I. Jeremiah Freed, 40:1-6:

A. Summary:

1. Ramah (31:15) was a transit point for deportees.

2. Jeremiah was allowed to choose exile or residence in Judah.

3. He was probably allowed this choice because, whereas the Judeans considered his prophecies traitorous, the Babylonians considered them as the words of an ally.

4. Jeremiah chose to reside in Judah and was placed in the custody of Gedaliah, the newly appointed governor of Judah, with whose family Jeremiah had long been friends (26:4; 36:10).

B. The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD indicates the following words of the Babylonian commander are a divine oracle from the Lord to Jeremiah.

1. Oracles did not always come to Jeremiah simply through direct revelation or by the LORD speaking directly to Jeremiah alone.

2. Sometimes, the Lord’s word could be revealed to Jeremiah through the words of someone else.

C. It is unclear where this conversation takes place in the chronological sequence of the story

1. Jeremiah 39:14 mentions Nebuzaradan (and others) taking Jeremiah out of the courtyard and then placing him under Gedaliah’s protection.

2. In this episode he is found among other Judahite prisoners, but he ends up with Gedaliah at the end.

3. It could be that this conversation takes place sometime after the events in 39:14, and that in the interim Jeremiah had gone to Ramah and been incarcerated along with other survivors by some Babylonian soldiers.
4. More likely, 39:14 relates the beginning and end of the Babylonians’ treatment of Jeremiah,

5. These verses relate some of what happened in the interim that led up to his finally coming into Gedalia’s care.

D. The enemy commander makes an amazing statement here.

1. 1st: He does not credit the gods whom he worships with the Babylonian victory.

2. 2nd: His statement implies some level of belief that Israel’s Lord truly is God, because only the true God could bring about what he has predicted.

3. 3rd: He gives an inspired explanation for why this fate has befallen Jerusalem.

E. These words validate Jeremiah’s message on several levels.

1. Literally, they confirm the fulfillment of the words of the prophecy to Ebed-melech just reported (39:16).

2. On a more immediate level, they serve to reassure Jeremiah (if he needs to be reassured) that the Lord is working through the Babylonians.

   a. These words would suggest to the reader that they, like Jeremiah, should be looking to the Babylonians to be the instruments for carrying out the Lord’s plans for his people.

   b. These words also echo the words of Jeremiah himself

      (1) He says that the LORD has brought this upon Jerusalem, and that he has done so because the people did not obey him (“listen to his voice;” cp. 37:2; 38:20).

      (2) This also should confirm to the readers that Jeremiah is a true prophet and that his words regarding the current exile in Babylon should be heeded.

F. The Babylon's treatment of Jeremiah is in marked contrast to his treatment at the hands his own people.
1. They had confined him, while this man allows him complete freedom to choose where he will go.

2. They had placed Jeremiah in a cistern and apparently were not concerned that he could easily have died there, whereas, Nebuzaradan pledges to take care of Jeremiah personally, if that is necessary.

G. Nebuzaradan’s directive to go back can be understood in a couple of ways.

1. It could imply that Jeremiah had already been staying with Gedaliah for a while (39:14) and that Nebuzaradan is advising him to return there.

2. It might also simply reflect the direction which he himself is now taking, that he has “set his face” to go to Babylon — From that perspective, to stay in Judah would mean “going back,” even if he has not left yet.

3. Gedaliah is not identified at greater length.

   a. He is Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan.

   b. This points to a long-term relationship between Jeremiah and a leading family in Jerusalem

   c. This Shaphan probably is the one who brought the scroll containing “the book of the covenant” to King Josiah (2 Kgs 22:3-13; cp. Jer 3:10).

4. Gedaliah’s uncle, Gemariah, had advised King Jehoiakim not to burn Jeremiah’s first scroll (Jer 36:25), a scroll brought to the king’s attention by Gedaliah’s cousin, Micajah (36:11).

5. Jeremiah had entrusted another of Gedaliah’s uncles, Elasah, with the letter that he sent to the early exiles (29:3).

H. Verse 6 represents the last reference to where Jeremiah “stayed” during the Fall of Jerusalem, thereby marking the end of a literary section in the book.

1. The repetition of this concluding formula also reminds the reader that Jeremiah still “remains,” even after Jerusalem has fallen and the people have been led away.
2. The establishment of **Mizpah** as the center for the new Babylonian province of Judah stands as something of an inclusio for the history of Israel’s monarchy (see also 2 Kgs 25:23).

   a. This Mizpah (not to be confused with another one in Gilead) was a gathering-place for the tribes in the days of the judges (Judges 20—21) and Saul (1 Samuel 7), and it was the site of Saul’s public anointing ceremony (1 Sam 10:17-25).

   b. As such, it stands as one of the last central places utilized by the tribes before there were kings, and it now reverts to that same capacity once Israel’s time of kings has come to an end.

II. 40:7–41:15, Gedaliah Assassinated:

A. **Summary:**

   1. This section forms a bridge to the later stories of 42-44, describing how Johanan came to be the sole leader of the renegade Judeans left behind by the Babylonians.

   2. Jeremiah is not mentioned in this section, nor is the LORD, leaving the impression that these people are living their lives apart from the Lord’s guidance.


B. **40:7-10:** does not state how these small bands of Judean soldiers manage to escape the Babylonian troops.

   1. Once Jerusalem has been captured and the “official” Judahite resistance has been squelched

   2. These troops are allowed to move about the country relatively easily, because they are able to come to the headquarters of the highest appointed official.

   3. Perhaps the Babylonians no longer viewed them as a threat.
4. The army officers listed here (and in 2 Kgs 25:23) are not mentioned in any other context.

5. It is possible that Ishmael is the brother of the man who read Jeremiah’s scroll to King Jehoiakim (Jer 36:14,21-23).

6. It is unlikely that Gedaliah could have made the promise in verses 9-10 unilaterally.
   a. The Babylonians probably had informed him that they would be lenient toward any refugees who surfaced, as long as they were not disruptive.
   b. The message of Gedaliah again is the same as that previously given by Jeremiah: serve the king of Babylon (e.g.,Jer 27:8).
   c. The promise that it will go well with you resonates with the exhortations of Deuteronomy; but this must have sounded rather hollow and mocking to these men.

7. The Deuteronomic promise assumed a free nation and was based on fidelity to the laws of the Lord
   a. Gedaliah’s promise is directed to a subject nation, in subjection because of their infidelity.
   b. Still, it indirectly perpetuates the message of Jeremiah by implying that the hopes formerly associated with the Promised Land are now to be realized through their Babylonian conquerors.

8. The surprise in verse 10 is in the final phrase — and live in the towns that you have taken over..
   a. It indicates that these soldiers have taken over certain towns in Judea.
   b. One would expect a response by the Babylonians, but there has been none.
   c. However, the Babylonians must have viewed these as too insignificant to warrant a response.
d. Too, these men are not really concerned about restoring a united nation of Judah.

e. They are not trying to rally all refugees under a common banner with which they might attempt to withstand the Babylonians.

f. Rather, they are making enemies with their own people, using their military might to help themselves at the expense of their countrymen.

9. Gedaliah encourages them to follow the course of economic rebuilding, indirectly suggesting they give up any military schemes.

a. He tells them to harvest and store away crops that are staples in the region.

b. These were things that had traditionally been the backbone of the local economy.

c. They are to be doing this agricultural work and not relying on others to provide goods for them.

d. They are to be preparing for peace, not war.

e. The political problems (namely, the Babylonians) would be handled by Gedaliah, who apparently has enough respect from both sides to be trusted by both.

C. 40:11-12: These Judeans must have fled to these neighboring countries prior to the final siege and destruction of Jerusalem.

1. The number of people involved in this return is unknown, but it probably was no more than a few thousand.

a. The reference to a remnant being left behind is rather ironic.

b. These are not “remnant” in the same sense in which Isaiah uses the term, when he talks about the Lord's leaving behind a group to perpetuate his people and his covenants with them.
c. This remnant has been left by the king of Babylon and Jeremiah has made clear that the future for Judah lies in the land of Babylon, not in the people left behind.

d. Those in Babylonian exile are the true “remnant” of the Lord's people (Jeremiah 24; Ezekiel 11).

2. There is also uncertainty as to how much time has passed since the end of the siege.

a. This is probably the same year that Jerusalem fell.

b. The crops they gather require some tending throughout the year, so it is unlikely they could produce a “bumper crop” just a few weeks after Jerusalem was destroyed.

c. Also, these people have had time to hear about the fate of Jerusalem, then hear about the appointment of Gedaliah, and then move back to their at homeland and harvest a crop.

d. Therefore, it seems plausible that these events transpire over the period of a year after Jerusalem has been sacked.

D. 40:13-16: The “abundance of wine and summer fruit” should have been taken as an indication that Gedaliah’s advice was sound.

1. Unfortunately, it was ignored by at least some of the Judeans left in the land.

2. **Johanan** mentions a rumored plot fomented by **Baalis** the Ammonite.

3. Perhaps Johanan reasoned that striking a blow against the appointed governor would bring the wrath of the Babylonian military down around the heads of the entire Judean population.

4. This would be a blow in the name of the people, which meant that they would suffer retaliation — something Johanan wanted to diffuse.

5. Perhaps Johanan supported Gedaliah’s stated policy, wanting to accept Babylonian domination and make the best of the situation.
6. This would make him more sympathetic to the nationalist zeal of Ishmael, but fearful that Ishmael is striking a blow too soon.

7. Further, Gedaliah’s dismissal of his warnings might reflect fear rather than confidence.
   a. Perhaps he was confident that no one would dare to strike out against him because of the Babylonians.
   b. At the same time he thought that these individual were so loyal to Ishmael that they would have reacted to an accusation against Ishmael as a ploy to neutralize his growing strength.
   c. So, perhaps Gedaliah is more fearful of his own people than he is of the Babylonians.

E. **41:1-3:** the warning of Johanan proves to be well-founded when Ishmael and his followers massacre Gedaliah and his associates.

1. The murders occur in the seventh month, though the year is not specified.

2. Nebuchadnezzar breached the walls July 586 B.C. (Jer 39:2) and razed walls the following month (2 Kgs 25:8-9).

3. Ishmael . . . of royal blood indicates that this is attempt by the Davidic family to reestablish its fallen kingdom.

4. Since Gedaliah had been appointed governor by the king of Babylon, this act was viewed as an act of direct rebellion against the sovereignty of Nebuchadnezzar.

5. The fact that Ishmael also killed the Judeans indicates that he was pitting those Jews as allies with the Babylonians against his own troops, the “true” patriots of Judah.

F. **41:4-10:** The above is substantiated when Ishmael intercepted a group from the north on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, lured them to Mizpah, killed all but 10 who bought their lives with stores of foods, and cast the bodies into an old cistern he took the rest of the people in Mizpah toward Ammon.
1. Ishmael's actions indicate that he rejected the political position of Gedaliah.

2. He also rejected Jeremiah's argument that the Babylonian domination was the Lord's will.

3. He, therefore, rejected the idea that the Lord hand his people over to their enemies and allow Jerusalem to be destroyed.

4. Since this notion spurred on Josiah’s Reform, because no reforms would have been deemed necessary if Jerusalem were inviolable, Ishmael likely resented those reform measures (see Jer 3:6-10) and had not opposed the return to idolatry under Jehoiakim.

5. To him, worship of the Lord allowed for the worship of other gods as well, and the defeat of Jerusalem only confirmed the power of those other gods.

6. Ishmael did spare 2 groups: (a) 10 of the 80 pilgrims who bribe him with provisions they have stored away and (b) people left in Mizpah who are taken captive.

   a. The king's daughters are in this group, indicating that Ishmael sees a political advantage in claiming control of these women, similar to Absalom’s control of David’s concubines (see on 2 Sam 16:21-22).

   b. This would have been viewed as part of Ishmael’s claim to sovereignty over the local population.

   c. It was also an act of defiance against the orders of Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard.

   d. Ishmael sets out to take all these captives to the Ammonites, giving further evidence that Ishmael put some faith in foreign gods.

G. 41:11-15: An avenging group under Johanan overtook Ishmael at Gibeon. Ishmael and 8 conspirators escaped to Ammon.

1. Johanan and his followers respond swiftly to the news of Ishmael’s attack.

2. They catch up with the fleeing assassins and their captives at Gibeon, just a few miles south of Mizpah.
3. The captives break free of Ishmael’s men, who turn and run without a fight, taking advantage of their now lightened loads to escape the rest of the way to Ammon.

III. Flight to Egypt, 41:16-18: Believing that the Babylonians will want to seek vengeance on those left behind for the death of their appointee, Johanan and his followers flee to Egypt.

A. Before they leave, however, they decide to seek the advice of Jeremiah, waiting ten perilous days for his reply (42:7).

1. The faith which this petition apparently supposes is in reality like the "faith" of Saul and Zedekiah.

2. Johanan has many parallels to king Zedekiah.

3. By showing them how Zedekiah’s failure to “hear the word of the LORD” led to his downfall (37:1—39:7), the text warns Johanan and his followers that a similar fate awaits them if they do not “hear the word of the LORD” from Jeremiah now.

4. They initially pledge that they will listen to whatever message Jeremiah delivers, but their refusal to accept his words in Jeremiah 43 shows how weak their faith truly is.

5. So, while Johanan and his followers perhaps have better political judgment than Ishmael, they initially demonstrate no more (or less) faith than Ishmael in their actions.

   a. They understand that the Babylonians will want to seek revenge for the death of their appointee.

   b. They also understand that they have thwarted the plot of the Ammonite king and can expect no help from that quarter.

   c. The most practical option is to turn to a nation with the greatest ability to provide them with shelter: Egypt.
They go several miles to the south (Geruth Kimham near Bethlehem), nearing the east-west road that they will take to Egypt, when they stop to consult with Jeremiah.