

Peace to End All Wars: What Christ's Birth Has Done and Will Do

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A story from WWI reminds us that there's still hope in the worst of times. In December of 1914, British soldiers heard German troops singing Christmas Carols. In the dark, huddled in their cold trenches, the British soldiers wondered what to make of this. But soon, they joined in the singing. And so, through Christmas Eve, the two warring armies celebrated the birth of their Messiah.

Amazingly, the Christmas spirit continued the next day, as "[some German soldiers emerged from their trenches and approached the Allied lines across no-man's-land, calling out "Merry Christmas" in their enemies' native tongues.](#)" For the rest of the day these enemies traded gifts, played soccer, and celebrated peace that only Christ can bring.

More than a century later, with the bloodiest century on record standing between us, the [Christmas Truce of 1914](#) flickers a light of hope that only Christ can bring. Still, the peace Christ brings intends to do more than foster temporary cease fires. As Micah 4:3 says of the Lord,

He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide disputes for strong nations far away; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

What a day that will be when wars cease! But for now, we live in a world filled with violence. Therefore, in what way does Christ bring peace, and how can we know peace this Christmas?

Micah's Road to Peace

In Micah 4 the prophet begins by looking to the future when the nations come to Zion.

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, and many nations shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

When nations come to worship the Lord, wars will cease (v. 3) as God's Word is taught from Zion to the ends of the earth. Gone will be rebellion against God, because those on earth will "walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever" (v. 5). The nations who followed their own gods will forsake their idols to come to Zion.

As Micah 4:6-13 displays, God shall redeem a remnant from Israel and attached to them will be others. Verses 6-7 read,

In that day, declares the Lord, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away and those whom I have afflicted; and the lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and forevermore.

In the same day ("that day") when peace is given, the Lord will bring to himself an afflicted people. God will gather this 'remnant' to bless those whom he previously cursed (cf. Hosea 6:1-3). To Israel, he promises that the nations will come to them, their kingship will be established as before (v. 8). But first, Micah writes in verses 9-13 that they must go into exile.

Writing in the days of Assyria's conquest of Israel, Micah says that before Israel's kingdom is established in peace, judgment from Assyria must come (5:5-6; cf. Isaiah 10). He says also in verse 10, from Babylon the Lord will rescue and you redeem you from your enemies. While the world gloats over their destruction, "they do not know the thoughts of the LORD; they do not understand his plan" (v. 11).

God will bring a remnant of Israel back to Zion (4:11-13; 5:3), along with a multitude from the nations (4:1-2). He will bring a king who will "shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God." This is what Micah 5:4 says, and it continues, "And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace" (Micah 5:4--5).

The Prince of Peace

Peace has been elusive since Cain killed Abel. In no generation has there been absence of warfare. The promise of lasting disarmament (Micah 4:3) is only brought by one man---the shepherd king whose birthplace is Bethlehem. Standing between the promise of peace in Micah 4:3 and its fulfillment in Micah 5:4-5 is the announcement of where this prince of peace would be born,

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. (Micah 5:2)

Bethlehem was the birthplace of king David, and it has ever since been known as the city of David. And it is again from this city where the coming king will be born. As God brought a king from Bethlehem when judges ruled and chaos reigned (that's the message of Judges, see Judges 21:25), so too God will establish his people under a new king, after they return from exile (Micah 4:10). This shepherd-king from Bethlehem will lead God's people home and give them lasting peace.

Peace Now and Not Yet

Today, one might look at this prophecy as having failed due to our ongoing wars, as if God is 28 centuries overdue on his word. But that would be to ignore Christmas.

The story of Jesus' birth tells us that the child born in a Bethlehem stable is the king God promised to bring peace. In Luke 2:14, the heavenly host announced the promised peace: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

Jesus is the shepherd-king who brings peace. Matthew 2:6 cites Micah 5:2 when the Gentile magi come and worship the king of the Jews.

In the birth of Christ, the promise of peace has come. And yet, in a world full of war, the peace God gives has not come in its fullness.

What Christ offers today is not peace between nations (see Micah 4:4). Jesus offers peace with God (Romans 5:1) and one another (Mark 9:50). As Ephesians 2 puts it, Christ is our peace (v. 14; cf. Micah 5:5); he has made peace between Jew and Gentiles (v. 15); and he proclaims peace to those far and near (v. 17), so that through him, his work on the cross, and his message of reconciliation he turns enemies into friends.

While the nations rage, the Spirit of Christ works through the preaching of the gospel and the blessed gift of saving grace and spiritual peace (cf. Acts 4:23-31).

Peace is the gift God gives to all who trust in him (John 16:33); it is the nature of God's kingdom (Romans 14:17). And while such peace has not yet eradicated war, it has produced incredible results in this age---like the Christmas Truce. How much more in the age to come? Read Revelation 21-22.

Holding Fast to the Prince of Peace

At Christmas, we marvel at the peace Christ gives during trouble. And yet we pray and yearn for more. Like children of Israel who longed for the Christ-child to come, we hope and pray and preach the gospel of peace with absolute confidence, that one day all wars will cease.

This is what Micah proclaimed. Its fulfillment began in the birth of Christ, and it will continue as his birth brings about new births. Eventually his death and resurrection will make all things new, and there will be no more war, no more death, no more tears, no more terror.

Until that day, let us hold fast to the Prince of Peace.

Merry Christmas! ds