

"Proclaim an Offer of Peace"

Peace. That's a word that probably sounds good to most people. Most people are not warmongers. Most of us genuinely want peace. Sometimes people have had to go to war in order to find peace. Even outside of physical war, you sometimes have to fight for what you believe in. Other times, the only road to peace will be if you surrender.

World War II is the classic example. The Allies were looking for peace by defending themselves. It involved going to war to fight for peace. Maybe they could have all surrendered, but that would not have given peace while Hitler continued his programs of genocide. On the other hand, Germany was wise when it finally did surrender in 1945, recognizing that there was no value for them in continuing to fight. There is a time for war and a time for peace.

Our passage today talks about war and peace in the old covenant. It talks again about the concept of holy war under Israel. Well, let me remind us again today as we study this passage that at this point in redemptive history we are not to engage in physical holy wars. We've made that case in earlier passages in Deuteronomy; that under the new covenant we do not engage in physical wars in the name of Christ. We have said that we are constantly engaged in a spiritual holy war. What God was doing with Israel in the Old Testament was a unique thing for that dispensation. At that time God's people were identified with one particular nation, living in one particular plot of land. They were a holy people in a holy land, and the battles that they engaged in to protect this holy land were holy wars. As such, they were a picture to us of what it meant to be God's people. In their God-given successes, they demonstrated a people blessed by God; as they destroyed other nations they became a picture of God's judgment that falls upon those who live in rebellion against God.

And yet it is this passage that shows a hope for the nations. This passage tells us that God never intended just Israel to experience the blessings of God. This passage should cause us to remember the promise God originally made to Abraham; that through his offspring, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. This passage holds out a measure of peace to the nations. It anticipates the fulfillment of this promise to Abraham. That's what we'll be thinking about today as we look at this passage. We'll think about how God ultimately extended peace to all the nations through the one who would come from Israel. In a passage that pictures so much war, we will also find a picture of the peace that foreshadows the greater peace God had in store for the nations.

Let's dig into this passage. Notice with me that there are two different classes of enemies described in this passage. This shows us that God wasn't setting up Israel as just some imperialistic nation to wreak destruction on the earth. Verses 15-16 make this distinction. The nations that are far off, those outside the Promised Land, they were not to utterly destroy those nations. Only a specific list of nations that lived in the Promised Land were to be utterly destroyed. Let's think about this second group here first. Verse 17 describes this group who lived in the Promised Land. It says Israel was to "utterly destroy" them. This is the Hebrew word *cherem*. We've talked about *cherem* warfare in the past. It was the Jewish concept of holy war in the Old Testament. It involved utterly destroying man, woman, and child.

This utter destruction is what Israel was to inflict on these people groups, according to verse 17. They were to leave nothing that has breath alive. Now when we spoke on this holy war in the past, I made the case that this was God's judgment against these nations. This wasn't God just giving justification to wipe out another people in the name of religion. I made the case that God was using Israel as a picture of final judgment on these nations. This is similar to what God did in the flood, when he destroyed the wicked from the face of the earth. It was similar to how God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Those were pictures of the final judgment ahead of time. I made the case back in earlier passages in Deuteronomy that this *cherem* warfare was of the same nature. God had made it clear that these weren't innocent people being put to death. Rather, they were rebellious pagans whose sins had come to their full measure. God then instructed Israel to be his hand of final judgment against these nations.

By having Israel utterly destroy them it's a picture of what will ultimately happen to any who oppose God's rule. When Christ returns, he will usher in the final judgment. This utter destruction that Israel performed in these holy wars is a picture of that final judgment. On that final Day of Judgment, God will give eternal death and damnation to the wicked. There will be no peace for those who have remained in their sins on that Day of Judgment.

And so again, notice in this passage that Israel was not allowed to go and execute this holy war destruction on all the nations. That's important to notice. God wasn't telling Israel to wipe out all the nations. Remember, God told Abraham that they were to be a *blessing* to all the nations; not the destruction of all the nations! As a side note, this reminds us that the New Testament church has not received any specific call to holy war on any nation. We as the church don't have any right to kill any nation or any person with a physical sword just because they don't believe. Israel was only given a specific call to holy war on a few specific nations; the New Testament church has not been given any such call.

And so Israel was only to utterly destroy a specific set of peoples; God has told us in Scripture that this was his punishment against these peoples for their multitude of sins. God used Israel as the means of his judgment. And so here this chapter distinguishes how Israel is to go to war with these specific nations, versus how they go to war with other peoples who are far off.

The difference is important. So let's think now about how Israel is to treat their other enemy nations; the ones that are far off, outside the Promised Land. The first thing that Israel was to do if they found themselves in conflict with another nation that was far off, was to offer them peace. Verse 10. "When you go near a city to fight against it, then proclaim an offer of peace to it." This is covenant language. They were to offer a covenant of peace, a formal treaty, with this enemy. They were to offer peace to this enemy, so that their enemy would become their friend. Realize, this would not have been an option for these other nations in the Promised Land, these ones that God had told them to utterly destroy. Chapter 7, verse 2, had specifically commanded Israel to *not* enter into covenant with these peoples in the Promised Land. They were under God's judgment and were to be destroyed. But here, we see a different approach for these other nations outside the Promised Land. They were to be offered peace.

If they accepted the peace, their lives would be saved, and they'd be in servitude to Israel. If the nation refused the peace, you'll notice that the way Israel was to conduct the war would be different than in the *cherem* warfare. Verses 13-14 describe that sort of war. They were to essentially conquer the city, killing the men, but not the rest of the people. They'd be able to keep the spoil of the land as plunder. That's different than how they handled the nations under *cherem*

warfare. Other passages on the cherem warfare say that Israel wasn't to take any spoil in *cherem* warfare. All of it was under a ban, devoted to destruction; a picture of God's complete wrath against sin. But these other nations were not to experience the picture of final judgment ahead of time. They were to be conquered militarily in that case, but not utterly destroyed. By the way, this passage doesn't tell Israel to go out looking for wars. It doesn't tell us why they might find themselves in a war. This could be primarily a defensive situation. There's nothing in this passage that would call Israel to act imperialistically, looking for war. No, the only imperial campaign they had been given was to take over the Promised Land. And yet, if for whatever reason they did find themselves at war with a far away nation, this describes how they should conduct that battle.

What I want us to see as we look at this passage is how this anticipates the gospel going out to the gentiles. The utter destruction to these nations in the Promised Land anticipates final judgment. But this offer of peace to the gentile nations who were far off, anticipates the gospel going to the gentiles. Ephesians 2 talks about how God has brought the gospel not only to Jews, but to also Gentiles. Ephesians 2:17 says that Christ, "Came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near." The peace offered in the gospel is the peace of eternal life. It's the peace of no longer being an enemy to God. It's the peace of no longer being an enemy to God's people. It's the peace of coming into the family of God's people. It's the peace of being saved from our sins. It's the peace of being saved from the final Day of Judgment. This is the peace Christ proclaimed to Jew and Gentile. He says we can have this peace by repenting of our sins and believing in the gospel; having faith in the salvation that he won for us on the cross. This isn't a peace just for the Jews; it's being offered to all the nations. God's people are told to offer it in the name of Christ.

Christ's offer of peace to the nations is anticipated here in this passage. Israel was to proclaim an offer of peace to the nations. I use the language of anticipation here, because it's not the same sort of peace that's offered in Christ in the new covenant. It anticipates that peace, it's not identical with it. This offer of peace is anticipated in two ways: in its acceptance and in its rejection. Both are anticipated in this passage, but neither are identical with what we find in the new covenant.

The acceptance of this peace from Christ is actually far better than the peace offered the nations in this passage. And the rejection of this peace is actually far worse than what happens to the nations who reject this peace in this passage. This is why we're talking about this passage anticipating the peace; it's not identical. But it foreshadows it. Think about the differences. They highlight the gospel for us. In this passage, if you accepted the peace offered by Israel, you'd have your lives spared, but you'd basically be in subservient relationship from the rest of God's people. Verse 11 says that the surrendering nation would become servants of Israel. Now certainly it's better to be a servant of God's servants than to be dead. But in the New Testament we see that a Gentile who accepts Christ's offer of peace is not brought into covenant relationship to be subservient to the rest of God's people. We don't just become second class citizens. No Ephesians 2 emphasizes the unity that Jews and Gentiles have together in Christ. We experience one united peace together with Christ. And so the peace shown here in this passage gives hope that Jews and Gentiles could live in peace together under God. That Jew and Gentile together could be in covenant relationship before God. This passage began to give some hope that all the nations would find blessing through Israel, as God promised. But this peace didn't go far enough. It left us looking for a better peace. That peace has come in Christ.

Of course, the rejection of Christ's peace is actually going to be far worse than than what's described here for rejecting Israel's offer of peace. Rejecting Israel's offer of peace would result in death for many, but not the widespread utter destruction like those destroyed in *cherem* warfare. Well, ultimately the picture of destruction in *cherem* warfare is actually a closer picture of what will happen to you if you reject Christ's peace. And yet I think it's helpful to see the two levels of destruction here in this passage. You see, today, if you are offered the peace of Christ and you reject it, that's not good. But likely you won't face the final Day of Judgment today either. Many have been offered the gospel peace today, and rejected it. Yet Christ has not yet returned; the final Day of Judgment has not yet happened. You could reject Christ's offer of peace and not meet the utter destruction, yet. You might live another day, and have yet another opportunity to receive this peace. And yet none of knows how much time we have left on earth. Let's not spurn this grace offered to us. You see, what's anticipated in this passage is that rejecting the peace is a bad thing. It has consequences; even immediate ones. Even today, if you reject Christ's peace, you may go on to have many years in this life; but rejecting Christ has immediate ramifications, especially spiritual ones, on your life.

And so this passage anticipates the offer of peace that Christ would bring to the nations. It anticipates the blessings of accepting this peace and the consequences of rejecting it. If you lived back then, you probably wouldn't have recognized the full significance of this passage; how this anticipated this greater peace to come. There were certainly hints to it. And yet we live this side of the cross. We have seen the coming of Jesus. We have the New Testament that helps us to read this passage with even greater light. And so in the greatest fulfillment of verse 11, I'd like to speak to any who are here today who do not know Jesus. I extend in the name of Christ an offer of peace. Today you can become reconciled to God. Today you can go from being an enemy of God to being his servant, and even more so, his adopted child whom he loves. And to the Christians that are here today, be reminded of the peace that you have with Christ through faith. We who were far off, have now received peace when we had deserved destruction. That's because on the cross, Christ bore our punishment in our place.

I'd like to spend the rest of our time today thinking about the spiritual warfare we now find ourselves in as Christians. It's true we are not called to physical war at this point against the nations. The church as the church is not to take up physical armaments. We are in a battle however. We are in a spiritual battle. 2 Corinthians 10:3 says that we do not war according to the flesh. Ephesians 6 reminds us that we are in a spiritual battle. We go forth now proclaiming Christ's offer of peace. We preach peace to those who are near and to those who are far off. When we preach peace to those who are near, we preach it to those in our midst, encouraging Christians to persevere by God's grace in the midst of Satan's attacks. When we preach peace to those who are far off, we are confronting unrepentant sinners with their need for grace and forgive; salvation which comes only in the name of Jesus. We warn of the folly of rejecting this peace, but we leave ultimate judgment up to God. We simply become messengers, challenging people with the Word; confronting their false hopes; tearing down their faulty arguments; presenting the truth of Christ. It is a battle; it's a spiritual one. One that the enemy will not hold back in his counter attacks. We use spiritual weapons; he might even try to use physical means to attack back at us. But we will stand firm in the strength of Christ.

And so I want us to find encouragement for this spiritual battle by looking at how Israel was encouraged in this chapter for their physical battles. The opening verses of this passage call the people not to fear. They were instead to believe. Moses encourages them of this right now long before the battles, verse 1. The

current priest was supposed to remind the people of this right before any battle they faced, verse 2. They were to have faith, not fear. But this wasn't just some blind faith. It wasn't some baseless faith. No, verse 4 promises them that God would go with them. God would bring the victory. And they should know that God is able to deliver that promise. Verse 1 reminds them that this is the same God who gave them victory over the Egyptians. You might remember the victory of the Red Sea, when horses and chariots and the armies of Pharaoh were swallowed up by the sea through the hand of God. And so the people's faith in God's victory wasn't without basis. It was founded in experience, having seen the might of God in the Exodus. And that is even more so the case with us. We've witnessed the power of God in the resurrection. If Christ has already conquered death, what enemy can really stand against us if Christ goes with us! God in Christ will give us as Christians victory in this spiritual battle we are in.

Of course, this is one of the biggest obstacles for us in fighting in this spiritual battle. Fear. It's easy to understand why someone might be afraid before going into a war zone as a soldier. That is scary. We can have that sort of fear as we fight the good fight of faith. It's scary to share our faith. It's scary to take a stand for Christ at your job when you refuse to do something immoral that your boss asks of you. Many Christians have had to face martyrdom over their faith. And yet most of us will likely never face that. But we still struggle with fear in sharing Christ with others. And yet, if Israel was encouraged by the strength of God, we should all the more be encouraged. We've been told the same thing. In Ephesians 6 we've been told to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. We, like Israel, don't go alone. Jesus told us that he would always be with us as we serve him. He will give us the ultimate victory. He is with us. His strength goes before us. Let us not fear, but believe this; really trust it; pray that he will strengthen us in our fear.

Notice too how God had Israel form their army in this passage. They were to be made up by those full of faith, not by those full of fear, or with other distractions. This of course highlights that victory for Israel would be by the might of God, and not by the size and skill of their army. Verse 1 says they shouldn't fear horses and chariots; presumably Israel's army at that time didn't have those accoutrements. Nor should they fear large numbers in the enemy's army. God's strength could overcome all these things. Instead, look at verses 5-9. This shows a systematic weeding down of Israel's army. There was no compulsion to serve in Israel's army. If you were afraid, you were to be dismissed. If you had a new house, or a new vineyard, or a new wife, you were to be dismissed. Nothing was to distract in their service in the LORD's army.

Those three things really cover the scope of distractions we might have: the house represents all our possessions that need our attention; the vineyard represents our job which needs our attention; our wife represents our family and other relationships that need our attention. These good things could become a distraction to serve in God's army, and so these specific cases are allowed to be dismissed from service. But of course, all of this shows that God doesn't need large numbers to have victory. You can think of Gideon's forming of an army in Joshua 7 and see this acted out in history. God doesn't need lots of people to win a battle. Yet he allows the faithful to participate in his victory.

Now when you read this passage, you don't get the sense that it was per se wrong to go attend to your new house or vineyard or wife, instead of serving in the army. And yet, we have a bit of a heightened call in the New Testament. You can think of the two New Testament passages we read earlier in the service. There's a heightened called for undivided devotion to the Lord in the New Testament. Paul tells us that there is nothing wrong to take a spouse. Certainly there's nothing

wrong to own a house or to attend to your daily vocations. In fact those are good things the Bible says. They are even divine blessings. It's a blessing from God to have a spouse the Bible says. Having a job or a home are blessings. God wants us to enjoy these things. And yet though these blessings have something in common. They are temporary. They are things we enjoy in this life.

That's why Paul can tell us in 1 Corinthians 7:29, "The time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none..." and he goes on to say that those who buy should be as those who do not possess. I could think this could easily be an abused verse. You have to read a verse in context. In context that verse couldn't mean that we don't have responsibilities to our spouses. It doesn't mean that. But what it's basically telling us is to understand the priority of the spiritual mission we've been placed on. As Christians, we are all soldiers in God's army. In the Old Testament, certain things like your new wife might be a reason to take some time off from service. But the time is short! Christ is coming back soon. We need to especially be concerned about bringing the gospel of peace to the nations. There's not much more time left. This gospel work has eternal ramifications. The results and benefits of this ministry are not limited to this age.

Again, Paul's not saying to disregard your wife, or your family, or your job, or being a good steward of your possessions. But he is calling us to set everything in the right perspective. There's a way to be 100% fully devoted in serving as a soldier for Christ, while still being married, working your day job, and mowing the lawn on weekends. You see, it's not that God wants to be your top priority, he wants to be your all. That in whatever you do, you do it in serving him. In your marriage, you point your spouse to Christ, and show Christ's love to your spouse. In your job, you work as serving the Lord, pursuing excellence in your work. In taking care of your earthly estate, you look to steward everything well, knowing that God has entrusted these things to you. Think about this: Satan wouldn't want you to do those things. He'd want you to neglect your spouse, to slack off at work, to waste away your wealth. In all these areas of life and more, you can be a reflection of Christ in thought, word, and deed. In all of these things you can fight in this spiritual battle. At times in this battle you'll be the one actively proclaiming the peace of Christ. At other times, you'll be the one living out the peace of Christ. In all these things, you are serving as a soldier of Christ.

So then brothers and sisters, let's keep our eyes on Jesus as we fight the good fight of faith. Go out in his strength, with the Word of God in our hearts and on our lips as we share the peace of Christ with the world. Amen.

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