

WAITING FOR GOD'S PEACE

Darryl sat quietly at the table, listening with the other school board members. The meeting had started out as routine, became tense, and now was mildly hostile.

It was supposed to be a meeting to discuss the challenge of funding cuts. But in a district as diverse as his, people were always comparing the funding of activities that appealed to one group or another.

"At least our kids aren't the ones making our school have so many translators. That's where all the money is going!" said one parent in a huff, with a glance at the Latino families seated in the room.

"Let me assure you, we are talking about different budgets. And let's try to keep the tone respectful, so that we can continue to hear from everyone," Darryl said, knowing his words would not be enough.

Being a "minority" in a majority-minority area wasn't easy, as he certainly knew. Even a local race for school board seemed to have ugly undertones. He often found himself caught in the middle of parents who would do anything to advocate for *their* students. He had sway with the community and a reputation for honesty, but there was little he could do to fix the underlying suspicion and racial tensions that had been around for years.

God, Darryl silently prayed to himself, we need your peace to reach down to our world.

1 What captivates our attention about the idea of peace, making us long for more and more?

2 Is there anything unrealistic about seeking peace in the world where we live? Why or why not?

² And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

³ And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

⁴ And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

² In the last days

the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established
as the highest of the mountains;
it will be exalted above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.

³ Many peoples will come and say,

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,

to the temple of the God of Jacob.

He will teach us his ways,

so that we may walk in his paths."

The law will go out from Zion,

the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

⁴ He will judge between the nations

and will settle disputes for many peoples.

They will beat their swords into plowshares

and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation will not take up sword against nation,

nor will they train for war anymore.

The Mountain of God

Isaiah—God's prophet to the nation of Judah—envisioned restoration, not only for his people, but for all nations. It exceeds what God's people might naturally expect. Isaiah writes, "The mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains" (Isa. 2:2), meaning it will be recognized for its enduring importance. Rival hills—representing rival kingdoms and their gods—shrink away to nothing. All will see the true God for who He is: the center of Israel's worship, which will become the center of the whole world. The nations will come to worship Yahweh, "streaming" to the place of His presence, like a flowing river.

Isaiah reveals that many will long to be part of God's people, going up to His mountain and to "the temple of the God of Jacob" (Isa. 2:3). Jacob had inherited the promises God made to Abraham and Isaac that God would make Abraham's family into a great nation and bless all people through his family (see Gen. 12:1–3). From Jacob came the twelve tribes of Israel, who inherited God's covenant after being rescued from slavery in Egypt. Isaiah 2 reveals that the nations will come to embrace the God of Jacob and be included in the Lord's tribe. People from all nations will become a part of God's people. They will come with the purpose of learning God's ways and walking in His paths. This will result in the law—the word of the Lord—going forth from exalted Zion, borne by the nations to spread throughout the earth.

In verse 4, Isaiah speaks of God as the righteous judge who will bring peace to the nations as they submit to Him. He will "settle disputes for many peoples" (Isa. 2:4). As a result, the nations will put away war and violence against one another, turning their pointless weapons into useful tools for farming.

Here, "plowshares" refers to the metal tip of a plow used to break up dirt or dig a furrow for planting (v. 4). The shards of broken swords would serve this purpose well. Similarly, the head of a spear can be fashioned into a curved knife for pruning. The transformation of weapons into tools means the ground will no longer be covered with the blood of violence, but cultivated for the good of earth's inhabitants. The nations will no longer need to "train for war" (Isa. 2:4), since God brings a lasting, abiding peace.

1 What does it mean for God's mountain to be established as the highest?

2 How are these verses related to God's promise to bless the nations through Abraham?

3 What will happen when people from all nations turn to the true God?

²⁶ And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; ²⁷ That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: ²⁸ For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

²⁶ From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷ God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

God's Desire for the Nations

Acts 17:26–28 finds Paul in the midst of a speech in the city of Athens—where residents fashion themselves to be educated and intellectual, open to all of the latest ideas. What a place to give a sermon! The Areopagus is where all of the best teachers and philosophers would come to speak, and Paul had inflamed opposition by debating Greek philosophers, who accused him of “advocating foreign gods” (Acts 17:18), a serious offence. Still, the Athenians seem curious.

As a springboard for his words, Paul mentions an altar he has seen, “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD” (Acts 17:23). Seizing upon this show of religious devotion, Paul says that he is not so much advocating foreign gods as he is proclaiming the one, true God who the Athenians are ignorant of—the Creator who is Lord of heaven and earth (Acts 17:24). In verse 26, he proclaims that all nations are a result of God’s creative work and intention. Moreover, God is over them and their leaders as their rightful Lord. Throughout history, nations rise, expand, and fall—all according to the will of God.

In verse 27, Paul conveys God’s intention by appointing times and boundaries for the nations. Paul says, “God did this so that they would seek Him” (Acts 17:27). Yet the seeking is not without difficulty. According to Paul, those seeking can “perhaps reach out for him and find him” (Acts 17:27). This language conveys the idea of

groping in the dark. Paul reassures the gathered crowd, “[God] is not far from any one of us” (Acts 17:27). It explains Paul’s mission, for it is tragic when God is not known by men and women who might be seekers. The city of Athens was full of idols and competing religious ideas (see Acts 17:16, 18). The true God remained unknown to them, obscured by pagan beliefs. Paul desperately wants the people of Athens to know the truth of the gospel, which is not only for Jews, but for all nations.

As he continues, Paul appeals to literary sources that would be familiar to his Greek audience. He shows that he has studied their poets and religious ideas, not only his Jewish Scriptures. Since the words of famous philosophers and poets carry weight for his audience, he quotes what serves his argument. This does not amount to wholesale approval for everything these writers say, but Paul knows that all truth is God’s truth. In other words, if something is wise and true, it belongs to God—no matter the source.

In verse 28, Paul says about God, “For in him we live and move and have our being.” He is actually quoting a line from the Cretan philosopher, Epimenides. Paul uses it to argue that all people owe their existence to the Creator—the “unknown God” who is in entirely knowable. Paul adds the poetic phrase, “We are his offspring” (Acts 17:28), originally attributed to the Stoic philosopher Aratus. Aratus wrote the phrase in a poem to Zeus—the right idea about the wrong deity! Paul makes the phrase point back to the true Creator, for all nations are from His creative design.

1 What is God’s desire for people of all nations?

2 Given that God is always near, what keeps some people from finding Him?

3 What can we learn from Paul’s strategy of quoting sources familiar to the Athenians?

Longing for Peace

"Hey dad, do you know about the attacks of September 11?" My son was sitting in the kitchen reading a children's history book. *Oh boy, I thought, I wonder what a kid's book says on that topic.*

I stopped washing the dishes. "Yeah," I said, "I remember when it happened. It was a pretty big deal."

As we talked, I was trying to figure out how much he already knew. Kids grow and pick up all kinds of knowledge about how dark the world can be; but my heart as a dad thinks, *Not yet. He doesn't need to know just yet.*

"Wasn't there something about Afghanistan?" he asked, and I explained that many countries went to war after the attacks.

"Are there wars going on today?" he asked. "What are they about?"

I remember I said something clumsy about "land disputes," but then kind of trailed off. What I really wanted to say was, *War is terrible, violence begets violence, but someday God will make it all right. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

But before I could open my mouth, my son had already moved on. He was roaming the house in search of his next game or adventure. I turned back to the dishes. I felt myself longing for peace, the way people sometimes do at Christmas or when they hear a song imagining a better world.

Can such longings be realized? Do prayers for peace get stuck in the ceiling, or do they reach the ears of someone who can actually bring peace to the nations? Scripture teaches that Jesus' death and resurrection changes everything. The kingdom of God has good news for the nations! If we could only glimpse the end of history, we would see an abiding peace.

1 How do you answer a question like, "What causes war and conflict in the world today?"

2 What is the last event that made you long for peace?

3 How can followers of Jesus share a message of peace for the nations?

Peace Forevermore

In a world where conflict and violence are ever-present, the anticipation of a new heaven and new earth, marked by eternal peace, is an incredible promise.

As you read or watch the news this week, pay special attention to the reports about wars and conflicts. Pause your news feed to pray for those stories. Then thank God that, when Jesus returns, those conflicts will be resolved and peace will reign, forever.

Key Text

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

—Isaiah 2:3 KJV

Many peoples will come and say,

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the temple of the God of Jacob.

He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths.”

The law will go out from Zion,

the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

—Isaiah 2:3 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of March 30 through April 4

- Mon.** John 14:1–4—Many Dwellings in the Father’s House.
- Tue.** 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18—Encouraging Words of Hope.
- Wed.** Job 19:23–27—I Know That My Redeemer Lives.
- Thu.** Isaiah 26:12–19—Awake and Sing for Joy.
- Fri.** Psalm 118:15–24—Give Thanks to the Lord.
- Sat.** 1 Corinthians 15:13–20—Christ Is Risen from the Dead.

Next Week: 1 Corinthians 15:13–20, 51–58

We will talk about bodily resurrection. What are some euphemisms we use for death and dying? Why do we default to speaking in those terms?