

WEEK

2

The Prince of Peace

Amid the pain and violence of our world, we hold fast to this hope: One day Jesus will usher in true and ultimate peace. He also brings us spiritual peace in the here and now as we experience redemption and live by the values of his kingdom. Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

A Vision of Peace

CAROLYN ARENDS

*Nation will not
take up sword
against nation,
nor will they
train for war
anymore.*

ISAIAH 2:4

Perhaps the greatest evidence that the Promised One is the Mighty God is this: He is the one—the *only* one—with a power great enough to bring lasting peace. He not only brings peace, he *is* peace. The Prince of Peace.

We are, of course, accustomed to a world in which peace is maddeningly elusive. In 2003, journalist Chris Hedges set out to determine whether there have been any sustained periods of peace on the human record. Defining *war* as any “active conflict that has claimed more than 1,000 lives,” he reviewed 3,400 years of history and discovered just 268 war-free years. In other words, approximately 92 percent of recorded history is marked by active conflict.

Of course, the people of ancient Israel did not need a journalist to tell them that human existence is plagued by wars and rumors of wars. They had



plenty of firsthand, trauma-inducing experience with conflict, violence, and oppression. What they *did* need was a prophet who could provide them with a vision of peace vivid enough to counter the horrific images already seared into their memories.

Isaiah brought them—and us—just such a vision. Consider the images in the second chapter of Isaiah. All the nations come streaming together to the mountain of God. That’s where they discover that the supposed dichotomy between peace and justice has been false all along. The Lord brings peace *through* justice. He judges between the nations and settles disputes, resolving not only wars but also their underlying causes.

And then watch what happens when humans find themselves in the presence of the Prince of Peace: The swords and spears they’ve brought to the mountain—weapons they’ve

long assumed were necessary to their survival—seem suddenly out of place. The people lay down their arms. But the Prince of Peace has something even more beautiful in mind. Soon, the people are working together to convert their weapons into gardening tools. Human ingenuity is redeemed and redirected from destructive ends to creative ends.

Isaiah is not naive. He has seen the brutality that can and does characterize the human condition. But he’s also caught a glimpse of the verdant, vibrant, peace-infused future the Prince of Peace has planned for his creation. It’s the sort of vision that gives a weary prophet hope—a vision about the sort of prince who will one day cause angels to exclaim, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:14).

Meditate on Isaiah 2:1-5
and 9:6-7.

What most strikes you about Isaiah’s vision of peace? How does this hope speak into our world today? Pray, expressing praise to the promised Prince of Peace.

The Prince of Shalom

CAROLYN ARENDS



*Water will gush forth
in the wilderness and
streams in the desert.*

ISAIAH 35:6

The Hebrew word that Isaiah uses to describe the peace that the Promised One will bring is *shalom*. It's a beautiful word that conveys wholeness, harmony, and health. Where we might settle for uneasy truces and Band-Aid fixes as proxies for peace, *shalom* represents something much more robust. Beyond the cessation of war, *shalom* is a transformation of the conditions that lead to war in the first place.

When there is *shalom*, everything gets to function the way it was created to. *Shalom* rejects the idea of life as a zero-sum game and dares to imagine the comprehensive flourishing of every person and every thing, all at the same time. Theologian Darrell Johnson teaches that *shalom* describes “a psycho-somatic-relational-racial-

economic-spiritual wholeness.” In chapter 35, Isaiah depicts that wholeness in beautifully poetic language.

Let’s start with the psychological wholeness the Prince of Shalom can offer us. According to Isaiah, there is a peace on offer that says, “Be strong, do not fear” to our “fearful hearts” (v. 4) until “gladness and joy” overtake us and “sorrow and sighing . . . flee away” (v. 10).

And what of somatic (or bodily) wholeness? In one vivid image after another, Isaiah describes physical healing: The blind see, the deaf hear, the lame “leap like a deer” and the mute “shout for joy” (vv. 5–6). Even the creation itself is healed, as “water will gush forth in the wilderness” (v. 6) and “the wilderness will rejoice and blossom” like a crocus flower bursting into bloom (vv. 1–2).

As Isaiah 35 builds to its culmination, we are offered a vibrant vision of relational, economic, and spiritual wholeness in the depiction of a redeemed people walking and singing together on a highway of holiness. There are no lions there, Isaiah tells us, and we can safely assume the way is free from all other predatory or opportunistic foes. The people enter Zion together, where “everlasting joy will crown their heads” (v. 10).

This ultimate shalom, Isaiah tells us, is our future. But there’s even more to it than that. Author Jonathan Martin suggests in *Prototype* that, because the Prince of Peace gives us his Spirit, we are called to be “people from the future”—people who practice shalom here and now.

This Advent, when you face a situation in which peace is sorely needed, ask the Lord: *What action or attitude would most move this situation toward the comprehensive flourishing of everyone and everything involved?* You may find that the Prince of Shalom makes you a stream in the desert and fills you with gladness and joy.

Contemplate Isaiah 35.

What words or phrases would you use to describe the peace envisioned here? How does it speak to our future hope? How does it speak to the work of the Prince of Peace in our lives today?

Peaceful Rest

ADRIEL SANCHEZ



*In that day the Root
of Jesse will stand
as a banner for the
peoples; the nations
will rally to him, and
his resting place will
be glorious.*

ISAIAH 11:10

One of the great tensions we often feel during Advent is the disparity between God’s promise of peace and the presence of war and violence in our world. Isaiah foretold that the Messiah’s reign would bring a world without worry. Picture a mother at perfect rest, watching her children play by the cobra’s den and not leaping into action. As a father of five, I find this is hard to imagine!

Parents know that feeling of overwhelming panic when their child approaches danger. During the Messiah’s reign, as Isaiah describes it, that feeling will go extinct.

But in our lived experience, the world doesn’t look anything like this. Thomas Hardy’s nearly 100-year-old poem “Christmas: 1924” laments,

“Peace upon earth!” was said.

We sing it,
 And pay a million priests to
 bring it.
 After two thousand years of mass
 We’ve got as far as poison-gas.

How do we reconcile the promise of peaceful rest with the reality of poison gas—or ballistic missiles?

The answer lies in the tension of the *now and not yet*. During Isaiah’s day, the promises God had made to King David in 2 Samuel 7—promises of an enduring and blessed kingdom—seemed broken. The house of David resembled a felled tree. But from its dry stump a Spirit-filled branch would emerge: Jesus, the Son of David. He would bring peace to both Jews and Gentiles, standing as a rallying flag to unite hostile nations (Isa. 11:10; Eph. 2:15).

This is realized *now* in part through the church, where even tax collectors like Levi and zealots like Simon find peace through Christ’s blood. God’s worldwide temple is made of living stones, and the bricks God builds with are chosen from every tribe, tongue, and nation. Today we can experience the promised peace of the messiah-king who says to the weary, “I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

But the *not yet* of Isaiah’s prophecy will arrive with Jesus’ second advent (Isa. 11:4; 2 Thess. 2:8). This is anticipated by the Edenic imagery

of subdued predatory animals in Isaiah’s prophecy. Jesus will one day perfectly subdue creation, calming deadly beasts and turning even a serpent into a child’s plaything. The glorified world of the new creation will ultimately satisfy our deepest longings for justice and peace.

Advent reminds us of the glorious rest given through Jesus’s first coming and anticipates the full restoration that will accompany his return. In this time of tension—between the now and not yet—God calls us to be marked by his kingdom grace, a people who pursue justice for the oppressed and spread the knowledge of Christ in our communities (Isa. 11:9; 2 Cor. 2:14). It is through this knowledge that weary sinners receive the glorious rest of Christ’s kingdom.

Ponder Isaiah 11:1-10.

Which descriptions of peace most draw your attention? Why? Pray, expressing your longing for the peace Christ brings in the now—and in the not yet.

The Healing Peace of Jesus

BETH STOVELL

*A bruised reed
he will not break,
and a smoldering
wick he will not
snuff out.*

ISAIAH 42:3

Isaiah and Matthew knew what it means that Jesus is the Prince of Peace. When Matthew described Jesus as fulfilling Isaiah 42:1-4, we see an image of *shalom*, the Hebrew word for *peace*. Unlike our often narrow understanding of peace as simply being “without war,” *shalom* encompasses a broad picture of how God makes everything wrong with the world *right*. This *shalom* of God is a peace that brings order out of chaos and justice in place of injustice.

Isaiah 42 starts by introducing God’s chosen one, “my servant.” This is the first of what some call the Servant Songs; the other songs are found in 49:1-6, 50:4-9, and 52:13-53:12. They tell a story of God’s servant enacting salvation to the ends of the earth (in chapters 42, 49, 50) and saving God’s people through the servant’s own suffering (in 52-53).

Here, in 42:1-4, the servant is the one God holds up and delights in. This



servant brings God joy! God's Spirit is on this servant, so that he can bring justice to the nations. This isn't a message of peace only for Israel, but for the whole world.

One might expect this Spirit-filled servant to be loud and proud about his chosen status with God, but instead he is characterized by his humility. He's not shouting out in the streets, but instead he's caring for those who are hurting. He's someone who can see that a reed is bruised—that a person is feeling trampled—but he won't let them break. He's someone who holds a person who feels like a tiny candle on the verge of going out, and he won't let their light fade. What does it mean to bring peace to those who are barely hanging on? The servant's quest for justice is characterized by gentleness. He sees those experiencing vulnerability; he won't let them fall.

Matthew 12 describes how Jesus fulfills Isaiah's prophecy. It may look at

first like Jesus is fulfilling this prophecy by asking his disciples to keep quiet (v. 16), similar to the quiet of the servant in Isaiah 42. But if we look at the entire chapter, Matthew shows us something different. Jesus, as the servant, cares for those who need healing. In the passages before and after verses 15–21, the emphasis is on how Jesus healed on the Sabbath (vv. 1–14), how Jesus “healed all who were ill” (v. 15), and how he healed a demon-possessed man, bringing him sight and the ability to speak (v. 22).

Jesus' kind of peace meets us in our weakest places, transforming injustice into justice, setting right what has been bruised, and he does this with the gentleness of his loving touch.

Reflect on Isaiah 42:1–4 and Matthew 12:15–21.

Optional: Also read Matthew 12:1–14, 22–37.

How have you experienced the shalom of Jesus that Isaiah and Matthew describe? What other scenes in the Gospels come to mind as examples of Jesus' peace?

Our Jubilean Hope

SARAH SHIN



*He has sent me
to bind up the
brokenhearted, to
proclaim freedom
for the captives and
release from darkness
for the prisoners, to
proclaim the year of
the Lord's favor.*

ISAIAH 61:1–2

When Jesus unfurled the scroll and read Isaiah 61, his hearers had been waiting for many generations for the Promised One—the Prince of Peace, the bringer of justice and freedom. They'd seen countless wars, successive occupying empires, and cultural changes that disoriented them as they navigated having faith in such circumstances.

We too live in times of geopolitical chaos, violence, and confusion. We too wait for the Prince of Peace to come in glory, to bring the final resurrection and restoration to places of death and mourning. It hurts to wait. It fills us with longing.

Isaiah 61:1–4 refers to the Jubilee Year in Leviticus 25—a radical command that called for restoring land and people who had been sold into

slavery because of debt. The Jubilee Year was the year of the Lord's favor, when debt-slaves would be freed and homes and lands would be restored. God desired every daughter and son of Israel to be restored to *home*. Yet Isaiah 61 also speaks of God's vengeance—and Jesus unsettlingly says that he has come to bring not peace but the sword and division (Matt. 10:34–36). How then, could Jesus be the bringer of peace?

When Isaiah speaks of the Prince of Peace, he's speaking of *shalom*—which is not only the absence of violence or evil, but also the fullness of a good life—of loving one's neighbor to see her flourishing and following a loving God each day.

The weekly Sabbath breaks our rhythms of work with rest and *shalom*, and the Jubilee is the Sabbath of Sabbaths. It is the *pinnacle* of *shalom*. So when Jesus declares the arrival of jubilean *shalom*, he not only offers salvation from judgment after this life but also asserts that *he* is the arrival of deliverance from slavery to both monetary and spiritual debt—into freedom and restoration in this life and beyond.

Thus, Jesus' birth and life are more than a prelude to the Cross. Indeed, his birth, his life, the Cross, and the Resurrection are all part of the larger story of God delivering his people—

a people who trust God and love their neighbor. As the Israelites were called to trust in God for deliverance and provision in the wilderness, so we are called to lean upon the Lord for the same—against all odds and in war, political turmoil, or wandering. And we're called to love our neighbor as part of that active hope.

Jesus inaugurated the Jubilee in the shadow of the occupying Roman Empire, and he invites us, despite the shadows all around, to follow him and to live in his jubilean kingdom. He bids us to actively yearn, hope, and wait for his resurrection power to break through in unexpected ways as he moves and lives in us.

Consider Isaiah 61:1–4 and Luke 4:16–21. *Optional: Also read Leviticus 25.*

How does the idea of Jubilee enrich your reading of Isaiah's prophecy? Of Jesus identifying himself as its fulfillment? Of Jesus as the Prince of Peace?

Born to Be Bruised

ALICIA AKINS

*He was pierced for
our transgressions,
he was crushed for
our iniquities; the
punishment that
brought us peace
was on him, and
by his wounds we
are healed.*

ISAIAH 53:5



Expectation mounted as God's people awaited their Messiah's arrival, just as we now await the celebration of his birth. Yet this fourth Servant Song in Isaiah reads much more like a eulogy than a birth announcement. It speaks of one who is not just coming, but of one who is *sent*. Each part of the servant's biography is imbued with purpose.

The servant's story is no mere tragedy. On the contrary, this song begins and ends by affirming the promised servant's triumph and exaltation. The middle of the song fleshes out *how* he will succeed: through suffering. Physically, the servant would be marred, pierced, crushed, and disfigured. Emotionally, his soul would be

weighed down with sorrow, suffering, and anguish. Socially, he would be rejected, despised, and oppressed. His body, spirit, and relationships would be broken. This inestimable yet unenviable life would be cut short, undervalued, and profaned. “Yet,” Isaiah says, “it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer.”

But why? For what purpose? Because “the punishment that brought us peace was on him.” His sorrow-sunk shoulders would carry the grief of the world, his crushing would remove our guilt, his welts would secure our healing, and his ostracization and judgment would purchase our peace. As messianic prophecies, these songs point to a set-apart king-priest who would one day rule and make offerings for God’s people. In the New Testament, both Philip and Peter see Christ as this song’s fulfillment. Philip explains the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch using this passage (Acts 8:26–40). Peter uses this song to exhort persecuted Christ-followers to endure because their path of suffering was well trod by their Savior (1 Pet. 2:22–24).

As we reflect on Jesus as the Prince of Peace, this passage challenges the tranquil and idyllic images of peace we may conjure up in our minds. Our peace was won through gruesome violence against Jesus—it cost him a lifetime

punctuated by sorrow, being misunderstood, and rejection. This suffering is what awaited the peace-bringing baby of our carols.

Our image of the Christ child swaddled and held tenderly by his parents contrasts sharply with the difficult truth of this Servant Song—of the Father not only sending the Son to an early death, but purposing it. While most human parents hope and pray for bright futures for their children, here we see a love-driven death mission that will secure the survival of many. This song doesn’t only tell us about the servant sent to suffer, but also of the Father’s heart: eager to save his people at any expense, even at the gravest personal cost.

Contemplate

Isaiah 52:13–53:12.

Optional: Also read the third Servant Song in Isaiah 50:4–9.

How does the suffering described here contrast with your vision of peace? How does it change or enrich it?

Jesus Is Our Peace

KELLY M. KAPIC

Two truths can be in conflict, and yet if they *are* true, we need to affirm them both.

First, our world is filled with genuine pain and trouble. As the Old Testament prophets warned, our rebellion against God has twisted us and our world. To pretend otherwise is to be naive at best or hard-hearted at worst. God doesn't ask us to lie about the hardships of life.

Second, Jesus is our peace—not in a cheap or cheesy way but in an earthy, knowing, cosmos-altering way. He is the only answer to this pain and trouble. Sent by the Father in the power of the Spirit, the Son of God became fully and truly human. This God of peace breaks into our broken world as

one of us and starts a renewed world, realizing the ancient prophetic hope. “He himself is our peace,” since “in his flesh” he breaks down the “dividing wall of hostility”—not just between the sinner and God, but also between Jew and Gentile, male and female, rich and poor, heaven and earth (Gal. 3:28; Col. 1:15–22).

And these two truths clash.

Jesus is our peace, not merely in some psychological manner, but also in a concrete, whole-life way. He is our peace, not by numbing us, but by forgiving and healing us and enfold-ing us into in his love and life. Even in the darkness of night and when confusion, doubt, and chaos swirl, Jesus still says, “Do not let your hearts be



*For he himself
is our peace.*

EPHESIANS 2:14

troubled and do not be afraid,” and “Peace I leave you; my peace I give you” (John 14:27).

We recognize trouble and brokenness as painful and problematic because they don’t resemble shalom. Whereas shalom brings harmony, goodness, and a flourishing world, we live amid wars, betrayal, and our own suffocating self-absorption. But in response to our rebellion and chaos Jesus brings his peace, his shalom. “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. . . . Take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). By connecting us to God, *he* is our shalom. *He* is Israel’s hope and thus the hope of the world.

This is how we have peace in a genuinely troubled world: God, from beyond our world, has given us himself as our peace. Christ, the God-man, is our peace: He doesn’t depend on our fluctuating emotions and circumstances. God doesn’t ask us to lie about pain and problems or about his goodness and presence in Christ. Both are true. Beloved, there is trouble, but Christ is our peace amid trouble, and he gives us refuge, strength, and direction to extend his peace to this hurting world.

Meditate on

John 14:27; 16:33; and
Ephesians 2:14–18.

How is Jesus your
peace in a concrete,
whole-life way—even
amid the very real
hardships of life?