

Psalms 115:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He will bless them that fear the LORD, both small and great.

Analysis

He will bless them that fear him, both small and great. This verse promises divine blessing to all who fear God, transcending social distinctions. The psalm has called Israel (v.9), Aaron's house (v.10), and God-fearers (v.11) to trust; now it assures all receive blessing regardless of status.

"He will bless" (יְבָרֵךְ/yevarekh) uses imperfect tense indicating future certainty: God "will" bless, not merely "might" bless. Barak means to bless, kneel, praise. God's blessing encompasses spiritual, material, relational, and eternal prosperity—comprehensive well-being flowing from covenant relationship. This blessing includes peace, provision, protection, presence, and ultimately salvation.

"Them that fear him" (יִרְאֵי יְהוָה/yirei Yahweh) describes blessing's recipients. "Fear" (yirah) means reverence, awe, worship, holy respect. This isn't terror but appropriate recognition of God's majesty, holiness, and authority producing humble obedience. Proverbs declares: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). Ecclesiastes concludes: "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

This "fear" balances love and respect, intimacy and reverence. It recognizes God as both Father and Judge, Savior and Sovereign. Philippians 2:12 commands: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Hebrews 12:28-29 exhorts: "let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire."

"Both small and great" (הַקְטָנִים וְהַגְדֹּלִים/haketanim im-hagedolim) explicitly

includes all regardless of social status, wealth, power, or influence. Qatan means small, insignificant, humble, low-status. Gadol means great, important, influential, high-status. God's blessing doesn't discriminate based on human hierarchies. Both peasant and king, servant and master, Gentile proselyte and Jewish priest receive equal blessing when they fear God.

This radicalism challenged ancient (and modern) assumptions. Ancient societies rigidly stratified people: royalty, priests, nobles, commoners, slaves. Yet God's kingdom reverses these hierarchies: "the last shall be first, and the first last" (Matthew 20:16). James warns: "have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons" (James 2:1).

Historical Context

Psalms 115 was likely written during or after the Babylonian exile, when Israel faced mockery from surrounding nations who questioned the power of their invisible God compared to pagan idols. The psalm's emphasis on God's sovereignty and the futility of idolatry would have provided crucial encouragement to a displaced people.

The phrase "both small and great" reflects ancient Near Eastern social stratification. Israel was a highly stratified society: kings, priests, nobles, landowners, farmers, servants, and slaves occupied distinct social tiers. Yet God's blessing transcends these human distinctions. This radical equality before God challenged prevailing social norms where blessings and favor typically correlated with status and power.

The "fear of the LORD" was central to Old Testament piety. It appears over 300 times in Scripture. For ancient Israelites, this fear shaped ethical behavior, worship practices, and daily decisions. The book of Deuteronomy repeatedly commands Israel to fear God (Deuteronomy 6:13, 10:12), connecting this fear with covenant obedience. Job is described as one who "feared God and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1). The wisdom tradition declares: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7).

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does 'fear of the LORD' relate to love for God, and can both exist simultaneously?
2. What does it mean practically to fear God in daily life, decisions, and relationships?
3. How should the promise of blessing 'both small and great' challenge church practices that favor influential or wealthy members?
4. Why might God's equal treatment of 'small and great' be offensive to human pride and status-seeking?

Interlinear Text

יְבָרֵךְ	יִרְאֵהוּ	יְהוָה	הַ קְטָנִים	וְהַ	גְּדֹלִים:
He will bless	them that fear	the LORD	both small	H5973	and great
H1288	H3373	H3068	H6996		H1419

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 112:1 (Blessing): Praise ye the LORD. Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments.

Luke 1:50 (Parallel theme): And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

Psalms 128:1 (Blessing): Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways.

Revelation 19:5 (Parallel theme): And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.

Psalms 29:11 (Blessing): The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace.

Revelation 11:18 (Parallel theme): And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.

Acts 13:26 (Parallel theme): Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.

Malachi 4:2 (Parallel theme): But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

Revelation 20:12 (Parallel theme): And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

Acts 26:22 (Parallel theme): Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: