

# A time for peace



The Christadelphians

# A Time for Peace

Peace is what we all long for. We are happiest when there is peace – when our home, our family, our neighbourhood, our country is at peace. People in countries torn apart by war just yearn for the day when peace will return and they can reconstruct their lives.

What are the prospects for peace?

The experience of two world wars, and many other conflicts besides, has made many people very pessimistic about the chances of peace. But there is good reason for having a more optimistic view, and the purpose of this booklet is to present compelling evidence from the Bible that God has plans for world peace, plans that can give us certainty and hope. One day (and Christadelphians believe that this really will be very soon) our planet will be filled with true and lasting peace. There will be justice, contentment, freedom from hunger and disease, freedom from aggression and war. Instead of a world full of division and discord, there will be a world-wide

kingdom of peace. It is a kingdom over which Jesus Christ, the King of Peace, will rule. The citizens of that kingdom will be those who, with faith and commitment, have accepted the Gospel of peace.

But we are jumping ahead of ourselves. Many readers will need a lot more to convince them. We live in an age of scepticism and doubt, an age when a diminishing number of people believe in God, and few take the Bible seriously. Most people would pour scorn on the previous paragraph as wishful thinking! But let us together examine the evidence that there might, after all, be something to cheer and reassure us in the Bible.



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First, however, we shall look at some of the attempts man has made in recent times to end war and bring peace to the world.

## Peace Initiatives

In the last two centuries there have been some serious attempts to bring about peace in a war-torn world. In 1843 there was a Peace Congress in

London; in 1849 another in Paris. In 1899, a significant international conference was held in The Hague – significant because it led to the building of the Peace Palace, which now houses the International Court of Justice, dedicated to the peaceful settlement of differences between peoples. The Peace Palace, in the Dutch city of The Hague, opened in 1913 (ironically just a year before the outbreak of World War 1) and its centenary was celebrated in 2013.

Another initiative to promote peace came with the launching, in 1901, of the Nobel Peace Prize. Alfred Nobel was a Swedish industrialist, inventor and arms manufacturer and it is thought that the Peace Prize, one of five prizes established on his death, was an expression of Nobel's wish to compensate for his part in developing destructive weapons. It is awarded annually to the person or organisation considered to have "done most for fraternity between nations". To take just one example, in 1993 the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Nelson Mandela and F. W. de Klerk, "for their work for the peaceful termination of the apartheid regime, and for laying the foundation for a new democratic South Africa".

### The League of Nations

In spite of everything, wars have continued, and so have initiatives to bring about peace. In 1919, at the conclusion of World War 1, a Peace Conference was held in Paris and one of the outcomes was the setting up of the League of

Nations, with a headquarters in Geneva, and with a mission to maintain world peace. It failed in this mission, chiefly because some of the members claiming to want peace were at the same time preparing for war. That is the attitude reflected in a sombre Bible verse: "*I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war*" (Psalm 120:7).

In 1938, Neville Chamberlain returned from Munich with a piece of paper, signed by Adolf Hitler, on the strength of which the British Prime Minister promised "Peace in our time" – but how misled he was!

### The United Nations

World War 1, optimistically described as 'a war to end wars', was followed all too soon by World War 2. In the aftermath of that conflagration, in 1945, governments agreed to set up the United Nations Organisation, which inherited some of the activities of the League of Nations. Today, in many of the world's trouble-spots, there are UN peace-keeping forces trying to maintain a truce between warring factions. The UN also sponsors an annual International Day of Peace devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace among nations.

Outside the UN building in New York is a wall on which the following Bible



text was inscribed, in recognition of the aims and ideals of the UN:

*“They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (from the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 2, verse 4).*

This inscription stands as a monument to man’s noble aspirations but 70 years on, we are bound to ask: Are the nations of the world any nearer to achieving the ideal which the founders of the UN hoped for? Has the Peace Palace in The Hague, or the award of Nobel Peace Prizes, helped to bring about global peace?

### Centuries of War

Sadly, the 20<sup>th</sup> century has witnessed many more conflicts. In 1947, there

was the war which led to the division of India and Pakistan; then the Korean War; the Vietnam War; wars in Algeria, El Salvador, Cambodia, Rwanda, and the Persian Gulf; strife in Northern Ireland; the Falklands conflict; wars and terrorism in the Middle East. And the 21<sup>st</sup> century has continued with more of the same: tribal and religious conflicts in Africa; the break-up of Yugoslavia; civil war in Sri Lanka; regime change in Iraq; insurgency in Afghanistan; intifada in Gaza; uprisings in Libya, Egypt, Syria and elsewhere during the ‘Arab Spring’. These and other troubles have left tens of thousands dead and millions uprooted. This is the sad legacy of war. This is what happens when, instead of seeking peace, people are ruled by selfishness and aggression.

### Frequently asked Questions

Faced with the horrors of war, people understandably ask questions. Why does the world have to be like this? Why do the innocent suffer? If there is a God, and if He is a God of love, why does He allow it? If God is our Creator, surely He could have made man more peace-loving? Why does *religion* so often seem to be at the root of wars? And how can churches proclaim a Gospel of peace and at the same time bless those who go to war?

These are hard questions, but the Bible has many of the answers. The Bible makes it clear that God created men and women with free will to choose whether to show kindness to their fellow human beings, or whether to show hatred. But it is equally clear that God from the very



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beginning wanted people to live in peace. The Bible teaches that fighting and the taking of human life are wrong. One of the Ten Commandments, which God gave to the people of Israel as a sensible code



of conduct, was “*You shall not murder*” (Exodus 20:13).

Very early on in the history of the human race recorded in Genesis, we come across the first act of aggression – the first murder. Cain was “*very angry with Abel his brother and killed him*” (Genesis 4:1-8). Ever since then, hatred, bloodshed and war have continued to be a sad feature of human existence. At certain times, and for good reasons, God actually commanded His people, Israel, to go to war – to purge the evils that were rampant among Israel’s neighbours. There have also been occasions when God allowed aggressors to attack His people, because they had lapsed into idolatry and evil ways themselves. But God has the right to take such actions,

and the fact that God has found it necessary to punish human wickedness in the past does not justify the wars that man has waged, year after year, century after century.

### God’s Standards

God has set standards by which we should live. Other civilisations and other religions, too, have had ethical codes that condemn the taking of human life. Such codes and standards have been respected by many, but have not led to the eradication of war. Killing has continued, and throughout history peace has been elusive.

Before we go on, it is worth stopping to deal with the accusation that religion, far from preventing conflict, has frequently been responsible for it. Those who make that accusation point to events like the Crusades of the Middle Ages, when the Church went to war against ‘the infidel’. They point also to the sectarian violence and religious feuding that we see around us now. Such accusations cannot be lightly dismissed. Christadelphians believe, however, that it is a *misguided* religion that allows and encourages fighting. The Christian religion is a religion of peace; Moslems insist that Islam, too, is a religion of peace. If the adherents of those – and other – religions kept to their principles, there *would* be peace.

Jesus, the founder of Christianity, taught his disciples that they should seek to be peaceable – and other writers in the New Testament echo Christ’s teaching:

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9).*

*“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:18).*

*“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22,23).*

*“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).*

*“Be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 Corinthians 13:11).*

The Gospel – by which we mean ‘the good news’ taught in the Bible – is called “*the Gospel of peace*” (Romans 10:15; Ephesians 6:15).

The God of the Bible (as we have just quoted) is a God of love and a God of peace. He gave commandments and set standards and asks us to respect and obey His laws. We cannot blame God when men choose to go against His laws, spread hatred, and bring calamity on the world. Mankind is to blame for aggression and war.

### **God’s Solution**

God offers a solution to the problem. He has given us hope. He caused His Son, the Lord Jesus, the Prince of Peace, to

be brought into the world, to be a Saviour of those who respond to the call of the Gospel and to be king over the coming Kingdom of peace to be set up on this earth. God has given us total assurance that, if we trust in Him and the Lord Jesus Christ, there is a future when the evils of the present age will be no more.

Most people are familiar with the ‘Christmas story’ and will have heard the following words spoken to the shepherds at the birth of Jesus: “*The angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord’ ... And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!’*” (Luke 2:10-14).

The words of the heavenly host have clearly not yet been fulfilled! We are still waiting for the promised “*peace on earth*”. The angels were looking beyond the time when Jesus first came into the world, beyond his death, resurrection and ascension to heaven – in fact, to the time when he would come again. That is the time we are now keenly looking for, and then there will be peace. Jesus will come back to the earth, this time not to die, but to be king, to rule the world justly and righteously. Those who have pinned their hopes on him and committed themselves to his service will be granted eternal life, to live forever in peace in Christ’s kingdom

on earth. Those who oppose him will no longer have the freedom to ‘do their own thing’ and will not be part of that kingdom.

*“The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Psalm 37:11).*

*Give the king your judgments, O God ... He will judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. The mountains will bring peace to the people ... In his days the righteous shall flourish, and abundance of peace, until the moon is no more” (Psalm 72:1-3,7).*

Can you believe this? How much evidence do you need to be persuaded that there *is* an alternative to the understandable pessimism all around us? Where else can we find a realistic solution to the never-ending spiral of conflict? What other hope is there for mankind in the face of all the ancient – and modern – feuds that no-one can resolve?

### **Does humanism have an answer?**

By the word ‘humanism’ we mean the widespread conviction, certainly in countries of the West, that there is no God; that evolution has brought us to where we are; that mankind is in charge of his own destiny; and that the future is in our own hands. One of the basic assertions of evolutionists is, of course, that life is constantly progressing and that the human race, which (they say) started from a very primitive state, is developing

and constantly improving. Thanks to scientific discovery, we can – it is claimed – look forward to longer, healthier lives. Some people would doubtless go so far as to say that, eventually, when the human race has progressed further, there will be a solution to the problem of war.

You will have to decide whether that is easier to believe than the promise of the Gospel. We are bound to point out, however, that the theory of evolution as expounded by Charles Darwin and his successors relies substantially on ideas such as ‘the survival of the fittest’. According to this, weaker populations have to give way to the stronger for the species to improve. If that’s true, then surely it excuses war? – for war is usually a battle between weaker and stronger forces. Evolutionary ideas actually work *against* our hopes for peace. We suspect that humanism would quickly lose converts if this aspect of evolutionary teaching was given too much emphasis!

### **The Answer is in the Bible**

We return to the Bible, not in desperation, not as a last resort, but because it makes such sound sense. We need to have faith that there is a God – and why should that be so difficult? We need to have faith that the Bible is indeed a divinely inspired book – and there is satisfying proof for this. Belief in God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the promises contained in the Bible have encouraged many, many people throughout the dark ages of human history. Such belief will give us true hope today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We are waiting for the coming of Jesus Christ; the fulfilment of countless prophecies in the Word of God; a day when Christ will judge the world, and establish a kingdom of peace for all who have humbly committed themselves to following him. But what about the present? What consolation is there for us while we wait for these world-changing events? The consolation is that by believing in the Gospel of peace we shall have *peace of mind now*:

*“Great peace have those who love your law, and nothing causes them to stumble” (Psalm 119:165).*

*“You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you” (Isaiah 26:3).*

*“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).*

*“These things I have spoken to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation ...” (John 16:33).*

*“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God*

*through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).*

*“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).*

It is good to know that we can have peace of mind now. But even more wonderful is the prospect of worldwide peace to come. That is the time of peace which disciples of Jesus Christ confidently look forward to, reassured by Bible prophecies and all sorts of signs in the world around us. Yes, even in the stark and depressing headlines that bombard us day by day we can tell that the climax of world history is imminent. Those with faith watch for these “signs of the times” and are convinced that God’s age of peace is soon to dawn.

### **God has promised**

What, then, are those signs? Some of them focus especially on events in the Middle East, on Israel and the Jews, reminding us of God’s ancient promises concerning the ‘promised land’, and Jerusalem. Thousands of years ago, God promised Abraham, the father of the Jewish race, that he and his descendants would inherit the land of Israel:

## **Israel-Gaza conflict: Mutual suffering and plain talking**

[www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), 22 November 2012

*“All the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever ... Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you” (Genesis 13:15-17).*

Later, God promised David the king of Israel that one of his descendants would inherit his kingship over a kingdom that would last forever:

*“I will set up your seed after you ... He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Samuel 7:12,13).*

When Jesus was born, those who knew their Scriptures could see that these and many other Old Testament prophecies were at last coming true. The angel who came to tell Mary about the baby who would be born said:

*“You will ... bring forth a Son, and shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David ... and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:31-33).*

The father of John the Baptist saw in the coming of Jesus the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham:

*“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people ... to perform the mercy promised to our fathers ... the oath which he swore to our father Abraham” (Luke 1:68-73).*

When he grew up, Jesus preached the Gospel of the kingdom and crowds flocked to hear him. In the end, sadly, most people turned against him and he was crucified. But God raised him from the dead; he ascended to heaven and will come again – this time as King to rule over all the earth. As the angels told the bewildered disciples when their Lord was taken from them:

*“This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).*

### **Israel – a sign of Christ’s coming**

Those disciples could never have foreseen how long it would be before Christ would return. The world has had to wait, not a year or two, not a century, but nearly 2,000 years for the second coming of Jesus Christ to set up the kingdom long ago promised to Abraham and David. During the greater part of those two millennia, the Jews were exiled from their land, dispersed throughout the world, and the idea of the promises to Abraham and David being fulfilled was beyond anyone’s imagination. But then, about 100 years ago, largely as a result of events during World War 1, what had seemed humanly impossible came within the realms of possibility: the story is told elsewhere, but in summary the way was opened for part of Palestine to be offered as a homeland for exiled Jews. After World War 2, the people who had survived the Holocaust in Europe were allowed back to the land of their



*king shall be king over them” (Ezekiel 36:19; 37:21,22).*

The Jews have always been witnesses to God and His purpose (see Isaiah 43). Currently, few Israelis believe in Jesus; many don't even believe in the God who caused them to return to their land. But as the day of Christ's coming draws near, the Bible predicts a religious

awakening and the State of Israel was established. Now the population of Israel has reached 8 million, of which just over 6 million are Jews and nearly 2 million are Arabs and other ethnic groups.

For Bible believers, the recent history of the Jews has provided a truly spectacular confirmation of the power of Bible prophecy, because the re-establishment of the people in their land was to be one of the major signs that the return of Christ is near:

*“I scattered them (said God) among the nations, and they were dispersed throughout the countries; I judged them according to their ways and their deeds ... But ... I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one*

awakening so that in due time some, at least, will recognise their king when he comes to claim his kingdom. Meanwhile the very existence of the state of Israel – against all expectations – is evidence that God is preparing the way for His Son to come back.

### **Other signs of the times**

Jesus himself told us about other signals to look for in advance of his coming:

*“There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations ... men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Luke 21:25-27).*

So the Lord will come – sooner probably than we think. And his coming will set in



motion a chain of remarkable events long foretold in the Bible. In preparation for that kingdom, there will be a resurrection of the dead:

*“The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).*

Will there be peace straight away? Almost certainly not! The “distress of nations” will doubtless continue for some time, because the King will not at first be accepted. There is no space here to discuss in detail the great confrontation of world powers in the last days, foretold by prophets like Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah. We can expect more wars before Christ’s reign of peace is finally inaugurated. Most nations will reject the rulership of Christ: he will have to rule “with a rod of iron” (Psalm 2:9; Revelation 19:15) and judgements will be poured out

on those who stand in the way of God’s kingdom. But then, at last, we can expect those prophecies about peace, justice and righteousness to become real:

*“He shall speak peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea” (Zechariah 9:10).*

*“The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places” (Isaiah 32:17, 18).*

At the heart of Christ’s kingdom will be the city of Jerusalem:

*“Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her ... Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river ... and you*

*shall be comforted in Jerusalem”  
(Isaiah 66:10-13).*

*“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:  
may they prosper who love you.  
Peace be within your walls, prosperity  
within your palaces” (Psalm 122:6,7).*

### Can you believe it?

Not many people are interested in what the Bible has to say. Fewer still accept that the Bible has something to tell us about the time in which we are living. How (they ask) can ancient Jewish writings have any possible relevance to our lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? This is where faith comes in. It requires faith to believe in God. It needs faith to accept that the Bible has authority. It demands faith to choose divine wisdom – the wisdom of the Bible – rather than the wisdom of the experts out there in the world today. What precisely have they to offer us? Presidents, monarchs, the bureaucrats in Brussels, the United Nations, economists, scientists ... do any of them really have a formula for creating an age of lasting peace? Immense efforts, over many years, have gone into restoring harmony in the Middle East, into solving the problems of Afghanistan, into healing the rifts in Africa. Time and time again, brief successes are followed by setbacks; new wars break out; truces are broken. There is no lasting answer.

Only God has the answer to the shattered peace of our world. Only when God sends His Son, Jesus Christ, will there be a solution. For many this is make-believe;

what we have put forward in this booklet will be viewed as fantasy. But the Bible has been proved true in the past, and it will be proved abundantly true again. Peace will be restored to this beautiful planet, which God created for His glory.

Tragically, some people are blinkered: many are too proud to believe what they do not want to believe. When Jesus first came into the world, who were the first to hear about it? Not the rulers, not the experts, not the scholars, but the shepherds, out on the hills, “*keeping watch over their flock by night*”. They heard the angels announce the birth of Jesus, and although we have quoted the words already, they deserve repetition:

*“There is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord ... And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2:11-14).*

### Peace at last!

The second coming of Jesus is imminent, and once more it will be particularly the humble and not the worldly-wise who will believe and understand it when it happens. Will you be among them? Have faith; *be bold enough to believe* – and wait with us for the day when Jesus Christ the eternal King will be here to rule the world in perfect peace for ever.

*John Morris*

*Bible passages are taken from the New King James Version*