



Thou Speakest Falsely of Him!

In this study we are going to look at an unusual and little known story found in the book of Jeremiah the Prophet. I have never, as far as I can remember, heard a sermon on this story. But first I want to have you notice a couple of references.

"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." 1 Corinthians 10:11

"The prophets of God spoke less for their own time than for the ages to come, and especially for the generation that would live amid the last scenes of this earth's history.

"Not unto themselves but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the Gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, which things the angels desire to look into."

"All these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." *The Signs of the Times 01-13-98*

All those stories and counsels and prophecies are more for us than for them. There are lessons in them, and parallels to our own day. We gain much by busily studying and pleading with God that the Holy Spirit guides us to those lessons, so we can take heed of them.

We want to set the scene here; the people of Judah have been taken captive into Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. There have been several attacks, until now the city lies in ruins. A few people have been left in the land, mostly the poor, to till the soil and care for trees and vineyards. The king made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan to be the governor over this feeble and scattered group.

When Jeremiah was rescued out of the prison that the Jews kept him in by Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, he was at liberty to go where he wished. He decided to go and cast in his lot with the remnant left in the land and seek to benefit them. It is interesting that the Babylonians recognised him as a true prophet of God, when most of the Jews refused to recognise this, in spite of the clearest evidence.

Shortly after these arrangements had been made, and the people were working in the fields under the captains that had been set up, some serious information came to the attention of these military leaders.

Obviously it was more than a rumor; there must have been some pretty good evidence that it was true, because Johanan, and all the other captains hurried to Mizpah as a united group and Johanan brought the warning to Gedaliah. Let's read about it starting in Jeremiah 40:13, 14.

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"Moreover Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that were in the fields, came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, And said unto him, Dost thou certainly know that Baalis the king of the Ammonites hath sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to slay thee? But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam believed them not."

He didn't want to believe anything bad, so he rejected the counsel of his best men and loyal servants. But Johanan didn't just give up on the matter; he knew it was true and it was serious, so serious he was willing to take action to stop it. So again he sought to communicate to Gedaliah:

"Then Johanan the son of Kareah spake to Gedaliah in Mizpah secretly, saying, Let me go, I pray thee, and I will slay Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no man shall know it: wherefore should he slay thee, that all the Jews which are gathered unto thee should be scattered, and the remnant in Judah perish?" Jeremiah 40:15

You can be sure, that if he was willing to kill this man to protect the governor, he had some very good reasons to know the threat was real. But again this sweet, but unwise man, Gedaliah, would not listen to him.

"But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said unto Johanan the son of Kareah, Thou shalt not do this thing: for thou speakest falsely of Ishmael." Jeremiah 40:16

Notice the attitude: "You are speaking unkindly of Ishmael, you are critical, you are making false accusations against a good man."

How do I know that he felt this way? Well, it is pretty clear by what happened next. It wasn't long before Ishmael and ten princes came riding into town, and rather than being alarmed about this, Gedaliah invited them home for dinner. There is no way he would have done this, if he had not believed Ishmael was a good guy.

"Now it came to pass in the seventh month, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah the son of Elishama, of the seed royal, and the princes of the king, even ten men with him, came unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah; and there they did eat bread together in Mizpah." Jeremiah 41:1

Buddy, buddy and all that. But *was* Ishmael a good guy? Did Gedaliah's trusting him, make any impression on him? Did Gedaliah's courtesy and kindness cause Ishmael to respond in like manner? It most certainly did not!

"Then arose Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and the ten men that were with him, and smote Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan with the sword, and slew him, whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land." Jeremiah 41:2

So perished a man who was too 'nice' to take a warning; it would have been bad enough if that were all that came of it, but because Gedaliah had rejected warning and good counsel, and allowed a wolf in among the sheep, many suffered.

"Ishmael also slew all the Jews that were with him, even with Gedaliah, at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans that were found there, and the men of war." Jeremiah 41:3

Now this guy managed to keep his dastardly deeds secret for a short while, and first thing you know some other innocent people walk right into the trap.

"And it came to pass the second day after he had slain Gedaliah, and no man knew it, That there came certain from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria, even fourscore men, having their beards shaven, and their clothes rent, and having cut themselves,

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with offerings and incense in their hand, to bring them to the house of the LORD."
Jeremiah 41:4, 5

Here comes this group of honest worshippers wanting to worship at what was left of the temple and here goes this treacherous wolf, out to meet them.

"And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah went forth from Mizpah to meet them, weeping all along as he went: and it came to pass, as he met them, he said unto them, Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam." Jeremiah 41:6

Here he goes; all full of crocodile tears and lies.

"And it was so, when they came into the midst of the city, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah slew them, and cast them into the midst of the pit, he, and the men that were with him." Jeremiah 41:7

Now another batch of men are slaughtered, all because of a rejected warning. But a few of these people managed to save their lives by bribing the wolf.

"But ten men were found among them that said unto Ishmael, Slay us not: for we have treasures in the field, of wheat, and of barley, and of oil, and of honey. So he forbore, and slew them not among their brethren. Now the pit wherein Ishmael had cast all the dead bodies of the men, whom he had slain because of Gedaliah, was it which Asa the king had made for fear of Baasha king of Israel: and Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it with them that were slain." Jeremiah 41:8, 9.

A whole pit full of dead bodies, just because one man wouldn't believe anything that wasn't nicey-nicey! Then the rest of the people were rounded up and kidnapped.

"Then Ishmael carried away captive all the residue of the people that were in Mizpah, even the king's daughters, and all the people that remained in Mizpah, whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had committed to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam: and Ishmael the son of Nethaniah carried them away captive, and departed to go over to the Ammonites." Jeremiah 41:10

Friends, these days we are seeing the foolishness of Gedaliah enacted over and over again. Messages are sent out from earnest watchmen, warning of deeply laid plots to undermine God's platform of truth, and weaken the confidence of the church in the Words of His prophet, and yet the majority receive these warnings and cast them aside saying, "Thou shalt not do this thing: for thou speakest falsely of this person"

Over and over we hear, "It isn't nice to criticize others", and "Who are *you* to point out the sins of others?" But friends, the proof is there! The very words and statements of these people are quoted verbatim from their books and sermons.

Their theories and claims are held up against inspired counsel, and clearly shown to be darkness. When we refuse to take warning from the Word of the Lord and faithful watchmen, we allow wolves to remain in the flock and many sheep will be slain, and just as in the case of Gedaliah, we can be slain ourselves and many others be led into the pit of error because of our unwise influence. 'Nicey-nicey' is sometimes just plain stupidity!

Let us look at more lessons in the second half of this story. Now we see Johanan again, coming to the rescue:

Jeremiah 41:11 "But when Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that were with him, heard of all the evil that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done, 12

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Then they took all the men, and went to fight with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and found him by the great waters that are in Gibeon. 13 Now it came to pass, that when all the people which were with Ishmael saw Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that were with him, then they were glad. 14 So all the people that Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah cast about and returned, and went unto Johanan the son of Kareah. 15 But Ishmael the son of Nethaniah escaped from Johanan with eight men, and went to the Ammonites."

Now we see a situation shaping up where the prophet Jeremiah again comes to the front with counsel from the Lord.

Jeremiah 41:16 "Then took Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that were with him, all the remnant of the people whom he had recovered from Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, from Mizpah, after that he had slain Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, even mighty men of war, and the women, and the children, and the eunuchs, whom he had brought again from Gibeon: 17 And they departed, and dwelt in the habitation of Chimham, which is by Bethlehem, to go to enter into Egypt, 18 Because of the Chaldeans: for they were afraid of them, because Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had slain Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon made governor in the land."

Now, Johanan and his captains made a profession of believing the prophet, and went to him for counsel. Sadly though, they already had their minds made up what they were going to do.

Jeremiah 42:1 "Then all the captains of the forces, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and Jezaniah the son of Hoshai, and all the people from the least even unto the greatest, came near, 2 And said unto Jeremiah the prophet, Let, we beseech thee, our supplication be accepted before thee, and pray for us unto the LORD thy God, even for all this remnant; (for we are left but a few of many, as thine eyes do behold us:) 3 That the LORD thy God may shew us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do."

All very proper and righteous, don't you think? But all is not as it seems.

Jeremiah 42:4 "Then Jeremiah the prophet said unto them, I have heard you; behold, I will pray unto the LORD your God according to your words; and it shall come to pass, that whatsoever thing the LORD shall answer you, I will declare it unto you; I will keep nothing back from you."

The prophet agrees to seek counsel for them and they promise;

Jeremiah 42:5 "Then they said to Jeremiah, The LORD be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the LORD thy God shall send thee to us.

6 Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the LORD our God, to whom we send thee; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the LORD our God."

Oh, so holy! Now after ten days the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, and he called for these captains and told them that the Lord said for them to remain in the land and not to go to Egypt. He promised they would be blessed and need not be afraid of the King of Babylon. He promised to bless them and protect them if they would obey Him. He also warned them that if they

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disobeyed and went to Egypt for protection, that all the trouble they were afraid of, was just what they were going to get!

Jeremiah 42:7 "So shall it be with all the men that set their faces to go into Egypt to sojourn there; they shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: and none of them shall remain or escape from the evil that I will bring upon them.

18 For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; As mine anger and my fury hath been poured forth upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem; so shall my fury be poured forth upon you, when ye shall enter into Egypt: and ye shall be an execration, and an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach; and ye shall see this place no more.

19 The LORD hath said concerning you, O ye remnant of Judah; Go ye not into Egypt: know certainly that I have admonished you this day."

A sharp warning to such godly men, isn't it? But wait a minute; let's hear the rest of it:

Jeremiah 42:20 "For ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the LORD your God, saying, Pray for us unto the LORD our God; and according unto all that the LORD our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it. 21 And now I have this day declared it to you; but ye have not obeyed the voice of the LORD your God, nor any thing for the which he hath sent me unto you. 22 Now therefore know certainly that ye shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, in the place whither ye desire to go and to sojourn."

God told Jeremiah that these men were lying, they already had made up their minds to do what they wanted to, and no council from the Lord was going to slow them down a bit!

So what happened when the prophet's message crossed their paths? What happened to their profession to believe the prophet, and to want his counsel? Jeremiah finished telling them the message of the Lord and here is their response:

Jeremiah 43:2 "Then spake Azariah the son of Hoshaiah, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the proud men, saying unto Jeremiah, Thou speakest falsely: the LORD our God hath not sent thee to say, Go not into Egypt to sojourn there: 3 But Baruch the son of Neriah setteth thee on against us, for to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they might put us to death, and carry us away captives into Babylon."

"You're lying! Someone bribed you; someone influenced you against us! If we listen to you, we'll all get killed." So off they went, to do what they intended to do all along. So why did they consult the prophet anyway? No doubt they were so cocky and sure of themselves, that they figured whatever they thought of, was the will of God. When the message did not agree at all with their ideas, they rejected it, and accused Jeremiah of falsehood.

How could they do this? Everything that Jeremiah had prophesied had come true to the 'T'. As we said before, even the Babylonians recognized his truthfulness. If we reject any truth because it is not what we want to believe, after a while we come to think our own ideas are the will of God, and no proof or evidence will be able to show us differently.

So off they went to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them. No sooner had they arrived there in Tahpanhes then Jeremiah got a message from the Lord:

Jeremiah 43:8 "Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah in Tahpanhes, saying, 9 Take great stones in thine hand, and hide them in the clay in the brickkiln, which is at the entry of Pharaoh's house in Tahpanhes, in the sight of the men of Judah; 10 And say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will send and take

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Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will set his throne upon these stones that I have hid; and he shall spread his royal pavilion over them."

King Nebuchadnezzar was going to come and take Egypt and set up his tent right over those very stones. Then all that the Lord had warned would come true, and the very things they feared, would happen to them because they did not believe or trust the Lord.

Now we see an interesting situation. While Jeremiah is there with this remnant now in Egypt, contrary to the Word of God, he sees them continuing to take part in heathen celebrations and holidays. He sees them burning incense to other gods, and pouring out drink offerings to the queen of heaven and making cakes to her. He gives them the message from the Lord saying:

Jeremiah 44:7 "Therefore now thus saith the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls, to cut off from you man and woman, child and suckling, out of Judah, to leave you none to remain; 8 In that ye provoke me unto wrath with the works of your hands, burning incense unto other gods in the land of Egypt, whither ye be gone to dwell, that ye might cut yourselves off, and that ye might be a curse and a reproach among all the nations of the earth?"

He points out to them that this idolatry and compromising and practicing the heathen, worldly ways, were why Jerusalem was now in ruins. He pleads with them to turn away from these things, which offend the Lord. He warns that they will all be wiped out, if they keep on with the sins that the Lord had sent Judah into captivity for. So what do they reply to his earnest appeal?

Jeremiah 44:15 "Then all the men which knew that their wives had burned incense unto other gods, and all the women that stood by, a great multitude, even all the people that dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying, 16 As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee. 17 But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. 18 But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine. 19 And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven, and poured out drink offerings unto her, did we make her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink offerings unto her, without our men?"

What twisted reasoning! Here they are saying that because they had done these things in the past and got away with it, this showed it was right to do it. They even twist things around, until they are saying that the trouble all came on them, not because they were sinning against God, but because they had left off these heathen practices.

Friends, when once we refuse the truth of God or the message of His prophet because it tells us something we don't want to hear, we start on a downward path to spiritual blindness and stupidity that nothing but total repentance and surrender to the Lord can ever turn back.

We can come to the place where no evidence, no matter how clear and strong will be accepted. We can be like ancient Israel after the rebellion of Korah. The very earth had opened up and swallowed these people, and the 250 princes with their censers had perished in the fire of God's wrath, and yet they confronted Moses the next day with, "You have killed the people of the Lord!" They would have killed him, had not God intervened.

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There is danger in turning our back on the least bit of a 'thus sayeth the Lord' because it means a change in our life that we are unwilling to make. Nothing is as dense as the spiritual darkness of those who reject God's Word because it crosses their inclinations. The sad decree goes forth, "They are joined to their idols, leave them alone" and the Holy Spirit departs forever. Oh, may we all plead for the eyesalve of spiritual discernment and apply it diligently, that we never come to such a pitiful end!