

Lamentations 4:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The anger of the LORD hath divided them; he will no more regard them: they respected not the persons of the priests, they favoured not the elders.

Analysis

Divine rejection confirmed: **"The anger of the LORD hath divided them; he will no more regard them: they respected not the persons of the priests, they favoured not the elders."** The Hebrew *penei YHWH chillekam lo yosif lehabbitam penei kohanim lo nas'u zeqenim lo chananu* declares God's active dispersal and rejection. *Chillekam* (חָלַקָם, "divided them, scattered them") indicates God intentionally dispersed these corrupt leaders. *Lo yosif lehabbitam* (לֹא יוֹסִיף לְהַבִּיטָם, "he will no more regard them") means God has withdrawn His favorable attention.

The indictment follows: "they respected not the persons of the priests" (*penei kohanim lo nas'u*, פְּנֵי כֹהֲנִים לֹא נָשְׂאוּ, "lift up the face") means to show honor, favor, or respect. These leaders showed no respect even for their own office. "They favoured not the elders" (*zeqenim lo chananu*, זִקְנִים לֹא חָנָנוּ, "show favor to the elders") similarly indicates contempt for traditional authority. *Chanan* (חָנַן) means to show favor, grace, or mercy.

Theologically, this teaches that those who dishonor their sacred offices lose God's favor. When priests acted contrary to their calling and elders abandoned wisdom, God scattered them. The principle appears in 1 Samuel 2:30: "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." Leadership isn't a license for corruption but a stewardship requiring faithfulness. Failure brings divine rejection.

Historical Context

The anger of the LORD scattering these leaders refers to the exile. Rather than maintaining the priesthood and eldership intact during captivity, God dispersed them. Some priests were executed (2 Kings 25:18-21). Others were scattered among exilic communities. The unified religious leadership structure was broken.

The charge that they "respected not the persons of the priests" likely refers to earlier corruption. Younger priests elevated through political connections rather than proper Aaronic succession, or priests who abandoned their duties for profit (Micah 3:11: "The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire"). They treated their own office with contempt through greed and corruption.

Similarly, "they favoured not the elders" indicates breakdown of traditional respect. Younger leaders disregarded older sages. Isaiah 3:5 describes this inversion: "the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable." This generational disrespect contributed to societal collapse. When even religious leaders show no regard for their own offices or for traditional wisdom, chaos ensues. God responded by scattering them, removing the pretense of legitimate leadership.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does God scattering leaders who disrespected their own offices demonstrate that position without faithfulness brings judgment?
2. What does this verse teach about the importance of honoring both sacred offices and traditional wisdom?
3. In what ways can Christian leaders today 'respect not the persons of the priests/elders'—dishonoring their own calling?

4. How does 1 Samuel 2:30 ('them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed') connect to this verse?

Interlinear Text

פַּנִּי	יְהוָה	חֵלֶק	לֹא	יוֹסֵף	לְהִבִּיט
The anger	of the LORD	hath divided	H3808	them he will no more	regard
H6440	H3068	H2505		H3254	H5027
פַּנִּי	כֹהֲנִים	לֹא	נָשְׂאוּ	זִקְנֵי	לֹא
The anger	of the priests	H3808	them they respected	not the elders	H3808
H6440	H3548		H5375	H2205	
חָנְנוּ:					
they favoured					
H2603					

Additional Cross-References

Lamentations 5:12 (Parallel theme): Princes are hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not honoured.

Hebrews 8:9 (References Lord): Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

Jeremiah 24:9 (Parallel theme): And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them.

Deuteronomy 32:26 (Parallel theme): I said, I would scatter them into corners, I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men:

Deuteronomy 28:25 (References Lord): The LORD shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.

