

## Jeremiah Chapter 40

Verses 1-43: In another example of how foreigners were more responsive to God's Word than the Lord's own people, the Babylonian officer Nebuzar-adan recognized that the fall of Jerusalem was the result of Judah's sin (Deut. 29:24-25).

**Jeremiah 40:1 "The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, after that Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he had taken him being bound in chains among all that were carried away captive of Jerusalem and Judah, which were carried away captive unto Babylon."**

This relates to the prophecy recorded in (Jer. 42:7), which was occasioned by the story that here follows concerning Ishmael's conspiracy against Gedaliah. After that Nebuzar-adan had let him go from Ramah. After Jeremiah was taken out of the court of the prison, he was carried, probably by mistake, expressly contrary to Nebuchadnezzar's orders, among the other prisoners to Ramah, a city in the tribe of Benjamin near Gibeon. Here it seems, the mistake was discovered and the prophet was discharged by the special order of the court.

We are now looking into what happened to Jeremiah after the fall of Jerusalem. Jeremiah had been chained as if he were a criminal. We have discussed before how the innocent sometimes are caught up in war, and there is nothing they can do about it. The real rewards that Jeremiah would experience were not in this world. His greatest reward is to stand before the LORD and hear Him say, "Well done, thy good and faithful servant". His chains are gone, he is free.

Verses 2-3: The pagan captain understood the judgment of God better than the leaders of Judah.

**Jeremiah 40:2 "And the captain of the guard took Jeremiah, and said unto him, The LORD thy God hath pronounced this evil upon this place."**

When he mustered his prisoners, to his great surprise he found the prophet among them, whom he took out from them and set him free. Though, before he dismissed him, he had the following conversation with him.

"And said unto him, the Lord thy God hath pronounced this evil on this place": The city of Jerusalem; from whence the prophet and the rest of the captives were just brought, and which now lay in ruins. The houses were burnt; the walls broken down; and the inhabitants spoiled and carried captive. This was the evil which the Lord, he says, had "decreed", as the Targum renders it; and had purposed to bring upon it. And which he had declared and pronounced by the mouth of Jeremiah, who's Lord God he was, being his prophet, and a worshipper of him. This Nebuzar-adan was apprised of by the Jews that deserted to the Chaldeans. And particularly, as is probable, by Gedaliah.

Even this Babylonian knew the destruction here was a judgement from God. This was not only a witness to Judah and Benjamin but to the Babylonians as well, that this was truly God. The Babylonians had worshipped false gods, but this captain realizes Jeremiah's God is God.

**Jeremiah 40:3 "Now the LORD hath brought [it], and done according as he hath said: because ye have sinned against the LORD, and have not obeyed his voice, therefore this thing is come upon you."**

As he purposed, so it came to pass. As he foretold by his prophet, so it was brought about by his providence. This Heathen captain acknowledges the hand of the Lord in all this. And suggests, that his master, the king of Babylon himself and the rest of the generals, were only instruments the Lord made use of. Which is very piously as well as wisely said; and more is here acknowledged by him than by the Jews themselves. Who were not willing to believe that God had determined evil against them or would bring it on them. At least, this they did not care to believe and own before, however they did now. He goes on to observe the cause of all this:

"Because ye have sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed his voice, therefore this thing is come upon you": Meaning not Jeremiah particularly, but his countrymen. And perhaps he might turn himself to, and address the captives that were before him. Here he vindicates the justice of God. And ascribes the ruin of this people, not to the valor of Nebuchadnezzar and his captains. Nor to the strength, and courage, and skillfulness of his army. Or to any righteousness and merits of the king of Babylon; or to the justness of his cause; but to the sins of the people.

There was no question in anyone's mind that this judgement from God was caused by their unfaithfulness to God.

Verses 4-6: The captain did exactly as Nebuchadnezzar had told him (in 39:12).

The Babylonians gave Jeremiah the choice of going to Babylon or remaining with the poor people in the land of Judah. Life in Babylon would likely have been easier, but Jeremiah chose to serve the struggling remnant that remained in the land. The Babylonians appointed "Gedaliah" from the family of "Shaphan" to serve as the governor of Judah. Gedaliah's family had protected and supported Jeremiah during his ministry (26:24; 36:12).

**Jeremiah 40:4 "And now, behold, I loose thee this day from the chains which [were] upon thine hand. If it seem good unto thee to come with me into Babylon, come; and I will look well unto thee: but if it seem ill unto thee to come with me into Babylon, forbear: behold, all the land [is] before thee: whither it seemeth good and convenient for thee to go, thither go."**

Or rather are; for when he said these words, it is highly probable the chains were on him, though now ordered to be taken off. These were not what were put upon him by the Jews, when in the court of the prison. For rather his legs, than his hands, would have had fetters on them there. But what were put upon him by the Chaldeans, when he fell into their hands. Though inadvertently

done by the inferior officers, and without the knowledge of the princes, or of this captain who loosed them. With these he came manacled to Ramah, with the rest of the captives. But now were loosed in the sight of them.

"If it seem good unto thee to come with me unto Babylon, come and one will look well unto thee": Or, "I will set mine eyes upon thee"; as the king of Babylon had ordered him to do (Jer. 39:12). Would favor him, protect him, provide for him, and use him in the most kind and generous manner.

"But if it seem ill unto thee to come with me to Babylon, forbear": If it was not agreeable to him to leave his native country, and to go into Babylon, he would not urge it, but leave him to his liberty. Yes he would advise him to continue where he was, and not take one step out of it.

"Behold, all the land is before thee": The land of Judea, which was at the disposal of the king of Babylon; and Jeremiah has a grant from him, by his officer, to settle where he pleased.

"Whither it seemeth good and convenient for thee to go, thither go": He left him to take his own way and do as he thought fit. And this agrees with his master's orders to him (Jer. 39:12).

We see that this captain was very smart. He did not want to anger God by forcing Jeremiah to go with him. He had great respect for this mighty prophet of God. Jeremiah is free to choose his habitation.

Verses 5-6: Jeremiah chose to go to Gedaliah, the newly appointed governor at Mizpah several miles north of Jerusalem. Gedaliah was soon to be assassinated (compare 41:1-3).

**Jeremiah 40:5 "Now while he was not yet gone back, [he said], Go back also to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon hath made governor over the cities of Judah, and dwell with him among the people: or go wheresoever it seemeth convenient unto thee to go. So the captain of the guard gave him victuals and a reward, and let him go."**

The captain of the guard seems to glory that he had been God's instrument to fulfil, what Jeremiah had been God's messenger to foretell. Many can see God's justice and truth with regard to others, who are heedless and blind as to themselves and their own sins. But, sooner or later, all men shall be made sensible that their sin is the cause of all their miseries. Jeremiah has leave to dispose of himself; but is advised to go to Gedaliah, governor of the land under the king of Babylon. It is doubtful whether Jeremiah acted right in this decision. But those who desire the salvation of sinners, and the good of the church, are apt to expect better times from slight appearances, and they will prefer the hope of being useful, to the most secure situations without it.

One of the greatest blessings a man or woman can have is to be free, especially when you have been imprisoned for a long time. Jeremiah is now free. Gedaliah was chosen as a governor over

Judah. He will rule Judah under the supervision of Nebuchadnezzar. This captain did not just wish Jeremiah God speed, but gave him food (victuals), and some money to sustain him.

**Jeremiah 40:6 "Then went Jeremiah unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah; and dwelt with him among the people that were left in the land."**

"Gedaliah" was the son of the godly "Ahikam" (compare 26:24; 2 Kings 22:12-14), son of Shaphan, Josiah's scribe (2 Kings 22:8). The son of a family with a rich history of faithful participation in governmental service, Gedaliah may have had considerable experience that qualified him for the important post of being Babylon's district governor. Some have suggested that he may be identified with the Gedaliah mentioned on a seal impression found at Lachish "Belonging to Gedaliah, who is over the house" (i.e., the royal minister).

Jeremiah's choice from the beginning had been to live in his home land. He had not planned to go to Babylon. He had made his choice early to stay in Jerusalem. His people were here and he could possibly help them. Gedaliah was the grandson of Shaphan. Shaphan had been a scribe for Josiah. It appears the grandson had inherited some of his faithfulness from his grandfather.

Verses 7-12: "Gedaliah" gave the same advice to the people as Jeremiah: "dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon". At this time, submission to Babylon was obedience to the Lord. Even in this time of judgment, God was blessing His people, allowing refugees from various locations to return to the land and to experience a productive harvest (2 Kings 25:23-24).

**Jeremiah 40:7 "Now when all the captains of the forces which [were] in the fields, [even] they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam governor in the land, and had committed unto him men, and women, and children, and of the poor of the land, of them that were not carried away captive to Babylon;"**

"Captains ... in the fields": The leaders of Judah's army scattered in fear.

These who fled the siege had been living in exile. They now hear that Nebuchadnezzar has made Gedaliah governor in Judah. He was over the remnant of people left in the land. If you remember from a previous lesson, these are the poor. They could not rule themselves so Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah for that task.

**Jeremiah 40:8 "Then they came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, even Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth, and the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, and Jezaniah the son of a Maachathite, they and their men."**

Having heard that the Chaldean army was gone, and so were in no fear of that. And also, that Gedaliah was made deputy governor, one of their own nation, a pious, prudent, good man. A man of ingenuity, mildness, and integrity. Under whose government they might expect to live

comfortably; and which was much preferable to captivity in a foreign country, though tributary to Babylon.

"Even Ishmael the son of Nethaniah": who was of the royal seed (Jer. 41:1).

"And Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah": Two brothers, but who they were, or their father, is not known, no mention being made of them but in this story.

"And Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth": Who he was is also uncertain.

"And the sons of Ephai the Netophathite": So called from Netophah, a city of the tribe of Judah near Bethlehem, and are mentioned together (Ezra 2:22). The Netophathites inhabited several villages (1 Chron. 9:16). Mention is made in the Misnic writings of artichokes and olives this place was famous for.

"And Jezaniah the son of a Maachathite": A family so called from Maacah, Caleb's concubine (1 Chron. 2:48).

"They and their men": These generals, and the forces under their command.

Ishmael was believed to be of royal birth. Some believe he might have been a close relative of Zedekiah. For our study here, it does not matter. During the siege, he had escaped to Baalis. He was a very evil man. Johanan was with this group, but did not share their evil intentions. These appear to have been leaders of some men. Perhaps they were like the captains themselves.

Verses 9-12: God had tempered the severity of judgment by allowing a remnant to prosper.

**Jeremiah 40:9 "And Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan sware unto them and to their men, saying, Fear not to serve the Chaldeans: dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you."**

They might express their fears, that should they continue with Gedaliah, as they were inclined to do, could they be safe. That seeing they had encouraged Zedekiah to hold out the siege to the last against the Chaldeans, and they should hear where they were, would demand them. And they would be taken and delivered up into their hands. Upon which Gedaliah not only promises them safety, but swears to them that they should live safely with him, and never be delivered up to the Chaldeans. And that he would undertake to indemnify them, and preserve them.

"Saying, fear not to serve the Chaldeans": As if it was an evil to do it. Or as if their yoke was hard and intolerable. Or as if it would be unprofitable, and turn to no account. Or they should be always in danger of their lives.

"Dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall he well with you": Settle in the land, and do not rove about from place to place like fugitives. Nor go out of the land through fear

of the king of Babylon. But continue in it, and live in subjection to him, and depend upon it you will live comfortably and safely.

Gedaliah offered them peace. If they would lay down their arms and serve the Chaldeans they could live. He told them not to fear that Nebuchadnezzar would not harm them if they would live peaceably.

**Jeremiah 40:10 "As for me, behold, I will dwell at Mizpah, to serve the Chaldeans, which will come unto us: but ye, gather ye wine, and summer fruits, and oil, and put [them] in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that ye have taken."**

The words show that the application took place in the autumn. The captains and their followers were invited to help themselves freely from the fields and vineyards and olive-yards, the owners of which had been carried off to Babylon, so as to relieve their immediate wants and provide for the coming winter. The "summer fruits" would probably include figs, apples, and the like.

This is a promise that their vineyards would be fruitful again. It seems that Gedaliah had been appointed as a mediator between the Chaldeans and the Hebrews that were left. He had the authority to offer them peace. They needed to start producing this fruitful land.

**Jeremiah 40:11 "Likewise when all the Jews that [were] in Moab, and among the Ammonites, and in Edom, and that [were] in all the countries, heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant of Judah, and that he had set over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan;"**

Who had fled thither, and to the places after mentioned, when the king of Babylon first invaded the land, and where they had continued unto this time.

"And among the Ammonites, and in Edom, and that were in all the countries": In all other neighboring countries, besides Moab, Ammon, and Edom. Some fleeing one way, and some another, which lay nearest to their borders, or where they thought themselves safest.

"Heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant of Judah": A few of their brethren, to cultivate the land, and repopulated it.

"And that he had set over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan": Whom they knew to be a wise and good man. These were engaging motives for them to return to their own land, being more desirable to live in than any other. They could then enjoy peace and safety; and to dwell with their brethren, their own countrymen. And of the same religion with them was more desirable than to dwell in foreign idolatrous countries. And especially since there was a government established to protect and defend them. And that in the hands of so worthy a prince as Gedaliah.

We remember from a previous lesson that many had fled to safety in the lands around Judah. Now the word has spread that the war is over and one of their own has been made ruler. Shaphan had a good reputation. They should have known that Gedaliah would be a good man too.

**Jeremiah 40:12 "Even all the Jews returned out of all places whither they were driven, and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah, unto Mizpah, and gathered wine and summer fruits very much."**

Through fear of the Chaldean army; they came all of them from the several countries before mentioned. So that here was likely to be a happy settlement and a flourishing commonwealth again. Here being princes and generals, soldiers and common people, in large numbers, that were returned and united under the government of Gedaliah.

"And came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah, unto Mizpah": They came out of the several countries where they had been for some time, and entered the land of Judah. But did not take up their abode anywhere, till they had presented themselves to the governor, and put themselves under his protection. Promising, no doubt, to regard him as such, and to be tributary to the Chaldeans. Being assured by him, as the generals and their forces before, that all would be well with them, giving them free liberty to settle in the cities and villages to which they belonged. And accordingly, they set out from Mizpah, and went to their respective habitations they had abandoned.

"And gathered wine and summer fruits very much" (see note on Jer. 40:10). The people of the land being carried captive; and the Chaldean army not having ravaged these parts. Or had left an abundance of fruits, which these people, at their return, found and gathered.

There was an inflow of the exiled Jews that came into the land and began to produce the vineyards and the fruit trees.

Verses 13-16: "Johanan": This mans' fair warning to Gedaliah of Ishmael's death plot went unheeded.

**Jeremiah 40:13 "Moreover Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that [were] in the fields, came to Gedaliah to Mizpah,"**

Who seems to be the principal captain next to Ishmael, against whom an information is brought, and so not present. This captain is here only mentioned by name, and before next to Ishmael.

"And all the captains of the forces that were in the fields": Or that had been in the fields, and probably might be there again (see Jer. 40:7). That is, the rest of them, besides Johanan mentioned, and Ishmael the conspirator.

"Came to Gedaliah to Mizpah": They had been with him before, and being satisfied by him of the safety they would be in, in the service of the Chaldeans under him. Either returned to the fields from whence they came, or went to those cities and villages he directed them to. But, like honest and faithful men, knowing there was a conspiracy against his life, came in a body to inform him of it. As judging he would be readier to give heed unto it, than if only a single person had informed him of it, as well as to show their affection and loyalty to him.

Mizpah was a city of Benjamin. Remember Johanan was the good one of the captains that ran from the siege.

**Jeremiah 40:14 "And said unto him, Dost thou certainly know that Baalis the king of the Ammonites hath sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to slay thee? But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam believed them not."**

The "Ammonites" were perennial enemies of the Hebrews. Johanan was trying to save the life of Gedaliah. He was taking a big chance coming to warn him. Baalis was behind the plot to kill Gedaliah. Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, was the man assigned to the actual killing of Gedaliah.

**Jeremiah 40:15 "Then Johanan the son of Kareah spake to Gedaliah in Mizpah secretly, saying, Let me go, I pray thee, and I will slay Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no man shall know [it]: wherefore should he slay thee, that all the Jews which are gathered unto thee should be scattered, and the remnant in Judah perish?"**

Partly that he might, as he thought, more easily prevail upon him, and persuade him to believe the information given. And partly for the sake of the proposal he had to make to him, which it was not proper should be publicly made.

"Saying, let me go, I pray thee, and I will slay Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no man shall know it": That he had slain him, or that Gedaliah had given him leave to do it.

"Wherefore should he slay thee, that all the Jews that are gathered unto thee should be scattered, and the remnant in Judah perish?" Suggesting, that it was not almost his losing his own life, which is and ought to be, precious to every man and should be carefully preserved, but it would be a public loss. The people, being without a governor, would disperse here and there, fearing their own lives and property would not be safe under a murderer. And that the Chaldeans would be so incensed by such an action, as to come and revenge his death on them. And thus, being scattered about, some one way and some another, would be no more under any form of government as a judicious body, and so perish as such. And thus, all their hopes, which began to revive, of their being a commonwealth again, would be lost. With this argument Johanan hoped to prevail on Gedaliah to give him leave to slay the conspirator.

**Jeremiah 40:16 "But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said unto Johanan the son of Kareah, Thou shalt not do this thing: for thou speakest falsely of Ishmael."**

In answer to his request, and the motion made by him.

"Thou shalt not do this thing": Or, "do not do this thing"; dissuading him from it, as being unlawful to take away a man's life in such a secret manner, without any legal process against him. Though it seems to carry more in it, that he laid his commands upon him not to do it, and threatened him if he did.

"For thou speakest falsely of Ishmael": Or "a lie"; a falsehood, mere slander. Which was not using Johanan well, neither kindly nor respectable, who had expressed such a concern for him,



and for the public good. The event related in the following chapter shows that the information was good, and that it was no lie or false statement that was told. And it would have been well for Gedaliah, and the people of the Jews, had he given credit to it. But the time was not come for the Jewish commonwealth to be restored; and things were thus suffered to be, for the further punishment of the sins of that people.

Johanah realizes the seriousness of the threat. He also realizes what a cruel man Ishmael is. He offers to kill Ishmael to keep him from killing Gedaliah. It appears the reason for this assassination is to scatter the Jews again. Gedaliah trusted Ishmael too much.

### **Jeremiah Chapter 40 Questions**

1. Verse 1 is the beginning of what for Jeremiah?
2. Jeremiah had been chained, as if he were a \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Where would Jeremiah receive his greatest reward?
4. What startling statement did the captain of the guard make to Jeremiah in verse 2?
5. Why had the judgement come?
6. What two choices did the captain give Jeremiah?
7. Who did he tell Jeremiah to go back to?
8. Who was Gedaliah?
9. What office had Nebuchadnezzar given him?
10. What did the captain give Jeremiah?
11. What is one of the greatest blessings a man or woman can have?
12. Which place did Jeremiah choose to go?
13. Who was Shaphan?
14. What news spread to those captains of the forces in the fields?
15. Who did Gedaliah rule over?
16. Which of these captains came to talk with Gedaliah?
17. Where was Gedaliah staying?
18. Ishmael was believed to be of \_\_\_\_\_ birth.

19. To whom had Ishmael escaped during the siege?
20. What promise did Gedaliah make them?
21. Gedaliah had been appointed a mediator of whom?
22. When the exiled Jews heard that some were left in the land living, what did they do?
23. Who came to Gedaliah and reported the plot against his life?
24. What did Johanan offer to do for Gedaliah?
25. Why would Gedaliah not let Johanan do this thing?