

1 Samuel 8:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants.

Analysis

He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants.

Samuel's warning reaches its devastating climax. The livestock tithe ("tso'n," sheep/flocks) represents pastoral wealth just as earlier verses addressed agricultural resources. But the final clause delivers the crushing conclusion: "ve'attem tiyu-lo la'avadim"—"and you yourselves shall be his servants." The very word "avadim" (servants/slaves) echoes throughout the Exodus narrative where Israel served Pharaoh. They were redeemed from servitude to serve God alone (Leviticus 25:55: "they are my servants, whom I brought forth out of Egypt"). Now they will voluntarily re-enter bondage to a human king. The irony is profound: seeking a king to avoid oppression by Samuel's corrupt sons, they will become the king's property. The Hebrew construction emphasizes their transformed status—not merely workers for the king but belonging to him. This verse exposes the ultimate cost of rejecting God's direct rule: exchanging the light yoke of divine lordship for the heavy burden of human tyranny.

Historical Context

The concept of subjects as royal "servants" was common in ancient Near Eastern political vocabulary. Vassal treaties often included language of servitude. The tenth of flocks would have been assessed annually, representing ongoing taxation of pastoral wealth alongside agricultural production.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What does it mean that Israel's pursuit of autonomy from God led to deeper bondage under human authority?
2. How does Christ's invitation to take His "easy yoke" (Matthew 11:29-30) contrast with the servitude Samuel describes?

Interlinear Text

צֹאֲנֶךָ	יֶעֱשֶׂה	וְאֶת־	תְּהִי־	לִי
of your sheep	He will take the tenth	H859	H1961	H0
H6629	H6237			
לְעֹבְדִים:				
and ye shall be his servants				
H5650				