

SESSION 2

LOOKING FORWARD TO PEACE

Leader pages on pp. 106-109

THE POINT:
WE HAVE PEACE WHEN WE HAVE CHRIST.

ISAIAH 8:20-9:7

^{8:20} Go to God's instruction and testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, there will be no dawn for them.

²¹ They will wander through the land, dejected and hungry. When they are famished, they will become enraged, and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God.

²² They will look toward the earth and see only distress, darkness, and the gloom of affliction, and they will be driven into thick darkness.

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^{9:1} Nevertheless, the gloom of the distressed land will not be like that of the former times when he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali. But in the future he will bring honor to the way of the sea, to the land east of the Jordan, and to Galilee of the nations.

² The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness.

³ You have enlarged the nation and increased its joy. The people have rejoiced before you as they rejoice at harvest time and as they rejoice when dividing spoils.

⁴ For you have shattered their oppressive yoke and the rod on their shoulders, the staff of their oppressor, just as you did on the day of Midian.

⁵ For every trampling boot of battle and the bloodied garments of war will be burned as fuel for the fire.

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⁶ **For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.**

⁷ The dominion will be vast, and its prosperity will never end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever. The zeal of the LORD of Armies will accomplish this.

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MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Looking upward (v. 21)—If the people had turned to God in their distress, they would have been delivered.

People walking in darkness (v. 2)—Darkness figuratively describes both the evil way the people were living as well as the absence of God (who is often associated with light).

Day of Midian (v. 4)—This is a reference to Gideon's victory over the Midianites in the days of the judges (Judg. 6–8).

Lord of Armies (v. 7)—The phrase refers to God's command over the armies of heaven and of Israel. God is the sovereign, omnipotent Lord of the universe.

HOW DOES THE LIGHT OF CHRIST GIVE YOU PEACE?

Hallmark Christmas movies seem to come earlier every year. Some love them. Others, not so much. One thing that's great about these Christmas movies is that they are predictably, inevitably heartwarming. A typical movie occurs in a picturesque small town where a handsome, career-focused bachelor from the big city reconnects with his high school friend. She's recently widowed. A conflict occurs around her cookie shop that is about to be shut down because of some new ordinance passed by the antagonist mayor. But romance between the city guy and his old friend ensues, and the Christmas spirit rekindles the heart of an antagonist which culminates with a festive celebration and a comical, romantic mistletoe kiss (cue the snowmaker). Hot cocoa, cookies, and peace prevail.

It's great for an escape, but life is a little different. Perfect endings and peace are hard to come by on Earth, but we all long for it, and perhaps that why those movies, no matter how predictable, continue to be celebrated. Advent celebrates a different story. It happened in a broken world, full of injustice until the one and only Creator stepped from glory to the grit of this war-torn world to offer us everlasting peace.

Peace Alludes in Darkness // Isaiah 8:20-22

Isaiah presents a fork in the road for the Judeans. They had to choose the Word of the Lord or stumble in darkness. The people's choices led them only into darkness, despair, and distress. In fact, these ancient people fell into the same traps that people fall into today. They would be seeking the mediums on TV. They would be searching for the guru trending on social media. They would binge watch shows promoting the culture of death we see today. They would follow the latest conspiracy theories on ancient aliens and paranormal pulp that saturate our world. Some things never change.

Whenever we choose to be captivated by false, yet intriguing voices, we end up as blind as these Judeans that Isaiah faced in his fragmented society. The truth he spoke was that people are blind, deaf, and helpless when they seek truth outside the reaches of God's grace. The people had fallen into meaningless pursuits.

They had no doubt forgotten King Solomon's words: "When I considered all that I had accomplished and what I had labored to achieve, I



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found everything to be futile and a pursuit of the wind. There was nothing to be gained under the sun" (Eccl. 2:11).

Isaiah set the stage for his message of a Messiah by identifying the total lack of peace that all these ideas and influences proliferated across the land. When the soul has no peace, the mind will do almost anything to get a taste of it, even if it is cheap and fleeting peace.

It's more than a little ironic that the time we set aside to celebrate peace on Earth is often our most frantic time of the year, filled with shopping lists, travel plans, and high expectations. Whatever emotions and disappointments that lay dormant among your extended family are usually heightened. But when we allow Jesus into the celebration, peace reigns.

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF PEOPLE GOING TO GOD TO FIND PEACE?

Peace Comes in the Light of the World //

Isaiah 9:1-5

The people of Israel knew all about darkness. As we saw in chapter 8, they dabbled in the darkness of spiritism and idolatry. The prophet Isaiah escorts us from the gloom of darkness in chapter 8 to the glory of light in chapter 9. A light dawns (v. 2), joy abounds (v. 3), injustice is crushed (v. 4), and the implements of war are destroyed (v. 5). There's a harvest on the horizon as well as freedom. These kinds of things happen when the light appears. When peace comes, disarmament happens! How can this be? Since Adam and Eve made their quick departure from the garden, it seems like the whole world has been in an arms race. Historians note that over the past 3,400 years, humans have lived without war for only 268 years.⁴

We've witnessed the devastating consequence of war over the past year in the Middle East. On a more personal level, we see conflict in families, churches, communities, and government. So, what makes us believe that peace could ever truly reign here on earth? It begins with the One who is praised in this jubilant song.

Jack Dawson painted this idea perfectly. In a painting he entitled, "Peace in the Midst of the Storm," we see a terrible, troubled, rocky cliff enduring a violent thunderstorm. Lightning erupts as the rain pelts the rocks. But where is the peace? You must look closely to find it. Cloistered in a small hollow part of the cliff, you can see a dove and her chicks sleeping. It's clear what Dawson was communicating.



DIGGING DEEPER WHO WERE THE MIDIANITES?

In Judges 6, the Israelites did evil in God's sight. They were handed over to Midian and oppressed for seven years. The Israelites created hiding spaces in mountains and caves, but their crops and their flocks were destroyed by the Midianites leaving the Israelites in poverty. What happened on the day of Midian? Later in chapter 6, God calls Gideon a valiant warrior and tells him to go and defeat Midian. God tells Gideon, "You will strike Midian down as if it were one man (Judg. 6:16)." Gideon obeys God and God narrows the number of his troops down to 300. Then God equips them with trumpets and sends them to the enemy's camp. By God's strength, the Midianites were overtaken and "no longer a threat (Judg. 7)." The reference to the day of Midian is a reminder that man lives under the oppressive yoke of sin, but God's strength, not our own, will overcome it and establish peace for eternity.

How has the Lord defeated enemies in your life?

We can experience peace when the world seems to be falling apart. Peace is found in the Rock. Mysteriously, even though we yearn for the serene moments where all is right with the world, we often find a deeper peace when it seems everything is falling all around us. We discover an uncommon peace when we are left with only Jesus. The old saying is true, "When Jesus is all you have, it is then that you discover He is all you need."

If there is one thing about darkness we can appreciate, it's that it keeps drawing us to the Light. The more darkness we experience, the more magnificent and powerful the great Light of Christ becomes.

HOW WOULD LIGHT CHANGE THE EXPERIENCE OF PEOPLE WALKING, STRUGGLING, AND LIVING IN DARKNESS?

Peace Comes through the Prince of Peace // Isaiah 9:6-7

Finally, we reach the allegro, the lively, cheerful part of this Messianic hymn. Up to this point, everything has been written in past tense. Now it pivots to a future tense. The pace quickens. The lyrics which addressed God using the word "You" change as well. These words are now sung to God's people: "Us." The familiar words proclaim, "For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us." The story is just getting started. The book of Micah gives us even more context:



"Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; one will come from you to be ruler over Israel for me. His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times. Therefore, Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of the ruler's brothers will return to the people of Israel. He will stand and shepherd them in the strength of the LORD, in the majestic name of the LORD his God. They will live securely, for then his greatness will extend to the ends of the earth. He will be their peace" (Mic. 5:2-5).

The providence of God becomes even clearer. A Son, born in Bethlehem, will be given to us. But wait! There's more! He will be called, "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6).

Pause for a moment and reflect on each of these titles:

- **Wonderful Counselor.** He is not too lofty to whisper truths and encouragement to us. He is an ever-present companion with wisdom and comfort. The Hebrew phrase could be translated, "a wonder planner." Every human heart yearns for wonder, if you want more wonder, seek the Planner of wonder.
- **Mighty God.** His arm isn't too weak to lift you from the insurmountable weight of your burdens or setbacks.
- **Eternal Father.** He's not going anywhere. He was, and is, and is to come!
- **Prince of Peace.** He is present and available to bring peace and restoration to every broken relationship. He brings balance and serenity to any discombobulated dilemma we encounter. Chaos is His specialty. The word "Prince" isn't just to be interpreted as a royal title. It also carries the idea of a manager. And let us not forget that peace is the word shalom, meaning to be made whole and complete. Our Savior is a manager who is constantly putting the pieces of our life together so that we can be whole.

WHICH OF THESE NAMES OF JESUS BRINGS YOU PEACE FROM GOD?

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Fast forward a few centuries to a three-horse town called Nazareth where a young girl receives this word: "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1:31-33).

The fingerprints of the Divine are everywhere. Notice the details. God is in the details. But also notice the span of time. It's hard for us to see the hand of God when things seem to move so slowly. Oftentimes, the work of God takes centuries, not exactly the length of a Hallmark movie. Everything is in His time. Even today, we can become frustrated that God's timetable differs from ours. We look at everything around us here and everywhere else, and we squirm impatiently and begin to doubt God's plan. We forget that we aren't the main characters in the story.

Our part is small but important. We pray for peace in Jerusalem just as prophets and poets of old have prayed. We might not see peace today, but peace is what we are hoping and praying for. Even greater, peace is something we can create and celebrate. Our longings are not in vain.

WHAT HOPE DOES THIS PASSAGE BRING TO THOSE WHO KNOW NO PEACE?

DID YOU KNOW?

During the Christmas season we publicly celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world. As we proclaim the importance of Jesus's birth, we may encounter individuals that challenge that Jesus is the only way. They believe Jesus is a way, but not the only way and that all religions eventually point to the same god. Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam may accept that Jesus Christ existed, but they do not believe who Jesus says He is. Jesus is the Messiah sent to save us from our sins. He was born of a virgin and lived a sinless life. He is God on earth wrapped in flesh. He is the only way. In John 14:6 Jesus tells us who He is. "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Biblical Truth: Salvation cannot be earned, is only received by faith as a gift from God.

How will you engage in a conversation this Christmas season with someone who does not believe that Jesus is the only way?

LIVE IT

How will you live in the peace that only Christ can bring?

Peace, our shalom, isn't just an ideal, it is a process that God is working out in our lives. He's making us whole. In turn, we are ambassadors, bringing shalom to a broken world. Shalom is a call to the adventure of reconciliation and restoration. Let's join Him.

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- **Listen:** In your time with God, read and listen to the song, "Oh, Holy Night," and reflect on the peace God gives in times of conflict.
- **Meditate:** Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Don't let your heart be troubled or fearful" (John 14:27). Spend a minute reflecting of the unique peace God gives.
- **Reconcile:** As we reflect on the concept of shalom, ask God to reveal to you someone whom you should reconcile or forgive. This week, initiate reconciliation in one relationship and leave the results to God.

DAILY READINGS

1. LOOKING FOR PEACE // ISAIAH 9:6-7

Before the birth of Christ, the Israelites suffered under the powerful rule of the Roman government. They suppressed the political and military affairs of the Israeli country. This caused great distress as the Israelites struggled to meet the demands of their suppressors. But the Jews were looking for peace. It had long been prophesied that peace would come, and it would come in the form of a Child. Jesus was that Child. He was born to bring peace not only to the Israelites but to the entire world. That's the reason we celebrate at Christmas. Jesus came as the Prince of Peace; and when He was born, peace was declared throughout the earth (Luke 2:14).

Let us rejoice that Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, is born. He is the peace we need.

2. A HEART AT PEACE // PROVERBS 14:30

We live in a stress-filled culture—family problems, crime, poverty, war. Many people may not be aware of this, but when stress goes unchecked it can create issues in our bodies. Heart disease is one of those issues. Stress can wear down our physical hearts. But on the other side of that, the Bible tells us that a heart at peace will give life. At some time or another, we all go through something, but God is greater than our stresses; therefore, we can take our stresses to Him. No matter what is happening in our lives, God will give us a heart at peace.

Our loving God wants us to live in peace. He wants to give us a heart of peace, so trust Him with every stress.

3. EVERLASTING PEACE // REVELATION 21:4

In the book of Revelation, Jesus gave us a glimpse of what it will be like in heaven. It can be very encouraging to know that beyond this world, there is a new world of everlasting peace. It's described as a place where "[Jesus] will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more." What a wonderful place

heaven will be. And consider this, that no matter what you are going through in this life, it's not the final word. God has a place that is far better than anything we can imagine.

Heaven will be a place with no anger, no hate, no sadness, no meanness. There will be none of the negative things we experience on this earth. It will be in a place of everlasting peace.

4. THE JOY OF THE LORD // NEHEMIAH 8:10

Have you ever cried because of a mistake you have made? Undeniable shortcomings can cause great sadness. But that's the place where God wants us to be. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matt. 5:4). What greater joy than to know that God can bear our burdens. We just need to take them to Him in prayer. Nehemiah learned this lesson. He and the Israelites wept because of past sin. But God told Nehemiah, "This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep" (Neh. 8:9). Then God told Nehemiah, "Because the joy of the LORD is your strength."

God will take us from weakness to strength when we come to Him with nothing. We will receive the joy of the Lord.

5. PROMISE OF JOY // PSALM 97:11

God has promised us that those who are righteous will see light, and those who are upright in heart will have joy. But this promise is fleeting because many times we fail to live in righteousness with upright hearts. When we fail God, instead of feeling the blessing of this promise, we become overwhelmed with guilt. We know that God has commanded an obedience that we can't quite meet. So, we walk away joyless. But there's hope if we don't question the promises of God. He has promised that we will have joy and light when we unreservedly trust Him. We must trust that God's grace and love is greater than all our sin.

Open your eyes and see what God has promised. He will give light and joy to those who trust Him.