

CHAPTER 41

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH 41

This chapter relates the event of the conspiracy against Gedaliah Johanan and the princes had informed him of, to which he gave no credit; but it proved true. An account is given of the murder of Gedaliah, and of the Jews and Chaldeans with him; and of the perpetrators of it, (^{<2410>}Jeremiah 41:1-3); and of the chief of them, Ishmael's treacherous dealing with fourscore men that came from several parts to the house of God to offer sacrifice, who all perished by his hands, excepting ten, (^{<2410>}Jeremiah 41:4-9); and of the rest of the people at Mizpah being carried away, in order to be captives among the Ammonites, (^{<2410>}Jeremiah 41:10); and of Johanan, and the rest of the captives, hearing of all this, and coming out to fight with Ishmael; upon which the people deserted him, and he fled to the Ammonites, (^{<2411>}Jeremiah 41:11-15); and of Johanan and the people settling in the way to Egypt, to flee there on occasion, should the Chaldeans fall on them for what was done to the governor, which they feared, (^{<2416>}Jeremiah 41:16-18).

Ver. 1. *Now it came to pass in the seventh month*, etc.] The month Tisri, which answers to part of our September, and part of October; according to the Jewish^{f747} chronicle, it was on the third day of this month, fifty two days after the destruction of the temple, that Gedaliah was slain; on which day a fast was kept by the Jews, after their return from captivity, on this occasion, called the fast of the seventh month, (^{<3015>}Zechariah 7:5 8:19); though, according to Kimchi and Ben Melech, this event happened on the first day of the month, the beginning of the new year; but the fast was kept the day following, because the first day was a festival. Josephus^{f748} says it was thirty days after Johanan had departed from Gedaliah, having given him information of the conspiracy against him:

[that] Ishmael the son of Nethaniah the son of Elishama, of the seed royal: not the son of King Zedekiah, but one of the remoter branches of the family; whether Elishama his father was the same with Elishama the scribe is not certain, (^{<2412>}Jeremiah 36:12,20); the Jews have a tradition that he descended from Jerahmeel, whose wife, Atarah, was the daughter of a

Heathen king, and was a proselyte, which Kimchi on the place relates; (see ~~1~~ 1 Chronicles 2:26,41); this circumstance, of his being akin to the royal family, is mentioned, to show that he envied the governor, and bore him a grudge for the honour he had, thinking that he had a better title to it, as being of the seed royal:

and the princes of the king, even ten men with him; some of the nobles of Zedekiah, who fled with him from Jerusalem, and deserted him when he was pursued and taken, and ever since had remained in the land; even ten of these joined with Ishmael in the conspiracy against Gedaliah, whom they bore an ill will to, for going over to the Chaldeans, and envying the power he was now possessed of. Some think these were ten ruffians, besides the princes of the king, since it may be rendered, “and the princes of the king, and ten men with him”; whom Ishmael and the princes took with them, as fit persons to assassinate the governor; and, besides, it is thought that eleven men were not sufficient to slay the Jews and the Chaldeans, as afterwards related; though it may be observed, that Ishmael, and these ten princes, did not come alone, as it can hardly be imagined they should, but with a number of servants and soldiers with them: these

came unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah: they had been with him before, to whom he had sworn, and given them assurance of security; and they departed from him to their respective cities, seemingly satisfied; and now return, to pay him a friendly visit, as they pretended:

and there they did eat bread together at Mizpah; had a feast, and kept holiday together, it being a new moon, the first day of the month, and the beginning of the new year too; so that it was a high festival: and perhaps this season was fixed upon the rather, to cover their design, and to perpetrate it; pretending they came to keep the festival with him, and who, no doubt, liberally provided for them; for bread here is put for all provisions and accommodations.

Ver. 2. *Then arose Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and the ten men that were with him*, etc.] After they had eat and drank well, they rose up from their seats at table:

and smote Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan with the sword, and slew him; they all drew their swords and thrust at him, and were assisting in the murder of him; though it is probable that it was Ishmael that gave him the mortal wound, since the phrase, “and slew him”, is singular.

Josephus^{f749} says that Gedaliah prepared a splendid table, and made a sumptuous entertainment for them, and being drunk himself, which they observed, took the opportunity and slew him, and all at table with him:

whom the king Babylon had made governor over the land; which mentioned; both to aggravate the crime they were guilty of, and to observe the reason of it, and what it was that prompted them to it; for so the words may be rendered, “because the king of Babylon had made him governor over the land”^{f750}.

Ver. 3. *Ishmael also slew all the Jews that were with him, [even] with Gedaliah, at Mizpah, etc.*] Not only those that were at table, but that were in the city also. Josephus^{f751} says, that having slain those that were at the feast with him, he went out in the night, and slew all the Jews in the city, and the soldiers that were left by the Babylonians in it; but this cannot be understood of all the individuals there, or of the main body of the people, for they were carried captive by him, (²⁴⁴⁰Jeremiah 41:9); but of those that opposed him, or were able to avenge the death of their governor, and he might suspect would do it:

and the Chaldeans that were found there, [and] the men of war; or, “even the men of war”^{f752}; this describes more particularly who they were that were slain, those of the Jews, and especially the Chaldeans, who were in military service; either the bodyguards of the governor, or the city guards, or both, whom Ishmael thought it advisable to cut off, lest they should fall upon him, and revenge the death of Gedaliah, and prevent his further designs.

Ver. 4. *And it came to pass, the second day after he had slain Gedaliah, etc.*] That is, the day following, for it was in the night, as Josephus relates, as before observed, the murder was committed:

and no man knew [it]; not any out of the city, or in remote parts; for those that were in the city must be sensible of it; but as yet the report of it had not reached the neighbourhood, and much less distant parts; this is observed on account of the following story, and to show how easily the persons after mentioned were drawn in by Ishmael.

Ver. 5. *That there came certain from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria, etc.*] Places in the ten tribes, and which belonged to the kingdom of Israel; so that it seems even at this distance of time, though the body of the ten tribes had been many years ago carried captive, yet there were still

some religious persons sons remaining, and who had a great regard to the temple worship at Jerusalem:

[even] fourscore men, having their beards shaven, and their clothes rent, and having cut themselves; as mourners for the destruction of Jerusalem, and the captivity of the people. The two first of these rites, shaving the beard, and rending of clothes, were agreeably to the law; but that of cutting themselves, their flesh with their nails, or knives, was forbidden by it, (^{<0828>}Leviticus 19:28 ^{<0540>}Deuteronomy 14:1); so that these people seemed to have retained some of the Heathenish customs of the places where they lived; for the king of Assyria had placed colonies of Heathens in Samaria, and the cities of it, (^{<2724>}2 Kings 17:24,30,31); these came

with offerings and incense in their hands: a meat offering made of fine flour, as the word signifies; and incense, or frankincense, which used to be put upon such an offering, (^{<0801>}Leviticus 2:1);

to bring [them] to the house of the Lord; but the temple was now destroyed; wherefore either they thought there was a tabernacle or sanctuary erected at Mizpah for divine service and sacrifice; or they intended to offer these offerings on the spot where the temple of Jerusalem stood; and where they hoped to find an altar, if only of earth, and priests to sacrifice; though the Jewish commentators, Jarchi and Kimchi, observe, that when they first set out, they had not heard of the destruction of the temple, but heard of it in the way; and therefore came in a mourning habit; but before knew nothing of it; and therefore brought offerings with them, according to the former; but, according to the latter, they had heard before they set out of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the captivity of the people; but not of the burning of the temple, until they were on their journey.

Ver. 6. *And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah went forth to Mizpah to meet them,* etc.] Hearing there was such a number of men upon the road to Jerusalem, in such a habit, and upon such a design, he thought it advisable to go out and meet them, and stop them, and decoy them into the city, and there destroy them; lest, if they should have got any hint of what had been done by him, they should spread it, and raise the country upon him, before he had executed his whole design:

weeping all along as he went; pretending equal concern for the destruction of the land, city, and temple, as they had:

and it came to pass, as he met them; when he came up to them, and some discourse had passed between them:

he said unto them, come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam; as if he was alive, and for whom he had a great respect, and whose character was well known to these men; and thought that this would be an inducement to come along with him: this he said either to try them, whether they had heard anything upon the road of the death of him; or as an argument to come into the city, suggesting the governor would gladly receive, and liberally entertain them. This looks as if their design was not to come to Mizpah, but to go on their way to Jerusalem, had they not been met with by him, and had he not thus solicited them.

Ver. 7. *And it was [so], when they came into the midst of the city,* etc.] Where Gedaliah's house was, to which he invited them; and as they went in, he shut up the court, as Josephus^{f753} says, and slew them, as it here follows:

that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah slew them, [and cast them] into the midst of the pit; when he had slain them, the fourscore men he had enticed into the city, except ten of them, he cast their dead bodies into a pit near at hand:

he, and the men that [were] with him; Ishmael and the ten princes, with what servants they brought with them; these were all concerned in the death of these men.

Ver. 8. *But ten men were found among them, that said unto Ishmael, slay us not,* etc.] They begged for their lives, using what follows as an argument to prevail upon him:

for we have treasures in the field, of wheat, and of barley, and of oil, and of honey; not that they had then a stock upon the ground at this time; for this being the seventh month, not only the barley and wheat harvests had been over long ago, but the rest of the fruits of the earth were gathered in: but this either means storehouses of such things in the field; or else that these things were hid in cells under ground, the land having been invaded, to secure them from the enemy, as is common to do in time of war; and so Josephus says^{f754}, they promised to deliver to him things hid in the fields, household goods, clothes, and corn:

so he forbore, and slew them not among their brethren; but saved them, and kept and carried them with him, in order to take these hidden treasures, which lay in his way to Ammon; for between Gibeon, where he was found, (^{<24112>}Jeremiah 41:12); and Ammon, lay Samaria, Sichem, and Shiloh; at least it was not far out of his way to take that course; and thus he appears to be a covetous man, as well as a cruel one.

Ver. 9. *Now the pit wherein Ishmael had cast all the dead bodies*, etc.] Not only of those seventy men of Samaria, etc. but

of the men whom he had slain because of Gedaliah; because of their attachment to him: or, “by the hand of Gedaliah”^{f755}; not by him, as an instrument; unless, as Jarchi observes, because he rejected the advice of Johanan, and provided not for his safety, and his people, it was as if they were slain by him^{f756}; rather the sense is, that they were slain by the side of him, or in the, place where he was, or along with him^{f757}; see a like phrase in (^{<24810>}Jeremiah 38:10); now both the one and the other were cast into one pit: and this

[was] that which Asa the king had made for fear of Baasha king of Israel; which was either a ditch that was cast up against the wall that went round the city; or a large pit or well in the midst of it, to hold water in it; and this was made by King Asa, either when he built and fortified Mizpah, (^{<11522>}1 Kings 15:22); or, as the Targum here, when Baasha king of Israel besieged it; which he made that he might be provided for with water during the siege; or to hide himself in it; or stop the enemy from proceeding any further, should he enter:

[and] Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it with [them that were] slain; which shows it rather to be a pit or well within the city than a ditch about it; since it was filled with the slain, with those that were slain with Gedaliah, and those seventy other persons; and by which he made the well useless to the inhabitants hereafter.

Ver. 10. *Then Ishmael carried away captive all the residue of the people that [were] in Mizpah*, etc.] All that were not slain by him, that remained after the slaughter he had made, chiefly the unarmed people; they being men of war who fell by his sword:

[even] the king’s daughters; whether they were the daughters of Zedekiah, Jehoiakim, or Jehoiakim, says Kimchi, we know not; but it is most likely that they were the daughters of Zedekiah the last king, and who was just

taken and carried captive; and so Josephus^{f758} expressly calls them; these the king of Babylon regarded not, because they could neither fight, nor claim the kingdom; only the sons of the king, whom he slew before his eyes; though it may be these were not his daughters by his lawful wife, but by his concubines, and so were not properly of the royal family, and less regarded:

and all the people that remained in Mizpah, whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had committed to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam; that were not slain, or carried captive by the Chaldeans; but were left at Mizpah, under the care and government of Gedaliah:

and Ishmael the son of Nethaniah carried them away captive: so that those who escaped one captivity fell into another, and even by the hand of one of their own countrymen:

and departed to go over to the Ammonites; he went from Mizpah with these captives, in order to carry them to the king of Ammon, and make them his slaves; who had put him upon this enterprise out of hatred to the Jews, and to enrich himself with their spoils. Some render it, “to go over with the Ammonites”^{f759}; which they suppose the ten men to be that came along with him and the princes, to commit the barbarities they did.

Ver. 11. *But when Johanan the son of Kareah,* etc.] The same that is mentioned (²⁴¹⁸Jeremiah 40:8,13,15); and who had informed Gedaliah of Ishmael’s designs against him, but he would not believe him:

and all the captains of the forces that [were] with him; his brother Jonathan, Seraiah, the sons of Ephai, and Jezaniah, (²⁴¹⁸Jeremiah 40:8);

heard of all the evil that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done; in murdering Gedaliah, and those that were with him, destroying seventy other persons he had decoyed, and carrying captive the rest of the people at Mizpah; for though Ishmael kept all this a secret as much as he could, for fear of these forces, and that he might get off clear to Ammon; yet, by some means or another, these captains came to hear of it, who, probably, were not at a great distance from Mizpah.

Ver. 12. *Then they took all the men,* etc.] All the soldiers that were under their command; this they did at once, believing the report to be true, as they had reason to do; since they knew of Ishmael’s designs, and had given

notice and warning of them to Gedaliah, though he would not listen to them:

and went to fight with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah: resolving to give him battle, and to revenge the innocent blood he had shed, and rescue the captives out of his hands he was carrying to the Ammonites:

and found him by the great waters that [are] in Gibeon; taking this road to the country of Ammon, though it was not quite the direct road; either to avoid the forces of Johanan; or rather for the sake of the hid treasure at Shechem, or Shiloh, or Samaria, the ten men had promised him for their lives. These great waters were the same with the pool at Gibeon, where the servants of Ishbosheth and the servants of David met, and sat one on one side, and the other on the other; and where twelve young men on each side slew one another, and from thence called Helkathhazzurim, (~~1012~~ 2 Samuel 2:12-16); and the Targum calls it

“the pool of many waters, which were in Gibeon.”

Josephus^{f760} calls it a fountain in Hebron; which perhaps should be read Gibeon.

Ver. 13. *Now it came to pass, [that], when all the people which [were] with Ishmael,* etc.] That is, those which he had brought captives from Mizpah; not those that came with him thither:

saw Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that [were] with him, they were glad; looking upon them as their deliverers; hoping by their means to be preserved from being carried captives to the king of Ammon.

Ver. 14. *So all the people that Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah cast about,* etc.] Or turned about, and wheeled off from Ishmael, and deserted him at once; not at all regarding his authority, nor fearing his menaces or his power; being in sight of the captains and their forces, they were determined to join, and put themselves under their protection, knowing them to be their friends, and that they, came to deliver them:

and returned, and went unto Johanan the son of Kareah; turned their backs on Ishmael, and marched directly to Johanan, and the captains of the forces under them.

Ver. 15. *But Ishmael the son of Nethaniah escaped from Johanan with eight men*, etc.] Of the ten he brought with him, (²⁴⁰⁰Jeremiah 41:1); two of them being slain in this skirmish, or taken by Johanan, or they fled another way:

and went to the Ammonites; who had put him upon, or however encouraged and assisted him in, his wicked attempts; though he returned to them not according to their wishes, nor with that honour and glory he thought to have done.

Ver. 16. *Then took Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that [were] with him*, etc.] After Ishmael had made his escape, whom they did not think fit to pursue, and the people had committed themselves to their care and protection; and having brought them to Mizpah again, they took them from thence, as follows:

all the remnant of the people whom he had recovered from Ishmael the son of Nethaniah from Mizpah, after [that] he had slain Gedaliah the son of Ahikam: those whom he had rescued from Ishmael, and had returned to Mizpah, be persuaded to go with him from thence; who are more particularly described, as follows:

[even] mighty men of war, and the women, and the children, and the eunuchs, whom he had brought again from Gibeon; or “men, [even] men of war”¹⁷⁶¹; warlike men, soldiers; by which it appears that Ishmael must have more than ten men with him when he came to Mizpah, as well to do what he did there, as likewise to carry away such a number of captives, among which were mighty men, men of war, some of whom he had slain, besides women and children, to which are added eunuchs, not mentioned before, such as the king of Judah had in his court; (see ²⁴³⁷Jeremiah 38:7); but these were of no account with the Chaldeans; and therefore they left them behind with the poor of the land; perhaps Ebedmelech might be among them, whose safety and protection is promised, because of his kindness to Jeremiah, (²⁴⁹⁵Jeremiah 39:15-18). The Targum calls them princes: these were brought back by Johanan from Gibeon, where he met with Ishmael, to Mizpah; from whence they had been carried, and whom he took from thence again.

Ver. 17. *And they departed*, etc.] From Mizpah, Johanan, and the captains of the forces, and all the people rescued from Ishmael:

and dwelt in the habitation of Chimham, which is by Bethlehem: so called perhaps from Chimham, the son of Barzillai the Gileadite, to whom David or Solomon might give this place to dwell in, (^{<1087>}2 Samuel 19:37) (^{<1107>}1 Kings 2:7). The Targum is express for the former, calling it

“the habitation which David gave to Chimham, the son of Barzillai the Gileadite;”

and as it was near Bethlehem, it might be a part of the patrimony which belonged to David, as a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite; which he might give to Chimham, out of respect to his father Barzillai, who showed kindness to him when he was obliged to flee from Absalom; which, though it returned to David’s family in the year of jubilee, as all inheritances did, yet might continue to be called after the name of Chimham, in commemoration of the royal grant of it to him. Josephus¹⁷⁶² calls the name of the place Mandra. The reason why Johanan and those with him pitched on this place was, because it lay in the way

to go to enter into Egypt; where they had an inclination to go; having still a friendly regard to that people, and a confidence in them, as appears by some following chapters; and that they might be ready and at hand to flee thither, should the Chaldeans come against them, which they feared.

Ver. 18. *Because of the Chaldeans,* etc.] Which clause some think should have been joined to (^{<2417>}Jeremiah 41:17). This is a reason given why they departed from Mizpah, and dwelt at the habitation of Chimham in the way to Egypt; and which is explained in the next words:

for they were afraid of them; at least this they pretended, that the Chaldeans would come upon them, and cut them off, and revenge themselves on them:

because Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had slain Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon made governor in the land; no doubt it was provoking to them to hear that the viceroy or deputy governor of the king of Babylon was slain in this manner; and still more so, as there were many Chaldeans slain with him; but there was no reason to believe that the king of Babylon would carry his resentment against the Jews with Johanan, or take vengeance on them, who had so bravely appeared against the murderers, and had rescued the captives out of their hands: this seems only a pretence for their going into Egypt; for though they were promised safety

in Judah by the Prophet Jeremiah, yet they were still for going into Egypt, as the following chapters show.