

CHAPTER 40

We have attended Jerusalem's funeral pile, and have taken our leave of the captives that were carried to Babylon, not expecting to hear any more of them in this book: perhaps we may in Ezekiel; and we must in this and the four following chapters observe the story of those few Jews that were left to remain in the land after their brethren were carried away, and it is a very melancholy story; for, though at first there were some hopeful prospects of their well-doing, they soon appeared as obstinate in sin as ever, unhumbled and unreformed, till, all the rest of the judgments threatened in Deuteronomy 28 being brought upon them, that which in the last verse of that dreadful chapter completes the threatenings was accomplished, "The Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again." In this chapter we have,

- I.** A more particular account of Jeremiah's discharge and his settlement with Gedaliah (v. 1-6).
- II.** The great resort of the Jews that remained scattered in the neighbouring countries to Gedaliah, who was made their governor under the king of Babylon; and the good posture they were in for a while under him (v. 7-12).
- III.** A treacherous design formed against Gedaliah, by Ishmael, which we shall find executed in the next chapter (v. 13-16).

~~2411~~ JEREMIAH 40:1-6

THE PRESERVATION OF JEREMIAH

The title of this part of the book, which begins the chapter, seems misapplied (*The word which came to Jeremiah*), for here is nothing of prophecy in this chapter, but it is to be referred to ~~2411~~ Jeremiah 42:7, where we have a message that God sent by Jeremiah to the captains and the people that remained. The story between is only to introduce that prophecy and show the occasion of it, that it may be the better understood, and Jeremiah, being himself concerned in the story, was the better able to give an account of it.

In these verses we have Jeremiah's adhering, by the advice of Nebuzaradan, to Gedaliah. It should seem that Jeremiah was very honourably fetched out of the court of the prison by the king of Babylon's princes (~~2813~~ Jeremiah 39:13, 14), but afterwards, being found among the people in the city, when orders were given to the inferior officers to bind all they found that were of any fashion, in order to their being carried captives to Babylon, he, through ignorance and mistake, was bound among the rest and hurried away. Poor man! he seems to have been born to hardship and abuse — *man of sorrows* indeed! But when the captives were brought manacled to Ramah, not far off, where a council of war, or court-martial, was held for giving orders concerning them, Jeremiah was soon distinguished from the rest, and, by special order of the court, was discharged.

1. The captain of the guard solemnly owns him to be a true prophet (v. 2, 3): “*The Lord thy God, whose messenger thou has been and in whose name thou hast spoken, has by thee pronounced this evil upon this place; they had fair warning given them of it, but they would not take the warning, and now the Lord hath brought it, and, as by thy mouth he said it, so by my hand he hath done what he said.*” He seems thus to justify what he had done, and to glory in it, that he had been God's instrument to fulfil that which Jeremiah had been his messenger to foretell; and upon that account it was indeed the most glorious action he had ever done. He tells all the people that were now in chains before him *It is because you have sinned against the Lord that this thing has come upon you.* The princes of Israel would never be brought to acknowledge this, though it was as evident as if it had been written with a sun-beam; but this heathen prince plainly sees it, that a people that had been so favoured as they had been by the divine goodness would never have been abandoned thus had they not been very provoking. The people of Israel had been often told this from the pulpit by their prophets, and they would not regard it; now they are told it from the bench by the conqueror, whom they dare not contradict and who will make them regard it. Note, Sooner or later men shall be made sensible that their sin is the cause of all their miseries.

2. He gives him free leave to dispose of himself as he thought fit. he *loosed him from his chains* a second time (v. 4), invited him to come along with him to Babylon, not as a captive, but as a friend, as a companion; and *I will set my eye upon thee* (so the word is), not only, “*I will look well to thee,*” but “*I will show thee respect, will countenance thee, and will see*

that thou be safe and well provided for.” If he was not disposed to go to Babylon, he might dwell where he pleased in his own country, for it was all now at the disposal of the conquerors. He may go to Anathoth if he please, and enjoy the field he has purchased there. A great change with this good man! He that but lately was tossed from one prison to another may now walk at liberty from one possession to another.

3. He advised him to go to Gedaliah and settle with him. This Gedaliah, *made governor of the land under the king of Babylon*, was an honest Jew, who (it is probably) betimes went over with his friends to the Chaldeans, and approved himself so well that he had this great trust put into his hands, v. 5. While Jeremiah had *not yet gone back*, but stood considering what he should do, Nebuzar-adan, perceiving him neither inclined to go to Babylon nor determined whither to go, turned the scale for him, and bade him by all means *go to Gedaliah*. Sudden thoughts sometimes prove wise ones. But when he gave this counsel he did not design to bind him by it, nor will he take ill if he do not follow it: *Go wheresoever it seemeth convenient unto thee*. It is friendly in such cases to give advice, but unfriendly to prescribe and to be angry if our advice be not take. Let Jeremiah steer what course he pleases, Nebuzar-adan will agree to it, and believe he does for the best. Nor does he only give him his liberty, and an approbation of the measures he shall take, but provides for his support: He *gave him victuals and a present*, either in clothes or money, *and so let him go*. See how considerate *the captain of the guard* was in his kindness to Jeremiah. He set him at liberty, but it was in a country that was laid waste, and in which, as the posture of it now was, he might have perished, though it was his own country, if he had not been thus kindly furnished with necessaries. Jeremiah not only accepted his kindness, but took his advice, and went to Gedaliah, to Mizpah, *and dwelt with him*, v. 6. Whether we may herein commend his prudence I know not; the event does not commend it, for it did not prove at all to his comfort. However, we may commend his pious affection to the land of Israel, that unless he were forced out of it, as Ezekiel, and Daniel, and other good men were, he would not forsake it, but chose rather to dwell with the poor in the holy land than with princes in an unholy one.

GEDALIAH'S ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLE

We have in these verses,

I. A bright sky opening upon the remnant of the Jews that were left in their own land, and a comfortable prospect given them of some peace and quietness after the many years of trouble and terror with which they had been afflicted. Jeremiah indeed had never in his prophecies spoken of any such good days reserved for the Jews immediately after the captivity; but Providence seemed to raise and encourage such an expectation, and it would be to that miserable people as life from the dead. Observe the particulars.

1. Gedaliah, one of themselves, is made *governor in the land*, by *the king of Babylon*, v. 7. To show that he designed to make and keep them easy he did not give this commission to one of the princes of Babylon, but to one of their brethren, who, they might be sure, would seek their peace. He was *the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan*, one of the princes. We read of his father (~~2408~~ Jeremiah 26:24) that he took Jeremiah's part against the people. He seems to have been a man of great wisdom and a mild temper, and under whose government the few that were left might have been very happy. The king of Babylon had a good opinion of him and reposed a confidence in him, for *to him he committed all that were left behind*.

2. There is great resort to him from all parts, and all those that were now the Jews of the dispersion came and put themselves under his government and protection.

(1.) The great men that had escaped the Chaldeans by force came and quietly submitted to Gedaliah, for their own safety and common preservation. Several are here named, v. 8. *They came with their men*, their servants, their soldiers, and so strengthened one another; and the king of Babylon had such a good opinion of Gedaliah his delegate that he was not at all jealous of the increase of their numbers, but rather pleased with it.

(2.) The poor men that had escaped by flight into the neighbouring countries of Moab, Ammon, and Edom, were induced by the love they

bore to their own land to return to it again as soon as they heard that Gedaliah was in authority there, v. 11, 12. Canaan itself would be an unsafe unpleasant country if there were no government nor governors there, and those that loved it dearly would not come back to it till they heard there were. It would be a great reviving to those that were dispersed to come together again, to those that were dispersed into foreign countries to come together in their own country, to those that were under strange kings to be under a governor of their own nation. See here in wrath God remembered mercy, and yet admitted some of them upon a further trial of their obedience.

3. The model of this new government is drawn up and settled by an original contract, which Gedaliah confirmed with an oath, a solemn oath (v. 9): *He swore to them and to their men*, it is probably according to the warrant and instructions he had received from the king of Babylon, who empowered him to give them these assurances.

(1.) They must own the property of their lands to be in the Chaldeans. “Come” (says Gedaliah), *“fear not to serve the Chaldeans*. Fear not the sin of it.” Though the divine law had forbidden them to make leagues with the heathen, yet the divine sentence had obliged them to yield to the king of Babylon. “Fear not the reproach of it, and the disparagement it will be to your nation; it is what God has brought you to, has bound you to, and it is no disgrace to any to comply with him. Fear not the consequences of it, as if it would certainly make you and yours miserable; no, you will find the king of Babylon not so hard a landlord as you apprehend him to be; if you will but live peaceably, peaceably you shall live; disturb not the government, and it will not disturb you. *Serve the king of Babylon and it shall be well with you.*” If they should make any difficulty of doing personal homage, or should be apprehensive of danger when the Chaldeans should come among them, Gedaliah, probably by instruction from the king of Babylon, undertakes upon all occasions to act for them, and make their application acceptable to the king (v. 10): *“As for me, behold, I will dwell at Mizpah, to serve the Chaldeans*, to do homage to them in the name of the whole body if there be occasion, to receive orders, and to pay them their tribute when the *come to us.*” All that passes between them and the Chaldeans shall pass through his hand; and, if the Chaldeans put such a confidence in him, surely his own countrymen may venture to do it. Gedaliah is willing thus to give them the assurance of an oath that he will do his part in protecting them, but, being apt to err (as

many good men are) on the charitable side, he did not require an oath from them that they would be faithful to him, else the following mischief might have been prevented. However, protection draws allegiance though it be not sworn, and by joining in with Gedaliah they did, in effect, consent to the terms of government, that they should *serve the king of Babylon*. But,

(2.) Though they own the property of their lands to be in the Chaldeans, yet, upon that condition, they shall have the free enjoyment of them and all the profits of them (v. 10): “*Gather you wine and summer fruits, and take them for your own use; put them in your vessels, to be laid up for winter-store, as those do that live in a land of peace and hope to eat the labour of your hand, nay, the labour of other people's hands, for you reap what they sowed.*” Or perhaps they were the spontaneous products of that fertile soil, for which none had laboured. And accordingly we find (v. 12) that they *gathered wine and summer fruits very much*, such as were at present upon the ground, for their corn-harvest was over some time before Jerusalem was taken. While Gedaliah was in care for the public safety he left them to enjoy the advantages of the public plenty, and, for aught that appears, demanded no tribute from them; for he sought not his own profit, but the profit of many.

II. Here is a dark cloud gathering over this infant state, and threatening a dreadful storm. How soon is this hopeful prospect blasted! For when God begins in judgment he will make an end. It is here intimated to us,

1. That *Baalis the king of the Ammonites* had a particular spite at Gedaliah, and was contriving to take him off, either out of malice to the nation of the Jews, whose welfare he hated the thought of, or a personal pique against Gedaliah, v. 14. Some make Baalis to signify the queen-mother of the king of the Ammonites, or queen-dowager, as if she were the first mover of the bloody and treacherous design. One would have thought this little remnant might be safe when the great king of Babylon protected it; and ye it is ruined by the artifices of this petty prince or princess. happy are those that have the King of kings of their side, who can take *the wise in their own craftiness*; for the greatest earthly king cannot with all his power secure us against fraud and treachery.

2. That he employed *Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah*, as the instrument of his malice, instigated him to murder Gedaliah, and, that he might have a fair opportunity to do it, directed him to go and enrol himself among his

subjects and promise him fealty. Nothing could be more barbarous than the design itself, nor more base than the method of compassing it. How wretchedly is human nature corrupted and degenerated (even in those that pretend to the best blood) when it is capable of admitting the thought of such abominable wickedness! Ishmael was of the seed royal, and would therefore be easily tempted to envy and hate one that set up for a governor in Judah, who was not, as he was, of David's line, though he had ever so much of David's spirit.

3. That Johanan, a brisk and active man, having got scent of this plot, informed Gedaliah of it, yet taking it for granted he could not but know of it before, the proofs of the matter being so very plain: *Dost thou certainly know?* surely thou dost, v. 14. He gave him private intelligence of it (v. 15), hoping he would then take the more notice of it. He proffered his service to prevent it, by taking off Ishmael, whose very name was ominous to all the seed of Isaac: *I will slay him. Wherefore should he slay thee?* Herein he showed more courage and zeal than sense of justice; for, if it be lawful to kill for prevention, who then can be safe, since malice always suspects the worst? **4.** That Gedaliah, being a man of sincerity himself, would by no means give credit to the information given him of Ishmael's treachery. He said, *Thou speakest falsely of Ishmael.* Herein he discovered more good humour than discretion, more of the innocency of the dove than the wisdom of the serpent. Princes become uneasy to themselves and all about them when they are jealous. Queen Elizabeth said that she would believe no more evil of her people than a mother would believe of her own children; yet many have been ruined by being over-confident of the fidelity of those about them.