

The Prince of Peace - The Sar Shalom

The true peace

Prepared by Martin Connolly

October 21, 2026

Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3, John 14:27, John 16:33

KEY SCRIPTURES

Shalom and the War of Ages

Peace as Present Possession and Future Reign

It is important to look at the single English word we have for “peace”. Any understanding of what the word means throws up the whole question of what it is. Two words that concern us Biblically, are the Greek *eirēnē* (ἡρενη), in its classical usage, it generally means the absence of war - a cessation of hostilities. It is the quiet that falls when armies withdraw. In its negative sense: peace is defined by what is not happening. Then we have the Hebrew *shalom* (שלום); it reaches further. It is not just the silence of the battlefield. It points to wholeness, completeness, soundness, in all aspects of life. It is an active condition of contentment. We can possess *shalom* while the world around remains troubled or at war. *Shalom* describes a state of integrity within, not only tranquillity without.

When the New Testament writers took up *eirēnē*, they

attempted filled the Greek word with Hebrew content. Certainly, the Gospel's word on the tongue of Jesus was Hebrew (or its close relation, Aramaic). In that the peace of the Gospel carries the fullness of shalom rather than the mere absence of conflict.

The Unbroken Record of War

Scripture presents human history, from its earliest chapters of Genesis, as one continuous account of violence. The first death in the biblical narrative is a murder; Cain rising against Abel his brother in the field. Within a few generations Lamech boasts of killing a man for wounding him, escalating vengeance into a grim mathematics of retaliation:

“If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.” (Genesis 4:24)

The Flood comes precisely because “The earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence”. (Genesis 6:11) The waters of the flood could not cleanse the human heart from evil. After Noah, the record continues: nations rise, empires clash, and the pattern spreads across every continent and every age. Tribe against tribe, village against village, city against city, nation against nation. In the natural course of things, there has never been a year in which the

whole earth rested totally from conflict. Peace treaties are pauses, never conclusions. The historian and the theologian come to the same verdict from different directions: the natural world does not, and cannot of itself, achieve a lasting and universal peace.

The evidence is there for all to see. It is written large across every inhabited continent. In sub-Saharan Africa the record runs from the expansions of Mali and Songhai to the Zulu Mfecane and the wars of Ashanti and Dahomey. There were also countless smaller tribal conflicts preserved in oral tradition and archaeology. Across Asia the Chinese dynastic cycle is almost a definition of endemic war. There were the Warring States, the Three Kingdoms, the catastrophic An Lushan rebellion. Even the Eurasian steppe poured out Huns, Avars, Magyars, Turks, and Mongols in wave upon wave against so called civilisations. Think of the Vandals and Goths and what they did against Rome. The Americas, North and South often seen sentimentally as peaceful before European contact. There may have been tribal conflict before. Then the Maya city-states, the Aztec flower wars, the palisaded Mississippian towns, and the Iroquois mourning wars all long predate the arrival of Europeans.

Europe itself supplies an almost unbroken chain. We have the Roman civil wars, the Crusades, the Hundred Years' War, the Wars of Religion, the Thirty Years' War, the Napoleonic Wars, and the revolutions that followed. And through it all the Mesopotamian and Levantine corridor, from Sumer and Akkad through Assyria and Babylon to the present. It is rare to find a single generation of true regional rest. Wherever the historical record permits us to look, we find war on every continent and in every age.

It is tempting to reach for a precise figure to capture this, and one is often quoted: that in the last 3,421 years of recorded history, only 268 have been free of war.[\[1\]](#) Such statistics should be handled with great care. The argument advanced here does not reach for statistics, there are no reliable ones, it needs only the evidenced, universal pattern of war, not an unverifiable count of peaceful years.

I am not pessimistic but I am a realist. I am grounded in the Biblical doctrine of the human condition. The root of war lies in the disordered human heart, which I believe is true. In the heart is envy, pride, fear, and the will to dominate. Jesus is clear on this:

“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries,

sexual sins, thefts, false testimony, and blasphemies.”

(Matthew 15:19)

No rearrangement of external circumstances can abolish it. The seed of Cain is carried in every generation. From this it follows, biblically, that “world peace” in the ordinary, political, natural sense is not merely difficult but impossible so long as the present age endures. It is a hope that the natural order, the world, is structurally unable to deliver.

The Prophetic Vision of a Coming Peace

And yet Scripture does not end in despair. The prophets saw the nations most clearly. Some of them watched Assyria and Babylon rise and fall. They spoke of a shalom that would one day come, not as a human achievement but as a divine gift from God breaking into history. Isaiah and Micah share almost the same words, a vision of the nations streaming to the mountain of the Lord to be taught his ways:

“They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” Isaiah 2:4; cf. Micah 4:3

The image is precise and deliberate. The instruments of war

are not destroyed but transformed. They are reforged into instruments of cultivation and harvest. The sword becomes the plough; the spear becomes the pruning hook. This is shalom in its fullest sense: not just the laying down of weapons but the redirection of humanity from destruction to flourishing. Joel, strikingly, reverses the same image to describe the judgment that precedes this peace. (Joel 3:10) It is a reminder that the day of peace is also a Divine day of reckoning, and that the two cannot finally be separated.

Importantly, the prophets locate this peace in a person, not merely in an era. It arrives when a particular King reigns. Isaiah names Him in one of the most familiar of all the messianic titles:

*“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given... and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, **The Prince of Peace.**” Isaiah 9:6*

The Prince of Peace, Sar Shalom (שַׁר שָׁלוֹם), is the one under whose government the increase of peace has no end (Isaiah 9:7). The universal peace of the ploughshares is not a self-generating human dream; it is the direct

consequence of the reign of this King. Nations will learn war no more because, at last, they are governed by the Author of shalom Himself. This is a shalom established from above, enforced by a righteous rule, and therefore secure in a way no treaty between fallen powers could ever be.

The Peace Available Now: Shalom Within

Between the violence and dis-ease, of the present age and the universal peace of the age to come we stand as individual believers. Here the Christian reading finds its pastoral centre. The Sar Shalom has come once already, though not yet to reign visibly over the nations. His first advent has brought his peace and is even now available. This is not to the world as a whole but to each person who receives Him and His Spirit. The shalom that will one day fill the earth, can come today to the heart that belongs to Him.

This is precisely the shalom Jesus offers His disciples, such as us. The night before his death, He made a statement that gives clarity:

“Shalom I leave with you, my shalom I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27)

The peace of the world is eir?n?. It is contingent, external, dependent on the absence of trouble and human breakable peace treaties. The peace of the Christ is true shalom. That is, an inward wholeness that persists even when trouble presses in from every side. Jesus also makes clear:

“These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have shalom. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

It is not the promise that the believer will be spared conflict, but the assurance of an unshakable integrity in the midst of it. The Jewish Paul calls it “the shalom of God, which passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7) A shalom that does not depend on circumstances but is a security of faith in Jesus, the Sar Shalom.

So the two truths hold together without contradiction in this Biblical paradox. In the worldly sense, there can be no world peace until the King returns. The present age is structurally at war with itself. However, in the very personal, spiritual sense, a real and present shalom is offered to every individual who accepts the Spirit of the Sar Shalom. The believer becomes, in effect, a signpost to the coming

kingdom. We have a Gospel to share. It offers a place where the future shalom is already tasted, ahead of the end of this age.

The Song of the Angels

Nowhere is this distinction drawn more sharply, or more easily missed, than in the announcement of the heavenly host to the shepherds at the birth of the Prince of Peace himself. The verse is among the most familiar in all of Scripture, and its familiarity has obscured a question of real weight. In the reading long carried by the Authorised Version and in some other translations, the angels declare:

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” Luke 2:14 (AV)

In this translation, the words sound like a proclamation of peace and benevolence extended to humanity at large. It is in this form that the verse is most often as a promise of a divine warrant for universal goodwill and for the hope of a general world peace. Yet the older and more widely attested Greek reading differs by a single letter, and the difference is decisive.[\[2\]](#) Where the Byzantine text has the nominative *eudokia* (??????), yielding a third parallel clause; “goodwill toward men”, the earlier text reads the genitive *eudokias*

(????????), which binds the goodwill to the men and gives: “peace among men of his good pleasure,” or “peace to those on whom his favour rests.” On this reading the announcement is not a blanket declaration of peace over all humanity. As the Gospel message demonstrates, the shalom is given to particular people. The ones who receive the Sar Shalom, they are the objects of God’s good pleasure.

There are always arguments over translations but the better-attested reading tells decisively in favour of the distinction this study has drawn throughout. The shalom proclaimed by the angelic host, at the nativity, is not the self-pacification of a warring world. It is the shalom that arrives with the Sar Shalom and rests upon those who receive him. As stated, it is the very inward, personal shalom offered to each individual who accepts the Spirit of the Sar Shalom.

The angels do not promise that the nations will cease from war because a child is born. Did the Roman wars cease etc.? Indeed, the grown adult of the proclamation said again, clearly, He came not to send peace but a sword. (Matthew 10:34) They, who say, that peace has come for all men, tread with care. We must not find ourselves in the position of those whom the prophets cry out against:

“For from their least even to their greatest, everyone is given to covetousness. From the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely. They have healed also the hurt of my people superficially, saying, ‘Shalom, shalom!’ when there is no shalom.” (Jeremiah 6:13-14)

The Misplaced Prayer for World Peace

From all of this a practical and, to some, an uncomfortable conclusion follows. The common exhortation to pray for world peace to come, that is, meaning a universal and lasting cessation of war brought about within the present age, is, on the biblical witness, misplaced. It is misplaced not because peace is unworthy of prayer, but because it asks the present order to yield what only the returning King can bring. Jesus himself drew the line: the shalom he leaves is expressly “not as the world gives” (John 14:27), and he located it “in me,” over against the tribulation his people would meet “in the world” (John 16:33). To pray for the world to generate its own universal peace is to pray for something He did not promise and, in a sense, came to deny.

This conclusion must be stated with precision, for without it the argument is easily misheard. It is emphatically not a claim that the believer should never pray about peace in the

present. Scripture commands the opposite. Paul urges that prayer be made “for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life”. (1 Timothy 2:1–2) This is a direct encouragement for praying that civic order be preserved, that wars be restrained, and that the mercy of relative cessation of war, be granted, within this fallen age. To pray for the peace of a city, a nation, or a troubled region, as a restraint of evil and a kindness to the suffering, is thoroughly biblical. The psalmist’s call to “pray for the shalom of Jerusalem” (Psalm 122:6) belongs here too, though its shalom points finally toward the city of shalom, of the great King.

The distinction, then, is not between praying for peace and not praying for it, but between two objects of prayer. To pray that God would restrain violence and grant seasons of peace within this age is right and commanded. To pray, or to expect, that the natural order will of itself arrive at a permanent and universal peace, is Biblically unsound. A warless world produced by human effort and petition before the King returns is to hope against the plain teaching of the Christ. The one asks for mercy within the present age; the other asks the present age to become the age to come.

Rightly understood, the model prayer itself directs us. When the Lord taught his disciples to pray “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10), he did not teach them to pray that the world would pacify itself, but that God would bring his kingdom. In effect, that the reign of the Sar Shalom would come. This is the properly biblical prayer for shalom: not “let the nations achieve peace,” but “let your kingdom come.” The eternal shalom that is wanted, arrives with the King, and only with him. To pray for the coming of the kingdom is to pray for the only world peace that Scripture ever promises. To pray like Paul, “Maranatha”, is the only way it will come.

“If anyone does not love the Master Yahshua Messiah, let him be accursed. Maran-Atha. The Master Comes!” (1 Corinthians 16:22 HRB)

Living Between the Ages

What this study would teach, is that we believers live between the age of the war-torn world and the shalom of the age to come. In that we are honest about the world’s incurable violence apart from the Christ. We are already carrying within our hearts a shalom that belongs to the world to come. The believers do not conjure up the Kingdom, but

they witness to it. We cannot end the wars of groups, national or rebels, but we can refuse to let their spirit rule our own heart. In doing so we become a sign-post with the Gospel and with our own lives of shalom. We have a living hope, the day when the swords of all the earth will at last be beaten into ploughshares, and the Sar Shalom will reign, and the nations will learn war no more. Hallelujah!

[\[1\]](#)The figure is commonly attributed to Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968), where it appears without any supporting source or calculation. It is in fact considerably older, having been used by Fulton J. Sheen in the early 1950s and by Douglas MacArthur in a 1935 address; the *Guinness Book of Records* later ascribed it to the Swiss scholar Jean-Jacques Babel. It was subsequently repeated as established fact by Donald Kagan, *On the Origins of War* (1995), and by numerous public figures thereafter. No one has produced the underlying tally of wars and years, and its precision is almost certainly spurious — a datum that has acquired authority by repetition rather than by verification.

[2]The nominative *eudokia* underlies the Byzantine/Majority text followed by the Authorised Version (“goodwill toward men”). The genitive *eudokias* is read by the earliest and most weighty witnesses — among them Codex Sinaiticus (original hand), Codex Vaticanus, and Codex Alexandrinus — and lies behind the Latin *pax hominibus bonae voluntatis* and the modern critical editions (Nestle-Aland, UBS), yielding “peace among those with whom he is pleased.” The variant turns on the presence or absence of a final sigma and is a classic instance of a single-letter difference bearing significant theological weight. Both readings are ancient; the genitive is the better attested. The point pressed here is not that the Authorised reading is illegitimate, but that the popular use of the verse as a charter for universal world peace exceeds what either reading, carefully construed, will support.

