

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT PEACE?

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The Bible is a book of war. Moses, David, and even Jesus are remembered for victories won at the expense of their enemies.

Yet, as RBC writer Dean Ohlman shows in the following pages, the Bible is also a history of peace. By showing how the story of the Bible begins, climaxes, and ends, Dean shows where conflict comes from and why the people of Christ have every reason to love peace rather than war.

May the following “biography of peace” help us realize that the Bible doesn’t predict wars to encourage wars. May we grow together in our love for the Teacher who said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

*Martin R. De Haan II*

# A PRESENT-DAY GARDEN OF EDEN

**T**he Galapagos Islands are like no other place on earth. Lying on the equator, 500 miles to the west of Ecuador, these exotic islands are known for having wild creatures that show little fear of humans. Visitors come back with photos of sea lions laying their heads on their laps, iguanas sitting on rocks next to them, and birds feeding from their hands.

The experience of getting so close to nature has prompted thrilled travelers to say that visiting the Galapagos was a highlight of their life.

On their return, some have said that the experience of having animals trust them made them feel almost like they were transported back to the Garden of Eden. It's as

if something in the human soul senses that the present natural order is not like it ought to be—that something is painfully wrong with the law of tooth and claw.

We know that “survival of the fittest” is indeed the way things presently work in nature’s economy. The law of the jungle is not the exception but the rule. It even characterizes much of what we experience in our own personal interactions.

So why is lasting peace what we dream for but never experience? Is the longing for such peace merely a repressed, but false, human hope? Or is it a smoldering desire based on a reality that once was—and will be again someday in the future?

The Bible offers its own answers to these questions in its eye-opening, unfolding story of human war and peace.

# THE STORY OF PEACE

The notion of peace, as we have it in the Bible, has monumental significance. In fact, the concept of peace forms the bookends of the Bible. The front bookend is found in the Old Testament in the second chapter of the first book: Genesis. Here peace is not defined, it's illustrated. And the picture is of the Garden of Eden.

## THE PEACE WE HAD

*The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food (Gen. 2:8-9).*

One of the first things to note about this Old

Testament paradise is that man recognized Eden's beauty before he saw its utility. As Adam awoke in the Garden, what he observed delighted his

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*The concept of peace forms the bookends of the Bible.*

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eyes. And what he noticed were its trees—beautiful trees that would also provide food.

From all the biblical references to the Garden of Eden, we form a picture of utopia. Here, surrounded by life-giving rivers, the first man and woman had intimate communion with their Creator. They walked and talked with God. All was beautiful. All was comfortable. All was harmonious. Life in all

its richness, completeness, and goodness filled the landscape of Eden. And in its center was a tree whose fruit guaranteed that man would not die: the tree of life. Here too, however, was the forbidden tree: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:9).

In this paradise, God graciously protected our first parents from toxic ideas and experiences. In fact, He forbade Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (v.17). As a wise parent warns an unknowledgeable and innocent child about danger, so God sought to protect naive and innocent Adam and Eve. To trust Him was to be safe.

If there were a movie about the moral history of mankind, this is the place in the story where the background music would transition to a minor key.

## **THE PEACE WE LOST**

We know, all too well, the story that followed. Adam and Eve were seduced by Satan to distrust their Creator. Although they didn't realize it at the time, they were about to cross a line of no return. As a result of their disobedience, our first parents were banished from the Garden and lost access to the tree of life.

Adam and Eve failed in what theologians now call the "cultural mandate." The Creator's intent was for His image-bearers to build a culture where the peace of God could express its unlimited potential for beauty and wonder.

Instead of uninterrupted peace and happiness, we find in the fourth chapter of Genesis the unfolding story of rapid social disintegration. Here we read of the first physical death. We watch as Cain, the murderer, becomes

a fugitive who builds a city of rebels. From that point onward, humanity was on a downhill slide.

This heartbreaking collapse of the human family is reflected in John Steinbeck's classic *East Of Eden*, a title that was taken from Genesis 4:16. His novel, which takes place at the beginning of the 20th century, alludes to and parallels in many ways the self-destructive choices made by Cain in Genesis 4.

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Steinbeck's novel shows that God did not demand compliance to satisfy some

divine ego. Instead, our compliance with His requirements was for our own good.

By rejecting the loving intent of their Maker, *moral* beings became *mortal*. From their first moment of distrust, Adam and Eve were no longer at one with their Creator, themselves, or the ground beneath their feet (Gen. 3:17-19). Now neither they nor their children would experience the ultimate tranquility, the wholeness, the freedom from hard labor, and the freedom from the fear of violence and death they had known in Eden.

But God left the memory of Eden etched upon the souls of a rebel family. To this day, the human race is left with a lingering desire for what we lost.

What did we lose? We lost the peace. This was the theme of English literature's most comprehensive epic

poem on human moral history: John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In it, mankind bemoans its fate:

Farewell, happy fields,  
where joy forever  
dwells: Hail horrors, hail  
infernal world; and thou,  
profoundest hell, receive  
thy new possessor.

## **THE PEACE THAT'S COMING**

Jump ahead to the far bookend of the Bible—to the final two chapters of the book of Revelation. The New Testament Greek word for peace does not appear here. What does appear is a portrait of another ideal human setting with echoes of Eden.

In the Bible's final chapter, we see our paradise regained:

*[The angel] showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God*

*and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him (Rev. 22:1-3).*

The apostle John gives us a glimpse of this place of everlastingly restored bliss, with its river, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Jesus). The life-giving river streams through the median of a boulevard that's lined by fruit trees.

In the mind's eye of redeemed humanity rises the image of Eden past and its beautiful trees, trees that seem to bow before the great tree: the tree of life.

Remember, this is the

tree from which we were banished, the tree God left protected by an angel with a flaming sword. But here in this place there is no angel to forbid our approach. To our great joy we discover that the tree that occupies this central spot in the holy garden paradise is indeed the tree of life.

In Genesis we learn of the great potential within pre-civilized humanity to live in community with God and the earth. In Revelation we see the ideal of civilized human culture—a place occupied not by two people in communion with God, but an unnumbered host of people communing with God. This is the epitome of “community.” In this peaceful paradise, as in the first, there is no death, sorrow, crying, nor pain.

John’s vision of eternal peace represents the ultimate bookend of the Bible. He foresaw, at the

end of this age, a new heaven and earth without conflict, without death, and without end.

John’s revelation of the future sees beyond the anticipation of the prophets of Israel who foresaw a messianic age that will have many but not all the characteristics of the eternal kingdom.

This age of peace will be marked by the coming of an anointed King (Isa. 9:6) whose rule will be characterized by a golden age of international peace (Isa. 2:1-4).

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Under the restored rule of this Messiah King, the natural world will be transformed. The climate will be ideal (Isa. 30:23-26), wild animals will be tame (Isa. 11:6-8), fishing will be abundant (Ezek. 47:9-10), people will have good health (Isa. 35:5-6), life will be lengthened (Isa. 65:19-22), and trees will provide food and medicine (Ezek. 47:12).

John Wesley tried to imagine what nature might experience in a transformed world that, under God's restored rule, would be marked by peace rather than conflict:

The whole brute creation will then, undoubtedly, be restored, not only to the vigor, strength, and swiftness which they had at their creation, but to a far higher degree of each than they ever enjoyed. They will be restored, not only to that measure of understanding which

they had in paradise, but to a degree of it as much higher than that, as the understanding of an elephant is beyond that of a worm. And whatever affections they had in the garden of God will be restored with vast increase; being exalted and refined in a manner which we ourselves are not now able to comprehend. The liberty they then had will be completely restored, and they will be free in all their motions. They will be delivered from all irregular appetites, from all unruly passions, from every disposition that is either evil in itself, or has any tendency to evil. No rage will be found in any creature, no fierceness, no cruelty, or thirst for blood.

# THE PORTRAIT OF PEACE

Many are familiar with a classic painting by Edward Hicks titled “The Peaceable Kingdom.” It is American art done in the primitive genre common to the Revolutionary War period. The painting illustrates the Scripture passage by the prophet Isaiah, in which he foretells the characteristics of the future messianic kingdom described in chapter 11:

*The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child*

*shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (vv.6-9).*

People are puzzled when they discover that some prints of Hicks' painting are different. So which is the real one? They all are. Hicks painted at least 60 and as many as 100 versions of it! The popularity of this image—then and now—highlights the longing in the human heart for peace.

In simplified versions of this prophetic vision of peace, Hicks surrounded the image with poetic couplets:

- The wolf did with the lambkin dwell in peace/His grim carnivorous nature there did cease.

- The leopard with the harmless kid laid down/And not one savage beast was seen to frown.

*sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the*



- The lion with the fatling on did move/  
A little child was leading them in love.

When the artist painted smiling lions, docile cattle, contented wolves, and leopards resting in the presence of lambs and kids, he seems to have understood the implication of Paul's picture of coming peace for nature itself:

*I consider that the*

*earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:18-21).*

The prospect of peace is a thrilling hope. But the reality of present conflict and suffering continues to assault that hope with pain. This pain is felt and expressed by a sort of universal groan.

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Nature groans. People groan. Even God, in the Holy Spirit, groans. However, we must not overlook the promise in the pain. In verse 22, Paul went on to reveal that “the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.” So while we suffer from the lack of

peace and tranquility now, we can find comfort in realizing that creation’s agony and our agony are not permanent. Our shared suffering is giving birth to ultimate peace, and we should “eagerly wait for it with perseverance” (v.25).

Hicks’ many illustrations depicted not only a future messianic kingdom of peace but also examples of human peacemaking that are appropriate to those who share God’s love for a world as it was meant to be.

In most of his works, Hicks, who was a Quaker, illustrates a significant historical event: William Penn signing a peace treaty with the Delaware Indians—a treaty that this devout man and his compatriots never broke. Penn also obtained land by paying the native Americans a fair price for it, not taking it from them by force. (One wonders what might have happened in the

United States if all the colonists of the New World had followed Penn's example.)



Hicks' inclusion of Penn and the Indians showed his belief that we have a present responsibility to work for peace in our relationships with others—individuals, people groups, and entire nations. Each of his paintings was a biblical sermon on canvas—a sermon about peacemaking.

Yearning for a peaceable future is incomplete unless

it's accompanied by a present practical commitment to peace. Followers of Jesus have every reason now to listen to their Teacher who said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Mt. 5:9).

Early 19th-century Methodist theologian Adam Clarke eloquently reflected on the kind of man or woman he believed Jesus was talking about:

A peacemaker is a man who, being endowed with a generous public spirit, labors for the public good and feels his own interest promoted in promoting that of others. Therefore, instead of fanning the fire of strife, he uses his influence and wisdom to reconcile the contending parties, adjust their differences, and restore them to a state of unity. As all men are represented to be in a

state of hostility to God and each other, the gospel is called the gospel of peace, because it tends to reconcile men to God and to each other. Hence, our Lord here terms peacemakers the children of God: For as He is the Father of peace, those who promote it are reputed [to be] His children. But whose children are they who foment divisions in the church, the state, or among families? Surely they are not of that God, who is the Father of peace, and lover of concord; nor of that Christ, who is the sacrifice and mediator of it; nor of that Spirit, who is the nourisher and bond of peace; nor of that church of the Most High, which is the kingdom and family of peace.

In contrast to such a love for peace, history is one of

tragic, ongoing conflict that confirms over and over our need for a solution that God alone can give. And so we, along with all creation, wait for that promised kingdom of peace.

While Edward Hicks painted the peacemaking work of William Penn into the background of his illustrated sermon, he often set the symbol of history's greatest Peacemaker in the center of it—in the glowing form of a snow-white lamb lying quietly beside the figure of a child or a wolf.

The observer of these paintings can see that nature's violent order of tooth and claw has been altered. No two animals could be so opposed in character: the strong, aggressive, ravenous wolf and the docile, harmless, innocent lamb. But what is not seen in the painting is the inexpressible price that was paid for this peace.

# THE COST OF PEACE

The vision of a peaceable messianic kingdom in which all creation is once again at one with its Creator is first revealed to us early in Isaiah 11 and shown again in chapter 65. But in between, we find a striking picture of what it took for humanity's lost paradise to be regained. It is Isaiah's prophetic vision of the Lamb of God, immortalized more than 200 years ago by George Frideric Handel in his magnificent oratorio *Messiah*.

*He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the*

*Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth (Isa. 53:5-7).*

As the setting of peace forms the bookends of the Bible, so the sacrificial lamb—which suffers that man may have peace—is a word picture and theme that extends from Genesis to Revelation. We see the first lamb sacrificed in the fallen first family: when Abel offered up the firstborn of his flock as a sacrifice for sin (Gen. 4:4). Next, the blood of a lamb was swabbed on the door frames of the houses of the people of Israel as they prepared for their exodus from Egypt, protecting them from death at the hands of the angel of God (Ex. 12).

Later, in the ceremonial rites of Israel established by God (see the book of Leviticus), the sacrifice of a lamb becomes a peace offering that temporarily made amends for their sins. In this national act of redemption, a remorseful people regularly saw peace shattered by violence—the innocent being sacrificed for the guilty.

These ceremonies of sacrifice continued until the days when a rugged prophet of the wilderness pointed to a rabbi from Nazareth and announced, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn. 1:29). Fittingly, Jesus’ public life ended during the celebration of Passover when He offered Himself as the ultimate sacrificial lamb on the cross of Calvary.

In his Revelation of Jesus Christ, the apostle John saw a vision of the

future restoration of peace that comes through the One who was sacrificed by God on the cross. While he was in exile on the Isle of Patmos, John saw in the courts of heaven the figure of “a Lamb as though it had been slain” (5:6). This Lamb would break the seven seals of a scroll that would reveal to the entire cosmos the meaning of that great sacrifice: It assured the return of eternal peace. The breaking of the seals brought such joy that not only did the angelic residents of glory sing their praises, but so did the creatures of the earth—no doubt in celebration of the end of the curse that had brought them constant suffering:

*Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand*

*times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!" (Rev. 5:11-13).*

According to the New Testament, this eternal hope comes with immediate implications. The price paid by Christ's death on the cross has purchased more than our eternal hope and peace. The immeasurable suffering of Christ has also established a basis for personal peace with God and with one another.

The Jewish apostle Paul wrote to readers who were once Gentile enemies:

*Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father (Eph. 2:13-18).*

In Paul's day, making such a statement of peace between longstanding ethnic enemies could only be attributed to the work that Christ had done in his heart—and in the hearts of his readers. Together, they had found a champion and hope for peace far greater than themselves.

## THE PRINCE OF PEACE

Along with the apostle Paul's Ephesian readers, we are living in a waiting period between paradises. Our first parents lost their original paradise by violating the one rule of trust given to them.

Their loss prompted our loving God to take the form of a man and offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sin. Only because of His death and subsequent resurrection can those of

us who repent and accept this sacrifice as payment for our sin have assurance of our soul's entry into paradise when we die, and our body's entry to the peaceable eternal kingdom at the end of days.

But do we have to just assume this without any historic evidence? No. We have the testimony of the Bible, which verifies from cover to cover both the reliability and rationality of our hope.

As to our *soul's* entry into paradise, we have the recorded words of Jesus on the cross who told the penitent thief on the cross beside Him, "I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Lk. 23:43). Furthermore, the letters of the apostle Paul and the apostle John's Revelation are filled with promises of our *body's* entry into God's eternal kingdom.

The remarkable growth

of the church after Jesus bodily left this earth and returned to the Father was motivated in large part by belief in a coming material kingdom. This faith of the early Christians was tied directly to the real and touchable person of Jesus Christ, who both in His life and death provided irrefutable evidence for anticipation of a coming kingdom of peace. The most compelling case, of course, was Jesus' resurrection. But even before His death, He demonstrated in His many miracles the reality of existence without the threat of suffering, disease, and death.

## **THE POWER OF THE PRINCE**

When Jesus performed His miracles, He was revealing to us the significance of His prophetic title as the Prince of Peace and His angelically proclaimed task

of bringing peace to earth and goodwill to men (Isa. 9:6; Lk. 2:14).

By His supernatural power, Jesus showed that He is the source of the peace of the ancient Garden and the peace of the future Garden

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City. His miracles of healing and restoration revealed to a suffering world what ultimate peace looks like. In calming the storm and mastering other natural

forces, He gave us a glimpse of nature free from the curse. In healing diseases, He showed us the perpetual therapeutic properties of the tree of life that will reappear in the holy Garden City for “the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:2). In exorcising and commanding demons, He revealed His power over the prince of demons who deceived Adam and Eve in the Garden and who will be absent from that eternal kingdom. And finally, in His ultimate miracle—His own resurrection—He demonstrated His power over death, the dreadful specter that has haunted us since our banishment from Eden but will be absent from our eternal home (see the Discovery Series booklet *The Miracles Of Jesus* Q0212).

## **THE CROWN OF THE PRINCE**

While the Bible does not explicitly state it, the crown

of thorns that Jesus was compelled to wear at His crucifixion may well have represented the curse and the broken peace of the natural world. In Genesis, thorns and thistles were the natural elements that marked the fall of man into sin (Gen. 3:18). In wearing the mocking crown, Jesus suffered and bled from the press of the thorns upon His head. Yet that very suffering and His subsequent death guaranteed creation’s ultimate blessing—a redeemed and peaceable earth free from effects of both the fall and the curse.

Stated simply, the miracles that marked the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ give us dramatic evidence for the life of peace that God intended for us in the beginning—and will bring about once again in the final eternal kingdom.

# THE WORDS FOR PEACE

## THE PRIMARY TERM FOR PEACE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Hebrew term that encompasses the peace we lost is the word *shalom*. It's found 208 times in the Old Testament. When all its uses are considered, we find that it's a rich term that provides us a virtual description of Eden. Here are many of its tones: completeness, soundness, welfare, safety, health, prosperity, quietness, tranquility, contentment, freedom from war, and friendship with God and others. No wonder our hearts long for the *shalom* that characterized mankind's original home.

## THE PRIMARY TERM FOR PEACE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Greek term that

encompasses the Bible's final vision of peace is *eirene*. Examining the 86 occurrences of this word in the New Testament, we discover this broad meaning: a state of national tranquility, exemption from rage and war, harmony, concord, peace between individuals, security, safety, prosperity, and the peace Messiah will bring.

The term *eirene* also has a meaning that is exclusive to New Testament Christianity: the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, fearing nothing from God and being content with its earthly lot, whatever that may be.

Finally, it relates to the state of devout and faithful followers of Christ after death. So in the souls of those who trust in Christ, not only is there a memory of our lost Garden, there's also a yearning for the coming Garden City.

## OTHER BIBLICAL TERMS FOR PEACE

There are other biblical terms for peace. In the Hebrew, we find different words for peace that relate to our common human experience: keep your peace (as in “hush!”), peace that comes when we are astonished into silence, peace that simply means silence or deafness, peace that comes because there is no war or violence, and the peace that comes with prosperity. Still the primary Hebrew term is *shalom*.

From its broad meaning, we can see that *shalom* becomes a golden strand that extends backward to Eden, when there was no death for people, and stretches forward to the coming eternal kingdom of God, when there will be no more death for people. Because the fear of death accompanies all of human life, we will not have such

perfect peace until death is vanquished.

In the Greek language, there are also a number of different terms for peace, and they too define the same common human experiences expressed by the Hebrew—chiefly about being silent or at rest. Yet the key word is *eirene*. It takes the baton from *shalom* in the last book of the Old Testament and carries it on to the last book of the New Testament.

## THE GREETING OF PEACE

The sign says, “Peace be with you.” The words appear in three languages: English, Hebrew, and Arabic. It’s a fitting sign because it’s posted at the entry point to Bethlehem from Jerusalem. Making it even more significant is that the sign faces a hilly area that’s been known throughout much of Middle

Eastern history as “the shepherds’ fields.” Tradition holds that these fields are the ones mentioned in the Christmas account from the gospel of Luke—fields marked by the ruins of rock towers that had for centuries been used by shepherds “keeping watch over their flock by night” (2:8). Close to this spot, the coming of the long-promised Prince of Peace was announced by the heralding angels who concluded their message of joy and good news with these immortal words: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (2:14).

The irony of the contemporary peace sign, however, is that it’s posted beneath a gun tower on a huge concrete wall recently constructed by the nation of Israel to help prevent the entrance of terrorists into its territory. This looming structure is just one segment

of a wall and fence barrier that is planned to run for more than 400 miles around the Palestinian West Bank. Israelis consider it to be a “peace fence.” Palestinians use an Arabic term that characterizes the barrier as a “racist segregation wall” encircling their land and creating what they see as a parallel to the infamous Warsaw Ghetto that confined Polish Jews during World War II.

A further irony is found in the fact that the phrase “peace be with you” is a traditional greeting used in both the Jewish and Arab communities. In modern Hebrew, the expression is “*sholom aleichem.*” In Arabic, it is “*assalamu alaikum.*” This common expression of goodwill undoubtedly led the Israeli officials to emblazon their “peace fence” with this subliminal human desire—in spite of what seems to

be perpetual hatred and violence in the region. Yet it is no surprise to find this salutation historically rooted in the Middle East.

“Peace be with you” is actually one of the oldest greetings ever recorded—going back to the time of Jacob, whom God had renamed Israel. Its first appearance in the Bible, in fact, indicates that the phrase was not initially a courtesy without conviction, which it has become. It was literally an expression of grace—of favor that was totally unmerited by its recipients.

We hear it first in the longest narrative in the Scriptures: the story of Joseph, which takes up the last 14 chapters of the book of Genesis. The story of Joseph is so rich and so full of dramatic twists and turns that it has been called a novella (a mini novel). Many would affirm that few stories

in the Bible touch the heart like this story. It is, in fact, the Bible’s *Les Miserables*—in which law demands punishment and death but mercy offers pardon and life.

The occasion is Joseph’s second greeting of his brothers who had sold him into slavery years earlier. If Joseph had been a man given to revenge, there would have been no second meeting. As Pharaoh’s steward in command over the resources of Egypt, he could have commanded that they all be executed as soon as he discovered who these scoundrels were. That’s what justice would have demanded. But mercy reigned in Joseph’s heart. So when the merciful magistrate orchestrated the certain return of his brothers into his presence, he met them with a greeting of grace: “Peace be with you,” he said (Gen. 43:23).

It has not escaped Bible

students over the centuries that the story of Joseph has striking similarities to the story of Jesus. Books have been written on the comparisons. A parallel that applies to the issue of peace is how Joseph epitomizes a savior who instead of meting out justice offers grace. And with the acceptance of that grace, peace is granted to his entire family.

As a youth, Joseph was at the mercy of his cruel brothers, who tormented him, rejected him, and finally sold him into slavery. He became dead to them. Years later, however, they were stunned to learn that the one they thought was dead was alive. Not only that, Joseph returned as their judge. And then he forgave them. They expected to hear a death sentence, but they got a blessing instead!

How like Jesus! He suffered at the hands of

His Hebrew brothers and died because of their hostility and cruelty. Unlike Joseph, however, Jesus forgives His brothers even before His return to ultimate power and authority. This is to our great blessing, because that forgiveness is also offered to us.

Jesus has every right to use His divine authority to condemn us to death for our rebellion and disobedience. But He offers us grace. Think of how thrilling it must have been for His disciples, our brothers in sin, to be the first to hear from Jesus the very same greeting Joseph gave his fearful brothers. Behind a locked door in fear of death at the hands of the angry religious leaders who had demanded the crucifixion of Jesus, the disciples awaited their own fate. Instead of the forces of the Jewish Sanhedrin, however, a solitary figure

quietly entered their presence in spite of the barred door. It was the risen Christ! And the first words they heard from Him after His resurrection addressed their fear: “Peace be with you” (Jn. 20:19). Two more times in the ensuing hours and days their Lord used a contraction of the greeting: “Peace to you!” (vv.21,26).

One wonders why there is no record of such a greeting from the lips of Jesus before the crucifixion, but accounts of it after He rose from the dead. One possible answer lies in the significance of His death and resurrection. Mankind could not truly have peace with God until the Lamb of God was offered up as a sacrifice for our sin. After His suffering, Jesus could finally offer the ultimate greeting of grace, saying in essence, “You were dead in trespasses and sin. Now, by satisfying the demands

of God’s justice, I have become your peace” (see Eph. 2:14).

In the days that followed, Jesus met with many of His disciples—explaining, at least to two of them, how the ancient Scriptures had foretold His coming and His offer of grace to those who merited justice and death (Lk. 24:25-27). Isaiah’s great messianic prophecy was no doubt one of those connections Jesus made for His disciples:

*For unto us a Child  
is born, unto us a  
Son is given; and the  
government will be upon  
His shoulder. And His  
name will be called  
Wonderful Counselor,  
Mighty God, Everlasting  
Father, Prince of Peace.  
Of the increase of His  
government and peace  
there will be no end,  
upon the throne of David  
and over His kingdom, to*

*order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this (Isa. 9:6-7).*

After Jesus' resurrection, His disciples would more fully understand the words He had spoken to them earlier:

*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (Jn. 14:27).*

## **BIBLICAL EXPRESSIONS OF PEACE**

**I** find great hope both in the soul's memory of Eden's *shalom* and the heart's longing for the *eirene* of the coming kingdom. Bolstering that hope are the revelations of peace found in the miracles of Jesus. Yet these demonstrations of

ultimate peace can quickly fade from my awareness when I'm battling the reality of the less-than-peaceful present. Is this vestige and promise of ultimate peace the only hope we have, or is there hope for serenity and harmony now? The Scriptures are filled with promises of a partial peace that people can have in the present. Consider these:

### **THE BLESSING OF PEACE**

When the ceremonies related to worship in the wilderness tabernacle were being given by God to Moses, the Creator offered a wonderful blessing the priests were to give the people of Israel as they lived in obedience. This blessing of peace is still perhaps the most common benediction in Christian churches around the world:

*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).*

There is a peace we can expect when we live in accord with God's mandates.

## **THE POETRY OF PEACE**

The Old Testament book of Psalms is filled with poetry of peace. Here's a sampling:

- *I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety (4:8).*
- *The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace (29:11).*
- *Mark the blameless man, and observe the upright; for the future of that man is peace (37:37).*
- *In His days the*

*righteous shall flourish, and abundance of peace, until the moon is no more (72:7).*

- *Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed (85:10).*
- *Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble (119:165).*

In these verses we see realizations of both present and future peace: now, as we seek to live in harmony with God's will and Word, and ultimate peace that will mark the eternal estate of those who accept the peace offering of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

## **THE PROVERBS OF PEACE**

Following the poetry, we have the wisdom of Solomon's proverbs of peace:

- *My son, . . . let your heart keep my commands; for*

*length of days and long life and peace they will add to you (3:1-2).*

- *[Wisdom's] ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace (3:17).*
- *Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but counselors of peace have joy (12:20).*
- *When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him (16:7).*

Again the message is that when we are wise, honest, understanding, and walking in the ways of God, we will (as a general rule) experience peace in our daily lives.

## **THE PROPHECIES OF PEACE**

After the poetry and the proverbs, we discover the wonderful prophecies of peace:

- *You will keep him in perfect peace, whose*

*mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You (Isa. 26:3).*

- *The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever (Isa. 32:17).*
- *“The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,” says the Lord, who has mercy on you (Isa. 54:10).*
- *I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore (Ezek. 37:26).*
- *“The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,” says the Lord of hosts. “And in this place I will give*

peace,” says the Lord of hosts (Hag. 2:9).

- You, child [John the Baptist], will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace (Lk. 1:76-79).

Of course, the continued theme here is that when we adhere to the values of God’s ultimate kingdom while we live in the present kingdom of Satan, we will receive a significant measure of peace—not the ultimate peace, but a soul peace that gives us a foretaste of that which is to come.

## JESUS’ PROMISE OF PEACE

Perhaps no assurance of peace is more treasured than that which we find in John 14:27—Jesus’ great promise of peace to His disciples. This promise is also to the disciples who would continue to grow in number throughout the ages until His second coming:

*Peace I leave with you,  
My peace I give to you;  
not as the world gives do  
I give to you. Let not  
your heart be troubled,  
neither let it be afraid.*

Biblical commentator Adam Clarke paraphrased Jesus’ words like this:

Such tranquility of soul, such uninterrupted happiness of mind, such everlasting friendship with God as I enjoy, may you all enjoy! And such blessedness I bequeath

unto you: it is My last,  
My best, My dying  
legacy.

We realize, of course,  
that the promise of peace  
depends upon our faith in  
the sacrifice of the Lamb of  
God through whom we are  
made right with our Creator.  
The apostle Paul made this  
clear in his letters to the  
young churches in Europe  
in which he explained the  
peace of justification:

*It pleased the Father  
that in [Jesus Christ] all  
the fullness should dwell,  
and by Him to reconcile  
all things to Himself, by  
Him, whether things on  
earth or things in heaven,  
having made peace  
through the blood of  
His cross (Col. 1:19-20).*

It's thrilling to see in this  
passage that all things in  
God's creation will one day  
experience the peace that  
comes through the sacrifice  
of the Lamb of God.

It was Jesus' promise

of peace that soon  
became a message to  
the church. Before Jesus  
ascended to the Father,  
He commissioned His  
followers, declaring that  
they must "go into all  
the world and preach the  
gospel to every creature"  
(Mk. 16:15). And the  
apostle Paul added,  
from the Old Testament  
prophet Isaiah:

*How beautiful are  
the feet of those who  
preach the gospel of  
peace, who bring glad  
tidings of good things!  
(Rom. 10:15).*

It's important to realize,  
however, that this offer of  
peace was not made only  
in the months and years  
immediately after the  
resurrection and ascension  
of Christ. It continued to  
be the proclamation of  
the church from that time  
until now. Paul wrote:

*Having been justified  
by faith, we have peace*

*with God through  
our Lord Jesus Christ,  
through whom also we  
have access by faith into  
this grace in which we  
stand, and rejoice in  
hope of the glory of  
God (Rom. 5:1-2).*

This means that whoever puts his or her faith in the sacrificial Lamb of God who died for our sins will receive God's ultimate salutation of grace: "Peace be unto you."

In the following hymn, Frances Havergal gives a beautiful picture of God's peace:

Like a river glorious  
is God's perfect peace,  
Over all victorious  
in its bright increase;  
Perfect, yet it floweth  
fuller every day.  
Perfect, yet it groweth  
deeper all the way.  
Stayed upon Jehovah,  
hearts are fully blest;  
Finding, as He promised,  
perfect peace and rest.

## **GOD'S OFFER OF PEACE**

As I pursued my study of the concept of peace in the Bible over several months, I came to the firm belief that the Scriptures do not merely give us a collection of divine thoughts about peace; they are virtually God's biography of peace.

The first book of the Bible chronicles the account of humanity's first ideal peaceable kingdom. It goes on from there to tell of our tragic fall into sin and rebellion. Following that, we see the hand of God creating through Abraham a people out of whom He will bless all the nations of the earth with the peace we all so desperately long for.

The remainder of the Old Testament follows the ups and downs of the children of Israel, who were to be the world's glowing

example of a nation at peace with God.

The New Testament begins with four great narratives about the One who humanly descended from Abraham to pay a dreadful price—that of a sacrificial Lamb who would die for the sins of the world.

From there, the biography records the story of the new examples of a people intended by God to shed the light of peace upon the world—the church of Jesus Christ.

Finally, we come to the messianic kingdom of peace that is replaced ultimately by the eternal kingdom that God wants every person to experience. The apostle Peter wrote:

*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish*

*but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).*

Because of this great desire of His, the Bible ends with a final invitation to a world desperate to experience ultimate peace. That peace can be ours because of the One who sits on the ultimate throne of peace:

*There shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever (Rev. 22:3-5).*

God desires for every one of us the ultimate peace that our bodies were made for and that our souls long for.

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