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Day 243 - August 31

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## Judah After Israel's Fall (725-585 BCE)

### *A Remnant Flees to Egypt*

**Readings: 2 Kings 25:23-26; Jeremiah 40:7-16; 41:1-18; 42:1-22; 43:1-13; 44:1-30; 51:64**

### *Reflections:*

- Jeremiah the weeping prophet had suffered his whole life with the rebellious and idolatrous nation of Israel. His final account ends with great sadness. The small remnant will act out yet again in cold hardened defiance to God's direct work with them through Jeremiah.
- The account opens with Gedaliah being set in place as governor. Although he is an enemy of Israel, he is actually placed there by God to display God's grace to those few that remain: "Babylon appointed Gedaliah...as governor over the land and had put him in charge of the men, woman and children who were the poorest in the land and who had not been carried into exile to Babylon." He was there to care for the poor and help them restore some measure of wellness to the land: "...you are to harvest wine, summer fruit and oil, and put them in your storage jars, and live in the towns you have taken over." In fact this is what they began to do. But an assassination plot emerges and even though Gedaliah is warned, he ignores the warning and is killed. The leader is a man named Ishmael who must have immediately brought to mind the Ishmael of Genesis. Eighty men, apparently righteous and mourning for the sins of Israel come to offer sacrifices to God. Ishmael pretends to be mourning only to set them up for slaughter. We see how evil he and his followers truly are. A well dub by King Asa (again an evil king) is now filled with the corpses of these righteous men. Ishmael takes the people of that area, Mizpah, captive but the man who had warned Gedaliah, Johanan, comes to their rescue. They escape and Ishmael and his small rebel forces retreat to the Ammonites.
- Will Johanan be a righteous leader? All the Israelites who remained were obviously afraid of the Babylonians now that the Governor Gedaliah had been assassinated. They approach Jeremiah yet again to ask for his counsel from God. He tells them to wait in the land and trust God to take care of them. He warns them not to flee in some attempt to save themselves or else judgment will surely fall on them. So what do they do? Of course. They call Jeremiah a liar and run off to Egypt in the hope that Egypt will save them. There they dive back into full idolatry as the women worship the Queen of Heaven. What does God declare through Jeremiah? "To this day they have not humbled themselves or shown

reverence, nor have they followed my law and decrees I set before you and your fathers.”  
The story of “what doesn’t work” could not end with any greater clarity or certainty: give me the rules, give me my space, give me a strong leader, and hold me accountable ...none of this works to change the human heart.

- This is a perfect exclamation mark at the end of Jeremiah’s life. Even as Israel for the most part is held captive as slaves in Babylon, the new Egypt, a small remnant has actually returned to Egypt to be enslaved again in idolatry. What are the chains that hold them? Are they chains of their enemies? No, it is the chains of a self-centered heart that rejects God as the true savior and provider and seeks to self-save over and over again. We see yet again (how many times have we seen this now?) that it is not external enemies or difficult circumstances that are our true problem. Our true issue is our heart. Our self-centered heart wants to be our own savior and not truly trust or wait for God. Praise God the Messiah will one day come to take away our hearts of stone and give us soft and humble hearts that will completely trust in God.
- “The words of Jeremiah end here.” What a prophetic conclusion to one of the greatest prophets in history of Israel. What a sober conclusion. As we turn the page we now step into life of a nation in chains, a people in exile. There are still lessons to learn as we will now discover.

