

# SHALOM

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'Shalom' is an exciting Hebrew word. 'Peace' no longer translates it. Shalom is wholeness, completeness, unbrokenness, full health, comprehensive well-being.

For the individual Shalom is soundness of being in every way; between persons it means relationships of trust, openness and caring that enable wholeness; in groups and society it involves social justice so that no sectional interest oppresses or exploits another; for nature it means living interdependently and responsibly, without pollution or destruction.

Shalom encompasses all reality, structural as well as personal. It speaks of the state of affairs where everything works and works together as God originally designed it. It is

not a human achievement, but a gift of God.

As God created the world, everything was in shalom with him and with everything else. Then came the fall. Out of right relationship with God, everything lost shalom and became at odds within itself and with others. In his love God has always pursued the restoring of shalom to his universe. His way is through his son, 'the Prince of shalom'.

When Jesus was born, the song over Bethlehem was 'Glory to the highest to God. Shalom on earth among men . . .' The Messiah had come to 'guide our feet into the way of shalom.' He was the man of shalom. His miracles were shalom signs that promised a creation restored to wholeness; to the healed he said, 'Go into

shalom.' It was shalom the disciples offered as they went two by two; to reject shalom was to reject salvation.

As the one who came to 'speak shalom to the nations', Jesus rode on the donkey into the City of shalom (Jerusalem). So often he had prayed for its shalom, now he wept for it. At the last supper he said, 'In me you may have shalom; in the world you have oppression.'

## Reconciled

It had been predicted that God would make a new 'covenant of shalom' and Jesus knew this would come only through the death of the Messiah, so he spoke of 'the new covenant in my blood'. Isaiah had said, 'The chastisement that brings shalom to us was upon him and by his wounds we are healed.' He

gave his shalom to bring shalom to all. Paul wrote that God was 'pleased through him to reconcile all things to himself, making shalom through the blood of his cross.' Jesus' mission was to bring shalom, and he passed this reconciling ministry on to his disciples: 'Shalom be with you . . . As the Father sent me, so I send you'.

Through trust in the Messiah 'we have shalom with God'. This reconciled relationship brings previously divided people into shalom with one another. Even Jews and Gentiles can unite in him 'for he himself is our shalom . . . and has broken down the barrier . . . that in himself he might create the two into one new humanity, making shalom.' God's people are freed from discrimination and oppression of race, culture, age, sex - or living in denial of Jesus. We are to 'live in shalom with each other' and 'seek the shalom of all people'. Did Jesus

not say 'Blessed are the makers of shalom'? His people are the sign now of the coming kingdom which is 'justice, shalom and joy in the Spirit'.

The powerful among God's people of old failed to make shalom and do justice. So they found themselves deported to Babylon. Through Jeremiah, God says to them (and to us), 'Seek the shalom of the city where I have sent you . . . for in its shalom you will find your own shalom.' Only when we share in God's mission to the world are we open to receive his gift to us.

As we await the Messiah's 'new earth in which justice dwells' we are urged 'to be found by him in shalom'. God's purposes will be fully realized through his Son. All non-shalom will be eradicated and 'the new City of shalom' will come among us. Jesus will bring shalom to all creation: 'the wildest beasts will be in shalom

with mankind'. As the prophet said, 'Of his reign and of his shalom, there will be no end.' And through him 'justice and shalom will kiss each other'.

The gospel, then, is 'good news of shalom'. It was God who 'sent out the word, evangelized shalom to those far off and near'. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, 'How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of one who . . . heralds shalom . . . who heralds salvation, who says "Your God reigns".'

Is it surprising that thirteen New Testament letters begin 'To you, grace and shalom from God our Father and the Lord Jesus, the Messiah'? Or that shalom is so often in the prayers of God's people? 'The shalom of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in the Messiah Jesus.'