

Class 10: Jeremiah 40-42

After the Fall of Jerusalem

June 7, 2017

In the previous studies we saw the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, the captivity of king Zedekiah. Chapter 40 begins by telling us that Jeremiah has been released from his bonds, and sent to the care of the governor. The word of the Lord comes in an unusual way to Jeremiah. It is the captain of the guard who speaks God's message by giving him a choice. Jeremiah may join the others in captivity in Babylon, or he may choose to stay behind (with the poor) in Judah. Jeremiah is set free and returns to the governor.

Governor Gedaliah: We then are told that the people begin to return to Jerusalem and Judah from afar. This includes those soldiers who had not been overcome (in the field), and those who lived in neighboring lands. Gedaliah offers a sort of amnesty to them all, telling them that they may return to their homes and resume their work in the fields, and that it will be well with them if they submit to the Chaldeans. This was Jeremiah's message, suggesting that Gedaliah (the grandson of Shaphan the Scribe who had aided Josiah in his restoration, and the son of Ahikam, who had saved Jeremiah earlier) is carrying out the will of God. The capital is moved to Mizpah.

There is also the introduction of intrigue. Gedaliah is warned by a captain of the army, Johanan son of Careah, that Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, had been sent by King Baalis of Ammon to kill him. Ishmael was one of the captains that came to Gedaliah (2 Kings 25:23). He is identified as being part of the royal family. Having come from Ammon may indicate that his troop was in refuge there. Gedaliah does not believe the account, and refuses to permit a pre-emptive assassination.

Chapter 41 recounts the assassination of Gedaliah by Ishmael and ten men. He also struck down the Jew with Gedaliah, and the Babylonian officials there too. Following this, some (false – Leviticus 19:27) worshippers come to offer sacrifices at the site of the temple, and Ishmael (again by treachery) slays these men too. Only ten are able to beg deliverance with their valuables.

When the captains under Johanan hear of this action, they rise up against Ishmael and his men. Ishmael flees back to the Ammonites, and takes all of the people left in Mizpah (Jeremiah and Baruch) with him. Johanan meets him at Gibeon, where Ishmael makes an escape to Ammon, and the people taken by Ishmael join up with Johanan.

Johanan's Hypocrisy: Chapter 41 ends with Johanan leaving with an intent to travel to Egypt. It is stated that this is due to a fear of the Chaldeans, as a result of the assassination of Gedaliah. Chapter 42 begins with what appears to be a genuine appeal to God. Johanan asks Jeremiah for a message from Jehovah, and promises to obey the message whatever it may be.

God's message remains the same: submit to the Babylonians and do not turn to Egypt (Jeremiah 37, etc.). God promises that Egypt will not be safe; He has a judgment concerning Egypt too. Yet it seems that Johanan intended to go to Egypt regardless of what Jeremiah's message was, and God sees the hypocrisy in his heart. God promises that Johanan's band will not escape the sword, pestilence and famine in Egypt as they hope.

Making Applications:

1. Why would the Ammonite king want the Jewish governor dead? How does this relate to the Ammonite relationship with Judah decades later in Nehemiah (2:10-19)?
2. Johanan's hypocrisy was that he asked God what to do, but then did what he wanted anyway. What lesson is for us on how we investigate the word of God?