

# Jeremiah

## Chapter 41

### *Gedaliah Murdered*

**In the seventh month, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, son of Elishama, of the royal family, one of the chief officers of the king, came with ten men to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, at Mizpah. As they ate bread together there at Mizpah, 2 Ishmael the son of Nethaniah and the ten men with him rose up and struck down Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, with the sword, and killed him, whom the king of Babylon had appointed governor in the land. 3 Ishmael also struck down all the Judeans who were with Gedaliah at Mizpah, and the Chaldean soldiers who happened to be there. 4 On the day after the murder of Gedaliah, before anyone knew of it, 5 eighty men arrived from Shechem and Shiloh and Samaria, with their beards shaved and their clothes torn, and their bodies gashed, bringing grain offerings and incense to present at the temple of the LORD. 6 And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah came out from Mizpah to meet them, weeping as he came. As he met them, he said to them, “Come in to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam.” 7 When they came into the city, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah and the men with him slaughtered them and cast them into a cistern. 8 But there were ten men among them who said to Ishmael, “Do not put us to death, for we have stores of wheat, barley, oil, and honey hidden in the fields.” So he refrained and did not put them to death with their companions. 9 Now the cistern into which Ishmael had thrown all the bodies of the men whom he had struck down along with Gedaliah was the large cistern that King Asa had made for defense against Baasha king of Israel; Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it with the slain. 10 Then Ishmael took captive all the rest of the people who were in Mizpah, the king's daughters and all the people who were left at Mizpah, whom Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, had committed to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam. Ishmael the son of Nethaniah took them captive and set out to cross over to the Ammonites. 11 But when Johanan the son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces with him heard of all the evil that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done, 12 they took all their men and went to fight against Ishmael the son of Nethaniah. They came upon him at the great pool that is in Gibeon. 13 And when all the people who were with Ishmael saw Johanan the son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces with him, they rejoiced. 14 So 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 leaders of the forces with him took from Mizpah all the rest of the people whom he had recovered from Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, after he had struck down Gedaliah the son of Ahikam—soldiers, women, children, and eunuchs, whom Johanan brought back from Gibeon. 17 And they went and stayed at Geruth Chimham near Bethlehem, intending to go to Egypt 18 because of the Chaldeans. For they were afraid of them, because Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had struck down Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land.**

**41:1 seventh month** – If this incident took place in the year of Jerusalem's fall (587 BC; cf 39:2), Gedaliah was governor in Mizpath for only three months. Perhaps the punitive measures Nebuchadnezzar took four years later (52:30) were in retaliation for Gedaliah's murder. (TLSB)

*one of the chief officers.* Ishmael's loyalty to Zedekiah might explain his assassination of Gedaliah, whom he considered to be a Babylonian puppet ruler. (CSB)

Likely jealous of Gedaliah, who was not a descendant of David. However, he may have acted out of hatred toward a Babylonian governor ruling over Israel or in support of Ammonite aggression. (TLSB)

*they ate bread together.* Ancient custom with respect to hospitality probably made Gedaliah assume that his guests would not harm him, much less kill him (see note on Jdg 4:21). (CSB)

**41:2** *whom the king of Babylon had appointed* – The men with Ishmael were all of them guilty of his murder, but the heaviest burden of guilt rested upon him who had planned the foul deed. (Kretzmann)

**41:3** *struck down* – Potential witnesses and successors were likewise killed. (TLSB)

**41:5** *with their shaved and their clothes torn.* Signs of mourning (see 16:6 and note; see also note on Ezr 9:3), probably over the destruction of Jerusalem. (CSB)

Mourning rites, by which the pilgrims expressed grief over the destruction of Jerusalem. God forbade such actions, so this behavior shows how the Israelites had adopted Canaanite practices. Cf 1Ki 18:28. (TLSB)

Such incisions into the skin being forbidden to the children of Israel, as a heathen custom. Lev. 19, 27, 28; Deut. 14, 1. (Kretzmann)

This behavior shows how the Israelites had adopted Canaanite practices. (TLSB)

*came.* In the “seventh month” (v. 1) to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. (CSB)

*Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria.* Formerly worship centers in the north. After the northern kingdom was destroyed in 722–721 B.C., many Israelites made periodic pilgrimages to Jerusalem, especially during the reform movements of Hezekiah (see 2Ch 30:11) and Josiah (see 2Ch 34:9). (CSB)

Cities and regions formerly conquered (722 BC) and settled by the Assyrians. (TLSB)

*grain offerings and incense.* Bloodless offerings, since the altar of the Jerusalem temple had been destroyed. (CSB)

*temple of the LORD.* Though the temple itself was in ruins, the site was still considered holy. (CSB)

The Babylonians had already destroyed the temple. These pilgrims would have made offerings at the site, a gesture of solidarity with the suffering Judeans. (TLSB)

These men mourned the destruction of the Temple, but continued their acts of worship even upon its site, covered with ruins as it was. Their road naturally led past the city of Mizpah, and they traveled along without the slightest apprehension of danger. (Kretzmann)

**41:6** *weeping.* Pretending to share the sorrow of the mourners from the north. (CSB)

False sympathy, meant to deceive. (TLSB)

**41:7** *the city.* Mizpah. (CSB)

*cistern.* A favorite place to dispose of victims, whether living or dead. (CSB)

This was either the trench about the city or a large cistern used for storing water in the event of a siege. (Kretzmann)

**41:8** *wheat and barley, oil and honey.* Supplies that Ishmael perhaps would have taken with him when he fled to Ammon (see v. 15). (CSB)

Caches of food were hidden from the invading Babylonians. (TLSB)

It was customary for men to hide their stores of grain and fruit in underground bins during troublous times in order to prevent their being taken by invading hordes. (Kretzmann)

*did not put them to death* – He was very likely taking their goods as a ransom for their lives, for the motive for Ishmael's crime seems to have been plain robbery, since he was evidently a wild and lawless man. (Kretzmann)

**41:9** *the cistern ... was the one King Asa had made.* Probably as part of the fortifications Asa had built at Mizpah (see 1Ki 15:22), since cisterns were essential for storing water during times of siege. Archaeologists have discovered numerous cisterns in the ruins of ancient Mizpah (modern Tell en-Nasbeh, seven and a half miles north of Jerusalem). (CSB)

**41:10** *all the rest.* Though not mentioned specifically, Jeremiah evidently was among the people taken captive. (TLSB)

*king's daughters.* Women who had been members of King Zedekiah's court, not necessarily daughters of the king himself. (CSB)

*Ammonites.* His intention being either to have his captives settle in the territory of the Ammonites, in the service of whose king he seems to have placed himself, or to sell them outright as slaves. Such is the way of men who yield to a life of sin: one crime leads to another, until they are fairly steeped in sins. (Kretzmann)

*cross over to the Ammonites.* Sponsors of Ishmael's assassination. (TLSB)

**41:12** *great pool in Gibeon.* Perhaps the same as the one mentioned in 2Sa 2:13. (CSB)

This is only a few miles northeast of Mizpah. The disposing of the seventy slain men and the gathering of the people of the city to be deported had clearly delayed Ishmael to such an extent that he could not get away in time. (Kretzmann)

**41:15** *eight of his men.* Ishmael lost only two of his men (see v. 2) in the fight with Johanan. (CSB)

**41:17** *Geruth Kimham.* Location unknown; perhaps means "lodging place of Kimham," a friend of David who returned with him to Jerusalem after Absalom's death (see 2Sa 19:37–40). (CSB)

A khan or caravansary, where large companies of travelers stopped for the night. (Kretzmann)

An inn, or khan, named after the son of David's friend Barzillai. (TLSB)

**41:18** *they were afraid* – They feared that they would be implicated in Ishmael's treason or in some way be held responsible for it. It would have been far better, since they had a good conscience in the matter, had they laid the facts in the case before the Chaldean authorities and cleared themselves. As it was, their

removal from Judea placed them under the suspicion of the Babylonians. Fear often dictates a wrong course, even where people are altogether innocent. (Kretzmann)

**Ch 41** Ishmael murders a number of pilgrims and Gedaliah, Babylon's appointed governor. Johanan, one of Gedaliah's soldiers, and his men overtake Ishmael. Johanan's faithfulness and mercy here contrast sharply with the treachery of Ishmael, who seeks advantage over others who are suffering. Like Johanan, have mercy on those who suffer and are confused by life's troubles. Repent of evil ambitions, and make service to the Lord and His people your highest goal. In mercy, the Lord made your salvation His highest priority, suffering death on the cross to bring you new life. • Teach us to trust You, O Lord, and always follow Your ways, through Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)