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BRIDGES FOR PEACE

Israel Teaching Letter

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The Blessing

The Blessing



The Word of God is full of the idea of blessing. God blesses His people, people bless God, fathers bless their sons, God blesses things, and individuals bless others. Obviously, God the Creator knew what mental health professionals tell us today. One of the most basic needs of human beings is the need for affirmation or blessing.

In this teaching letter, I would like to explore the idea of blessing with you. I would like to start with perhaps the best known scriptural blessing, the priestly Aaronic Benediction. *“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace”* (Numbers 6:24–26). As you read this letter, it is my hope that you will know it is God’s desire to bless you, and that you will be encouraged to bless God and those He puts in your life.

The Power of Words

Words have great impact on our lives. I remember as a child hearing the saying, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” As an adult, I realize the utter falsehood of that statement. Bones heal much faster than emotional wounds. The wounds caused by words can change an individual for his or her entire life. By the same token, positive words spoken to and about us can make a powerful difference in our lives.

Growing up, I was my dad’s helper. As an evangelistic family traveling from one end of North America to the other, there was always work to do: hooking and unhooking the trailer, changing tires, mailing out newsletters, setting up equipment for our audiovisual presentations, book tables, and temporary offices. Frequently, my dad would tell me, “Becky, you are a good worker.” To this day, I know that I am a good worker. He spoke positive words over me that affect me to this day. Conversely, I know people whose parents told them repeatedly that they were stupid, ugly, or clumsy. They came to believe those things about themselves, and, as adults, they still struggle to overcome negative self-images.

Our tongues have the ability to bring blessings or curses to those around us, especially those we love the most. Scripture has much to say about this. *“Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things...With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so”* (James 3:5, 9–10). *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue”* (Proverbs 18:21a). *“Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing”* (Proverbs 12:18, NIV).

God has called us to use our tongues to bless. *“Not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing”* (1 Peter 3:9).



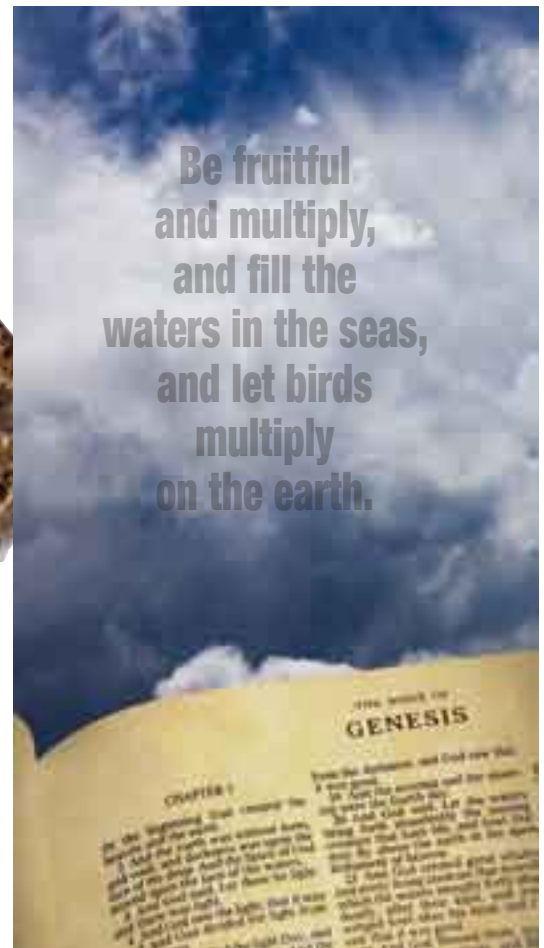
Letters form words
that **bless** or words that **curse**.
Choose **well** which you will use.

God's Blessings

From the beginning, God showed His character to be one of blessing. In the creation narration, we see the first instances of God blessing in the Bible. *“And God blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth’...So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth”* (Genesis 1:22, 27–28).

Notice that there is an element of multiplication when the blessing of God is present. We also see multiplication and blessing combined in the account of Yeshua (Jesus) feeding the 5,000. Scripture says, *“...He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes”* (Matthew 14:19b).

When the children of Israel were poised to enter the Promised Land, they were presented with an opportunity to choose their quality of life. Moses called them to make a choice: obedience, which would result in blessing, or disobedience, which would result in cursing. The principle remains unchanged. We have the choice between a life of blessings or curses. We find the blessings listed in Deuteronomy. In part they say, *“Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. Blessed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground and the offspring of your beasts, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out”* (Deuteronomy 28:3–6, NASB). God is a God of blessing, who desires to bless our lives with goodness and who created us in His image to bless Him and those around us.



Patriarchal Blessings

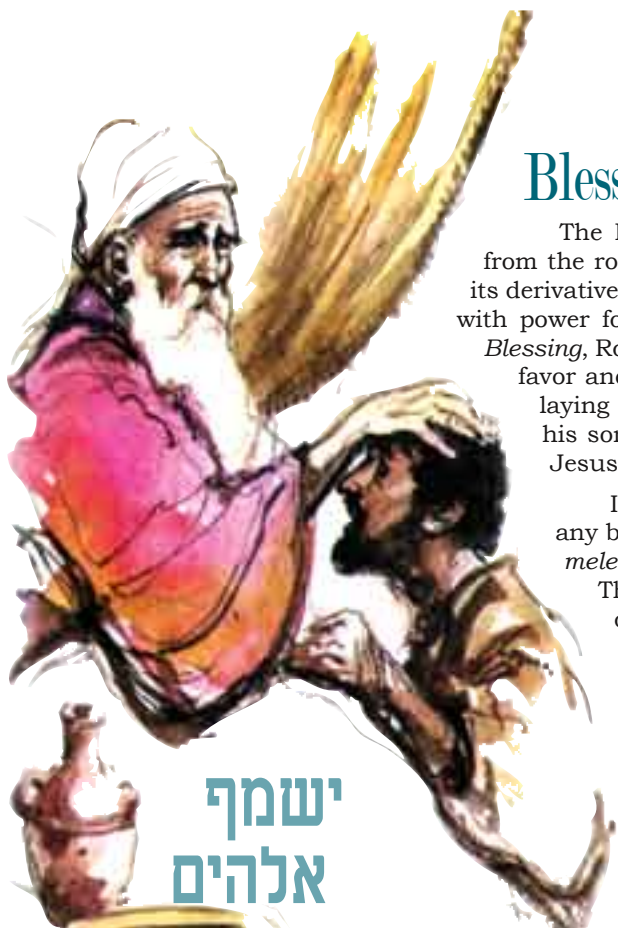
A few years ago, my husband Tom flew to America to be with his father who was extremely ill. Tom knew that it might be the last time he would see his father alive. Dad Brimmer was failing fast. He was sleeping most of the time and wasn't communicating much. Tom had been reading about the patriarchal blessing in the Bible and had a deep desire to be blessed by his father. Upon arrival at his father's hospital bedside, the first time his father awoke, Tom asked for his blessing: "Dad, you might want some time to think about it first, but I really desire your blessing." To his surprise, his father, who had been so noncommunicative, answered immediately: "I don't need to think about it. I am ready now." Tom, who always carries his handheld palm computer, got out a portable keyboard and typed every word of his father's blessing. Dad Brimmer never recovered from his illness and has been with the Lord now for several years. But, his words of blessing continue to encourage and bless Tom.

Subsequently, my sister Sandy went to our parents and said, "Mom and Dad, Tom's dad gave him a blessing, and we want one too." They wrote out special blessings for each of us. Those handwritten blessings are treasured by both of us. I keep mine right by my desk where I can read it often. My father passed away this summer, and the blessing I received is even more precious to me now.

Parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, you have the awesome privilege of speaking into the lives of the young people in your family. I encourage you to choose blessing instead of cursing. You will be making an investment in eternity and for the health and well-being of your family that is inestimable.



Tom & Becky Brimmer



ישמך
אלהים
כאפרים
וכמנשה

May God
make you like
Ephraim and
Manasseh

Blessing in Jewish Life

The Hebrew word translated “blessing” is *berakah* (ברכה) and is derived from the root (ברכ) and means to kneel, bless, praise, and salute. This root and its derivatives appear 415 times in the Bible. In Hebrew, “to bless” means to endue with power for success, prosperity, fecundity, longevity. In his book *The Family Blessing*, Rolf Garborg offers this definition: “The intentional act of speaking God’s favor and power into someone’s life, often accompanied by a gesture such as laying hands on the person. This is the kind of blessing spoken by Isaac to his son Jacob, and in turn by Jacob to His sons. It is the type of blessing Jesus gave His disciples (Luke 24:50) and to the children.”

In Judaism, there is a blessing for everything. The opening words of any blessing (*berakah*) are always the same: “*Baruch atah Adonai, eloheinu melech ha olam*” (Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe). The cycle of life is punctuated with events that all have their own kind of blessing. The year is accented with feasts, all with their own unique blessings; the week is crowned with the blessing of *Shabbat* (Sabbath); and the day is marked by three services in which God is blessed.

In between these services, throughout the day, the Lord is blessed for nearly every thing the Jewish person encounters. They include blessings offered in thankfulness for the pleasures received from eating, drinking, scenting, etc.; blessings designed to show that certain religious practices are divinely commanded; and blessings expressing the idea that all tragic or joyous events in private life come from God. There are blessings for nearly every conceivable occurrence: hearing good news, witnessing a lightning storm, seeing the wonders of nature, buying a new house, acquiring new clothes, etc. (Birnbbaum).

A *Shabbat* blessing is said in Jewish homes every Friday night as Jewish fathers (and sometimes mothers) lay their hands on their children and bless them: “May God make you as Ephraim and Manasseh” (for sons, Genesis 48:20), “May God make you as Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah” (for daughters, Ruth 4:11), and end with the Aaronic Benediction. This parental benediction is also given at the time of a child’s wedding ceremony and by parents on their deathbed. When grandparents are still living, it is also customary for children to receive their blessings as well, especially on the eve of *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) and before the wedding ceremony (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*).

Every Friday night during the *Shabbat* meal, the husband blesses his wife in the presence of their guests and children with the *Eshet Chayil* (Virtuous Woman) passage in Proverbs 31. When a Jewish couple marries, an integral part of the ceremony is the seven *brachot* (blessings), which are said by close relatives and friends.



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www.israelimages.com/lral Teitelbaum

1. You are blessed, Lord our God, the sovereign of the world, who created everything for His glory.
2. You are blessed, Lord our God, the sovereign of the world, the creator of man.
3. You are blessed, Lord our God, the sovereign of the world, who created man in His image, in the pattern of His own likeness, and provided for the perpetuation of his kind. You are blessed, Lord, the creator of man.
4. Let the barren city be jubilantly happy and joyful at her joyous reunion with her children. You are blessed, Lord, who makes Zion rejoice with her children.
5. Let the loving couple be very happy, just as You made Your creation happy in the Garden of Eden, so long ago. You are blessed, Lord, who makes the bridegroom and the bride happy.
6. You are blessed, Lord our God, the sovereign of the world, who created joy and celebration, bridegroom and bride, rejoicing, jubilation, pleasure and delight, love and brotherhood, peace and friendship. May there soon be heard, Lord our God, in the cities of Judea and in the streets of Jerusalem, the sound of joy and the sound of celebration, the voice of a bridegroom and the voice of a bride, the happy shouting of bridegrooms from their weddings and of young men from their feasts of song. You are blessed, Lord, who makes the bridegroom and the bride rejoice together.
7. You are blessed, Lord our God, the sovereign of the world, creator of the fruit of the vine.

At a Jewish funeral, they pray a beautiful prayer called the *Kaddish*, often referred to as the Mourner's Prayer. Interestingly, it is not focused on the mourning or the one who has passed away; rather, it is a prayer focused on God.

Glorified and sanctified be God's great name throughout the world which He has created according to His will.

May He establish His kingdom in your lifetime and during your days, and within the life of the entire House of Israel, speedily and soon; and say, Amen. May His great name be blessed forever and to all eternity.

Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, extolled and honored, adored and lauded be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations that are ever spoken in the world; and say, Amen.

May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen.

He who creates peace in His celestial heights, may He create peace for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen.

In Jewish culture, when a person who has passed away is referred to, his or her name is always followed by the phrase, "of blessed memory." On June 2, my father Dr. David Allen Lewis, of blessed memory, passed away. At his funeral, many spoke about the blessing he had been in their lives. Many flowers, e-mails, cards, and letters arrived telling of the blessing of my father's life. My sister and I prepared memory books for our mother, his children, and grandchildren. Those books tell the story of a life that was blessed and that continues to bless even though he has left our presence and is enjoying his eternal reward.



The Priestly Benediction

In Temple days, the priests gave benedictions every morning. In his book *The Mitzvot*, Abraham Chill describes it this way: “They would ascend a platform, raise their hands over their heads and spread out their fingers in a prescribed, traditional manner. [In the television show *Star Trek*, Spock, played by Leonard Nimoy, made this gesture with his hands accompanied by the words, “live long and prosper.” Interestingly, Nimoy is Jewish and adapted this from the Priestly Blessing.] The High Priest did not raise his hands above his forehead where he wore the ‘tzitz,’ the miter which had the name of God on it...In the Temple, the Tetragrammaton, (the four letter word) which comprises God’s name [יהוה], was employed in the Priestly Blessing, that is the Name was pronounced as it was written. Outside the Temple, it is forbidden to pronounce the name of God in this manner. The name is pronounced as ‘Adonai.’”

Till this day, the Jewish people pronounce this blessing in synagogue services and in family settings. The name of God (יהוה) is not pronounced at all. Many Christians pronounce this holy name of God as Yahweh or Jehovah, but this makes Jewish people nervous. They say *Adonai* (Lord) or *HaShem* (The Name) instead. The tetragrammaton has not been pronounced in so long, it seems that the exact pronunciation is unknown today.



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Who Does God Bless?

There are many places in Scripture where God says He blesses people as a result of their choices. “*He will bless those who fear the Lord, both great and small*” (Psalm 115:13). The word translated fear in this passage is *yireh* (יראה) and incorporates the ideas of fear, terror, awesome or terrifying thing (object causing fear), respect, reverence, and piety.

In today’s world, we often seem to approach God in a rather informal, “let’s be pals” sort of way. Yes, He wants to have a close relationship with us, but in no way is it a relationship between equals. We should always remember that He is awesome, the Almighty Creator who is to be revered. We should understand that our actions reflect whether or not we fear God. Isaiah 66:2 says that God looks favorably on the one who “...*trembles at My Word.*”

“*Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble*” (Psalm 41:1). At Bridges for Peace, we minister to the poor every day, and we claim this blessing from the Lord. How many who would consider themselves good Christians turn their face away from the beggar on the streets, not helping, and perhaps even thinking they brought their misfortune on themselves?

“*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night*” (Psalm 1:1-2). God blesses those who love His Word and choose to spend time reading, meditating, and applying Scripture.

“*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!...It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord*





commanded the blessing—life forevermore” (Psalm 133:1, 3). The blessing of God is present when we dwell in unity with one another. Conversely, when we are in strife, we cannot expect the blessing of God in our lives. God’s blessings are available to us today. It is all about our choices. If we choose to fear Him, obey His commands, spend time with Him in prayer and in the Word, love Him and one another, He promises blessings.

Blessing Israel

God told Abraham, the first Hebrew, that He would bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him (Genesis 12:3a). We see that this promise is still in effect today. Nations and individuals who bless Israel enjoy blessings (spiritual and material). When Tom and I first raised support for our ministry, a family began to support us. This family had several children and not a lot of money, but they chose to support us on a monthly basis because they believed this promise. After a year, they wrote and told us that previously they had barely managed on their limited budget, but since giving to Israel, they were amazed at how God had blessed them financially. We have heard this kind of testimony repeatedly, as God indeed blesses those who bless the children of Abraham. Psalm 122:6 says, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: ‘May they prosper who love you.’” Remember the story of Balaam? He was the prophet who tried to curse Israel, but God only allowed him to bless Israel. In fact, Balaam declared God’s promise to Abraham: “Blessed is he who blesses you, and cursed is he who curses you” (Numbers 24:9b). Choose to bless Israel, and you will also experience this blessing.



Blessing the Lord

The Bible is full of injunctions to “bless the Lord.” As those who love Him, our lives should be characterized by our praise, adoration, and exaltation of the Lord, the Almighty God. I am greatly blessed by a recent trend in worship music. Many of today’s modern Christian musicians are writing and singing songs directed toward God in praise and blessing. Such songs are a prayer to God, and the Psalms are full of them. “I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable...All Your works shall praise You, O LORD, and Your saints shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, and talk of Your power” (Psalm 145:1-3, 10-11).

power
honor
glory
extol
great
praise





Applying These Truths

Each of us makes choices every day. We choose to bless or curse our loved ones by our choice of words. We can make a deliberate decision to be a blessing in their lives, or we can carelessly and foolishly belittle, criticize, and withhold blessing. We choose to live a life that reverently fears God, or we choose to give Him lip service. We choose to obey or disobey. We choose to worship perfunctorily or from the heart. We choose to bless Israel or curse Israel. In Deuteronomy 27 and 28, we read of the children of Israel choosing between blessing and cursing. They were clearly told the benefits of blessing and the consequences of cursing. Even today, we have that choice in front of us. Choose blessing and an abundant life, today. It is never too late to choose God's way. Even if you have made bad choices in the past and are suffering the consequences, you can begin to turn that around today. God is the God of second chances. Choose His ways today, and begin to walk in His blessing.

By Rebecca J. Brimmer
International President and CEO



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All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

Many pastors, Bible teachers, and lay people have written and asked if they can use these notes for preaching and teaching. The answer is a resounding "yes"! It is our hope that the information contained herein will be disseminated over and over again, whether through the spoken word or by photocopying and redistributing these teachings. "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3).

