



The **Fiery** Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 40:13 - 41:15

Topic

Governor Gedeliah ignores the warning
that Ishmael is going to kill him

Title

"Kill Me Ishmael"

Introduction

You've probably heard of Stockholm Syndrome. It's the documented psychological phenomenon in which hostages express empathy and sympathy and have positive feelings toward their captors.

Did you know that it's possible to experience something like that without being kidnapped? An expert in victimology writes,

Stockholm syndrome can be seen as a form of *traumatic bonding*, which does not necessarily require a hostage scenario, but which describes “strong emotional ties that develop between two persons where one person intermittently harasses, beats, threatens, abuses, or intimidates the other.”

I sincerely hope and pray that none of you has such a person in your life. If you do, please deal with it; abuse is not godly, nor is submitting to abuse.

Having said that, if you are a Christian, there **is** such a person in your life - one who wants to beat and abuse you; one who harasses, threatens and intimidates you.

It's the devil. Although he's been defeated and has no power over you, if you're not careful you can nonetheless be taken captive by him to do his will.

Don't take my word for it. Listen to what the Bible says in Second Timothy 2:24-26.

2Timothy 2:24 And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient,

2Timothy 2:25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,

2Timothy 2:26 and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, **having been taken captive by him to do his will.**

The context of those verses is how to lovingly deal with folks being led astray by false teaching. For our purposes this morning we note that the last phrase states that it is possible to be ensnared by the devil, in one of his traps, and be taken captive by him in such a way that you end up doing things that are consistent with his will rather than God's will.

Don't take this too far. It doesn't mean you can be possessed by the devil or that you can somehow lose your salvation.

As Dave Hunt says, "you can't be taken captive by him at his will unless you are willing. Satan doesn't have the power just to take captive anybody he wants saved or unsaved."

Think of being "taken captive" in the sense of yielding yourself to the devil's influence and then behaving in a manner more consistent with his character and methods than with those of Jesus Christ.

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What can we do to avoid being taken captive by the devil to do his will? Our text in Jeremiah gives us a glimpse of an Israelite who we would say was the devil's captive. As we look at his story we are warned to recognize the danger we face and to recoil at the potential for destruction should we give in to the devil's will.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Must Recognize The Danger Of Being Taken Captive By The Devil To Do His Will, and #2 You Must Recoil At The Destruction Of Being Taken Captive By The Devil To Do His Will.

#1 You Must Recognize The Danger Of Being Taken Captive By The Devil To Do His Will

(40:13-16)

Our story takes place as newly appointed Governor Gedaliah is working to rebuild the nation of Judah. He's a great leader, with a solid plan that is definitely within the will of God. It's no surprise, then, that he would be opposed by the enemy of God.

Jeremiah 40:13 Moreover Johanan the son of Kareah and all the captains of the forces that were in the fields came to Gedaliah at Mizpah,

Jeremiah 40:14 and said to him, "Do you certainly know that Baalis the king of the Ammonites has sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to murder you?" But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam did not believe them.

The Ammonites were next on Nebuchadnezzar's to-do list of nations to conquer. If they could keep him busy with uprisings in Judah, perhaps he'd leave them alone.

Satan doesn't appear as a character in this narrative; at least, not directly. What we see is a wicked rival king influence an Israelite to do his will in opposition to the will of God. It can therefore serve as a great illustration of what it means to be taken captive by the wicked rival king of this world, Satan, to do his will in opposition to God's will.

Jeremiah 40:15 Then Johanan the son of Kareah spoke secretly to Gedaliah in Mizpah, saying, "Let me go, please, and I will kill Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no one will know it. Why should he murder you, so that all the Jews who are gathered to you would be scattered, and the remnant in Judah perish?"

Jeremiah 40:16 But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said to Johanan the son of Kareah, "You shall not do this thing, for you speak falsely concerning Ishmael."

I like Johanan. He's a loyalist; he's a pragmatist. If I didn't know better I'd think he was Sicilian.

The devil is defeated but is no less dangerous.

As to the morality of his suggestion I think we need to take a raincheck. In light of what happens in chapter forty-one the point being made is that Gedaliah did not take seriously the danger of Ishmael opposing God's will in order to do the will of a rival king.

We should take the devil seriously. Satan is busy setting traps for you. He's a very good trapper, by the way. He has a lot of resources at his disposal; and he has time on his side - meaning that he can set a trap and wait years to spring it, when it will do the most damage.

All he requires is your willingness to be influenced by some wicked thought that goes unchallenged. Or some root of bitterness that you allow to grow. Or some misrepresentation of Jesus that you start to believe.

The devil is defeated but is no less dangerous. For centuries he worked to defeat Jesus Christ. Now that the Lord has defeated him, on the Cross, Satan has turned his attention to destroying Christians.

Theologian Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote,

... the enmity of Satan is not only toward the person of God... but also toward every true child of God. Too much emphasis cannot be placed on this fact. Satan has no controversy or warfare with his own unregenerate people, but there is abundant Scripture to prove that he makes unceasing effort to mar the life and service of believers.

Do not underestimate his zeal to take you captive to do his will. Do not yield to his influences - not for a moment. If you do, repent and return to the humility of serving The Lord.

Maybe it will help if you see with your own eyes the kind of devastation that can be accomplished by one person being taken captive by the devil to do his will.

#2 You Must Recoil At The Destruction Of Being Taken Captive By The Devil To Do His Will

(41:1-15)

We know next to nothing about Ishmael except that he was in the royal line of David. He might, therefore, have been king of Judah instead of Gedeliah - who was not in the royal line of David, who was an appointee of Nebuchadnezzar's.

It's perhaps enough to get you bitter and make you vulnerable to the influence of a wicked rival king.

Jeremiah 41:1 Now it came to pass in the seventh month that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the royal family and of the officers of the king, came with ten men to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, at Mizpah. And there they ate bread together in Mizpah.

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

Jeremiah 41:3 Ishmael also struck down all the Jews who were with him, that is, with Gedaliah at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans who were found there, the men of war.

One of the most chilling lines of dialog in the *Godfather* movies is uttered by Michael Corleone. As he is calmly contemplating how to murder a rival, he says, "If anything in this life is certain, if history has taught us anything, it is that you can kill anyone."

You gotta wonder if Ishmael comforted himself by thinking that what he had done was for the greater good of Judah. Even though Jeremiah had been prophesying surrender to Babylon, I could see Ishmael and others thinking that resistance was their patriotic duty. To them Gedaliah was a puppet ruler who should be deposed - not the rightful ruler to whom you should submit.

Human beings have an amazing capacity for justifying disobedience to God. God's Word can be clear as crystal but we can nevertheless imagine ways in which it doesn't apply - not in our special case.

Jeremiah 41:4 And it happened, on the second day after he had killed Gedaliah, when as yet no one knew it,

Jeremiah 41:5 that certain men came from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria, eighty men with their beards shaved and their clothes torn, having cut themselves, with offerings and incense in their hand, to bring them to the house of the LORD.
Jeremiah 41:6 Now Ishmael the son of Nethaniah went out from Mizpah to meet them, weeping as he went along; and it happened as he met them that he said to them, "Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam!"
Jeremiah 41:7 So it was, when they came into the midst of the city, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah killed them and cast them into the midst of a pit, he and the men who were with him.

Take a long look at Ishmael. He was a hero general who had led troops fighting against Babylon. He had still been in the field, risking his life, when the city was breached. He wasn't a terrorist or a criminal. I'm sure if you would have told him that he was going to kill seventy innocent worshippers who were coming to make their offerings at the ruined Temple he would have been incensed.

Yet here he was, almost overnight going from a heralded general to an assassin to a mass murderer.

Sin is a slippery slope. It's more than that; it's a sheer cliff. One sin leads to another until you find yourself in a free fall headed towards a splattering. Remember, the devil sets traps, and traps use bait, and bait is something that, at least at first, seems desirable.

Jeremiah 41:8 But ten men were found among them who said to Ishmael, "Do not kill us, for we have treasures of wheat, barley, oil, and honey in the field." So he desisted and did not kill them among their brethren.

Jeremiah 41:9 Now the pit into which Ishmael had cast all the dead bodies of the men whom he had slain, because of Gedaliah, was the same one Asa the king had made for fear of Baasha king of Israel. Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it with the slain.
Jeremiah 41:10 Then Ishmael carried away captive all the rest of the people who were in Mizpah, the king's daughters and all the people who 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.

Sin is a slippery slope. One leads to another until you are in deeper than you'd ever imagined. Remember, the devil sets traps, and traps use bait, and bait is something that is at first desirable.

Ishmael added kidnapping to his criminal profile.

What's the phrase we sometimes use - "Hero to zero?" Being compared to Asa is like that. Asa was an earlier king of Judah who started well but finished poorly. Same with Ishmael.

I said earlier that though the devil isn't mentioned anywhere in this account, he is easy to recognize. In John 10:10 Jesus warned us that Satan is like a thief who comes to rob, steal, and destroy. Other verses describe him as a murderer from the beginning. His fingerprints (if he has any! Featherprints?) are all over the events in this chapter.

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,

Jeremiah 41:12 they took all the men and went to fight with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah; and they found him by the great pool that is in Gibeon.

Israelite versus Israelite. It's terrible when there is infighting among the people of God. It's a victory for the devil, for sure.

Don't get me wrong; Ishmael must be opposed. In sixth century Judah that meant hand-to-hand combat.

Our verses in Second Timothy, about being taken captive, tell us that today the "servant of The Lord must not quarrel." That word for "quarrel" just happens to mean *hand-to-hand combat*.

We are to oppose those who are taken captive, who are doing the will of the devil, with the truth of God's Word, as servants, in humility and with gentleness. We don't back down, but we do not meet them on their level; we take the spiritual high ground.

Jeremiah 41:13 So it was, when all the people who were with Ishmael saw Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces who were with him, that they were glad.

Jeremiah 41:14 Then all the people whom Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah turned around and came back, and went to Johanan the son of Kareah.

Jeremiah 41:15 But Ishmael the son of Nethaniah escaped from Johanan with eight men and went to the Ammonites.

Not the best outcome but certainly a better one than we might have expected.

It puts us on notice that there will always be Ishmael's out there, eager to do the will of the rival king.

Do you see the destruction caused by yielding to the will of the devil? You do; I do; but we can still sometimes, if not most of the time, fail to apply it to ourselves.

When I was growing up I can remember several educational programs aimed at keeping kids on the right path. One you might remember (if you're old enough) was the film, *Reefer Madness*, which was shown in my school.

Released in 1936, it's described as "an American propaganda exploitation film revolving around the melodramatic events that ensue when high school students are lured by pushers to try marijuana - from a hit and run accident, to manslaughter, suicide, attempted rape, and descent into madness."

Did I just hear chuckling?

I don't know about you but my friends and I laughed at that documentary back then, too. We never for a moment entertained the slightest thought we could end up like the strung-out addicts depicted in the film - *even though we were high while watching it.*

What I'm saying is that we have an almost innate sense that it's "not me" when it comes to being taken captive by the devil to do his will. It gives us a false courage to dabble with sin, or bitterness, or some such thing - thinking we would never let it get very far. We yield to the devil in some area, step into his snare, thinking **we** can set the boundaries of how far we will go.

While we are laughing at *Reefer Madness*, the devil is laughing at us.

The heralded general who would be king went from assassin to mass murderer to kidnapper in just a few days time. It's a warning - one we ought to heed without laughter.

The good news is that Satan really has been defeated. His schemes and strategies are mostly known to us. He's easily recognized. Whenever there is pride or strife or envy or greed; whenever there is gossip or slander or backbiting; that's him influencing someone.

In James 4:7 we read, "submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

Albert Barnes says, "While you yield to God in all things, you are to yield to the devil in none. You are to resist and oppose him in whatever way he may approach you, whether by allurements, by flattering promises, by the fascinations of the world, by temptation, or by threats."

You need not be subject to traumatic bonding with Satan. Barnes goes on to say,

The true way of meeting him is by direct resistance, rather than by argument; by steadfastly refusing to yield in the slightest degree, rather than by a belief that we... can return to virtue when we have gone a certain length in complying with his demands. No one is safe who yields in the least to the suggestions of the tempter; there is no one who is not safe if he does not yield.

I'm not suggesting we become paranoid - although I do like the quote, "it's not paranoia if there really is someone out to get you!"

The devil really is out to get you... to get me... But he *has* been defeated and all we need to do is resist him. It's not paranoia - just caution.

Jesus prayed for us with regard to the devil.

John 17:15 I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.

God certainly can keep us from Satan. We just need to quit yielding ourselves to him.

In the 1980's cop-drama, *Hill Street Blues*, the tough but caring sergeant, knowing the multitude of dangers his officers faced on a daily basis, always ended his squad room briefings by saying the same thing. It's good advice for us, too.

He would say, "Let's be careful out there."