–Save This Page as a PDF–

The Aaronic Blessing
6: 22-27

The Aaronic blessing DIG: What does it mean to bless someone? How do we bless God? What are some of the promises in the B'rit Chadashah that Messiah will keep us? What is the full meaning of the word "shalom" and how does Messiah give it to His people? When you read or hear Aaron's blessing, which images are especially touching to you?

REFLECT: Why do you think that the priests were to say the Aaronic Blessing to the people? What purpose did it serve? What does the blessing ADONAI gave to Aaron teach us about the desire of God for us? Thank the Lord that He delights to draw close to us. Ask the Lord to continue to "keep you" as you face difficulties that this life will bring.

The main objective of this passage is for God, through the Levites, to extend a blessing on the people of Isra'el.

Among the chief duties of **the priest** was to bless **Isra'el** in the name of **ADONAI (Deuteronomy 19:8** and **21:5)**. However, the blessing issues solely from **ADONAI; the priest's** function was to channel it. This point is made emphatically clear by the threefold use of **the divine Name** in **the blessing** formula itself. And if this were not enough, the authorization for **the priests** to pronounce **the blessing** concludes with the warning that even though **the priests** utter **the divine Name**, it is not **they** but **ADONAI** who alone can activate **the blessing**. This repeated emphasis on the divine source of **the blessing** is projected into even bolder relief when it is contrasted with the formula of welcome pronounced upon the worshiper as he entered the Temple, "We **bless** you from the House of **ADONAI (Psalm 118:26)**. Clearly our text has taken great pains to underscore that, although **the priest** is holy **(Leviticus 8:30** and **22:9)**, indeed, one of **God's set apart one's (Leviticus 10:3)**, **he** possesses no divine powers of **his** own. **He** is the representative of **Isra'el**, but whether **his** purpose is blessing or forgiveness **(Leviticus 4:20)**, consent and implementation reside solely with **God**.[106]

This **blessing** was bestowed on **Isra'el** every day during Temple times. Each day, following the daily, continual **burnt offering** (see the commentary on **Leviticus, to see link click Ai – The Burnt Offering: Accepted by God**), **the priests** would recite this **blessing** over **the Israelites**. In modern observance, this passage is prayed by anyone, but on the festival days, the cantor in the synagogue actually calls the rabbi to step forward at that point in the liturgy. Those who are descended from Aaron approach the front of the congregation, turn to the assembly, lift their hands in the prescribed manner shown here, and chant **the priestly blessing**.[107]



The blessing is couched in poetic Hebrew style, an elevated form of speech characterized by parallelism, terseness, and the use of metaphor. In Hebrew, the first line of **the blessing** in **verse 24** consists of **three** Hebrew words; the second line has **five** Hebrew words, and the third line has **seven** Hebrew words. The progression in the number of words mirrors the outward movement and flow of **God's blessing** through the single priest to the broader community. Each of the three lines consists of two clauses. The first clause invokes **God's** movement toward **the people (bless, make His face shine on you, lift His face toward)**, and the second clause names the results of these three divine movements toward **the people (keep you, be gracious to you, and give you shalom)**.[108]

ADONAI said to Moshe, "Speak to Aaron and his sons, and tell them that this is how you are to bless the people of Isra'el: you are to say to them . . . (6:22-23). Furthermore, there are three lines, each line building upon the other as they add an additional thought to the previous one. Each line begins by invoking the sacred name of **ADONAI**. This is **the Name** that stresses **God's** covenant keeping attributes. This **blessing** is an absolute and unconditional imparting of

benefits from **Ha'Shem** to **His people**. There is no "if" clause in **the blessing**. By repeating it three times, the text puts the proper emphasis where it belongs – on **ADONAI Himself**, **Who** is the only source for any **blessing**.[109]

The God who keeps: **May ADONAI bless you and keep you (6:24)** The first request for **blessing** is to ask **the Holy One** to **keep Isra'el**. This word **"keep"** (Hebrew: *shomer*) is the usual word for **"guard"** or **"protect."** This is quite relevant for as I write these words, **Isra'el** is at war with Hamas and Hezbollah. The Scriptures teach that **God** is **the Keeper of Isra'el**. Only **He** has the ability to preserve the nation from war, **sin** and famine. While **He** planned difficult times of distress and trial, ultimately, in the end, this **blessing** will come true. **Isra'el**, despite all of **her sin** and enemies, will be **kept** secure by **ADONAI**. **This is what God** says: **He who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar – ADONAI-Tzva'ot is His Name. "Only if these decrees vanish from My sight," declares ADONAI, "will the descendants of Isra'el ever cease to be a nation before Me" (Jeremiah 31:35-36).**

This is also the same on a spiritual level for all who rely on **the Holy One**. If we are part of the holy community, the redeemed community by faith in the atonement and resurrection of **Yeshua Messiah**, **ADONAI** will also keep us, for we are eternally secure in **Him** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ms – The Eternal Security of the Believer**). Even if our halo slips, if we are truly **His**, **He** will **keep** us, just as **He** promised to **keep Isra'el**.[110]

The God who is gracious: **May ADONAI make His face shine on you and be gracious to you (6:25).** How is it that **God** can **keep** and **guard** such a people who knowingly **sin** against **Him**? The answer lies in the second request, **the** second **blessing**: **ADONAI be gracious to you.** The Hebrew word translated **gracious** is from the root *chanan*. It can be translated *to show favor* or *to be gracious*. This word, in conjunction with its Greek counterpart in the B'rit Chadashah just oozes with unconditional **forgiveness**. The best illustration of this word is in the story of **Hosea** and **Gomer**. Just as **Hosea** was instructed to relate to **his** estranged and unfaithful wife **Gomer**, so does **God** relate to **His** sometimes estranged and unfaithful people, **Isra'el**. Despite their sorry spiritual state, **God** always grants forgiveness freely.

This is also the same way He acts towards us. **Ephesians 1:7** teaches that **God "lavished" His grace** on us who believe in **Yeshua Messiah**, despite knowing

how rebellious our flesh can be. Specifically, we are told that we have . . . **forgiveness of our sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace (Ephesians 1:7-8).**[111]

One expression of **God's grace** is that **He makes His face**, or countenance, to **shine upon** us. This metaphor of light reminds us that light connotes clarity, revelation, the warmth of sunshine, rescue from cold darkness, renewal of life, and the brightness of joy. The bright **shining** of **God's face** upon **Isra'el** is the theme in **Psalm 67** of **His blessing** and deliverance in times of trouble. **The psalm** begins: **May God be gracious to us and bless us, and make His face shine upon us; may Your ways be known on earth, your salvation among the nations (Psalm 67:1-2). The psalm's** focus on all the nations and all creation suggests a wider picture of **God** as **Creator** of all. As the life-giving rays of the warm sun extend over all the world, so **the blessing** of **God's shining face** radiates to the end of the earth. **Psalm 67** concludes: **The Land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear Him (Psalm 67:6-7).**

The shining of **the** divine **face** leads to **God's** being **gracious**, dealing with people not according to their **sins**, but with freely given love and compassion. **And ADONAI** said: **I will cause all My goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim My Name, YHVH, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion (Exodus 33:19).**[112]

The God who grants peace: The third line of **blessing** brings the passage to a climax. **May ADONAI lift up His face toward you and give you shalom (6:26).** Since **God keeps** and freely lavishes us with **His grace**, then one thing is certain . . . we will have **His shalom**. **The midrash says this about shalom: Great is shalom, for no vessel can retain blessing so effectively as shalom. The blessings are of no avail unless shalom goes with them (Bemidbar Rabbah 11.7). Shalom is certainly one of the "pillars of the world," according to the Talmud.** In seeking to **bless the Israelites** with **shalom,** the Holy One undoubtedly meant wholeness of life, and freedom from war with their enemies. But I think it goes way beyond that, as great as those **blessings** are. **Shalom, according to the ArtScroll . . . is not simply the absence of war. It is a harmony between two conflicting forces. It is the proper balance between the needs of the body and his higher duty to the soul (ArtScroll Chumash, page 765).**

Yeshua Messiah, the Prince of Peace (see the commentary on **Isaiah Ck – He Will Be Called the Prince of Peace**), said that **He** came to give us such **peace** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Kq – No One Comes to the Father Except Through Me**). **ADONAI** also promises to those who believe **in Him . . . the peace that passes all understanding, guarding our hearts and our minds (Philippians 4:7).**[113]

The ultimate goal of **God's blessing** is summed up by the final word of **shalom**, or **peace**, which is the outcome of **Ha'Shem's lifting up His face** and is the ultimate word of **the blessing** as a whole. **Shalom** denotes a rich array of benefits (but no guaranties): prosperity **(Psalm 37:11** and **Proverbs 3:2)**; longevity, happiness in a family **(Psalm 128:6)**, safety, security **(Psalm 4:9** and **122:6-8)**, good health **(Psalm 38:4)**, friendship **(Jeremiah 38:22)**, and general well-being. In **the Psalms**, **shalom** and **righteousness** go together: **Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet, righteousness and shalom will kiss each other (Psalm 85:10).**

In this way they (the priests) are to place my Name on the people of Isra'el, so that I will bless them (6:27). The book of **Genesis** ends with **Jacob's** last words to **his twelve sons** couched in the form of **a blessing (Genesis 49:3-27). Moshe's** last words to **Isra'el** the day before **he** died at the end of **Deuteronomy** were extended words of **blessing** for **the twelve tribes** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Fy – This is the Blessing**). Most of the major prophetic books of the TaNaKh end with words of promise and **blessing** in spite of earlier words of judgment. Whether in the congregational practice of worship or in **ADONAI's** ultimate will for **God's** people throughout biblical history, the word of **blessing** and hope is **the LORD's** final word. The provisions for **the priestly blessing** of the community round out this section of **Numbers** with its obedient concern for the holiness of the camp and the enjoyment of **God's blessing** in **Isra'el's** midst. **The Israelites** bear **the Name of God** as a community, with **His** presence in **her** midst, a **Name** and presence whose ultimate will is **peace**, **mercy** and **blessing**.[114]

The pronouns in this blessing are singular, meaning **God's blessings** come to us personally, but there is a plural pronoun in **Numbers 6:27, "I will bless them." ADONAI** blesses the nation by blessing individuals, and by blessing the nation, **He** blesses the world. **YHVH** promised **Abraham, "I will bless you . . . and you will be a blessing (Genesis 12:2).** We **bless** the world by sharing **God's** truth, often one person at a time.

We need **the blessings** that **God** lists here: to be cared for by **the Lord**, who watches over us; to have **His face shine on** us **and be gracious to** us; to have the riches of **His grace** given to us; to have **Him** pay attention to us when we call; and, as the result of these things, to enjoy **His** presence in our hearts. **Shalom** is one of the greatest words in the Hebrew vocabulary, and it means much more than the absence of storms and trouble around us. It involves quietness of heart within us, spiritual health and spiritual prosperity, adequacy for the demands of life, and the kind of spiritual well-being that rises above circumstances. Paul said it this way: **Don't worry about anything; on the contrary, make your requests known to God by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving. Then God's shalom, passing all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with the Messiah Yeshua. In conclusion, brothers, focus your thoughts on what is true, noble, righteous, pure, lovable or admirable, on some virtue or on something praiseworthy. Keep doing what you have learned and received from me, what you have heard and seen me doing; then the God who gives shalom will be with you (Philippians 5:6-9).**[115]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for sending Your one and only Son to be the sacrificial **Lamb** who paid the penalty for our sin **(John 1:29),** and so graciously give **Messiah Yeshua's righteousness (Second Corinthians 5:21)** to all those who love and follow **Him** as **Lord** and **Savior (Romans 10:9-10).** Thank **You** for guiding **the priests** to bestow this **blessing** on **Isra'el** every day during Temple times. What a wonderful **blessing** it must have been!*

*Make **Your face** to **shine** on **Your** people today. When the sun is shining brightly and the wind is blowing ever so softly – come what may, our hearts are at peace and our **face** is smiling. However, when **Your face shines** on us, it is much better than even the brightest sunshine. When you **bless Your** children, **You** fill them with a warm **peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7)**. **Your** Almighty power and strength cause any fear or worry to evaporate into thin air! How comforting it is to know, that **Your face** is **the face** of not only the most powerful ruling **Monarch** of the world, but **You** are also the kindest and best loving Heavenly **Father**! How much we love **You** and want to bless you back by living our lives as a continual offering of praise of **You,** and in humble and quick obedience of all **You** say. In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*