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Author(s): Martens, Elmer A.

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Intertext Messaging: Echoes of the Aaronic Blessing (Numbers 6:24–26)

Elmer A. Martens

This essay is presented to Professor John E. Toews in deep appreciation for our years of collegiality in Seminary administration, and especially for his contribution to me as mentor in the writing of my first book, God's Design.

Intertextuality is a technical description of a relatively common rhetorical device. An example of intertextuality is a pastor encouraging some form of sacrifice by saying, "Ask not what your church can do for you, but ask what you can do for your church." Older listeners, at least, will at once recall the stirring message of President John F. Kennedy, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country." Thus the Christian minister, by echoing a words from another venue, invokes a broader historical context, while also evoking the passions associated with a popular American president's memorable challenge. In

As an apostle, Paul assumes an authoritative priestly role by having his salutation echo the ancient benediction

Scripture, formulations such as the priestly blessing (Num. 6:24–26) are likewise echoed by other writers. While such reuse can be in the nature of a direct quotation, often the reuse is by way of allusion, or more subtly by recasting of the older text.

Intertextuality is the process of invoking a text, either through direct

Elmer A. Martens is President Emeritus and Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno, California. A former editor of Direction, he is the author of God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology, several commentaries on Jeremiah, and assisted in the New Living Translation version of the Bible. One of his passions is teaching Bible in non-Western countries.

quotation or through allusion, as a way of adding color and depth to the topic under discussion. The theoretical notion underlying such study of texts is that in literary works creativity is not so much saying something totally novel as it is juxtaposing ideas or giving new contexts to older concepts. A much-quoted statement from Julia Kristeva, a popularizer of the ideas of Michael Bakhtin, the Russian novelist/philosopher, sums up the idea: "Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another."¹ In biblical studies, terms such as intertextuality but also inner-biblical exegesis are being employed to describe investigations of the inter-relationships of canonical texts.² One of many examples in Scripture, cited by John Hays, is Paul's statement, "I know that this will turn out for my salvation through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:19), which echoes Job 13:16, "Even this will turn out for my deliverance, for deceit shall not enter in before him."³ Another example, examined here, is the reuse of the ancient priestly blessing.

THE PRIESTLY BENEDICTION (NUMBERS 6:22–27)

The archaeological discovery of amulets in a tomb in the Hinnom valley in Jerusalem continues to cause quite a buzz. The inscriptions on the silver strips (4" x 1" and 1.5" x 0.5") include an abbreviated form of the priestly blessing with the wording: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and give you peace." This find is of high interest because, dated to the end of the seventh century BC, it is the earliest witness to a biblical text, some four centuries earlier than the Qumran texts.⁴ If the Aaronic Blessing is of interest for Hebrew linguistic and archaeological reasons, it is most certainly of interest to scholars and pastors for theological and hermeneutical reasons. How might one trace the messaging options by which subsequent writers have reused the priestly blessing?

The priestly blessing in Numbers 6:24–26 is set within a short unit containing an instruction to Moses about mediating a blessing (Num. 6:22–23) and a concluding explanation (Num. 6:27). To catch echoes of this ancient formulation in subsequent texts, one must know the seminal text well. A few observations about the Aaronic benediction will set the stage for identifying the re-use of this ritual saying, whose genre is that of petition.

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
(Num. 6:24–26).

The three-line prayer proper is followed by a concluding explanation:

by intoning these words, God's name will be placed over the people.⁵

Yahweh is the subject in each of the three sentences in the petition, perhaps for emphasis since grammatically the subject need not be repeated. The meaning of the name "Yahweh" can be summed up as "present to act in salvation."⁶ In the first clause of each sentence Yahweh is named, but he is the implicit subject also of the second clause. To put the name of Yahweh over the people is reminiscent of God placing a pillar of fire and cloud over his people. That is, Yahweh is invoked as having a large stake in those over whom he hovers. The "you" in the petition is second person singular, which some take to be a collective, but may better be construed as referring to the individual, who, however, is part of a larger community. With each line longer than the previous one, the effect is incremental. "Thus, the impression is given of a stream of blessing that begins as a trickle but flows ever more strongly."⁷

The benediction is to be spoken by "Aaron and his sons" (Num. 6:22), a point reiterated in Deuteronomy 10:8 where the levitical priests, clearly a distinctive group, are said to "stand before the Lord to minister to him, and to bless in his name." One of the tasks of those in priestly office is to "pronounce blessings in the name of the Lord" (Deut. 21:5). Not only is the act of pronouncing blessings part of a religious ritual, it is an act specific, if not exclusive, to an authorized group.

Are there six petitions or three? Given Yahweh as the subject for each line, and the rhythm such that each line is longer than the next, it is preferable to think of three petitions, each with a call on God to act, followed by a specific outcome of such action. One might think of the last part of each line as expegetical, namely fleshing out or expanding the initial request. In this way the first half of a line is expositied, either by adding a new request (as in Lord bless you *and keep you*), or as a consequent action, as in "*and be gracious to you*" or "*and give you peace*." Patrick Miller succinctly articulates the structure: "the first clause of each line invoke[s] God's movement toward the people, the second clause, his activity in their behalf."⁸ Michael Brown, however, sees it differently. The five additional verbs, he thinks, simply expand on and articulate what is entailed in "bless."⁹ Michael Fishbane, who favors the *waw* ("and") as copulative and so regards the second part of each request as a consequence or result, concludes, "So regarded the PB [priestly blessing] would articulate three blessings, not six."¹⁰ Similarly Chaim Cohen opines, "[T]he six verbal forms of the PB must be understood ... as three composite actions, each reflecting a benevolent Divine attitude towards the worshipper together with its concomitant practical consequence."¹¹ Given the parallelism, it is better to think of three petitions, rather than six or even a single request amplified.

As to the first petition for "blessing" (*bārak*), the book of Genesis,

heavy with the theme of blessing, fleshes out the meaning of the word. God blesses Adam and Eve with the words: “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28). Hence “to bless” is to empower, to make productive, even to cause to prosper. God makes Abraham’s life productive by giving the barren couple a son, Isaac. Jacob and Esau are given their father’s blessing, which is attested in the course of a life-time with progeny and the acquisition of goods. In short, blessing is not, as often perceived, a feeling or sentiment, but one of benefits, intangible but also tangible.¹²

The second verb “keep” (*šamar*) is about guarding and protecting. Like “bless,” the term occurs in the creation account where Adam is commissioned to “keep” (*qal* infinitive) the garden, which suggests tending and caring for the garden as well as protecting it (Gen. 2:15). One context in secular usage of the word is that of a watchman on a city wall alert to the danger of armies or fires (Isa. 21:11–12). For the notion of Yahweh as active in “keeping,” (*qal* participle) one may cite Yahweh as the one “keeping covenant” (1 Kings 8:23). That is, he tends to it. “The underlying root meaning is ‘to pay careful attention to.’”¹³ In general, one may think of “keep” in the sense of “tending” as in keeping the garden (Gen. 2:15), or as protective watching.

The third verb, “make his face to shine” (*ʿwr*), is in parallel with “lift up his countenance” of the next line, but the two lines do not have identical meanings. The verb *ʿwr* in the *hiphil* means “to give light” as, for example, the pillar of fire by night giving light to the Israelites exiting from Egypt (Exod. 13:21). “Make bright” is said of eyes, as when famished Jonathan came on honey and was refreshed, “his eyes brightened” (1 Sam. 14:27), or as when Ezra acknowledged God’s favorable action, “in order that he may brighten our eyes” (Ezra 9:8). Chaim Cohen, citing Psalm 31:16 and 80:3, 7, 19, explains that the body idiom to “make his face shine upon” has the sense of rejoicing and denotes “God’s joyous and benevolent attitude toward his worshippers.”¹⁴ One is to think of a smiling radiant face that expresses contentment and joy and points to favorable acceptance. Cohen, leaning on ANE parallels, distinguishes between the two parallel petitions. The second, “May the Lord lift up his countenance” is also a body idiom but denotes “to show special regard for, to pay special attention to.”¹⁵ The phrase, Cohen claims, occurs elsewhere only in Deuteronomy 28:50 and Psalm 4:7. The Deuteronomy passage is illuminating in offering a contrast, translated by Cohen as: “A brazen-faced nation that will show no special regard for the old, nor show any favor for the young.”¹⁶ In short, “making his face to shine” is about an emotion of joy; “lifting up the countenance” is about an attitude exuding readiness to help.

Two verbal forms remain. The verbal form “be gracious” (*hānan*), to have a disposition of kindness, is often in the imperative (e.g. Ps. 27:7;

cf. Isa. 33:2). In God's explanation to Moses, the two ideas of "grace" and "mercy" are linked, an observation that is significant for the NT usage, as will be shown later: "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy (*rahm*) on whom I will show mercy" (Exod. 33:19). About the final verbal phrase, "to grant peace" (*šālôm*), Willard Swartley's summary is apt: "*Shalom* is an iridescent word, with many levels of meaning in Hebrew Scripture. The base denominator of its many meanings is *well-being, wholeness, completeness*."¹⁷ In sum, the Aaronic benediction is a petition to God for beneficence to be shown to a people, a beneficence couched in six verbs: bless, keep, make a face to shine, be gracious, lift up countenance, and give peace.

OLD TESTAMENT ECHOES OF THE PRIESTLY BENEDICTION

With such common vocabulary words as "bless," "keep," "graciousness," and "peace" it is presumptuous to think that any use of these terms would at once recall the Aaronic blessing. Yet, in two instances at least there are strong echoes of the priestly benediction.

Psalm 67

One such echo occurs in Psalm 67 where the opening lines unmistakably recall the priestly blessing. "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us" (v. 1; Heb. v. 2). Not only at the opening of the Psalm but also in the concluding lines the word "bless" appears: "God our God, has blessed us. May God continue to bless us" (vv. 6b, 7a; Heb. 7b, 8a). One can agree with Michael Fishbane, "[T]he clustered technical terminology in Ps 67:2 leaves no reasonable doubt that its source is Num 6:24–26."¹⁸

Of note in this partial reuse of the priestly benediction is the substitution of the name Elohim for Yahweh. The more generic name for the deity, one could speculate, is due to the international flavor of the Psalm: nations (*gôyîm* v. 2; Heb. v. 3); peoples (*'ammîm* vv. 2,3,4; Heb. vv. 3,4,5; *'ummîm* v. 4; Heb. v. 5). The pronouns in the Psalm are first person plural: "us," whereas in the benediction the pronoun is second person singular, "you." More important is the exposition of "blessing" along the lines of intent, for the infinitive (*lâmed* with *yâda'*, "to be known") signals a purpose. That is, God's blessing is desired "for the sake of" or "with the intention that...." The intended blessing is desired, not in the interests of individuals or even of Israel, but in the interests of God's salvation becoming known to peoples everywhere: "that your ways be known in the earth and your salvation to all nations" (v. 2; Heb. v. 3). The fresh insight here is that the prayer for empowerment (blessing) is not a dead-end street, a favor implored for oneself, but is intended to function as a channel for God's revelation and salvation

to nations. Indeed, what is envisaged is a world of nations enriched with the knowledge and salvation of God as a result of God's favor (blessing, empowerment) on Israel. God's favor is desired for the sake of others. Here the truism holds: "blessed to be a blessing." That sentiment is reiterated at the end of the Psalm where the invocation for God to "bless us" stands next to the statement "let all the ends of the earth revere him."

So from the viewpoint of inner-biblical exegesis, this psalm articulates what is entailed in the term "blessing." On the one hand, God's "blessing" has to do with the earth yielding its increase (v. 6; Heb. v. 7) and so harks back beyond the Aaronic benediction to the Genesis account of creation with its promise of fruitfulness and productivity. The focus is physical; one might say immediate. More central to this Psalm, however, is the Abrahamic covenant in which God's promise of blessing to Abraham impacts the world: "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). The Psalm expands, even exploits a notion not explicitly present in the Aaronic benediction: the request for blessing is instrumental. One might conjecture that the missional dimension is especially meant to be highlighted since *Selah*, interpreted as calling for a pause, follows the quotation of priestly blessing and so prepares for the new theme about the world's nations knowing God's salvation (v. 2; Heb. v. 3). God's favor on a people is sought for the ultimate benefit of the peoples of the world. The ancient benediction, Israel-focused, has become globally-focused. Its dimensions are distant both in geography and in chronology. In short, the Psalm in its reuse of the priestly blessing tweaks it in three ways. "Blessing" is about physical productivity. Blessing also has a decidedly spiritual dimension, one having to do with knowing God's salvation. And thirdly, the benediction is given a missional thrust.

Psalm 121

If Psalm 67 is a meditation on the blessing element of the benediction, Psalm 121 is a meditation on that part of the benediction that reads, "The Lord ... keep you." Since the word "keep" is common, the claim that Psalm 121 is an echo of the priestly blessing needs substantiation. To begin with, the second person pronoun, a characteristic of the priestly blessing, is also an arresting feature of the Psalm: "the one keeping *you*" (v. 3); "sun shall not strike *you*" (v. 6) "Yahweh will keep *you*" (v.7); "he will keep *your* life" (v. 7); "Yahweh will keep *your* going and *your* coming" (v. 8). At the same time there is reference to the collective "the one keeping Israel" even as in Numbers the postscript to the benediction is that in this way the priests shall "put my name on the Israelites" (Num. 6:27; cf. 6:23). So the instructions to the priests are to bless the congregation even though the blessing itself uses the second person singular. While one might argue that

the second person pronoun is referring to the collective Israel, it is equally likely that individuals were in view.

The connection of this Psalm to the benediction is especially notable in its use of “keep” (*šmr*), for forms of the word are found six times in this psalm, as follows: “he who keeps (*šmr*) you will not slumber” (v. 3); “he who keeps (*šmr*) Israel” (v. 4); “The Lord is your keeper (*šmr*)” (v. 5); “the Lord will keep (*šmr*) you from all evil (v. 6); “he will keep (*šmr*) your life” (v. 6); and “The Lord will keep (*šmr*) your going out and your coming in” (v. 8). This last promise, along with the earlier reference to God being a shade, is reminiscent of the wilderness journey and the presence of the cloud to shade by day and the pillar of fire to give light at night. If the Psalm evokes the image of journey, it should be remembered that the priestly blessing on which the psalm draws was given in the context of a journey.

A more indirect connection of this psalm with the priestly blessing arises out of the literary context, the Songs of Ascent in which Psalm 121 is found (see its superscription). T.R. Ashley suggests that each of the Ascent Psalms (Pss. 120–134) shows some literary allusion to the priestly blessing. Among his examples are the following: *brk* (bless) in Psalm 128:5; 133:3; 134:3; *šmr* (keep) in Psalm 121; *hnn*, (be gracious) in 123:2–3; 130:2; *šālôm* (peace) in 122:6–8; 125:5; 128:5–6. Ashley concludes that there is “some justification for the contention that these psalms were composed under the influence of at least four of the major terms in Num. 6:24–26.”¹⁹ If this claim is granted, then all the more reason to conclude that Psalm 121 is a veiled reuse of the priestly benediction.

What significance has such a reuse? The poet of Psalm 121 subtly elaborates the meaning of *šmr* (keep) via two implied images, one of which is that of an escort. The journey image opens this psalm of ascent. As usually depicted, the psalms of ascent are psalms for the “going up” to Jerusalem at the time of festival. If one imagines pilgrims from the north and east who, after crossing the Jordan en route to the temple, lift their gaze to the mountainous ascent fraught with its dangers of thieves and wild beasts, the question is pressing: Where is the help needed for this arduous part of the journey? One danger is that one will stumble and fall. The Psalmist is assured that the Lord as his helper, keeper, escort will be there to prevent a fall. “He will not let your foot be moved” (v. 3). An escort would be alert to the pilgrim’s comfort and would see to it that the pilgrim would be shaded from the sun as necessary. “The sun shall not strike you by day” (v. 6). It is to that image of walking to which the poet returns in the final lines: “Yahweh will keep your going out and your coming in” (v. 8), not as one who gives occasional attention to such travels and journeys, but as one who bestows the benefit of a divine escort “both now and forevermore.” The

priestly blessing given first in a wilderness setting and so not unrelated to journeying, is here given an explicit journeying context.

Another image that derives from *šmr* (keep) is specifically about protection. Someone on guard duty on a city wall will likely be tempted to sleep. With the three-fold mention of sleep and slumber (v. 3) the poet evokes the image of someone who is a security guard. The Psalm depicts God as a watchman. The constant vigilance expected of a watchman is alluded to in the expression, “By day (or ‘day by day,’ *yōmām*)” and “in the night” (v. 6). In the phrase, “The Lord will keep (*šmr*) you from all evil, the Lord will “keep (*šmr*) your life” (v. 7), the two images of “guard” and “escort” merge. The escort is watchful for dangers on the journey. The guard is an all-around watchman who looks after the safety of the person in every circumstance.

As in Psalm 67 where “blessing” is given definition, so also here “keep” is moved from the generic and general to a specific. Yahweh is watchful over the journey in its entirety. The escort is solicitous of the traveler’s welfare, making certain of shade and sure-footing. The “keeping” activity entails guarding from evil (*ra’*) of any kind. Harm, in whatever form, will not be allowed to come near. The re-use of the benediction by the Psalmist is more than a repetition of the ancient blessing. The ancient ritual is “tweaked” to encompass the image of a journey, be that the physical ascent to Jerusalem, or symbolically, the journey of life. Psalm 67 and Psalm 121 are two poems which echo the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:24–26 and are examples of inner-biblical exegesis. It is not unreasonable to think that the priestly benediction surfaces also elsewhere. Certain phrasings, such as “May your blessing be on your people” (Ps. 3:8) or the refrain “Let your face shine, that we may be saved” (Ps. 80:3, 7, 19; Heb. vv. 4, 8, 20), are formulations whose wordings hark back to the benediction. According to Michael Fishbane, Psalm 4 leans on the benediction with its call for Yahweh to show favor, be gracious (v.1; Heb. v. 2) and especially “Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord”(v. 6; Heb. v. 7). Even more, there is a concluding reference to *šālôm* (peace; v. 8; Heb. v. 9).²⁰ Fishbane has also proposed that Malachi 1:6–2:9 with its invective against the priests is an example of utilizing the language of the priestly blessing in an ironic transformative way.²¹ Sensitive to text messaging, one might also discern other instances of the reuse of the priestly benediction.²² Like the *aurora borealis*, the northern lights in Canada, the priestly benediction appears (reappears?) in colorful variations to illumine the theological landscape.

NEW TESTAMENT ECHOES OF THE PRIESTLY BENEDICTION

In principle, one might expect that since the priestly word to the congregation is in the form of a benediction, the letters in the New Testament might resonate with the OT benediction. This is not true of the non-Pauline letters, which do not end with a generalized benediction.²³ Jude might be an exception for his conclusion does have a formulaic ring: "Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen" (Jude 24–25).

It is in Paul's letters that an echo of the benediction may be discernible, not at their conclusion but at their beginning. Paul's letters routinely begin with "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:2) or slight variations/expansions of the same: "Grace to you and peace" (1 Thess. 1:1); or "Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior" (Titus 1:4). Might these formulations echo the final sentence pair of the priestly blessing, "And be gracious to you.... and give you peace"?

In favor of such a link are the two words "grace" and "peace," which appear in both the priestly benediction and in Paul's letters. Also supporting such a linkage is the identification of the source in both the priestly blessing and in Paul's letters: God. In the priestly blessing God, whose name is Yahweh, is thrice mentioned. The Hebrew invocation is in the jussive form, the more literal translation of which would be "May the Lord bless you and keep you..." Similarly the NT Greek greeting is to be understood not as an imperative, but as a wish form, "May grace and peace" The verb is lacking which implies that the sentence is to be construed as a wish, as in "Grace and peace to you." The words "grace" and "peace" are in the nominative case, technically described as the nominative absolute. One grammarian comments about such salutations, "The verb [in a greeting] never appears in the *corpus Paulinum*, however. This may be significant, especially if the suggestion that Paul invented (or at least popularized) the 'grace and peace' salutation is taken seriously, for what would be a 'signature' item for him (and hence so understood by his churches) may have needed expansion via an explicit verb in other writings."²⁴ Moreover, since most of the above examples are of greetings to churches, the congregational context for both Paul's letters and the priestly blessing would make such correspondence not forced but natural. Besides, Paul as a trained scholar in the Hebrew Scriptures would obviously be familiar with the priestly blessing. While traditionally the priestly blessing is thought to be pronounced at the conclusion of a worship service, there is no reason why the blessing may not have been spoken as an invocation. Hence Paul's

opening greeting would be equally fitting as a closing greeting. One may be permitted the conjecture that the reason for Paul opening his letters with this greeting rather than concluding with it was to put the gospel message front and center.

However, the allusion by Paul to the priestly blessing is not quite as straightforward as it might appear in the English translations. The Septuagint, the Greek OT version likely familiar to Paul, renders the OT word *hanan*, “and be gracious to you,” with the Greek *eleeō*, “and show you mercy.” The English translation of the Greek OT (LXX), departing from the Hebrew (MT) order somewhat, is: “Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel saying to them — and they shall put my name on the sons of Israel, and I the Lord will bless them—

May the Lord bless you and keep you

May the Lord make his face shine upon you and *show mercy to you*;

May the Lord lift up his face upon you and give you peace.²⁵

Were Paul to have literally quoted the LXX, his epistolary salutations would read: “Mercy and peace to you.”

In intertextual studies the correlation of vocabulary is significant. If the Pauline greeting is indeed a deliberate re-use of the benediction, one would expect exact vocabulary (if from the LXX), specifically the use of mercy, *eleos* rather than grace (*charis*). So whether the priestly benediction lies behind Paul’s salutation, “grace and peace” can still be questioned inasmuch as Paul speaks of “grace” whereas the Septuagint, often presumed to be the source for Paul’s Scripture quotations, uses the word “mercy” (*eleos*). One might account for Paul’s use of *charis* (grace) instead of *eleos* (mercy) by noting that these are synonyms, as in “But you O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious” (Ps. 86:15; cf. Exod. 34:6). “Grace” (*charis*) is a stronger term, however, in that it is in response to someone who is undeserving, whereas mercy (*eleos*) has the sense of pity, an emotion evoked by someone else’s helplessness. Still, it would seem that grace is not far from mercy nor mercy far from grace. “Grace” is closer to the heart of the gospel. Judith Lieu comments, Judith Lieu comments, “Certainly, ‘grace’ does have a distinctive role in Paul’s theology, perhaps acquiring some of the weight that ‘hesed’ has in the Old Testament, and thus taking the place of ‘mercy’ (*eleos*).”²⁶

Paul’s own conversion experience was an experience of God’s grace (Eph. 2:8). Moreover, grace and peace are brought together in Ephesians 2 in that God’s initiative of grace results in *shalom*, thus a summary of what God’s salvific activity entails. Even there Paul refers to “God who is rich in mercy.” Captivated by the richness of God’s “glorious grace” (Eph. 1: 6–7), Paul invokes this marked characteristic of God’s activity in his

prayer-wish for his readers. So even though Paul uses *charis* rather than *'eleos*, the very combination of "grace and peace" might still have its roots in the priestly blessing. That is made even more likely when it is remembered that Paul would use the Bible in Hebrew where "grace" is a perfectly good translation of *ḥanan*.

Since the two key words, "grace" and "peace" in Paul's salutation are common-place vocabulary, Paul's greeting need not be connecting to the benediction at all, but might simply be a rather conventional, even if modified greeting. That the salutation, "Grace and peace...." derives from everyday Hellenistic greeting combined with a Jewish one is a view represented in several commentaries. William Baker, commenting on 1 Corinthians 1: 3, opines that "'grace' derives from the standard Greek greeting and 'peace' is the traditional Jewish greeting [T]he intercultural greeting is standard in the openings of nearly all Paul's letters, probably reflecting the multiracial composition of the churches to whom he wrote."²⁷

However, the argument for Paul adopting a public greeting is not entirely compelling. For one, the origin of this two-term formula is still debated. Was "grace and peace" a common everyday greeting among all of the peoples in the various regions to whom Paul wrote letters? Are we to believe that Paul used a conventional greeting, if indeed it was a conventional greeting, and merely added the coda about God the Father and Jesus Christ as the source? This is unlikely, for Paul is making a weighty theological point! The ubiquitous elaboration which Paul makes by adding "from God our Father *and the Lord Jesus Christ*" (e.g. 2 Cor. 1:3) is odd, to say the least, if this greeting is little more than a conventional form of "hello." A theological comment about God's grace would be strange, if not trivializing, when attached to a common everyday greeting. Should one not take more seriously the weighty theological comment about the source of grace and peace, and look for a trajectory on grace and peace that is outside the secular? Alternatively, might this "signature" Pauline formulation have precedent? Ralph Martin notes, "A strikingly similar expression occurs in Jewish literature in 2 *Baruch* 78:2: 'Thus speaks Baruch, the son of Neriah, to the brothers who were carried away captive: Grace and peace be with you.'"²⁸ In any case, should one not take more seriously the weighty *theological* comment about the source of grace and peace? One can then envision a trajectory that extends from the priestly blessing through works such as 2 *Baruch* to Paul's writings (or from Paul's writings to 2 *Baruch*, depending on dating). In such a scenario, text messaging about grace and peace stretch over the centuries. Perhaps the common conclusion that Paul's greeting represents a combination of Hellenistic and Jewish forms needs to be revisited.

Granted, it may still be something of a reach to regard Paul's salutation

in his letters as a re-use of the priestly blessing. But, while speculative, it is not an unreasoned reach. If the echo of Paul's salutation of "grace and peace" is less than sharp, but distant, the arguments marshaled here support that there is an echo nevertheless. The exercise of intertextuality is more than matching some words; it is realizing the power of ancient texts now hinted at, now expounded. More than repetition or echo is involved. Lieu, who concludes that Paul's salutation is his distinctive contribution, refers to the combination of grace and peace as having a "scriptural" feel of divine blessing. When she writes about the "liturgical 'feel,'" of the balanced phrases, she is all but tracing Paul's greeting to the priestly blessing.²⁹ For those learning the art of stereophonic listening in reading biblical texts, there is gratification in recognizing and recalling a familiar word from the past. Ralph Martin cites Numbers 6:24–26 when commenting on Paul's salutation even though he leans toward a Hellenistic context for the salutation. Martin writes that "Paul modified the standardized greeting in Hellenistic letters (*chairein*, 'greetings') by using the Christian terms 'grace' (*charis* which sounds like *chairein*) and 'peace' (*eirēnē*), which is virtually the Greek equivalent of the Heb. *shalom*, meaning the blessing of God's salvation (Num. 6:26)."³⁰ Martin, in citing the priestly blessing, is not deaf to the echo. Or put differently, he is in tune with intertext messaging!

IMPLICATIONS/APPLICATION

If one adopts the view that Paul's salutations have roots in the Hebrew Scriptures, then several observations/implications follow. Most striking must be the addition of "and the Lord Jesus Christ" in Paul's use of the benediction. The priestly benediction assumed monotheism; only Yahweh is mentioned as the source of the anticipated beneficence. By repeatedly adding the person of Jesus Christ to the name "God the Father," Paul is making a statement about the deity of Jesus Christ.³¹ As explained in his letters, Paul sees Christ as the bringer both of grace (Eph. 1:7) and peace. As Gordon Wenham notes, "In Jesus the full meaning of peace is revealed: he gave peace, made peace, and is our peace (John 14:27; Eph. 2:14f.)."³² In Paul's salutation, Jesus Christ is essentially placed on par with God, a major tweak of the benediction.

A second observation is that in presumably drawing on the priestly blessing in his literary correspondence, Paul may be seen as a second Moses. Like Moses, Paul has a mediating function, even an authoritative function. In pronouncing the benediction, Moses placed the name of God over the people. So also Paul is placing the name of God *and* Jesus over the congregations and individuals to whom he writes. As an apostle Paul assumes an authoritative priestly role by having his salutation echo the ancient benediction. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, for example, no sooner

has he written his salutation about grace and peace, then he moves into a discourse on blessing. God “has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing” (Eph. 1:3).

A third observation pertains to the debate as to whether the early apostles were thinking and writing within a Hellenistic world view or a Hebrew world view. If the connection between Paul’s salutation and the priestly blessing can be sustained it would be further evidence that Paul should be placed within the Hebrew orbit of thought rather the Greek.

Fourthly, the preacher can benefit from attending to intertext messaging. For example, with Numbers 6:24–26 as a preaching text, the exposition is made easier by observing how the Scripture itself elaborates on the meanings of such terms as “bless” and “keep.” Similarly the application of such a text can take account, using the “echo” texts, of what it means to live under divine benediction. Additionally, attention to intertextuality offers the preacher some liberties in utilizing a text. There is warrant for reading between the lines. By listening carefully and well, wider horizons are opened, providing for the preacher a cornucopia of preaching material.³³

NOTES

1. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 66, quoted in Robert L. Brawley, *Text to Text Pours Forth Speech: Voices of Scripture in Luke Acts* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 135, fn 6.
2. For an introduction to the subject with a focus on Old Testament, see Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985). For an excellent set of examples, along with a theoretical discussion see Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1989). For an overview see, “Intertextuality” and “Inner-Biblical Interpretation” in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, John H. Hayes, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999). That intertextual studies remain a fascination is indicated by two recent publications: Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias, eds., *Early Christian Literature and Intertextuality: Volume 1: Thematic Studies*; and Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias, eds., *Early Christian Literature and Intertextuality, Volume 2: Exegetical Studies*, both from T & T Clark International, 2009.
3. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 22.
4. Details can be found in G. Barkay, “The Divine Name Found in Jerusalem,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 9, no. 2 (1983): 14–19;

- Erik Waaler, "A Revised Date for Pentateuchal Texts? Evidence from Ketef Hinnom" *Tyndale Bulletin* 53.2 (2002): 29–55; and Gabriel Barkay, Andrew G. Vaughn, Marilyn J. Lundberg and Bruce Zuckerman, "The Amulets from Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation," *Bulletin of American Schools of Oriental Research* 334 (2004): 41–71.
5. One can argue from within speech-act theory whether such statements are declarative or performative. See J. K. Aitken, *The Semantics of Blessing and Cursing in Ancient Hebrew* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007).
 6. E. A. Martens, *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology* (3d ed.; N. Richland Hills, TX: Bibal Press, 1998), 8–10.
 7. T. R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 151.
 8. Patrick D. Miller, "The Blessing of God. An Interpretation of Numbers 6:22–27," *Interpretation* 29 (1975): 243.
 9. Michael L. Brown, "brk," in *NIDOTTE*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 762.
 10. Michael Fishbane, "Form and Reformulation of the Biblical Priestly Blessing," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103, no. 1 (1983): 116.
 11. "The Biblical Priestly Blessing (Num. 6:24–26) in the Light of Akkadian Parallels," *Tel Aviv* 20 (1993), 228.
 12. Occurrences of the verb *bārak* total 327 times in the OT; the noun occurs seventy times. So Aitken, "The Semantics of Blessing and Cursing," 88, 92. See D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1978); Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and in the Life of the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); Mary Anne Isaac, "Literary Structure and Theology of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Three-fold Blessing" *Direction* 24, no. 2 (1995): 65–74. Each of the six verbs is treated at length in a study not available to me: Francesco Cocco, "La sonorisa de Dios. Los verbs de la bendició de Num 6,24–26," in *La Carma humana de la Escritura. Hommenaje a Don Andrés Ibáñez Arana* (Biblical Vitoriensa 6; Vitoria-Gasteiz: Editorial ESET, 2007), 163–75.
 13. Keith N. Schoville, "šmr," in *NIDOTTE* 4: 182.
 14. Cohen, 30.
 15. Cohen, 233.
 16. *Ibid.* The NRSV translates: "a grim-faced nation showing no respect to the old or favor to the young."
 17. W. S. Swartley, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006),

27. Italics his. Swartley's footnotes in the chapter serve well as an initial bibliography on the subject of peace. Cf. C. Westermann's explanation that the meaning of the Hebrew word corresponds to the English of being "okay." "Peace (*Shalom*) in the Old Testament," in *The Meaning of Peace*, Perry Yoder and Willard Swartley, eds. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 21.
18. Michael Fishbane, "The Priestly Blessing and its Aggadic Reuse" in *The Place is Too Small for Us*, ed. Robert P. Gordon (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbraun, 1995), 224. Reprinted from "Aggadic Transformations of Non-legal Pentateuchal Traditions," *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 329–34.
19. Ashley, *Numbers*, 151–153. Ashley leans on an earlier article by L. Liebreich, "The Songs of Ascent and the Priestly Blessing," *JBL* 74 (1955): 33–36.
20. M. Fishbane, "Form and Reformulation," 116.
21. Fishbane, "The Priestly Blessing and its Aggadic Reuse," 223–29.
22. Lynn Jost, my colleague, provocatively suggests that Psalms 1–5, like the Psalms of ascent, may have the priestly blessing as a backdrop. He notes, for example, that Psalm 1 begins with a blessing and concludes with YHWH watching the righteous; that Psalm 2 concludes with a blessing; and that Psalm 5 ends with a blessing and includes a reference to YHWH as a refuge and protector. Likewise, Psalm 3 concludes with a hope for blessing. Psalm 4, Jost observes, includes the word *šālôm* (peace) in the final verse.
23. Cf. "Peace to all of you who are in Christ" (1 Pet. 5:14b); "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21); and "Peace to you" (3 John 15a.)
24. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 51. I owe the reference to my colleague, Jon Isaak.
25. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 116. Italics added.
26. Judith M. Lieu, "'Grace to you and Peace': The Apostolic Greeting," *Bulletin of John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 68, no. 1 (1985): 169.
27. W. Baker, "1 Corinthians" in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* vol. 15, ed. Philip Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009), 22.
28. Ralph Martin, "2 Corinthians" in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, vol. 15, ed. Philip Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009), 285. Martin references A. E. J. Kliijn's translation

- of the pseudepigraphic *Apocalypse of Baruch* (Syrian).
29. Lieu, *The Apostolic Greeting*, 168, 178.
 30. Martin, "2 Corinthians," 284–85.
 31. See Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998). Bauckham traces the allusions in Phil. 2:5–11 to Isa. 52–53 to further his argument about divine identity (pp. 56–61). A similar argument about divine identity could be made via Paul's salutations. I owe this pointer to Bauckham's work to Craig Blomberg.
 32. Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester/Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press), 91.
 33. I acknowledge with gratitude the feedback and suggestions of my seminary teaching colleagues: Professors Jon Isaak, Tim Geddert, and Lynn Jost; of Richard Hess and Craig Blomberg, and of my friend, Dean Williams.