

In John 16:33, Jesus underscores the reality that His disciples will experience difficulty—He tells them that they will face tribulation. But, somehow, in the midst of that, He also promises peace. How do you understand what Jesus is saying?

Apparently, Jesus was inaugurating a new kind of life of peace with His disciples; He said He was giving them peace, He was inviting them to live in that peace. And yet, there was still going to be trouble.

In that sense, the reign and rule of peace began—right there and then. But the fullness of the experience of that peace was not immediate—there was still going to be hardship and trouble. In one sense, this peace has a “now-and-yet-not-fully-yet” quality to it. How does that fit with what we have seen in Isaiah 9 and the other Old Testament passages? How do you understand this inauguration of the peace of God through Jesus that is yet to be experienced in its fullness?

Ultimately, this idea means that we are living in something of the “in between” times. Messiah has come; He has entered into His rule. The Prince of Peace has begun to pour out His peace. But the fullness has not yet been experienced. Christmas is the inauguration; Christ’s coming is the culmination. And we live in between. But we should be living in the continuity of that rule of peace that began then and will culminate in our future. What does that look like for you, in your life, today? Talk with the Lord about that.

Day Five

We have spent the past few weeks looking at the prophet Isaiah’s description of the promised Messiah—Jesus, the Savior, whose birth we celebrate. We have focused on the four names given used to describe the Messiah found in Isaiah 9. Let’s do a little reflection and review. Read Isaiah 9:1-7.

What does Isaiah tell us about the Messiah by identifying Him as “Wonderful Counselor”?

What does Isaiah tell us about the Messiah by identifying Him as “the Mighty God”?

What does Isaiah tell us about the Messiah by identifying Him as “Everlasting Father”?

What does Isaiah tell us about the Messiah by identifying Him as the “Prince of Peace”?

Clearly, much of what is implied or captured by one of these names is reflected in one of the others; there is some “overlap.” But, the names also reflect particular facets of Messiah Jesus’ life and character and ministry. As you gather into your mind and heart the fullness of these four names, what thoughts stir in you? How does reflecting on these names or titles impact the way you relate to Jesus?

Christmas is, obviously, a time to reflect on and remember the great thing God did for us in sending the Son to be born. But we can, sometimes, be a bit casual in our thinking about what Christmas really means. How does reflecting on these names or titles impact the way you think about Christmas?

The angels responded in glad chorus the way they did that first Christmas because they grasped the magnitude of what God was doing in and through the Son. The shepherds who heard the news and saw the child responded in joyful worship the way they did that first Christmas because they grasped the wonder of what God was doing through the Son. The wise men reoriented their lives and came and worshipped the way they did that first Christmas because they grasped the life-altering thing that God was doing through the Son. Let Isaiah’s words open you, anew and afresh, to the amazing, wonderful, glorious, life-altering thing that God has done in sending the Son. This is the heart of our celebration.



Day One

If you know the “Christmas story” then you likely have heard Luke’s account of what happened on that first Christmas evening. Although it may be familiar, revisit the account; read Luke 2:1-14.

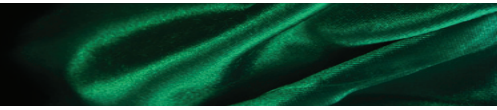
How did the angels explain what was going on? What did they tell the shepherds that God was doing that night?

How do you understand that? What do you think the angels meant by what they had said?

Try and imagine what it would have been like to be one of those shepherds. What would you have heard in the angelic announcement? What would “good news” and “peace on earth” turn your attention to?

What kinds of things might have gone through the minds of the shepherds as they headed into Bethlehem? What might they have been thinking as they explained to Mary and Joseph what they had seen and heard?

The shepherds returned to their flocks “glorifying and praising God.” Why? What had captured their minds and hearts?



How can you get in on the joyful worship that characterized these shepherds on that first Christmas day? What do you need to see or know or hear or grasp so that your heart might be moved to such exuberant worship?

Talk to the Lord about the angels message. Ask Him to help you see and hear all that those shepherds heard that wonderful night.

Day Two

The angelic announcement to the shepherds included the proclamation of “peace on earth” (Luke 2:14). What do you think of when you think of “peace on earth”?

The Old Testament word for “peace” is *shalom*. It means more than merely the cessation of hostility; the idea behind *shalom* is that of wellness, wholeness, satisfaction. Think of the picture of life under the care of the “Shepherd” spoken of in the 23rd Psalm. How is life described in that psalm?

Isaiah 55:1-13 is another Old Testament passage where God’s peace (*shalom*) is pictured. What kind of life is portrayed there? How would you describe it?

If the shepherds—like any faithful Jew—had some concept of God’s “peace,” it might well have been understood in terms we see described and pictured in passages from the Psalms and the Prophets as we have just looked at. Given such background, in what fresh ways might you describe what it could have meant for the angels to announce the arrival of God’s “peace on earth”?

With these thoughts in mind, turn and read the proclamation made by the prophet Isaiah about the coming, promised deliverer

from God in Isaiah 9:6-7. What do you think is being conveyed in identifying the Messiah, this promised son, as “the Prince of Peace”?

Given what we have been looking at with regard to God’s “peace” (*shalom*), what do you think it would be like to live under the rule of this “Prince of Peace”?

Day Three

Look back again at Isaiah 9:6-7. How do you understand the references, in that text, to things like “government,” “throne” and “kingdom”? To what do you think such terms refer? Why?

What is being pictured in this prophecy about the future of “the throne of David”? What is being referred to in speaking of David’s “throne”?

In Ezekiel 37:15-28, we encounter one of a large number of Old Testament passages that speak of a future “Davidic king” (a king like David, a king in David’s line, a king who inherits and lives out the promises of God made to David himself). What is being described here?

Notice, in particular, verses 24-28, where we are given a description of a future rule of a king like David, a king in David’s place. What will characterize this yet-future kingdom?

What is God intending to do in the establishing of this kingdom?

What do you think life would be like in that kingdom and under the

ruler pictured in these verses?

How does the language of Ezekiel 37 correspond to what we have read in Isaiah 9? What connections do you see? What contrasts?

If we take God’s promises (as presented us in Isaiah 9, Ezekiel 37, and elsewhere in the Scriptures) as true, what is it that you think *we* should anticipate in the future? What is being held out for us, individually and personally, and for us, corporately as all mankind?

Do you see this promised future in place? To some degree? In what ways?

Day Four

In Jesus “upper room discourse”—when He was explaining to His disciples what life would be like after His death and ascension—Jesus spoke of peace. Let’s explore that a bit; read John 14:25-31; 16:25-35.

What does Jesus tell His friends and followers about His peace?

What do you think He wanted them to understand? What was the “peace” that He was giving them?

What was going to aid the followers of Jesus to experience and live in this peace He spoke about?

Does Jesus’ promise of peace mean that His followers’ lives will always “go smoothly”? Why or why not?