

Bless You!

*Restoring the
Biblically Hebraic
Blessing*

-COVER DESIGN BY PETER SHERBURNE

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Restoring the Biblically Hebraic Blessing

John D. Garr, Ph.D., Th.D.

GOLDEN KEY BOOKS
Restoration Foundation
P. O. Box 421218
Atlanta, Georgia 30342, U.S.A.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	9
Chapter 1: Covenant and Blessing	13
Chapter 2: Original Blessing	29
Chapter 3: God's Personal Blessing	45
Chapter 4: Applying the Divine Name	53
Chapter 5: The Blessing Continuum	65
Chapter 6: Blessing God	73
Chapter 7: Blessing Others	81
Chapter 8: The Posture of Blessing	85
Chapter 9: A Shield of Blessing	91
Chapter 10: Blessing Bandits	99
Chapter 11: Hands of Blessing	105
Chapter 12: Releasing God to Bless	113
Chapter 13: Contending for Blessing	121
Chapter 14: Family Blessings	131
Chapter 15: Ultimate Blessing	151
Index	157

Introduction

“Bless you!” is an oft-repeated phrase in today’s world. When someone sneezes in public, others use this exclamation to wish him well. When Christians in various communions greet one another, they often repeat the phrase as a gesture of good will and good wishes. Very few, however, actually think that a blessing is conveyed, for such language and actions are merely social convention and expressions of concern and support.

In the ancient world, however, people routinely blessed one another. They shared mutual blessings over homes, children, land, labors, travels, and resources of every sort. Blessings were almost commonplace; however, they were certainly not meaningless. The ancients actually believed that something occurred when they blessed.

Much has been said about divine blessings (or the lack thereof) upon humanity. Universalists insist that all humanity—perhaps even all creation—is or will be eternally blessed by God. Some argue that blessings apply to certain people groups while other segments of the population live under eternal curses. Much of the Christian church asserts that God’s blessing is essentially reserved for Christian believers. Whole segments of Christianity have been founded upon the idea that God is obligated to bless those who call upon him in faith. Some even suggest that God is at the beck and call of man with virtual on-demand blessings instantly available to those who understand and recite certain formulae.

What, then, is the biblical truth about the concept of blessing, and how should it be manifest among those who believe in God in today's world? Since divine blessing is such a vital concept, essential to mental, physical, and spiritual health, it is important that we "get it right." We must return to the source so that we can drink from the fountain of the water of life. Downstream sources are inevitably polluted and perhaps even poisoned. This is but another example of the truth that understanding the Hebrew foundations of Christian faith is a golden key that unlocks the treasures of Holy Scripture. Tapping into the Jewish roots of our faith is always an enriching, invigorating experience.

In order to have a clear and comprehensive understanding of divine blessing, then, we must return to the matrix from which the concept of blessing emerged. We must recover the Hebraic foundations of the blessing itself, of the one who blesses, and of the one who is blessed.

We can never have an accurate understanding of our Christian faith until we first know the Scriptures, history, and culture of the Jewish people in which Christianity is rooted. Unless we return to the Hebrew foundations of Christian concepts and applications, we will always be vulnerable to misconception, superstition, and exploitation.

It is for this reason that we have undertaken this volume in which we will discuss the biblical and historical background of the concept of blessing, the dynamics of the blessing process, applications of blessing, times for blessing, and reciprocity in blessing. We will also study the biblical emphasis on family blessings and their impact upon individuals and society. We will carefully examine the Jewish roots of the blessing experience so that we can more clearly understand both the concept and its applications. I am convinced that you will be amazed when you come to know the biblical background of the blessing and how it can impact your life and that of your family and community in powerful and enduring ways.

I would like to express my appreciation for the blessing of shared insight that has come to me from friends and colleagues in ministry and in academia. Foremost among these is my faithful friend, Dr. Karl D. Coke, president of Redirection Ministries, who has both blessed me personally and has shared invaluable insights into the dynamics of blessing. Others include Dr. Lynn Reddick, president of Open Church Ministries, who has made the study of blessing a passion that has enriched the lives of many around the world. I am also grateful to Dwight A. Pryor, president of the Center for Judaic-Christian Studies, and Dr. Marvin R. Wilson, Professor of Biblical Studies at Gordon College, for their incisive and inspiring teaching on aspects of this subject. I also give thanks to God for the superb help of Dr. Charles Bryant-Abraham and his wonderful wife Lu Ellen for their invaluable contributions of insight and wisdom and for their critique of the manuscript. I am likewise deeply indebted to Judy Grehan for her careful examination of the manuscript and for her thoughtful suggestions for its improvement both in content and style.

One thing we know for certain is that in a world filled with curses there is a profound need for blessing. There is a deep-seated hunger in the heart of all humanity for words of benediction to be spoken into lives pained by brokenness and loneliness. Evidence of this is that some 1,236 books on blessing are currently listed in Amazon.com. Many of these promote pagan ritual blessings from polytheism, pantheism, and other monist religions that only lead people further from the divine truth about blessing. I believe this volume will make a significant contribution to understanding the biblically Hebraic blessing that will bring true enrichment to lives of believers around the world.

I pray that as you read this book, you will be transported into a new dimension of blessing and being blessed. I trust also that this volume will generate in you a hunger for greater understanding of the heritage of our Christian faith that is deeply rooted in soil of biblical and Second Temple Judaism, the faith

in which Jesus and the apostles lived their lives and expressed their devotion to God.

Understanding your faith in its original Hebraic context can be one of the greatest blessings in your life since the time that you came to faith in the living God and in his eternal provision for redemption, his Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

“The blessing of the Lord be upon you: we bless you in the name of the Lord.”

Fraternally in Messiah,
Dr. John D. Garr
Shavuot, 2003

Chapter 1

Covenant and Blessing

God's overwhelming determination to bless his people is captured in a profoundly succinct declaration from the pen of Paul in the introduction to his Ephesian letter. In language and formula typical to his fellow Jews of all ages, the rabbi from Tarsus, who had become the apostle to the Gentiles, exclaimed, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."¹

Two distinct Jewish traditions of the time were manifest in this statement. First, the apostle employed the ancient formula of *berakhot* (blessings), beginning his declaration by first blessing God. Jewish blessings to this day begin with the same exclamation that predates the Christian era: "*Barukh attah Adonai, Elohenu, Melekh haOlam . . .*" ("Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe . . .").² Paul no doubt understood that no blessing, prayer, or petition should be offered without first ascribing a blessing of praise to God himself, the giver of every good gift and blessing.

The second device that Paul used from his rabbinic heritage was the repetition of words, which in the Hebrew language is the means of adding emphasis. Comparatives and superlatives are created in this manner by repeating words and