

A Word Study by Pastor Melissa Scott, Ph.D.

“Bless” and “Blessed” Part 1

English definition¹ of “**bleſs**” verb transitive – past and past participle “bleſſed”/of a priest, etc. who pronounces words, eſpecially in a religious rite, aſking for favor; to aſk God to look upon favorably/to conſecrate (eſpecially bread and wine), ſanctify by the ſign of the croſs. To call God holy to adore. To attribute one’s good fortune to (an auſpicious time), one’s fate, etc. To thank – “bleſs the day I met...” / to make happy or ſucceſſful, alſo a euphemism, curſe or damn. An exclamation of ſurpriſe, pleaſure or indignation, gratitude, etc. Exclamation to a perſon who juſt ſneezed.

“**bleſſed**”² – conſecrated, revered, fortunate. (Roman Catholic Church – title given to a dead perſon as an acknowledgement of his or her holy life) beatified. Bringing happiness, bliſſful.

Etymology³ – “**bleſs**” (the origin, formation, and development of “bleſs”) bleſs-bleſ make holy, hallow; hold or call holy; pronounce or make happy. A purely English formation from OE (Old English) blētsian, blēdsian, blōedsian: –* blōoisōjan, from “blooan,” *blood*, the etymological meaning being “mark ſo as to hallow with blood”; the ſenſe of development was influenced by its being uſed to translate Latin *benedicere* and Greek *eulogein* in Chriſtian uſe (originally – ſpeak well of or to, but uſed to render Hebrew *barak* bend the knee, worſhip, bleſs God, etc.) and by its aſſociation with “bliſs.”

(“bliſs” is etymologically unrelated to “bleſs.”) The development of the current uſe “bleſs” (bleſſe) OE to Middle English from the 13th century. The word’s connotations of “happineſſ” and “wellbeing” were influenced by “bliſs.” (Alſo “happineſſ” from “happy” from “hap” – chance or luck.)⁴

¹ The Oxford American Dictionary and Language Guide. NY: Oxford University Press, 1999.

² The Oxford American Dictionary and Language Guide. NY: Oxford University Press, 1999.

³ The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology. NY: Oxford University Press, 1966.

⁴ Ayto, John. Dictionary of Word Origins. NY: Arcade Publishing, 1990.

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“Bless” and “Blessed” in the New Testament (KJV) and the Greek words εὐλογ- and μακάριος: Two different Greek words were used to translate the English words “bless” and “blessed.” See the following examples:

Matthew 5:8 “*Blessed* are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”

Here the Greek word is μακάριος, which sounds like *makarios*.

1 Peter 1:3 “*Blessed* be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus....”

Here the Greek word is εὐλογητός, which sounds like *eulogeetos*.

εὐ (Strong’s #G2095) (good, well) + λογ / λεγ (Strong’s #G3056 and #G3004) (to say, speak, reckon, tell...) This is how the εὐλογ- words are used in the New Testament:

εὐλογέω	40 times as a verb*	Strong’s ⁵ #G2127
εὐλογητός	8 times as an adjective	Strong’s #G2128
εὐλογία	16 times as a noun	Strong’s #G2129

The use of the verb εὐλογέω falls under a few categories:

- 1) “Bless those that curse you” – The response of a believer to evil.
See: Mt 5:44, Lk 6:28, Rom 12:14, 1 Cor 4:12, 1 Peter 3:9 etc.
- 2) Jesus blessing food/bread etc. before feeding the multitudes.
See: Mt 14:19, 26:26; Mk 6:41, 8:7, 14:22; Lk 9:16, 24:30
- 3) The cup of blessing which we **ble**ss (communion), the children; of Christ, in the womb of Mary, dedicated as a child in the temple, etc. See: 1 Cor 10:16 (communion)

The use of the adjective εὐλογητός – all 8 times, it is used *only of God* and not of man.

See: Mk 14:61; Lk 1:68; Rom 1:25, 9:5; 2 Cor 1:3, 11:31; Eph 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3

The use of the noun εὐλογία – for “bounty” in 2 Cor 9:5, describing giving and sowing; also “the cup of blessing.” See: 1 Cor 10:16 (communion)

*The high number of verbal uses will be important when compared to *makarios* and its verbal occurrences and uses.

⁵ Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance. TN: T. Nelson, 1990.

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Makarios in the New Testament:

μακαρίζω	2 times as a verb	Strong’s #G3106
μακάριος	50 times as an adjective	Strong’s #G3107
μακαρισμός	3 times as a noun	Strong’s #G3108

makarios – from *mak/makro*, meaning: large or lengthy + *arios*, meaning: that which is pleasing – perhaps related to ἀρέσκω – to be agreeable (akin also to “lift up”).⁶

Μακαρίζω as a **verb** used by Mary, the mother of Jesus (Lk 1:48), that she will be called “blessed,” and by James 5:11, “Behold, we count them happy which endure.”

The **adjectival** use of μακάριος is exemplified in Matthew 5:3–11 (also Mt 11:6, 13:16, 16:17, 24:46, etc.)

The **noun** is being represented by “blessedness.” (All 3 times)

Summary of εὐλογ– and μακάριος:

Usage clearly suggests the εὐλογ– words being used are for verbal action (40 times) more than as a noun or adjective, and μακάριος being used (50 times) primarily for its adjectival force. The adjectival use of *makarios* is describing the state or condition of a man, mankind, women, etc., but the adjective εὐλογητός is only being used to God (doxological), used by man of God.

The Latin Vulgate used *benedictus* to translate the Greek word εὐλογ–, staying in harmony with “good words or speech.” *Bene* meaning good + *dictus* from *dicere* meaning to speak or say. As for *makarios*, the Latin word being used is *beati* (some of our English words from the *beati* stream: beautiful, beauty, beau, bonus, bounty) from *beātus*, meaning “bless or happy,” the past participle of the Latin verb *beare*, relative of *bellus* and *embellish*, *beare* + *fiacre* meaning “to make happy.” Etymologist John Ayto says “happy” comes from “hap,” meaning chance or luck.⁴

⁶ Vine’s Concise Dictionary of the Bible.

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To better understand εὐλογ– and μακάριος, we will look at the LXX (Septuagint) Greek version of the Old Testament including Apocrypha (c. 200–300 BC) and move into the Hebrew and Semitic meanings (semantics or semasiology, the study of word meanings).

LXX – εὐλογ– & μακάριος = Hebrew *brk* בָּרַךְ & *'asr* אָשַׁר

The pattern used in translation is overwhelmingly clear: εὐλογ– finds its counterpart *brk* בָּרַךְ and μακάριος with *'asr* אָשַׁר.

Examples include:

Psalm 103:1 (LXX)

Εὐλόγει ἡ ψυχὴ μου τὸν κύριον.... (“Bless the LORD, O my soul....”)

Hebrew – *brk* בָּרַךְ **verb piel-imp-2p-fem-sing** (KJV uses “bless” and NIV uses “praise”)

Psalm 84:4 (LXX)

μακάριοι οἱ κατοικοῦντες.... (“Blessed are they that dwell....”)

Hebrew – *'asr* אָשַׁר **noun masc-pl & construct meaning אֲשֶׁר־ is attached to *those who dwell...***

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Brk extends into various Semitic languages and will have some diverse meanings.

The Classical Arabic verb بَرَكَ *barak*^a (and noun بروك) primarily and almost exclusively connotes “the lying or kneeling down of the camel” [procubuit camelus], the description of this action. “The great brutes fall stiffly with a sob upon both their knees and under doubling their crooked hind legs they sit ponderously down upon their haunches. Then shuffling forward one or the other fore knee, with a grating of the harsh gravel under their vast carcass weight, settle themselves.” Such is the action of *barak*^a. This understanding is not completely removed from the Hebrew Old Testament. In Genesis 24:11, it says:

“And he made his camels *to kneel down* without the city by a well of water....”

וַיִּכְרַךְ
krb

← Hebrew reads from right to left:

וַיִּכְרַךְ הַגְּמֵלִים מְחוּץ
And he made the camels ...outside
he kneel the camels ...outside

In the evolution of the Arabic word *brk*, it also carried the idea of “to be firm, steadfast, to remain.”

In the Ethiopic, *brk* ቦረክ carries from the Amharic, the verb used of a tree or plant weighted down by its fruit. In Ge’ez, ቦረክ means “knee” and does not always carry the idea of kneeling or genuflecting, although ቦረክ in Amharic may mean to submit oneself. This meaning of submitting or kneeling is also found in the Hebrew Old Testament in Isaiah 45:23, “I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.” *brk* ቦረክ Hebrew כָּרַךְ *b^crek brk* (see New Testament equivalent Philippians 2:10–11).

As for the Hebrew, we find several scholars who say that *brk* means the following:

Dillmann⁷, Gesenius⁸, Nestle⁹ – *brk* means to genuflect, to kneel before God. But these scholars were not unanimous as to the signification and origin. My observation is the lack of distinguishing the Creator blessing His creature (His method, means) vs. the creature (mankind) worshiping God (his method, means).¹⁰

⁷ Dillmann, “Grammatik der Äthiopischen Sprache” (2e ed.) (Leipzig 1899)

⁸ “Gesenius’s Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures” (London 1860)

⁹ Nestle, “Marginalien und Materialien” (Tübingen 1893)

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Bate¹¹ fancied both God and the human mind as bending down in the act of blessing. I would say God condescends from the heavens, from the Supreme and Superior to bless (*brk*) mankind. The Hebrew word image is of a person’s complete body and being “bending down,” not just the mind¹². Burger¹³ –in a benediction, the recipients bended their knees as a sign of humility and gratitude towards the giver of the blessing. Jastrow¹⁴ –the evolution of *brk* was “to carve out, to hollow, to choose.” Many scholars also say that *brk* had two distinct meanings –to kneel and to spread out or expand, with the traditional association of kneel and bless. The Hebrew word *b^erēkâ* means a pool of water, a place where animals (camels, etc.) and people might kneel to drink.

Brk occurs 398 times in the Old Testament:

71 times in the Qal (Qal is the simple active stem of the verb) “Blessed” (be)

233 times in the Pi’el (Pi’el is the intensification of Qal)

71 times as a substantive

3 times in the Niphal

13 times in the Pu’al

7 times in the Hithpael

Noteworthy – *Brk* appears in Genesis 88 times vs. *’asr* only 3 times.

¹¹ Thesaurus Syriac (Oxford 1879–1891)

¹² © Pastor Melissa Scott, 2010

¹³ Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche (2nd ed.)

¹⁴ Jastrow, M. A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature. NY: Judaica Press, 1996.

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How God “blessed” in the Old Testament:

In Genesis 1:22, “God blessed them” refers to what He has just created in Genesis 1:21: “And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good.” In Genesis 1:22, God told them to be fruitful and multiply: “And God blessed them, saying....”

...לאמר	אלהים	אתם	ויברך
...say to	God	them	blessed he and

God *said*. He *spoke* His *words* to His creation. Genesis 1:28 will be the same pattern, except it is upon mankind. The addition for Adam is not only to *be fruitful* and *multiply* but to *replenish* the earth. We can immediately see God’s blessing is not “luck” or a mere expression for hopes of good fortune; and interestingly, the commands of blessing are in the imperative: *Be fruitful! Multiply! Replenish!* Etc. This is God declaring upon His creation the power of His word to be realized. Genesis 5:2: “Male and female created he them; and *blessed (brk)* them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.” This becomes important after the Noahic covenant and blessing. (The Noahic blessing to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” in Genesis 9:1–2 is essentially the Adamic blessing.) But when we get to Abram, the addition to the blessing includes a great name. In Genesis 5:2, the blessing God gave pertained to their name; at this time, they were the revered creation and the highest named (other than God). (The culmination of this concept is in Philippians 2:9, applied to Christ: “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name.”)

The patriarchal blessing given to Abram in Genesis 12:2–3:

- 1) I will make of thee a great nation
- 2) And I will bless thee
- 3) And make thy name great
- 4) And thou shalt be a blessing
- 5) And I will bless them that bless thee
- 6) And curse him that curseth thee
- 7) And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Blessings of the patriarchs (Genesis 12:2–3, 22:17–18, 26:4, 28:14, etc.)

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The blessings of God were specific in the sense of Genesis 17:18. “Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!” Essentially, Abraham is requesting that Ishmael *be* the promised blessing. God specifically says in Genesis 17:16, “And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her.” God repeats Himself in Genesis 17:19, “Sarah thy wife [specifically] shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him....” God names Isaac, *giving him a name....*

The blessing as divine power of fertility is a large part of the book of Genesis. Westermann¹⁵ concludes “the blessing that confers the power of fertility is inseparable from creation where the Creator is the one who blesses and the created living being has the power to reproduce itself because of the blessing.” God blessed, first by speaking directly to those He chose to bless, and then indirectly through the line of primogeniture, whereby the patriarch passed on the blessing through the laying on of hands or pronouncement.

God condescended to “bless” His creation, but here we must distinguish “blessing(s)” coming from God to man vs. man offering up blessings to God. For example, Deuteronomy 28 – for obedience to God’s word, “these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee”: If you will listen/hear and be obedient, you will be blessed in the city and in the field, the fruit of your body, of your ground, the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and flocks of your sheep. Also “Blessed thy basket and kneading trough....” You will be blessed coming and going, your enemies destroyed – they will come against you one way and flee from you seven ways; blessing on your barns, and all you set your hand to. He will bless you in your land. He will establish you a holy people, called by the name of the Lord, and all will be afraid of you. You will be plenteous in goods, there will be rain for your land, and He will bless the work of your hands so that you will lend and not borrow. You will be the head and not the tail; above and not beneath. (Also see Deuteronomy 28:15–68 regarding curses for disobedience.)

¹⁵ Westermann, C. What Does the Old Testament Say About God? GA: John Knox Press, 1979.

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Man “blessing” God:

2 Chronicles 6:12–14, specifically at verse 13: “and upon it he stood (Solomon), and *kneeled down*” בָּרַךְ (brk) “upon his knees before all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven....”

Psalms 95:6 carries the same idea: “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us *kneel*...” (berekah)

Psalms 134:1–3: “Behold, *bless* (brk) ye the LORD, all ye servants of the LORD....Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and *bless* (brk) the LORD. The LORD that made heaven and earth *bless* (brk) thee out of Zion.”

And again, Psalm 104:1: “Bless the LORD, O my soul....” (brk)

The emphasis is on speaking good words Godward. Other examples include men blessing men (priesthood), and *brk* as a salutation in Ruth 2:4.

In *brk*, we find a rich sense of gratitude in speaking good words Godward. The idea of worshiping God on bended knee – where the creature stops its movement – bringing himself to the ground – perhaps as dust to dust or in reverence and humility with arms extended (reaching out to God in adoration).

I will briefly show why *brk* and *'asr* are **not** synonymous. God can be *brk* and can bestow *brk*, but God is never *'asr*. KJV translators used “blessed” or “happy” for *'asr*. Hence, the reason for including a brief etymology on the word “happy” (page 1). If *'asr* denotes “luck or chance” by virtue of the origins of “happy,” this cannot be something that would require God. Therefore, we must avoid translating *'asr* as mere “happy” or “happiness,” which also lends to an emotive description which can change as our emotions do. *'Asr* usually is attached to a construct, and many times, that construct contains words like “trust,” “faith,” “refuge,” “shelter,” “confidence,” etc. That means *'asr* is dependent upon the verbal action of trusting, obeying, etc., God, i.e.: “Blessed is the man who trusteth in thee.” (Psalm 84:12). See Psalm 2:12, 34:8, 40:4, 65:4, 84:4, 84:5, 84:12, 89:15, 112:1, 128:1, 144:15, 146:5, Proverbs 8:32, 8:34, 16:20, Isaiah 30:18, etc.

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'Asr in the New Testament = *makarios* will be primarily adjectival 50 times (5 other uses). Someone who has trusted or “faithed” in the Lord becomes *'asr* “blessed” and therefore is able to speak *brk*.

εὐλογ – good words – going beyond the circumstance that is seen – one could not speak good words Godward without being *'asr* – the very act of proclamation on a regular basis places a person in a state or condition of *'asr*.