

Gedaliah Ruled For 3 Months in 586 BC

Gedaliah ben Ahikam was appointed governor. His father had once saved **Jeremiah's** life (26:24). His grandfather Shaphan was one of Josiah's high officials (**Second Kings 22:3**), and gave strong support to Josiah's reform movement. **Gedaliah** himself had been one of Zedekiah's chief officials. Since Jerusalem was uninhabitable, the seat of government was placed at Mizpah. **Yirmeyahu**, who received preferential treatment by the Babylonians, was placed with other refugees under **Gedaliah's** care at Mizpah.

Even though **Gedaliah** tried hard to appease the population, his plan failed (40:7-12). After a time a certain Ishmael, a member of the royal house who must have escaped from the Babylonians (with the backing of the king of Ammon), assassinated **Gedaliah**, who, though warned of the plot, would not believe the warning.

Ishmael and his fellow conspirators also slew the Babylonian garrison and innocent people who were present. The news of this shameful act reached Johanan ben Kareah, who was absent from Mizpah when the slaughter took place. He pursued Ishmael with a band of armed men, but Ishmael escaped to Ammon. **Gedaliah's** friends in Mizpah, fearing repercussions from Nebuchadnezzar, determined to flee to Egypt, taking with them an unwilling **Jeremiah** (see **Gh - The Flight to Egypt**).

Whether because of this senseless massacre, or for some other reason, there was a **fourth deportation of exiles** in 582 BC (see **Gs - In the Thirty-Seventh Year of the Exile Jehoiachin was Released from Prison**). What happened to Judah thereafter we are not told. The lights had gone out and would not be turned on again for many years. Nothing more is heard of the land of Judah for over forty years, although we know a little more about the exiles in Babylon. The story does not resume until the Babylonian Empire itself was destroyed by Cyrus the Persian and the exiled Jews were repatriated to resume their life in their homeland.

After the conquering of Jerusalem the Babylonians selected the leading people of the city for deportation. The tactic was to remove every one of influence and leadership - artisans, merchants, political leaders, military generals - so that the general populace would be dependent on and submissive to the invaders. Without the leaders the people, like sheep, would submit to the puppet king and the occupying army with a minimum of resistance. It is interesting that **Jeremiah** was left behind. **He** had been ignored for so long as a leader by his own people that the Babylonians didn't consider him important enough to exile.

After four deportations, Isra'el was taken into exile. The people were uprooted from the place in which they were born. The land that had been promised to them, which they had possessed, in which their identity as a people of God had been formed, was gone. They were forced to travel across the Middle Eastern desert seven hundred miles, leaving home, Temple and hills. In the new land, Babylon, customs were strange, the language confusing, and the landscape oddly flat and featureless. All the familiar landmarks were gone. The weather was different. The faces were anonymous and obscure.

No matter how awful the situation may seem, **the God of Isra'el** is still sovereign and in control. **He** never forgets **the nation** that **He** chose to be **His** own treasured possession (**Exodus 19:5**). **God's** desire is to bring **them** back to **Himself** with **their** hearts seeking **God**. Though **He** disciplines **them**, still **God** protects **them** and watches over **them** wherever **they** go (see the commentary on **Esther Bk - The Triumph of the Jews**), for **their** good. This is what the Lord says: "**When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. 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 hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,**" declares the Lord, "**and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,**" declares the Lord. (**Jeremiah 29:10-14**).