

Hosea 4:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And there shall be, like people, like priest: and I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings.

Analysis

Like people, like priest: 'And there shall be, like people, like priest: and I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings.' The proverb כָּאִם כַּכֹּהֵן (ka'am kakohen, literally 'as people, as priest') indicates both share equal guilt and equal judgment. When priests fail to maintain distinctiveness, God treats them identically to laypeople—both judged for covenant breach. This demolishes any privilege of office apart from faithful service. God's impartiality appears throughout Scripture (Deuteronomy 10:17, Romans 2:11, Ephesians 6:9). The parallelism 'punish...ways' and 'reward...doings' emphasizes retributive justice: consequences match actions. New Testament maintains this principle: greater responsibility yields greater accountability (James 3:1, Luke 12:48). Only Christ's imputed righteousness saves—neither office nor achievement suffices.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern religions typically elevated priests above common people through privileged status, special rights, and sacred immunity. Israel's covenant, however, held leaders to higher standards (Leviticus 21:1-22:16 details priestly holiness requirements). When priests violated these standards, they forfeited privilege and faced identical judgment as laypeople. The phrase became proverbial, appearing similarly in Jeremiah 5:31, Isaiah 24:2. Historically, Assyrian conquest made no distinction between priest and peasant—all experienced destruction and exile equally. This demonstrates that religious office provides no shield against divine judgment when covenant obligation is violated. The

Reformation similarly challenged medieval Catholic claims of priestly immunity and privilege.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does God's impartiality in judgment confront presumptions on religious status or spiritual heritage?
2. What does it mean that Christian leaders are held to higher standards (James 3:1), and how does this relate to 'like people, like priest'?

Interlinear Text

וְהָיָה H1961	כָּעָם H5971	כַּכֹּהֵן H3548	וּפָקַדְתִּי י H6485	עָלָיו H5921
And there shall be like people	like priest	and I will punish		
וְלָהֶם H1870	וּמַעֲלָלָיו H4611	אֲשֶׁר יִב H7725	לֹא H0	
them for their ways	them their doings	and reward		

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 24:2 (Parallel theme): And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the taker of usury, so with the giver of usury to him.

Jeremiah 5:31 (Parallel theme): The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?

Matthew 15:14 (Parallel theme): Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

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