

ON EARTH PEACE

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Recently the President of the United States ordered his troops to withdraw from Syria. Although the United States has the tiger by the tail there, withdrawal seems to be the best course of action, and is favored by those who love peace and not war. There is “a time of war, and a time of peace,” and Christians should, if possible, be at peace with all men, for they are followers of the Prince of Peace who came to bring peace on earth. (Ecclesiastes 3:8; Romans 12:18)

After the death of King Solomon, the kingdom was divided between the Kingdom of Israel in the north, and the Kingdom of Judah in the south. The kings of the north were wicked, as were the people, so God sent the Assyrians to conquer them, and to carry them into exile, and they became the so-called Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. The Kingdom of Judah continued for another one hundred years, but it also rebelled against God, so He sent the Babylonians to conquer it, and to carry its people away into exile in Babylon. The people in exile would repent of their sins, and would cry out to God for deliverance, saying:

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? (Isaiah 51:9, 10)

God had in the Exodus made a name for Himself among the nations by bringing the Israelites safely through the Red Sea, and destroying the Egyptians. The people in exile in Babylon would cry out to God for deliverance as the Israelites had cried out to Him for deliverance from bondage in Egypt. They would cry out, and God would deliver them. The prophet Isaiah prophesied:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. (Isaiah 52:7-10)

God did deliver Israel from exile. The Persians conquered the Babylonians, and Cyrus, king of Persia, decreed that the Jews should return to their homeland. They did return, yet the world at that time did not see the salvation of God. That would come five-hundred years later with the Advent of Christ.

On the day of Christ's birth, an angel appeared to shepherds and proclaimed to them good news.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone

round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. (Luke 2:8-14)

It was fitting that the angel would appear to shepherds, and that they would be among the first to see the Christ, for shepherds were in those days considered a lowly class, and God exalts the humble. Moreover, Christ is the Good Shepherd which God promised to give to His people. Through the prophet Ezekiel He said, “And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, *even* my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.” (Ezekiel 34:23) When the shepherds heard the angel, they were naturally afraid of a divine visitation. The angel reassured them, however, and said that he was the bearer of good news that would cause them great joy. He told them that that very day in Bethlehem, the city of David’s birth, there was born that promised son of David, the heir to his throne, who is the shepherd of His people and the Savior of the world. They would find this King, not in a palace, but in a stable, not in a crib, but in a manger, a trough used to feed cattle. The Son of God had humbled Himself, and so God would exalt Him to be King of kings and Lord of lords.

After the angel spoke these things, an army of angels appeared, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” They gave glory to God, because He is God, and because He is full of love and mercy. For thousands of years, men have been at war with God, and with each other. God, unlike man, loves His enemies so that, although they oppose Him, He does good to them. He has always caused the sun to shine on good men and on bad; He has always caused the rain to fall on both. (Matthew 5:45) He always given good things to all men, even the pagan nations who refused to acknowledge Him. (Acts 14:16) In sending His beloved Son into the world, however, He would do more than bless men with earthly blessings. He would forgive them their sins and give them new life. He would through Christ reconcile the world to Himself, making peace with man His enemy. (2 Corinthians 5:19; Romans 5:1) He would be their friend. Men at peace with God will also be at peace with each other. They will cease hostilities as they march together under the banner of the Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 2:2-4)

To the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, be glory forever and ever. *Amen.*