

JEREMIAH 40

UNDER GEDALIAH'S LEADERSHIP

We have witnessed the fall of Jerusalem and seen the captives marched off to Babylon; and now, in this chapter and the four following ones, we shall learn the story of the few poor Jews who were left in the land after their brethren were carried away. And alas! It is a very melancholy story; for although there were some hopeful prospects of their well-doing at first, they soon appeared as obstinate in sin as ever. They were unhumbled and unreformed, until all the rest of the judgments threatened in Deuteronomy 28 were brought upon them. In fact, we find the very last verse of that dreadful chapter literally fulfilled in this narrative: "The Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again."

Nebuchadnezzar had given definite instructions to his chief officers to take special precautions for the safety of the prophet Jeremiah. When the city finally fell into their hands, they sent and took him out of the court of the prison; and he was brought with the other captives to Ramah, which was about five miles north of Jerusalem. In a remarkable address which Nebuzaradan – the captain of the guard – made to Jeremiah, he acknowledged the retributive justice of Jehovah. Then the chains were struck off from Jeremiah's fettered hands; and liberty was given him to either accompany the rest of the people to Babylon, or go where he pleased throughout the land. It seems that Jeremiah hesitated as to which direction to take, but Nebuzaradan urged him to make his home with the local governor whom Nebuchadnezzar had appointed over the remnant of the Jews who were left in the land of Judah. This governor's name was Gedaliah; and Nebuzaradan encouraged the prophet to strengthen Gedaliah's hands, and to give him the benefit of his counsel in the difficult office with which he had been entrusted. Out of all the people, Nebuchadnezzar deemed Gedaliah to be the most capable of maintaining allegiance to the Babylonians, and of preserving some kind of authority over the scattered remnant. To him, therefore, Jeremiah came. And he came with an allowance of food, as well as other tokens of the esteem in which the Babylonians regarded him.

After being established as the governor, Gedaliah went to Mizpah, a town in the tribe of Benjamin, to establish that as his seat of government. To the oversight and care of the governor, a number of people had been committed. These included some men, who were most likely elderly or infirmed; women and children, whose husbands and fathers had perished in the siege; and the poor people of the land, who had not been carried captive into Babylon. These sheep needed a kind shepherd; and Jeremiah went to dwell among them, so that he might sympathize with them in their sorrows, and help them in their deep distresses.

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The kindness shown to Jeremiah by the Babylonians – verses 1-6
- ❖ The peaceful state of the land under the leadership of Gedaliah – verses 7-12
- ❖ The Ammonite king devises an evil plot against Gedaliah's life – verses 13-16

When the Babylonians had invaded the land of Judah, many of the people had fled for refuge into the territories of Moab, Ammon, and Edom. In these places, they were relatively safe. But when they heard that Gedaliah had been made governor over the people, they left their hiding-places and came to Mizpah also. They were all received with great kindness; and Gedaliah assured them – on oath – that they had nothing to fear from the Babylonians, if they would only remain in the land and be content to remain loyal subjects of the king of Babylon.

But alas! Further troubles were at hand. A sad history follows this brief time of peace in the land. Wicked men laid their heads together to hatch a vile plot of murdering Gedaliah! The king of the Ammonites, named Baalis, wished to destroy the last hope and refuge of the Jewish people; or maybe he had some personal hatred for the



newly-appointed governor. A man named Ishmael was one of the people who had returned to Mizpah, and whom Gedaliah had personally welcomed; and King Baalis incited this traitor to undertake to kill the governor. Ishmael, being a member of the royal family, was probably envious of Gedaliah's high position of leadership; and therefore, he was only too ready to play the traitor's part.

Somehow, news of this plot became known to Johanan and the other men who had come to be with Gedaliah in Mizpah. Johanan and his friends told the governor of the great peril that he was in. "Ishmael," they said, "has been sent to slay thee!" Johanan even secretly volunteered to go and forestall the treacherous murder by quietly killing Ishmael himself. "Wherefore should he take away thy life," he asked, "and all the remnant of the Jews be scattered?" But Gedaliah would not believe these men. He thought that they were lying about Ishmael, and so he would not permit him to be killed. So Johanan could do nothing but step back, which he surely did with an anxious and troubled mind. It was indeed a praiseworthy simplicity when Gedaliah refused to suspect Ishmael of being so disloyal and so wicked. But unfortunately, the outcome was that he himself lost his life, the peaceful and prosperous condition of the poor remnant was immediately shattered, and things speedily went downhill for the rest of the Jews.

As we read this chapter, we see how soon even Divine judgments lose their effect, unless Divine grace keeps the remembrance of them alive in our hearts! After the fall and ruin of Jerusalem, who would have imagined that rebellion and dissatisfaction would have sprung up so soon among these people? There can be no change in people's hearts except that change which amazing grace makes. Lord Jesus! Give Your people a new heart and a new mind, so that we may be prepared for the everlasting enjoyment of You in glory!

Lord, we repent of times when Your chastening hand has seemed to have no effect upon us. We ask that You would help us to learn the spiritual lessons which they were meant to convey to our souls. Amen.