

FAITH SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

August 22nd, 2010

What to do in Babylon

Focal Passage: Jeremiah 40:1-42:22

Cross References:

Context The three chapters covered in this lesson detail the events in Judah after the exile. Jeremiah is chained up with the other exiles and then offered a choice by the Babylonian army, he can remain in Judah or go to Babylon. In these three chapters we are given the events as they happen in Judah. In chapters Forty-Three and Forty-Four we are given the events that happen in Egypt.

There are two very intriguing aspects of the tone of this text. First,

Jeremiah remains humble when he

finally has the opportunity to gloat

and proclaim the accuracy of his

prophecies. Throughout his ministry Jeremiah faithfully spoke the word of the Lord amidst harsh opposition.

Now that the prophecy has come to fruition Jeremiah's true character is revealed. He continues to love the people while remaining faithful to the Word of the Lord. The second

intriguing aspect of this passage is

the continued disobedience of the

people of Israel. While many were broken to the point of repentance the large majority of people opposed Jeremiah and the Lord at every turn. The people are at a point of exile and desperation they can continue their rejection or come to repentance.

Bible in a Year Daily Readings

Aug. 16th – Aug. 22nd, 2010

Aug. 16th Jeremiah 40-43

Aug. 17th Jeremiah 44-46

Aug. 18th Jeremiah 47-48

Aug. 19th Jeremiah 49

Aug. 20th Jeremiah 50

Aug. 21st Jeremiah 51-52

Aug. 22nd Lamentations 1-2

Highlights of the Week

Jeremiah 44 Disaster comes because of idolatry

Jeremiah 46:1-5 A message of protection to Baruch

Jeremiah 46:6-28 A message to Egypt and hope for Israel

Jeremiah 49-51 Prophecies concerning surrounding cities

Jeremiah 52 The Fall of Jerusalem

Lamentations 1 "How deserted is this city once so full of people."

Lamentations 2 The Wrath of the Lord

Introduction to This Section

NOTE:

Some introductory notes to Chapter 40 help frame the entire section. The following discussion from the Expositor's Commentary gives a little more context and some of the issues in the text.

Since there is no prophetic word till 42:9, "word" is to be taken in the sense of history as well as prophecy. The two were, however, related; the OT historical books are included under the heading of The Prophets. Ramah, the modern er-Ram, is about five miles north of Jerusalem. This Benjamite town was the place where the captives were questioned before being deported to Babylon. In the confusion when Jerusalem fell, Jeremiah was at first taken and placed in chains—manacles for the hands only (cf. v.4). When Jeremiah arrived at Ramah, he was released at the command of Nebuzaradan, who had evidently been told who Jeremiah was and what Nebuchadnezzar had ordered to be done with him.

Some expositors doubt whether Nebuzaradan could or would have said the words quoted in vv.2-3. Was this his own theology or does it reflect that of the writer? Some think the quotation incongruous for a Babylonian and take it as a recast by the writer in terms of his own faith. But this is not the only possible explanation. Although the words are couched in Hebrew theological terms, this is not so improbable as it at first appears. The Assyrians paid attention to the beliefs of the people whom they fought, for use in psychological warfare (cf. 2 Kings 18:22, 33-35; so WBC). The Babylonians may have been aware of certain supernatural reasons for Judah's fall; as one view proposes, Jeremiah's reputation as a prophet was evidently known to them (so Harrison). Unquestionably the words sound like those of Jeremiah himself, and this may show that Nebuzaradan had some acquaintance with the prophet's teaching. The simplest explanation may be that he knew of the content of Jeremiah's main emphasis in preaching and was simply quoting it as appropriate for the occasion.

Feinberg, Charles L. "a. The release of Jeremiah (40:1-6)" In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*: Volume 6. 625. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, © 1986.

Jeremiah 40:1-6

¹ *The word came to Jeremiah from the LORD after Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard had released him at Ramah. He had found Jeremiah bound in chains among all the captives from Jerusalem and Judah who were being carried into exile to Babylon.*

² *When the commander of the guard found Jeremiah, he said to him, "The LORD your God decreed this disaster for this place.*

³ *And now the LORD has brought it about; he has done just as he said he would. All this happened because you people sinned against the LORD and did not obey him.*

⁴ *But today I am freeing you from the chains on your wrists. Come with me to Babylon, if you like, and I will look after you; but if you do not want to, then don't come. Look, the whole country lies before you; go wherever you please."*

⁵ *However, before Jeremiah turned to go, Nebuzaradan added, "Go back to Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon has appointed over the towns of Judah, and live with him among the people, or go anywhere else you please." Then the commander gave him provisions and a present and let him go.*

⁶ *So Jeremiah went to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah and stayed with him among the people who were left behind in the land.*

DISCUSSION:

- Read verses 2-4. Why did the Babylonian soldier seem to understand more about God's actions than most of Jerusalem?
- What was Jeremiah's choice?
- What does his choice in v. 5 reveal about the character of Jeremiah?
- What convictions did Jeremiah have about the hope for Jerusalem?
- Things looked bleak for Jerusalem, but Jeremiah understands God's provisional hand and clings to the hope of the Lord.

Jeremiah 40:7-10

⁷ When all the army officers and their men who were still in the open country heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam as governor over the land and had put him in charge of the men, women and children who were the poorest in the land and who had not been carried into exile to Babylon,

⁸ they came to Gedaliah at Mizpah—Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah, Seraiah son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah the son of the Maacathite, and their men.

⁹ Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, took an oath to reassure them and their men. “Do not be afraid to serve the Babylonians,” he said. “Settle down in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will go well with you.

¹⁰ I myself will stay at Mizpah to represent you before the Babylonians who come to us, but you are to harvest the wine, summer fruit and oil, and put them in your storage jars, and live in the towns you have taken over.”

¹¹ When all the Jews in Moab, Ammon, Edom and all the other countries heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant in Judah and had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, as governor over them,

¹² they all came back to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah, from all the countries where they had been scattered. And they harvested an abundance of wine and summer fruit.

DISCUSSION:

- What kind of leader was Gedaliah?
- Remember the prior prophecies of Jeremiah. Serving the Babylonians was what the Lord had commanded.
- Would you have stayed behind? Why or Why not?

Jeremiah 40:13-16

¹³ Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers still in the open country came to Gedaliah at Mizpah

¹⁴ and said to him, “Don’t you know that Baalis king of the Ammonites has sent Ishmael son of Nethaniah to take your life?” But Gedaliah son of Ahikam did not believe them.

¹⁵ Then Johanan son of Kareah said privately to Gedaliah in Mizpah, “Let me go and kill Ishmael son of Nethaniah, and no one will know it. Why should he take your life and cause all the Jews who are gathered around you to be scattered and the remnant of Judah to perish?”

¹⁶ But Gedaliah son of Ahikam said to Johanan son of Kareah, “Don’t do such a thing! What you are saying about Ishmael is not true.”

DISCUSSION:

- Why did Gedaliah not believe Johanan?
- Should Johanan have assassinated Ishmael?
- Chapter 41 reveals that Ishmael did indeed kill Gedaliah and the Jews were forced to flee.
- Times are dark in Jerusalem and there does not seem to be a lot of hope.

APPLICATION

Those who did not go to Babylon and chose to stay in Jerusalem represented a possible remnant in the land. There was a little hope under the leadership of Gedaliah, which was dashed with his assassination.

There are times in our lives when the little hope we have is diminished by our circumstances. The faithfulness of God and the perfection of His plan is often all we have to rely on. Romans 8:31-39 makes it clear that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. When times are difficult we are tempted to be disobedient and do things our own way. We must remain faithful to the God who has called us and do what the Word tells us to do.