

Joshua 24:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods;

Analysis

God forbid that we should forsake the LORD (חֲלִילָהּ לָנוּ מֵעֲזֹב אֶת־יְהוָה, chalilah lanu me'azov et-YHWH)—The people's emphatic response uses chalilah ('far be it from us'), the strongest Hebrew expression of rejection, like Abraham's protest in Genesis 18:25. Their declaration echoes the Shema's exclusive devotion (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

Yet this passionate pledge, made at Shechem's covenant renewal, tragically proved hollow—Judges 2:10-13 records the next generation's immediate apostasy. Their confidence was sincere but self-deluded, illustrating what Jesus warned in Matthew 26:33-35 when Peter swore undying loyalty. Covenantal faithfulness requires divine grace, not merely human resolve.

Historical Context

This verse comes from Joshua's farewell address at Shechem (circa 1406 BC), the same location where Abraham first received God's promise (Genesis 12:6-7) and where Jacob buried foreign gods (Genesis 35:2-4). The covenant renewal ceremony deliberately evoked Israel's patriarchal heritage.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. When have you made passionate spiritual commitments that later proved harder to keep than expected, and what does this reveal about the difference between human willpower and dependence on God's grace?
2. How does the tragic irony of Israel's confident pledge followed by immediate apostasy (Judges 2) challenge overly optimistic assessments of our own spiritual strength?
3. What practical safeguards—accountability, spiritual disciplines, community involvement—help translate sincere covenant commitments into sustained faithfulness?

Interlinear Text

וַיַּעַן	הָעָם	וַיֹּאמֶר	חַלֵּי יְלֹהִים	לִּי	נָחֵז בְּ
answered	And the people	and said	God forbid	H0	that we should forsake
H6030	H5971	H559	H2486		H5800
אֶת	יְהוָה	לְעֹבֵד	אֱלֹהֵי יָם	אֲחֵרִים:	
H853	the LORD	to serve	gods	other	
	H3068	H5647	H430	H312	

Additional Cross-References

1 Samuel 12:23 (References God): Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: