

THE MURDER OF GEDALIAH

TEXT: JEREMIAH 40 & 41

INTRODUCTION:

1. Jeremiah 40 begins with Nebuzar-adan, the captain of the guard, explaining that because Judah had sinned, and not obeyed God's voice, their God had brought these afflictions upon them (40:1-3).
2. H.A. Ironside said, "Sad it is to note that this heathen conqueror had a clearer sense of the truth than the majority of the leaders among the Jews" (*Jeremiah and Lamentations*).
3. Then Nebuzar-adan told Jeremiah he was free to go wherever he wanted (40:4). We see in chapter 39:14 and 40:5 that Jeremiah was told he could stay with Gedaliah.
4. Jeremiah could have gone along to Babylon, where he would have been treated well, but he chose to remain in his native land and minister among his people despite the afflictions (cf. 39:11, 12; 40:4, 5).
5. Undoubtedly Jeremiah would have been more comfortable in Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar would have treated him well.
6. Ironside said, "He desired not the world's patronage, as he feared not its wrath...To many it might have been considered a fine thing to be invited to the conqueror's capital, there to be honored as a sage and a seer, and to receive various tokens of the king's appreciation because of his steady opposition to the policy of resistance to Babylon and dependence upon Egypt. But in all this, Jeremiah had been in no sense the servant or tool of the Chaldean emperor. He had remained to the last the simple prophet of the Lord.
 - If he counseled submission to Babylon, it was because the Word of the Lord so directed.
 - If he warned the princes and the people of the folly of counting upon the Egyptian alliance, he did so because he had the mind of the Lord regarding it" (*Jeremiah and Lamentations*).
7. Surely, Jeremiah detested the paganism and idolatry of Babylon.
8. Some have wondered why Jeremiah did not go to Babylon to minister to the exiles. Daniel and Ezekiel and other prophets were taken to Babylon. The LORD wanted Jeremiah to stay behind in Judah.
9. Nebuzar-adan, "the captain of the guard gave him victuals and a reward, and let him go" (40:5).

I. GEDALIAH IS MADE GOVERNOR (40:7).

1. Judah's army had been scattered in the fields throughout the countryside. When they heard the report that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah governor they came to Mitzpah to see him (40:7, 8).
2. It was at Mitzpah that Laban caught up with Jacob, after Jacob had fled (Genesis 31:49).
3. Gedaliah swore unto them that they would be safe if they stayed in the land of Judah and served the king of Babylon (40:9).
4. Gedaliah told them that he would stay at Mitzpah, and that they should gather wine, and summer fruits, and oil, and put them in their vessels, and dwell in their cities (40:10).
5. Also, all the Jews that were in Moab, and among the Ammonites, and in Edom, and that were in all the countries, heard the news, they returned out of all the places where they were driven, and came to Mizpah, and they also gathered wine and summer fruits (40:11, 12).
6. All seemed well, but unbeknownst to Gedaliah a wicked man named Ishmael was plotting to kill him (40:13, 14).

II. GEDALIAH IS WARNED BY JOHANAN

1. Johanan and some other of the soldiers heard about the plot and warned Gedaliah (40:13, 14). Unfortunately, Gedaliah did not believe them (40:14).
2. H.A. Ironside said, "Gedaliah, the governor, was a truly pious man, of upright principles, but not at all the kind of a person to take the lead in the troublous times that had fallen upon his native land. Brave, honorable and unsuspecting, he yet lacked that genius for true leadership, and that necessary sternness in dealing with evil, which the times demanded. It was not long, therefore, ere he became the victim of a diabolical conspiracy which resulted in his assassination by one whom his too generous heart had implicitly trusted" (*Jeremiah and Lamentations*).
3. In other words, Gedaliah was too naive and gullible to serve as the governor.
4. Ishmael was descended from King David and of the royal line (cf. 41:1). Perhaps envy and resentment were the motives behind his plot to kill Gedaliah. He may of felt he should have been governor.
5. Perhaps Ishmael was bitter over what happened to his relative King Zedekiah. The Bible does not explain the motives for his treachery, other than the fact that he was sent by Baalis, the king of the Ammonites (40:14). Perhaps Baalis paid him a large sum.

6. In any event, Gedaliah could not believe the report so he dismissed Johanan's offer to kill Ishmael before Ishmael could kill Gedaliah and the others (40:15, 16).
7. Gedaliah may of felt it would have been wrong to kill Ishmael without stronger proof of his treachery, but nevertheless he was unwise in not taking some precautions.

III. GEDALIAH IS MURDERED BY ISHMAEL

1. Jeremiah 41:1 records the date of the assassination. This would be about two months after the burning of Jerusalem.
2. Ishmael and his ten friends were warmly welcomed by Gedaliah. "They did eat bread together in Mizpah" (41:1b). H.A. Ironside said, "It was like the feasting of Judas at the last passover. Those who ate bread with Gedaliah lifted up the heel against him" (*Jeremiah and Lamentations*).
3. While they were eating their meal together, Ishmael and his men killed unsuspecting Gedaliah with the sword (41:2).
4. Merrill Unger says this was "in gross violation of the sacred right of hospitality and in defiance of the king of Babylon's authority in appointing Gedaliah over the land" (*Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*).
5. That was horrible enough, but Ishmael went on to murder all the Jews who were with Gedaliah at Mizpah, as well as the Chaldeans who were there to protect Gedaliah (41:3).
6. Furthermore, Ishmael continued his brutal killing spree by killing seventy (out of a group of eighty) innocent religious pilgrims from cities in northern Israel on their way to the temple in Jerusalem (41:4-7).
7. "Having their beards shaven, and their clothes rent, and having cut themselves" (41:5) indicates they were in mourning. It also indicates a corrupt form of syncretistic religion -- a mixture of Baal-worship and true worship.
8. They probably had heard the temple was destroyed and wanted to present an offering on the site where the temple had stood (41:5).
9. "With despicable hypocrisy Ishmael went forth to meet the pilgrims, pretending to share their sorrow (41:5, 6)" (Unger).
10. As soon as the travelers entered into the midst of the city of Mizpah, Ishmael and his murderous accomplices slaughtered them all and threw their dead bodies into a pit -- a cistern that had been built by King Asa three hundred years earlier (41:7; cf. verse 9).

11. Ten of the pilgrims survived by telling Ishmael they would give him "treasures in the field, of wheat, and of barley, and of oil, and of honey" (41:8).
12. After they finished killing the travelers, Ishmael and his men "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" and brought them Ammon, the land of the Ammonites (41:10; cf. 40:14).
13. Among this group of captives was Jeremiah (cf. 42:1-3).
14. When Johanan, and all the captains of the forces that were with him, heard of all the evil that Ishmael had done, they took off after them (41:11, 12).
15. They went to fight with Ishmael and found him by the great waters that are in Gibeon (41:12). The captives were happy to see Johanan and his captains and they "returned, and went unto Johanan" (41:13, 14).
16. Ishmael, along with eight men, managed to escape and they took off for Ammon (41:15).
17. Meanwhile, Johanan and his group "departed, and dwelt in the habitation of Chimham, which is by Bethlehem, to go to enter into Egypt" (41:16, 17).
18. Verse 18 explains why they chose not to go back to Mizpah. They felt it would be safer for them to go to Egypt than to go back to Mizpah. They thought the Chaldeans might blame them for the murder of Gedaliah.
19. The book of Jeremiah does not record any reprisals from Babylon. However, I read something interesting in a book by Irving L. Jenson. He asks, "Is the deportation referred to in 52:30 such a reprisal?" (*Jeremiah and Lamentations*).
20. The first deportation was when King Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon. The second deportation is the one referred to in Jeremiah 39 when Jerusalem was burned to the ground, the temple destroyed, King Zedekiah's sons killed before his eyes, and then his eyes put out.
21. Why a third deportation five years later?

CONCLUSION:

1. Johanan was unquestionably a brave and a patriotic man, but apparently he was not one who waited upon God for direction.
2. Without inquiring of the Lord, he led his fellow soldiers and the group he rescued from Ishmael to Chimham, near Bethlehem, the route to Egypt (41:17, 18).

3. Johanan was determined to leave the land of Palestine, fearing the wrath of the Chaldeans because of Ishmael's assassination of the governor and the Babylonian guard (41:17, 18).
4. Having first determined upon their path, Johanan and the others made a pretence of seeking the mind of the Lord (42:1-3).
5. Christians often do that. They make up their mind, then pray afterwards, when it ought to be the other way around.