

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, 13–18

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

I. Final Peace Among Nations

Isaiah 2:2–4

2 And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

4 And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

2. The beginning of the book of Isaiah warns Judah against an even deeper conflict: 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).

After dire warnings for Judah to repent, the Lord promises that something incredible will happen during *the last days*. The breadth of this oracle is astounding: *all nations* will come to *the Lord's house*, that is, the temple in Jerusalem. They will come not as enemies, ready to mount an attack, but as disciples, ready to learn 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 house* located high on the top of *the mountain* 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 top 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 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 people* realize the nature

28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also 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 verse 26, 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 blood*, 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 it in order for the nations to *feel after 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 every 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.

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. It should be amazing to *us* how widely read Paul is! It was compelling enough for at least part of the council to want to hear more of what Paul had to say in the future.

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. 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 people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and 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.