

# Jeremiah 40:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then Johanan the son of Kareah spake to Gedaliah in Mizpah secretly, saying, Let me go, I pray thee, and I will slay Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no man shall know it: wherefore should he slay thee, that all the Jews which are gathered unto thee should be scattered, and the remnant in Judah perish?

## Analysis

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Johanan's secret offer to Gedaliah—"Let me go, I pray thee, and I will slay Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no man shall know it"—reveals both his genuine concern for the governor and the moral complexity of the situation. Johanan proposed pre-emptive assassination 'in secret' (literally 'and a man will not know'), suggesting he understood that public execution of Ishmael (a man of royal blood, verse 1) without clear proof of conspiracy might destabilize the fragile community. His reasoning—"wherefore should he slay thee, that all the Jews which are gathered unto thee should be scattered abroad, and the remnant in Judah perish?"—demonstrates strategic thinking: Gedaliah's death would shatter the community structure, causing refugees to flee again and the fragile recovery to collapse. Johanan correctly perceived that stability depended on Gedaliah's leadership and authority. However, his proposed solution—secret assassination—raises ethical questions about ends justifying means. Would murdering Ishmael based on credible but not yet acted-upon conspiracy be justice or merely pragmatic elimination of a threat? The passage doesn't explicitly condemn or endorse Johanan's offer, but Gedaliah's refusal (verse 16) suggests he found it morally unacceptable. This tension between preventing harm through morally questionable means versus maintaining ethical standards even at risk remains relevant for believers facing complex threats.

## Historical Context

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Johanan's offer of secret assassination reflects ancient Near Eastern political realities where eliminating threats to rulers and states through covert action was standard practice. David faced similar situations with Saul (1 Samuel 24, 26) and showed restraint despite opportunity, while other biblical figures (Ehud in Judges 3, Jehu in 2 Kings 9) executed violent actions against rulers at divine command. The proposal to act 'and no man shall know it' indicates Johanan planned to make Ishmael's death appear accidental or attributable to others, avoiding the political complications of Gedaliah being seen as eliminating a rival of royal blood. Johanan's argument about preventing community collapse proved prescient—when Gedaliah was indeed assassinated two months later (41:1-3), the remaining Jews fled to Egypt in fear of Babylonian reprisal (chapters 42-43), exactly as Johanan predicted. This creates historical irony: the harm Johanan sought to prevent through pre-emptive action occurred because Gedaliah refused to act. However, whether Johanan's proposed solution would have succeeded or merely created different problems remains unknowable. The passage invites reflection on whether Gedaliah's moral stance or Johanan's pragmatic calculation was wiser.

## Related Passages

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**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

**1 John 4:8** — God is love

## Study Questions

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1. How should believers weigh preventing genuine future harm against maintaining ethical standards in present action?
2. What does Johanan's accurate prediction of consequences teach about the relationship between political pragmatism and prophetic/moral wisdom?
3. When is pre-emptive action against credible threats justified, and when does it cross into evil that cannot be sanctified by good intentions?

## Interlinear Text

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וַיֹּחֲזֵק	בֶּן	קָרֵחַ	לֵאמֹר	אֶל	גְּדַלְיָהוּ	בְּסֵתֶר
Then Johanan	the son	of Kareah	saying	H413	to Gedaliah	secretly
H3110	H1121	H7143	H559		H1436	H5643
בְּמִצְפָּה	לֵאמֹר	אֵי לָכָה	נָא	יָבֹכֶה		אֶת
in Mizpah	saying	H1980	H4994	I pray thee and I will slay		H853
H4709	H559			H5221		
יִשְׁמָעֵל	בֶּן	נְתַנְיָהוּ	וְאֵין	לֵא	יָדָע	לָמָּה
Ishmael	the son	of Nathaniah	and no man	H3808	shall know	H4100
H3458	H1121	H5418	H376		H3045	
יָבֹכֶה		נִפְסָה	וְנִפְסָה		כָּל	
I pray thee and I will slay		H5315	unto thee should be scattered		H3605	
H5221			H6327			
יְהוּדָה		הַנִּקְבָּצִים		אֵלֶיהָ	וְאֶבְדָּה	שְׁאֵרֵי יִתְּ
thee that all the Jews		which are gathered		H413	perish	and the remnan
H3064		H6908			H6	H7611
יְהוּדָה:						
in Judah						
H3063						

## Additional Cross-References

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**1 Samuel 26:8** (Prayer): Then said Abishai to David, God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time.

**2 Samuel 21:17** (Parallel theme): But Abishai the son of Zeruiah succoured him, and smote the Philistine, and killed him. Then the men of David swore unto him, saying, Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the light of Israel.

