

Peace on Earth

How often have you heard a statement like “Jesus came to bring peace to the earth”? Have you said or thought it yourself? Is that statement true? What does Scripture say?

Matthew 10:34

34 “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

How then can there be this perception that Jesus came to bring peace? Where does such a thought come from? At the Last Supper Jesus foretold His death and in this context Jesus told his disciples:

John 14:27

27 “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.

Did they then have peace? Were they not fearful? No. Soon they would, all of them, flee away. Soon that rooster would crow and Peter would be crestfallen. So this statement must refer to a time after that; a later time. But only days earlier, as He left the Mount of Olives and entered Jerusalem to cries of “Hosanna”, He had words for Jerusalem.

Luke 19:37–38

37 As soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen,

38 shouting: “BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

Peace in heaven! Glory in the highest! No mention of earth at all. But these weren't the words of Jesus. The people thought their king was about to take His place on the throne and Rome would be soon defeated. So what did Jesus say to Jerusalem?

Luke 19:42–43

42saying, “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes.

43“For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side,

The things which make for peace have been hidden from you! Wait! Wait! That's not in the script. We are the victors; not the ones hemmed in, not the ones surrounded! No. Jesus was right. Jerusalem did not withstand Rome.

Sometimes we see the following statement used to affirm that Jesus came to bring peace.

John 16:33

33 “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

But did He say that they had peace? No. What did He say then? I have spoken things to you. As a result you will come to be in Me. Then you will have the fruit called peace; but not in the world. As long as you remain in the world you will have tribulation.

But despite all of these things, I think the most likely reason for the misconception that Jesus came to bring peace is attributable to a misinterpretation of the proclamation made by the heavenly host when they joined the Angel of the Lord who was telling the shepherds about the good news of a birth in Bethlehem.

Luke 2:13–14

13 And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

14 “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

How then is this statement misinterpreted? Surely it is clear. Isn't it?

“Glory to God in the highest” is unambiguous praise of God, but how does “And on earth peace among men ...” represent praise of God? Of course peace among men could only be due to God and that certainly would cause us to praise Him. However, is that what the heavenly host intended ~~us~~ the shepherds to understand?

Earlier, in verse 10, the angel says he brings good news. He says “... born for you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.” The Lord has become human!!! Good news! The gospel. Now wouldn't the heavenly host be reinforcing that message of the gospel, the good news? Consider this possibility.

14 “Glory to God in the highest and on earth. Peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

God is in the highest and He's on earth too! - Glory to God! Praise Him!
Peace Himself is among men! - Glory, glory glory! Is this not indeed wonderful news?