



## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

### (Reflections on Armenian names)

The surname *Achabahian* (sometimes also *Achabah*, a male first name) means "the one at the right hand (of God)." It is the Armenian version of the Latin name *Dexter*, which means the very same thing.

This idea of being at God's right hand is a very important one in Christian understanding. Many versions of the Creed speak of Christ, after His Ascension, as now "sitting at the right hand of the Father." Countless prayers of the Church (see for example the one considered in this issue's *Words and Worship* column) ask God to allow us to be at His right hand. We want to be with Jesus Christ there, sharing in the presence of God as fully as possible.

In the New Testament, Our Lord tells us about the importance of this right-hand position in no uncertain terms in the parable of the sheep and the goats, found in Matthew 25. This terrifying depiction of the Last Judgment talks about God dividing the nations as a shepherd separates his sheep from his goats at the end of the day. The sheep, at the right hand, are those who did what God commands and who showed charity to others in their lives. Those at the left hand will go to eternal fire, never helping those in need around them or, as Christ says it in the Gospel, "did it not to one of the least of these" and therefore "did it not to Me."

So when we hear the name *Achabah* or *Achabahian*, the person who carries it is a living reminder that, in every single action we undertake, a choice must be made. Will we live as if other people and their needs are of first importance, or will we live as if other people were invisible? Will we treat others, no matter how miserable or unattractive, as if they were Christ Himself, or will we treat them with disdain? Will we be at the right or the left hand of God?

## WOMEN WHO FOLLOWED THE LORD

*This month: Huldah, a Prophetess of the Old Testament*

It's not an uncommon experience to come upon something valuable while digging through old things in the attic, or even sometimes in the trash. Huldah the prophetess is known to us because she was asked to determine the value of something found in the rubbish of not just any old attic or trash barrel, but the Temple of Jerusalem.

While repairs were being made to the Temple, under the virtuous reign of King Josiah, the Book of the Law (a scroll containing the earliest form of what we know as the Book of Deuteronomy) was found in the rubbish being removed from the site. It was very important to determine the authenticity of the scroll, for the words it contained were threatening: they referred to God as a jealous sovereign who did not want His people to run after false gods, and warned that they would be destroyed if they did. Finding the scroll caused much anxiety to the king and the high priests, for though Josiah himself was a good and pious king, there was much worship of idols, cults of male prostitutes, and other abominations among the people.

Who could determine whether the scroll was authentic? It would have to be someone highly regarded by the highest religious authorities, a person devout and pure enough to be trusted in knowing the will of God and determining whether the scroll truly contained His words. The king put it to the priest Hilkiah and his helpers this way: "Go, inquire of the Lord for me, and 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 fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us" (2 Kings 22:13).

Hilkiah and the others went to the person they thought most able to fulfill this dire responsibility: Huldah. She lived in the Second Quarter of Jerusalem, near the Temple. She was of good family, the wife of Shallum whose relatives were Keepers of the King's Wardrobe. Obviously she had a widespread reputation for being a person of piety and intelligence—greater, in fact, than the reputation of any man who might have been consulted for the same reason.

Huldah gave her visitors a clear and prophetic message for King Josiah: "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: 'Tell the man who sent you to me, thus says the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place and upon its inhabitants, all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read. Because they have forsaken me and have



burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke 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. 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 which you have heard, 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 you have rent your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, says the Lord. Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place.” (2 Kings 22:15-20).

There are three things we can notice about Huldah's words to the king's men. First, of course, is the simple fact that she is a woman. It simply is not true that women had no place and were never recognized in Old Testament history. Like others (Deborah and Miriam, for example), Huldah displayed qualities of piety and faithfulness which were recognized and called upon.

The second noteworthy thing is the prophecy that she makes about King Josiah. She not only sees the destruction coming to Judah, but that its monarch will be spared. We do not often think about, or hear of, women prophesying in the Old Testament, but it did happen and it is recorded along with the prophecies of men.

Most of the next chapter of 2 Kings is devoted to the reforms which King Josiah made as a result of the authentic scroll and its warnings being found. It is a little like reading the accounts of St. Gregory the Illuminator's destruction of pagan shrines and temples in Armenia after the conversion to Christianity, for it meant a real upheaval of what people had been used to, and a serious attempt to live according to the will of God. (To get an idea of how far away from God's law the people had gotten, we need only read 2 Kings 10 which tells us that King Josiah “defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the sons of Hinnom, that no one might burn his son or his daughter as an offering to Molech.”)

Though King Josiah was slain by Pharaoh Neco at Megiddo before Judah's terrible sufferings began, those troubles were soon to come. Jehoahaz, Josiah's son, was the next ruler and not a good one. The ensuing years were to bring more faithless rulers, the fall of Jerusalem, and the eventual control of Judah by the Egyptians. The prophecy was fulfilled.

In the midst of all this destruction stands the figure of Huldah. She is an example of the possibility to remain good while much around you is terribly bad. She refused to be influenced by the evil around her, or to turn away from God just because others did. In her humility she did not demand or look for recognition, but only the chance to serve God. That chance was given to her, as it has been given to so many others who seek it above any other thing.

## THE PRAYER OF THE CHALICE

Father, to Thee I raise my whole being  
 —a vessel emptied of self. Accept,  
 Lord, this my emptiness, and so fill  
 me with Thyself—Thy light, Thy  
 love, Thy Life—that these Thy  
 precious gifts may radiate  
 through me and overflow the  
 chalice of my heart into the  
 hearts of all with whom I  
 come in contact this day  
 revealing unto them  
 the beauty of  
 Thy joy  
 and  
 wholeness  
 and  
 the  
 serenity  
 of Thy peace  
 which nothing can destroy.



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