

## Seek the Peace of the City

A Study of the Biblical Topic of Peace

### Exiles—Then and Now

Jeremiah, known as “the weeping prophet,” lived in Jerusalem. But hundreds of miles away many of his fellow Jews were living as exiles in the city of Babylon, longing to return to their beloved city. False prophets promised that the exile would last a short time, but Jeremiah sent them a letter to refute these empty promises. The exile would last a full seventy years, as God had said (Jeremiah 29:10; Daniel 9:2). What should they do in the meantime? God’s instructions were clear: “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its peace [Hebrew, *shalom*] you will find your welfare” (Jer. 29:7).

What does this have to do with us as Christians living in the 21st century? Although there are important differences between us and the exiled Jews in the 500’s B.C., three points of similarity are worth noting. First, the Jews were in exile by God’s sovereign appointment (compare Jeremiah 29:1 and 4), just as God is sovereign over where we live and serve today. Second, the Jews were considered exiles, living in a place that was not their final home, just as the New Testament refers to Christians as “exiles” (1 Peter 1:1, 17; 2:11; see Philippians 3:20).

The third point of similarity is this: both the Jews of the Babylonian exile and Christians of the “earthly exile” are to seek the welfare of their “city,” the place of their exile (see Galatians 6:10; James 1:26-27; 1 Peter 2:15-21; 3:9). Thus, Jeremiah’s letter to his fellow Jews serves as a fitting statement for Christians’ responsibility to our earthly city: “Seek the peace of the city.”

This raises important questions: What is this peace? Where does it come from? And how do we seek it? What follows is a Biblical exposition of the topic of peace. The central idea is that the foundation of true peace is a right relationship with God, possible only through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Therefore, those who have this peace seek the peace of their earthly city because their ultimate hope for peace lies *beyond* that city—in a city to come. *We will make the most peace in this world as we serve Jesus the Prince of Peace.*

### What Is Peace?

The word translated *peace* in Jeremiah 29:7 is the Hebrew word *shalom*. *Shalom* means more than just the absence of conflict. It is *wholeness*, like when all the pieces of a complicated machine are put together in the right way. This is by far the most common way in which *shalom* is used throughout the Old Testament. When speaking of *shalom* in the context of relationships, we see three main aspects.

**Peace with others.** It’s easy to know when you are not at peace with someone else. Due to some unfairness or wrongdoing, the *shalom* that should exist between you and someone else has been fractured. In the Old Testament, we see the importance of peace with others in the treaties made between individuals or nations (Joshua 9:15; see Genesis 37:4).

**Peace with self.** When we are afraid, angry, anxious, or guilty, we are not at peace. Something has fractured our *shalom*. This is evident in the Lord’s words that “there is no peace for the wicked (Isaiah 48:22).

**Peace with God.** It is easy to overlook the fact that conflict between others and conflict within oneself may be traced to the most significant conflict of all: our conflict with God. The *shalom* humans are meant to enjoy with God has been fractured by sin (Colossians 1:21-23).

## Where Does Peace Come From?

Since sin is the destroyer of *shalom*, *shalom* can come only when the brokenness of sin is healed. This is precisely what Jesus came to the earth to do. The prophet Isaiah foretold the coming of one who would be the “Prince of Peace [*shalom*],” whose government of peace would be without end (Isaiah 9:6-7). When the angels announced Jesus’ birth, they sang, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth *peace* to those on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:14). In an act of astonishing love, Jesus the Prince of Shalom gave up his *shalom* to offer us *shalom*—peace—with God. Isaiah also foretold that “the punishment that brought us peace [*shalom*] was on him and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). Because Jesus took the punishment for sin, those who believe in him can be at peace with God: “Therefore being justified by faith,” Paul writes, “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

## How Do We Seek Peace?

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes the citizens of his kingdom as “peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9). Those who have peace with God make it their mission to spread the “gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15). This means not only that we will urge others to trust in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19-20), but that we will prove ourselves as “peacemakers”—*shalom*-makers in the city in which God has placed us. While we do not stake our ultimate hope that there will be peace in this world, as citizens of the kingdom of peace, we want to make as much peace in this world as possible. We want to live in such a way that makes people in our city say, “We want to know your Prince of Peace.” As citizens of a city to come, we are called to seek the *shalom* of our city for now (Jeremiah 29:7).

## Discussion and Application

1. Think of a time when you were *not* at peace with another person. What kinds of emotions, words, and actions come out from such a situation?
2. Think of a time when you were not at peace within yourself. What caused this lack of peace, and what kind of emotions did you experience? Read Philippians 4:6-7; John 14:27; 16:33 and 1 John 1:9. Suppose you could travel back in time and counsel yourself. In light of these verses, what would you say to your anxious self?
3. Read 1 Peter 3:18 and Colossians 1:20. What did Jesus suffer in order to bring us peace with God? What does this tell us about the costliness of peace?
4. Why is it easy to overlook the fact that true peace comes only through a right relationship with God through Christ (John 14:6)? In what ways do we tend to bypass this true way of peace?
5. How would you reason with a person who says that it doesn’t matter how we treat our city as long as we tell the people about Jesus? How would you reason with a person who says that caring for our city matters more than telling the people about Jesus?
6. For personal reflection: Is there someone you are not at peace with? Is there some good (*shalom*) in the city you can do? Reflect on Ephesians 4:3; Hebrews 12:14; Romans 14:19 and prayerfully determine to make peace.