

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

JEREMIAH 38-41

Heaven has its heroes, but seldom are they recognized in this life. The people God calls *champs* this world calls *chumps!* If you want to search for the people God considers great, don't look in the palaces and penthouses, but among the mocked and maligned.

AW Pink once penned, “It is a strong proof of human depravity that man's curse and Christ's blessing meet on the same person.” Jeremiah was such an example.

The prophet was mighty for God, yet he was unpopular with the Jews of his day. Even in the final throes of the nation's judgment - when it'd become apparent that all he'd said was true - the princes still tried to silence his voice by sealing him in a prison cell.

Chapter 38 tells us, “Now Shephatiah the son of Mattan, Gedaliah the son of Pashhur, Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur the son of Malchiah heard the words that Jeremiah had spoken to all the people, saying...” These were the men who made up King Zedekiah's cabinet. They were of a pro-Egyptian party.

Though Jeremiah had warned the Jews that Babylon would overthrow Jerusalem, there were people in the King's court who wanted to solicit the help of Egypt in defending the nation against the Babylonian threat.

And here was Jeremiah's warning, “Thus says the Lord: ‘He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and

by pestilence; but he who goes over to the Chaldeans shall live; his life shall be as a prize to him, and he shall live.”

Jeremiah was a patriot. He was loyal to Judah, but God was clearly on the side of the Babylonians or *Chaldeans*. They were God’s tool of judgment. The only hope of survival was to defect.

Jeremiah was saying that *surrender to Babylon* and *submitting to the will of God* were one in the same.

If Jeremiah had only been concerned for himself he would’ve followed his own advice and abandoned the city, yet he stayed. He was a captain willing to go down with the ship. He was a voice of warning until the end.

He says in verse 3, “Thus says the Lord: ‘This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon’s army, which shall take it.’” Therefore the princes said to the king, “Please, let this man be put to death, for thus he weakens the hands of the men of war who remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man does not seek the welfare of this people, but their harm.” The pro-Egyptian princes didn’t like that Jeremiah was demoralizing the troops who were fighting Babylonians. They want to shut-up Jeremiah.

“Then Zedekiah the king said, “Look, he is in your hand. For the king can do nothing against you.”

Recall Zedekiah was the king who sought Jeremiah’s help in Chapter 37. He’d consulted with him in private, but he lacks the guts to stand up for him in public.

King Zedekiah was two-faced. He respected the Prophet to an extent, but feared losing political support.

We also need to be careful that we're not seeking God privately, while distancing ourselves publicly.

Verse 6, “So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the king’s son, which was in the court of the prison, and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire. So Jeremiah sank in the mire.” They arrest Jeremiah and drop him into a dungeon. This was probably an old cistern - a water reservoir full of sludge and slime. The build-up of mud had made it unusable.

Imagine, this man of God flailing away, trying to stay afloat in deep, thick, crawling, suffocating sludge.

We once had a fellow who attended our church who owned a company that cleaned out water towers, and cooling tanks. One day, he described for me what we'd expect Jeremiah to find at the bottom of a cistern...

The slime would be puffy - very fine and light - which made it impossible to wipe off. There was no way for Jeremiah to get the mess out of his hair and eyes. It engulfed him. It would've created a claustrophobic feeling. The mire also stunk, and gave off toxic gases that would disorientate him. My friend said Jeremiah's ordeal would be like you or I diving into a septic tank.

And cold... long before he starved to death he'd died of hypothermia. The temperature in a subterranean cave is 57 degrees. You die in water 75 degrees. Jeremiah's wrinkled

body would be shaking and numb, buried in the cold slime. *And he's in his 60s at the time.*

What a way to spend your retirement years! Earlier in 18:18 Jeremiah's enemies had plotted, "Come and let us attack him with the tongue..." They tried a mud-slinging campaign to discredit the prophet. Here they go from *slinging mud* to now *sinking him in the mud*.

The first time Jeremiah was opposed by wicked men was in Chapter 11 and he reacted with **impatience**. He cried out to God to judge his enemies and avenge him.

Instead God told him to brace himself (12:5), "If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses?" Jeremiah, don't think it's tough now, it's going to get a lot tougher.

Jeremiah needed to cultivate some **endurance**.

The second time the Prophet was opposed he grew **indignant**. He resented the message God had given him. He accused God of being unfaithful. Jeremiah copped an attitude, and God responded by pointing out that it was Jeremiah who'd been unfaithful, not God.

Jeremiah had forsaken God, even while trying to serve Him. God says 15:19, "If you return, then I will bring you back." He needs an attitude of **repentance**.

And the third time Jeremiah runs into a barrier he tries to retire. He's wants to quit. He's now **indifferent**.

Yet God revives his heart. Jeremiah rediscovers God's Word, and it becomes a fire in his bones. God refills His tank. Jeremiah renews His **dependance**.

These were all steps in Jeremiah's spiritual growth. God was instilling in his prophet *endurance*, an attitude of *repentance*, and a greater *dependance* on Him.

But on this occasion there's no record of Jeremiah complaining at all! He takes the persecution in stride.

Even though his body was *sinking in the mire*, his spirit was *soaring in the heavens*. He had learned what Paul taught Timothy in 3:12, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." And as a result of his faithfulness God sends him some help!

Verse 7, "Now Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs, who was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon." The word "Ebed-Melech" means "Servant of the king." It was not a name, but a title. This man was the king's attache'.

In the ancient orient when a man was employed in the king's court, he was neutered or made a eunuch. This prevented any hanky-panky between the king's servants and the royal princesses. This man was a eunuch from Ethiopia. He probably had black skin.

Do you recall another Ethiopian eunuch in Scripture?

In Acts 8, the Apostle Philip is sent from Samaria to Gaza to find an Ethiopian eunuch who's seeking God. He leads him to Christ and sees that he's baptized.

We're told that this Ethiopian eunuch is sent to help Jeremiah. "When the king was sitting at the Gate of Benjamin, Ebed-Melech went out of the king's house and spoke to the king, saying: "My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon, and he is likely to die from hunger in the place where he is. For there is no more bread in the city." Then the king commanded Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, saying, "Take from here thirty men with you, and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon before he dies." The king still had compassion on Jeremiah.

These thirty men were needed, *not to lift Jeremiah*.

He was so emaciated that could've been done by a couple of men. But the king sends thirty men with Ebed-Melech in case he runs into any opposition.

"So Ebed-Melech took the men with him and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took from there old clothes and old rags, and let them down by ropes into the dungeon to Jeremiah." Think of what's happening here. "Ebed-Melech" is the "servant of the king." He has access to the throne. He cares for Jeremiah. *And I love how this man helps the Prophet...*

He's compassionate! He gathers soft rags and old clothes to place under Jeremiah's arms so the ropes don't cut into his tenderized flesh. He and the thirty men with him, lift Jeremiah out of the miry pit in the most gentle, and loving, and tender way possible.

I believe this is a picture of God's mercies toward us. At times we get stuck in the muck. In our attempts to serve the Lord we get mired down and need a lift.

And when we do, God sends Ebed-Melech - the Holy Spirit, who is also *a servant of the king*. He is the comforter Jesus promised us. Whenever the Holy Spirit is seen typologically in the Scriptures it's always as *an unnamed servant* - Genesis 23, Ruth 2, likewise here.

And "[The Servant of the King](#)" knows how to gently and compassionately lift His servants out of the pit!

And often, our Ebed-Melech also uses the help of human hands. His thirty men represent the Church!

It's lonely in the mire. You become disoriented from the toxic nature of your disappointments. *Like Elijah* you think you're all alone. *Like Moses* your arms grow weary and start to droop. We need other Christians.

We forget there's a servant of the king and thirty men nearby who know our need and want to lift us out.

Tonight, if you need help, reach out to a brother or sister and ask for prayer. Realize, *God's Spirit* likes to use *God's people* to pull a servant out of a miry place.

Verse 12, "[Then Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah, "Please put these old clothes and rags under your armpits, under the ropes." And Jeremiah did so. So they pulled Jeremiah up with ropes and lifted him out of the dungeon. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.](#)" Many Bible expositors see in Jeremiah a type of Christ. Jesus

descended into hell, or the miry pit, then was raised to life three days later.

Jesus, God's Prophet, was rescued by the decree of God the King, and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

“Then Zedekiah the king sent and had Jeremiah the prophet brought to him at the third entrance of the house of the Lord. And the king said to Jeremiah, “I will ask you something. Hide nothing from me.” Again, Zedekiah is seeking Jeremiah for guidance from God.

At first, you might think this is commendable. Until you peel back the king's motivation. He goes back to Jeremiah, not because he wants to obey, but he hopes God has changed his mind - come around to his way of thinking. Zedekiah wants God to accommodate him.

I hope the king wasn't holding his breath...

Yet I'm afraid that's what folks do today. Erroneously, they think God is going to change the rules - *or at least make an exception for them*. That's not how it works.

Verse 15, “Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “If I declare it to you, will you not surely put me to death? And if I give you advice, you will not listen to me.” Jeremiah fears that if he speaks the truth, the King will both *kill him*, and then *ignore him*... *And what good will that do?*

“So Zedekiah the king swore secretly to Jeremiah, saying, “As the Lord lives, who made our very souls, I will not put you to death, nor will I give you into the hand of these men who seek your life.” And notice Zedekiah's concern for secrecy. He “*swore secretly*.” I am sure that didn't provide Jeremiah much

confidence that the king would keep his word. *He was gutless.*

“Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “Thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘If you surely surrender to the king of Babylon’s princes, then your soul shall live; this city shall not be burned with fire, and you and your house shall live. But if you do not surrender to the king of Babylon’s princes, then this city shall be given into the hand of the Chaldeans; they shall burn it with fire, and you shall not escape from their hand.’” Here was God’s simple word to King Zedekiah - *surrender and live or resist and die.*

And Zedekiah the king said to Jeremiah, “I am afraid of the Jews who have defected to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they abuse me.”

This was the king’s problem, he feared those who’d defected and he also feared those who were calling on him to resist! *He feared men more than he feared God!*

“But Jeremiah said, “They shall not deliver you. Please, obey the voice of the Lord which I speak to you. So it shall be well with you, and your soul shall live.” Jeremiah pleads with the king to trust God!

Verse 21, “But if you refuse to surrender, this is the word that the Lord has shown me: ‘Now behold, all the women who are left in the king of Judah’s house shall be surrendered to the king of Babylon’s princes, and those women shall say: “Your close friends have set upon you and prevailed against you; your feet have sunk in the mire, and they have turned away again.”’

‘So they shall surrender all your wives and children to the Chaldeans. You shall not escape from their hand, but shall be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon. And you shall cause this city to be burned with fire.’” The king’s rebellion will be the cause of it...

“Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, “Let no one know of these words, and you shall not die. But if the princes hear that I have talked with you, and they come to you and say to you, ‘Declare to us now what you have said to the king, and also what the king said to you; do not hide it from us, and we will not put you to death,’ then you shall say to them, ‘I presented my request before the king, that he would not make me return to Jonathan’s house to die there.’” Zedekiah is so afraid of the factions in his own government. All he’s concerned about is placating the powers that be. He tells Jeremiah to be silent about their conversations.

“Then all the princes came to Jeremiah and asked him. And he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded. So they stopped speaking with him, for the conversation had not been heard.”

Jeremiah honored the king’s request for secrecy.

But eventually, he leaked the conversations. We’re reading about them now. Jeremiah wants everyone to know it’s rebellion to God that destroyed Jerusalem.

The chapter closes, “Now Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison until the day that Jerusalem was taken. And he was there when Jerusalem was taken.”

In Chapter 39 Jeremiah's warnings finally become a reality, "In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusalem, and besieged it.

In the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, on the ninth day of the month, the city was penetrated."

For forty years the Prophet pleaded with the Jews that judgment was on the horizon. Yet they refused to believe. They kept thinking the Egyptians would ride to their rescue. Obviously, that never happened...

And now marauding Babylonian warriors storming the streets of Jerusalem. Angry, bloodthirsty troops are going house to house - killing, and raping, and looting. Their worst nightmares have now become their reality.

The siege lasted 18 months. It began in the 9th year of Zedekiah, in the 10th month. The walls were finally breeched in the 11th year, 4th month, and 9th day.

Notice the exact date is given! On our calendar the infamous day is July 18, 586 BC. The fall of Jerusalem began on that date. It's such an important event in Scripture, it's recorded four times - 2 Kings 25, 2 Chronicles 36, Jeremiah 52, and of course here.

"Then all the princes of the king of Babylon came in and sat in the Middle Gate: Nergal-Sharezer, Samgar-Nebo, Sarsechim, Rabsaris, Nergal-Sarezer, Rabmag, with the rest of the princes of the king of Babylon."

Some of these names are actually titles.

“*Rabmag*” is “chief of the wise men.” “*Rab*” means “chief” and “*mag*” which is short for “magi or wise men.”

But the point here is that the Babylonians are no longer outside the walls, but they’re sitting in the Middle Gate. They have taken possession of the city.

“So it was, when Zedekiah the king of Judah and all the men of war saw them, that they fled and went out of the city by night, by way of the king’s garden, by the gate between the two walls. And he went out by way of the plain.” Zedekiah tried a night-time escape. He fled through an underground passageway east toward the Jordan. It might’ve been Hezekiah’s tunnel! A waterway many of us have navigated on our trips to Jerusalem.

At the time, Ezekiel was living in Babylon, but he was given a glimpse of the king’s escape. In Ezekiel 12:12 he writes, “The prince... shall bear his belongings on his shoulder at twilight and go out... I will also spread My net over him, and he shall be caught in My snare.”

Which is exactly what happened. Verse 5, “But the Chaldean army pursued them and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. And when they had captured him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, to Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he pronounced judgment on him.” Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and the general, was behind enemy lines.

His headquarters was in Riblah, north of Damascus. That’s where they brought Zedekiah and his princes.

“Then the king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes in Riblah; the king of Babylon also killed all the nobles of Judah. Moreover he put out Zedekiah’s eyes, and bound him with bronze fetters to carry him off to Babylon.” Eleven years earlier it was Nebuchadnezzar who had installed Zedekiah as king.

Yet instead Zedekiah had thanked him by revolting.

For 20 years the kings of Judah had been a thorn in Nebuchadnezzar’s side. Zedekiah was the final straw.

To punish Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar kills the king’s sons before his very own eyes - then plucks out those eyes with a hot poker. So that the last lingering vision in the mind of Zedekiah was the execution of his sons.

And this unravels two seemingly contradictory prophecies... In Jeremiah 34:2 Zedekiah was warned that he would see Nebuchadnezzar eye to eye, face to face. Whereas in Ezekiel 12:13 God says of Zedekiah, “I will bring him to Babylon... yet he shall not see it.”

Zedekiah saw Nebuchadnezzar at his headquarters in Riblah, but was blind when he arrived in Babylon.

Verse 8, “And the Chaldeans burned the king’s house (the royal palace) and the houses of the people with fire, and broke down the walls of Jerusalem.

Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive to Babylon the remnant of the people who remained in the city and those who defected to him, with the rest of the people who remained.

But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left in the land of Judah the poor people, who had nothing, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time.

Now Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon gave charge concerning Jeremiah to Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, saying, "Take him and look after him, and do him no harm; but do to him just as he says to you."

It's fascinating that Nebuchadnezzar knew of Jeremiah. I'm sure Daniel had given him information, as well as the spies who'd heard him preach "defect."

Perhaps Daniel showed the king Jeremiah's writings where he called Nebuchadnezzar "servant of Yahweh."

However it happened, Nebuchadnezzar recognized Jeremiah as an ally. In reality, Jeremiah wasn't a friend to Babylon, or to anyone other than God. In chapters 50-51 he utters scorching judgments against Babylon.

Jeremiah was on no one's side but God's! It is though encouraging to see Jeremiah finally rewarded with some mercy for his years of faithfulness to God.

"So Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard sent Nebushasban, Rabsaris, Nergal-Sharezer, Rabmag, and all the king of Babylon's chief officers; then they sent someone to take Jeremiah from the court of the prison, and committed him to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, that he should take him home. So he dwelt among the people." After a lifetime of sacrificial service to God, Jeremiah gets to go home.

“Meanwhile the word of the Lord had come to Jeremiah while he was shut up in the court of the prison, saying, “Go and speak to Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: “Behold, I will bring My words upon this city for adversity and not for good, and they shall be performed in that day before you. But I will deliver you in that day,” says the Lord, “and you shall not be given into the hand of the men of whom you are afraid. For I will surely deliver you, and you shall not fall by the sword; but your life shall be as a prize to you, because you have put your trust in Me,” says the Lord.” Ebed-Melech was also rewarded for his faithfulness to God!

Chapter 40, “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.” In Chapter 39 after he was rescued from the king’s prison, Jeremiah was set free and taken home, so *why is he now bound in chains?*

He’s chained with the rest of the Jews in Ramah.

There’s an emotional extra-biblical story told by the Jewish rabbis. When Jeremiah saw his fellow Jews shackled, he voluntarily chained himself to them to show love for them. He’d been bound to the Jews spiritually for forty years. He’d suffered for them, and would continue to do so as they were taken into exile.

This is the kind of love that voluntarily bound Jesus to the cross. He suffered *with us* and ultimately *for us!*

Verse 2, “And the captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him: “The Lord your God has pronounced this doom on this place. 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.”

Out of the mouth of a pagan Babylonian Jeremiah is reminded of the truth. It’s possible that due to the influence of Daniel and Ezekiel, the Babylonians had a better grasp of God’s truth that the Jews in Jerusalem.

The captain goes on to say, “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. 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.” This is an incredible kindness. In essence, the Babylonians are offering to set Jeremiah up for life. He can move to Babylon, or stay in Judah. He can take any parcel he wants. All options are open!

But notice what he does, “Then Jeremiah went to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, to Mizpah, and dwelt with him among the people who were left in the land.” He chooses to stay with his people - even the poorest.

Jeremiah could've hob-knobbed with the Babylonian jet-set - moved into a villa on the Euphrates - and entertained important people for the rest of his life. Instead, he identified with the leftovers and lowest.

Just as it was said of Moses, “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt...”

This was Jeremiah's heart. He cared more for *loyalty* than *luxury* - for *God's people* than for *popular people*.

Verse 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, 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.” These men were a paramilitary group who'd been hiding while the city was besieged. They may've waged a guerrilla war.

Now they come out of hiding and join Gedaliah.

Judah is now a Babylonian province and the king set up a governor - a Jew named "Gedaliah" and made his capitol the city of Mizpah, 8 miles north of Jerusalem.

"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. 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." 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, 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." Jews who had fled Judah as refugees from the Babylonian invasion now return.

This means that three groups now occupy the land...

First the poor. **Second**, the guerrilla fighters. And **third**, the refugees who'd fled and are now returning.

Verse 13, "Moreover Johanan the son of Kareah and all the captains of the forces that were in the fields came to Gedaliah at Mizpah, 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.

The Ammonites and Israelites had a long history of hostility. King Baalis didn't want the Jews to refortify and reassemble, so he hires a hit-man named Ishmael to assassinate Gedaliah... *or so says Johanan...*

“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?” Johanan knew that if Gedaliah was assassinated, Nebuchadnezzar would be fed up with the rebellion in the region, and crush the Jews once and for all, leaving the land to foreigners.

“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.” Gedaliah seems to have been a *good man*, but he was a *gullible man!*

Chapter 41 tells us, **“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.”** They feigned fellowship. Let's eat a meal. Eating together spoke of oneness and loyalty and trust.

Yet notice what is said here about Ishmael? He was ***“of the royal family.”*** This Ishmael was an heir to the throne of David.

He had a right to the throne. Gedaliah was a just a governor appointed by a pagan no less.

Can you imagine a jealousy brewing in his heart?

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. 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. And it happened, on the second day after he had killed Gedaliah, when as yet no one knew it... The news cycle was a bit slower in those days.

“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.” These Samaritans wanted to visit the site of the former Temple in Jerusalem. They wanted to mourn its destruction. The fall of the Temple occurred on the 9th day of the month of Ab in 586 BC.

The 9th of Ab is still a day of mourning for the Jews.

It's interesting, just months after the Temple's destruction, its ruins were considered sacred. This is the case today. In 70 AD the Romans demolished a rebuilt Temple. All that's left is a single retaining wall.

Yet the Western Wall attracts pilgrims from all over the planet. People come to pray at the Wailing Wall. This was the desire of these Shechemites from Shiloh.

“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!” 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.” These men were brutal, ruthless! Ishmael’s crew kill the men from Shechem to cover up the assassination of Gedaliah.

“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.”

It is customary on a trip like this one, to bring supplies for the return trip home. Ten of the men from Shechem use the groceries to barter for their lives.

Verse 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.” It could be that the Prophet Jeremiah was among these captives taken to Ammon.

“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, 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. 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.” Jeremiah and the other Jews rejoice! Deliverance has come by the hand of Johanan.

Johanan had earlier warned Gedaliah of Ishmael's plan. Gedaliah didn't believe him. It cost him his life.

Gedaliah had been gullible! Not everyone has good intentions. One biblical truth we know is that every human is born a sinner, and is capable of deception.

In Matthew 10:16 Jesus says, “Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” A snake would seem to be at a horrible disadvantage. It crawls on its belly. But it lays low. It has street-smarts. It knows how to survive. And a dove is harmless. It avoids unnecessary conflict.

Gedaliah's lack of discernment became his death sentence. Here Johanan tries to clean up the damage.

“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.

But Ishmael the son of Nethaniah escaped from Johanan with eight men and went to the Ammonites.

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. And they departed and dwelt in the habitation of Chimham, which is near Bethlehem, as they went on their way to Egypt, 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.” And notice the phrase, “*on their way to Egypt.*” Because the Jews fear a Babylonian reprisal their plan is to flee to Egypt.

And here’s the irony of ironies... 860 years earlier God had delivered them from Egypt, now the Jews are back where they started... *Here’s the lesson for us...*

Despite all God has done in us, if we don’t continue in our faith, we’ll end up back in the bondage we escaped. **Let’s not just have faith, but continue in faith!**