

Waiting for God's Peace

Devotional Reading: Revelation 5:8–14

Background Scripture: Isaiah 11:6–10; John 18:28–38;

Ephesians 4:4–6, 13–19

Today's Scripture: Isaiah 2:2–4; Acts 17:26–28

I. Final Peace Among Nations

Isaiah 2:2–4

² In the last days

**the mountain of the LORD's temple
will be established
as the highest of the mountains;
it will be exalted above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.**

³ Many peoples will come and say,

**“Come, let us go up to the moun-
tain of the LORD,
to the temple of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths.”
The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the LORD from
Jerusalem.**

⁴ He will judge between the nations
and will settle disputes for many
peoples.

**They will beat their swords into
plowshares
and their spears into pruning
hooks.**

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

The beginning of the book of Isaiah warns Judah against a war of rebellion that the people were waging against God.

Isaiah explains that the Judeans will have no peace with other nations or among their own people until they first accept God's terms of peace. Thus, Isaiah calls Judah to repent (Isaiah 1).

2. After dire warnings for Judah to repent, the Lord promises that something incredible will happen *in the last days*. The breadth of this oracle is astounding: *all nations* will come to *the Lord's temple* in Jerusalem. They will come not as enemies, ready to mount an attack, but as disciples, ready to learn from and have a relationship with God.

It is not immediately clear what Isaiah means by “the last days.” The original audience likely understood such days to be a part of the future history of the nation.

The imagery of *the Lord's temple* located high on the top of *the mountains* indicates the temple's relative importance. At the time of Isaiah's prophecy, other fictitious gods were commonly worshiped and offered sacrifices on mountains and hills as well. The elevated location of the Lord's house on *the highest of the mountains* indicates the Lord's holiness above all other gods and authorities. God had commanded the people of Israel to destroy such sites (dedicated to false gods) upon entrance into the promised land of Canaan, but the vision in the verse before us is that of a singular, holy

mountain naturally elevated above all others. The last days will make clear that the Lord alone is God and that the God of Israel is the only true God.

3a. When *many peoples* realize the nature of *the mountain of the Lord* as defined above, they will be drawn toward it and to the God who dwells there. Further, they will also draw each other to the mountain, encouraging one another to *go up* and approach God together. The image is one of a people who no longer oppress each other or encourage each other to pursue idolatry but help each other serve the one true God. The image of many people from various nations worshipping *the God of Jacob* may have shocked its original audience. Still, Isaiah underscores the promise by later prophesying that Israel's historical enemies of Egypt and Assyria would experience blessing and become the people of God too.

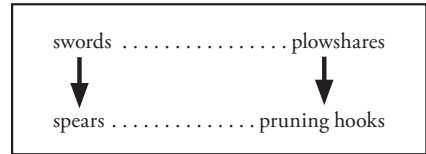
3b. A logical prerequisite for being able to *walk in God's paths* is learning *his ways*. *The law* was given to Israel to guide them as they lived before God in the land he gave to them. Initially, God designed his law to identify people who were distinct in bearing witness to him as the one true God. Israel was to be a "kingdom of priests" with the unique honor of displaying God's character to a watching world. When the nations saw Israel flourish because of its people's obedience, they would inquire and want to share in that life. Sadly, prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah indicate that this beautiful display is not what happened. Instead, Israel and Judah often subverted their priestly role through idolatry and oppressive behavior toward others.

In the verse before us, God promises that, once again, people would follow *the word of the Lord*. Israel would truly become a light to the nations by broadcasting that word to all. The Gospel of Luke returns to this image, with the prophet Simeon announcing that Jesus himself would

be that "light" to heal the relationship between God and the nations.

4a. The word translated *judge* can mean "arbitrate," though other shades of intention are possible. God himself will be the one to decide what is true, good, and righteous as he executes justice between people groups in the world. Yet while *many peoples* from among *the nations* will seek God and learn from his word, many others will not. God will deal with such people according to their folly, violence, and injustice.

4b. In each of our three verses from Isaiah, we can see a pattern of *parallelism*. Parallelism, which appears frequently in Hebrew poetry, happens when words in one line of a verse reflect the words in another line to communicate a larger point. In this partial verse, we see parallelism communicating God's promise to establish a permanent peace between himself and humanity.



4c. When every *nation* becomes devoted to God's reign, there will no longer be a need for conflict between them. They will be transformed from self-interested, violent people groups into participants in the kingdom of God.

II. Divine Origin of Nations Acts 17:26–28

²⁶ "From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷ God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸ For in him we live and move and have

our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’”

26. Many of Paul’s listeners in Athens would have been trained in philosophy. With this in mind, Paul adapts his usual mode of sharing the gospel. Rather than beginning with obvious references to Hebrew Scripture, as he might with a Jewish audience, some commentators propose that Paul adopts a common three-part form of classical debate:

I. Points of Reference

(common ground; Acts 17:22–23)

II. Points of Relevance

(importance of the topic; Acts 17:24–28)

III. Points of Disturbance

(how Christianity differs; Acts 17:29–31)

Well into his second point by this verse, Paul draws on his knowledge of Hebrew Scripture to strengthen his argument while also referencing concepts found in Greek philosophy. He affirms the creation of humanity from *one man*, affirming all peoples’ descent from Adam and Eve.

27. God created the earth to be inhabited. He allowed all kinds of nations to flourish in different times and places. But *why* did God create nations in this way? Paul explains that God did this in order for the nations to *seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him*.

It is important to recognize that God is not playing a game of hide-and-seek in this regard. Although God transcends both time and space, he is concurrently *not far from any one of us*—this speaks to what is called his “immanence.” This word describes his close presence and activity within the created world. God has always worked among nations to heal the broken relationship between humanity and himself. His works are designed to create opportunities for people from every nation to seek him.

Can people from every nation find God? Paul thinks they can. God has not left himself without a witness through nature and history. At the same time, people from all nations can be ignorant, blinded, and self-deceived by their own sin. Idolatry has darkened their sensibility to the true God. Paul even notes that the Athenians ignorantly worshiped what they called “an unknown god” (Acts 17:23).

Nevertheless, the true God never left them. God is present among the nations. Indeed, God is present to every person. The transcendent God is also the “right here, right now” God.

28. As Paul addresses the council, he confirms his statements about God by quoting their *own poets*. We might imagine that Paul’s audience was surprised to hear an expert in Jewish law quoting Greek poets.

Paul’s first quote may come from Epimenides, a sixth-century BC philosopher-poet who writes that in Zeus, “We live and move and have our being.” He then follows immediately by quoting the third-century BC poet Aratus, who describes Zeus with the words: “We are truly his offspring.” Paul adapts these quotes to align with the Scriptural truth that God created and sustains all of humanity.

It is important to note that Paul is not arguing that Zeus and the God of Scripture are equal or even similar. Rather, he finds common ideological ground with the philosophers before claiming that the Lord is unique. This common ground indicates that some people and nations can understand truths about God, even if their ideas about him are misguided. In effect, Paul says, “Hey, even some of your own people have figured out this part.” Paul uses the council’s own way of thinking as a springboard for the gospel. In this way, Paul’s line of argument in verse 28 proves his words in verses 26 and 27!

Involvement Learning

Waiting for God's Peace

Into the Lesson

Write down words or phrases beginning with each letter that describe the experience of *peace*.

P _____

E _____

A _____

C _____

E _____

Into the Word

Read Isaiah 2:2–4. What does he prophesy will happen “in the last days”?

In what ways will the nations respond to other nations? to the Lord?

How would this prophecy have encouraged Isaiah's original audience? How does Isaiah's prophecy encourage us?

Read Acts 17:26–28. What does Paul say is the reason that God made the nations?

How does Paul cite ancient poets and philosophers to reinforce his teaching points?

How would Paul's speech persuade the citizens of Athens? How does Paul's speech encourage us?

What do these passages teach us about peace?

Key Text

Many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.” The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
—Isaiah 2:3

Into Life

Brainstorm a list of situations where people have unresolved conflict and need to experience God's peace. Sketch a plan for fostering peace in that situation. Then pray for each situation.

Thought to Remember

Nations will find peace
only when they find God.