

# CHRISTMAS 2017

Week Two | December 3, 2017 | Peace

## PREPARATION

### MONDAY THROUGH WEDNESDAY

Spend some time alone in God's Word reading through Micah 5:1–5a, Romans 5:1, Ephesians 2:11–19, and Isaiah 2:2–4. Pray that God would bring to life the truths of this text and encourage others with the truth of Scripture.

### THURSDAY THROUGH SATURDAY

Read through the questions included in this week's guide. Many questions have been included in this lesson for discussion. Determine which questions will work well to encourage, push, and grow your love for God and others in the best way.

### DAILY

As you prepare, pray for the preaching of God's Word this coming week at the corporate church gathering. Pray also for your time together with your group; that the Spirit would make effective the teaching to bring gospel clarity, gospel change, and a heart for gospel mission to those present.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Through Christ, believers have peace with God and one another, as well as the promise that the entire world will be at peace one day.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

When we choose to live in the peace God offers, we no longer have to live “at war” with the Lord, each other, and the world around us.

### MEDITATE

*“He is our peace ... who tore down the dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:14).*

## GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

Q: When you hear “peace on earth” during the holiday season, what is your first thought?

Q: How would you define “peace”? What do you think most determines or influences your definition?

While many have heard the Christmas carol, “Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men,” not many know the story behind the song. For the American poet and writer, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, life seemed good for a season. He had married his sweetheart, and they had six children whom they loved dearly. They had a comfortable income due to his writing success, and Longfellow even had a great deal of fame in his time due to his literary accomplishments. However, right on the heels of “the good times,” the Civil War broke out. Many of his dear friends died, one by one. On top of the nation’s turmoil, Henry’s wife died due to a fire accident in their home. Henry himself was burned too badly to even attend her funeral. One of his sons ran away to join the army but came back horribly injured. In all this agony, Henry penned the famous carol we all know today. In one place he says,

*I heard the bells on Christmas Day, their old familiar carols play  
And wild and sweet, the words repeat, of peace on earth, good will to men.*

He could hear the familiar phrase all around him that we often hear during the holidays, “peace on earth!” Yet the next stanza tells of his grim reality in such a dark season.

*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, good will to men.”*

In this stanza, knowing what he was facing personally and nationally, it makes perfect sense that he feels a lack of peace on earth! Though the carol bells rang out in the streets, hatred was all around him in the Civil War, and personal loss made everything worse. Yet, recalling his hope in the Lord, Henry finished the poem based on what he knew to be true.

*God is not dead, nor doth He sleep!  
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth, good will to men.*

In the midst of such agony, Henry somehow believed God could extend good will to humankind, even in time of war, hatred, and darkness. He also believed that, in the end, peace would spread throughout the earth due to God's good character and Christ's work. In this lesson, we will learn how we can have the peace Longfellow had—with God, with one another, and even in our war-torn world.

🗣️: *Have you ever had moments like Henry did, torn between the peace you have in God and despair over the state of the world?*

🗣️: *Share about a time God created peace between you and someone you'd normally consider an enemy.*

## 📌 UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

In this Christmas series, we are learning about four concepts commonly referenced during the holidays: *hope, peace, joy, and love*. In Lesson 1, we studied hope. Now we explore the Biblical idea of peace. While the world may define this as tranquility of emotions or the absence of difficult circumstances, God defines peace another way. Through the prophets Isaiah and Micah, we will learn about the military undertones of peace and war. Through Romans and Ephesians, we will learn how this applies to us now, in Christ. Through this week's selected passages, we will see various aspects of the peace we get to enjoy through Christ's coming and work in the gospel:

### 1. OUR PEACE WITH GOD

### 2. OUR PEACE WITH EACH OTHER

### 3. OUR FUTURE PEACE IN ALL THE EARTH

## GOING DEEPER

+ *This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's Biblical truth.*

## OUR PEACE WITH GOD

### 📌 MICAH 5:1-5A AND ROMANS 5:1

Q: *In Micah 5, what happens to Israel's ruler? Who is promised to replace him?*

Q: *What's the difference between peace as a feeling versus peace as the political status between two nations?*

During a period when they were left to themselves without much foreign interference, a wealthy upper class emerged within the people of God (who had split into northern and southern kingdoms). With this new upper class came corruption that trickled down through the entire people. Throughout this book, Micah serves as God's prophet, confronting His people on various sins during this season, including idolatry, the unjust seizure of property, the failures of all their leaders (whether civil, religious, or prophetic), false teaching, corrupt business practices, violence, and the oppression of those less fortunate. The people of God had seriously gone off track in every area!

In chapter 5, Micah begins by telling the people that they better gather their troops for a fast-approaching siege that has been sent as God's judgment for their sin. As the people have laid siege to the less fortunate among them, a foreign army is coming to lay siege to them for their inexcusable wrongdoing. While they once enjoyed fellowship with God, they now are estranged from Him. While they were once at peace with God, they have now made themselves His enemy by breaking the covenant stipulations they promised to keep. God has declared war in the form of a foreign army, and there's no stopping it.

Q: *Looking at your own heart and life, what sins would God accuse you of if you were a member of the people of God during Micah's day? In what ways would God accuse you of "getting off track" or breaking His covenant law?*

Q: *Explain why humankind, including you, is just as wayward as God's people were in Micah's time.*

While this part of his speech is grim, Micah doesn't leave the people with just a "doom and gloom" message. Yes, a siege is coming to overtake the people to punish them for their sin, but God will not abandon them forever.

Though their current king will be punished with shame and disgrace for his poor leadership (a king many scholars consider to be Zedekiah, who was blinded from being struck on the cheek by the rods of Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers), a perfect future King born in Bethlehem is promised to rule His people one day. Though they face a time of brutal

war and chaos, this King will usher in a time of peace. Though their leaders did not shepherd them well, this coming King would be the perfect shepherd. Though the people did not spread God's glory to the ends of the earth as they were supposed to do, this coming King would do just that. In all the places they failed, He would succeed! This Shepherd-King would come to end Israel's season of war and estrangement from God.

As we look to the New Testament, we see this coming King is Jesus Christ. As Romans 5 tells us, He is the reason we have peace with God. Like God's people in the time of Micah, we have failed in every way. We once were enemies of God, unwilling and unable to keep the covenant law as we should. And just like them, a siege was coming for us, eternal punishment for our sin in hell. Instead of fellowship, we were estranged from God. Instead of peace, we were at war with Him. Doom was certain, and there was nothing we could do.

But because of Christ's willingness to stand in our place, the "siege" marching toward us was rerouted and tore Him apart instead. Now, instead of being in a state of war with God, we are in a state of peace with Him. The white flag is raised. And in addition to no longer being an enemy of the King, we are given the status of His Son—righteous, loved, and in the royal family! While this kind of peace doesn't mean our life circumstances will change from difficult to tranquil overnight, it does mean we have perfect standing before God, which is the most important circumstance we could ever hope to change. How incredible is this kind of peace Christ offers us in the gospel!

**Q:** *Have you ever thought of "peace with God" as having military connotations, the way the Scripture does in these passages? How have Micah 5 and Romans 5 changed your general view of peace?*

**Q:** *How would you explain the relevance of "peace" to a non-believing friend who said this to you: "I don't understand why 'peace' is plastered everywhere during the holiday season while so many horrible tragedies are happening in the world right now. Talking about peace feels so trite given how troubled our culture has been the past few years."*

**Q:** *Is there any other way to have peace with God apart from Christ? Explain your answer.*

## OUR PEACE WITH EACH OTHER

■ ■ EPHESIANS 2:11–19

♀: *Who does Jesus create peace between in this passage? How does this still speak to us today?*

♀: *Why would two very different cultural groups consider themselves “one”?*

♀: *Why is it hard to unite with people who are vastly different from us?*

While Micah 5 and Romans 5 teach us about our peace with God through the work of Christ, Ephesians 2 tells us about our peace with each other. As the Bible shows us over and over, the Jews and the Gentiles could not be more different from one another. Whether in their upbringing, their customs, their language, their race, their political leanings and expectations, their eating habits, or their financial situations, these two groups could not find any common ground. More than having nothing in common, at certain points, they were hostile enemies, fuming toward one another in hatred, each considering their side superior.

♀: *What are some groups in our modern time that misunderstand each other, have opposite views, or even fume with hatred toward each other? What groups in our culture are considered natural enemies?*

An unexpected thing happened when the gospel reached beyond the Jewish community into the Gentile world. Paul told the groups they couldn't have separate churches or operate in separate, culturally insulated cliques like they had before. Instead, they were considered one people group now, with their commonality in Christ. In Ephesians 2, instead of focusing on all the things that divide these two groups (a list a mile long!), he focuses on Christ, the one thing that unites them. Through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, God communicated that above cultural distinctions, there's ultimately only one “race” or category of human—sinner—and one ultimate solution—Jesus. Every person in Christ receives Jesus' status before the Father as a child and an heir, regardless of what group they belong to. For all their intense differences, the Jewish and Gentile Christians were expected to be unified around the cross; and not just in theory, but in their everyday relationships. The word Paul uses to describe this incredible reality is “peace.” Christ Himself is the way we have peace with each other, even those who are different from us in every other way. Just as His sacrifice created peace between us and God, it also creates peace between us and other believers, no matter our earthly differences.

For us, in a culture marked by outrage and anger that spews from one group to another (politically, racially, or

otherwise), it would be easy to distance ourselves from Christians who differ from us in areas we deem important, whether it's our parenting style, our race, or our political persuasions. However hard it may be, we must fight this tendency and follow God's direction for us in Ephesians 2. We must show with our very lives and relationships that Jesus, with His own precious blood, has torn down all the dividing walls of hostility between groups that once waged war on each other and provided peace between them instead. As D. A. Carson says, "The church itself is not made up of natural 'friends.' It is ... a band of natural enemies who love one another for Jesus' sake."

- ♀: *What group of people within the Christian faith do you consider yourself most different from [Ex: a group with a different political view, a group from a different race than you, a group with a different upbringing or culture]? What would being "one" with people from this group look like in your life?*
- ♀: *Explain why non-Christians find it intriguing when two Christians who should [by worldly standards and labels] be considered "natural enemies" display unity and peace instead?*

## OUR FUTURE PEACE IN ALL THE EARTH

### ☒ ISAIAH 2:2-4

- ♀: *Where do you see the concept of "peace" in this passage?*
- ♀: *Where do the nations put their weapons? Why?*
- ♀: *Who mediates between the nations in this passage? Why do you think that's significant?*

Though we have peace with God and one another at present, we can't help but look around at a broken world and wonder if peace will ever *fully* reign here. We long for a time when God not only brings peace to our hearts, minds, and relationships in Christ, but to the entire world. We sometimes wonder if it will ever happen. Thankfully, Isaiah 2:2-4 gives us a resounding yes.

In these verses, Isaiah tells us that in “latter days,” or the distant future beyond the horizon, the true way to God—Christ (and His people)—will finally rise above all other religions. As the resurrected Christ reigns in victory, the entire world will know He is who He says He is, and that the one true God is real. No one will come against Him; instead, everyone will want to walk in His ways.

Isaiah also tells us that the usual way of settling major issues between nations, namely war, will be no more. The once hostile nations will put away their weapons because the earth will have a reigning King and Judge who will rule all people groups Himself. In this future time, there will be no more flawed human authority mediating between the nations, but instead, the benevolent, wise, and just King Jesus will do so. In this picture, we see our longing fulfilled—freedom from all earthly war, a perfect state of peace where the Lord rules the earth and everything in it with perfect love, justice, and harmony.

Though we can't see it on the horizon now, the Scriptures promise us the Lord *will* fulfill total transformation in the earth, and it will be a world at total peace. In seeing the ways Jesus has already brought us peace with God and with each other, and how He promises to eventually bring peace to the entire world and the nations within it, we can worship Him today in total trust. We are not in a state of war with God anymore. We are not at war with each other, either. And one day, the nations of the earth will cease to be at war with one another as well. All this because of Jesus. What a mighty, true, and powerful “Prince of Peace” we have in Christ!

- 🔗: *How does knowing that earthly peace is promised to us in the future change the way we live today?*
- 🔗: *How is Scripture's definition of peace different than the world's?*
- 🔗: *How would you explain Jesus' title, “Prince of Peace”, to the unbeliever? Why is He called this?*

## NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*



- 🕒: *Take some time to write out your own personal story. How did you go from being “at war” with God to being “at peace” with Him? Under what circumstances did Christ become the agent of peace between you and God? At what point in your life were your eyes opened to the fact that Jesus rescued you from the “siege” of judgment coming against you? Use these questions to prompt your writing.*
- 🕒: *Think through your closest friendships. Would any of them qualify as someone the world would consider your natural enemy? Do you have any dear friendships with people of another culture, race, socio-economic status, or political stance than you, whom you are now “at peace” with because of your commonality in Christ? If you can’t identify a person who fits this, intentionally pursue this Ephesians-2 type of relationship with someone, knowing that God calls us to have unified friendships with Christians who are very different than us.*
- 🕒: *What are some other passages about the peaceful, renewed experience we will have with the Lord in the new heavens and earth? Study these passages this week to help you focus on the promises of your future in Christ.*
- 🕒: *Who in your life needs to hear about the peace offered to them in Christ? What person needs to know the Prince of Peace during this holiday season, so that he/she can finally be at peace with God, others, and eventually, the world?*

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week’s focus.*

- God, thank You for making a way in the gospel for me to go from being in a state of war with You to a state of peace.
- God, help me pursue and exhibit unity with other believers who are very different from me.
- God, let the future peace of the whole world influence the way I live even now.
- God, bring to mind a lost friend or family member that desperately needs the peace You offer us in Jesus.

**MICAH 5:1** Striking a ruler “on the cheek with a rod” represents extreme insult. The phrase is meant to communicate the total victory of Israel’s enemies over her.

**MICAH 5:2** This section ties the coming King to the Davidic line and His birthplace of Bethlehem, both of which Christ fulfilled. When it says that the coming King’s “origins” are from old, it does not mean that Jesus had a point of origin, as if there was a time He did not exist. “Origins” here can mean two things, according to evangelical scholars: one, that the beginnings of this coming King would come from the ancient line of David and the tribe of Judah; or two, that “origins” simply translates as “goings out” or “activities.” In this rendering, the verse would mean that this future King has been active among His people since their beginnings.

**ISAIAH 2:2** For God’s house to be “lifted up above the hills” or placed high on a “mountain” is prophetic imagery. Given that ancient people believed that various gods lived on mountains, the author is telling us that, in the end, God’s temple and people will be the peak of world religion and attractive to all people groups. “Highest” here probably means “most exalted in honor,” not actually physically highest.

**ISAIAH 2:4** Some Christian interpreters take this scene to describe the earthly reign of Christ in the millennium, while others see it as a prediction of Christ’s reign in the new heavens and new earth. In any case, people of all times have taken these words to express their longings for freedom from war, when the nations seek to follow the “ways” of “the God of Jacob” (Is. 2:3) and the Lord Jesus Himself shall judge between the nations. The main message is that God will exercise His rule on the earth through the Messiah, not earthly leaders.

**EPHESIANS 2:14** In reference to the “dividing wall,” it is interesting to note that there was an inscription on the wall of the outer courtyard of the Jerusalem temple warning Gentiles that they would only have themselves to blame for their death if they passed beyond it into the inner courts. Paul may or may not be alluding to this wall, but it well illustrates Christ’s reconciliation of all people into a new humanity. Where there were once distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, these two groups are made into one, the church.

*\*All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes, the New American Commentary (Isaiah and Micah), and the Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Proverbs–Isaiah and Micah). D. A. Carson quote is from Love in Hard Places.*

