

Simple Root Definition: to bless
 Translated in the OT: Strong's (1288); Blessed(176x), Bless(116x), Blesseth(8x), Salute(4x), Blessest(3x), Curse(3x), Blessing(2x), Blaspheme(2x), to Kneel(2x), Kneeled(1x), Cursed(1x), Praise(1x), Praised(1x), Saluted(1x), Thanked(1x), Congratulate(1x), Misc. Intensifiers(7x); Total(330x)¹

Defining Passages: Genesis 24:48 "And I bowed down my head, and worshipped the LORD, and **blessed** the LORD God."
 Job 42:12 "The LORD **blessed** the latter part of Job's life more than the first."²
 Psalms 5:12 "For thou, LORD, wilt **bless** the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield."

Commentary: Waltke supposes that ברך comes from ברכים(knee).³ From this, to kneel is then an obvious meaning of ברך. Girdlestone asserts a connection from kneel to blessing in "that blessing signifies. . . the expression of grateful praise proceeding from the inferior and ascending to the superior."⁴ This may have been the original meaning of ברך which led to its first use in Genesis 1:22 as "blessed."

There are three major uses of ברך in the Old Testament, God to man, man to God, and man to man. These three types are also seen in the examples above. In most all of the ברך occasions, one wants to exalt or praise the other because he believes that the other deserves it. VanGemeran explains ברך in such a way that it could well explain every Old Testament usage of God to man and man to God:

God blesses human beings by speaking well of them, thereby imparting "blessing" (good things) to them, and so they are "blessed[ברך]". . .human beings bless God by speaking well of him, attributing "blessing" (good qualities) to him, and so he is "blessed[ברך]."⁵

¹ Online Bible Millennium Edition, (Winterbourne, Canada: Timnathserah, 2001); James Strong, The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), 133, 235, 593.

² Willem VanGemeran, New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis: Volume 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 758; (bold mine).

³ Bruce Waltke and M. O'Connor, An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 411.

⁴ Robert Girdlestone, Girdlestone's Synonyms of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1983), 242-243.

⁵ VanGemeran, 764.

When one person blesses another the phrase is "בָּרַךְ אֶתְּךָ לַיהוָה."⁶ The name of God usually seems to be implemented in the man to man type. The only way one will truly be blessed is through the LORD (as Balaam knew to be true).

The obvious exceptions to these definitions being plenary definitions are to kneel and to curse. Kneeling to another would be a sign of subservience and of good intention, thus fulfilling part of the meaning. To curse can be defined as "blessing" someone with bad things.

There are five occurrences of בָּרַךְ in Ruth.⁷ All except for the last occurrence is a blessing from one person given to another. Three of those four employ the use of יְהוָה. The second usage of בָּרַךְ which does not use God's holy name, may imply for God to bless Boaz; this is displayed in the next verse, the third usage, where Naomi blesses Boaz again but now with the use of יְהוָה. The fifth and last usage is from people blessing the LORD. In this usage the people are praising the LORD for His work in Naomi's life.

The verse at hand is Ruth 3:10, in which Boaz blesses Ruth in the name of the LORD for seeking him to fulfill the role of the redeemer. In this verse, the word has some aspect of wishing future material elements to Ruth, but it also has an aspect of indirect praise to the LORD in what He has done in Ruth's life. He gave her the steadfastness to be committed to Naomi. Boaz sees Ruth's commitment to both Naomi and the LORD when Ruth "asks" Boaz to be her kinsman redeemer. Boaz asserts Ruth as a beloved to him with his vocative, "my daughter." Blessings in Ruth are always given to those who are beloved (2:4; 3:10; 4:14) or who have special character (2:19-20).

In conclusion, the best way to describe "to bless" is to say that it means *may you receive much good, because you deserve it*. In this way it can fit into all three major uses, God to man, man to God, and man to man. It is however, only through the LORD that any blessing can happen.

⁶ Gesenius, Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1979), 142.

⁷ Online Bible Millennium Edition.