

The Priests' Blessing – or, Birkat Kohanim

In ancient times, although it was God's plan for a whole nation to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex.19:6), many people rebelled. Yet it was the tribe of Levi who had the inner resolve to execute God's dreadful command against those who sinned (Ex.32:25-29 and Num.25:10-13).

The Levites, as descendants of Aaron, became the priests on behalf of the nation of Israel, and were set apart as such, were duly consecrated and commanded to use the words we have in Numbers 6:24-26. God's own promise (v.27), underlines a double-effect of this blessing prayer.

The Levitical Priesthood continued until the life of John (the Baptist) ben Zechariah, son of a priest, who, through baptising Jesus, fulfilled all righteousness with his cousin (Matt.3:15). So, the Levitical order was embodied in our timeless "Priest for ever in the order of Melchizedek" (Heb.7:17).

As followers of Jesus, we are declared to be "...a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (1 Pet.2:9), because it is our privilege, in and through Jesus, to share in the priesthood of all believers. This means that each Christian may express the Levitical priestly blessing through the timeless framework of the Melchizedekic priesthood of Jesus!

Previously, to give thanks for the holiness conferred through Aaron, the Levitical priests would say:

Baruch attah Adonai Elohenu, melech ha'olam
Asher kidshanu bikdushato shel [A'aron] / [Y'oshua]
V'tzivanu l'varech et am Yisrael b'ahavah.

The priests would then be called to raise their hands to express the Hebrew letter "*shin*" for "heart/breast" to represent "Shaddai" (the all-sufficient One), before offering this blessing:

Yevarekh'kha Adonai veyishmerekha
Ya'er Adonai panav eleykha vichuneka
Yisa Adonai panav eleykha veyasem lekha shalom.