

Jeremiah 42:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then they said to Jeremiah, The LORD be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the LORD thy God shall send thee to us.

Analysis

The people's solemn oath to Jeremiah establishes explicit covenant terms: 'Then they said to Jeremiah, The LORD be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the LORD thy God shall send thee to us.' Invoking God as 'true and faithful witness' creates formal covenant accountability—they call divine judgment on themselves if they disobey. The phrase 'if we do not even according to all things' commits them to complete obedience, not selective compliance. The condition 'for the which the LORD thy God shall send thee to us' acknowledges prophetic revelation as divine instruction they're bound to obey. This oath parallels covenant renewals throughout Israel's history (Exodus 24:3-7, Deuteronomy 26:17-19, Joshua 24:21-24, Nehemiah 10:28-29), suggesting formal solemnity. However, their eventual violation (chapter 43) made this oath bearing false witness and covenant breaking, compounding their sin. The passage illustrates how easily humans make bold promises during calm moments, fully intending compliance, only to renege when divine commands conflict with fear or desire. Their sincerity may have been genuine when spoken, but untested resolve proves inadequate when challenged. This warns against glib religious commitments made without counting the cost of obedience (Luke 14:28-33).

Historical Context

Oath-taking with God as witness carried ultimate solemnity in ancient Israelite culture. The phrase 'The LORD be a true and faithful witness' (literally 'may Yahweh be between us a witness of truth and faithfulness') invoked divine presence to judge any violation. Such oaths were legally binding and breaking them brought divine curse. Old Testament law prohibited false oaths (Leviticus 19:12, Exodus 20:7), making this doubly serious: both covenant breaking and taking God's name in vain. That the entire community participated ('then they said') made this corporate oath-taking, similar to covenant ceremonies at Sinai, Shechem, or during Josiah's reforms. Their subsequent violation (43:1-7) when Jeremiah delivered God's word commanding them to stay in Judah rather than flee to Egypt demonstrated that their oath was empty religious formalism. Like Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) who promised one thing but delivered another, these survivors made solemn vows while planning disobedience if God's word contradicted their predetermined path. The tragedy is that their oath made their eventual disobedience more culpable, adding oath-breaking to rebellion.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does making solemn religious commitments without genuine intent to obey regardless of cost compound sin when we subsequently disobey?
2. What does this passage teach about the danger of confusing sincere emotion in the moment with tested, costly obedience over time?
3. In what ways do believers today invoke God's name in commitments we later violate when obedience proves costlier than anticipated?

Interlinear Text

וְהָמָה	אָמַר ו	אֶל	יִרְמְיָהוּ	יְהוָה	יְהוָה ה	בְּנוֹ	לֵעֵד
H1992	Then they said	H413	to Jeremiah	H1961	The LORD	H0	witness
	H559		H3414		H3068		H5707
אֱמֶת	וְנֶאֱמָה	אִם	לֹא	כָּל	הַדְּבָר		אֲשֶׁר
be a true	and faithful	H518	H3808	H3605	not even according to all things		H834
H571	H539				H1697		
יִשְׁלַחְךָ	יְהוָה ה	אֱלֹהֶיךָ	אֵל יִנּוֹ	כִּי	נִשְׁפָּה:		
shall send	The LORD	thy God	H413	H3651	between us if we do		
H7971	H3068	H430			H6213		

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 31:50 (Witness): If thou shalt afflict my daughters, or if thou shalt take other wives beside my daughters, no man is with us; see, God is witness betwixt me and thee.

Judges 11:10 (Witness): And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words.

Revelation 3:14 (Faith): And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

Revelation 1:5 (Faith): And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,

Malachi 3:5 (Witness): And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.

Malachi 2:14 (Witness): Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.

Micah 1:2 (Witness): Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is: and let the Lord GOD be witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple.

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