

Jeremiah

Chapter 40

Jeremiah Remains in Judah

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD after Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he took him bound in chains along with all the captives of Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon. 2 The captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him, “The LORD your God pronounced this disaster against this place. 3 The LORD has brought it about, and has done as he said. Because you sinned against the LORD and did not obey his voice, this thing has come upon you. 4 Now, behold, I release you today from the chains on your hands. If it seems good to you to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will look after you well, but if it seems wrong to you to come with me to Babylon, do not come. See, the whole land is before you; go wherever you think it good and right to go. 5 If you remain, then return to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon appointed governor of the cities of Judah, and dwell with him among the people. Or go wherever you think it right to go.” So the captain of the guard gave him an allowance of food and a present, and let him go. 6 Then Jeremiah went to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, at Mizpah, and lived with him among the people who were left in the land. 7 When all the captains of the forces in the open country and their men heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam governor in the land and had committed to him men, women, and children, those of the poorest of the land who had not been taken into exile to Babylon, 8 they went to Gedaliah at Mizpah—Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, Johanan the son of Kareah, Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, Jezaniah the son of the Maacathite, they and their men. 9 Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, swore to 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 dwell at Mizpah, to represent you before the Chaldeans who will come to us. But as for you, gather wine and summer fruits and oil, and store them in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that you have taken.” 11 Likewise, when all the Judeans who were in Moab and among the Ammonites and in Edom and in other lands heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant in Judah and had appointed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, as governor over them, 12 then all the Judeans returned from all the places to which they had been driven and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah. And they gathered wine and summer fruits in great abundance. 13 Now Johanan the son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces in the open country came to Gedaliah at Mizpah 14 and said to him, “Do you know that Baalis the king of the Ammonites has sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to take your life?” But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam would not believe them. 15 Then Johanan the son of Kareah spoke secretly to Gedaliah at Mizpah, “Please let me go and strike down Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no one will know it. Why should he take your life, so that all the Judeans who are gathered about you would be scattered, and the remnant of Judah would perish?” 16 But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said to Johanan the son of Kareah, “You shall not do this thing, for you are speaking falsely of Ishmael.”

40:1–44:30† A lively narrative of the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem. Chronologically, the chapters are the latest in the book (although 52:31–34 is later, it is part of the appendix). (CSB)

40:1 *The word came.* A heading introducing the prophecies of Jeremiah after the exile, just as “The word ... came” (1:2) introduces his prophecies from the time of his call up to the exile (see 1:3). (CSB)

This is the heading or superscription of the entire next section of Jeremiah's book of prophecies, of which chapters 40 and 41 are the historical introduction. (Kretzmann)

Nebuzaradan ... released him. The command to release Jeremiah seems to have been given while he was still in the court of the prison in Jerusalem, but He was not actually set at liberty until the company of captives reached the city of Ramah. (Kretzmann)

Ramah. Located about five miles north of Jerusalem, it was one of the towns through which Jerusalem's people passed on their way to exile in Babylonia (see 40:1; cf. Isa 10:29; Hos 5:8). (CSB)

chains. Manacles that were fastened to the wrists (see v. 4; see also Job 36:8; Isa 45:14). (CSB)

40:2–3 Nebuzaradan doubtless knew the basic content of Jeremiah's prophetic message against Jerusalem, and he here repeats it to the prophet in summary fashion. (CSB)

The Chaldean general expressed it as his conviction that the evil which had come upon the Jews was the result of their disobeying the command of the Lord. (Kretzmann)

40:2 *your God.* Cf 22:8–9; Ezr 1:2–4; 6:1–12 for similar words by a heathen acknowledging the power of Israel's God. (TLSB)

40:4 *I release you.* Jeremiah's prophecies of Jerusalem's defeat were interpreted as loyalty to Babylon. (TLSB)

I will look after you. Nebuzaradan promises to carry out Nebuchadnezzar's wishes concerning Jeremiah (see 39:12). (CSB)

The whole land is before you. Cf. Abram's offer to Lot in Ge 13:9. (CSB)

That is, if it did not please Jeremiah for any reason whatever, **forbear.** The matter was entirely for the prophet to decide, and no one would interfere with his choice. (Kretzmann)

40:5 *Gedaliah son of Ahikam. Ahikam son of Shaphan.* One of King Josiah's officials (see 2Ki 22:12, 14), along with an Achor who may have been the father of the Elnathan in v. 22. (CSB)

Ahikam was also the father of Gedaliah, who would become governor of Judah after Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 B.C. (see 40:5) and who also befriended Jeremiah (see 39:14). (CSB)

allowance of food. The Hebrew for this word is translated "allowance" in 52:34. (CSB)

The Babylonians wanted to develop cooperative relationships with the people they conquered. These grants made it possible for Jeremiah to stay and survive in the land. (TLSB)

40:6 *lived with him* – Jeremiah showed himself a true patriot in choosing to remain in his own country in the midst of adverse conditions and in spite of the ingratitude of the Jews, rather than to enjoy honors and pleasures at a heathen court. Christian patriotism is properly patterned after this behavior of the prophet. (Kretzmann)

Jeremiah stayed in Mizpah as a citizen of this new Babylonian province. (TLSB)

40:8 *Johanan*. A captain in the army of Judah. Cf 41:11–16. Johanan would later break a vow (43:2–6) and lose favor with the Lord and Jeremiah. (TLSB)

40:10 *gather wine and summer fruits and oil*. Nebuzaradan (see 39:9) had arrived in Jerusalem in August of 586 B.C. Grapes, figs and olives are harvested in Palestine during August and September. (CSB)

store them in your vessels – He skillfully put it so as if they were to enjoy the fruits of the land for themselves alone, in order to reduce the resentful attitude of the Jews, lest the idea of tribute-money make them rebellious at once. (Kretzmann)

cities that you have taken – Since Jerusalem was razed, people had to move into smaller towns that were not destroyed. (TLSB)

40:11 *Judeans* – Refugees of the war. (TLSB)

remnant – Residents of Judah, not the prophesied remnant that would return. (TLSB)

40:12 *gathered...abundance* – The harvest being all the more plentiful since there were comparatively few people left in the land. (Kretzmann)

40:13 *leaders of the forces...open country* – Judean troops who had been ignored by the Babylonians. (TLSB)

40:14 *Baalis*. Either (1) “King Ba’lay,” as his name is written on an early sixth-century B.C. bottle discovered in Jordan, or (2) Ba’al-Yasha’, an Ammonite king whose name appears on a stamp seal found at Tell el-‘Umeiri in Jordan in 1984. (CSB)

King of Ammon, which lay east of the Jordan River, hoped to gain some advantage from the disorder following an overthrow of Judah. Archaeologists have discovered an Ammonite seal with the name Ba’alyasha, which may be the same ruler mentioned here. (TLSB)

He may have harbored plans to put himself into possession of the entire country by one bold stroke. (Kretzmann)

Ammonites. Ammon was among the nations that earlier had been allies against Babylonia. (CSB)

40:15 *secretly*. This was a most emphatic assurance that he would safeguard the prophet's life. (Kretzmann)

Ishmael. The jealous and ambitious rival, who envied Gedaliah his position of governor, would thus have been removed without tumult. (Kretzmann)

remnant. The confusion which was bound to follow the removal of Gedaliah was sure to result in great harm to the country, possibly to the undoing of all the labor bestowed upon its restoration by Gedaliah. (Kretzmann)

40:16 *speaking falsely*. Lit. “a lie.” Gedaliah’s naive faith in Ishmael’s integrity would cost him his life. (CSB)

This does not mean that he accused Johanan of lying, but that he declared the rumor concerning his intentions to be false. It is one of the mysteries of providence that the Lord sometimes permits the righteous, in spite of warning, to rush to their destruction. (Kretzmann)

Ch 40 Gedaliah, appointed governor by the occupying Babylonians, naively ignores warnings of an assassination plot against him. Gedaliah trusts in his own wisdom and strength, setting the stage for his death and disastrous results for the survivors of Jerusalem. However, the Lord rescues Jeremiah and preserves a faithful remnant of the people in the land. Even in the worst of times, God is at work for the salvation of souls. • Father, always keep the cross of Christ before us, showing us the depth of Your love and reminding us of the cost of discipleship. Amen. (TLSB)