

# CHAPTER 40

## INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH 40

This chapter treats of the release of Jeremiah, and the care taken of him; of the gathering of the princes and people of the Jews to Gedaliah, appointed their governor, dispersed about Judea, and other countries; and of a conspiracy against him, of which information was given him. The release of Jeremiah, where, and by whom, (<sup>240B</sup>Jeremiah 40:1-4); the liberty granted him to go to Babylon, or stay in Judea, as he thought fit; and, if he chose the latter, is advised to go to Gedaliah, appointed governor, or where he would; and is dismissed with food, and a reward, (<sup>240B</sup>Jeremiah 40:4-6); upon which he went and dwelt with Gedaliah, (<sup>240B</sup>Jeremiah 40:7); to whom also the captains of the dispersed forces joined themselves, to whom he swore, and bid them be of good cheer; and exhorted them to serve the Chaldeans, which he urged from the profit of it to them, and by his own example, (<sup>240B</sup>Jeremiah 40:8-10); and to whom also gathered the Jews in other countries, (<sup>240B</sup>Jeremiah 40:11,12); by the captains he is informed of a conspiracy against his life, and one of them offers to destroy the conspirator, which Gedaliah would not agree to, disbelieving the information, (<sup>240B</sup>Jeremiah 40:13-16).

**Ver. 1.** *The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord*, etc.] The word of prophecy, as the Targum; but there being no prophecy in this and the following chapter, only a narration of facts, this is generally referred to what came ten days after, and which begins (<sup>240B</sup>Jeremiah 42:7); so Jarchi and Kimchi; all between being included in a parenthesis, or a relation of facts preparatory, to lead on to it; though Abarbinel takes it to be a general title to all histories and prophecies in this book, from henceforward to the end of it. Jarchi and Kimchi make mention of a Midrash, which refers it to the special word of the Lord to Jeremiah to go to Gedaliah, (<sup>240B</sup>Jeremiah 40:5); interpreting that passage as the words of the Lord, and not of Nebuzaradan; but Abarbinel's sense seems best. The time of this prophecy was

*after that Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah*; which was a city in the land of Benjamin near Gibeon, seven miles

from Jerusalem, as Jerom<sup>f738</sup> says; here Nebuzaradan had his rendezvous, whither he brought his captives as they fell into his hands, among whom were Jeremiah:

*when he had taken him*; out of the court of the prison, and out of Jerusalem, and brought him to Ramah:

*being bound in chains among all them that were carried away captive of Jerusalem and Judah, that were carried away captive unto Babylon*; how it came to pass is not certain, but so it was; that, though by the orders of Nebuzaradan and the princes, agreeably to the command of the king of Babylon, Jeremiah was taken out of the court of the prison, yet was not set free; but without the knowledge of Nebuzaradan, and through the inadvertency of inferior officers, he was taken and bound, and with other prisoners brought to Ramah, in order to be transported to Babylon, which lay in the way to it; for Ramah was to the north of Jerusalem, as Babylon was: these chains were for the hands, or what we call handcuffs, as Kimchi, Abarbinel, and Ben Melech observe, and as appears from (~~2404~~Jeremiah 40:4).

**Ver. 2.** *And the captain of the guard took Jeremiah*, etc.] When he mustered his prisoners, to his great surprise he found the prophet among them, whom he took out from them, and set him free; though, before he dismissed him, he had the following conversation with him:

*and said unto him, the Lord thy God hath pronounced this evil on this place*; the city of Jerusalem; from whence the prophet and the rest of the captives were just brought, and which now lay in ruins; the houses burnt; the walls broken down; and the inhabitants spoiled and carried captive. This was the evil which the Lord, he says, had “decreed”, as the Targum renders it; had purposed to bring upon it; and which he had declared and pronounced by the mouth of Jeremiah, whose Lord God he was, being his prophet, and a worshipper of him: this Nebuzaradan was apprized of by the Jews that deserted to the Chaldeans; and particularly, as is probable, by Gedaliah.

**Ver. 3.** *Now the Lord hath brought [it], and done according as he hath said*, etc.] As he purposed, so it came to pass; as he foretold by his prophet, so it was brought about by his providence. This Heathen captain acknowledges the hand of the Lord in all this; and suggests, that his master, the king of Babylon, himself, and the rest of the generals, were

only instruments the Lord made use of; which is very piously as well as wisely said; and more is here acknowledged by him than by the Jews themselves; who were not willing to believe that God had determined evil against them, or would bring it on them; at least, this they did not care to believe and own before, whatever they did now; he goes on to observe the cause of all this:

*because ye have sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed his voice, therefore this thing is come upon you;* meaning not Jeremiah particularly, but his countrymen; and perhaps he might turn himself to, and address, the captives that were before him. Here he vindicates the justice of God; and ascribes the ruin of this people, not to the valour of Nebuchadnezzar and his captains; nor to the strength, and courage, and skilfulness of his army; or to any righteousness and merits of the king of Babylon; or to the justness of his cause; but to the sins of the people.

**Ver. 4.** *And now, behold, I loose thee this day from the chains which [were] upon thine hands,* etc.] Or rather are; for, when he said these words, it is highly probable they were on him, though now ordered to be taken off; these were not what were put upon him by the Jews, when in the court of the prison; for rather his legs, than his hands, would have had fetters on them there; but what were put upon him by the Chaldeans, when he fell into their hands; though inadvertently done by the inferior officers, and without the knowledge of the princes, or of this captain, who loosed them; with these he came manacled to Ramah, with the rest of the captives, but now were loosed in the sight of them:

*if it seem good unto thee to come with me unto Babylon, come, and one will look well unto thee;* or, “I will set mine eyes upon thee”<sup>f739</sup>; as the king of Babylon had ordered him to do, (<sup>24912</sup>Jeremiah 39:12); would favour him, protect him, provide for him, and use him in the most kind and generous manner:

*but if it seem ill unto thee to come with me to Babylon, forbear;* if it was not agreeable to him to leave his native country, and to go into Babylon, he would not urge it, but leave him to his liberty; yea, would advise him to continue where he was, and not take one step out of it:

*behold, all the land [is] before thee;* the land of Judea, which was at the disposal of the king of Babylon; and Jeremiah has a grant from him, by his officer, to settle where he pleased:

*whither it seemeth good and convenient for thee to go, thither go*; he left him to take his own way, and do as he thought fit; and this agrees with his master's orders to him, (<sup>24912</sup>Jeremiah 39:12).

**Ver. 5.** *Now while he was not yet gone back, [he said], go back also to Gedaliah, etc.]* These words, by different versions, are made difficult to be understood, both, whose words they are, and of whom they are spoken. Jarchi makes them to be words of God, and the sense this,

“and by all this he (Jeremiah) had no mind to return; and God said to him, go back to Gedaliah.”

According to the Targum, they are the words of Nebuzaradan, which paraphrases them thus;

“if thou wilt not return (that is, with him to Babylon, or rather to Jerusalem, or best to his own native place), or if thou wilt not dwell (that is, in this place), go back to Gedaliah.”

But of whom they are spoken interpreters differ. Some say of Zedekiah, as Cocceius; while he (Zedekiah) does not return, that is, to Jerusalem; which possibly he might, though as yet not determined by the king of Babylon; in the mean while is bid to go to Gedaliah, appointed governor. Others of Gedaliah, thus, while he (Gedaliah) does not return, but stays at Mizpah, go to him thither. Though it seems best to understand it of Jeremiah, who, having had leave from the captain, did not immediately set out anywhere; but, seething to be at a loss which way to go, Nebuzaradan gives him his advice; that seeing he did not care to go to Babylon, that he would go to Gedaliah

*the son of, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon had made governor over all the cities of Judah, and dwell with him among the people*; this was one of the princes of Judah, who, during the siege, went over to the Chaldeans, and who was in great esteem with them; and being, no doubt, recommended to the king of Babylon by his generals, he made him governor of the land under him:

*or go wherever it seemeth convenient unto thee to go*; though he gave him his advice, he did not press it, but left him at full liberty to take his own way, and go into what part of the land he pleased, and settle in it:

*so the captain of the guard gave him victuals, and a reward, and let him go*; the prophet was just come out of prison, and destitute of the necessaries of life, and the land was laid waste by the enemy; and therefore he could not have subsisted without a supply, which was liberally given by the captain; not only food for present refreshment, and sufficient for his journey, which way soever he took, but a present of money or clothes, or both; which was very kind usage of a prophet by a Heathen officer.

**Ver. 6.** *Then went Jeremiah to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah,* etc.] A city in the tribe of Benjamin, not far from Ramathon; which, as Josephus says, was about five miles from Jerusalem. Jeremiah took the captain's advice, though it might have been better with him had he gone along with him to Babylon; but he chose rather to dwell in his own land, and suffer affliction with the people of God, than to dwell at ease in a foreign and idolatrous land:

*and dwelt with him among the people that were left in the land*; among the poor people that Nebuzaradan left, who dwelt either at Mizpah or at Anathoth, and lived as they did.

**Ver. 7.** *Now when all the captains of the forces which [were] in the fields,* etc.] Not the captains of the king of Babylon's forces, but the captains of the king of Judah's forces; who either during the siege had lurked in the fields and villages, not daring to fall upon the Chaldean army, or attempt to raise the siege; or rather who fled with Zedekiah from Jerusalem, when the city was taken, and who deserted him, when he was apprehended, and shifted for themselves, and were dispersed about in the country, where they continued for some little time: but when

*they and their men*; their servants, or rather the common soldiers that were under them:

*heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam governor in the land*; his viceroy or deputy governor in the land of Judea; being a prince of considerable note among the Jews, and in high favour with the king of Babylon:

*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 unto Babylon*; even as many men, women, children, and poor, as were left in the land, and not carried captive; these were all committed to the care of this prince, to rule over and govern them; to keep them in subjection to the

king of Babylon; to employ them in cultivating the land, from whence some profit might arise to the conqueror and new proprietor of it.

**Ver. 8.** *Then they came to Gedaliah to Mizpah*, etc.] Having heard that the Chaldean army was gone, and so were in no fear of that; and also that Gedaliah was made deputy governor, one of their own nation, a pious, prudent, good man, a man of ingenuity, mildness, and integrity; under whose government they might expect to live comfortably; and which was much preferable to captivity in a foreign country, though tributary to Babylon:

*even Ishmael the son of Nethaniah*; who was of the seed royal, (<sup><2410></sup>Jeremiah 41:1);

*and Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah*; two brothers, but who they were, or their father, is not known, no mention being made of them but in this story:

*and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth*; who he was is also uncertain:

*and the sons of Ephai the Netophathite*; so called from Netophah, a city of the tribe of Judah near Bethlehem, and are mentioned together, (<sup><1872></sup>Ezra 2:22 <sup><1072></sup>Nehemiah 7:26); the Netophathites inhabited several villages, (<sup><1396></sup>1 Chronicles 9:16); mention is made in the Misnic<sup>f740</sup> writings of artichokes and olives this place was famous for:

*and Jezaniah the son of a Maachathite*; a family so called from Maacah, Caleb's concubine, (<sup><1388></sup>1 Chronicles 2:48);

*they and their men*; these generals, and the forces under their command.

**Ver. 9.** *And Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan aware unto them and to their men*, etc.] They might express their fears, that should they continue with Gedaliah, as they were inclined to do, could they be safe; that seeing they had encouraged Zedekiah to hold out the siege to the last against the Chaldeans, and they should hear where they were, would demand them, and they, should be taken and delivered up into their hands; upon which Gedaliah not only promises them safety, but swears to them that they should live safely with him, and never be delivered up to the Chaldeans, and that he would undertake to indemnify them, and preserve them:

*saying, fear not to serve the Chaldeans*; as if it was an evil to do it; or as if their yoke was hard and intolerable; or as if it would be unprofitable, and turn to no account; or they should be always in danger of their lives:

*dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you*; settle in the land, and do not rove about from place to place like fugitives; nor go out of the land through fear of the king of Babylon, but continue in it, and live in subjection to him, and depend upon it you will live comfortably and safely.

**Ver. 10.** *As for me, behold, I will dwell at Mizpah, to serve the Chaldeans that come unto us*, etc.] Here he urges his own example, as before their welfare, to engage them to dwell in the land, and serve the Chaldeans; this was what he had determined to do, and had fixed upon Mizpah, a frontier town, and in the way to Babylon, as a proper seat of residence for him, as a governor under the king of Babylon: “to serve the Chaldeans”; or “to stand before them”<sup>f741</sup>; that should come to him as messengers from the king of Babylon, to receive tribute or bring orders to him; all which he would take care of, as well as be an advocate for the Jews, and plead on their behalf, for favours to be bestowed on them; and particularly for these generals and their forces, that they might be pardoned, and dwell safely in the land: he suggests, that they need not trouble themselves about these things; all affairs of this kind he would take upon himself to transact; so that they would have nothing to fear, nor anything to do, but as follows:

*but ye, gather ye wine, and summer fruits, and oil*; that is, grapes to make wine of, and olives to make oil of, and summer fruits, such as figs and apples. The Targum interprets it lumps of figs; and so Jarchi; for fruits of trees are meant, and not fruits of the earth, as corn and wheat; for both barley and wheat harvests were over before this time; the city being taken in July, and, a month after that, Nebuzaradan came and carried off the captives, and left the poor with Gedaliah, appointed governor. It may be rendered, “autumnal fruits”<sup>f742</sup>; for the word signifies autumn as well as summer;

*and put [them] in your vessels*; casks, bottles, and such like vessels, suitable to the things mentioned, and which were in common use, in order to be laid up for winter; and as they used to do in times of peace, not fearing any enemy to come and take them from them:

*and dwell in your cities which ye have taken*; not by force of arms, or as they pleased; but which they had held in possession formerly as the inheritances of their families, and which they had lately reassumed, or might however enter upon the quiet possession of.

**Ver. 11.** *Likewise, when all the Jews that [were] in Moab*, etc.] Who had fled thither, and to the places after mentioned, when the king of Babylon first invaded the land, and where they had continued unto this time:

*and among the Ammonites, and in Edom, and that [were] in all the countries*; in all other neighbouring countries, besides Moab, Ammon, and Edom; some fleeing one way, and some another, which lay nearest to their borders, or where they thought themselves safest: when they

*heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant of Judah*; a few of their brethren, to cultivate the land, and repopulated it:

*and that he had set over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan*; whom they knew to be a wise and good man; these were engaging motives to them to return to their own land, being more desirable to live in than any other, could they enjoy peace and safety; and to dwell with their brethren, their own countrymen, and of the same religion with them, was more eligible than to dwell in foreign idolatrous countries; and especially since there was a government established to protect and defend them, and that in the hands of so worthy a prince as Gedaliah.

**Ver. 12.** *Even all the Jews returned from all places whither they were driven*, etc.] Through fear of the Chaldean army; they came all of them from the several countries before mentioned; so that here was like to be a happy settlement and a flourishing commonwealth again; here being princes and generals, soldiers and common people, in large numbers, that were returned and coalesced under the government of Gedaliah:

*and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah, unto Mizpah*; they came out of the several countries where they had been for some time, and entered the land of Judah; but did not take up their abode anywhere, till they had presented themselves to the governor, and put themselves under his protection; promising, no doubt, to regard him as such, and to be tributary to the Chaldeans; being assured by him, as the generals and their forces before, that all would be well with them, giving them free liberty to settle in the cities and villages to which they belonged; and accordingly they set out from Mizpah, and went to their respective habitations they had abandoned:



*and gathered wine and summer fruits very much*; (see Gill on “<sup>2400</sup>Jeremiah 40:10”); the people of the land being carried captive; and the Chaldean army not having ravaged these parts, or however had left an abundance of fruits, which these people, at their return, found and gathered.

**Ver. 13.** *Moreover, Johanan the son of Kareah*, etc.] Who seems to be the principal captain next to Ishmael, against whom an information is brought, and so not present; this captain is here only mentioned by name, and before next to Ishmael:

*and all the captains of the forces that [were] in the fields*; or that had been in the fields, and probably might be there again; (see <sup>2400</sup>Jeremiah 40:7); that is, the rest of them, besides Johanan mentioned, and Ishmael the conspirator: these

*came to Gedaliah to Mizpah*; they had been with him before, and being satisfied by him of the safety they would be in, in the service of the Chaldeans, under him, either returned to the fields from whence they came, or went to those cities and villages he directed them to; but, like honest and faithful men, knowing there was a conspiracy against his life, came in a body to inform him of it, for the greater certainty of it; as judging he would be more ready to give heed unto it, than if only a single person had informed him of it, as well as to show their affection and loyalty to him.

**Ver. 14.** *And said unto him, dost thou certainly know*, etc.] Not that they thought he did know, or that the thing was so flagrant that he must know it; but that he might be assured of the truth of it, from the information they were now about to give him: or, “dost thou [not] in knowing know?”<sup>1743</sup> it is most certainly true; and thou mayest depend upon it that it is real matter of fact:

*that Baalis the king of the Ammonites hath sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to slay thee?* very probably Ishmael, with the forces under him, fled to the king of the Ammonites upon the taking of Jerusalem; who, out of ill will to the Jews, always bore them by the Ammonites, envying their reestablishment under Gedaliah, and hoping to make a prey of them if their governor was removed, moved it to this young prince to dispatch him; and who might be forward enough to undertake it, being displeased that Gedaliah should be governor, which he might think was an office he had a better right to, being of the seed royal; and therefore readily agreed to be sent on this bloody errand, to take away the governor’s life: or, “to smite

[him] in the soul”; or “to smite his soul”<sup>f744</sup>; that is, to give him a mortal blow, his death’s wound, to separate soul and body:

*but Gedaliah the son of Ahikam believed them not*; being a good man, and knowing he had done nothing to disoblige him, could not believe a person of such birth and dignity would ever be guilty of such an action: very likely Ishmael had behaved in a very princely complaisant manner, and had expressed a great affection for the governor, and had been very familiar with him; and being of the seed royal, it is highly probable Gedaliah had shown a distinguished regard to him, which he might think was the reason of this charge being brought against him, out of envy to him; however, since it came from such a body of men, though he was not over credulous, yet he ought to have inquired into it, and provided for his own safety, and the public good, against the worst that might happen.

**Ver. 15.** *Then Johanan the son of Kareah spake to Gedaliah in Mizpah secretly*, etc.] Partly that he might, as he thought, more easily prevail upon him, and persuade him to believe the information given; and partly for the sake of the proposal he had to make to him, which it was not proper should be publicly made:

*saying, let me go, I pray thee, and I will slay Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no man shall know [it]*; that he had slain him, or that Gedaliah had given him leave to do it:

*wherefore should he slay thee, that all the Jews that are gathered unto thee should be scattered, and the remnant in Judah perish?* suggesting, that it was not barely his losing his own life, which is, and ought to be, precious to every man, and should be carefully preserved, but it would be a public loss; the people, being without a governor, would disperse here and there, fearing their own lives and property would not be safe under a murderer; and that the Chaldeans would be so incensed by such an action, as to come and revenge his death on them; and thus being scattered about, some one way, and some another, would be no more under any form of government as a body politic, and so perish as such, at least; and thus all their hopes, which began to revive, of their beings commonwealth again, would be lost: with this argument Johanan hoped to prevail on Gedaliah to give him leave to slay the conspirator.

**Ver. 16.** *But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said unto Johanan the son of Kareah*, etc.] In answer to his request, and the motion made by him:

*thou shalt not do this thing*; or, “do not do this thing”,<sup>f745</sup>; dissuading him from it, as being unlawful to take away a man’s life in such a secret manner, without any legal process against him; though it seems to carry more in it, that he laid his commands upon him not to do it, and threatened him if he did:

*for thou speakest falsely of Ishmael*; or “a lie”,<sup>f746</sup>; a falsehood, a mere calumny; which was not using Johanan well, neither kindly nor genteelly, who had expressed such a concern for him, and for the public good. The event related in the following chapter shows that the information was good, and that it was no lie or calumny that was told; and it would have been well for Gedaliah, and the people of the Jews, had he given credit to it; but the time was not come for the Jewish commonwealth to be restored; and things were thus suffered to be, for the further punishment of the sins of that people.