

Psalms 118:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Let them now that fear the LORD say, that his mercy endureth for ever.

Analysis

Let them now that fear the LORD say, that his mercy endureth for ever. The third summons widens beyond ethnic Israel and Aaronic priesthood to yir'ei YHWH (those who fear the LORD)—a category including Gentile proselytes and all who revere God regardless of ancestry. Yirah (fear) encompasses awe, reverence, worshipful respect, and covenant faithfulness—not servile terror but filial devotion combined with holy awareness of God's transcendent majesty. This phrase appears throughout Psalms describing the righteous (Psalm 15:4, 22:23, 25:14, 103:11, 13, 17).

The inclusion of God-fearers anticipates the gospel's expansion beyond ethnic boundaries. Acts repeatedly mentions God-fearing Gentiles who worshiped at synagogues and became the gospel's first Gentile converts (Acts 10:2, 22, 35; 13:16, 26, 50). Cornelius, the centurion, was phoboumenos ton Theon (one who fears God)—the Greek equivalent of yare YHWH. These Gentiles experienced God's chesed without full covenant membership, previewing the mystery Paul would unfold: Gentiles are fellow heirs through Christ (Ephesians 3:6). All who fear God—Jew or Gentile, priest or layperson—testify to the same enduring mercy.

Historical Context

Throughout Israel's history, Gentiles who feared the LORD found welcome: Rahab sheltered spies and joined Israel (Joshua 2, 6:25); Ruth clung to Naomi's God and entered Messiah's lineage (Ruth 1:16-17); the widow of Zarephath hosted Elijah (1

Kings 17:8-24); Naaman the Syrian received healing (2 Kings 5). The temple's outer court—the Court of the Gentiles—provided space for God-fearing Gentiles to worship (Isaiah 56:6-8). Jesus cleansed this court, declaring it a house of prayer for all nations (Mark 11:17). Pentecost gathered devout Jews and God-fearing proselytes from every nation (Acts 2:5-11), and the Spirit fell on Cornelius's household before they were baptized (Acts 10:44-48), demonstrating God's mercy transcending ethnic covenant boundaries.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does the inclusion of 'God-fearers' in Psalm 118 challenge ethnocentric or exclusivist attitudes in worship and community?
2. What does it mean to 'fear the LORD' in a way that combines reverence, love, and faithful obedience rather than servile terror?
3. How should the church's testimony to God's enduring mercy cross cultural, ethnic, and social boundaries as this verse anticipated?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמְרוּ	יְרֵא י	יְהוָה	כִּי	לְעוֹלָם
say	Let them now that fear	the LORD	endureth for ever	
H559	H4994	H3373	H3588	H3068
				H5769

חֲסֵדוֹ:
that his mercy
H2617

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 22:23 (References Lord): Ye that fear the LORD, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel.

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.

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