

Prince of Peace

DAVE BAST

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men; or as newer versions translate Luke 2:14: Peace to those upon whom God's favor rests. Well either way, the Christmas song of the angels proclaims glory to God for the amazing miracle of Jesus' birth, and it promises peace as a result; not just peace in heaven, but peace right here, right now, on earth; but the failure of God's promised peace to materialize is disappointing, to put it mildly. The contrast between the promises offered in the Christ Child and the reality of day-to-day life in the world, and even day-to-day life in our church today, is heartbreaking; but nevertheless, we believe and proclaim that Jesus is the Prince of Peace. In fact, we are about to do that again right now, here on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and before we get into this last of the Messiah's titles, let's listen again to this magnificent passage from Isaiah 9 that we have been focused on in this series of programs.

²The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned. ³You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy. They rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. ⁴For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. ⁵Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁶For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be on his shoulders, and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

DAVE BAST

So, we have been picking out that verse 6 there from Isaiah 9 with the four names of the Messiah: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace; and really, though we have been looking at each in turn, they are a composite, aren't they, Scott?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

All four together give us a full picture.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; you cannot have one without the other three*, and taken together it is this marvelous, marvelous portrait of the Messiah providing everything we could possibly need: Wise counsel, almighty power, the nurture and protection and love of a father; and now, the one who will bring peace. He will be the Peace Prince. He would be unlike anybody else who ever came, and he would be very unlike most earthly kings and rulers, who are not often known as peace princes. Many leaders from history have titles like: Ivan the Terrible, William the Conqueror, Alexander the Great. Those are all militaristic, mighty, powerful titles. Prince of Peace goes another way.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; and you just think of how these fit together so beautifully. So, you know: Wonderful Counselor. He is the wisdom of God, as we said; but what good is wisdom if you do not have the power to enforce it or the strength to carry it out? So, he is also Mighty God, and what good is that if you are not caring and compassionate, but he is the Everlasting Father; and what good is that if it is just limited to you and your little circle around you? No, he is the Prince of Peace, who will bring peace, really, for the whole world; and that picks up on a theme. A prince, obviously, is the son of a king, right?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right.

DAVE BAST

And he is a future king himself; he will be the king. So, the promised Messiah...running through the scriptures of the Old Testament are these prophecies of a king who would come, ultimately sent from God into the world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and it starts already in Genesis, near the end of Genesis. Jacob...one of the early patriarchs of Israel...Jacob is going to die soon. He is an old man, he has moved to Egypt now, where his son Joseph has become an important ruler, and he says...he makes this prophecy in Genesis 49:10: The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs, and the obedience of the nation is his. That is, by the way, a rather startling prophecy, since there really wasn't a people yet...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jacob's twelve...well, he had twelve kids and their families...they would not even be referred to a nation for four hundred years yet, in Exodus eventually; but he is predicting there will be a nation, and it is going to be a lasting kingdom before it is all done.

DAVE BAST

Right; it is also interesting, before we move on, but that little snippet from Genesis 49, where Jacob singles out Judah as the one through whom the king would come, Jacob was all about Joseph.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

That was his favorite son; and he was about Joseph's kids; those are the ones he lavished his blessing on, Ephraim and Manasseh; but here, the Holy Spirit constrains him to prophesy about Judah, and that would, of course, see its place taken in history with David, who was of the tribe of Judah; so in 2 Samuel the Lord

promises to David when he is ruling as king: ^{7:11b}The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you... ¹⁶Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me. Your throne will be established forever. And then here, we come back to Isaiah 9, and that 7th verse that we read, where it is confirmed and strengthened: He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness...and not just now, but forever.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and so you start to get these hints and whispers already early in the Old Testament that actually, for that to happen, we are going to need somebody even greater than David, because David had his weaknesses, he had his flaws. His son Solomon would come next, and he had his weaknesses and flaws. They both did a good job; they ruled over the united kingdom of Israel, but things fell apart soon enough after Solomon died. The kingdom split in two; now we had Judah to the south and Israel to the north. Eventually Israel got decimated by the Assyrians; and Judah would be carted off into captivity. Clearly, Israel as a nation would fall into shambles in just a few centuries. So, what about all this talk about *forever*, and somebody being on David's throne *forever*? Clearly, that is not going to be just another earthly king. We are being pointed to something—someone—very new and very different.

DAVE BAST

That is for sure; and if you, again, just try to hear these words...this prophecy...as the original hearers would have...how they would have been struck by them, I am sure that many who heard this glowing promise of the Prince of Peace who would reign on his father David's throne forever and ever, and he would establish justice and peace, and they look around and they say: What, are you kidding? We are facing the Assyrian army here. Hezekiah was the king at the time that Isaiah spoke, and one of the Assyrian generals came to him and stood outside the walls and just mocked them and said: Who do you think you are? We have rolled up every single one of your neighbors. Here we are... I'll tell you what, Hezekiah; I will give you two thousand horses if you can come up with two thousand men to ride on them. So, he is mocking them. They have nothing left. They are about to be overwhelmed, and yet, the promises come. What could they mean? Where do they point? What is the reality here beyond what seems to be the case of Israel being defeated? Does it mean that this is just a cruel, empty hope that has no future in it? No, these are promises of God, and thus, they will come true, as we will see in just a moment.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this fourth program, an Advent series of programs, a five-part series ultimately. This is program number four, where we have been looking at the four titles of the Messiah, as we get them in Isaiah Chapter 9, and we are on the last one, now: Prince of Peace; and we were just saying, Dave, that at the time Isaiah made all of these promises and so forth, Israel could hardly imagine a king who would rule on the throne forever, because they had had a whole series of human kings who were not only not forever, they were horrible. So, is Isaiah just blowing smoke here? Is this just sort of whistling in the dark, wish fulfillment? What is going on? Well, there is going to be somebody who is going to come, and Isaiah speaks of that in *another* very famous passage, Isaiah Chapter 11. So, let's listen to these words.

DAVE BAST

¹There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse (There is the idea of David's family again...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Jesse was David's father.) and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit, ²and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him... ³and his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord... ⁴With righteousness he shall judge the poor... ⁶The wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat; and the calf and the

lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁷The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. ⁹They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

So, talk about your lyric, poetic hope for this what is often called the peaceable kingdom...there have been a lot of paintings of that that we have probably seen at one time or another; but it was all going to start from a shoot from a stump, and that also does not sound all that good; but again, think of that image of a cut down tree. That is what Israel was thinking about. That is an image they could relate to, but it is not dead, Isaiah says; it is not a dead stump. It is going to have a sprig of hope; it is going to have a shoot that is going to come right out. There will be new growth; and boy, when it really blooms, it is going to be something.

DAVE BAST

You mentioned, Scott, the peaceable kingdom. That is a subject for artists, and it is a beautiful thing, these animals lying down next to each other that are usually preying upon one another; but there is another beautiful, artistic rendering of this passage that was especially popular in the Middle Ages. It is called the Jesse Tree, and I remember seeing one of the great examples of it in a stained glass window in Chartres Cathedral in France; so, Jesse is lying asleep on his side at the bottom, and this big stem is growing up out of him, and on the branches are the kings of Israel, some of them good, some of them bad, but at the very top of it, seated in glory, enthroned as the Prince of Peace is the Lord Jesus. He is the descendent. He is the shoot from the stump of Jesse. He is the one who will bring justice and righteousness, and therefore peace, into the world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and it is going to be, once again, something that is going to be everlasting. It is not going to be momentary, as most of our political rulers are now. It is not going to be just another government program or something that may or may not work, and even if it does, it will be temporary. No, it is going to be an eternal kingdom. It is going to transform the entire creation, as you just said, Dave. This is a picture that we do not see in real life. I remember somebody saying once that the lion will lie down with the lamb, but the lamb is not going to get much sleep. Well, in this world that is true, but in the vision Isaiah sketches, it will be true, and it is all, again, ruled by this Prince of Peace—this ultimate Prince who will become the king in the line of David. It is going to transform our relationships. We have talked a lot on *Groundwork* over the years about the concept of shalom, and this really is the picture of shalom. Shalom is peace, not just in the sense of an absence of war...that is often what we think about peace...it is just no fighting; shalom is more robust. It has these positive dimensions. It is not just an absence of fighting; it is the existence of every creature and every person being in a whole web of mutually edifying relationships.

DAVE BAST

Right; and not only is there this mutual care, where everybody is concerned for everybody else, and not just out for themselves—out for number one—but it is all...at the top of it, it is all ruled by this wonderful prince, this Prince of Peace, who is different from all earthly leaders, really; and Scott, you mentioned politicians. You know, we don't have kings ruling over us anymore; you could get a good king or you could get a bad king; but it just seems like those who do rule over us have their limitations, and many of them are really self serving. They maybe have a rhetoric of caring for others or caring for the poor, but they are always concerned about getting re-elected themselves, aren't they? That seems to be their chief... But listen to the description of the Messiah in Isaiah 11**, the Jesse Tree passage:

²The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him... ³His delight will be in the fear of the Lord. (He is not about himself...)

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

⁴And with righteousness he shall judge the poor.

When we hear that word *judge* in the Old Testament, especially in Isaiah, what we should think of...what the word means...*mishpat*...is making the right decision. He knows what to do and he will do it, and he will do it for the benefit of the vulnerable, of the poor, of the needy, as we saw in our last program, the fatherless—the orphan—the widow. So, that is where the peace comes from, too. It is this universal flourishing; it is this shalom that is administered by a perfect ruler, a perfect leader who knows what to do and is determined to do it for the good of all.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; I remember one time when I preached on this, and there is something in the Hebrew here, actually, which kind of authorizes this paraphrase of the Prince of Peace. I referred to Jesus as the captain of shalom: Captain Shalom. He is going to be the shalom person; he is going to be the person who is going to fulfill all of God's vision; which is all wonderful, and it was wonderful for Israel to have this promise. It was probably somewhat hopeful, even at a very dark time of Israel's history, to hear Isaiah say all of this; but the truth is, when Isaiah finished speaking and they looked around, they did not see this yet; and the truth is, neither do we. I mean, we believe this Messiah, this captain of shalom, has already come, has risen from the dead, has ascended back to heaven, so where is this kingdom? Where is this shalom? Very few of us see it in the news most days, things that make for shalom. We see quite the opposite. So, what does it mean for us even today to grasp this part of Isaiah's vision, this title for the Messiah? We will think about that as we close out the program in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and we are thinking in this program about how is it that the Messiah, who we now believe was Jesus of Nazareth...*is* Jesus of Nazareth...how is he the Prince of Peace? And if he came to bring this great peace and this great shalom, where is it? You know, to this day, actually, Dave, when Jewish people...when we say: Well, Jesus is the Messiah...the Jewish people are still waiting for the Messiah...if you say: No, Jesus is the Messiah, the first thing they say is: Oh, really? Where is his kingdom?

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Where is it? Point to it.

DAVE BAST

In a sense, we are as much waiting as they are. We are all waiting together for the Messiah to come; we just happen to believe we know his name already...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

But there is a point to be made there, and it is a good one and a right one. We sing about peace on earth every year at Christmas, every year during Advent, and yet it seems as elusive as ever. I remember the old

Christmas carol... I don't know how much we sing it anymore: *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*. It is actually a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who was the most famous American poet in the 19th Century; he was huge, he was kind of a rock star; but it starts out: I heard the bells on Christmas day, their old familiar carols play, and wild and sweet the words repeat of peace on earth, goodwill to men. And then a later verse goes like this: And in despair I bowed my head, there is no peace on earth, I said; for hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, goodwill to men.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and that is because this was 1863 in America, and anybody who knows their history knows that was the heart of the Civil War; this terrible, bloody conflict in the United States—the battle to end slavery and so forth. So, there was no peace on earth, there was no peace in America then!

DAVE BAST

Yes, and it is two Christian groups, supposedly, fighting one another and killing each other for the right to keep a third group of Christians enslaved. So, yes, talk about mocking the song, all these Christmas carols of peace on earth. No wonder he bowed his head in despair.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so do we all, to a certain extent; but it is interesting that for Longfellow anyway... You know, we start out the poem with the familiar words about I heard the bells, and then there is that stanza you just quoted that is probably less familiar. I am not sure I remember that one at all about bowing his head: There is no peace; but then he listened to the bells a little longer and the poem that became the hymn goes on: Then pealed the bells more loud and deep, God is not dead, nor doth he sleep. The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth, goodwill to men; goodwill to people. So, he turned a corner there and said: Despite all this darkness and this warfare and this bloodshed, God is not dead. The bells are proclaiming he is still alive; he has a plan...the Messiah still has a plan; the one whose birth we celebrate at Christmas...he has a plan.

DAVE BAST

The wrong shall fail, the right prevail; and that is really hope—that is faith looking forward. Faith holds on to these promises of shalom, these promises of justice finally triumphing, these promises that the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, will make the decisions that will benefit the poor. There is all this military stuff in the Isaiah 9:6 passage that we have been looking at, too. We have not read it in each program, but it is powerful if you look back at it, where the victory of the Prince of Peace finally will have to be won on the battlefield against the forces of evil; and he talks about breaking the yoke of Midian, one of Israel's ancient enemies, and how all the garments rolled in blood will finally be burned in the fire. He is going to get rid of the aftermath of battle. So, we look forward to this final victory in hope, even though we do not see it yet; but that is what faith does.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and you know, Advent as a season...advent itself means arrival...but traditionally in the Church it has been a season of anticipation. It is a season of waiting, because we now know, and the Church has known for two thousand years now, that we actually live between the two advents of the Messiah. He came in Jesus, he ministered, he taught, he lived, he died, he rose again, and he has ascended to heaven; and he is coming back. There will be another advent; and so, there is a sense in which the anticipation of Advent—the season of waiting for his birth the first time is carried over now as we wait for him to come again; and in the meantime, the battles continue...the battle against evil continues. We are going to have dark seasons of warfare in this world, but the Church continues to wait, to hold its collective breath, because we know something is coming; and it is painful, as Paul says in the New Testament, it is painful, but it is childbirth pain, not just suffering for suffering's sake. It is giving birth to something better.

DAVE BAST

So, one of the ways, I think, that we can most realize this and kind of keep our faith strong...as Longfellow did, you know, in that song; he finally remembered God is not dead: The wrong shall fail, the right

prevail...is to continue to go back to these promises...these scriptural promises...and let them kind of fill us with hope and with anticipation.

Speaking of Christmas carols, there is a wonderful service that is broadcast every year, online and on the radio, from King's College in Cambridge, England; the Service of Lessons and Carols; it is just about one hundred years old. I remember listening to that once and the radio announcer at the end of the service said: Well now, we leave the beauty of this chapel and we go out into the dark of Christmas Eve...out into the real world, was the point he was making; and I remember thinking: No, *inside* the chapel, that is the real world, where the promises are echoed again and again, because that is reality. The darkness is temporary. It is real, too, but it is less real, it is less powerful, than the light that came with the coming of Jesus into the world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It reminds me of the preacher, William Willamon. In one of his sermons he said that he had been preaching a couple of weeks before, and a man at the church door said: Nice sermon, Pastor, but now it is back to reality; and he [Willamon] said: I wanted to grab him by the throat and say: *This* is reality...my *sermon* was reality. This is reality as it has been revealed to us in scripture through the Messiah of God, who is that Wonderful Counselor, that Mighty God, that Everlasting Father, and yes, the Prince of Shalom—the one who has brought the first hints and whispers of the kingdom—of that shalom was incarnated in Jesus' life, and now we wait for his return.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and as we wait, as we anticipate, as we watch, we can work for it, too. We are supposed to be people of peace; we are supposed to be peacemakers. God has reconciled us to himself in Christ, that is the Gospel, and given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is the application of it. So, we go out and we try to be people of shalom in a world that so very much needs it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast and Scott Hoezee. We hope you will join us again next time as we finish our study of Isaiah 9 by turning our eyes to the light.

Connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com. Tell us scripture passages and topics you would like to hear discussed on *Groundwork*.

* **Correction:** The correct number here should be three. In the audio of this program, host Scott Hoezee misspoke and said "four," but there are four names total in Isaiah 9:6.

** **Correction:** The audio of this program misidentifies the Jesse tree passage as Isaiah 7. The correct biblical reference for the Jesse tree passages is Isaiah 11.

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