Spring 2005

Ishmael's Assassination of Gedaliah: Echoes of the Saul-David Story in Jeremiah 40:7-41:18

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BIBLICAL STUDIES

ISHMAEL'S ASSASSINATION OF GEDALIAH: ECHOES OF THE SAUL-DAVID STORY IN JEREMIAH 40:7–41:18

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When one reads the book of Jeremiah, it might appear as if the account of Ishmael ben Nethaniah's assassination of Gedaliah, the governor of Judah, in Jer 40–41 is nothing more than a tragic footnote or addendum to the story of the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. Both Ishmael and Gedaliah are rather minor figures in the history of ancient Israel who appear only briefly on the pages of the Hebrew Bible.[1] Nevertheless, the narrator of Jer 40–41 provides a much more detailed record of the events surrounding Ishmael and Gedaliah than the parallel account in 2 Kgs 25:22-26.[2] In addition, the narrator in Jeremiah infuses

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[1] The assassination of Gedaliah, though, was of such import to the post-exilic community that it was commemorated as one of the fast days connected with national laments for the fall of Jerusalem (cf. Zech 7:5; 8:19). See Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 504 n. 13. For seal and inscriptional evidence related to the characters of Gedaliah and Ishmael, see Bob Becking, "Inscribed Seals As Evidence for Biblical Israel? Jeremiah 40:7–41:15 *par example*," in *Can a 'History of Israel' Be Written?* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe; JSOTSup 245; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 65-83; and J. Andrew Dearman, "My Servants the Scribes: Composition and Context in Jeremiah 36," *JBL* 109 (1990): 412-13.

[2] Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers note that similarities between the two passages indicate that the shorter account in Kings "probably does provide the content source" for the Jeremiah narrative (*Jeremiah 26–52* [WBC 27; Dallas: Word, 1995], 234). In several places, the wording of the two accounts is almost identical (cf. Jer 40:5 and 2 Kgs 25:22; Jer 40:7-10 and 2 Kgs 25:23-24; Jer 41:1-3 and 2 Kgs 25:25; Jer 41:10 and 2 Kgs 25:26). However, the expanded nature of the narrative in Jer 40–41 demonstrates the independence of this account. Christopher R. Seitz also notes concerning Jer 40:7–41:18 that the "authenticity" of this narrative "on strictly literary grounds is generally upheld" (*Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah* [BZAW 176; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989], 274).

Scholars have long noted the "Deuteronomic" influence on the prose sections of the book of Jeremiah. See, for example, W. Thiel, *Die deuteronomistiche Redaktion von Jeremia 26–45* (WMANT 52; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1981). Concerning these Deuteronomic features in Jeremiah, Carolyn J. Sharp notes that one must ask, "[Does] the Jeremianic prose reflect originally Jeremianic material that has been thoroughly worked over by later Dtr traditionalists, or does it reflect material that was preserved and shaped by Jeremiah traditionalists who betray some familiarity with Dtr terminology and ideas?" (*Prophecy and Ideology in Jeremiah: Struggles for Authority in the Deutero-Jeremianic Prose* [OTS; New York: T&T Clark, 2003], 6). The most plausible explanation of the relationship between the book of Jeremiah and the Deuteronomistic History is that the two works have had a mutual influence on each other. See Henri Cazelles, "Jeremiah and Deuteronomy," in *A Prophet to the Nations: Essays in Jeremiah Studies* (ed. Leo G. Purdue and Brian W. Kovacs; trans. L. G. Perdue; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1984), 89-111.

these characters with theological significance beyond their apparent importance by engaging in a form of intertextuality in which Ishmael's murder of Gedaliah represents a reversal of the earlier and more famous story of the conflict between Saul and David.[3] The purpose of this article is to develop the intertextual connections between the story of Gedaliah/Ishmael and the earlier accounts of Saul/David and to demonstrate how the narrative in Jer 40–41 stands as part of the larger rhetorical emphasis in the book of Jeremiah on the rejection of the historical house of David.[4]

In this intertextual reading of the conflict between Gedaliah and Ishmael, Gedaliah emerges as a Saul-figure who replaces the Davidic scion as the divinely

The term "Deuteronomic" appears to describe accurately the general provenance of the Jeremianic prose tradition, though this terminology is not used in this study to imply discontinuity between the poetic and prose materials in the book of Jeremiah or to ignore the features that specifically distinguish the message of Jeremiah from that of the Deuteronomistic History. For discussion of these unique features in the Jeremiah tradition, see J. G. McConville, *Judgment and Promise: An Interpretation of the Book of Jeremiah* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1993).

[3] In the field of literary criticism, the term "intertextuality" is used in diverse ways but refers in this study to the attempt to discover how a biblical text echoes, alludes to, or references other biblical texts and to explain the semantic and rhetorical significance behind these inner-biblical connections. As much as is possible, there is an attempt in this study to determine how the narrator in Jer 40–41 has referenced the story of David and Saul. For discussion of the various forms of inner-biblical allusions and exegesis found within the OT, see Esther Menn, "Inner-Biblical Exegesis in the Tanak," in *A History of Biblical Interpretation, Vol. 1: The Ancient Period* (ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 55-79; Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 6-31; and Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 2-43.

Richard B. Hays contrasts the "production-oriented" approach to intertextuality that is reflected in this study to a "text-oriented perspective," in which the interpreter compares two or more texts that have no direct historical linkage ("Intertextuality: A Catchall Category or a Specific Methodology?" [paper presented at the annual meeting of the SBL, San Antonio, Tex., 21 November 2004]). In the "text-oriented" approach, the reader's primary function is to create new meaning(s) for the text rather than to discern the meaning of the original writer. As an example of "text-oriented" intertextuality, Hays cites Michael J. Gilmour's recent *Tangled Up in the Bible: Bob Dylan and Scripture* (New York: Continuum, 2004).

[4] This intertextual reading of chs. 40–43 is supported by the fact that earlier studies on the narrative materials in Jer 26–45 have recognized the use of other allusions to events/figures in OT history as part of a sustained rhetoric against the house of David. In ch. 26, Jehoiakim is compared unfavorably to Hezekiah and Josiah (cf. 26:17-23). In addition, Jer 36 contains an implied comparison between Jehoiakim and Josiah that becomes evident when this chapter is read in light of 2 Kgs 22, another text dealing with a royal response to a previously unknown scroll claiming to be the word of Yahweh that warns of coming judgment. See Charles D. Isbell, "II Kings 22:3–23:24 and Jeremiah 36: A Stylistic Comparison," *JSOT* 8 (1978): 33-45.

The interaction between Jeremiah and Zedekiah in chs. 27–29 and 37–39 appears to recall the earlier dialogue between Isaiah and Hezekiah during the Assyrian crisis more than a hundred years earlier. This intertextual connection condemns Zedekiah's lack of faith and explains why Judah did not experience a last-minute deliverance from the Babylonian army like the one experienced during the reign of Hezekiah. See further A. R. Pete Diamond, "Portraying Prophecy: Of Doublets, Variants and Analogies in the Narrative Representation of Jeremiah's Oracles—Reconstructing the Hermeneutics of Prophecy," *JSOT* 57 (1993): 113-14.

The likelihood of allusion to the story of Saul and David in Jer 40–41 is also increased by the Deuteronomic provenance of the books of Samuel and Jeremiah (see n. 2 above). The negative

appointed leader. Ishmael is of royal blood (מִזֶּרַע מְלוּכָה, 41:1) and thus natu-
rally represents the David-figure in the story. However, the irony behind the nar-
rator's allusions to Saul and David is that Gedaliah more closely resembles
David, while Ishmael as a member of the house of David acts in the manner of
King Saul by attempting to use violence to subvert a divinely sanctioned change
in leadership.

I. *Ishmael and Gedaliah: The Collapse of the House of David*

The collapse of the house of David in the book of Jeremiah culminates with
the character of Ishmael ben Nethaniah. Ishmael continues the pattern of
Davidic disobedience reflected in Judah's final four rulers: Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim,
Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah.[5] As Applegate explains, the actions of Ishmael in the
assassination of Gedaliah "complete the picture of the House of David's inimi-
cal opposition to Yahweh's purposes in both Babylonian supremacy and Judean
restoration."[6]

The result of this persistent royal disobedience, accompanied by the rebel-
lion of the nation at large (cf. 37:1-2), is that Yahweh has decreed the temporary
subjugation of Judah to Babylon and the removal of the Davidic ruler from the
throne. In fact, the book of Jeremiah engages in some of the most shocking
rhetoric in all of the Hebrew Bible to present the full force of this theopolitical
perspective, suggesting that Babylon has replaced Jerusalem as the city of *shalom*
(cf. 29:4-7, 16-19) and that Nebuchadnezzar has replaced the Davidic king as
Yahweh's divinely appointed ruler and "servant" (עֶבֶד) (cf. 25:9; 27:6; 43:10).[7]
Stulman explains concerning this viewpoint in Jeremiah, "As Yahweh's servant
or vassal, Nebuchadnezzar cannot be opposed. Non-compliance to his decrees
is denounced as false and viewed as direct insubordination."[8] This arrange-
ment is temporary (cf. 25:11; 27:7; 50–51), and Nebuchadnezzar only retains

re-casting of the Saul-David story in the narrative of Ishmael's assassination of Gedaliah in Jere-
miah recalls explicitly negative assessments of kingship and the house of David within the Deuter-
onomistic History that undermine the persistent royal David-Zion ideology (cf. 1 Sam 8:10-18;
1 Kgs 11:1-13; 2 Kgs 21:1-16).

[5] In both Jer 17:19-27 and 22:1-5, the prophet delivers an "either-or" message that explicitly
hinges the continued rule of the Davidic kings and the security of Jerusalem on royal obedience to
the laws of Yahweh. Jer 21:11–23:6 contains a series of judgment oracles against Judah's final rulers
that is framed by general warnings/indictments against the house of David at large. For narratives
recounting individual episodes of royal disobedience, cf. Jer 26, 36 (Jehoiakim); 34:8-22; 37:1–38:24
(Zedekiah).

[6] J. Applegate, "The Fall of Zedekiah: Redactional Debate in the Book of Jeremiah, Part 1,"
VT 48 (1998): 142.

[7] For these aspects of the message of Jeremiah, see John Hill, *Friend or Foe? The Figure of Babylon
in the Book of Jeremiah MT* (Biblical Interpretation Series 40; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), 145-57; and
Jonathan P. Sisson, "Jeremiah and the Jerusalem Conception of Peace," *JBL* 105 (1986): 429-42.
Hill (*Friend or Foe*, 106-11) notes that the designation "servant" (עֶבֶד) for Nebuchadnezzar equates
the Babylonian ruler with David (cf. 2 Sam 3:18; 7:5, 8).

[8] Louis Stulman, "Insiders and Outsiders in the Book of Jeremiah: Shifts in Symbolic Arrange-
ments," *JSOT* 66 (1995): 53-54.

this status as long as he serves as the instrument of Yahweh's wrath against sin-
ful Judah (cf. 21:2, 4, 7; 25:9, 11, 12; 27:6, 8, 12). Nevertheless, any attempt on
the part of Judah to circumvent this subjugation through political or military
maneuvering will only serve to bring the nation under further divine judgment
(cf. 27:12-15; 34:1-7; 37:6-10; 38:2-3, 17-23).

It appears that Ishmael's assassination of Gedaliah is precisely an attempt to
overturn this divine decree of subjugation and to restore the old order of
Davidic-rule over Judah.[9] The murder of Gedaliah is not only a senseless act of
violence but also represents an attack on the divinely appointed leadership of
Judah in that: (1) Gedaliah is appointed by Nebuchadnezzar (cf. 40:5, 7, 11;
41:2, 10); and (2) Nebuchadnezzar is Yahweh's "servant" (עבד).[10] In terms of
Saul-David intertextuality, it is now a member of the family of David who acts
the part of Saul and carries out an attack on the Lord's appointed ruler. It is
now the house of David that is rejected and replaced by other leadership.

As noted above, Gedaliah's leadership in the aftermath of the fall of Jerusa-
lem enjoys the divine sanction that had belonged to the house of David. Addi-
tionally, there is a harmony between the prophet Jeremiah and Gedaliah that
did not exist between the prophet and the final kings in the line of David. Geda-
liah espouses the same "serve Babylon that it may go well for you" ideology (cf.

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[9] F. B. Huey lists several possible reasons for Ishmael's attack on Gedaliah: (1) hatred of Geda-
liah as a traitor; (2) jealousy over Gedaliah's appointment; (3) vengeance against Nebuchadnezzar
for his brutal attacks on Zedekiah's family; (4) attempt to undermine Babylonian authority in
Judah; (5) aspirations to restore an independent Jewish nation; and (6) payment from Baalis, the
Ammonite king (*Jeremiah, Lamentations* [NAC; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993], 352). See
also Seitz, *Theology in Conflict*, 275.

[10] There is some debate concerning the status of Judah and Gedaliah following the fall of Jerusa-
lem. It appears unlikely that the Babylonians actually established a provincial government in the land
of Judah or even had consistent bureaucratic policies toward the various nation-states in the Levant.
Thus, it is possible that Judah remained a vassal kingdom under Babylon and that Gedaliah (and later
Zerubbabel) was actually viewed as a "king" rather than a governor, either by the Babylonians
and/or the remnant of Judeans remaining in the land. The Hebrew term for "governor" does not
appear in the text of 2 Kgs 25:22-24 or Jer 40–41 with reference to Gedaliah, and the מלך in 41:1
and 41:10 may refer to Gedaliah, rather than Zedekiah. If Gedaliah is recognized as a king, it makes
Ishmael's opposition all the more understandable. For further discussion, see David Vanderhooft,
"Babylonian Strategies of Imperial Control in the West," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian
Period* (ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 235-62;
Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Philadelphia:
Westminster/John Knox Press, 2003), 383 n. 28; H. G. M. Williamson, "Exile and After: Historical
Study," in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches* (ed. David W. Baker and
Bill T. Arnold; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 253; Peter R. Ackroyd, *The Chronicler in His Age* (JSOTSup
101; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 91-92; and J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes,
A History of Ancient Israel and Judah (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 421-24. For discussion of the
larger issue of the nature and extent of the Babylonian exile and a response to the minimalist view
that the Babylonian exile and return is a fictional reconstruction of the Persian or Hellenistic period
(the "Myth of the Empty Land" view), see B. Oded, "Where is the 'Myth of the Empty Land' To Be
Found? History versus Myth," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, 55-74.

40:9) found in the preaching of Jeremiah (cf. 27:12; 42:10-12).[11] The Baby-
lonians entrust the prophet Jeremiah to Gedaliah's care (39:14), and the patro-
nyms of Gedaliah (ben Ahikam ben Shaphan) (39:14; 40:7-8) reveal that
Gedaliah is a member of the family of Shaphan that supports and protects
Jeremiah at several critical moments during his ministry (cf. 26:24; 29:3;
36:10-14).[12]

Conditions in the land under Gedaliah's leadership are also described in
largely favorable terms. Gedaliah offers words of comfort and reassurance, with
the call to "settle" (ישׁב) and the promise that things will "go well" (יטב) for the
people of the land (40:8-9), seeming to anticipate in some form the blessings of
secure settlement and prosperity promised in the portrayal of Israel's future res-
toration in Jer 30–33.[13] The Judeans who have been scattered to foreign lands
by the Babylonian assault return because of their confidence in Gedaliah
(40:11-12). Their "return" (שׁוב, 40:12) foreshadows the ultimate "return"
(שׁוב) promised by the prophet.[14] The future era of restoration will include agri-
cultural bounty (cf. 31:5, 12-13), and under Gedaliah, the people enjoy "an
abundance of wine and summer fruit" (40:10, 12).[15]

This hyperbolic language with reference to conditions in the aftermath of
exile signifies that Gedaliah has replaced David as the divinely approved leader.
Judeans return to the homeland from Moab, Ammon, and Edom to place
themselves under the authority of Gedaliah, the very places that David himself
had subjected in expanding Israel's territory and establishing a fledgling empire
(cf. 2 Sam 8–10). In Jeremiah's oracles concerning Israel's future salvation, the
blessings of "return/restoration" (שׁוב) are associated with a new David (cf.

[11] The prophet Jeremiah is absent in 40:7–41:18 for the only time in the narrative material in
Jer 26–45. Regardless of the compositional reasons behind the prophet's absence, the literary effect
is that Gedaliah stands in the role of the prophet as "the alter ego of Jeremiah," even proclaiming
a "fear not" message resembling the prophetic salvation oracle. See Douglas R. Jones, *Jeremiah*
(NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 469. Note how the words of the prophet are also placed in
the mouth of the pagan commander Nebuzaradan in 40:2-3.

[12] For the relationship between Jeremiah and the family of Shaphan, see Miller and Hayes, *A
History of Israel and Judah*, 423, and Dearman, "My Servants the Scribes," 408-14.

[13] Note the verb ישׁב in 31:24; 32:27 (and the conceptual idea in 30:10; 31:40; 33:16), and the
verb יטב in 32:40-43; 33:9 with reference to the restoration. John Goldingay captures this nuance
of the narrative when he states that conditions under Gedaliah "may have seemed like a new begin-
ning, almost the new beginning that Jeremiah had promised" (*Old Testament Theology, Vol. 1: Israel's
Gospel* [Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2003], 699).

[14] Note the framing references in chs. 30–33 to the "restoring of the fortunes" (שׁבות) in
30:3 and 33:26. 31:8-10 also contains the promise of "return" (שׁוב) from the "ends of the earth,"
and the Judeans return to Gedaliah from various points of exile.

[15] This positive portrayal of events in the land under Gedaliah is all the more surprising in light
of the message of the prophet Jeremiah that the ultimate hope of restoration lies with the exiles in
Babylon (cf. Jer 24, 29). Seitz attempts to resolve this tension by pointing to different redactional
levels (*Theology in Conflict*, 205-91). However, it is more significant to realize that the final form of
Jeremiah MT is stressing a potential blessing that is forfeited by persistent disobedience to the word
of Yahweh. Continued refusal to "submit to Babylon" (cf. 40:9; 42:10; 43:7) results in continued
divine discipline for the people of Judah.

23:5-6; 30:8-9; 33:15-16), but in the immediate aftermath of the exile, the incipient enjoyment of the blessings of restoration is realized under the leadership of Gedaliah.

The positive tone of the story disappears with the intrusion of the Davidic figure, Ishmael ben Nethaniah. Ishmael is among the returning Judean army officers scattered by the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem who gather around Gedaliah subsequent to his appointment (40:7-8). Ishmael presents himself to Gedaliah, in much the same way that David himself originally served in the house of Saul (cf. 1 Sam 16:1-13).[16] Ishmael is first mentioned as part of a potential conspiracy against Gedaliah in 40:14-15, and then, almost as if revealing a clandestine secret, the narrator eventually discloses in 41:1 that Ishmael is a member of the royal family.[17] The battle lines are drawn between Ishmael, from the house of David, and Gedaliah, who serves as a representative of the new order under the hegemony of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians.

II. *Ishmael and Gedaliah: The Overturning of the Story of Saul and David*

The first direct connection with the Saul-David story in Jer 40–41 is the fact that Gedaliah is appointed to rule over Judah at Mizpah (40:7-10), which also served as the locale for Saul's anointing as Israel's first king (cf. 1 Sam 10:17-27).[18] In addition, the foreign ruler who helps to inspire Ishmael's conspiracy against Gedaliah is Baalis, the king of the Ammonites (41:14), and Ishmael eventually flees to the land of Ammon when recognizing the futility of further resistance against the Babylonians (41:15).[19] David himself had close ties with Ammon during the early part of his reign.[20] The alliance of Ishmael and Baalis

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[16] Ishmael is explicitly identified as one of Gedaliah's officers (רב המלך) if מלך in 41:1 is a reference to Gedaliah. See n. 10 above. If not, it still appears that Ishmael is an officer inherited from Zedekiah by Gedaliah.

[17] Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah* (Smith & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, Ga.: Smith & Helwys, 2002), 539.

[18] Miller and Hayes suggest that Mizpah was chosen as the center of the government because of the destruction of Jerusalem and the earlier prominence of Mizpah as a cult center (*A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 423-24). Mizpah most likely remained the capital of Judah until Nehemiah's refortification of Jerusalem ca. 445 B.C.E. For further discussion of the political, commercial, and cultic significance of Mizpah (Tell en-Naṣbeh) in the Babylonian period, see Jeffrey S. Zorn, "Tell en-Naṣbeh and the Problem of the Material Culture of the Sixth Century," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, 413-47; and Ephraim Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, Vol. 2: The Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Periods (732–332 B.C.E.)* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 321-23.

[19] Huey suggests that Baalis may have wished to carry on the anti-Babylonian plot of 594 B.C.E., may have held a personal grudge against Gedaliah, or may have had territorial designs that included annexing parts of Judah into his kingdom (*Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 352). For discussion of the discovery of a seal bearing the name of Baalis, see L. G. Herr, "The Servant of Baalis," *BA* 48 (1985): 169-72.

[20] 2 Sam 10:1-2 mentions "the kindness of the Ammonites to David." P. K. McCarter interprets this phrase as referring to Nahash of Ammon offering support to David during the time of his long power struggle with the house of Saul (*II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* [AB 9; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1984], 270, 273-74). Nahash likely supported Saul's rival as a means of diminishing the power of the Israelite king.

against Gedaliah recalls the original alliance of David and the king of Ammon against the house of Saul. Saul's defeat of the Ammonites was also his first important military victory (cf. 1 Sam 11:1-11).

Events are lining up in exactly the same manner as the original power struggle between Saul and David. However, in the conflict of Jer 40–41, it is Gedaliah who refuses to kill, while the Davidic figure, Ishmael, embraces the very forms of violence that David eschewed in his original conflict with Saul. When warned of Ishmael's conspiracy against him, Gedaliah refuses the opportunity to strike first and put his enemy to death, just as David did when he had the opportunity to kill Saul (40:15-16; cf. 1 Sam 24:1-15; 26:1-16). Gedaliah refuses to act even though Johanan offers to strike down his enemy, just as Abishai had offered to finish off Saul for David (1 Sam 26:8).

Ishmael and his men kill Gedaliah in an especially treacherous manner by gaining his confidence through a shared meal and then slaying him at the table (41:3-5).[21] In addition to murdering Gedaliah, Ishmael also kills the garrison of Babylonian soldiers and "all the Jews" with Gedaliah at Mizpah (41:3).[22] Holladay comments on the serious breach of the ancient Near Eastern ethic of hospitality reflected in the brutal murder of Gedaliah by noting that "a host is bound to entertain and protect his guest (cf. Gen 19:1-3; Judg 19:15), and by the same token the guest is under the benevolent protection of his host."[23] Saul had similarly planned to kill David, who was a guest at his table, and then angrily tried to kill his son Jonathan when he learned that Jonathan had assisted David's escape (1 Sam 20, esp. vv. 5, 24-32).[24]

David separated himself from any such actions of deceit and treachery against the house of Saul.[25] When David's officer Joab murders Abner after pretending to desire a private conference with him, David calls for divine vengeance against Joab (2 Sam 3:22-30). When the sons of Rimmon kill and behead Ish-bosheth while he lies sleeping in his bed, David has them executed (2 Sam 4:1-12). By killing Gedaliah, Ishmael reveals himself to be like Saul and unlike David in his presumptuous willingness to perform violence against God's

[21] The assassination of Gedaliah could have occurred in Sept/Oct 587 B.C.E. shortly after the fall of Jerusalem, a year or two later, or even as late as 582 B.C.E. in connection with another campaign of Nebuchadnezzar into Syria-Palestine and a third deportation from Jerusalem (cf. 52:30). For a survey of the options, see Keown et al, *Jeremiah 26–52*, 241. The events that transpire under Gedaliah in 40:7-16 would seem to suggest the passage of at least one year.

[22] The phrase "all the Jews" (כל־היהודים) refers to either a specific military contingent or administrative staff with Gedaliah or is a hyperbolic statement designed to heighten the scope of Ishmael's violence (cf. the reference to survivors from Mizpah in 41:10).

[23] William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26–52* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 296. For the ancient Near Eastern ethic of hospitality, see also Victor H. Matthews and Donald C. Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel, 1250–587 B.C.E.* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993), 82-95.

[24] Contrast David's loyalty to the house of Saul in allowing Mephibosheth to eat at the king's table (cf. 2 Sam 9:1, 3, 7).

[25] For a critical assessment of David's character, which asserts David's complicity in the demise of the house of Saul, see Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

appointed ruler.[26] Ironically, Ishmael, unlike Saul, succeeds in killing Yahweh's chosen leader but is ultimately unable to reverse Yahweh's decree concerning the subjugation of the house of David.

Ishmael's killing spree continues with the murder of seventy Israelite pilgrims coming from the north to Jerusalem for worship (41:1-9), which recalls Saul's impious behavior in slaughtering the eighty-five priests of Yahweh at Nob (cf. 1 Sam 22:17-23). Ishmael's treacherous and deceptive nature is again evident as he gains the confidence of the worshippers by promising to lead them to Gedaliah (which he will!) and by sharing in their acts of mourning (41:6).[27] While the text is silent concerning the motives behind Ishmael's murder of the pilgrims, the most plausible explanation is that Ishmael viewed the worshippers as loyal to Gedaliah.[28]

The culmination to the conflict between Gedaliah and Ishmael in Jer 40–41 also bears resemblance to the conclusion of the Saul-David story, with the reversal of the original event again being the emphasis of the narrator. Ishmael's last desperate act involves the taking of Judean hostages at Mizpah, including the king's daughters left behind in the land, perhaps in order to guarantee safe passage as he makes his way to refuge among the Ammonites (41:10). In the narrative of Samuel, the last recorded event before the account of the death of Saul and his sons involves the kidnapping of the wives and children of David and his men by the Amalekites (1 Sam 30:1-31). David and his men heroically overtake the Amalekites and recover their loved ones and possessions. However, in the Jeremiah narrative, it is now a member of the house of David who has become the kidnapper stealing the daughters of David. Johanan, the military officer who replaces Gedaliah in the struggle against Ishmael, is the one who becomes the rescuer, while Ishmael must flee in defeat and disgrace (41:11-15).

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[26] For Saul's relentless desire to kill David because of his recognition that God was with David, cf. 1 Sam 18:11-12; 19:9-16; 20:30-31. For the contrasting attitude of David, cf. 1 Sam 24:1-13; 26:5-12.

[27] Beyond the connection to Saul, Ishmael's violent behavior in this episode invites comparison with the brutal and ruthless rulers of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, particularly Jehu in his over-zealous extermination of the house of Ahab. Jones comments, "Ishmael is . . . shown to act in the spirit of Jehu and to carry the same judgment" (*Jeremiah*, 471-72). Jehu kills 42 Judean princes at the "well" (בור) of Beth Eked (2 Kgs 10:14), while Ishmael employs a "well" (בור) as the receptacle for the corpses left behind in his killing spree (41:7-9). Jehu slaughters 70 royal princes of Israel (2 Kgs 10:6-9), just as Ishmael murders the 70 pilgrims from the north (41:4-8). Ishmael deceives and gains the confidence of the pilgrims from the north by feigning participation in their rites of mourning, not unlike the way in which Jehu gains the confidence of the priests of Baal as a means of putting them to death (cf. 2 Kgs 10:18-27).

As with the comparison of Ishmael to Saul, the Ishmael-Jehu connection places Ishmael in association with a ruling family that stands under a sentence of divine judgment (cf. Hos 1:4-5) without the promise of an enduring dynasty that is given to the house of David. For the election of the house of David over the apostate kings of the northern kingdom of Israel, cf. 1 Kgs 14:8-16; 15:34; 16:25-26, 30-33; 22:52-53; 2 Kgs 13:10-11; 15:9, 24, 28. Ishmael's association by character with the house of Saul/Jehu overrides his association by kinship with the house of David.

[28] Seitz, *Theology in Conflict*, 275.

The site of the confrontation between Ishmael and Johanan—the pool of Gibeon—recalls yet another event near the end of the conflict between the houses of David and Saul. Following the death of Saul and his sons, an especially bloody episode occurs when Abner and Joab agree to have twelve supporters of David engage in hand-to-hand combat with twelve men of Saul. The end result is that all twenty-four men are killed at the pool of Gibeon (cf. 2 Sam 2:8-16). In Jer 41, the pool of Gibeon, rather than a place of bloodshed, becomes a place of deliverance as Johanan and his men are able to rescue the hostages taken by Ishmael. In 2 Samuel, the stand-off at the pool of Gibeon is immediately followed by the defeat of Saul's forces by David's troops (2 Sam 2:17). It is Saul's men, led by Abner, who must flee (2 Sam 2:29), because it is the house of David that is in ascendancy, while the house of Saul is in decline (2 Sam 3:1). The roles are reversed following the confrontation at the pool of Gibeon in Jer 41. There is now defeat for the house of David as Ishmael's final act is flight to the Ammonites (41:15).

There are ultimately no victors in the triumph between Ishmael-Gedaliah/Johanan narrated in Jer 40–41, a sad fact highlighted by the mention of two geographical locations—Bethlehem and Geruth Kimham—in 41:17, which also provide connection to the original story of David. Bethlehem is the hometown of David, the place of origin for the Davidic dynasty (1 Sam 16:1-13; cf. Mic 5:2). The exact location of Geruth Kimham is unknown, but the name Kimham (כמהם) appears in the narrative recounting of David's return to Israel to assume the throne after the rebellion of Absalom (cf. 2 Sam 19:37-40). Kimham is the name of a Davidic loyalist who crosses the Jordan River with David as he returns to the land, and the town Geruth Kimham most likely belonged to the portion of land given to Kimham as reward for his faithfulness to David.[29] Thus, in 2 Samuel, the name Kimham refers to a time of restoration when David returns to Jerusalem after the rise of a pretender to the throne. Ishmael has already fled the land, and there is no such victory for the house of David in the context of Jer 41. Geruth Kimham is further a point of departure for Johanan and his party as they also prepare to leave the land of Judah for Egypt (41:16-18; cf. 42:7-18; 43:1-7), bringing about a reversal of not only the story of David but also of the Exodus, Yahweh's great act of redemption that had enabled Israel to take possession of the Promised Land.

III. *Conclusion*

The echoing of the Saul-David story in the account of Ishmael's assassination of Gedaliah in Jer 40–41 highlights the irony in the reversal of fortunes for the house of David. It is as if Saul is now replacing David, and the blessings and promises associated with David's rule over Israel are erased and forfeited as there is no longer a Davidic ruler on the throne. Just as David was Yahweh's instrument to accomplish God's rejection of the house of Saul, Gedaliah serves as God's instrument in demonstrating his condemnation of the house of David.

[29] See Steven G. Dempster, "Chimham," *ABD* 1:909.

These allusions to the Saul-David conflict serve to validate in part the divine judgment against the house of David in the book of Jeremiah. The house of David embodied in the figure of Ishmael reflects the same insubordination toward Yahweh and violent obsession with retaining power that had earlier necessitated the removal of the house of Saul from the privileged position of leadership.

The connection of Gedaliah and Ishmael to Saul and David also accentuates the covenantal crisis created by the removal of the Davidic ruler from the throne. The narrator in Jer 40–41 suggests that the house of David experiences the same divine rejection that was the fate of the house of Saul (cf. 1 Sam 13:13-14; 15:1, 23, 26; 28:17), a startling and disturbing notion in light of Yahweh's original promise to David that this very thing would never happen (cf. 2 Sam 7:15-16; Ps 89:30-37). The Saul-David intertextuality adds to the shock value of the story of Gedaliah and Ishmael and magnifies the national import of this episode. The book of Jeremiah ultimately resolves the crisis created by the apparent failure of the promises of the Davidic covenant by projecting a radical discontinuity between the present and the future for the house of David. Yahweh's promises to the house of David remain in effect, but the new David promised for Israel's future (cf. 23:5-6; 30:8-9, 18-21; 33:14-26) can only emerge after the complete dismantling of the historical house of David and the formation of a new covenant with Israel in which Yahweh will transform the nation so that both people and king will walk in his ways (cf. 31:31-34; 32:36-41). The account of Ishmael and Gedaliah is the sad final episode in this story of dismantling.

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