

“RUIN, REDEMPTION, AND RESTORATION”

Studies in the Book of Jeremiah

Jeremiah 40:1-41:18

“The Thin Line Between Hero and Villain: Part 1”

Introduction: Over the next two weeks we will examine a sad scenario that takes place among the remnant of Judah in the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon. We will see real examples of how villains can function as heroes and heroes can become villains.

I. Nebuzaradan: Captor and Liberator (Jeremiah 40:1-6)

Leadership profile: Nebuzaradan was the captain of the guard and servant of Nebuchadnezzar. He led the troops who burned the temple and broke down the walls of Jerusalem. God used him to execute His judgement in Jerusalem. Tradition states that Arioch (the captain of the guard sent to execute the wise men in Daniel 2) is Nebuzaradan. To the rebellious Israelites Nebuzaradan would have been a villain. To others he is a liberator used by God to execute His word and vindicating the oppressed.

General principles:

- Sin brings ruin. Consequences affect the individual sinner and the community.
- Consequences do not equal condemnation. Some experienced grace and mercy.
- God is faithful to perform His word of judgement and His word of restoration.
- God’s sovereignty and providence. Providence represents the unseen hand of God orchestrating circumstances to fulfill His desired outcome.

II. Gedaliah: Naïve Optimist (Jeremiah 40:7-16)

The army that fled with Zedekiah escaped and returned to join with Gedaliah (2 Kings 25:5). People were left behind to maintain the land possibly with the expectation of sending tribute/taxes to the ruling foreign power.

A group of military commanders warned Gedaliah about a plot on his life. Gedaliah does not believe them and rejects Johanan’s offer to kill Ishmael.

Leadership profile: Gedaliah’s father Ahikam (a royal official) helped protect Jeremiah from persecution (Jeremiah 26:24). Gedaliah was appointed governor by Nebuchadnezzar, and he rallied the remnant with hope. However, Gedaliah failed to seriously assess the risk to his own life (Romans 13:1-4;

Proverbs 22:3; Proverbs 14:15; Proverbs 20:18; Proverbs 15:22; Nehemiah 4:8–9; Matthew 10:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:6).

III. Ishmael's Treachery and Johanan's Bravery (Jeremiah 41:1-17)

Gedaliah's rule lasted 2 months. He was betrayed by one of his own military leaders.

Leadership profile: Baalis king of the Ammonites is directly responsible for orchestrating the assassination of Gedaliah (Jeremiah 27:1-3). God declared judgement on the Ammonites (Ezekiel 25:1-7; Matthew 4:10; John 3:20; Ephesians 4:17–19). Baalis plotted evil against an innocent man who was trying to submit to the authorities ordained by God. He demonstrated outright rebellion against God and proved he was an instrument of the kingdom of darkness.

Leadership profile: Ishmael was one of the army captains and a traitor allied with the Ammonites. Possibly hoped to usurp Gedaliah's authority because he was from the Judean royal family. Ishmael is evidence of the levels of corruption in Judah's leaders. He conspired with the enemy against his own people (Psalm 41:9).

Johanan demonstrated bravery by rallying the forces to confront Ishmael. Sometimes displaying bravery and a willingness to fight the enemy will cause him to flee and result in the liberation of captives. Are you willing to confront the spiritual enemy to set captives free?

Leadership profile: Johanan was one of the captains of the armies in the field. He tried to warn Gedaliah of a plot against his life. He offered to kill Ishmael before he could make his move. Is it morally appropriate to kill someone for what they are planning to do?

We have a flawless leader, the Lord Jesus. “and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen” (Revelation 1:5-7).

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