

The Prince of Peace

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6, KJV

One of my favorite Christmas carols, *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*, contains the same line in all five stanzas; that being the sweet refrain, "peace on earth, good-will to men." [1] Yet lurking ominously in the midst of this song lies this reckoning which contradicts reality:

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." [2]

With the exception of a few decades, the history of the world is the history of war. Even now, civilization is under attack. World War III may be around the corner. Throughout the world, terrorists have interrupted the normal flow of life, especially where western interests are at stake. From Bali to New York, bombs have exploded and planes have been flown into tall buildings. The possible detonation of a dirty bomb by terrorists in a public place gravely concerns security officials. Dirty bombs not only do extensive damage in the vicinity of the explosion, but they will also emit low levels of radiation throughout an extended area several miles in diameter from the center of the blast. Just how severe a health hazard the radioactive materials pose over a long period of time is unknown.

Violence and war are ugly. Every time I read or hear of the death of one of our soldiers in Iraq or Afghanistan, I wince for reason of the pain that surviving loved ones--parents, wives, children, and friends--go through. Not only is war ugly, but it's also heartbreaking.

A generation ago we read about suicide bombings in Israel, a place that seemed a world away. But now those same types of bombings threaten our homeland. *Jihad*, the version of holy war perpetrated by Muslim terrorists-extremists, has come to this continent, and for the foreseeable future, America probably will never be the same again. Hate continues to mock the song "of peace on earth, good will to men."

Ironically though, Jerusalem, the city whose name means "city of peace," remains the epicenter of contention for international peace. Through the prophet Zechariah the Lord declared:

Behold, I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that causes reeling to all the peoples

around; and when the siege is against Jerusalem, it will also be against Judah. And it will come about in that day that I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it will be severely injured. And all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it. (Zechariah 12:2-3)

Yet it is also decreed that Jerusalem will not be a besieged city in perpetuity, for One is coming to that city whose name is "**Prince of Peace**" (Hebrew, *Sar-Shalom*, Isaiah 9:6).

From Jerusalem, a city whose history bespeaks turmoil and dispute down through the ages, One is coming again, Jesus the Messiah, whose legacy will not be that of a brutal tyrant--though He will be a mighty warrior--but rather that of a "peaceful prince." During His reign, "**The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them**" (Isaiah 11:6, KJV). During His reign, nations "**shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more**" (Micah 4:3, KJV).

Rulers and leaders, both ancient and modern, have staked their claim in human history as warriors. Today, their names live in infamy--Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Attila the Hun, Napoleon, Mao, Hitler, Stalin, Hussein, Bin Laden, and Ahmadinejad. Iron-fisted rulers have made themselves notorious through war. Never has the world known a real *Prince of Peace*.

But as promised by the prophet Isaiah, "**Be joyful with Jerusalem and rejoice for her, all you who love her . . . For thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I extend peace to her like a river, And the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream'**" (Isaiah 66:10, 12). As Jerusalem is presently a hub for conflict, so one future day that city will become an international center for peace under her governance by the *Prince of Peace*. Of this future Ruler, one scholar notes that His reign will "bring a cessation of war and a wholeness, or health, to society." [3]

The world will not always exist in harm's way. Isaiah saw the prospect of a coming different world order, one in which the whole earth would dwell in peace, one in which there would be "**no end to the increase of His [i.e., Messiah's] government or of peace**" (Isaiah 9:7). Yet even in the coming day, given the antipathy of the world's system toward Him, I doubt that the Lord Jesus Christ will be awarded a Nobel Peace Prize. Even so, we would cry out, "**Maranatha!**" which is to say, "O Lord come!" (1 Corinthians 16:22).

ENDNOTES

[1] Henry W. Longfellow, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day," *The Celebration Hymnal* (Dallas: Word / Integrity Music, 1997) 267.

[2] Ibid.

[2] Herbert M. Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985) 98.