

# Jeremiah 40 - Jeremiah with Gedaliah the Governor

V. Present calamity of Judah (Jer 34:1–45:5)

(3) After the fall (Jer 40:1–45:5)

(A) Jeremiah's Ministry to those that remained in the land (Jer 40:1–42:22)

(a) Jeremiah's choice to remain in the land (40:1-6)

(b) Gedaliah governorship (40:7–41:10)

(i) Gedaliah encourages the remaining Jews to serve the King of Babylon (40:7-12)

(ii) Assassination (40:13–41:10)

(a) Revelation of the murder plot (40:13-16)

## Introduction

Jer 40-44 describe a series of events that occur after the fall of Jerusalem. Jer 40-42 are events that occur in Judah after Babylon has succeeded in crushing Jerusalem and taking Zedekiah captive.

Jer 43-44 involve a flight to Egypt and what happens there. Jeremiah sort of becomes the unwilling prisoner of a group that are taken into Egypt. In Jer 40 Gedaliah is appointed governor of Judah. After the third siege when Nebuchadnezzar takes the people of to Babylon except the poor. Nebuchadnezzar has a sub-governor by the name of Nebuzaradan who is familiar with Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's writings. He recognizes that Jeremiah was trying to warn his people not to resist. He speaks to Jeremiah in Jeremiah's idiom. The Babylonian leadership had a belly full of the house of David because they had one rebellion after another so they had enough.

Gedaliah is not of the royal line and they appoint him as governor. By the way, the name *Gedaliah* was found in a seal at Lachish. Gedaliah is a pretty good guy towards Jeremiah. He has shown up several times before in the book of Jeremiah, he protected Jeremiah (Jer 26:24) and is mentioned in 2 Kings 22:12,14. He is the deputized governor of the area. Gedaliah means well, but he is naïve. He is brave and honorable but he is unsuspicious which is a failing in a leader. He was warned twice that his most trusted aides were going to assassinate him. A very diabolical conspiracy, led by a man named Ishmael—Ishmael, I believe, owed his life to Gedaliah, so he is quite ungrateful. He succeeds in assassinating Gedaliah and leads a band of guerillas to do some pretty wild things. Chapters 40-41 are almost a narrative of this whole political intrigue.

## **Jeremiah is Unchained**

Now this Babylonian leader, Nebuzaradan, is going to free Jeremiah. It is unclear why he had to be unchained. Some scholars believe that Jeremiah fettered himself in brass to identify with the captives. The Babylonians wouldn't have it, they unshackled him, they were honoring the role that he had in trying to convince his people not to resist the Babylonian siege. They even speak to Jeremiah in his own idiom, but that doesn't mean they are believers, they just talk in terms that Jeremiah could relate to. Jeremiah is free to choose where he wants to live. He declines to go to Babylon and live under the protection of a somewhat position of stature in the Babylonian court, in Babylon itself. He would rather stay in the land and so Nebuzaradan assigns him to Gedaliah the governor. Jeremiah attaches himself so to speak to Gedaliah. It would appear on the surface that the Babylonian leader understood Jeremiah's message better than the leaders of Judah.

## **Jeremiah 40**

(3) After the fall (Jer 40:1–45:5)

(A) Jeremiah's Ministry to those that remained in the land (Jer 40:1–42:22)

(a) Jeremiah's choice to remain in the land (40:1-6)

**1** The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD after Nebuzaradan captain of the bodyguard had released him from Ramah, when he had taken him bound in chains among all the exiles of Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon.

**1** The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD after Nebuzaradan captain of the bodyguard had released him from Ramah, when he had taken him bound in chains among all the exiles of Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon.

**1** This is the message that came to Jeremiah from the LORD after Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had released him from Ramah, when he was bound in chains, along with all the exiles from Jerusalem and Judah who were being taken into exile in Babylon.

**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.

2 Now the captain of the bodyguard had taken Jeremiah and said to him, "The LORD your God promised this disaster against this place;

2 Now the captain of the bodyguard had taken Jeremiah and said to him, "The LORD your God promised this calamity against this place;

2 The captain of the guard took Jeremiah and told him, "The LORD your God has predicted this disaster on this place.

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

- A Babylonian general speaking here in a reference that he knew that Jeremiah could speak to, and yet it is very provocative because there is more insight by this declaration by this Babylonian military leader than was evidenced in this entire book by any of the leaders of Judah, from the king on down.

— Even Zedekiah who sought out Jeremiah from time to time, did not seem to comprehend that God is set to bring this about as a form of judgment. From the victors, we have this interesting insight saying "*The Lord thy God*," not "*the lord my god*."

3 and the LORD has brought *it* and done just as He promised. Because you *people* sinned against the LORD and did not listen to His voice, this thing has happened to you.

3 and the LORD has brought *it* on and done just as He promised. Because you *people* sinned against the LORD and did not listen to His voice, therefore this thing has happened to you.

3 And now the LORD has brought it about and has done just as he said. Because you *people* sinned against the LORD and didn't obey him, this has happened to you.

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.

- A summary of the Babylonian...at a minimum, it implies that they are pretty knowledgeable of their writings. People who have studied the text carefully feel that there is evidence that they understood not only Jeremiah's writings but also Ezekiel who was a captive in Babylon at the time.

4 But now, behold, I am setting you free today from the chains that are on your hands. If you would prefer to come with me to Babylon, come *along*, and I will look after you; but if you would prefer not to come with me to Babylon, do not *come*. Look, the whole land is before you; go wherever it seems good and right for you to go."

4 But now, behold, I am freeing you today from the chains which are on your hands. If you would prefer to come with me to Babylon, come *along*, and I will look after you; but if you would prefer not to come with me to Babylon, never mind. Look, the whole land is before you; go wherever it seems good and right for you to go."

4 Now, look, I've freed you today from the chains that were on your hands. If you want to come with me to Babylon, come, and I'll look after you. But if you don't want to come with me to Babylon, don't. Look, the whole land lies before you, so go wherever it seems good and right for you to go."

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.

- This is a special dispensation given to Jeremiah and a few poor (Jer 39) who were turned loose and left to stay in the land.

— This is no empty opportunity. This guy is heavy leverage, probably number 2 or 3 leader in the land. He is the military leader in the area, having appointed Gedaliah.

— He is making Jeremiah an offer to come to Babylon not as a slave, he would have some restricted freedom.

— He also recognizes Jeremiah's emotional identity, his cultural background, his commitment to the land and the Lord might cause him to be uncomfortable even in the capital of the world, but he understands if Jeremiah refuses.

5 As Jeremiah was still not going back, *he said*, "Go on back then to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon has appointed over the cities of Judah, and stay with him among the people; or else go anywhere it seems right for you to go." So the captain of the bodyguard gave him a ration and a gift, and let him go.

5 As Jeremiah was still not going back, *he said*, "Go on back then to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon has appointed over the cities of Judah, and stay with him among the people; or else go anywhere it seems right for you to go." So the captain of the bodyguard gave him a ration and a gift and let him go.

5 When he still did not respond, Nebuzaradan said, "Return to Ahikam's son Gedaliah, whom the king of Babylon has appointed over the cities of Judah, and remain with him among the people—or go wherever it seems right for you to go." Then the captain of the guard gave him an allowance of food and a gift and sent him off.

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.

- So he has food, a reward, and is turned loose.

- From Jeremiah's point of view, he probably thinks this is a dismal climax to a 40-year ministry.

— Over the time of 5 kings, he has had a bitter message, preaching to a people who he knew wouldn't hear and he had to preside over the decline of his nation.

— His ministry is not over, but the main event is behind him, Jerusalem is finally fallen and the nation is enslaved and are on their way to serve in Chaldea.

6 Then Jeremiah went to Mizpah to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam and stayed with him among the people who were left in the land.

6 Then Jeremiah went to Mizpah to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam and stayed with him among the people who were left in the land.

6 Jeremiah came to Ahikam's son Gedaliah at Mizpah, and he remained with him among the people who were left in the land.

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.

- Mizpah shows up a lot in the times of the Judges, the early days of the kings. It is going to end up being a sort of major capital and administrative center, that is where Gedaliah chooses or is assigned to minister from. It is not surprising that the Babylonians would take a jaundiced view of them administrating from Jerusalem. Jerusalem has been a source of grief to the Babylonians, so operate out of Mizpah, not Jerusalem.

It is interesting to see Jeremiah's choice, because Jeremiah could indeed have chosen to go to Babylon. There were many men of God who assisted the people by attaining leverage at the palace on behalf of the people. Mordecai in the days of Esther, Nehemiah the cupbearer to the king 70 years later benefitted the nation by getting the authority to rebuild the city. Moses is another example, but he is perhaps a more interesting example because he made the same choice that Jeremiah did, chose rather to live on the back side of the desert than to enjoy the wealth of the court.

Jeremiah, not knocking these other people, appears to be led, not to be at the court of Babylon, where his career and concept could have paralleled Daniel's, by being faithful to Judaism. Jeremiah appears to be led to take his lot with his people. How many of us have the insight to be in the world but not of it.

Jeremiah clearly was making some choice here; he in effect was turning his back on the cruel tyranny of paganism. He wanted no part of the Babylonian court, but rather to eke out what existence he could in his famine-ridden land that has been left to the few survivors.

### **The Guerillas**

The Babylonians weren't absolutely thorough, there were those that in the siege and in the tumult of the battle, hid and went for the hills, becoming a group that we would be tempted to call guerillas. They were military guys by no means unskilled, but not submissive, they recognize that it might be smarter to hide out and live to fight another day. This group of guerillas that end up in the hills become not only a problem, but a source of some conspiracies.

(b) Gedeliah governorship (40:7—41:10)

(i) Gedeliah encourages the remaining Jews to serve the King of Babylon  
(40:7-12)

7 Now all the commanders of the forces that were in the field, they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam over the land, and that he had put him in charge of the men, women, and children, those of the poorest of the land who had not been exiled to Babylon.

7 Now all the commanders of the forces that were in the field, they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam over the land and that he had put him in charge of the men, women and children, those of the poorest of the land who had not been exiled to Babylon.

7 All the leaders of the forces who were in the field along with their men heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Ahikam's son Gedaliah over the men, women, children, and the poor of the land who had not been taken into exile in Babylon.

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 So they came to Gedaliah at Mizpah, along with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah, Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, and Jezaniah the son of the Maacathite, *both* they and their men.

8 So they came to Gedaliah at Mizpah, along with 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 the Maacathite, *both* they and their men.

8 Those who came to Gedaliah at Mizpah included Nethaniah's son Ishmael, Jonathan, Kareah's son Jonathan, Tanhumeth's son Seraiah, Ephai's sons from Netophah; and Jezaniah, the son of a man from Maacah. They came along with their men.

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.

- Ishmael is the leader of this bunch, and Johanan is a pretty aggressive guy. These men were professional military men, the revolutionaries.

9 Then Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, swore to them and to their men, saying, "Do not be afraid of serving the Chaldeans; stay in the land and serve the king of Babylon, so that it may go well for you.

9 Then Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, swore to them and to their men, saying, "Do not be afraid of serving the Chaldeans; stay in the land and serve the king of Babylon, that it may go well with you.

9 Ahikam's son Gedaliah, the grandson of Shaphan, swore an oath to them and their men: "Don't be afraid to serve the Chaldeans. Remain in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and things will go well for you.

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.

- These renegade men were in the fields, and had hid out in the mountains and when they heard that Gedaliah was put as the governor, and so they go there.

— Apparently Gedaliah had the authority to grant them some kind of amnesty, fundamentally they were like deserters or they were targets, there were probably warrants out for their arrests in effect.

— Gedaliah points out, don't make any trouble, be subservient to our new rulers and it will be all right. You won't be carried off in shackles to Babylon. You can dwell in the land, but he wants peace. The presumption is that as governor he could grant them the authority to remain.

10 Now as for me, behold, I am going to stay in Mizpah to stand *for you* before the Chaldeans who come to us; but as for you, gather wine, summer fruit, and oil, and put *them* in your storage vessels, and live in your cities that you have taken over."

10 Now as for me, behold, I am going to stay at Mizpah to stand *for you* before the Chaldeans who come to us; but as for you, gather in wine and summer fruit and oil and put *them* in your storage vessels, and live in your cities that you have taken over."

10 As for me, I'll remain at Mizpah to represent you before<sup>7</sup> the Chaldeans who come to us. As for you, gather wine, summer fruit, and oil. Put it in your containers and live in your cities that you have taken over."

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.

- These men have taken cities, they had their hideouts, they apparently had their places where they operated from, they were not just vagrants, they were men that represented semi-rural power blocks.

— What is implied here is that Gedaliah had the authority to grant this kind of relief of exposure. These guys were in effect fugitives but he is saying, If you serve the Chaldeans, everything will be fine. We are pledging allegiance to our new bosses, they are in charge.

11 Likewise, also all the Jews who were in Moab and among the sons of Ammon and in Edom, and who were in all the *other* countries, heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant for Judah, and that he had appointed over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan.

11 Likewise, also all the Jews who were in Moab and among the sons of Ammon and in Edom and who were in all the *other* countries, heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant for Judah, and that he had appointed over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan.

11 All the Judeans who were in Moab, those with the people in Ammon, those in Edom, and those in all the other countries also heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant for Judah and that he had appointed Ahikam's son Gedaliah, the grandson of Shaphan, over 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; - Moab, Ammon and Edom were some of the places that the Jews had fled to when they were under persecution.

12 Then all the Jews returned from all the places to which they had been scattered and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah, and gathered wine and summer fruit in great abundance.

12 Then all the Jews returned from all the places to which they had been driven away and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah, and gathered in wine and summer fruit in great abundance.

12 So all the Judeans returned from all the countries where they had been scattered. They came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah, and they gathered wine and summer fruit in great abundance.

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.

The Babylonians are not stupid. Instead of having a "scorched earth policy" their concept was instead of just going through and slaughtering everyone, leave the remnant, the poor stay there, and also they delegated the authority that those who would come back and wanted to settle and keep it peaceful. They just want it quiet, and they also did an interesting thing by appointing a Jew in charge, Gedaliah.

Gedaliah was not of the house of David: he was appointed by the Babylonians to be in charge. He is a pious man that the people would rally around. When they heard that the

Babylonians had left a remnant there, they just didn't scorch it, they put Gedaliah in charge.

What Gedaliah didn't think through, because he wasn't very political savvy, he should have thought about Ishmael who was of the house of David. He is not of the royal part of the family, but he is one of the other descendants of David, he could claim Davidic ancestry. It comes behind that phrase any intelligent administrator would say to mark that he was ambitious, watch him, he is dangerous. A cynical Macheavelian prince would knock him off before he got a chance because of the implied threat in the situation. Gedaliah is not cut of that cloth. He is a peacemaker, unfortunately a naïve peacemaker, and that is the most dangerous kind.

(ii) Assassination (40:13–41:10)

(a) Revelation of the murder plot (40:13-16)

**13** Now Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces that were in the field came to Gedaliah at Mizpah,

**13** Now Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces that were in the field came to Gedaliah at Mizpah

**13** Kareah's son Jonathan and all leaders of the forces who were in the field came to Gedaliah at Mizpah.

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

- Johanan is alleging that Ismael prior to this was in the country of Ammon and had made a deal with the king of Ammon, Baalis, to kill off Gedaliah. Baalis would want to kill Gedaliah, because the Ammonites are uncomfortable with a strong Judah. He is afraid that Judah may rise to power again, he doesn't have any stock with the Babylonians, and they are really running things.

Baalis was an ally of Zedekiah, and he was also an enemy of the Babylonians. He couldn't get too frisky because they are obviously very powerful. The family of Gedaliah is Ahikam and that family opposed a league that Baalis wanted in Jer 27, so there is some bad blood. First of all Baalis had a friend in Zedekiah, and he was brutalized by the Babylonians, his sons were slaughtered and his eyes were put out and he was taken captive, so he recruits or at least extracts a promise out of Ishmael to take out Gedaliah, and Ishmael obviously had his own agenda, being of the house of David.

The name of King Baalis was found in a Siran bottle that is dated 667-580 BC, which is very possible to be the very Baalis that we have here. Ishmael appears to have made this pledge. His fellow guerilla leaders, one of them Johanan, are not to excited about the idea.

Johanan is not some weakling, he is a fellow guerilla leader but he goes to Gedaliah and tips him off. If you and I were Gedaliah, we would at least get suspicious.

14 and said to him, "Are you well aware that Baalis the king of the sons of Ammon has sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to take your life?" But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam did not believe them.

14 and said to him, "Are you well aware that Baalis the king of the sons of Ammon has sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to take your life?" But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam did not believe them.

14 They told him, "Are you aware that Baalis, the king of the people of Ammon, has sent Nethaniah's son Ishmael to take your life?" But Ahikam's son Gedaliah did not believe them.

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.

15 Then Johanan the son of Kareah spoke secretly to Gedaliah in Mizpah, saying, "Let me go and kill Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no one will know! Why should he take your life, so that all the Jews who are gathered to you would be scattered and the remnant of Judah would perish?"

15 Then Johanan the son of Kareah spoke secretly to Gedaliah in Mizpah, saying, "Let me go and kill Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and not a man will know! Why should he take your life, so that all the Jews who are gathered to you would be scattered and the remnant of Judah would perish?"

15 Then Kareah's son Jonathan spoke privately to Gedaliah at Mizpah: "Let me go kill Nethaniah's son Ishmael, and no one will know. Why should he take your life? Otherwise all the Judeans who have gathered around you will be scattered, and the remnant of Judah will perish."

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?

Apparently the first time may have been in public, maybe in some kind of administrative counsel chamber, and there could be some very good reasons for an administrator to say that it is nonsense, but Johanan goes to Gedaliah in private.

We don't know if this is just an argument, or just where Johanan is coming from. What he is really worried about and it is valid, isn't Gedaliah's life, that is just one aspect the personal aspect, but he recognizes the value in that the person of Gedaliah being acceptable to

these tribes and groups gave at least some hope of gathering in the land peaceably. If he is slaughtered by some assassination plot, it can't bode well for the people. Johanan is right, he is smart, there is a very real issue there.

**16** But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said to Johanan the son of Kareah, "Do not do this thing, for you are telling a lie about Ishmael."

**16** But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said to Johanan the son of Kareah, "Do not do this thing, for you are telling a lie about Ishmael."

**16** Ahikam's son Gedaliah replied to Kareah's son Jonathan, "Don't do this! You're lying about Ishmael!"

**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.

- For Gedaliah to put the kibosh on an assassination plot and Ishmael it is understandable and appropriate, but for him to just somehow not take other precautions is irresponsible. He has an obligation to his office as well as to his life.