

THE BOOK OF YIRMIYAHU
Rav David Sabato

Shiur 28: The Assassination of Gedalyahu (Chapters 40-41)

I. Buds of Hope – The Remnant of Yehuda Gathers with Gedalyahu

After the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of its inhabitants to Bavel, the Babylonian king appoints Gedalyahu the son of Achikam as governor over the poor people who have remained in *Eretz Yisrael*. The choice of Gedalyahu for this office is not accidental. We know several important things about Gedalyahu's family. His grandfather Shafan was King Yoshiyahu's scribe, as well as his partner in the reforms instituted by Yoshiyahu following the discovery of the Torah scroll (see II *Melakhim* 22). His father Achikam was a minister in the days of Yoshiyahu, and is mentioned as having saved Yirmiyahu from death at the hands of the people following his prophecy about the Temple (*Yirmayahu* 26:24; II *Melakhim* 22:13). We learn about another son of Shafan, Gemyahu, and his son Mekhiyahu from the story about the prophetic letter in chapter 36.

It is likely that Shafan's family were counted among Yirmiyahu's supporters, and that they opposed Tzidkiyahu's rebellion against Bavel. For this reason, the king of Bavel saw fit to appoint as governor Gedalyahu, a member of that family, whom he viewed as loyal to the Babylonian regime.¹ This also explains Yirmiyahu's support for him. The Babylonian king's objective was to save the kingdom of Yehuda from desolation and to foster an agricultural community subject to his authority.

Three parties come to Gedalyahu in the wake of the news of his appointment, in three widening circles. First, Yirmiyahu hears from Nevuzar'adan: "Go back then to Gedalya the son of Achikam the son of Shafan, whom the king of Bavel has made governor over the cities of Yehuda, and dwell with him among the people... Then Yirmiyahu went to Gedalya the son of Achikam to Mitzpa" (40:1-6). Afterwards, the surviving military personnel hear the news and come to him: "Now when all the captains of the forces which were in the fields, they and their men, **heard** that the king of Bavel had made Gedalyahu the son of Achikam governor in the land... then they came to Gedalya to Mitzpa" (7-10). Finally, the Jews in the surrounding countries hear as well: "Likewise, when all the men of Yehuda that were in Moav, and among the children of Ammon, and in Edom, and that were in all

¹ In the excavations at Lachish, in the layer dated to the First Temple period, a seal was found that reads: "To Gedalyahu, who is appointed over the house." Some identify him with Gedalyahu the son of Achikam.

the countries, **heard that** the king of Bavel had left a remnant of Yehuda, **and that** he had set over them Gedalyahu the son of Achikam the son of Shafan; then all the men of Yehuda returned out of all places unto which they were driven and came to the land of Yehuda, to Gedalyahu, to Mitzpa" (11-12).

Despite the similarity between these three parties, it is possible to identify differences between their respective motives. We will now examine the three accounts and point out the differences between them.

Yirmiyahu (40:1-6)

In the previous *shiur*, we discussed at length the account given here of Yirmiyahu's fate in comparison to the parallel account in chapter 39. Now we will consider the matter from the perspective of chapter 40, in the context of the various parties that come to Gedalyahu, and we will relate to one important point in the encounter between Yirmiyahu and Nevuzar'adan.

Attention should be paid to the clearly "religious" nature of their conversation, in which Nevuzar'adan speaks to Yirmiyahu in his own language: "The Lord your God has pronounced this evil upon this place. Now the Lord has brought it, and done according as He has said; because you have sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed His voice, therefore this thing is come upon you" (2-3). Nevuzar'adan relates to the destruction as a fulfillment of God's will, which came "to this place" in the wake of the people's sins. He presents Yirmiyahu with the choice whether to go to Bavel in exile, together with the majority of the people, with improved conditions and under government supervision, or alternatively to remain in the land of Yehuda with Gedalyahu, who had been appointed governor by the king of Bavel. Yirmiyahu's choice to remain in the land of Yehuda is not self-evident. In light of his earlier prophecies to the people of Yehuda and to the exiles in Bavel one might have expected him to opt for exile in Bavel until the arrival of the redemption. This choice indicates that Yirmiyahu views the remnant of people that were left in the land under the leadership of Gedalyahu as a real opportunity for rebuilding the nation in its land.² He does not see exile as a *fait accompli*. As we shall see, Yirmiyahu's interpretation of the events has important ramifications for understanding the continuation of the story.

The Captains of the Forces and their Men (40:7-10)

The second party that joins Gedalyahu is composed of military personnel, the captains of the forces and their men "in the fields." It stands to reason that following the fall of Jerusalem these soldiers scattered in the fields for fear of revenge from the Babylonians. Now, when they hear the news, they seek to return. Two pieces of information reach their ears: "That the king of Bavel had made Gedalya the son of Achikam governor in the land, and had

² It does not explicitly say here whether Yirmiyahu's motives were personal or prophetic, but from the continuation of the story (42:10) it becomes clear that Yirmiyahu's support was based on the word of God: "If you will still abide in this land, then I will build you up; for I repent of the evil that I have done to you."

committed to him men, and women, and children, and of the poor of the land, of them that were not carried away captive to Bavel." First, they hear of Gedalyahu's appointment, and afterwards of the commitment to him of the poor of the land. The first tidings concerning Gedalyahu's appointment is the important one from their perspective, as they apparently were concerned about the Babylonians taking revenge, and therefore they needed the protection of Gedalyahu, the representative of the king of Bavel. The verse spells out Gedalyahu's oath:

And Gedalyahu the son of Achikam the son of Shafan swore to them and to their men, saying: Fear not to serve the Kasdim; dwell in the land and serve the king of Bavel, and it shall be well with you. As for me, behold, I will dwell in Mitzpa to stand before the Kasdim, who will come to us; but as for you, gather wine, and summer fruits, and oil, and put them in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that you have taken. (9-10)

Gedalyahu, who understands their fears, opens with soothing words: "Fear not to serve the Kasdim." Their well-being is, of course, conditional on their loyalty to the Babylonian king, the current ruler: "Dwell in the land and serve the king of Bavel, and it shall be well with you." The oath includes a commitment from both sides: Gedalyahu will dwell in Mitzpa and stand before the Kasdim in order to protect them, while they will dwell in their cities and ensure the continued existence and settlement of the desolate land by harvesting and processing its fruit. Gedalyahu's order reflects the central problem confronting him at that time. The destruction occurred on the ninth of Av, and this conversation presumably took place a short time afterwards. It is the end of the summer, the time of ingathering the crops, but there is no one to gather in the produce, since most of the people have been exiled. Gedalyahu focuses on summer fruits (figs) and wine, since these are two basic commodities that are easily preserved and on which people can survive – as is evident, for example, from the story of David's flight from Avshalom (II *Melakhim* 16:1-2): "And when David was a little past the top of the hill, behold, Tziva the servant of Mefivoshet met him, with a couple of asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread, and a hundred bunches of **raisins**, and a hundred of **summer fruits**, and a bottle of **wine**. And the king said to Tziva: What do you mean by these? And Tziva said: The asses are for the king's household to ride on, and the bread and **summer fruit** for the young men to eat; and the **wine**, that such as be faint in the wilderness may drink."

The Jews Living Outside *Eretz Yisrael*

In the third phase, the tidings spread beyond the border of the country and reach the Jews living in the countries surrounding *Eretz Yisrael*: Moav, Ammon, and Edom.

Likewise when all the men of Yehuda that were in Moav, and among the children of Ammon, and in Edom, and that were in all the countries, heard that the king of Bavel had left a remnant of Yehuda, and that he had set over them Gedalyahu the son of Achikam the son of Shafan:

then all the men of Yehuda returned out of all the places unto which they were driven, and came to the land of Yehuda, to Gedalyahu, to Mitzpa, and gathered a great abundance of wine and summer fruits. (11-12)

Like the military personnel, they too receive two reports, but here the order of the reports is reversed. First they hear that the king of Bavel left a remnant of Yehuda, and only afterwards do they hear that he set Gedalyahu over them. From their perspective, the important thing is that they have a place to which they can return. A Jewish community still exists in *Eretz Yisrael*, and it is possible to go there and join it.

The nature of the activities of each group should also be noted. The main action of the military is **dwelling** in the land where they are already found and maintaining it agriculturally. In contrast, the main action of the Jews outside the country is **returning** to *Eretz Yisrael*, which stands in contrast to their having been scattered in the various countries: "Then all the men of Yehuda **returned** out of all the places unto which **they were driven.**" To this we can add another difference. The captains of the forces hear that men, and women, and children were committed to Gedalyahu. In contrast, the Diaspora Jews hear that "the king of Bavel had left a **remnant** (*she'erit*) of Yehuda." The repeated term *she'erit* bears the clear connotation of a chance and a hope for renewal after the catastrophe. Thus, for example, in the story of Yosef and his brother, the connection of which to the story of Yirmiyahu has already been noted (*Bereishit* 45:7): "And God sent me before you to preserve you a **remnant** (*she'erit*) in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance." And in a prophecy of Yeshayahu (II *Melakhim* 19:30-31): "And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Yehuda shall yet again take root downwards, and bear fruit upwards. For out of Jerusalem shall go a **remnant** (*she'erit*)...." The best example is taken from the prophecy of Yirmiyahu himself, which precisely parallels the context of the expression here (*Yirmiyahu* 23:2): "And I will gather the **remnant** of My flock **out of all countries into which I have driven them, and will bring them back** to their folds: and they shall be fruitful and increase." The return to *Eretz Yisrael* of those who had been driven away from it is formulated in terms of a minor redemption. The buds of hope appear in the land, and the rehabilitation of the people in their own land in the aftermath of the difficult destruction appears imminent and real.³

Thus, we see that Yirmiyahu decided to join Gedalyahu out of religious-prophetic motives, since he saw in his appointment God's desire to rebuild the nation. The military personal decided to join him for political motives, relying on Gedalyahu's official status vis-à-vis the Babylonian kingdom, which they feared. And the Diaspora Jews joined Gedalyahu out of nationalistic-popular motives and a desire to return to their own country.

³ Those who had been driven away who gather to Gedalyahu join the task of gathering the summer fruits and the oil that had been cast upon the captains of the forces: "And they gathered a great abundance of wine and summer fruits."

II. The Double Warning and Gedalyahu's Refusal (40:13-16)

The section that follows shifts back to the military personnel mentioned earlier:

Moreover, Yochanan the son of Kare'ach, and all the captains of the forces that were in the countryside, came to Gedalyahu to Mitzpa, and said to him: Do you certainly know that Ba'alis, the king of the children of Ammon, has sent Yishamel the son of Netanya to slay you? But Gedalyahu the son of Achikam did not believe them. (40:13-14)

The beginning of the section (verse 13) describes the captains' arrival before Gedalyahu and parallels the account of their arrival in verses 7-8. It seems that this repetition is meant to bridge the cutting off of the account by the description of the arrival of the Diaspora Jews. However, while in the first passage Yishmael the son of Netanya is mentioned along with them, here the deep rift between the groups is revealed. The faction headed by Yochanan the son of Kare'ach accuses Yishmael of a plot to assassinate Gedalyahu.

Why does the text choose to split the story regarding the arrival of the captains of the forces? It may do this for literary reasons, in order to describe the circles of reports mentioned above. It seems, however, that this matter has deeper significance. The previous section is sort of a parenthetical statement meant to illustrate the great symbolic importance of Gedalyahu as representative of the remnant and as the last chance for the people's renewal and rehabilitation in their own land. Against this background, the warning to Gedalyahu issued by the captains of the forces assumes national and historical importance. Yishmael's assassination plot is directed not only at Gedalyahu the person. This is an attack against the people's opportunity for renewal and rehabilitation in their own land.

Gedalyahu receives two appeals regarding Yishmael's assassination plot, and he responds to both of them with refusal. One appeal is made by Yochanan and all the captains – openly – and it is meant to inform him of the plot so that he may take care of it himself ("Do you certainly know..."). Gedalyahu responds to the substance of this warning with disbelief: "But Gedalyahu did not believe them." This warning is joined by a second warning:

Then Yochanan the son of Kare'ach spoke to Gedalyahu in Mitzpa secretly, saying: Let me go, I pray you, and I will slay the son of Netanya, and no man shall know it. Why should he slay you, that all Yehuda that are gathered to you should be scattered, and the remnant of Yehuda should perish? But Gedalyahu the son of Achikam said to Yochanan the son of Kare'ach: You shall not do this thing, for you speak falsely of Yishmael. (15-16)

This appeal is made by Yochanan alone, in secret, and in it Yochanan assumes the responsibility to take a practical counter-measure: to strike at Yishmael, just as Yishmael had schemed to strike at Gedalyahu. The advantage of this step is that "no man shall know it," and thus people will not

connect it to Gedalyahu, since the appeal was made secretly. To the information that was given in the first appeal regarding Yishmael's plot, Yochanan adds speculation about the dramatic consequences of the assassination: "That all Yehuda that are gathered to you should be scattered, and the remnant of Yehuda should perish." These expressions, which are taken from the previous accounts, are meant to emphasize, as stated, that an attack of Gedalyahu would amount to the elimination of the remnant of Yehuda and the chance for rebuilding the nation.

Thus, Gedalyahu's refusal to heed the warning is not merely complacency on the personal plane regarding the danger posed to his life, but also a great risk on the public-national level. The political struggle against Gedalyahu has widespread national consequences. Gedalyahu takes a sharp stand against this appeal; he forbids Yochanan from taking action and even accuses him of speaking falsely of Yishmael.

III. The Murder of Gedalyahu (41:1-3)

Now it came to pass in the seventh month, that Yishmael the son of Netanya the son of Elishama, of the royal seed, and some of the chief officers of the king, and ten men with him, came to Gedalyahu the son of Achikam to Mitzpa; and there they did eat bread together in Mitzpa. Then Yishmael the son of Netanya and the ten men that were with him arose, and struck Gedalyahu the son of Achikam the son of Shafan with the sword, and slew him, whom the king of Bavel had made governor over the land. And Yishmael slew all the men of Yehuda that were with him, with Gedalyahu, at Mitzpa, and the Kasdim that were found there, and the men of war. (41:1-3)

Having failed to heed the warning of Yochanan the son of Kare'ach and his men, Gedalyahu falls into a trap that was set for him by Yishmael the son of Netanya and his men; he is killed in his house in Mitzpa in the course of a Rosh Hashana dinner that he hosted for them.⁴ Here Gedalyahu's naiveté reveals itself in a most striking manner – not only did he not agree to prevent the assassination, but he did not even take any precautions against Yishmael, and he invited him over for a meal together with ten of his men. The irony of the situation cries out: Eating bread together symbolizes friendship and alliance, as in the case of the meal shared by Yaakov and Lavan in Mitzpa (*Bereishit* 31:54) and Yitro's eating with Moshe and the elders of Israel (*Shemot* 18:12). Here, however, Yishmael and his men exploit the friendly and non-suspecting atmosphere in order to assassinate Gedalyahu, who suspects nothing. Gedalyahu's extreme gullibility stands in sharp contrast to Yishmael's nasty cunning, thanks to which he and ten of his men succeed in overcoming Gedalyahu and all the men who were with him in Mitzpa. The hope for renewed and rehabilitated life in *Eretz Yisrael* that first appeared with the appointment of Gedalyahu is nipped in the bud.

⁴ "The seventh month" means on the Rosh Chodesh of the seventh month, i.e., on Rosh Hashana.

What were the motives of Yishmael the son of Netanya? This is not explicitly stated, but several hints are scattered throughout the story. Verse 1 states that Yishmael was of "royal seed." From the information that was provided about him to Gedalyahu, we know that Yishmael was sent by Ba'alis king of Ammon (40:14), and later (41:10) it states that he asked to be sent to the people of Ammon. It is likely then that this murder is just the tip of the iceberg of the fierce political struggle that took place in the kingdom of Yehuda prior to the destruction. The royal family and most of the ministers supported the rebellion against Bavel, and apparently received support from the people of Ammon in the east, who opposed Babylonian rule.⁵ It seems that even Tzidkiyahu tried to escape to the children of Ammon in the aftermath of the breaching of the city. Against them stood the "pro-Babylonian" faction, with Yirmiyahu's support and led by members of the family of Shafan the scribe. Thus, the assassination plot stems from deep political memories and from the tension between the royal family of Yishmael and the family of Shafan, to which Gedalyahu belonged.

Apart from this, there is also a deeply personal cause: Yishmael, who was of royal descent, cannot accept the possibility that Gedalyahu, who came from a family of scribes, should become the political leader of the people of Yehuda.

IV. The Massacre on the Second Day (40:4-9)

And it came to pass on the second day after the killing of Gedalyahu, and no man knew it, that there came certain men from Shekhem, from Shilo, and from Shomron, eighty men; (their beards shaven, and their clothes rent, and having cut themselves) with offerings and incense in their hand, to bring them in the house of the Lord. And Yishmael the son of Netanya went out of Mitzpa to meet them, weeping as he went. And it came to pass, as he met them, that he said to them: Come to Gedalyahu the son of Achikam. And when they came into the midst of the city, Yishmael the son of Netanya slew them, and cast them into the midst of the pit, he and the men that were with him. But ten men were found among them that said to Yishmael: Slay us not; for we have in the countryside hidden stores of wheat, and of barley, and of oil, and of honey. So he desisted, and did not slay them among their brethren. (4-8)

The day after the murder of Gedalyahu and his men in Mitzpa, Yishmael conducts another slaughter. The total destruction of the people of Mitzpa leads to the situation that "no man knew" about the murder even on the second day. But these words allude to another matter as well: An identical expression was used by Yochanan in his proposal to Gedalyahu to kill Yishmael – "and no man shall know it." The ironic parallelism between the two

⁵ Above (27:3) it says that the king of the children of Ammon came to Jerusalem during the days of Tzidkiyahu to plan the revolt against Bavel. It is possible that following the collapse of the kingdom of Yehuda, Ba'alis sought to take control of its western neighbor through Yishmael.

phrases alludes to a connection between the two situations. Since Gedalyahu failed to heed Yochanan's warnings and to listen to his counsel to kill Yishmael in secret without anybody knowing about it, the opposite happens – nobody knows about Gedalyahu's death.

Verse 5 describes a group of people who arrive "from Shekhem, from Shilo, and from the Shomron," but this account is difficult to understand. On the one hand, these people are portrayed as observing mourning practices; on the other hand, they have offerings in their hands which are to be brought to the house of the Lord. The second element raises another difficulty. How did they plan to bring an offering to the house of the Lord after the destruction of the Temple? Rashi explains: "When they left their homes, they did not know about the destruction of the Temple, and while they were on the road they heard, and tore their garments and shaved their beards." In this way, Rashi resolves the two difficulties and reconciles the contradiction between the two elements. However, his explanation raises another difficulty. If, indeed, they heard about the destruction while on the road, why did they continue with their journey to the ruined shrine?

The Radak proposes an explanation that is based on Rashi's comment, but also deals with the problem that we raised:

There is a difficulty: From the fifth month, when the Temple was destroyed, until the seventh month, how did they not hear in Shilo, and in Shekhem, and in Shomron that Jerusalem had been captured, the Temple destroyed, and the people exiled from it? It may be suggested that they heard of the capture of Jerusalem and about the exile of Israel from it, but they thought that since Nevuzar'adan left of the poor of the land, he also left of the Temple, that it was not fully destroyed or burned, so that those who are left in the land could offer their sacrifices. But when they heard on the road that the house of the Lord was burned, they rent their garments. They also heard that the king of Bavel appointed Gedalyahu over the remnant of Yehuda and they were coming to him.

The Radak adds that these men decided in the wake of the reports to come to Gedalyahu. It is important to note the places from which these men came – the cities that were part of the kingdom of Israel, which was destroyed about a century earlier. In passing, we learn here about the existence of Jewish communities in the kingdom of Israel after the destruction, who maintained connections with the Temple in Jerusalem. From other places in the book of *Yirmiyahu* we learn that at the end of the First Temple period, Yoshiyahu sought to unite the remnants of the kingdom of Israel with the kingdom of Yehuda.⁶

Yishmael's despicable cunning reveals itself in this story as well. He feigns grief and weeps. In this way, he expresses, as it were, solidarity with

⁶ Another possibility is that those people sought from the outset to offer a sacrifice in the destroyed Temple, which explains the combination of mourning and sacrifice.

them and acquires their trust, and once again kills those who fall into his net, casting them into a pit which becomes a mass grave. The sole survivors are those who ransom their lives with treasures in the field. Thus, we learn that Yishmael's lust for blood is topped only by his lust for money.

The account of the appalling mass murder committed by Yishmael is reminiscent of the accounts of the murders committed by Yehu, one of the cruelest and most cunning killers in the Bible (II *Melakhim* 10:7-14):

And it came to pass, when the letter came to them, that they took the king's sons and slew seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent them to Yizrael... And he arose and departed, and came to Shomron. And as he was at the shepherds' meeting house in the way, Yehu met with the brothers of Achazyahu king of Yehuda, and said: Who are you? And they answered: We are the brothers of Achazyahu, and we are going down to greet the sons of the king and the sons of the queen mother. And he said: Take them alive. And they took them alive, and slew them at the pit of the meeting house, forty-two men; neither left he any of them.

In both stories, we are told about a rebel who assassinates the king and his men and commits two acts of slaughter. The first slaughter is of the children of Achav – the slaughter of seventy people – which parallels the action of Yishmael, who also slaughters seventy people (ten of the eighty people were saved). The second slaughter committed by Yehu is also similar to the slaughter committed by Yishmael. In both cases we are told about a group of government supporters who came to visit, and they are slaughtered and cast into a pit.⁷

Later in the story, geographical and historical connections are spun to another historical story:

Now the pit wherein Yishmael cast all the dead bodies of the men whom he had slain by the hand of Gedalyahu, was that which Asa the king had made for fear of Basha king of Israel: and Yishmael the son of Netanyahu filled it with the slain. (41:9)

The verse draws an explicit connection between the murderous act committed by Yishmael and the war between Asa and Basha described in I *Melakhim* (15, 16). It seems that this connection is meant to remind us of the harsh civil war that raged in their day.

The verse states, "Whom he had slain by the hand of Gedalyahu" (*asher hika be-yad Gedalyahu*), implying that it was Gedalyahu who killed them, and not Yishmael. The commentators proposed various explanations of

⁷ In the story of Yehu, the people come from Yehuda to Shomron, whereas in our story they come from Shomron to Yehuda.

this difficult formulation according to the plain meaning of the verse.⁸ *Chazal* offered a sharp and surprising explanation of the matter (*Nidda* 61b):

It is written: "Now the pit wherein Yishmael cast all the dead bodies of the men whom he had slain by the hand of Gedalyahu." But was it Gedalyahu who killed them? Was it not in fact Yishmael who killed them? But owing to the fact that he should have taken note of the advice of Yochanan the son of Kare'ach and did not do so, Scripture regards him as though he had killed them. Rava said: As to slander, though one should not believe it, one should nevertheless take note of it.

In this harsh exposition, *Chazal* lay some of the blame for the murderous acts of Yishmael on the shoulders of Gedalyahu, who in his naiveté and righteousness was unwilling to hear the accusations and guard himself against Yishmael.

V. The Reaction of Yochanan and His Men (40:10-15)

Then Yishmael carried away captive all the residue of the people that were in Mitzpa, the king's daughters, and all the people that remained in Mitzpa, whom Nevuzar'adan the captain of the guard had committed to Gedalyahu the son of Achikam; and Yishmael the son of Netanya carried them away captive, and departed to go over to the children of Ammon. But when Yochanan the son of Kare'ach and all the captains of the forces that were with him heard of all the evil that Yishmael the son of Netanya had done, then they took all the men, and went to fight with Yishmael the son of Netanya, and found him by the great pool of waters that are in Giv'on. Now it came to pass, that when all the people who were with Yishmael saw Yochanan the son of Kare'ach and all the captains of the forces that were with him, then they were glad. So all the people that Yishmael had carried away captive from Mitzpa turned about and came back, and went to Yochanan the son of Kare'ach. But Yishmael the son of Netanya escaped from Yochanan with eight men, and went to the children of Ammon.

After the murders that he committed and before the matter becomes known, Yishmael plans to go over to the children of Ammon together with his captives, thus verifying the information mentioned earlier by Yochanan regarding his relationship with Ba'alis, king of Ammon. But before he can cross the Jordan, Yishmael is stopped by Yochanan and his men in Giv'on. This meeting brings to mind another meeting that took place at that same spot centuries earlier: the story of the meeting between Avner, commander of Ish-Boshet's army, and Yoav, commander of David's forces, in II *Shmuel* 2:12-

⁸ The Radak proposes two explanations according to the plain sense of the text. According to the first explanation, "*be-yad*" here means "because of": "At the hand of Gedalyahu – because of Gedalyahu, as he was the reason for killing all of them, because he came to Mitzpa to kill him, and because he killed Gedalyahu, he also killed those who were with him." According to the second explanation, "*be-yad*" relates to the place: "*Be-yad Gedalyahu* means in the place of Gedalyahu, that is, in the place where he was in Mitzpa."

17.⁹ In the course of that violent encounter, a difficult civil war broke out between the supporters of Ish-Boshet and the supporters of David, which led to terrible bloodshed.

Three events serve then as the backdrop for the story of the murder of Gedalyahu: the massacres of Yehu, the war between Asa and Basha, and the story of the meeting between Avner and Yoav at Giv'on. These events paint Yishmael's deed with the red color of mass murder and civil war, and turn it into another link in the chain of internal civil wars in the history of the people of Israel that led to the destruction. Internal strife and narrow personal and political motivations joined together in the story of the assassination of Gedalyahu to become the fatal blow to the last chance to rebuild the nation in its land.

(Translated by David Strauss)

⁹ The phrase, "weeping as he went," appears in another Scriptural story: When Avner takes Michal to David in an effort to unite the kingdoms, her husband Palti the son of Layish follows after her, "weeping as he went." This story is found near the story of the pool at Giv'on.