

## Numbers 6 (24-26) – The Blessing

Currently, the oldest biblical text we have is from over 2600 years ago. It was found in Jerusalem in 1979 on two rolled-up pieces of silver. And they contain Numbers 6:24-26, known today as the Aaronic or Priestly Blessing.

Vs.24 – The LORD bless you and keep you,

This is 3 Hebrew words, made up of 15 Hebrew consonants

Vs.25 – The LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you;

This is 5 Hebrew words, made up of 20 Hebrew consonants

Vs.26 – The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.

This is 7 Hebrew words, made up of 25 Hebrew consonants

The increasing number of Hebrew words (3/5/7) and consonants (15/20/25) in each line of vs.24-26 show a progression of a face-to-face encounter with God. It is like verbal set of steps into God's intimate presence. The first part of each line is the cause for the effect which follows, incrementally raising you up to that most blessed state of peace, and wholeness, shalom.

God had saved Israel out of bondage in Egypt. After this, he gave them the Law. Sometime in their wilderness journey, before they entered the Promised Land, God instituted this blessing. This wasn't something they earned. The blessing emphasizes that it is the Lord who blesses the people, doing for his children what they cannot do for themselves.

This is not a prayer but a promise. This is about what the Lord has done for his people. It's a statement of divine approval, not just an expression of hope, and it's not a magical incantation to gain God's support. Rather this promise is stated as fact. The blessing was his sign of promise and seal of approval.

Vs.27 says – *So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.* In placing his name upon his people, God is placing his very being

upon them. So, this blessing is to be used as a benediction, a “good word” from God which both affirms your standing and exhorts you to holiness.

There is a difference between a doxology and a benediction. A doxology is a word of blessing spoken by us to God. A benediction is a word of blessing spoken by God upon us. An example of a doxology would be Jude 1:25 – *to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.* An example of a benediction would be 2 Corinthians 13:14 – *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

This blessing is the promise of God shining his face on us, so it’s appropriate to look up to receive the benediction. When the minister says these words, it’s appropriate that he does so with his hands raised. This practice finds its basis in Leviticus 9:22; when Aaron blessed the people (presumably with these words), he lifted his hands. Luke 24:50 tells us that just before Christ ascended to the Father, he lifted up his hands and blessed the disciples. Many believe that Jesus used this very blessing in doing that. When the blessing was conferred from a father to a son, the father would place his hand on his son. So, in a congregation, the raised hand signifies touch.

Although this blessing was pronounced over the whole congregation, it is phrased in the singular “you.” It’s a loving Father blessing each of his children. The name of God is mentioned three times, emphasizing the fact that the Lord is the source of all goodness and blessing. James 1:17 says – *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*

In vs.24, the Hebrew word for “bless” here is *barak*, which means to kneel down. It’s related to the Hebrew word for knee. This blessing is a picture of God stooping down to touch his children with his loving hands. To provide for them. You might even say that this is God embracing his children, like Jesus, who said – *Let the children come to me...And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them* (Mark 10:14-16).

God humbles himself to bless his beloved. Love came down a ladder at Bethel. Love came down on Mt. Sinai to bless Moses and the children of Israel. God blesses his children by sending his own son, Jesus Christ. At the Last Passover, Jesus kneeled to wash the feet of his disciples. He was giving them the gift of himself, of his love while showing them the way to serve others. Philippians 2:8 says that Jesus *humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

The Hebrew word for “keep” is *shamar*, which means to hedge about with thorns. The image painted by this word is of a shepherd protecting his sheep by penning them in to keep out predators such as wolves. This is one place where people get the idea of praying for a hedge of protection (cf. Isaiah 5:5 / Ezekiel 22:30 – KJV uses the word hedge instead of wall). But this blessing is not praying for a hedge; this is God saying there *is* a hedge. Again, this can be seen as the Lord wrapping his arms around you to protect you.

In vs.25, the Hebrew word for “face” is *panim*, which refers to one’s entire being as revealed in the face. The NLT renders vs.25 as – *May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you.* The idea of shining is connected with *ore*, a Hebrew word for light. Genesis 1:3 says – *And God said, “Let there be light (ore),” and there was light.* God shining on you is how you got saved. 2 Corinthians 4:6 says – *For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness (Genesis 1:3),” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

The highest good of any person is to see God in his majestic beauty, his face lighting up, and smiling on you with his loving grace. But when God hides his face, it brings you despair. Psalm 13:1 says – *How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?* The redeemed soul longs to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. Psalm 27:4 says – *One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD...* God invites you to seek his face, and our hearts cry out for his face. Psalm 27:8 says – *You have said, “Seek my face.” My heart says to you, “Your face, LORD, do I seek.”*

Gracious in Hebrew is *khanan*, literally to show favor, to be merciful, and to exhibit a compassionate longing. God's rebellious people didn't deserve the Priestly Blessing, but God gave it to them because of who he is. Exodus 34:6 says – *The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.* And each time the people turned away from the Lord, he promised to treat them with mercy and compassion if they returned. 2 Chronicles 30:9 says – *For the LORD your God is gracious and merciful and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him.* Repentance involves seeking God's grace by seeking his face. The face of God radiates his divine, unmerited favor, which we call grace.

Vs.26, like vs.25, speaks of God's face upon you. In vs.25, when God shines his face on you, it radiates his gracious favor on you. It's God's smile. In vs.26, when God lifts up his countenance on you, it brings you peace. It's God's constant attention. And the Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*, means completeness or wholeness. It comes from the root word *shalam*, which means to restore and make even better than the original state. This shalom, this peace, is much more than the absence of conflict. It is an overall sense of well-being. Romans 5:1 says – *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

This blessing explains why faces are so important. It's because God made us with faces so that he could shine his face on ours. The story of the Bible is the story of faces – Creation – this was God making us in his image with faces. The Fall – this was us hiding our faces in shame. The Struggle – this is our wrestling with God to see his face. Redemption – this is seeing God's glory in the face of Christ, and living in the hope of glory. Until the Consummation – this is when we see God face to face.

People are made in God's image. James 3:9 says *no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.* This tells you that how we treat God's image in others is a direct reflection of how we relate to God. Christian, God has smiled on you. And knowing God's

favorable countenance, his shining face, upon you should not only transform your understanding of where you stand with God, but it should also transform your view of others since others share in the same image of God. You should act like those that know God have been smiled on by God. And you should act like those who don't know God can be smiled upon by God. You should want them to be smiled upon by God. In fact, this could be a simple prayer – Lord Jesus, please smile upon them. And your acts of mercy are like your face shining on your neighbor; it is a means by which you love God, or despise God (Matthew 22:37-40, 25:31-46).

Jesus told us that whoever has seen him has seen the Father (John 14:9). And Paul declared that the glory of God has been unveiled in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). Moses saw God's glory, but was not allowed to see his face (Exodus 33:18-20). But for the Christian, the Holy Spirit uses God's Word to help you see what Moses longed to see but could not. The glory of God was revealed when Jesus entered the world (John 1:14). Still, as 1 Corinthians 13:12 says – *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.* And what the Aaronic Blessing declared prospectively is now being granted to you progressively as you are being transformed from one degree of glory to another by gazing in faith upon Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). And then, one day, when Jesus returns, *we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is* (1 John 3:2), face to face.

Therefore, when the Aaronic blessing is pronounced over you today, it is a gospel blessing! And it reminds you to live every moment of life *Coram Deo*, before the face of God. As you go into the world, you do not leave the presence of God, because his blessing has set his name on you.

Now, let's put the picture all together.

The Lord will kneel down and put his arms around you to protect you.

The Lord will smile on you and put his favor on you.

The Lord will keep his attention on you and make you whole.

Amen.