

Numbers 6:22-27

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/num/num-6/numbers-622-27/>

Numbers 6:22-27 contain what many have called the “Aaronic Benediction.” It is also called the “priestly prayer.” It expresses the priests’ desire for the LORD to shower His people with favor. It demonstrates that the priests were to be a source of blessing for the LORD’s people.

Some consider this the “LORD’s Prayer of the Old Testament.”

The next law begins as earlier ones—*Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying (v. 22).* It begins a new unit of thought. This law, however, was directed toward the priests, seeing how Moses was to *speak to Aaron and to his sons (v. 23).* The subject of this law was what Moses needed to teach the priests concerning how to *bless the sons of Israel.*

The blessing itself is in verses 24 – 26. It is comprised of three lines that have the following characteristics:

- Each line is longer than the previous one. The first line (v. 24) has three Hebrew words. The second line (v. 25) has five Hebrew words, and the third line (v. 26) has seven Hebrew words.
- Even the number of Hebrew letters in each line is interesting. Line one has 15 letters, line two has 20 letters, and line three has 25 letters. This type of precision shows the wonderful elegance of this prayer.
- Each line has two parts.
 - The first part contains a request to the LORD to perform some action. Each request is in the Hebrew jussive form, which is used to express a desire or wish. Here, the requests by the priests are for the LORD to act on their behalf. They could be translated “May the LORD...”
 - The second part of each line specified the desired result of the action requested in the first part of the line.

Verse 24 contains the first line. It is the most general of the three. It reads,

[May] *the Lord bless you, and keep you (v. 24).*

To be blessed was to receive that which was good. Here, the LORD was asked to *bless* His people, which was asking the LORD to bestow beneficial things. The *you* here is singular, indicating that the blessing applied to each and every individual in the covenant community.

The second part of the line was a request for the LORD to “keep” His people. The word for *keep* (Hebrew “shamar”) can also be translate “to guard” or “to keep watch.” The thought here is that the LORD’s blessing would result in the protection of His people.

The second line asked that:

the Lord make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you (v. 25).

The LORD's face revealed His presence. So this would indicate a prayer for God to be present. For His *face* to *shine* upon His people is also for God to be delighted with them (1 Samuel 14:27). Again, the *you* indicates that this applies to each individual in Israel.

God's favor gives them light, life, protection from evil, and restoration (Psalm 80:3, 7, 19). By contrast, the LORD showed His anger when hid His face (see Deuteronomy 31:17 – 18; Psalm 30:7).

The second part of line two asked that the LORD *be gracious to you*.

Another result of the LORD causing His face to “shine” was to bestow His grace or favor. When the LORD causes His face to shine, His people are receiving His favor. That the priests pray for *the LORD to make His face shine* upon the people is to petition that the LORD would see the people and favor their deeds.

It is set forth in God's covenant with Israel what God desires of Israel, who they are to obey in order to gain God's favor. But humans are always going to fall short. So God's favor will always be an act of mercy. This prayer is a recognition that no person can demand anything of God; His favor is always an act of mercy.

The third line containing the third blessing asked that:

the Lord lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace (v. 26).

The word translated here as *countenance* is the same word translated *face* in verse 25. For the LORD to *lift up His countenance* (literally “lift up His face”) was to take notice of Israel. To focus upon them, perhaps like a protective parent, a shepherd to his sheep, or a security guard over his charge. This was designed to bring great comfort to the LORD's people, knowing that God was watching over them, and that they could rest in His deliverance, provision, and protection.

The comfort that came when resting in the LORD's protective gaze would result in *peace*. The word for “*peace*” (Heb. “shalom”) means more than a lack of conflict. It speaks of all the good things of life in all of their fulness. It is the complete harmony of all aspects of life and relationships. The New Testament word “righteousness” conveys the same basic idea. It is all the parts working together to a common end, fulfilling the designer's purpose.

Thus, “shalom”/*peace* is fulfillment of each person. True fulfillment has its root in a spiritual fulfillment, a fulfillment that transcends this life.

This is what the priests were to pray for Israel.

It could be said that this fulfillment/*peace* (“shalom”) comes as a result of all the things requested of the LORD in this prayer:

- “keeping” (i.e. guarding) His people (v. 24),
- making His face “shine” upon them with His favor (v. 25), and
- shepherding them by “lifting His countenance” with His protective gaze (vs. 26).

To be in God’s presence and protective care and to receive His favor is essential to our *peace* (“shalom,” our fulfillment as humans.

Some have noted that the two key items in this prayer are “grace” (favor) and “peace,” and reasonably conclude that Paul based his greetings in his epistles on these words (see 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3 as examples).

Verse 27 summarizes the priestly blessing. It states that if the priests *shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I then will bless them* (v. 27).

The word translated *invoke* (Heb. “sim”) is normally rendered “make,” “to put,” “to set,” or “to place.” Hence, the first part of the line could read “so they will place my name upon the sons of Israel.”

The meaning of the phrase *invoke my name* or “place my name” might be understood to mean that when the priests name (or proclaim) the LORD as the God of the Israelites, He will in turn bless them. It could also be that when the priests prayed this prayer in obedience to God’s command that they were invoking His name to bless them.

This prayer for Old Testament priests to pray for the LORD’s covenant people is appropriate for any believer to pray for any other believer in the New Testament. New Testament believers are each priests as unto the Lord, since each believer has direct access to God through Christ (Hebrews 10:19-23). Just as the LORD was the source of blessing for Israel, He is also the source of blessing for His Church.

Jesus spoke of blessing in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:3 – 11). In the “Beatitudes,” Jesus stated a number of ways His followers could be blessed by living out a set of inner attitudes. Psalm 188:25f, which conveys the idea that the one who depends completely on the LORD would be blessed, is quoted in all four gospels when Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:9, 23:39; Mark 11:9; Luke 13:35; John 12:13). These are a few examples of verses that indicate that God blesses or rewards those who walk in obedience to Him (2 Corinthians 5:10).

But here it seems there is another principle in action, namely that when authorities pray for those whom they serve, the LORD promises to bless them.

Jesus is our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14). He prayed for all His followers, that God would bless them by keeping them in His name (John 17:11). We can expect that God heard and answered His prayer.

It would seem that every parent would have the opportunity to pray for God to bless their children, and every leader to pray for God to bless those in their care. Such a prayer does not negate the personal responsibility each person has before God. However, it seems clear that God does bless those who are the recipient of such a prayer. That both of these are true stand in paradox, but God is paradoxical to a human perspective ([for more, read our Tough Topics Explained: Founding Paradox](#)).

Biblical Text

²² Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²³ “Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, ‘Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them:

²⁴ The Lord bless you, and keep you;

²⁵ The Lord make His face shine on you,

And be gracious to you;

²⁶ The Lord lift up His countenance on you,

And give you peace.’

²⁷ So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I *then* will bless them.”