

Jeremiah Chapters 40-41 John Karmelich

1. Let me start with my one word title: "Rebellion". The focus of these chapters is on life in the land of Israel after the Babylonians conquered it. It's a "now what" chapter. We get told that Jeremiah initially being taken captive with everyone else who's still around. When his guard figures out it is Jeremiah, essentially he gets set free. Most of these chapters focus on the story of two men: One is the Babylonian placed in charge of that area while most of the Jewish population is deported to other places in that empire. Some poor people remain there to farm the land. Then we'll read of an Israelite who decides to kill the new Babylonian ruler there. Others will join that rebellion and yes there's suffering in these chapters because of it!
 - a) OK John sounds like another story of people rebelling against God's will and suffering for it. I'm sure the story has cute plot twists, but let's get the important thing out in the open: Why should we care? The bible is all about how we apply it to our lives, as you preach. If I'm not rebelling against God at this moment, why should I care about any of this stuff?
 - b) Because "rebellion" against God is a natural part of the human condition. A famous line in Christian speak is "we're all born sin positive, an incurable disease". I've also listened to a number of well known veteran Christian speakers say even with all they've learned in their Christian life, they still struggle with sin. My point is whether we like it or not, that's (rebellion) a part of the Christian life as much as anything else.
 - c) So do we panic? What do we do about it? First, relax. If we believe "the key facts": Jesus is God, died for our sins and is in charge of our lives then I'd argue we're saved no matter what! The reason we're to be aware of rebellion is simply because it's our nature. We can deal with it as we recognize we're messing up, confess it, and then continue to use our life as a witness for Him. After all, that's why we're created in the first place.
2. With that obvious sermon out of my system, let's get back to Jeremiah. What I kept wondering as I read this, is why dedicate two chapters to the story of a man who assassinated the Babylonian in charge at that moment? Yes it's a cute story and I'd argue it's historically accurate, but why is this story part of the bible? Why does God want us to know all of this? It can't just be to learn history as it actually occurred. The bible isn't meant to be a history book. It's mostly here to teach us how He wants us to live as a witness for Him. That's a good introduction to explain the details of these two chapters, so let's do that now!
 - a) The first part of Chapter 40 tells the story of Jeremiah being taken prisoner like everyone's been done in Jerusalem at that time. When the head guard figured out who Jeremiah was, the guard got all "Religious Jewish" on him. The non-Jewish (Babylonian) effectively said, "You're the guy who's been preaching for the Israelites to surrender for years. You've been saying it is God's will for your people to give up. Since you've been on our side I'm going to let you go. If you want to come to Babylon with the other prisoners, come along. You won't have to wear any chains as I trust you Jeremiah. If you want to hang around Israel with those who are still here, you're free to do that. In effect "it's your call".
 - b) Keep in mind at this point, Jeremiah probably thought, "I did all that God called me to do. I did my best as to warn my fellow Israelites that this is coming. Now that the destruction has occurred I guess I'm free to do what I want. It's the danger of thinking, "God's through with me as I did all He asked". Little did Jeremiah know God still has more for him to say. After all, we're only about four fifth's through the book. There's a reason God wanted him to tell the story of what occurs in these two chapters. In fact, Jeremiah's not mentioned for the rest of these two chapters. I picture Jeremiah as simply acting as the one who God did call to write this down for some purpose greater than he could realize. Before I move on, I would like to set a theory as to why this is here: These chapters start with a speech given by a non-Jewish person explaining what is God's will! They go on to tell the story of a big failure to obey God's will through a rebellion. We'll read how it fits our lives as well.

- c) Anyway, Jeremiah decided to stay in the land of Israel. I think that fact is mentioned just so we know Jeremiah was "around" when the other events take place in these chapters.
 - d) The next paragraph focuses on the Babylonian who was placed in charge of that land. His name is Gedaliah. So you know he'll be killed these chapters. We'll also get introduced to the villain of this story, a man named Ishmael. That's the same name as Abraham's (as we read in Genesis) firstborn son who came before the promised son Isaac. My simple point's that the name Ishmael is associated with the "flesh". In a similar way, here's a Jewish man also named Ishmael centuries later fighting God's will by killing the Babylonian leader of the Israelites at that time. Could I be reading too much into this? Is it just another man by the same name fighting God's will and thinking he's doing what's right by killing the man who's now in charge of God's land? To use an old Jewish expression, "Coincidence is not a biblical principal!" It's just a theory I'm throwing out there.
 - i) Anyway, much of Chapter 40 deals with those dealing with the Babylonians ruling in the land of Israel at that time. It names soldiers coming to show their respect as the war's now over and it names people working with Ishmael to try to change the plan of God at this time. Bottom line the scenes being set for a big rebellion!
 - ii) We also get a minor hero in this story. A man gets wind of the plot to kill the guy who's now in charge. He volunteers to go kill Ishmael. The governor, again who's name is Gedaliah says in effect, "no big deal, he won't really try to kill me".
 - iii) To fit my theory, think of it as us "trying to satisfy the desire of the flesh and deny it's a problem to satisfy that desire". With Gedaliah denying Ishmael is any sort of a problem "it fits the pattern" so to speak. Gedaliah strikes me as a nice guy trying to deal with the cards he's dealt as the local leader over Israel. He refuses to see an issue that's dangerous and suffers for it. It fits my theme of not seeing any danger when we're not doing God's will. OK, back to the story.
 - e) All of this leads to the "blood bath" that's Chapter 41. Ishmael kills Gedaliah along with a bunch of the Jewish people in that area after the deportation. Other Israelites will come to Jerusalem to "do the sacrifice ritual" even though the temple has been destroyed. Yes they get killed for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.
 - f) Then the story shifts to other Jewish men who work to put a stop to Ishmael. Let's just say the effort to stop this man worked and apparently order was restored. We don't read any Israelites being punished for killing the "governor". Ishmael himself escapes across to the land of Jordan (today) across the river and that's the last we read of him.
 - g) All in all Chapter 41 is essentially one big blood bath with a lot of people killed and others dealing with the killings in one form or another. All of this leads back to the big question: Why is all of this in the bible? I'll end my introduction on that topic and of course, explain why we should care:
3. What I see in this story about the Babylonian king, and the "bad Israelite" is the consequences of a rebellion against God's will. The Babylonian governor refused to take rebellion threat seriously as he suffered death because of it. The Israelites who did the killing appear to have gotten away with it as the chapter and story ends of him escaping out of Israel. Others suffered because they were in the vicinity. The underlying message is the consequences of rebellion. It is an intriguing story full of drama and killing. It might even have made a good short movie. I think it's in the bible as an example of rebellion. In fact I'd even argue the reason God let Ishmael "escape" is an example of the fact we can't kill "the desires of the flesh. Is it possible I'm reading too much into this? Yes. However, I hold the view the bible isn't just here to teach us history. It's a guide as to how we are to live our lives as a witness for Jesus. A story about rebellion the consequences that come with a rebellion against God are woven all through the story. So why is Jeremiah only mentioned in the beginning of it? I suspect it's to show that when the Godly are "removed" here comes "sin". Yes, I don't know for sure, but it fits the pattern. OK then, time for details.

4. Jeremiah 40, Verse 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.
- a) What fascinates me about this sentence is we have no idea what God said to Jeremiah here in this verse or in this story. The last chapter was about the Israelites being deported from the land of Israel to elsewhere in the Babylonian kingdom. Other than this into story that's about the fact Jeremiah can go where he wants, we don't know what God actual said. So, why mention it? I suspect it's so he became aware of the story that's told in these chapters here. Could I be wrong? Of course. Another possibility is we're about to read of the guard who took Jeremiah captive speaking as if he knew God's plan. So it's possible God spoke to Jeremiah that way. Either way, it's here.
 - b) I want you to stop and consider Jeremiah's life at this point. He spent about 2-3 decades if I'm not mistaken, warning what God's going to do if the Israelites refused to repent. They didn't listen, and well, the bad news is now complete. I wonder if Jeremiah thought, what is going to happen to me now? Is my life over? Is God going to stop speaking to me now that the country is pretty much destroyed? The fact that the chapter opens with the phrase "The word came to Jeremiah from the Lord" had to be a pleasant thought to him. It was a reminder that "This isn't it" as far as Jeremiah's life and ministry is concerned.
 - c) OK John, good for Jeremiah why should I care? Because we never know when God's done with us. Most of us have had moments of burn out where we feel like we can't go on any further. It's natural and this too shall pass! Sometimes the key is simply to just trust that God's not through with us until He says so. He has the right to use us or not use us when He desires. Simply meaning we're to go through life, making the best decisions we can. I don't know what my future holds and neither do you. All we can do is make plans and to make the best decisions possible based on what's in front of us. Jeremiah didn't know his future, but trusted God through it. Speaking of Jeremiah's future, Verse 2:
5. Verse 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.
- a) Keep in mind this isn't Jeremiah talking. It's a Babylonian guard. Jeremiah was taken as a prisoner just like everyone else. I don't know how the commander recognized Jeremiah. I suspect he heard about his reputation based on the speech made in these verses. He asked a few people where he'd find Jeremiah or maybe he heard him speak before.
 - b) Notice the Babylonian is invoking God's most holy name. That's what "LORD" in capitals means. Maybe he heard other Jewish people use it and picked it up. The point is this guy realized Jeremiah predicted disaster due to Israel's collective sins and "preached it". It also shows anyone in the Old Testament can preach correctly, not just Israelites. Consider that this guy's name is now known through all of history for correctly preaching the truth. We read in Verse 1 that the "word came to Jeremiah", yet there are no Jeremiah quotes here in these chapters. Maybe it's as simple as the fact that the word came to Jeremiah by way of this man speaking. Just a possibility.
 - c) OK John interesting history. Why should we care? If nothing else it shows that rebellion against God is often in the face of people who knew what was the right thing to do. It's an example of open rebellion against God and being called it for it!
 - i) So what about the related issue? Should we call out those who should know what to do but ignore it? Matthew 18 lays out the method we're to confront sin issues. I would say in short is we approach them one on one. If they refuse to acknowledge it, then we repeat the issue with witnesses. If they don't a third time, then God tells us in effect to go public.

- ii) The only time I ever saw this play out was years ago, in a church I was involved in at that time had an elder who was having an affair and refused to walk away. He also refused to quit that church board. Anyway, that played out and as best I recall he left the church after that.
 - iii) My sole point here is simply that it's ok to "call someone out" if we do it the way it says in the "Matthew 18" model.
 - iv) Meanwhile, we still have the scene of Jeremiah and the guard setting him free:
6. Verse 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."
- a) Essentially the guard gave Jeremiah a bunch of options. He said in effect, we all know of your preaching against Israel. Now that it's "past tense and your job is done", you're free come with the other prisoners to Babylon (but not in chains, as you can come as free man) or he could stay in the land of Israel and report to Gedaliah who is the head guy in charge of those who were staying in that land after the deportation.
 - b) The view of the Babylonians at this point in effect was, "We're tired of all this rebellion in this land, but we don't want to waste good farmland". Therefore we're leaving the poor so they can farm it and we can collect taxes based on their hard work is my best guess.
 - c) Anyway, Jeremiah had the option of "hanging around". I'm sure he wondered if God was through with him now that the invasion is done. The answer is no simply because we got another ten chapters or so to go in this book.
 - d) Trying to think like Jeremiah, he probably thought, I'm trained to be a priest, if I'm given a chance to stay, I might as well stay and minister to Jewish people here. Maybe he prayed first and simply made the decision. That too is a good thing to keep in mind as a believer: We are free to make the best decisions we can given the information in front of us, if none of the options violates biblical principals.
 - e) Bottom line Jeremiah had the option to stay or go, and he chose to stay. That also explains how Jeremiah knew the details we'll read in the rest of these two chapters. In other words God apparently didn't make it clear for Jeremiah to stay, yet God used the events that will occur in these chapters to teach us about the consequences of rebellion.
7. Verse 5 (cont.): 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.
- a) I get the "He let Jeremiah go" part. Why does the text mention he gave Jeremiah as gift as well? Maybe to show that not all Babylonians were cruel killers. Maybe it was just a way of saying, "Thanks for speaking the truth and here's my way of saying thanks for how you played a part in this whole affair". It also shows that God doesn't just care about salvation issues. He also provides for us as to continue to be a witness for Him.
 - b) Anyway, Jeremiah chose to stay and not he went to report in to the "governor" who ruled at a place called Mizpah. Without going into details, since Jerusalem was being destroyed it was the place where he set up headquarters to rule over the land.
 - c) Before we move into the "heart" of these two chapters, first a word about what's ahead. It will shift focus from Jeremiah to the governor and the man who killed him. Remember it is a story about rebellion against God's will and the consequences of rebellion.
 - d) Yes it occurred a "gazillion" years ago. The point isn't the specifics of the story as much as it to teach us about the consequences about rebellion against His will. We'll about to read of many innocent people getting hurt. That's what happens when rebellion occurs!

8. Verse 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."
- a) We sort of get a "roll call" here of the players in the rest of this chapter and the next one. I want you to notice a lack of any mention of Jeremiah here. In fact he's not mentioned until we get to the next lesson on Chapters 42-43, which is a related but different story. I'm sure he was in the background of this story as he got to record some gory details and they will occur. I'm jumping the gun here. Let's focus on these verses for a bit.
 - b) The key people in the rebellion against the governor are mentioned here led by Ishmael. Keep in mind all of this is a "Jewish thing" in the sense that all the people rebelling against the Babylonian leader. So if these are the "bad guys" why are they all listed by name? My guess is because Jeremiah was there and wanted to single them out. Since we're dealing with the topic of rebellion, it sort of shows that "we don't get away with stuff".
 - c) Anyway, these Israelites came to the governor's headquarters, and the governor told them to "relax, settle down, farm the land, accept the fact the Babylonians are now in charge, oh and pay your taxes". That last part wasn't mentioned specifically, but I'm guessing it was implied just by the fact of who's in charge!
 - d) It's also noteworthy to realize that the Babylonians didn't completely destroy that land. In these verses the Israelites were told to collect the harvest. That means seeds were planted and things grew or just naturally grew. Either way, God provided for the poor still living in that land.
 - e) The governor closed in effect by saying, "Deal with it, accept it, do your job as I'm the guy in charge here now."
 - f) Anyway, most of the players are all in place for the drama that's about to unfold! We get a few more in the next two verses.
9. Verse 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.
- a) Let's be honest, when it's a time of war, a lot of people like to run for safety. Across the Jordan River in what is the country of Jordan today was three distinct territories that are called Moab, Ammon and Edom. Anyway, a lot of Jewish people went there to avoid a life as a slave in Babylon. Now that the war is over and the current governor says come on back farm the land, and everything is fine some Jewish people did return there.
 - b) Anyway all of this sets up the story we're about to read about murder and rebellion:
10. Verse 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?"
- a) Bottom line, some people got wind of the fact that Ishmael wanted to kill the governor.

- b) So why would the other Jewish people not support this effort? The logical answer is if the plot to kill that governor was successful, the Babylon army could come back and wipe out even more than they did this time. Besides reading between the lines here, it appears that this governor was as decent a man as the Israelites would hope for. He wasn't killing any of the remaining people but was really trying to be reasonable.
 - c) So given all of that why would this Ishmael guy want to kill him? Because rebellion is the natural aspect of our personality. We want to be in charge. We want to rule ourselves. It is the false idea that we're really in control of our lives when in reality God is, even if that is not a thing we're willing accept at the moment. It could simply be an act of rebellion to the Babylonians ruling. After all the Amorites apparently are behind this. That is another small nation that also feared the rise of the Babylonian Empire. By killing this guy it was meant to send a message to the Babylonians. Grant it, its not a good plan, but truly it was an act of rebellion.
 - d) All that leads us back to these verses. A man named Johanan tells the governor let me go kill Ishmael. I'm positive he wants to kill you and "let me beat him to the punch". It seems like this Johanan guy was simply trying to do the right thing. Obviously he could simply have him arrested but he'd need witnesses that this guy really did want to kill him. Still it is an action of "violence to stop violence" and whether or not the motivation was right, it's what he wanted to do. The reaction to this plan is in the next verse.
11. Verse 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."
- a) I don't know if Gedaliah (the governor) was naïve or just the overly trusting type. Either way it'll be his fate to die for not "nipping this in the bud" when he had a chance. As we'll see, it will cost him his life for that factor.
 - b) Think about it from my theme about Rebellion. To be naïve about it and not deal with it is what causes death. I'm not saying all sin leads to human death, but obviously not live our life as God desires we do is effectively rebellion. We may still be saved, but it will always be costly when we fail to live as He desires. As the old saying goes, "When we play with fire, we get burned". That's what happened to Gedaliah here. Speaking of "playing with fire", it's time to get to the murder itself.
12. Chapter 41, Verse 1: In the seventh month Ishmael son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, who was of royal blood and had been one of the king's officers, came with ten men to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah. While they were eating together there, ² Ishmael son of Nethaniah and the ten men who were with him got up and struck down Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, with the sword, killing the one whom the king of Babylon had appointed as governor over the land. ³ Ishmael also killed all the Jews who were with Gedaliah at Mizpah, as well as the Babylonian soldiers who were there.
- a) Let's start by explaining what the "seventh month" means. For Jewish people it's the time of several high holidays, including a "New Year's celebration", a day of fasting and a time of a big seven day party called "The Feast of Booths". My point is even though Jerusalem was in ruins and the temple no longer existed, "Old habits died hard" and the people did travel to "headquarters". Could I be wrong? Could it just be that Jeremiah recalled exactly when the murder occurred? Sure. We don't have a year stamp here, but obviously it had to be soon after all the war was over.
 - b) Anyway, it's "killing spree" time. Ishmael killed Gedaliah. However he didn't stop there. He also killed the Jewish people who were with him at that headquarters and Babylonian soldiers who were there in effect to enforce the new "law of the land". Bottom line it was a blood bath. However, it's not over yet as we'll see in the next set of verses.
 - c) OK John this is a sad story that occurred thousands of years ago. I should care because? It is a story of "sin left unchecked" as it grew into a full scale rebellion against God's word. It meant a lot of suffering and innocent people being killed!

13. Verse 4: The day after Gedaliah's assassination, before anyone knew about it, ⁵ eighty men who had shaved off their beards, torn their clothes and cut themselves came from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria, bringing grain offerings and incense with them to the house of the LORD.
- a) I just talked about the fact the 7th month of the Jewish calendar is an annual celebration. I bring that up again here, because we read of eighty men traveling to the headquarters that the governor set up. Could it simply have been a peace offering? Of course. Either way, it was a way of saying, "OK, the war's over, the damage is done, we bring gifts saying we're accepting the situation. It mentions these men shaved their beards, ripped their clothes as well as cut themselves. To make it simple, these were all designed to be signs of remorse. I see it as to realize, we blew it big time, time to make peace with the Babylonians as they're there to make peace with the situation.
14. Verse 6: Ishmael son of Nethaniah went out from Mizpah to meet them, weeping as he went. When he met them, he said, "Come to Gedaliah son of Ahikam." ⁷ When they went into the city, Ishmael son of Nethaniah and the men who were with him slaughtered them and threw them into a cistern.
- a) So the "blood bath" continues here. From Ishmael's perspective, it was about trying to get people to riot up against the Babylonians and kill anyone willing to submit to them. Yes, I would say it's crazy to try to rebel against an empire, but these men were bloodthirsty and while they were killing they kept at it.
 - b) The underlying lesson of course has to do with rebellion against God's desire for our lives, as we deal with the consequences of that rebellion. However, I'm beating a dead horse at this point, so I won't drive the point any further.
15. Verse 8: But ten of them said to Ishmael, "Don't kill us! We have wheat and barley, oil and honey, hidden in a field." So he let them alone and did not kill them with the others
- a) Bottom line, ten men bribed their way out of this killing spree.
 - b) Logically the question is, besides the fact it's probably historically accurate as somehow it was Jeremiah who found out all these details and wrote it down for us, why have this fact stated for us. How does it fit the rebellion theme? The answer is sometimes we must do a thing to protect ourselves in the face of disaster. When things are going horribly wrong in the world around us, sometimes we simply have to make the best decisions we can even if it is painful. I'm sure the men who did the bribe weren't crazy about their loss, but it was a wise decision in that it spared their lives.
 - c) Let's face it when we deal with rebellion around us, it's a time of disaster. All we can do is put our trust in God and make the best decisions we can. By the way, it's the last we know of the men who survive here, as the point is made about what they did. Back to the killing spree and the results thereof.
16. Verse 9: Now the cistern where he threw all the bodies of the men he had killed along with Gedaliah was the one King Asa had made as part of his defense against Baasha king of Israel. Ishmael son of Nethaniah filled it with the dead.
- a) Here we get another historical fact, again, if nothing else to prove to us that Jeremiah did know of all the details of what happened then and there. For you "history buffs" well over a hundred years earlier, when the North and South Israel kingdom were at war, the king of the south built a big cistern as part of his defense plan of his territory. Again a cistern is simply a large hole used to collect water for future use.
 - b) The point is Ishmael and his men have been killing bodies left and right. They needed to put them somewhere, so they filled this big hole with all those bodies.
 - c) The point of course is when we start rebelling against God's will for our lives we panic as we try to do things to cover up our mess. The simple point is "rebellion is messy" and we add sin to sin by trying to cover our tracks of what we did. Yes consequences are coming in a matter of verses, but you get the idea so far.

17. Verse 10: Ishmael made captives of all the rest of the people who were in Mizpah--the king's daughters along with all the others who were left there, over whom Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam. Ishmael son of Nethaniah took them captive and set out to cross over to the Ammonites.
- a) Realize that Ishmael's goal is to start a rebellion against Babylon. You might recall in the last lesson that the last king of Israel was taken captive and all his sons were killed as that was the last thing the king saw before he was blinded. Notice Verse 10 says that the king's daughters were left there, so they weren't part of the caravan taken to Babylon.
 - b) I have to admit, I wondered how Jeremiah escaped all of this? After all he was in favor of the Babylonians based on what he preached. My guess is he hid out somewhere while all of this was going on and was busy writing down information as he heard.
 - c) Anyway, Ishmael knew that all of this would endanger his life and apparently he is done with his killing spree. Now he wanted to take people captive across the Jordan River back to the land of the Ammonites (again part of Jordan today.)
18. Verse 11: When Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers who were with him heard about all the crimes Ishmael son of Nethaniah had committed,¹² they took all their men and went to fight Ishmael son of Nethaniah. They caught up with him near the great pool in Gibeon.¹³ When all the people Ishmael had with him saw Johanan son of Kareah and the army officers who were with him, they were glad.¹⁴ All the people Ishmael had taken captive at Mizpah turned and went over to Johanan son of Kareah.¹⁵ But Ishmael son of Nethaniah and eight of his men escaped from Johanan and fled to the Ammonites.
- a) We're sort of wrapping up this story in a strange way. Apparently some army officers that were not killed so far, rallied themselves to take on Ishmael. His captives don't appear to be bound up so they went over to stand with Johanan and the Babylonian soldiers.
 - b) However, Ishmael himself and eight of his fellow killers escaped. I must admit it does not sound very "biblical" to let the bad guys live through it. Yes that's the way it occurred. It's also a model of how temptation works. Let's face it, we can't kill those desires. All we can do is turn them over to God so He can work with us with them.
 - i) Let me explain: God's power is greater than ours by definition. He also gives us an ability to deal with temptation. It's by trusting in His power. God promises to give us a way to escape when we face such temptations.
 - ii) So if that's true, why did all those people get killed? It wasn't their fault all Ishmael went on the warpath. As I state every now and then, if this life is all that there is, it is a very unfair life. All we can do is trust God and make the best decisions we can through all situations. When temptations come, the best thing we can do is pray to help us with it. To help through horrible situations.
 - iii) We can't kill the urge for temptation and I suspect that's the word picture of why it is that Ishmael escaped. Again, the name Ishmael is associated with "the flesh". It was the name of Isaac's brother who wasn't the promised son and was born by an effort of "the flesh" to help God along with His plan. It can't be a coincidence that this Ishmael is also doing things that are causing temptation. Not in a sexual sense but in desire for power. He wanted to overthrow the Babylonians. Yes God had a plan to end them, but again it's on His timing and anytime we use "the flesh" as to try to help God, all we do is get in trouble. That's the underlying story here.
 - c) Bottom line is this strange two story ends with a bunch of people dead and the killers get off "scott free". There's no mention of them anymore in the book.
 - d) So why have a "temptation" story here at this point in Jeremiah? Because the war's over. I think people thought, "OK, the damage is done, I'm free to do what I want now!" We'll be in trouble any time we think, "God's finished with his thing, now I can do whatever I feel like doing!" That line of thinking that "it's ok to give into temptation" will always get us in trouble and that's the underlying message of these two chapters.

19. Verse 16: Then Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers who were with him led away all the survivors from Mizpah whom he had recovered from Ishmael son of Nethaniah after he had assassinated Gedaliah son of Ahikam: the soldiers, women, children and court officials he had brought from Gibeon. ¹⁷ And they went on, stopping at Geruth Kimham near Bethlehem on their way to Egypt ¹⁸ to escape the Babylonians. They were afraid of them because Ishmael son of Nethaniah had killed Gedaliah son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon had appointed as governor over the land.
- a) All that's left now is more of the "clean up" operation. In the next chapter, we'll see how it affects Jeremiah himself. However, that's a different story that I'll leave for next time.
 - b) In the meantime, there's still the issue of what to do with the rest of the Israelites there in the land of Israel at that time. Bottom line everyone there had to be even more scared as a massive killing took place of the Babylonian officials. The Israelites left in the land had to be thinking, we can't hang around here, our fate will be like that of the king or worse. So they decided to escape to Egypt. What happens next is the discussion for the next lesson.
 - c) Best I take that issue on next time, and stop here. Besides we had enough killing here. I'm going to deal with the remaining Israelites and Egypt in the next lesson.
 - d) Again, I'm convinced the reason this story was put here was the Babylonian invasion is a past issue. It's like thinking, "OK, that's over with, what do we do now? The answer of course is to still obey God and make the best decisions we can given what's in front of us. The governor should have taken the threat seriously. The Israelites should have stood for the right thing and worked to stop the mad man. Anyway, these two chapters where the main character is in a sense not part of the story and is "hiding in the background" tells us of the danger of rebellion and how that affects the world around us.
20. Anyway, it is what it is. Let's close in prayer and ask God to give us His strength and power to turn from rebellion against Him and do His will through all situations. Heavenly Father, help us in our weakness to turn from rebellion against you. Help us to recognize situations where fleeing is what's needed. Help us to stand up for what's right and have the boldness to be Your witness to a lost and dying world around us. Guide us today to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen