

Jeremiah 41:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

So all the people that Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah cast about and returned, and went unto Johanan the son of Kareah.

Analysis

The captives' joyful response to seeing Johanan—'So it was, that all the people whom Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah cast about and returned, and went unto Johanan the son of Kareah'—demonstrates both their prior unwillingness to follow Ishmael and their relief at rescue opportunity. The phrase 'cast about' (or 'turned around') indicates they immediately reversed direction upon seeing Johanan's forces. This suggests they had been Ishmael's captives unwillingly rather than supporters, making Ishmael's flight with them attempted kidnapping, not political alliance-building. The ease with which they defected shows Ishmael's hold on them was purely coercive; once stronger military force appeared offering liberation, they abandoned him immediately. This detail indicates that Ishmael's action had virtually no popular support—he acted with a small band of accomplices against the community's will. The captives' choice to go 'unto Johanan' rather than dispersing in multiple directions shows they viewed him as legitimate leadership and potential protection. However, this same group would later pressure Johanan to flee to Egypt (42:1-43:7), showing how collective fear and fleshly pragmatism can overwhelm temporary relief and gratitude.

Historical Context

That all the captives defected simultaneously indicates either they had been planning escape or they acted spontaneously when opportunity arose. The lack of fighting mentioned (v.15 notes Ishmael escaped with eight men, suggesting two of

his original ten had died or defected) implies the confrontation was more standoff than battle—when captives defected and Ishmael saw he was outnumbered, he fled rather than fight. This matches patterns of bandit leaders throughout history: their authority derives from fear and advantage, dissolving quickly when faced with superior force. The captives included 'the king's daughters, and all the people' (v.10), representing the entire surviving community structure at Mizpah. Their return to Johanan reunited the fractured remnant but didn't solve the fundamental problem: Gedaliah was dead, Babylonian officials were murdered, and any stable governance structure had been destroyed. The community's relief at rescue would quickly give way to terror about Babylonian reprisal, driving their eventual flight to Egypt despite Jeremiah's prophecy warning against it (42:13-43:7).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does the captives' immediate defection from Ishmael to Johanan illustrate the difference between coerced compliance and genuine loyalty?
2. What does this rescue teach about God's provision of deliverance even amid larger catastrophes that can't be fully reversed?
3. In what ways do believers experience both gratitude for specific deliverances and ongoing fear about larger problems that remain unresolved?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּסָּבּוּ	כָּל	הָעָם	אֲשֶׁר	שָׁבָה	יִשְׁמָעֵאל
cast about	H3605	So all the people	H834	had carried away captive	that Ishmael
H5437		H5971		H7617	H3458
מִן	הַמִּצְפָּה	וַיָּשׁוּבּוּ	וַיֵּלֶכְוּ	אֶל	יֹחָנָן
H4480	from Mizpah	and returned	H1980	H413	unto Johanan
	H4709	H7725		H3110	H1121

קָרַח׃
of Kareah
H7143