 (H1–10) conceals 26 Huldah spellings within 125 text words. The entire balance of Scripture has 2,657 such spellings in 305,371 text words. The chi-squared probability of coincidence within Isaiah 9 is zero. The Huldah coding—hostile and friendly mixed together—cannot be coincidental. This is an example of a change in the MT that actually added text words and coding. Also, of course, the editors may have subtracted an unknown number of text words with coded spellings.

Scholarly opinion is that the original Hebrew texts have been edited and modified so that the surviving Masoretic Text is just one of several versions.[13] Certainly, the MT is not wholly the original text. It is, however, the text we have—a text that still contains *several million encodings*. And these can help students of the Bible immensely. Consider this result. The Society of Biblical Literature has convened the best minds in biblical studies to find the identity of Dtr—the person or persons who wrote the book of Deuteronomy and framed the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel,

---

what might happen coincidentally. We subtracted coded spelling results on the wrong side of this norm, which reduced findings by an additional 20 percent. Kavanagh, *The Shaphan Group*, 85–86, discusses this adjustment.

13. Email dated September 1, 2011, from professor Juha Pakkala, University of Helsinki, to the author.

and Kings. This is the Holy Grail of biblical scholarship. Within the SBL, an organized search has been going on for years, but still no luck. Yet this writer, with four months of labor, has been able to locate the Dtr members within Deuteronomy and calibrate their influence on the book (a later chapter discusses Dtr's identity). Probabilities, fast computers, and this new technique of finding encoded spellings made this possible. Without even considering the Dtr find, surely several million newly discovered lines of encodings justify a look.

Is the coding that remains after Scripture's editors finished their work coincidental? No, little of it is coincidental. The social sciences commonly use a .05 probability breakpoint (1 in 20) to determine whether or not something occurs by chance. By contrast, this author has incorporated .001 in the computer search program, 1 in 1,000, which is fifty times more selective.[14] Those several million lines of encodings are no coincidence. All this engenders confidence that this book's findings are truly the work of Scripture's original authors and editors.

Also, simply because coding is succinct, it resists change. The average Hebrew verse can house about a half-dozen coded spellings of the same name. Adding letters to one or more of the verse's words would not alter a previous encoding; subtracting letters would if one of the letters taken had been used to build the encoding (a one-in-four chance). Adding or dropping just one text word would disrupt some but not all of the spellings, while adding words at either end of the verse would have no effect.

Webster's defines truth as the "actual state of a matter," and "conformity with fact." The operative words are actual and fact. Actual facts are unassailable and indisputable.[15] The anagrams and coded spellings reported in this book are actual facts. Those facts may be misinterpreted in whole or in part but actual facts they remain. We hope that others will quickly move to join in interpreting the facts pouring from this newly opened cornucopia.

14. Despite this .001 limit, final outcomes total one-half percent of findings (.005), a difference due to the high number of coded spellings at the far-right tail of the distribution. Stated another way, to secure outcomes averaging .005, we had to set individual cutoffs at .001.

15. The thought comes from Golletz, *Consensus*, 84.

LOW STATUS OF WOMEN

Most leading authorities would agree with the statement, "The Bible was written and compiled by males who had no special interest in women's roles."[16] Others go further: "Few could dispute the overwhelming orientation of the Hebrew Bible to the male world"; "The Bible is written in androcentric language, [and] has its origin in the patriarchal culture of antiquity"; and "The Old Testament is man's 'book,' where women appear . . . simply as adjuncts of men . . . [It is] a collection of writings by males from a society dominated by males."[17] Virtually all Hebrew Scripture was written after kings were enthroned and temples established in Israel and Judah. Prior to this time (say until 950 BCE), the foci of activities were the family household, the clan, and the tribe. Scripture speaks of it as the period of the judges, and a pro-monarchy editor of the book of Judges has inserted the refrain, "In those days there was no king in Israel." That same person closes the book by adding, "All the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judg 21:25).

In the uplands of Israel, the work contributed by women as mothers and wives was vital. Women birthed and nurtured children, processed food, cooked meals, and made and repaired clothing. As mid-wives, women were important health-care providers.[18] Women also furnished field labor to help their family wring a living from rocky soil, though the most important crop they produced were children, an essential contribution in an agricultural, hand-labor economy. Yet this came at a cost, for the risks of childbirth were considerable. Remember God's sentence upon Eve: "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children" (Gen 3:16).[19] Mortality rates uphold this truth. A scientific study shows that the average life span of women in the eastern Mediterranean during biblical times was twenty percent shorter than that of men.[20]

The authority of women in *pre*-monarchy Israel was extensive and included religious leadership within the household. Lack of separate

16. King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 49. By count, men's names mentioned in HS outnumber those of women by an astounding nine to one.

17. Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 4; Bird, *Missing Persons*, 13; and Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 21.

18. King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 52.

19. Those words may have been written by Huldah. Her name is significantly coded beneath this and Gen 3:17, the following verse.

20. Nicholson, "Longevity." See chart: http://www.beyondveg.com/nicholson-w/angel-1984/angel.

8

buildings for worship at the earliest sites indicates that worship was family-centered, and probably led by women.[21] Archaeologists have unearthed thousands of female cult figurines at numerous sites in Israel dating between the tenth and sixth centuries BCE, which is the period of the monarchy. No male figurines have been reported. These small female figures were common in Judah, and they came from the debris of homes, not of sanctuaries. Devotions within households were prevalent and, judging by the sex of the figurines, represented women seeking "to secure fertility, safe childbirth, and/or adequate lactation."[22] The figurines may have been associated with the Canaanite goddess Asherah, the goddess of fertility who was the consort of the storm-god Baal.

When kings displaced judges as sources of law and protection, female authority was diminished. During nearly four centuries of rule, the monarchs established centralized palace and military bureaucracies, both of which were male. Also, the northern and southern kingdoms vied for the allegiance of their subjects by offering sites of worship manned (literally) with male priesthoods. Also, law supported religion. Much of the Pentateuch was written by members of a priesthood that was all-male and hereditary, and those first five books catalogue Israelite law.[23] The oldest adult male inherited, although a widow with an underage son could also inherit. If there were no male descendants, daughters could inherit property and marry men of their choice—if they selected within the tribe. Marriages were arranged. After a woman married, she joined the household of her husband, a practice that offered continuity of land tenure. The bride then fell under the supervision of her new mother-in-law. At the death of her husband, the newly widowed woman could marry her husband's brother to perpetuate the deceased's name and ensure that property remained within the clan. A man could take several wives, though monogamy remained the ideal. Also, a man could father children with any female slave owned within the household. Only a husband might initiate divorce proceedings, and after divorce he had no responsibility to support his ex-wife.

Phyllis Bird writes, "The picture of woman obtained from the Old Testament laws can be summarized . . . as that of a legal nonperson; where she does become visible it is as a dependent, and usually an inferior, in a

---

21. Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 159. Meyers points out that the Micah story in Judges tells us that households had their own shrines.

22. Meyers, *Households*, 31, 57.

23. Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 11.

male-centered and male-dominated society. The laws, by and large, do not address her, most do not even acknowledge her existence . . . Where ranking occurs she is always inferior to the male. Only in her role as mother is she accorded status equivalent to a man's."[24]

Interestingly, when most Hebrew Scripture was written, Israelite women appear to have been no worse off, and in some ways better off, than women in surrounding cultures.[25] While this excuses much, it does not address the problem of how women of the twenty-first century should interpret Scripture that seems to bind rather than liberate. However, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argues that, correctly understood, the Bible fosters the liberation of women. One of her strategies for achieving this is to "recover works written by women in order to restore critical attention to female voices and intellectual traditions."[26]

This is exactly what this book seeks to achieve. It will use coded spellings and anagrams to pry from Scripture the role that Huldah played in creating the Bible.

During the last several decades, this writer has enjoyed a monopoly on applying anagrams, coded spellings, and Word Links to Hebrew Scripture. As a result, this present search for the historical Huldah often assumes as given events that are as yet unrecognized by others. Here, for example, is a startling finding that serves to show how Huldah used coded spellings. It is the familiar opening of the book of Jeremiah:

> The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah . . . to whom the word of the LORD came . . . in the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month. Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, "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." Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." (Jer 1:1–6)

Encoded within this text are sixteen spellings of two athbash versions of Huldah-the-prophetess and one version of Huldah-the-queen-mother. One of the Huldah-the-prophetess renderings has three spellings and the

---

24. Bird, *Missing Persons*, 30.

25. Wegner, "Leviticus," 48. Wegner cites the research of Sarah B. Pomeroy in *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah.*

26. Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 23, 28.

other has five.[27] Also stitched into the Jeremiah opening are no fewer than eight encoded Huldah-the-queen-mother spellings.[28] Each of these three different groupings stands as statistically significant—defined as having less than one chance in a thousand of being coincidental.[29] These Huldah encodings lie within vv. 3–6, with all three crossing v. 5, which carries the memorable words, "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." The footnotes allow anyone who wishes to verify these coded spellings to do so.

How does one account for Huldah's coded presence in Jeremiah's call? Was Jeremiah in some way honoring the prophetess? That is un-likely. Readers will soon learn that Jeremiah repeatedly used anagrams to criticize Huldah—and he also employed coded spellings in the same way. Proof is close at hand. While three spellings of Huldah-the-prophetess are concealed within the verses quoted above, another seven underlie verses 16–17 in this same opening chapter.[30] There God says, "I will utter my judgments against them, for all their wickedness in forsaking me; they have made offerings to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands." The Huldah coding within the call verses (Jer 1:1–6) praise and probably describe the female prophet; the spellings that underlie verses 16–17 bristle with hostility toward her. Given Jeremiah's fulminations against Huldah (which this book will document), the best way to ac-count for the coding beneath the prophetic call passage is that Huldah or someone very close to her wrote it, attributing it to Jeremiah. Those words of God very likely applied to Huldah herself. Huldah was the one whom God formed and knew in the womb, consecrated even before birth, and appointed a prophet to the nations. Perhaps Jeremiah had told Huldah about his call, and Huldah then expressed it in words of her own. But the fact must be that they were her own words, words spoken from her

---

27. ‪)qwry)) txd‬, which is an athbash variation of ‪h)ybnhhdl x‬, Huldah-the-prophetess, has three spellings using ten consecutive text words starting with word 4 in v. 5; ‪M+cytmml r(‬ has five spellings starting at word 3 in v. 4.

28. Huldah-the-queen-mother, ‪hrybghhdl x‬, is encoded eight consecutive times, from 3–12 to 3–21 for the first to 3–19 to 5–1 for the last. To illustrate, the sequence of letters (one per text word) for the 3–12 spelling is ‪hhbhl ydgr x‬.

29. The coding with three spellings in the Jeremiah preface has seven more in vers-es 16–17. The two batches together make the chapter's coding statistically significant.

30. Spellings of ‪)qwry)) txd‬ (one letter per text word) begin at words 16–6 through 16–12 and end at words 17–1 through 17–7, making seven coded spellings of Huldah-the-prophetess. This, of course, is an athbash variation.

own prophetic experience. Both Huldah and Jeremiah were familiar with Judah's court circles, and both were of an age.[31] Indeed, tradition says that they were related.[32] Possibly they learned their craft from the same master, for each was to become a consummate writer who could readily apply anagrams and coding to Scripture. In the small world of seventh-century Judah, the two prophets would have been well acquainted, though probably not as friends. Judging by Jeremiah's fierce criticisms, he and Huldah were anything but friends during the Exile.

In view of all this, it is most likely that the prophetic call that until now has been associated with Jeremiah in reality is Huldah's own call. Literally, Jeremiah would only have allowed the Huldah coding over his own dead body. The best scenario, then, appears to be that Huldah outlived Jeremiah and in her final years edited some portion of that great prophet's work.[33] While doing so, she inserted the marvelous, touching—and encoded—words that described her own call. Was it spite that led her to do so? Could it have been compassion? One could argue either or even both, though we choose compassion. She selflessly offered her own most personal experience to memorialize her fellow prophet. Vats of ink have been consumed in commenting on this passage, but until now not one drop has ever been used to write the name Huldah. The stunning discovery that Jeremiah's famous call really belonged to Huldah corrects that omission.

ANAGRAM BREAKTHROUGHS

One of the great events of the Exile was the Cyrus-led revolt of the 570s—an event that has so far escaped the notice of scholars. The uprising, with its disastrous aftermath, gave rise to much Scripture, some of which contained Cyrus anagrams. These anagrams offer a handy way to date passages. If they include a Cyrus anagram, they must have been created later than 575. Biblical writers used anagrams much as modern authors use italics—to make a point, to insult, or to associate a person with a trait, an event, or a condition. When Ezekiel accused, "You *played the whore* [Huldah anagram] with the Egyptians" (Ezek 16:26), he employed "played the

---

31. One expert estimates Jeremiah's year of birth as c 640 BCE (Lundbom, "Jeremiah," 686), and we calculate that Huldah was also born about 640.

32. Rothkoff, "Huldah," 1063.

33. Tertullian and Jerome say that Jeremiah died in Egypt, stoned to death by his exiled fellow countrymen (Lipinski, "Jeremiah," 1351). The reason for the execution is not known. Huldah would have outlived Jeremiah by some fifteen years.

whore" to conceal the Huldah anagram.[34] It was a direct attack upon her and her presumed dealings with Egyptian authorities. In his prophecies, Ezekiel seldom shied from repetition, and in chapter 16 he used that same root containing Huldah ten other times. Today's scholars should assume that virtually every literate sixth-century-BCE Jew knew exactly whom Ezekiel was addressing. Chapter 16 also contains four Cyrus anagrams.[35] These assure that the prophet wrote after the plot to take Jerusalem was already well advanced. Since Ezekiel prophesied so as to "make known to Jerusalem her abominations" (Ezek 16:2), Cyrus and his Israelite forces may already have taken that city, an event that probably occurred in 573 BCE.

This next illustration of anagrams comes from a text marking the middle of the exilic campaign. The Israelite army, camped before the city of Jericho, apparently needed a new commander.

> . . . when *Joshua* [Asaiah] was by Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing before him with a drawn sword in his hand. *Joshua* [Asaiah] went to him and said to him, "Are you one of us, or one of our adversaries?" He replied, "Neither; but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." And *Joshua* [Asaiah] fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and he said to him, "What do you command your servant, my lord?" The commander of the army of the LORD said to *Joshua* [Asaiah], "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy." And *Joshua* [Asaiah] did so. (Josh 5:13–15)

The name Joshua contains the anagram Asaiah. That person had been a minor official under King Josiah forty years earlier. Asaiah also had been in the delegation that called upon Huldah (2 Kgs 22:12), and he later was an active member of the Shaphan group.[36] By contrast, the fictional Joshua character could have been a creation of Dtr in this same monarchy-Exile period.[37] The verses above use Asaiah anagrams five times within a short span. The probability is miniscule that so many Asaiah anagrams could

---

34. The text word ynztw contained the letters for zwny, which is an athbash anagram of Huldah. Henceforth, [H] will stand for [Huldah anagram]. Other anagrammed names will be spelled out—for instance [Cyrus]. Where a single text word contains two different anagrams, the reading will be [H, Cyrus], [Cyrus, Ezra], or [Cyrus, Cyrus].

35. Using a verse-word format, 4–14 and 27–12 conceal the Cyrus anagram lmht, 25–12 has ykgr, and 52–12 contains Khqn.

36. Kavanagh, *The Shaphan Group*, 74.

37. Ramsey, "Joshua," 999.

occur coincidentally within a text of so few words.[38] The conclusion is that Joshua is probably Asaiah. Quite possibly he led Israelite forces during the Cyrus revolt. The venture ended very badly—previous work indicates that Asaiah may have been captured and that he later perished as a Babylonian substitute king. Psalm 23 might be an account of Asaiah's end.[39]

For the first time ever, we know about the campaign to capture Jerusalem and the way that it ended. Knowing this, what can one surmise about the odd story of the man with the sword who approached Joshua-Asaiah? The stranger announces that he comes as commander of the army of the Lord. Had the ultimate outcome been good, the chapter would have ended as it was first written—probably with the promise to the kneeling Joshua-Asaiah that God's army would deliver a triumph. But when the opposite proved true, the Dtr editor hastily had to cut the ending.[40] After all, how could the army of the Lord be allowed to lose? Something else supports this theory about the story's finish. The words "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy" are identical to those that God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush (Exod 3:5). The Dtr writer had constructed a parallel between Moses and Asaiah, a parallel that the author had to retract after the Babylonians crushed the uprising.

Here is another example of what anagrams have to teach. In Ezek 34:17–19, the prophet himself renders his opinion of the harm that the revolt caused. "I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats: Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, but you must tread down with *your feet* [Cyrus, Cyrus] the rest of your pasture? When you drink of clear water, must you foul the rest with *your feet* [Cyrus, Cyrus]? And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with *your feet* [Cyrus, Cyrus] and drink what you have fouled with *your feet* [Cyrus, Cyrus]?"[41] What seems at first reading to be pedestrian writing is really a revelation. The prophet cleverly arranged his vocabulary so that one text word had within its letters the characters of two athbash variations of Cyrus. Then he used that text word four times, fashioning eight anagrams. After Hebrew Scripture has surrendered all possible anagrams for all

---

38. The probability that five Asaiah anagrams would appear coincidentally within sixty-six text words is 3.12×10^{-17}.

39. Kavanagh, *The Shaphan Group*, 109.

40. The RSV and the NRSV translators also think that the story has been truncated.

41. In each of four cases, Ezekiel fashions two Cyrus anagrams—Ml ᚱg and ykᴳr—from Mkyl gr, "your feet." See Kavanagh, *The Shaphan Group*, 36–37, and *The Exilic Code*, 36, for further comments on the Cyrus revolt.

possible names, something may emerge to match these eight Cyrus anagrams. But until then, these Ezekiel verses hold the record for repetition.

Other Judahites also drew Ezekiel's ire, starting with Huldah. The quotation above puts a Huldah anagram within "fouled" and the entire passage conceals other anagrams: four for Baruch, two for Asaiah and Ezra, and one each for Jehoiachin and Jacob. Huldah had good company in that risky venture to retake Jerusalem. They included Jeremiah's amanuensis, an ex-official of Josiah, the author of the P Source, Judah's exiled king, and a principle of the Second Isaiah group.

Though Cyrus profited, for others there was hell to pay. One of those presented the bill was Ezekiel himself. He was rounded up with numerous other exiles, imprisoned, and subsequently executed as a substitute for Nebuchadnezzar. Isaiah 52:13—53:12 is an account of his final days.[42] Some twenty years after the revolt failed, Cyrus first surfaced in Near Eastern history and began to acquire nations, starting with the Medes.[43] The revolt in Palestine began in 575 BCE, plus or minus a year or two. Cyrus was not to conquer Babylon until 539, "freeing" the Jews when he did so. As of today, no other student of Scripture has noticed this uprising. This is too bad, because the revolt is the fulcrum that tipped the Exile downward towards disaster. Also, a large amount of scripture addresses the tragic aftermath of this event. Until scholars begin to understand the context of such Scripture, cogent analysis of those texts will continue to be limited.

---

42. Kavanagh, *The Exilic Code*, 110–15.

43. In 553 Nabu-naid, the new king of Babylon, allied himself with Cyrus the Persian. Olmstead, *Persian Empire,* 36. This was the first mention of Cyrus of which historians are aware. Thus, biblical anagrams help to sight Cyrus two decades earlier than those working in the related field of Persian history.