

Series: Jeremiah – A Question And Decision

Chapters 40-44



Jeremiah mourns in the ruins of Jerusalem by Horace Vernet [1844]. Jeremiah was in his mid-50s when Jerusalem was destroyed.

Jeremiah began his ministry at age 17 probably around the year 627 BC. This was in the middle of the reign of King Josiah 640-609 BC. When Jerusalem falls in 587 or 586 BC, he is in his mid to late 50s. The events of Jeremiah 40-44 take place in a period of around 5 years following the destruction of Jerusalem.

“A Question Near Bethlehem”

Jeremiah 42:1-3



This is Bethlehem from the North, near here is when Jeremiah 42 takes place

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Jeremiah 42:1-3 [ESV]

1 Then all the commanders of the forces, and **Johanan** the son of Kareah and **Jezaniah** the son of Hoshaiiah, and **all the people from the least to the greatest**, came near **2** and said to Jeremiah the prophet, "**Let our plea for mercy come before you, and pray to the LORD your God for us, for all this remnant — because we are left with but a few, as your eyes see us — 3 that the LORD your God may show us the way we should go, and the thing that we should do.**"

“A Question Near Bethlehem”

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A movement that has become quite acute in Evangelical Christianity is called “deconstruction” where an evangelical Christian either renounces the authority of scripture and basic premises of the faith or renounces Christianity all together. There have been many reasons given and speculations proffered for these often high profile defections.

Joshua Harris, pastor and Christian author. In 2019 he divorced his wife and left the Christian Faith.

“A Question Near Bethlehem”

Jeremiah 42:1-3



In reading the reasons and statements given by various “deconstructed” Evangelicals I have come to believe that in all cases they don’t want to accept what God says about things. And they simply decide not to accept it.

Joshua Harris’ statement and journey is characteristic of this.

I don’t blame them for the emotional response...all of us struggle with this.

Joshua Harris, pastor and Christian author. In 2019 he divorced his wife and left the Christian Faith.

Lamentations 1:1-3 [ESV]

1 How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow has she become, she who was great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a slave.

2 She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has none to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies.

3 Judah has gone into exile because of affliction and hard servitude; she dwells now among the nations, but finds no resting place; her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress.

“A Question Near Bethlehem”

Jeremiah 42:1-3



Jeremiah mourns in
the ruins of Jerusalem
by Horace Vernet
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At Nebuchadnezzar’s command Jeremiah is offered his freedom or he may emigrate to Babylon as an honored guest of the Babylon state. Jeremiah chooses to stay in Judah with the newly appointed governor Gedaliah. Gedaliah is the son of a Jewish noble who had protected Jeremiah during the reign of Jehoiakim. Jeremiah had been viewed as a traitor for his prophecies and his admonitions to submit to Babylon. Many of the king’s advisors had wanted to kill him.

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And yet Jeremiah was a patriot. One of the young men who must have heeded Jeremiah’s warnings was Gedaliah. We know that he was a royal official under Zedekiah but had gone over to the Babylonians, likely due to the prophecy of Jeremiah.



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Psalm 25:4-7 [ESV]

4 Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths.

5 Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.

6 Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

7 Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!

“A Question Near Bethlehem”

Jeremiah 42:1-3



This seal impression is likely from Gedaliah's. It was found in 1935 in the ruins of Lachish, a Jewish fortress protecting Jerusalem. It reads "Gedaliah, who is over the house". It likely means he was originally commander of Lachish. His father was a Jewish noble on the king's counsel . He went over to the Babylonians.

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Gedaliah was probably the commander of Lachish before it fell to the Babylonian forces. Lachish was a fortress that had been built to protect Jerusalem. If Gedaliah surrendered it as Jeremiah instructed the Jewish people to do it would explain the trust the Babylonians placed in him and the feeling by some Jews that he was a traitor. Gedaliah was assassinated the day after Rosh Hashanah in the 2nd year after the destruction of Jerusalem.

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Gedaliah had been encouraging the cultivation of the land and welcoming back Jewish refugees who had fled to the countries around Judah. He had proclaimed a general amnesty for former Jewish soldiers who were now functioning as “free-booters” in the countryside. Johanan was one of these captains. He came and offered soldiers as a militia.

Another man by the name of Ishmael from the royal family returned from the country of Ammon.

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Gedaliah was a good hearted, honest but naive man.

Ishmael was under hire as an assassin from the King of Ammon who saw the growth and stability of Judah as a threat.

Johanan found out about the plot and attempted to warn Gedaliah. He even offered to quietly assassinate Ishmael before his plot could come to fruition. Gedaliah thought he was jealous of Ishmael and did not wish to alarm the returning refugees.

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When Johanan and the militia were away. Gedaliah held the Rosh Hashannah feast and invited Ishmael and his associates to attend. The following evening Ishmael and his 10 comrades murdered Gedaliah, his Babylonian guards and counselors. They then went on a killing spree in the fortress of Mizpah. When they became aware that Johanan was aware of their assassination they went to the nearby city of Gibeon to provision themselves to return to Ammon.

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Jeremiah 5:1-6 [ESV]

1 Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her.

2 Though they say, "As the LORD lives," yet they swear falsely.

3 O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth? You have struck them down, but they felt no anguish; you have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent.

“A Question Near Bethlehem”

Jeremiah 42:1-3

King Zedekiah’s sons slaughtered before his eyes by Gustave Dore [1832-1883].

Ishmael and his cohorts take all the refugees, those under Gedaliah’s protection and the Judean princesses left in Gedaliah’s care as hostages in this flight. Johanan catches up with them while they are in Gibeon. Ishmael and 8 of his comrades flee leaving the hostages.



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Johanan is painfully aware of the brutal revenge that the Babylonians are capable of and he decides to flee taking the hostages with him on the road to Egypt. They stop at a sheep pen area just north of Bethlehem on the road to Egypt. Here is where they ask their question of Jeremiah.



King Zedekiah's sons
slaughtered before his eyes by
Gustave Dore [1832-1883].

Matthew 15:8-12 [ESV]

8 "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; 9 in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

10 And he called the people to him and said to them, "Hear and understand: 11 it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person."

12 Then the disciples came and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?"



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We often want God to agree with us, our views, our plans or our fears. The problem that deconstruction address is this one. Sometimes what God expects is not what we want or believe should be. To be honest there are many times when I read scripture that I don't want to hear what is being said.

Jeremiah by Michelangelo

Nov. 6, 2022

“A Question Near Bethlehem”

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Jeremiah by Michelangelo

The message is uncomfortable, or the command difficult or the submission so deep that I do not want to acknowledge it as true or from God.

So I remake God in my image or more honestly I deny His existence. Even very religious people become good at this ploy. That is Jesus' point in Matthew 15.

They are enforcing a purity tradition about hand washing while violating a command to honor their parents.

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Acts 8:18-24 [ESV]

18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! 21 You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."

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When we attempt to avoid the voice of God because it is uncomfortable or deny the voice of God because we do not like it, we often have to besmirch the messenger. If we deconstruct God’s will or intentions or even worse wheedle around them by charm, tradition power or wealth we are rebels against his purpose. God’s message to Johanan was to stay in the land and trust in God’s protection. Johanan and those with him were unwilling and they brought the refugees along.

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Desperation can cause us to turn toward God but our decision following that moment will determine our spiritual health going forward.



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