

What It Means to Be Blessed by God

by Dr. David A. DeWitt

- **What does the Bible teach about being blessed by God?**
- **Can we apply the Old Testament blessings to physical earthly prosperity today?**
- **Under what conditions are we blessed by God today?**
- **Can we pray for God to bless us today?**

Let me begin with my conclusion. Then I'll show you how I got there and develop it a bit. I believe I've looked at every passage in the Bible that uses the word *bless* or *blessed* . After reading them all, I've concluded:

There may be no bigger difference between the Old and New Testament than the concept of being blessed by God.

In the Old Testament, the blessings of God were physical, earthly, and temporal, usually in the land of Israel.

In the New Testament, the blessings of God were spiritual, heavenly, and eternal, not earthly prosperity.

Definition: Webster's *New World College Dictionary* (1999, page 155) defines *bless* or *blessed* as it relates to our usage with the phrases "to make or declare holy by a spoken formula or a sign ... to ask divine favor for, to make happy or prosperous; gladden, to praise or glorify, to keep or protect from harm, evil, etc."

So a good synonym for **blessing** is **prosperity** .

When we look at our concordance, we see that there are two Hebrew and two Greek words translated into the English word for *blessing* . In other words, the English word is much broader than the Hebrew and Greek words. We can picture it like this:

(Hebrew) *barak*

(Greek) *eulogeo*

Means "to speak well of"

Example: Ephesians 1:3 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*

(Hebrew) *ashar*

(Greek) *makarios*

Means "to be fortunate, happy or prosperous"

Example: Matthew 5:3 *Blessed are the poor in spirit*

In this brochure, we are dealing with the second definition above. In particular, we are focusing on the New Testament word *makarios* (Strong's #3107).

The big--and I mean **HUGE** --difference is when and where we receive the blessing. In the Old Testament, it's here on earth during this life (and usually in the land of Israel). In the New Testament, it's not here or now but in heaven after this life. It seems to me:

If you are a Christian, following the instructions of Jesus Christ and the apostles, you should never understand that God blesses people by making them prosperous this side of heaven.

True, God blesses people now. But that blessing is a hope of **future reward** , never present physical earthly prosperity (Matthew 5:5-9; Luke 6:20-26).

True, God makes some people prosperous. But that's a burden of stewardship not a blessing (Luke 12:48).

True, God helps people now and answers prayer. But all that is to conform us to the image of Christ, not to make us physically prosperous (Romans 8:26-29).

True, *godliness is profitable for all things ... for the present life and also the life to come* (1 Timothy 4:8). But the profit of godliness is spiritual peace while ministering under the persecutions of the world, not numerical, physical, or earthly prosperity (2 Timothy 6:6-12).

Can't we apply the Old Testament today?

Of course. We **should** apply the Old Testament today. But if your application is the opposite of Christ and the apostles, in what sense are you a Christian? How can we say we accept Christ yet deny His teaching? Some say they are not denying Christ's teaching, just adding the Old Testament to it. But in this case, they are denying it because Christ taught that you were to consider yourself blessed when you are not prosperous now (Luke 6:20-26; see also Luke 14:13-14; Ephesians 1:3; Titus 2:13; James 1:12; and Revelation 14:13; 19:9).

“How are you?”

“God's really blessed us.”

In America, we often hear, “God has really blessed us” as a statement of giving God credit for our physical, earthly, or ministry prosperity. “I prayed for God to bless me, and I became prosperous” is easy to say in America or in the post-modern western world. Since the year 1800 (the Industrial Revolution), virtually every western society has seen each generation become more prosperous (and less godly) than the one before. But try that prayer for blessing in Russia during the reign of the Khrushchev, in Central Europe during the 90s or in areas of massive poverty in India or Central Africa today. The same is true of ministry prosperity. Are those ministering under the persecutions of Communism and Islam just not saying their prayers right? If your church is not becoming a mega-church, are you not blessed by God? The idea that God blesses people with prosperity today is western and modern, not global or biblical.

The New Testament talks about being blessed in this life. But the context is one of reaping the benefits, that is, prospering in the next life. (For example, compare James 1:25 with 5:1-8.)

The same is true of ministry. Sometimes God gave large numbers, sometimes just a few. But no place does the New Testament tell us to pray for higher numbers. Jesus' ministry went from crowds to the twelve to four, of which Peter and John became the prominent leaders. Paul's ministry went from synagogues to churches to a few disciples, and many of them left him (2 Timothy 1:15 and 4:9-18).

The New Testament concept of blessing is when we suffer for the sake of righteousness, we should consider ourselves blessed because we will be blessed with rewards in heaven.

Any Old Testament passage teaching physical, earthly, temporal blessing in this life should be applied today to blessings in heaven. For example, consider the popularized prayer of Jabez. *Now Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, “Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my border, and that Thy hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldst keep me from harm, that it may not pain me!” And God granted him what he requested* (1 Chronicles 4:10). The **interpretation** of this is a physical expansion of the territory of Jabez in the land of Israel. The **application** today might be a prayer like this: *Lord, bless me by expanding my heavenly rewards. Have Your hand upon me, that I may be willing to endure suffering for You, so I will be rewarded in heaven.*

According to the New Testament, we should consider ourselves blessed by God (because we will receive blessing in heaven):

- (1) When we are humble (Matthew 5:3; Luke 1:48).
- (2) When we are poor, hungry, or weeping (Luke 6:20-21).
- (3) When we are hated for Christ's sake (Luke 6:22-23).
- (4) When we hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:5-9).
- (5) When we are persecuted for the sake of righteousness (Matthew 5:10-12).
- (6) When we are not offended at Christ or His ways (Luke 7:23; Matthew 11:6).
- (7) When we read, understand, and obey the revelation of God in the Scripture (Luke 10:23; 11:27-28; Revelation 1:3).

- (8) When we give to those who cannot give back to us (Luke 14:12-14).
- (9) When our faith is based upon the unseen revelation of God (John 20:29, 1 Peter 1:7-8).
- (10) When we depend on God's forgiveness rather than our own good works (Romans 4:7-8).
- (11) When we die in the Lord (Revelation 14:13; 19:9).
- (12) When we are ready for Christ's return (Luke 12:37, 38, 43).

So, feel free to pray for any of those things.

Questions and Answers

Q: *What does the Bible teach about being blessed by God?*

A: To be blessed by God in the Old Testament was physical earthly prosperity, but Christ and the apostles taught it **only** as heavenly eternal rewards.

Q: *Can we apply the Old Testament blessings to physical earthly prosperity today?*

A: No. That would be inconsistent with the way Christ and the apostles applied it in this age.

Q: *Under what conditions are we blessed by God today?*

A: We should consider ourselves blessed when we suffer for obeying Christ not because we will prosper now but because we will in heaven.

Q: *Can we pray for God to bless us today?*

A: Sure, as long as you are praying for persecution and poverty on earth so that you will be prosperous in heaven.