

Gedaliah's Unbelief and Ishmael's Insurrection

Jeremiah 40-41

Jeremiah 40:1-12 - *"The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord after Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he had taken him bound in chains among all who were carried away captive from Jerusalem and Judah, who were carried away captive to Babylon. ² And the captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him: "The Lord your God has pronounced this doom on this place. ³ Now the Lord has brought it, and has done just as He said. Because you people have sinned against the Lord, and not obeyed His voice, therefore this thing has come upon you. ⁴ And now look; I free you this day from the chains that were on your hand. If it seems good to you to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will look after you. But if it seems wrong for you to come with me to Babylon, remain here. See, all the land is before you; wherever it seems good and convenient for you to go, go there."*

⁵ Now while Jeremiah had not yet gone back, Nebuzaradan said, "Go back to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon has made governor over the cities of Judah, and dwell with him among the people. Or go wherever it seems convenient for you to go." So the captain of the guard gave him rations and a gift and let him go. ⁶ Then Jeremiah went to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, to Mizpah, and dwelt with him among the people who were left in the land.

⁷ And when all the captains of the armies who were in the fields, they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam governor in the land, and had committed to him men, women, children, and the poorest of the land who had not been carried away captive to Babylon, ⁸ then they came to Gedaliah at Mizpah—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 a Maachathite, they and their men.⁹ And Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, took an oath before them and their men, saying, "Do not be afraid to serve the Chaldeans. Dwell in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you. ¹⁰ As for me, I will indeed dwell at Mizpah and serve the Chaldeans who come to us. But you, gather wine and summer fruit and oil, put them in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that you have taken."¹¹ Likewise, when all the Jews who were in Moab, among the Ammonites, in Edom, and who 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, ¹² then all the Jews returned out of all places where they had been driven, and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah, and gathered wine and summer fruit in abundance."

Background Notes for Jeremiah 40

Jeremiah 39 was an account of the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. King Zedekiah tried to escape, but he was captured, blinded by Nebuchadnezzar, and sent to Babylon as a captive. Most of the people who were not killed in the slaughter were carried away into exile to Babylon. Only the poorest people and refugees were left in the land under Gedaliah, the puppet governor whom Nebuchadnezzar put in charge.

In chapter 40, Nebuzaradan, the captain of the Babylonian guard, gave Jeremiah a choice: he could go to Babylon with the rest of the captives, or he could stay with the people in the devastated land under the governorship of Gedaliah (v4). Why were the Babylonians so nice to Jeremiah - even giving him rations and a gift (v5)? Do you remember that Jeremiah had told King Zedekiah and the people not to fight the Babylonians, but rather that surrender was the only means for saving their lives? Notice that the Babylonians knew about Jeremiah's prophecy of judgment on Jerusalem (v2-3).

Jeremiah came to Governor Gedaliah in Mizpah, which was the new government center. Included in the people gathered there were the poor people whom the Babylonians had left in the land, the remaining guerilla forces who now came out of hiding, and the Jewish refugees who had returned from the surrounding foreign nations where they had fled.

Doctrinal Point for Jeremiah 40

Leaders have a responsibility to review bad reports.

Jeremiah 40:13-16 - *"Moreover Johanan the son of Kareah and all the captains of the forces that were in the fields came to Gedaliah at Mizpah, ¹⁴ and said to him, "Do you certainly know that Baalis the king of the Ammonites has sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to murder you?" But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam did not believe them. ¹⁵ Then Johanan the son of Kareah spoke secretly to Gedaliah in Mizpah, saying, "Let me go, please, and I will kill Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no one will know it. Why should he murder you, so that all the Jews who are gathered to you would be scattered, and the remnant in Judah perish?"¹⁶ But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said to Johanan the son of Kareah, "You shall not do this thing, for you speak falsely concerning Ishmael."*

Governor Gedaliah seems to have been a good man, and things prospered in Judah under his short puppet governorship (v12). But Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, didn't like submitting to Gedaliah. With the backing of Baalis the king of the Ammonites, he plotted to kill Gedaliah. Ishmael had royal connections (chapter 41), so he was jealous of Gedaliah and angry that Gedaliah had been chosen as governor. Johanan, the military commander, knew of Ishmael's plot and informed Gedaliah. He even offered to take care of the problem, but Gedaliah did not believe his report and told General Johanan that he was lying (v13-16).

As the leader of God's people, Gedaliah should not have been so naïve and trusting of those who had not yet proved their loyalty. At the very least Gedaliah should have checked out the report given by his trusted military advisor. Leaders have a responsibility to review bad reports. Some bad reports are not true - but bad reports should at least be checked out.

I know of a Christian businessman whose business was almost stolen from him by an unscrupulous subordinate – because he didn't check out the bad reports about this dishonest and disloyal employee! This is also true in the local church. Church leaders are responsible to review bad reports about members in the fellowship. Bad reports may not be true, but they should be checked out. Leaders have a responsibility to review bad reports.

Jeremiah 41:1-9 - *“Now it came to pass in the seventh month that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the royal family and of the officers of the king, came with ten men to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, at Mizpah. And there they ate bread together in Mizpah. ² Then Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and the ten men who were with him, arose and struck Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, with the sword, and killed him whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land. ³ Ishmael also struck down all the Jews who were with him, that is, with Gedaliah at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans who were found there, the men of war.*

⁴ And it happened, on the second day after he had killed Gedaliah, when as yet no one knew it, ⁵ that certain men came from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria, eighty men with their beards shaved and their clothes torn, having cut themselves, with offerings and incense in their hand, to bring them to the house of the Lord. ⁶ Now Ishmael the son of Nethaniah went out from Mizpah to meet them, weeping as he went along; and it happened as he met them that he said to them, “Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam!” ⁷ So it was, when they came into the midst of the city, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah killed them and cast them into the midst of a pit, he and the men who were with him. ⁸ But ten men were found among them who said to Ishmael, “Do not kill us, for we have treasures of wheat, barley, oil, and honey in the field.” So he desisted and did not kill them among their brethren. ⁹ Now the pit into which Ishmael had cast all the dead bodies of the men whom he had slain, because of Gedaliah, was the same one Asa the king had made for fear of Baasha king of Israel. Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it with the slain.

“Then Ishmael carried away captive all the rest of the people who were in Mizpah, the king’s daughters and all the people who remained in Mizpah, whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had committed to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam. And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah carried them away captive and departed to go over to the Ammonites.

¹¹ But when Johanan the son of Kareah and all the captains of the forces that were with him heard of all the evil that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done, ¹² they took all the men and went to fight with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah; and they found him by the great pool that is in Gibeon. ¹³ So it was, when all the people who were with Ishmael saw Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces who were with him, that they were glad. ¹⁴ Then all the people whom Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah turned around and came back, and went to Johanan the son of Kareah. ¹⁵ But Ishmael the son of Nethaniah escaped from Johanan with eight men and went to the Ammonites.

¹⁶ Then Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that were with him, took from Mizpah all the rest of the people whom he had recovered from Ishmael the son of Nethaniah after he had murdered Gedaliah the son of Ahikam—the mighty men of war and the women and the children and the eunuchs, whom he had brought back from Gibeon. ¹⁷ And they departed and dwelt in the habitation of Chimham, which is near Bethlehem, as they went on their way to Egypt,¹⁸ because of the Chaldeans; for they were afraid of them, because Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had murdered Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon had made governor in the land.”

Background Notes for Jeremiah 41

Ishmael assassinated Governor Gedaliah, and he also killed many of Gedaliah’s officials. He also slaughtered a large group of pilgrims coming from the north to offer sacrifices in Jerusalem, where the Temple had been before it was

destroyed. Ishmael posed as if he was mourning the fall of Jerusalem and then killed all of the pilgrims except ten men who bargained for their lives in exchange for food supplies. What an evil man!

Doctrinal Point for Jeremiah 41

Leaders have a responsibility to remove bad persons.

After Ishmael did his evil work, he tried to make his way with his captives over to the country of Ammon for protection from the Babylonians, who were sure to avenge the assassination of Gedaliah, Nebuchadnezzar's handpicked governor. General Johanan, the military leader, did the right thing. He pursued Ishmael and did what he could to remove this evil man from the scene.

Leaders must do the same today. Evil people must be removed from their places of power and influence. Church leaders must remove bad people from church fellowship, whether they are heretics or immoral people. Many sad examples could be given here, but suffice it to say that church leaders have a responsibility to remove bad persons.

Practical Application

Your present good actions are not responsible for the future sins of others.

"Now the pit into which Ishmael had cast all the dead bodies of the men whom he had slain, because of Gedaliah, was the same one Asa the king had made for fear of Baasha king of Israel. Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it with the slain" (Jeremiah 41:9). Good King Asa constructed this cistern as a good deed when he was trying to defend Judah from the attacks of wicked King Baasha of the northern kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 15 & 2 Chronicles 16). In Jeremiah 41, wicked Ishmael used this same cistern as part of his evil plans. Does this make good King Asa partly responsible for Ishmael's sinful use of this cistern? No, of course not. Ishmael bore full responsibility for his evil deeds.

It is true we should always try to think through how our present actions could possibly be used for evil purposes in the future. But let's face it - just about anything we do or make in the present could be twisted and used for evil in the future - including church buildings and ministries.

So don't become paralyzed, and thus fail to take action in the present. You and your present good actions are not responsible for the future sins of others.