

Joshua 24:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the LORD.

Analysis

Nay; but we will serve the LORD—The people's emphatic lo ('no/nay') rejects Joshua's warning that they cannot serve YHWH (v. 19). Their insistence **we will serve** (אָתֶנוּ נָעֹבְד, et-YHWH na'avod) uses the same verb (avad) meaning both 'serve' and 'worship,' denoting covenant allegiance requiring exclusive devotion.

Yet this confident self-assertion proves the very problem Joshua identified—they trust their own resolve rather than recognizing their need for divine enablement. Judges 2:7 shows they kept faith 'all the days of Joshua,' but not beyond—human commitment without heart transformation inevitably fails. This anticipates the new covenant's promise of internalized law and new hearts (Jeremiah 31:33, Ezekiel 36:26).

Historical Context

This exchange occurs at the climactic moment of Joshua's farewell—he's challenged them three times (vv. 14-15, 19-20, 21-22), eliciting increasingly emphatic pledges. Ancient Near Eastern covenant ceremonies often included such call-and-response patterns, with witnesses invoked to seal commitments.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. When has your confident declaration of spiritual commitment revealed overconfidence in your own strength rather than humble dependence on God's grace?
2. How does the contrast between Israel's sincere-but-failed old covenant pledges and the new covenant's promised heart transformation change your understanding of Christian perseverance?
3. What role does corporate covenant renewal (through worship, communion, baptism, church membership vows) play in sustaining faithfulness that individual resolve cannot maintain?

Interlinear Text

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