

# CHAPTER 41

It is a very tragical story that is related in this chapter, and shows that evil pursues sinners. The black cloud that was gathering in the foregoing chapter here bursts in a dreadful storm. Those few Jews that escaped the captivity were proud to think that they were still in their own land, when their brethren had gone they knew not whither, were fond of the wine and summer-fruits they had gathered, and were very secure under Gedaliah's protectorship, when, on a sudden, even these remains prove ruins too.

- I.** Gedaliah is barbarously slain by Ishmael (v. 1, 2).
- II.** All the Jews that were with him were slain likewise (v. 3) and a pit filled with their dead bodies (v. 9).
- III.** Some devout men, to the number of fourscore, that were going towards Jerusalem, were drawn in by Ishmael, and murdered likewise (v. 4-7). Only ten of them escaped (v. 8).
- IV.** Those that escaped the sword were taken prisoners by Ishmael, and carried off towards the country of the Ammonites (v. 10).
- V.** By the conduct and courage of Johanan, though the death of the slain is not revenged, yet the prisoners are recovered, and he now becomes their commander-in-chief (v. 11-16).
- VI.** His project is to carry them into the land of Egypt (v. 17, 18), which we shall hear more of in the next chapter.

## ~~2410~~ JEREMIAH 41:1-10

### THE MURDER OF GEDALIAH

It is hard to say which is more astonishing, God's permitting or men's perpetrating such villanies as here we find committed. Such base, barbarous, bloody work is here done by men who by their birth should have been men of honour, by their religion just men, and this done upon those of their own nature, their own nation, their own religion, and now

their brethren in affliction, when they were all brought under the power of the victorious Chaldeans, and smarting under the judgments of God, upon no provocation, nor with any prospect of advantage — all done, not only in cold blood, but with art and management. We have scarcely such an instance of perfidious cruelty in all the scripture; so that with John, when he saw the *woman drunk with the blood of the saints*, we may well wonder with great admiration. But God permitted it for the completing of the ruin of an unhumiliated people, and the filling up of the measure of their judgments, who had filled up the measure of their iniquities. Let it inspire us with an indignation at the wickedness of men and an awe of God's righteousness.

**I.** Ishmael and his party treacherously killed Gedaliah himself in the first place. Though the king of Babylon had made him a great man, had given him a commission to be *governor of the land* which he had conquered, though God had made him a good man and a great blessing to his country, and his agency for its welfare was as life from the dead, yet neither could secure him. Ishmael was of *the seed royal* (v. 1) and therefore jealous of Gedaliah's growing greatness, and enraged that he should merit and accept a commission under the king of Babylon. He had *ten men* with him that were *princes of the king* too, guided by the same peevish resentments that he was; these had been with Gedaliah before, to put themselves under his protection (<sup>2408</sup>Jeremiah 40:8), and now came again to make him a visit; *and they did eat bread together in Mizpah*. he entertained them generously, and entertained no jealousy of them, notwithstanding the information given him by Johanan. They pretended friendship to him, and gave him no warning to stand on his guard; he was in sincerity friendly to them, and did all he could to oblige them. But those that did *eat bread* with him *lifted up the heel* against him. They did not pick a quarrel with him, but watched an opportunity, when they had him alone, and assassinated him, v. 2.

**II.** They likewise put all to the sword that they found in arms there, both Jews and Chaldeans, all that were employed under Gedaliah or were in any capacity to revenge his death, v. 3. As if enough of the blood of Israelites had not been shed by the Chaldeans, their own princes here mingle it with the blood of the Chaldeans. The vine-dressers and the husbandmen were busy in the fields, and knew nothing of this bloody massacre; so artfully was it carried on and concealed.

**III.** Some good honest men, that were going all in tears to lament the desolations of Jerusalem, were drawn in by Ishmael, and murdered with the rest. Observe,

**1.** Whence they came (v. 5) — *from Shechem, Samaria, and Shiloh*, places that had been famous, but wee now reduced; they belonged to the ten tribes, but there were some in those countries that retained an affection for the worship of the God of Israel.

**2.** Whither they were going — *to the house of the Lord*, the temple at Jerusalem, which, no doubt, they had heard of the destruction of, and were going to pay their respects to its ashes, to see its ruins, that their eye might affect their heart with sorrow for them. They *favour the dust thereof*, <sup>2434</sup>Psalm 102:14. They took *offerings and incense in their hand*, that if they should find any altar there, though it were but an altar of earth, and any priest ready to officiate, they might not be without something to offer; if not, yet they showed their good-will, as Abraham, when he came to *the place of the altar*, though the altar was gone. The people of God used to go rejoicing to the *house of the Lord*, but these went in the habit of mourners, with *their clothes rent and their heads shaven*; for the providence of God loudly called to weeping and mourning, because it was not with the faithful worshippers of God as in months past.

**3.** How they were decoyed into a fatal snare by Ishmael's malice. Hearing of their approach, he resolved to be the death of them too, so bloodthirsty was he. He seemed as if he hated every one that had the name of an Israelite or the face of an honest man. These pilgrims towards Jerusalem he had a spite to, for the sake of their errand. Ishmael went out to meet them with crocodiles' tears, pretending to bewail the desolations of Jerusalem as much as they; and, to try how they stood affected to Gedaliah and his government, he courted them into the town and found them to have a respect for him, which confirmed him in his resolution to murder them. *He said, Come to Gedaliah*, pretending he would have them come and live with him, when really he intended that they should come and die with him, v. 6. They had heard such a character of Gedaliah that they were willing enough to be acquainted with him; but Ishmael, when he had them *in the midst of the town*, fell upon them and *slew them* (v. 7), and no doubt took the offerings they had and converted them to his own use; for he that would not stick at such a murder would not stick at sacrilege. Notice is taken of his disposing of the dead bodies of these and the rest that he had

slain; he tumbled them all into a great *pit* (v. 7), the same pit that Asa king of Judah had digged long before, either in the city or adjoining to it, when he built or fortified Mizpah (<sup>1182</sup>1 Kings 15:22), to be a frontier-garrison against *Baasha king of Israel* and *for fear of him*, v. 9. Note, Those that dig pits with a good intention know not what bad use they may be put to, one time or other. He slew so many that he could not afford them each a grave, or would not do them so much honour, but threw them all promiscuously into one pit. Among these last that were doomed to the slaughter there were ten that obtained a pardon, by working, not on the compassion, but the covetousness, of those that had them at their mercy, v. 8. They *said to Ishmael*, when he was about to suck their blood, like an insatiable horseleech, after that of the companions, *Slay us not, for we have treasurers in the field*, country treasures, large stocks upon the ground, abundance of such commodities as the country affords, *wheat and barley, and oil and honey*, intimating that they would discover it to him and put him in possession of it all, if he would spare them. *Skin for skin, and all that a man has, will he give for his life*. This bait prevailed. Ishmael saved them, not for the love of mercy, but for the love of money. Here were riches kept for the owners thereof, *not to their hurt* (<sup>2183</sup>Ecclesiastes 5:13) and to cause them to *lose their lives* (<sup>3819</sup>Job 31:39), but to their good and the preserving of their lives. Solomon observes that sometimes *the ransom of a man's life is his riches*. But those who think thus to bribe death, when it comes with commission, and plead with it, saying, *Slay us not, for we have treasures in the field*, will find death inexorable and themselves wretchedly deceived.

**IV.** He carried off the people prisoners. *The king's daughters* (whom the Chaldeans cared not for troubling themselves with when they had the king's sons) and the poor of the land, the vine-dressers and husband-men, that were committed to Gedaliah's charge, were all led away prisoners towards the country of *the Ammonites* (v. 10), Ishmael probably intending to make a present of them, as the trophies of his barbarous victory, to the king of that country, that set him on. This melancholy story is a warning to us never to be secure in this world. Worse may be yet to come when we think the worst is over; and that end of one trouble, which we fancy to be the end of all trouble, may prove to be the beginning of another, of a greater. These prisoners thought, *Surely the bitterness of death, and of captivity, is past*; and yet some died by the sword and others went into captivity. When we think ourselves safe, and begin to be easy, destruction

may come that way that we little expect it. There is many a ship wrecked in the harbour. We can never be sure of peace on this side heaven.

## 2411> JEREMIAH 41:11-18

### JOHANAN PURSUES ISRAEL

It would have been well if Johanan, when he gave information to Gedaliah of Ishmael's treasonable design, though he could not obtain leave to kill Ishmael and to prevent it that way, yet had staid with Gedaliah; for he, and his captains, and their forces, might have been a life-guard to Gedaliah and a terror to Ishmael, and so have prevented the mischief without the effusion of blood: but, it seems they were out upon some expedition, perhaps no good one, and so were out of the way when they should have been upon the best service. Those that affect to ramble are many times out of their place when they are most needed. However, at length they *hear of all the evil that Ishmael had done* (v. 11), and are resolved to try an after-game, which we have an account of in these verses.

**1.** We heartily wish Johanan could have taken revenge upon the murderers, but he prevailed only to rescue the captives. Those that had shed so much blood, it was a pity but their blood should have been shed; and it is strange that vengeance suffered them to live; yet it did. Johanan gathered what forces he could *and went to fight with Ishmael* (v. 12), upon notice of the murders he had committed (for though he concealed it for a time, v. 4, yet murder will out) and which way he was gone; he pursued him, and overtook him by the great *pool of Gibeon*, which we read of, <sup><10B></sup>2 Samuel 2:13. And, upon his appearing with such a force, Ishmael's heart failed him, his guilty conscience flew in his face, and he durst not stand his ground against an enemy that was something like a match for him. The most cruel are often the most cowardly. The poor captives *were glad when they saw Johanan and the captains that were with him*, looking upon them as their deliverers (v. 13), and they immediately found a way to wheel about and come over to them (v. 14), Ishmael not offering to detain them when he saw Johanan. Note, Those that would be helped must help themselves. These captives staid not till their conquerors were beaten, but took the first opportunity to make their escape, as soon as they saw their friends appear and their enemies thereby disheartened. Ishmael quitted his

pray to save his life, and *escaped with eight men*, v. 15. it seems, two of his ten men, that were his banditti or assassins (spoken of v. 1), either deserted him or were killed in the engagement; but he made the best of his way to the Ammonites, as a perfect renegado, that had quite abandoned all relation to the commonwealth of Israel, though he was of the seed royal, and we hear no more of him.

**2.** We heartily wish that Johanan, when he had rescued the captives, would have sat down quietly with them, and governed them peaceably, as Gedaliah did; but, instead of that, he is for leading them into the land of Egypt, as Ishmael would have led them into the land of the Ammonites; so that though he got the command over them in a better way than Ishmael did, and honestly enough, yet he did not use it much better. Gedaliah, who was of a meek and quiet spirit, was a great blessing to them; but Johanan, who was of a fierce and restless spirit, was set over them for their hurt, and to complete their ruin, even after they were, as they thought, redeemed. Thus did God still walk contrary to them.

**(1.)** The resolution of Johanan and the captains was very rash; nothing would serve them but they would *go to enter into Egypt* (v. 17), and, in order to that, they encamped for a time *in the habitation of Chimham, by Bethlehem*, David's city. Probably it was some land which David gave to Chimham, the son of Barzillai, which, though it returned to David's family at the year of the Jubilee, yet still bore the name of *Chimham*. Here Johanan made his headquarters, steering his course towards Egypt, either from a personal affection to that country or an ancient national confidence in the Egyptians for help in distress. Some of the *mighty men of war*, it seems had escaped; those he took with him, *and the women and children, whom he had recovered from Ishmael*, who were thus emptied from vessel to vessel, because they were yet unchanged.

**(2.)** The reason for this resolution was very frivolous. They pretended that *they were afraid of the Chaldeans*, that they would come and do I know not what with them, *because Ishmael had killed Gedaliah*, v. 18. I cannot think they really had any apprehensions of danger upon this account; for, though it is true that the Chaldeans had cause enough to resent the murder of their viceroy, yet they were not so unreasonable, or unjust, as to revenge it upon those who appeared so vigorously against the murderers. But they only make use of this as a sham to cover that corrupt inclination of their unbelieving ancestors, which was so strong in them, *to return into Egypt*.

Those will justly lose their comfort in real fears that excuse themselves in sin with pretended fears.