

6/22/25

Sermon Title: Jeremiah Returns to His Fellow People Left in the Land of Judah

Preacher: Pastor Kim Soonbae

Scripture Passage: Jeremiah 40:1–16

(Jeremiah 40:1) 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.

(Jeremiah 40:2) When the commander of the guard found Jeremiah, he said to him, “The LORD your God decreed this disaster for this place.

(Jeremiah 40:3) 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.

(Jeremiah 40:4) 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.”

(Jeremiah 40:5) However, before Jeremiah turned to go,^[a] 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.

(Jeremiah 40:6) So Jeremiah went to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah and stayed with him among the people who were left behind in the land.

(Jeremiah 40:7) 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,

(Jeremiah 40:8) 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^[b] the son of the Maakathite, and their men.

(Jeremiah 40:9) 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.

(Jeremiah 40:10)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 olive oil, and put them in your storage jars, and live in the towns you have taken over.”

(Jeremiah 40:11)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, (Jeremiah 40:12) 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.

(Jeremiah 40:13)Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers still in the open country came to Gedaliah at Mizpah

(Jeremiah 40:14)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.

(Jeremiah 40:15)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?”

(Jeremiah 40:16)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.”

From chapter 1 to chapter 38 of this book, we find the warnings and prophecies that God gave to the people of Judah through the prophet Jeremiah.

Chapters 39 to 44 record the fulfillment of those prophecies.

Among these chapters that describe the fulfillment, chapter 39 records the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of Judah by Babylon.

Chapters 40 to 44 detail the events that occurred in the land of Judah in the years following its fall, along with the messages from God delivered through Jeremiah during that time.

This chapter begins with the encounter between the Babylonian commander Nebuzaradan and the prophet Jeremiah, following the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah by the Babylonian invasion.

Nebuzaradan finds Jeremiah among the exiles being taken to Babylon and releases him at Ramah.

After that, the word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah—this being the first message given by God after Judah's fall.

The fact that God continues to speak to Judah through Jeremiah even after their destruction shows that God's ultimate purpose was not simply to hand them over to Babylon for their downfall.

Rather, it reveals His ongoing desire for restoration and relationship with His people.

(Jeremiah 40:1) 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.

Ramah was located about 8 kilometers north of Jerusalem, not far from Anathoth, the hometown of Jeremiah.

The Babylonian army gathered the captives there before sending them off to Babylon.

After the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah had been released from the courtyard of the guard by order of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

However, it is unclear why he was later found bound in chains among the exiles being taken to Babylon.

It is speculated that after staying at Gedaliah's house, Jeremiah may have gone out to deliver God's message and was mistakenly seized by Babylonian soldiers and added to the group of captives.

Interestingly, the passage says, "The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah," yet no direct message from God follows.

Instead, it is the Babylonian commander Nebuzaradan who speaks.

At times, God speaks through events, circumstances, or even the mouths of others.

In this case, it appears that God's message is being conveyed through the foreign commander Nebuzaradan.

Commander Nebuzaradan accurately identifies the reason for Judah's downfall.

He declares that Judah fell because they sinned against the Lord and did not obey His voice.

(Jeremiah 40:2) When the commander of the guard found Jeremiah, he said to him, "The LORD your God decreed this disaster for this place.

(Jeremiah 40:3) 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.

Commander Nebuzaradan was already aware of what Jeremiah had proclaimed to the people of Judah, and now he acknowledges that Jeremiah's prophecy has been fulfilled.

The Babylonian commander Nebuzaradan immediately releases Jeremiah.

He then invites him to come with him to Babylon, promising that he will treat him well if he chooses to go.

However, he also tells Jeremiah that King Nebuchadnezzar has appointed Gedaliah as governor, and if Jeremiah prefers to return to him and live among the people remaining in Judah, he is free to do so.

(Jeremiah 40:4) 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."

(Jeremiah 40:5) However, before Jeremiah turned to go,^[a] 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.

Commander Nebuzaradan of Babylon entered Jerusalem a month after its destruction, further demolishing the city and organizing the deportation of captives.

That such a man would show favor to Jeremiah was because he remembered King Nebuchadnezzar's command not to harm Jeremiah and to grant him whatever he requested.

King Nebuchadnezzar was already well aware of Jeremiah's actions in Jerusalem before its fall.

As a result, Jeremiah was classified as pro-Babylonian.

Without hesitation, Jeremiah chose to remain in Judah.

Life was extremely harsh not only for the exiles taken to Babylon, but also for those who remained in Judah.

These people were considered unworthy even to be taken captive.

They had no possessions, no education, and lived at the bottom of society.

Jeremiah chose to stay with them, knowing that it was God's will for him to do so.

Jeremiah understood that God's ultimate purpose for Judah was not its destruction, but that the people might return to Him through judgment.

So he stayed in Judah and continued to proclaim God's word.

Although Jeremiah had urged the people of Judah to surrender to Babylon before Jerusalem's fall, he did so not for his own comfort, but because it was the only way for Judah to survive.

His true concern was not for his own well-being, but for the restoration of his people.

Jeremiah went to Mizpah to stay with Gedaliah and lived among the remnant of the people in the land, continuing to proclaim the word of God to them.

(Jeremiah 40:6) So Jeremiah went to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah and stayed with him among the people who were left behind in the land.

Gedaliah was the grandson of Shaphan and the son of Ahikam.

His grandfather Shaphan, who served as an official under King Josiah, played a significant role in initiating a religious reform after delivering the Book of the Law found in the temple to the king.

His father Ahikam was one of the royal envoys sent by King Josiah to consult the prophetess Huldah and later protected the prophet Jeremiah when he was in danger after preaching at the temple.

Gedaliah settled in Mizpah, away from the ruins of Jerusalem, and devoted himself to stabilizing the kingdom of Judah, which had fallen into chaos and fear.

Upon hearing that King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah as governor over Judah, all the military leaders and their men came to Gedaliah and gathered around him.

(Jeremiah 40:7) 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,

(Jeremiah 40:8) 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^[b] the son of the Maakathite, and their men.

(Jeremiah 40:9) 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.

(Jeremiah 40:10) 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 olive oil, and put them in your storage jars, and live in the towns you have taken over.”

Gedaliah reassured them that even now, if they served the king of Babylon and his officials, they would be safe.

He clearly understood that the only way for the people of Judah to survive at that point was to submit to the Chaldeans.

So he told them that he would remain in Mizpah to represent the people of Judah and serve the Chaldeans, and instructed them to go and help the people living in the towns of Judah to gather and store wine, summer fruits, and oil, so they could live.

Not only the people originally living in Judah, but also the Judeans who had been scattered across the Jordan in regions like Moab, Ammon, and Edom, heard that King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah as governor of Judah.

They returned from all these places and joined the remnant in cultivating the devastated land and harvesting its fruit.

(Jeremiah 40:11) 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, (Jeremiah 40:12) 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.

The devastated land began to regain stability, and people were able to resume normal life.

They could once again hold on to hope for the future.

However, in the midst of this recovery, a secret and shocking plot to assassinate Gedaliah was unfolding.

Baalis, the king of the Ammonites, incited Ishmael son of Nethaniah to kill Gedaliah.

When the military officers, led by Johanan, learned of the assassination plot, they informed Gedaliah of the plan.

But Gedaliah did not believe them.

(Jeremiah 40:13) Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers still in the open country came to Gedaliah at Mizpah

(Jeremiah 40:14) 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.

Johanan knew that if Gedaliah, the governor of Judah appointed by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, were to be assassinated, the people of Judah would be scattered once again, and even the remnant would be destroyed.

Therefore, he met Gedaliah in secret and tried to persuade him to let him kill Ishmael.

(Jeremiah 40:15) 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?"

However, Gedaliah did not accept Johanan's proposal.

(Jeremiah 40:16) 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."

Gedaliah's decision leaves us with deep regret.

As a result, Gedaliah was murdered, and just as Johanan feared, the people of Judah were once again scattered.

We do not know exactly why Gedaliah did not accept the warning about the assassination plot.

It is possible that, having experienced the factional divisions within the royal court during King Zedekiah's reign, Gedaliah feared that responding to such a report would further divide the already devastated Judah.

Nevertheless, Gedaliah made an unwise decision that led to a great tragedy.

Beloved members of Church of God Dreams,
Judah has fallen.

Jerusalem has been conquered by Babylon, and the temple has been burned.

The king, nobles, and many people who once lived in Jerusalem have been taken into exile.

The land of Judah has become a land of despair, where no hope can be seen.

Only those who were poor, uneducated, abandoned, and forgotten by the world remain in the land.

And yet, Jeremiah returns to that very place.

Although the Babylonian commander Nebuzaradan offered him generous treatment if he would go with him to Babylon, Jeremiah did not choose the path of comfort.

Instead, he made the decision to remain where God's will was — among the remnant of God's people.

He knew that even though the land was in ruins, that was his place.

Not only those taken to Babylon but also those who remained in the land were still important to God.

God brings forth hope even in places of despair.

He plants seeds in barren soil and kindles the flame of His word among the broken walls.

Jeremiah returned to the heart of devastated Judah to proclaim once again the message:

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:11)

The place Jeremiah returned to was not one of comfort.

There he would face further suffering, rejection, and threats to his life.

But he did not retreat.

He was led by the call of God.

Jeremiah did not simply fulfill the role of a prophet - he bore the very heart of God.

Because God never gave up on His people, Jeremiah also never abandoned them.

Today, we too often stand at a crossroads like Jeremiah - between the way of comfort and the way of commitment, between the path of self-interest and the path of God's will.

Just as Jeremiah chose the latter — to stay with those who remained in Judah and bring them God's word, comfort, and hope - may we also return to the places

where God sends us, to the neighbors who are left behind, and bring them God's word, comfort, and hope.

Even if that place feels like a ruin, God will write a new story there.