

**PEACE** (שָׁלוֹם, *shalom*; εἰρήνη, *eirēnē*). A pervasive concept in the Bible that most commonly relates to a relationship of love and loyalty with God and **one another**.

### In the Old Testament

In the **Old Testament**, “peace” carries the fundamental meaning of welfare, prosperity, or wholeness as well as the absence of hostility (compare Westermann, “Peace [*Shalom*],” 20, 44–53). The term is frequently used as the antithesis of harm (רָעָה, *ra'ah*; compare **1 Sam 20:7**; **Jer 29:11**; **38:4**) and as a synonym for what is good (טוֹב, *tov*; **Deut 23:6**; **Ezra 9:12**; **Jer 33:9**).

#### *Peace in Greetings and Farewells*

The biblical characters use the term “peace” in friendly greetings and farewell statements to communicate an absence of hostility. For example, when his brothers are unsure whether he will exact retribution on them for having extra money in their sacks, **Joseph** assures them of his friendly disposition toward them by stating, “Peace to you; do not fear” (**Gen 43:23**; compare **Judg 6:23**; **19:20**; **1 Sam 25:6**). Also, typical friendly farewells are given in terms of peace: “Go in peace” (**Gen 44:17**; **Exod 4:18**; **1 Sam 25:35**; **29:7**; **2 Sam 15:27**).

#### *Peace in the Sense of Welfare*

The Old Testament contains examples of people asking about “a person’s peace,”

which equate to inquiries about how the person is faring (**Gen 29:6**; **43:27**; **Exod 18:7**; **Judg 18:15**; **1 Sam 17:18**; **2 Kgs 4:26**; **10:13**) or the possibility of entering into diplomatic negotiations with that person (**2 Kgs 9:17–22**; Wiseman, “Is It Peace?” 317–22). For example, when **David** asks **Uriah** how the battle with the **Ammonites** is progressing, he “asked concerning the peace of **Joab** and the peace of the people and the peace of the war” (**2 Sam 11:7**). In this case, “peace” does not refer to the absence of hostilities but the welfare of those involved and progression of the fighting (Mauser, *Gospel of Peace*, 15).

The biblical authors also use the term “peace” in prayers for prosperity for the king (**Psa 72:7**), **Jerusalem** (**Psa 122:6–8**), and **Israel** (**Pss 125:5**; **128:6**). God speaks peace to His people (**Psa 85:8**) to **bless** them (**Num 6:26**). Westermann argues that the **Hebrew** word for “peace” “signifies the welfare of persons in community in the most comprehensive meaning of existence” (Westermann, “Peace [*Shalom*],” 43).

#### *Peace as the Absence of Hostility*

At times, “peace” indicates the absence of hostilities. In texts where the term “peace” contrasts with warfare, it likely communicates a mere cessation of warfare instead of friendship (**Deut 20:10**; **Judg 4:17**; **21:13**; **1 Sam 7:14**; **1 Kgs 2:5**; **5:12**; **Jer 25:37**; **Ezek 7:25**; **Mic 3:5**). **Ecclesiastes 3:8** places peace and warfare in direct contrast: “There is a time for war,

and there is a time for peace.” Those responsible for procuring peace treaties that brought an end to warfare were called “messengers of peace” (Josh 9:15; 10:4; 11:19; 2 Sam 10:19; 1 Kgs 22:44; Isa 33:7).

The biblical authors depict the absence of hostilities as fundamentally a good thing (compare Deut 20:10–15). For example, David was not allowed to build the temple because he engaged in frequent warfare, but his son Solomon (whose name derives from the term for peace, שָׁלוֹם, *shalom*) was able to build the temple because God had granted him peace from his enemies (2 Chr 22:9; compare 1 Kgs 5:3–4).

Isaiah predicted that when the Messiah arrived, He would be called the “Prince of Peace”—presumably because He would achieve lasting peace over His enemies (Isa 9:6; compare Mic 5:5). At this point, God would destroy weapons in the world as the people “beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks” (Isa 2:4 ESV; Mic 4:3 ESV; compare Wolff, “Swords into Plowshares,” 211–28).

### *Peace in Relationships*

In the Old Testament, the term “peace” is often used to describe a relationship characterized by friendship, care, loyalty, and love. These relationships can be with God or between people. A close friend in the Old Testament is commonly called “a

man of my peace” (Pss 7:4; 41:9; Jer 20:10; 38:22; Obad 7). The term “peace” often appears in the inauguration of covenants, which often formalize an already-existing relationship of love and loyalty (von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:130; contra Westermann, “Peace [*Shalom*],” 41). Thus, in Obadiah 7, “the men of your peace” parallels “the men of your covenant.” Joshua 9:15 describes how Joshua “made peace with them [the Gibeonites] and made a covenant with them.” To be at peace with someone, then, can mean more than just the cessation of hostilities but a relationship of love and loyalty (compare Gen 26:28–31; Psa 55:20). Further, it is wicked to “speak peace” to one’s neighbors while devising evil in one’s heart (Psa 28:3; Jer 9:8), precisely because to “speak peace” is an expression of friendship, not hatred (compare Gen 37:4).

A relationship with God marked by loyalty and love is also described as a relationship of peace (contra Westermann, “Peace [*Shalom*],” 40). Although it appears sometimes as if the wicked have peace (Job 21:9; Psa 73:3), in reality peace with God is the possession not of the wicked (Isa 48:22; 57:21) but of those who are meek (Psa 37:11) and righteous (Isa 57:1–2), who serve Yahweh (Psa 35:27), who love the law of God (Psa 119:165), and who please the Lord (Prov 16:7). The nature of this peace with God is evidently glorious and much more than the

absence of hostility—for peace is parallel with good things ([Deut 23:6](#); [Ezra 9:12](#)), such as:

- inheriting the land ([Psa 37:11](#));
- long life ([Prov 3:2](#));
- quietness and trust ([Isa 32:17–18](#));
- righteousness ([Pss 35:27](#); [37:37](#); [72:3](#); [85:10](#); [Isa 48:18](#); [60:17](#));
- strength ([Psa 29:11](#));
- tranquility ([Gen 15:15](#); [Exod 18:23](#); [2 Kgs 2:6](#); [Psa 4:8](#); [Isa 32:17](#));
- divine steadfast love ([Jer 16:5](#)).

Those possessing this peace have a future ([Psa 37:37](#)), joy ([Prov 12:20](#)), and long life ([Psa 34:14](#)). Aaron's blessing demonstrates a link between peace and God's presence ([Num 6:24–26](#); compare [Pss 29:11](#); [85:8](#), [11](#); Durham, “[שְׁלוֹם](#), *shalom*; and the Presence of God,” 281–93).

### *Covenant of Peace*

Peace with God and one another is fundamental to the promises of Israel's restoration and the new creation. [Isaiah 32:15–18](#) promises that when the Spirit, who is the sign of the new age, is poured out, He will create righteousness and peace. God has future plans of peace for His people ([Jer 29:11](#)); peace will characterize the new temple ([Hag 2:9](#)) and Jerusalem ([Jer 33:9](#)), whose inhabitants will “love truth and peace” ([Zech 8:19](#)). In the Genesis creation account, the narrative revolves around the notion of peace—the creation and maintenance of

order and the reversal of disorder (Ollenburger, “Creation and Peace,” 147–58). In the same way, the prophetic vision of the new creation is a vision of order and peace produced by justice and righteousness (Brueggemann, *Peace*, 15–18). Although God had promised in the Sinai covenant to give peace to Israel if they obeyed ([Lev 26:6](#)), this was not realized due to Israel's sin ([Isa 48:18](#); [Zech 8:10](#)). The prayer of Solomon that Israel's heart would be at peace with (or devoted to) God ([1 Kgs 8:61](#)) did not come to fruition even in Solomon's own experience as he turned to foreign gods ([1 Kgs 11:4](#)). It is only in the inauguration of the new covenant that this lasting peace with God and one another is achieved, and thus this new covenant is called a “covenant of peace,” a covenant that assuages divine wrath ([Isa 54:10](#); [Ezek 34:25](#); [37:26](#); compare [Num 25:12](#); [Mal 2:5](#); Batto, “Covenant of Peace,” 187–211).

[Isaiah](#) places emphasis on future peace with God. “Peace” ([שְׁלוֹם](#), *shalom*) serves as a significant concept uniting [Isa 48–55](#) (Lessing, *Isaiah 40–55*, 632). In [Isaiah](#) the sins of Israel had separated them from God and hindered the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant ([Isa 48:18–19](#)). [Isaiah](#) stresses that “there is no peace for the wicked” ([Isa 48:22](#); compare [Isa 57:21](#)). But God solves Israel's plight through the work of the Servant, whose death as a guilt offering ([Isa 53:10](#)) brings peace with God ([Isa 53:5](#)). As a result of His

work, the [good news](#) of peace is proclaimed to a worldwide audience, who will by union with the Servant experience great peace in the future age ([Isa 52:7; 54:1–10, 13; 55:12; 57:19; 60:17; 66:12](#)).

### Peace in the New Testament

The [Graeco-Roman concept](#) of peace held various nuances. For example, the Homeric literature portrayed peace as an ideal state that a hero achieved through war. This led to the common adage, “If you wish peace, prepare for war” (compare Vegetius, *Concerning Military Affairs* III [preface]). On the other hand, the [Stoics](#) conceived of peace as an inward tranquility. The [New Testament](#) concept of peace shows dependence on the Semitic understanding of peace rather than the Graeco-Roman conception. In the New Testament, the concept of peace is consistent with the Old Testament in that it refers to prosperity, which climaxes in the peace the Messiah brings.

#### *Peace in Greetings and Farewells*

The greetings and farewells in the New Testament also reflect those of the Old Testament in their use of the term “peace” (compare [Tertullian, Against Marcion 5.5](#)). For example, when [Jesus](#) sends out His disciples to accomplish His ministry, He instructs them to “let their peace be upon a house” ([Matt 10:13; Luke 10:5–6](#))—referring to a friendly greeting (compare [Heb 11:31](#)). [Jesus](#) Himself issues the friendly farewell “go in peace” after

healing the woman with a flow of blood ([Mark 5:34; Luke 8:48](#)) and forgiving a sinful woman ([Luke 7:50](#)). After His [resurrection](#), [Jesus](#) appeared to His disciples several times with the greeting “peace be to you” ([Luke 24:36; John 20:19, 21, 26](#)). [Jesus’](#) original audience would have understood these phrases as the typical Semitic way to wish someone well (compare [Acts 16:36](#)).

The greetings and farewells of the [New Testament’s letters](#) also use the term “peace.” The New Testament texts often open with the [prayer](#) that grace and peace would be given to believers ([1 Thess 1:1; 1 Pet 1:2; 2 Pet 1:2; Jude 2](#)) from God the Father ([Col 1:2](#)), from the Father and [Jesus Christ](#) ([Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; 2 Thess 1:2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4; Phlm 3; 2 John 3](#)), or from the Father, Son, and [Spirit](#) ([Rev 1:4–5](#)). Several New Testament letters also conclude with such prayer wishes (compare [2 Cor 13:11; Gal 6:16; Eph 6:23; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Thess 3:16; 1 Pet 5:14; 3 John 15](#)).

#### *Peace as the Absence of Hostilities*

In the New Testament, “peace” can also refer to the absence of hostilities (compare [Acts 7:26; 12:20](#)). “Peace” is used in this way to describe peace treaties between [kings](#) ([Luke 14:32](#)). [Jesus](#) uses “peace” in reference to the absence of hostility when He speaks of conflict between family members and states that He “did not come to cast peace upon the



earth but a sword” (Matt 10:34; Luke 12:51; compare Frankenmölle, “Peace and the Sword,” 217–18). This statement communicates that, although Jesus is the “Prince of Peace,” He is also a divisive, polarizing figure because of His unique claims of identity.

Paul teaches that if an unbelieving spouse desires a divorce from a believer, the believing spouse is not bound to chase after the unbeliever, because “God has called you in peace” (1 Cor 7:15). This suggests that God has called believers to live toward unbelievers without conflict and strife (compare Rom 12:18). In Revelation, the horse rider of the second seal was allowed “to take peace from the earth in order that people might slay one another” (Rev 6:4).

### *Messianic Peace*

The most prevalent nuance to the concept of peace in the New Testament is the messianic peace accomplished by Christ and experienced by the Church (compare Acts 9:31). In the Old Testament, the concept of messianic peace referred to both the absence of hostilities and a reconciled relationship with God and others in the context of the new creation. This messianic peace comes to fruition in the New Testament in Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection (Constantineanu, *Social Significance*, 76–77).

The angels’ declaration at Jesus’ birth, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace” (Luke 2:14 ESV) connects His

arrival with messianic peace. Jesus tells two women He heals to “go in peace”—referring to messianic peace. He also tells the women, “your faith has saved (σωζω, sōzō) you,” which refers to both their having been physically healed and having received salvation by faith (Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50; (Witherington, “Salvation and Health,” 145–66). Jesus also proclaimed the gospel of peace to Israel (Acts 10:36; compare Isa 52:7; Eph 2:17), referring to the new and reconciled relationship to God and others that had dawned in His ministry (compare Eph 6:15). The crowd’s praise at Jesus’ triumphal entry likewise connects Jesus with messianic peace: “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (Luke 19:38).

Jesus achieved messianic peace by means of His death on the cross, which reconciled people to God and one another (compare Rom 5:1; Col 1:20). Ephesians 2:13–18 explains that whereas the Gentiles were at one time outside of and estranged from the people of God (Eph 2:11–12), through the atoning sacrifice of Christ they have been brought near to God and His people (Eph 2:13). Jesus’ death abolished the Sinai law-covenant, which erected a barrier between God and humanity and between Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:14–15). In its place He created peace for all those united to Him by faith, who are now seen as “one new man” (Eph

2:15), and who are now reconciled to God and have access into His presence (Eph 2:16–18; compare Eph 3:12). Jesus Himself proclaimed the accomplishment of this peace to His disciples when He appeared to them after His resurrection and blessed them: “Peace be to you” (Luke 24:36; John 20:19, 21, 26). The centrality of Jesus and His work on the cross is evident in that Paul can say of Jesus, “He himself is our peace” (Eph 2:14; compare Isa 9:6–7; Heb 7:1–3; Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 112). In this sense, God is truly “the God of peace” (Rom 15:33; 16:20; 1 Cor 14:33; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23; Heb 13:20; compare 2 Thess 3:16).

Christians experience peace when they trust in Christ and grow in their faith. This is what Paul prays for when he asks that “the God of hope might fill you with all joy and peace in believing” (Rom 15:13). Paul further promises that when believers cast their cares on God through prayer, “the peace of God surpassing understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:7). This subjective sense of peace, security, and tranquility is probably what Jesus referred to when He said, “My peace I give to you.” In this verse, Jesus links peace with the encouragement not to be afraid (John 14:27; compare John 16:33; Rom 8:6).

### *Peace in Relationships*

The New Testament writings frequently encourage believers to live in peace with

one another, which requires that they maintain relationships based on love, loyalty, and care (compare Mark 9:50; Rom 14:19; 2 Cor 13:11; Eph 4:3; Col 3:15; 1 Thess 5:13; Heb 12:14; 1 Pet 3:11). This type of relationship characterizes the kingdom of God (Rom 14:17) and is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22; compare 2 Tim 2:22) and wisdom (Jas 3:17–18). Those who make peace—even within the context of the Church itself—are called sons of God, are blessed by God, and will receive their final reward (Matt 5:9; Jas 3:18; Heb 12:11; compare Humphrey, “Matthew 5:9,” 62–78).

The openings and closings of the New Testament letters communicate the Semitic understanding of peace. The typical Greek epistolary greeting was “greetings” (χαίρειν, *chairein*), and the typical Hebrew greeting was “peace” (שלום, *shalom*; εἰρήνη, *eirēnē*). Paul combined and modified these greetings in the phrase “grace and peace” (χάρις καὶ εἰρήνη, *charis kai eirēnē*; Lieu, “‘Grace to You and Peace,’” 161–78). This combination reflects the ethnic makeup of the church, which was composed of both Jews and Gentiles joined to Christ by faith. Given the early church’s recognition that the gospel was meant for both Jews and Gentiles, the greeting “grace and peace” carried a theological reminder of the peace with God that the Church possessed through Christ, as well as an ethical reminder of their need to live in light

of this peace (Kremer, “Peace,” 139–40).

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