

Journey through Jeremiah Part 44, Murder of Gedaliah

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney, Th.D. – Wednesday, Oct. 25, 2017

† Jeremiah 40:1-16

1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, after that Nebuzaradan 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.

If you remember in our last study we saw that Nebuchadnezzar had commanded his Chief captain of the guard, Nebuzaradan, to protect Jeremiah and give him anything that he wanted. Here is what he charged him to do: **12 Take him, and look well to him, and do him no harm; but do unto him even as he shall say unto thee.**

It appears from reading verse 1 of our text tonight that Jeremiah had been included in the prisoners that were chained and taken to Ramah.

Ramah was a city in the Land of Benjamin where Nebuzaradan had setup his headquarters. It was a type of processing station for the prisoners before they were taken to Babylon.

Nebuzaradan follows Nebuchadnezzar's orders by taking Jeremiah out of the prisoner population to set him free.

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

Notice how this pagan Chaldean soldier recognizes the power of the LORD God Jehovah. He has some understanding of the prophecies that Jeremiah had spoken and is aware that it was the sins of the people of Judah that had caused the LORD to allow them to be taken as prisoners and their land destroyed.

It looks like he is stating that Jeremiah personally sinned against God and that all of this happened because he was being punished but he is referring to all the inhabitants of Judah when he says this, not specifically Jeremiah.

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.

It's funny that Nebuzaradan seems to be taking full credit for saving Jeremiah instead of giving credit to Nebuchadnezzar who had given the order of protection. He offers Jeremiah to come with him to Babylon and that he would protect him or Jeremiah is free to go wherever he wishes to go.

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.

Nebuzaradan also tells Jeremiah that he should go to Gedaliah who is now the governor of Judah and dwell with him so that he will be protected. Or if he wants, he is free to go wherever he wants to go.

Then he gives Jeremiah things he needed for survival; victuals, and a reward. This would have been enough food to live on for a few days and money for traveling. Remember, Jeremiah has just been taken out of prison so he has nothing except the clothes he is wearing. If he is going to survive he would need things like this to stay alive.

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.

Jeremiah takes Nebuzaradan's advice and goes to live with the people under the new governor, Gedaliah. This man Gedaliah was a Jewish man that had surrendered to the Chaldeans as Jeremiah had encouraged them to do. He has obviously found favor in the eyes of Nebuchadnezzar and he places him in charge of the land as a governor. He would serve the King of Babylon but would rule over the remaining poor folks that were allowed to remain in Judah.

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;

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.

All these men we read about in verses 7 and 8 are evidentially Judean soldiers who had hid out during the siege or the ones that escaped on the same night that Zedekiah had tried to escape through the hidden passage way behind the palace garden. They've been lurking in the land staying hidden until they find out this man Gedaliah has been made governor of Judah.

They seem to trust Gedaliah since he is one of their own and feel confident enough to come back and live under his rule.

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.

Gedaliah assures them that they will be okay living there as long as they serve the Chaldeans and do not try to revolt or rebel against them.

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.

Gedaliah tells them that he is going to reside in Mizpah in order to conduct business between the Chaldeans and the Jews. Mizpah was between Babylon and Jerusalem so it was a good place for him to setup his headquarters.

He tells the men to just tend to their fields and live in peace and no harm will come to them.

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;

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.

Not only were there soldiers hiding out during all of this but several other Jews that had ran and took refuge in other places during the siege now come back after hearing that Gedaliah is in charge.

We have no way of knowing how many people are now living in the Land of Judah at this time but it appears to be several.

13 Moreover Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that were in the fields, came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, 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.

Just when it seemed that there was some sort of peace and folks could live some type of normalcy, more trouble comes.

The soldiers that had come to live under Gedaliah come to him and inform him that the King of the Ammonites has sent this man, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to kill him. Unfortunately, Gedaliah does not believe them.

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?

One of the soldiers volunteers to go and kill Ishmael before he can have the chance to kill Gedaliah. I guess he was an early version Massad, the Israeli Intelligence Agency. 😊

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.

Well, despite being warned and the offer from Agent Johanan, Gedaliah does not believe these accusations against Ishmael and forbids anything to be done to him.

Jeremiah 41:1-18

1 Now it came to pass in the seventh month, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah the son of Elishama, of the seed royal, and the princes of the king, even ten men with him, came unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah; and there they did eat bread together in Mizpah. 2 Then arose Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and the ten men that were with him, and smote Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan with the sword, and slew him, whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land.

Just as Gedaliah had been warned, this Ishmael did indeed come to murder him. Only 2-months since he had become governor. We find out from this text that Ishmael was of the royal seed. This means that he was a descendant of King David. Most likely he felt that he deserved to be reigning over Judah instead of Gedaliah.

3 Ishmael also slew all the Jews that were with him, even with Gedaliah, at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans that were found there, and the men of war.

Ishmael and his 10 mercenaries don't waste any time. They immediately kill Gedaliah and then they kill his whole cabinet along with the soldiers that had come to live in Mizpah plus some Chaldeans that were there as well.

4 And it came to pass the second day after he had slain Gedaliah, and no man knew it, 5 That there came certain from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria, even fourscore men, having their beards shaven, and their clothes rent, and having cut themselves, with offerings and incense in their hand, to bring them to the house of the LORD.

Word had not yet gotten out that Ishmael had slain Gedaliah and the other men. Now these 80 men show up to offer sacrifices. A score =20 so 4 x 20 = 80. It's possible that these men had heard about the destruction of the Temple but were hoping to make sacrifices still on the altar or ground where the Temple was.

It's strange that they had "cut themselves," this was forbidden by the law. It may be that they were practicing both Judaism and some type of pagan religious rite.

6 And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah went forth from Mizpah to meet them, weeping all along as he went: and it came to pass, as he met them, he said unto them, Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam.

Seems that Ishmael is also an actor. He pretends to cry. He acts as if something is wrong with Gedaliah so that he can lead these men somewhere to be slaughtered.

7 And it was so, when they came into the midst of the city, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah slew them, and cast them into the midst of the pit, he, and the men that were with him.

Wow, this Ishmael is one blood thirsty dude. He along with his 10 mercenaries, jump these 80-men and begin killing them and dumping their bodies in a pit.

8 But ten men were found among them that said unto Ishmael, Slay us not: for we have treasures in the field, of wheat, and of barley, and of oil, and of honey. So he forbore, and slew them not among their brethren.

10 of the 80 men pleaded for their lives and promised that they had treasures buried in the field that they would give them in exchange for their lives. Ishmael allowed them to live.

9 Now the pit wherein Ishmael had cast all the dead bodies of the men, whom he had slain because of Gedaliah, was it which Asa the king had made for fear of Baasha king of Israel: and Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it with them that were slain.

The pit where Ishmael threw all the dead bodies was one that was dug back when Asa was King of Judah. We do not read about this pit anywhere else in the Bible so it must have been something that the Jews would have known about. It probably happened the same time Asa had built walls up in Benjamin and Mizpah, we read about that in **1 Kings 15:22: Then king Asa made a proclamation throughout all Judah; none was exempted: and they took away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Baasha had builded; and king Asa built with them Geba of Benjamin, and Mizpah.**

So, the pit mentioned in Jeremiah might have been a pit dug around the walls and filled with water, we just aren't sure or why the significance of it being noted here other to tell us where the bodies were buried.

10 Then Ishmael carried away captive all the residue of the people that were in Mizpah, even the king's daughters, and all the people that remained in Mizpah, whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had committed to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam:

and Ishmael the son of Nethaniah carried them away captive, and departed to go over to the Ammonites.

Ishmael then rounds up all of the remaining people in Judah and intends to drive them to the Land of the Ammonites. No doubt his plan was to sell them into slavery to the Ammonites.

11 But when Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that *were* with him, heard of all the evil that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done,
12 Then they took all the men, and went to fight with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and found him by the great waters that *are* in Gibeon.

This Johanan was the same man that had tried to warn Gedaliah that Ishmael was coming to murder him and also offered to go and kill him before he had the chance to. Johanan along with several other soldiers hunt down Ishmael and find him beside the waters of Gibeon.

13 Now it came to pass, *that* when all the people which *were* with Ishmael saw Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that *were* with him, then they were glad.

14 So all the people that Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah cast about and returned, and went unto Johanan the son of Kareah.

So when Johanan shows up with his army of men, all of the prisoners see him and escape over to his side for protection.

15 But Ishmael the son of Nethaniah escaped from Johanan with eight men, and went to the Ammonites.

Ishmael somehow escaped capture along with eight other of his men and they make it to the safety of the Land of Ammonites.

16 Then took Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that *were* with him, all the remnant of the people whom he had recovered from Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, from Mizpah, after *that* he had slain Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, *even* mighty men of war, and the women, and the children, and the eunuchs, whom he had brought again from Gibeon:

17 And they departed, and dwelt in the habitation of Chimham, which is by Bethlehem, to go to enter into Egypt,

18 Because of the Chaldeans: for they were afraid of them, because Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had slain Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon made governor in the land.

After Ishmael escaped, Johanan and his men take all of the captives and begin traveling toward Egypt. They think if they can get to Egypt then they will be safe from Nebuchadnezzar.

Now, having studied all of this I want you to take notice of something. If you remember, God, had told them he would destroy the Land of Judah and the people would suffer. It was his way of punishing them for their habitual sinning against him and their disobedience.

Whether you like it or not, God has used all these ruthless, bloodthirsty men to carry out his will. The remnant of Judeans thought they would be able to dwell back in the Land of Judah under the leadership of Governor Gedaliah, but God had different plans and allowed the enemy to come in and drive them from the Land.

† All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version of the Bible