

## **GOING DEEPER STUDY NOTES** (December 10, 2023)

FOR PERSONAL OR GROUP STUDY

I'm writing this on December 7. 82 years ago, just before 8am on a Sunday morning, Japanese fighter planes attacked Pearl Harbor and damaged or destroyed 20 naval ships and 300 aircraft; killing 2400 in the process. The next day the United States declared war on Japan. A few days we were officially at war with Germany too.

The human cost of WWII was staggering ... 15 million military deaths, another 45 million civilian deaths. 25 million wounded. The United States lost over 400,000. The Soviet Union 24,000,000.

Why is peace so difficult and elusive?

I doubt there has ever been a time when all were at peace.

Major conflicts rage on in The Ukraine, in Burma, in Gaza, In the Sudan. There are dozens of "lesser" battles at any given moment.

Who would choose war over peace? Only the unbalanced.

Something has gone terribly wrong. Even when it doesn't come to blows, bombs, and bullets there is a lack of peace in our communities, our homes, our closest relationships, and inside each of us too.

Peace is much more than a temporary pause in outward conflict ...

Peace brings a sense of wholeness, of contentment, of compassion, of love, and understanding. That's what we need. That's the miracle we pray for. There is no human answer for our lack of peace. It takes a work of God changing human hearts, to bring real peace. Visitors from the East traveled a great distance that first Christmas because they believed Jesus was not your typical king ... they believed He was much more ... they were right. Jesus is our only source of peace, lasting peace, power, lasting power. May we be His people of Peace.

### **Do You Hear What I Hear? Peace** (Matthew 2:1-12) ESV

"<sup>1</sup>Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'<sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup> "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,

are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler, who will shepherd my people Israel."

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them to

Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.'<sup>9</sup> After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup> And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way."

### **WHAT DOES IT SAY?**

1. What does this passage tell us about: the Wise men? About Herod? About the religious leaders in Jerusalem?
2. What does this passage tell us about "the star"?
3. How did God protect Mary, Joseph, the Baby? Why did He?

### **WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

4. "When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." What does that mean?
5. What did Herod mean when he said, "bring me word, that I too may come and worship Him"? v.8
6. What does it mean, "when they saw the star they rejoiced ..."

### **WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO YOU?**

7. Why did the wise men from the east stop in Jerusalem?
8. Why didn't Herod, or others, go to Bethlehem? Would you go?
9. Nature, the star, led the wise men to Jerusalem, not directly to Jesus. How does nature help you to know/love Jesus?
10. What, in the Bible, helps you know Jesus? Discuss.
11. What is your level (1 low to 10 high) of personal peace?
12. What current relationship in your life needs peace? What steps are you willing to take to gain the peace you need?

As you spend time praying, remember that prayer is meant to be the most natural part of your day. Prayer is a conversation: talking to God, and listening to God. Reflect on the lack of peace in the world, and the need for peace in your life. Ask God to help you experience peace regardless of the circumstances you are in. Ask God to help you be a peacemaker. Jesus came at Christmas as the Prince of Peace ... because He loves you.