

**Jer. 41, The Assassination of Gedaliah**  
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**Overview**

1. Chapters 40-44 discuss what happened after the fall of Jerusalem. In a word, they show that the people who remain in the land are no more receptive to the word of the Lord than those to whom Jer has previously preached.
  - a) In the last study, ch. 40, Jer is released and joins the relatively comfortable remnant in Mizpeh, who however exhibit no inclinations toward the Lord.
  - b) Today, 41, the governor of the remnant is assassinated in a plot by the king of Ammon.
  - c) 42-43, flight to Egypt: though God tells them not to, the remnant goes south.
  - d) 44, in Egypt, they return to their idolatry.
2. Overview of ch. 41  
Just as ch. 40 shows a reign of peace under Gedaliah, ch. 41 shows a storm of terror under Ishmael.
  - a) 1-10, Ishmael does what Johanan said he would. A major effort to destabilize what government remains in Judah and demoralize the few people left in the country.
  - b) 11-15, Johanan thwarts his effort, but on a human scale, not by any trust in God.
  - c) 16-18, Then Johanan prepares to leave the country and flee into Egypt, from fear of the Babylonians.
3. *Application*: If we trust in human strength, we will also suffer from human weakness. In the last chapter, the Jews seemed to be doing pretty well under Gedaliah, with no help from God. But in this chapter, we see the other side of the coin: people can preside in times of peace, but can also bring incredible suffering and injustice. The only acceptable solution is to trust in the Lord alone.

**A. 1-10, Ishmael's havoc**

1. Political background

- a) Who is Ishmael?
  - 1) 40:7,8, one of the guerilla captains who came together under Gedaliah.
  - 2) 40:14, an operative of Baalis king of Ammon.
  - 3) 41:1, a member of the royal family.

- b) What is Ammon?
- 1) One of the three kingdoms on the other side of Jordan: from N to S, Ammon, Moab, and Edom. (Present-day Amman derives its name from this kingdom.)
  - 2) Descended from Lot by his daughters.
  - 3) Long history of opposition to Israel (see concordance or Bible Dictionary).
- c) What's going on?
- 1) Ammon hates Israel; rejoices when Neb. tramples her; gloats over the Jews who must take refuge in Ammon.
  - 2) When Neb. leaves a viable Jewish government in Judah, they are disappointed. (Think how Israel will feel if Hussein survives in Iraq!) Their disappointment is amplified when the refugees among them, virtual slaves, choose to return to Judah.
  - 3) So they plot to destabilize the country. Motives:
    - a> Desire for territory;
    - b> Jews as slaves;
    - c> Motivate Neb. to come back and finish the job; just plain meanness and hatred on Ammon's part.
  - 4) Their mechanism: They find someone from the royal family, Ishmael, and stir up his jealousy against Gedaliah. He takes three actions:
    - a> Assassinate the governor and his staff;
    - b> By slaying pilgrims in the governor's name, seeks to develop a rumor that Gedaliah has been mishandling the country, thus stirring up Neb. to come back and finish the job;
    - c> Takes as many folk captive as he can to Ammon, presumably to become slaves there.
- d) *Application*: Sometimes the stories of the Bible become so stylized in our minds that we envision them in a sterile, stage-like setting, and think that real political turmoil is unique to our day. Not so! The situation in these chapters is every bit as embroiled as the present situation in the middle east. In fact, Ammon's eagerness for Neb. to destroy Israel completely is highly parallel to Israel's desire for the US to destroy Iraq completely, and just as Ammon sends an assassin to finish off Gedaliah, no one would be very surprised if Israel were to send a hit squad after Hussein. The point for us is that the issues of obedience to the Lord and trust in him are entirely relevant in this sort of situation. Nothing new has happened; the Bible is not a relic of a world vastly different from ours, but speaks directly to the same

conditions of the human heart that we see so vividly today.

2. 1-3, The assassination of Gedaliah and his associates

- a) The act: at a meal with Gedaliah, Ishmael kills not only the governor but also his Jewish staff and Babylonian advisors. Wiped out everyone in the room.
- b) The meaning:
  - 1) To eat together is a sign of friendship and mutual protection. Cf. Gen. 19:1-8, where Lot is bound to protect his visitors, even at the risk of his own family. Also Judg. 19:23,24, the Levite visiting the old man in Gibeah.
  - 2) So Ishmael's action against Gedaliah is the basest sort of treachery.
  - 3) v.2 emphasizes that the man he has killed was appointed by the Babylonians, so this act is designed to infuriate them. Furthermore, he kills Babylonians who are associated with Gedaliah's staff as well. Clearly he is trying to offend Nebuchadnezzar.

3. 4-9, The slaughter of the pilgrims

Ishmael's motive is to destabilize and wreak havoc, and in these verses he seeks to do this by making it look as though Gedaliah is responsible for the slaughter of a group of pilgrims seeking to worship the Lord. Think of how the good news of Gedaliah's rule brought people flocking to him in ch. 40. Now Ishmael is trying to reverse that tendency.

- a) 4, Gedaliah's death is not yet known. So we should read this paragraph recognizing that people still think he is in charge, and that life is remarkably peaceful in the aftermath of the conquest.
- b) 5, The pilgrims
  - 1) Their origin: three of the major cities of the northern kingdom. That kingdom was conquered by Assyria 140 years before, and those who were settled there brought in false religions that mingled with residual Yahwism, already corrupt under Jeroboam. Still, there were always some who retained some allegiance to Jerusalem (2 Chr. 34:9), and Josiah's reform included efforts to destroy pagan sanctuaries even in the north and bring these people to Jerusalem for the feasts, as did Hezekiah before him (2 Chr. 30:11).
  - 2) Their destination: Jerusalem. The temple is gone, so they can only bring bloodless offerings ("offerings" = grain offerings), but they have heard of Gedaliah's rule of peace, and so they are confident to journey south to the

temple site to pay their respects.

3) Their mourning: beards cut, clothes torn, flesh flayed, in sadness over the destruction of the temple. The first and third of these are pagan practices, forbidden in the law, Lev. 19:27; 21:5; Deut. 14:1. Shows how even the faithful in the Northern Kingdom were influenced by pagan practices.

4) *Application:* These pilgrims give us a glimpse of what a faithful remnant looks like in time of apostasy: still there (cf. Elijah's 7000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal), but subject to defilement and contamination by the unbelief around them. Two lessons for us:

a> Never think the remnant is gone. God will always have his own.

b> Beware of the world's pollution. It can creep in insidiously.

c) 6-9, Ishmael deceives and slays the pilgrims.

1) 6, By weeping, he seems to share in their mourning for the temple.

2) He invites them to come see Gedaliah, as though the governor were still alive and wants to offer hospitality to pious pilgrims on their way south. The southernmost of the three cities is about 40 km north of Mizpeh, and even soldiers could go only 20 in a day, so they would welcome the offer of a safe night's lodging.

3) 9 says that he slew them "because of Gedaliah." Lit., "by the hand of Gedaliah," that is, by means of him, or with his authority. He led them to understand that the treachery was not his, but Gedaliah's, and thus seeks to spread terror through the land instead of the confidence that Gedaliah had cultivated.

4) 8, He leaves ten alive, after they bribe him with the promise of wealth. In fact, to spread the rumor he seeks to build, he needs some survivors, who will now testify not only to Gedaliah's cruelty but also to his greed.

4. 10, Retreat to Ammon

Having done the King of Ammon's dirty work, he rounds up the people and leads them captive back to Ammon. Many of them had just escaped there when they learned of Gedaliah's rule. Now they will return to an even harsher slavery.

*Application:* Human saviors are always like Gedaliah--perhaps honorable and true, but always subject to failure. Those who trust in them can always be disappointed. How different is the Lord Jesus. Those who trust in him will never be ashamed; he is

able to save *to the uttermost* all those who come to God by him. If the son shall set you free, you shall be free indeed.

#### B. 11-15, Yoxanan to the rescue

1. Yoxanan discovers what has happened, and comes to rescue the people. He has been out in one of the neighboring villages, according to Gedaliah's instruction (40:10), and so was spared in the coup.
2. When the people see him, they break away from Ishmael and rally to Yoxanan; they are free, but (apparently in the confusion) Ishmael escapes and flees to Ammon. Note that he leaves with eight men (15), having started with 10 (1). The other two were probably killed in the skirmishing; given Yoxanan's aggressiveness before Gedaliah was killed, it is unlikely he is mild with Ishmael now.
3. *Application*: Notice how God brings judgment on evildoers, often through others no more righteous than themselves. To the world, this looks like a scrap between rival guerilla chieftans, but we can see in it the hand of God. We need to learn to see all of history in this light.

#### C. 16-18, The people prepare to flee to Egypt

All along, the guerilla chiefs have been leery of Neb. Now, with their protector having been slain by one of them, they are particularly afraid, and turn their faces toward Egypt once again.

The notion that it is folly to look to Egypt for protection is a frequent one in the OT, and one that has application to us today. The Lord has delivered us from *the power of Satan* into a relation of *blessing* with him, one in which we must confront *fleshly problems* in this world. The various examples of this practice in the OT give us three important lessons, one concerning our place of blessing, one concerning the power from which we have been delivered, and one concerning the problems that we face.

1. The patriarchal period: *It is wrong to forsake the Lord's promises for fleshly substitutes.*
  - a) Famine was a common problem in Palestine, for there crops depended on the rain. Egypt is watered by the Nile, so famine is much less common there, and the patriarchs were repeatedly tempted to leave the land of promise in time of famine and take up lodging in Egypt. But in all but one case, this proves to be a mistake.
    - 1) Gen. 12:10. Abram went there in time of famine. But it was not the land God had promised him; he built no altar there; he almost compromised Sarah's honor; and acquired Hagar, who later became a source of grief to him.
    - 2) Gen. 26:1,2. Isaac, who copied many of his father's practices, also tried to go to Egypt in time of famine, but

the Lord expressly forbade him.

3) Gen. 46:1-4. When Jacob was on his way to see Joseph in Egypt, he hesitated until God gave him express permission. Even so, Egypt later enslaved the Israelites.

b) Today: God offers a clean conscience to those who receive the Lord Jesus, but by far most people today pursue psychiatric or psychological remedies to guilt and do not take what God has provided. As a manager, I find great direction in the word of God, and often quote Proverbs to my associates, but most managers read secular books for their ideas. Like the Motrin ads on TV: why accept a lesser alternative?

2. Time of the exodus: *It is wrong to look for help to the powers from which the Lord has delivered us.*

a) Egypt was a place of bondage to Israel. When God brought them out, he told them not to return there for military help; he has shown himself stronger than Egypt, so it doesn't make sense to depend on them for aid. Deut. 17:16, Jewish kings forbidden to turn to Egypt for arms. Reference is not to a previous command; this is the command itself, and it is referenced again in Deut. 28:68.

b) Today: Imagine a believer, delivered from alcoholism or drugs, who later seeks to deal with the pressures of life by turning back to these things. In fact, every unbeliever serves satanic powers, Gal. 4:8, and when we look to the flesh for help in our Christian lives, we are "turning again to the weak and beggarly elements," Gal. 4:9, and becoming "entangled again in the yoke of bondage", Gal. 5:1. God has already demonstrated his superiority to these forces when he saved us. Why should we go back to them?

3. Monarchy: *It is wrong to think that the answer to fleshly problems is fleshly answers.*

a) Geographically, Israel is a narrow bridge of fertile land between Asia and Africa. Once she became a monarchy, seeking to exist as an independent nation, she was always contending with the major powers on each side. To the south, the power was always Egypt. To the north, it was at various times Syria, Assyria, and Babylon (the latter two much farther away). Too often, when Israel was under pressure from one neighbor, she turned to the other (usually Egypt) for protection. We have seen this most recently in Jer. 37, where Zed. hopes that the Egyptians will deliver him from Neb's siege. Perhaps she felt that God's help was OK for spiritual matters, but he couldn't impact the real world. Yet he made it!

1) 2 Kings 17:4, Hoshea of Israel vainly tries to get help from Egypt against Shalmaneser of Assyria.

- 2) Isa. 36:6, Sennacharib rebukes the people of Judah under Hezekiah for hoping for deliverance from Egypt.
- 3) Ezek. 17; Jer. 37:5, Zedekiah appears to have sent to Egypt for help against Neb's invading army.
- 4) General warnings:
  - a> Isa. 20, the fall of Ashdod a symbol to the Jews of the fallacy of trusting in Egypt.
  - b> Isa. 30:1-3
  - c> Isa. 31:1-3
  - d> Ezek. 29:1-6, God condemns Egypt for being a staff of reed to the nation of Israel.

b) Today, we too are faced with a multitude of concrete, physical challenges. God is lord of creation just as much now as when he created the heavens and the earth, and we must not be tempted into fearing that our physical problems require solutions apart from him.

In the light of these lessons, consider the situation of the remnant under Yoxanan. They already know that Egypt is weaker than Neb (to say nothing of God), since Egypt could not drive off the Babylonian army during the siege of Jerusalem. God has delivered them from Neb already, under Gedaliah, and he can certainly work a comparable wonder to preserve them now. They should lay hold of God's promises and not look to the flesh. But no, they will go down to Egypt.

**Summary:**

If we trust in men to deliver us, we must also be prepared when they fail us. Gedaliah pointed people to his own rule and the fairness of Babylon; when he is taken out of the picture, their happiness is turned to suffering. And yet they do not learn, but turn to another human helper, Egypt, instead of to God. May the Lord give us grace to live our lives not trusting in the arm of flesh, but in the power of God.

**Psalm:** 146 (tune: What a Friend)

**Analysis** 41:1-18, Ishmael's Coup and its aftermath

Note the inclusio between vv.1-2 and vv.15,18, showing that vv.16-18 belong here and not with the next section.

A. 1-10, Ishmael's havoc

1. 1-3, The assassination of Ged and his associates

- a) 41:1 WA/Y:HIY B.A/XODE\$ HA/\$.:BIY(IY B.F) YI\$ :MF(")L B.EN-N:TAN:YFH BEN-):ELIY\$FMF( MI/Z.ERA( HA/M.:LW.KFH W:/RAB."Y HA/M.ELEK: WA/(:A&FRFH ):ANF\$IYM )IT./OW )EL-G.:DAL:YFHW. BEN-):AXIYQFM HA/M.IC:P.FT/FH
- b) WA/Y.O)K:LW. \$FM LEXEM YAX:D.FW B.A/M.IC:P.FH
- c) 41:2 WA/Y.FQFM YI\$ :MF(")L B.EN-N:TAN:YFH WA/(:A&ERET HF/):ANF\$IYM ):A\$ER-HFYW. )IT./OW
- d) chiasitic p

- 1) Ish. killed Ged.
    - a> WA/Y.AK.W. )ET-G.:DAL:YFHW. BEN-):AXIYQFM B.EN-\$FPPFN  
B.A/XEREB
    - b> WA/Y.FMET )OT/OW ):A\$ER-HIP:QIYD MELEK:-B.FBEL B.F/)FREC
  - 2) Ish. killed those with Ged.
    - 41:3 W:/"T K.FL-HA/Y.:HW.DIYM ):A\$ER-HFYW. )IT./OW  
)ET-G.:DAL:YFHW. B.A/M.IC:P.FH W:/)ET-HA/K.A&:D.IYM ):A\$ER  
NIM:C:)W.-\$FM )"T )AN:\$"Y HA/M.IL:XFMFH HIK.FH YI\$:MF(")L
2. 4-9, The slaughter of the pilgrims  
NB: done "by the hand of Gedaliah," v.9; Ishmael is seeking to discredit Gedaliah's rule.
- a) 41:4 WA/Y:HIY B.A/Y.OWM HA/\$."NIY L:/HFMIYT )ET-G.:DAL:YFHW.
  - b) W:/)IY\$ LO) YFDF(
  - c) 41:5 WA/Y.FBO)W. ):ANF\$IYM MI/\$.:KEM MI/\$.ILOW  
W./MI/\$.OM:ROWN \$:MONIYM
    - 1) their mourning: the first and third of these are forbidden in the law, Lev. 19:27; 21:5; Deut. 14:1.
      - a> )IY\$ M:GUL.:X"Y ZFQFN
      - b> W./Q:RU("Y B:GFDIYM
      - c> W./MIT:G.OD:DIYM
    - 2) their offering:
      - W./MIN:XFH W./L:BOWNFH B.:/YFDFM L:/HFBIY) B."YT Y:HWFH
  - d) 41:6 WA/Y."C") YI\$:MF(")L B.EN-N:TAN:YFH LI/Q:RF)T/FM  
MIN-HA/M.IC:P.FH HOL"K: HFLOK: W./BOKEH
  - e) quote p
    - 1) quote f: WA/Y:HIY K.I/P:GO\$ )OT/FM WA/Y.O)MER ):AL"Y/HEM
    - 2) quote: B.O)W. )EL-G.:DAL:YFHW. BEN-):AXIYQFM S
  - f) 41:7 WA/Y:HIY K.:/BOW)FM )EL-T.OWK: HF/(IYR WA/Y.I\$ :XF+"M  
YI\$:MF(")L B.EN-N:TAN:YFH )EL-T.OWK: HA/B.OWR HW.)  
W:/HF/):ANF\$IYM ):A\$ER-)IT./OW
  - g) execution p
    - 1) command: quote p
      - a> 41:8 WA/(:A&FRFH ):ANF\$IYM NIM:C:)W.-B/FM
      - b> quote f: WA/Y.O)M:RW. )EL-YI\$:MF(")L
      - c> quote:
        - 1> )AL-T.:MIT/"NW.
        - 2> K.IY-YE\$-L/FNW. MA+:MONIYM B.A/&.FDEH XI+.IYM  
W./&:(ORIYM W:/\$EMEN W./D:BF\$ WA/Y.EX:D.AL
    - 2) execution: W:/LO) H:EMIYT/FM B.:/TOWK: ):AX"Y/HEM
  - h) 41:9 W:/HA/B.OWR ):A\$ER HI\$:LIYK: \$FM YI\$:MF(")L )"T  
K.FL-P.IG:R"Y HF/):ANF\$IYM ):A\$ER HIK.FH B.:/YAD-G.:DAL:YFHW.  
HW.) ):A\$ER (F&FH HA/M.ELEK: )FSF) MI/P.:N"Y B.A(:\$F)  
MELEK:-YI&:RF)"L
  - i) )OT/OW MIL.) YI\$:MF(")L B.EN-N:TAN:YFHW. X:ALFLIYM
3. 10, Retreat to Ammon
- a) 41:10 WA/Y.I\$ :B.: YI\$:MF(")L )ET-K.FL-\$:)"RIYT HF/(FM ):A\$ER  
B.A/M.IC:P.FH )ET-B.:NOWT HA/M.ELEK: W:/)ET-K.FL-HF/(FM  
HA/N.I\$:)FRIYM B.A/M.IC:P.FH ):A\$ER HIP:QIYD N:BW.ZAR:):ADFN  
RAB-+AB.FXIYM )ET-G.:DAL:YFHW. B.EN-):AXIYQFM
  - b) WA/Y.I\$ :B./"M YI\$:MF(")L B.EN-N:TAN:YFH
  - c) WA/Y."LEK: LA/(:ABOR )EL-B.:N"Y (AM.OWN S



- B. 11-15, Yoxanan to the rescue
1. 41:11 WA/Y.I\$:MA( YOWXFNFN B.EN-QFR"XA W:/KFL-&FR"Y HA/X:AYFLIYM ):A\$ER )IT./OW )"T K.FL-HF/RF(FH ):A\$ER (F&FH YI\$:MF(")L B.EN-N:TAN:YFH
  2. 41:12 WA/Y.IQ:XW. )ET-K.FL-HF/):ANF\$IYM
  3. WA/Y."L:KW. L:/HIL.FX"M (IM-YI\$:MF(")L B.EN-N:TAN:YFH
  4. WA/Y.IM:C:)W. )OT/OW )EL-MAYIM RAB.IYM ):A\$ER B.:/GIB:(OWN
  5. temporal p
    - a) time: 41:13 WA/Y:HIY K.I/R:)OWT K.FL-HF/(FM ):A\$ER )ET-YI\$:MF(")L )ET-YOWXFNFN B.EN-QFR"XA W:/)"T K.FL-&FR"Y HA/X:AYFLIYM ):A\$ER )IT./OW
    - b) contrast p
      - 1) what the people did: rally to Johanan.
        - a> WA/Y.I&:MFXW.
        - b> 41:14 WA/Y.FSOB.W. K.FL-HF/(FM ):A\$ER-\$FBFH YI\$:MF(")L MIN-HA/M.IC:P.FH
        - c> WA/Y.F\$UBW.
        - d> WA/Y."L:KW. )EL-YOWXFNFN B.EN-QFR"XA
      - 2) what Ishmael did: escape.
        - a> 41:15 W:/YI\$:MF(")L B.EN-N:TAN:YFH NIM:LA+ B.I/\$:MONFH ):ANF\$IYM MI/P.:N"Y YOWXFNFN
        - b> WA/Y."LEK: )EL-B.:N"Y (AM.OWN S
- C. 16-18, reason p: The people prepare to flee to Egypt.
1. text:
    - a) 41:16 WA/Y.IQ.AX YOWXFNFN B.EN-QFR"XA W:/KFL-&FR"Y HA/X:AYFLIYM ):A\$ER-)IT./OW )"T K.FL-\$:)"RIYT HF/(FM ):A\$ER H"\$IYB M"/)"T YI\$:MF(")L B.EN-N:TAN:YFH MIN-HA/M.IC:P.FH )AXAR HIK.FH )ET-G.:DAL:YFH B.EN-):AXIYQFM G.:BFRIYM )AN:\$"Y HA/M.IL:XFMFH W:/NF\$IYM W:/+AP W:/SFRISIYM ):A\$ER H"\$IYB MI/G.IB:(OWN
    - b) 41:17 WA/Y."L:KW.
    - c) WA/Y."\$:BW. B.:/G"RW.T {K:MOW/HEM} [K.IM:HFM] ):A\$ER-) "CEL B."YT LFXEM LF/LEKET LF/BOW) MIC:RFYIM 41:18 MI/P.:N"Y HA/K.A&:D.IYM
  2. reason: reason p
    - a) text: K.IY YFR:)W. MI/P.:N"Y/HEM
    - b) reason: K.IY-HIK.FH YI\$:MF(")L B.EN-N:TAN:YFH )ET-G.:DAL:YFHW. B.EN-):AXIYQFM ):A\$ER-HIP:QIYD MELEK:-B.FBEL B.F/)FREC S