



Isaiah 9.³⁻⁷— Meditation

³Thou hast multiplied the nation,
and ~~not~~ increased the joy:
they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest,
and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.
⁴For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden,
and the staff of his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian.
⁵For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise,
and garments rolled in blood;
but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire.
⁶For 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.
⁷Of the increase of his government and peace
there shall be no end,
upon the throne of David,
and upon his kingdom,
to order it, and to establish it
with judgment and with justice
from henceforth even for ever.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts
will perform this.

There may be few things in the history of human civilization more common and pervasive than war. This is certainly true of ancient Israel, which sat on one of the world's major fault lines of conflict and corridors for marching armies, this way and that. Over and over again, Israel felt the violent aggression of some would-be conqueror and his brutal armies. Few depict this human occupation—or should we call it “preoccupation”—better than John the Revelator with his depiction of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

So, Isaiah's promise of a king that could and would stop the beating of the oppressor, remove Israel's yoke of defeat and bondage, and end the drumbeat of incessant warfare was good news, comforting news indeed. Though we modern westerners have difficulty appreciating the imagery, Isaiah promised that the end of warfare would bring a joy such that could be likened to the joy felt at a bountiful harvest, itself a happy and sure guarantee of survival over winter months.

In depicting the end of warfare, Isaiah calls forth a highly evocative image. While verse five has caused translators problems, the New International Version of the Bible provides an effective translation.

“Every warrior’s boot used in battle
and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
will be fuel for the fire.”

At its most basic and historical level, the promised king seems to have been Judah’s King Hezekiah. The army turned away and defeated was that of the Assyrians. As the story goes, this victory was won, not through the intervention of Judah’s army, but through the direct intervention of Judah’s God.¹ Thus, Isaiah accurately predicted,

“The zeal of the LORD of hosts
will perform this.”

But this victory and the ensuing peace were short lived. The human occupation of war continued. Eventually, Judah was defeated, first by the Babylonians and then again by the Romans, and then disappeared as an independent nation. So much for Isaiah’s promises and hopes.

But there have always been and still are those who believe that “the zeal of the LORD of host” has a plan for a greater end of war and a more enduring peace; that however zealous and “skillful” humankind is for and at warfare, God is even more zealous and skillful for and at peace. But, God cannot and will not, we believe, bring lasting peace through violence. He cannot live by the sword any more than humans can live by the sword.² So, how does he accomplish this peace?

It is part of the Christmas testimony that God sent His only begotten Son into a world racked by war to proclaim and establish peace. Throughout his life, this Jesus, this Prince of Peace was faithful to his call, as he expressed the night of his death.

“Peace I leave with you,
my peace I give unto you:
not as the world giveth, give I unto you.”³

But, if world peace is to be achieved, it will come one human heart at a time. The human occupation, even preoccupation with war is not to be conquered until the planet’s inhabitants give individual entrance to the Prince of Peace, who, only, can calm the troubled, divided heart of a species turbulent and insecure in its own skin. This human occupation of war will see no end until the inner war that rages within each individual is finally ended; for no oppressor is more zealous than self against self.

“I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin... O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”⁴

In coming to earth, Jesus, Prince of Peace and Wonderful Counselor, came to put an end to this private war, thereby hoping to put an end to all societal, national, and global war. As each individual personally

¹ See Isaiah 36-37

² See Matthew 26.⁵²

³ John 14.²⁷

⁴ Rom. 7.²²⁻²⁴

learns the way of inner peace through Jesus' ministrations, they can and must join in the ministration of peace with those still at war. They must "renounce war and proclaim peace"⁵ at all levels—private, societal, national, and global. Only by finding inner peace through Christ and becoming a peacemaker with him in the lives of those still at war can we hope to achieve lasting and expansive peace so as to truly "be called the children of God."⁶

And when we finally conquer that spirit of war with the spirit of peace we will see and acknowledge as Isaiah did that it is "the zeal of the LORD of host" that has "perform[ed] this." Then we can sing hallelujah and shout praises to our God and King.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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⁵ DC 98.¹⁶

⁶ Matthew 5.⁹