

# Blessing (Makarism, Beatitude) Form

## Introduction

The blessing is an ancient form of prophetic speech often coupled with the curse or woe. Its origins lie in the covenant treaty form (Reader 85). The blessing was promised to the covenant parties if they abided by the terms of the treaty.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the blessing or beatitude becomes a vehicle for teaching. Through the beatitudes, which open the first of five major sermons in the gospel, Jesus teaches who the new beneficiaries of the covenant will be.

## Structure

Like the list-genealogy, the blessing has a simple structure: a group is named as blessed and then their reward is specified. Matthew groups several blessings together in 5:3-12. Note the alternating pattern of blessed group/reward in the series.

<sup>3</sup> “Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup> “Blessed are they who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> “Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the land.

<sup>6</sup> “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for  
righteousness,  
for they will be satisfied.

<sup>7</sup> “Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.

<sup>8</sup> “Blessed are the clean of heart,  
for they will see God.

<sup>9</sup> “Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.

<sup>10</sup> “Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake  
of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> “Blessed are you when they insult you and  
persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you  
[falsely] because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for  
your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they  
persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

## Content

The blessing recalls the terms of the covenant to which the person is party and the promised rewards if one remains faithful.

## Function

The blessing serves as an exhortation to continue the covenanted and soon-to-be-rewarded behavior. Often parallel curses or woes are presented to serve as a negative exhortation or threat against infidelity and as a condemnation of the group’s opponents (see examples below). These blessings and curses were originally part of cultic and political rituals conducted in the Temple, although in Deuteronomy and Matthew they take place on other mountains.

## For Further Practice

Deuteronomy 28:1-69

*Rule of the Community* I.21–II.18

Luke 6:20-26