

Matthew 23:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

Analysis

And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted—this perfectly balanced chiasm uses *hypōsei* (ὑψώσει, will exalt) and *tapeinōthēsetai* (ταπεινωθήσεται, will be humbled/abased) in divine passive voice—God does the exalting and abasing. The verbs *hypson* (ὑψῶν, exalting) and *tapeinon* (ταπεινῶν, humbling) are present participles describing habitual actions, not isolated incidents.

Jesus articulates a fundamental spiritual law: self-promotion leads to divine demotion, while self-humbling precedes divine elevation. This principle runs throughout Scripture (Proverbs 29:23; Luke 14:11, 18:14; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5-6). The Pharisees' self-exaltation guaranteed their judgment, while Jesus's own self-humiliation to death resulted in His name above every name (Philippians 2:8-9). This verse provides the theological ground for the woes that follow—God will humble those who exalted themselves.

Historical Context

Ancient Mediterranean honor culture drove constant competition for public recognition and social status. Self-praise was common among philosophers and orators. Jesus's teaching that God humbles the self-exalting and exalts the humble contradicted cultural norms that encouraged aggressive self-promotion.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does pride manifest in religious contexts, especially among those considered spiritually mature?
2. Why must genuine humility precede true exaltation in God's kingdom?
3. What does Jesus's own humiliation-then-exaltation pattern teach about the path of discipleship?

Interlinear Text

ὅστις δὲ ὑψωθήσεται ἐαυτὸν ταπεινώσει καὶ ὅστις

he And shall be exalted himself shall be abased and he

G3748 G1161

G5312

G1438

G5013

G2532

G3748

ταπεινώσει ἐαυτὸν ὑψωθήσεται

shall be abased himself shall be exalted

G5013

G1438

G5312

Additional Cross-References

James 4:6 (Parallel theme): But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

1 Peter 5:5 (Parallel theme): Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

Proverbs 29:23 (Parallel theme): A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.

Luke 14:11 (Parallel theme): For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Matthew 18:4 (Parallel theme): Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Proverbs 15:33 (Parallel theme): The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility.

Luke 18:14 (Parallel theme): I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Matthew 5:3 (Parallel theme): Blessed are the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven.

Daniel 4:37 (Parallel theme): Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

Job 22:29 (Parallel theme): When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up; and he shall save the humble person.