

Jeremiah 23:33

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, What is the burden of the LORD? thou shalt then say unto them, What burden? I will even forsake you, saith the LORD.

Analysis

And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, What is the burden of the LORD? The Hebrew **נַשָּׁה** (massa, 'burden/oracle/pronouncement') is a wordplay—it means both 'prophetic oracle' and 'heavy burden.' False prophets trivialized this term, using it casually. God responds: **What burden? I will even forsake you, saith the LORD** (**מַה-מַשָּׁה וְנִתְשַׁה אֲתֶם נְאֹמְנִיתֶה**, mah-massa v'natashti etkhem ne'um-YHWH). The pun suggests: 'You want a burden? The burden is that I will abandon you!'

The verb **שָׁה** (natash, 'forsake/abandon/cast off') represents covenant divorce—God withdrawing His presence. This is the ultimate burden: not judgment itself but God's absence. The flippant use of sacred terminology (**נַשָּׁה**) provokes divine anger. When people treat prophecy as entertainment or casual conversation ('What's God's latest oracle?'), they profane holy things. The severest judgment is divine abandonment—'I will forsake you.' Paul echoes this: 'God gave them over' (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). Nothing is more terrifying than getting what you demand—a God who leaves you alone.

Historical Context

By Jeremiah's era, the term *massa* had become common religious jargon, emptied of weight and reverence. People asked 'What is the *massa* of the LORD?' like asking for gossip or news. This casual treatment of prophetic oracles reflected broader covenant disregard. God's response—'I will forsake you'—predicted the exile when divine presence would depart the temple (Ezekiel 10:18-19) and God would abandon Jerusalem to Babylon.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How might you be treating divine revelation casually, as religious trivia rather than weighty truth?
2. What would it mean for God to 'forsake' you—withdrawing His presence and leaving you to your choices?
3. In what ways does flippant religious language profane sacred realities?

Interlinear Text

וְיַשְׁאַלְבָּן יְכִי
H3588 shall ask H7592 And when this people H2088 H176 or the prophet H176 H5030

כָּהֵן וְאָמְרָתְךָ מָה מִשְׁאָנָה יְהִי וְאָמְרָתְךָ
H3548 or a priest H559 H4100 What is the burden H4853 H3068 H559 thee saying

נִאֵם אַתָּה אֶלְيָם מִשְׁאָנָה יְגַנְּשָׂתִי מִשְׁאָנָה
H413 H853 H4100 What is the burden H4853 H5203 H853 H5002 thee saying

וְיְהִי
of the LORD
H3068

Additional Cross-References

Malachi 1:1 (References Lord): The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.

Isaiah 13:1 (Parallel theme): The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see.

Jeremiah 12:7 (Parallel theme): I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies.

Nahum 1:1 (Parallel theme): The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.

Habakkuk 1:1 (Prophecy): The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see.

Hosea 9:12 (Parallel theme): Though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them, that there shall not be a man left: yea, woe also to them when I depart from them!

