

## Message #45

## Jeremiah 41:1-18

On April 14, 1865, Ward Lamon, the bodyguard for President Abraham Lincoln, warned him not to go to Ford's Theater. Tensions were high and the Presidential box was in plain sight. Lincoln did not listen and was assassinated. One of the most famous mafia hits took place in New York at Sparks Steak House. Paul Castellano pulled up to that restaurant to go to dinner in 1985 and four men wearing long white trench coats and black Russian styled hats pulled out guns and shot Castellano 6 times and his bodyguard 4 times and killed them. John Gotti was behind it and before they could eat their meal they were dead. There had been some suspicions and warnings but Castellano didn't pay much attention to it and ended up dead.

This kind of assassination is not new to the Mafia in New York or Ford's Theater in Washington; this kind of thing took place back in the days of Jeremiah. There were warnings that an assassin was on the way, but Gedaliah didn't pay attention and he ended up dead.

**WHEN A PERSON CHOOSES NOT TO SEEK GOD'S WILL AND NOT SEEK TO RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD AND WARNINGS, THE END RESULT WILL ALWAYS BE DISASTER.**

When you live near an ocean or even near Lake Michigan and they put up a red flag, you need to heed that warning and not go into the water because if you don't heed the warning, you can end up in serious trouble. That is what happens here. God, in His sovereignty, warned Gedaliah, but he did not take it seriously and ended up dead. There are eleven historical facts to see:

**HISTORICAL FACT #1** – Ishmael and his entourage travel to Mizpah to meet and eat with Gedaliah. **41:1**

The text says this happened in the seventh month. We know from Jeremiah 39:2 that Jerusalem was destroyed in the fourth month of 586-587 BC. So we assume that this happens three months later after the fall of Jerusalem, which would be the seventh month.

Now Ishmael was the grandson of Elishama, who was one of the sons of David (II Sam. 5:13-16). So he had royal blood in him.

Apparently he and ten of his men were invited to dine with Gedaliah. They are all assassins. It was and still is a wonderful thing to be invited into the home of someone for dinner and fellowship. It is a sign of friendship and loyalty.

Ishmael and Gedaliah had at one time been friends. In fact, it was Ishmael who originally led people back to Gedaliah (40:8). Although his motives may have been clandestine, Gedaliah saw him as a friend.

Even though Gedaliah had been warned that Ishmael wanted to kill him (40:13-14), he did not believe it. He does not know the evil that Ishmael is plotting, while eating a meal.

Gedaliah has no way of knowing that this is a trap. These are treacherous and dangerous men with no scruples.

**HISTORICAL FACT #2** – Ishmael and his ten men assassinate Gedaliah. **41:2**

There is nothing so evil as to go into someone's home and eat a meal with them and then kill them. John Calvin said this is nothing but "detestable cruelty and barbarity."

While they were in Gedaliah's home eating a meal, Ishmael and his men killed him. While they were eating a meal, Ishmael and his men murdered Gedaliah. This is an abominable thing to do. It is a total betrayal. In the east, a meal is a sign of hospitality and friendship.

I believe those who go to a meal and betray a friend will pay a high price before God. His own Son was betrayed at a meal. So when this kind of thing happens, God pays close attention. God will never look lightly on someone who goes and eats with a person and then murders them physically or verbally.

We learn from **verse 2** that one of the things that was realized by Ishmael is that the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, had appointed Gedaliah over the land.

It may have been a jealousy that prompted this murder.

**HISTORICAL FACT #3** – Ishmael and his ten men killed all who were with Gedaliah. **41:3**

We don't know the exact number of people killed here at this meal but it was more than just Gedaliah. The ten men with Ishmael killed both Jews and Babylonians. Because it was a surprise attack, they were easily able to kill them all.

More than likely they do not want to leave any witnesses behind that can report to Nebuchadnezzar what happened.

It may be that a couple of Ishmael's men were killed here because when we get to **verse 15**, there are only eight men, not ten men.

**HISTORICAL FACT #4** – Ishmael and his entourage kill 70 men who came to bring their offerings to the Lord. **41:4-7**

Eighty men showed up from various countries. They were coming to Mizpah to bring their offerings for worship and to mourn over what had happened to Jerusalem at the Temple. They apparently intended to worship at the place where the Temple once stood.

It appears from **verse 5** that they were in a state of mourning as they brought their grain offerings and incense to the house of the LORD. The problem is, the house of the LORD is no longer standing. But they brought their offerings there anyway, realizing this was the Temple site that was used for worship.

Their worship, however, was not true to the word of God. They shaved off their beards; they tore their clothes and “they gashed themselves.” That point that “they cut themselves” was forbidden behavior in the book of Leviticus (Lev. 19:28; 21:5; Deut. 14:1).

These are men who are not really focused on obeying God in their worship services. They are interested in religion, but not obeying the word of God. This is probably one reason why God lets them be killed.

According to **verse 6**, Ishmael went out in front of these men and put on quite a hypocritical show. He went out weeping as if he were broken-hearted too. He pretended that the loss of the Temple was something that really saddened him. In fact, he invited the men to come to Gedaliah’s house.

He knows that Gedaliah is dead because he killed him, but he is leading them into a trap.

According to **verse 7**, as soon as the men were inside the city, Ishmael slaughtered seventy of the eighty men and threw them into the cistern. Ishmael has no regard for the sanctity of human life. He was a violent murderer, who doesn’t flinch at killing.

We are not sure as to his motive. We don’t know why he killed them. Perhaps he wanted to steal their offerings.

**HISTORICAL FACT #5** – Ishmael and his men spare ten men who came to bring their offerings. **41:8**

Ten men were not killed and they promised Ishmael that they could show him where more food such as wheat, barley, oil and honey were hidden in a field.

It appears that Ishmael is after the loot.

This prompted Ishmael not to kill these ten. So Ishmael would keep them alive because it would mean wealth for him.

**HISTORICAL FACT #6** – Ishmael puts the corpses of the men he has killed into the cistern. **41:9**

Ishmael threw 70 dead bodies into a cistern. The cistern had been made by King Asa (913-873 BC) some 350 years before this event.

Cisterns were often times underground and used for storing water and at times grain.

**HISTORICAL FACT #7** – Ishmael takes the remaining people captive to the sons of Ammon. **41:10**

Ishmael kidnaps the rest of the helpless people and takes them with him. There are probably three reasons he did this:

- 1) To escape punishment for his crime. Nebuchadnezzar would not look favorably on Ishmael.
- 2) To join with Baalis who was behind this assassination (40:14).
- 3) To sell the remnant of Jewish people as slaves.

**HISTORICAL FACT #8** – Johanan goes to fight Ishmael for all the evil he has done. **41:11-12**

Johanan was the man who warned Gedaliah that Ishmael wanted to kill him. When he learned what Ishmael had done, he took all his men and started tracking him and he found him at the “pool that is in Gibeon.”

This place is located about six miles northwest of Jerusalem. This cistern was 82 feet deep and there was a spiral stairway cut out of the rock that has 93 steps that lead from the ground surface down to the water.

**HISTORICAL FACT #9** – Ishmael’s captives are happy to see and join Johanan. **41:13-14**

The only reason they had gone with Ishmael is because he forced them. When they saw Johanan, they were happy and rejoicing. They all turned around and went back to Johanan. They were able to break away from Ishmael.

**HISTORICAL FACT #10** – Ishmael and eight men escape from Johanan. **41:15**

We may notice here that the number of men with Ishmael has dropped from ten to eight. We may assume that two of the men died in fighting action.

When Ishmael and eight of his men saw Johanan, they abandoned their prisoners and fled.

**HISTORICAL FACT #11** – Johanan recovers all the people from Ishmael and take them to Egypt. **41:16-18**

Now Johanan is not really thinking accurately here because there is no way that God wants His people to go to Egypt for protection.

Even though Johanan had not done anything wrong, he feared that the Babylonians would kill them all because of what happened to Gedaliah and the Babylonian soldiers at Mizpah.

Ishmael had ruined the potential of peace for any of these people.

So instead of him returning to Mizpah, he took his group south toward Egypt.

According to **verse 17** they stayed in “Geruth,” which means lodging place. But the truth is no matter where they go, they cannot get beyond the limits of Nebuchadnezzar and certainly they cannot get beyond the limits of God.

Now the thing that we see in this is that no one is consulting God and no one is consulting Jeremiah. Even though God has spared them to this point, they are not seeking God. They are heading back to Egypt. This is the one place in the world where the Jews should never go.

Gedaliah did not seek God and he is dead.

Johanan does not seek God and he is heading as a fugitive to Egypt.

In fact, it will take this entire situation to bring them to the point where they say we need to get Jeremiah to pray (**42:2**).

This whole thing could have been avoided if they would have consulted Jeremiah and received the word of God.

When you don't listen to warnings in God's word, the end is always disaster.

#### **PARTING APPLICATIONS:**

1. When things appear hopeless, God's people need to turn to the Lord and trust the Lord and obey His word.
2. God's people need to heed the warnings God sovereignly reveals.