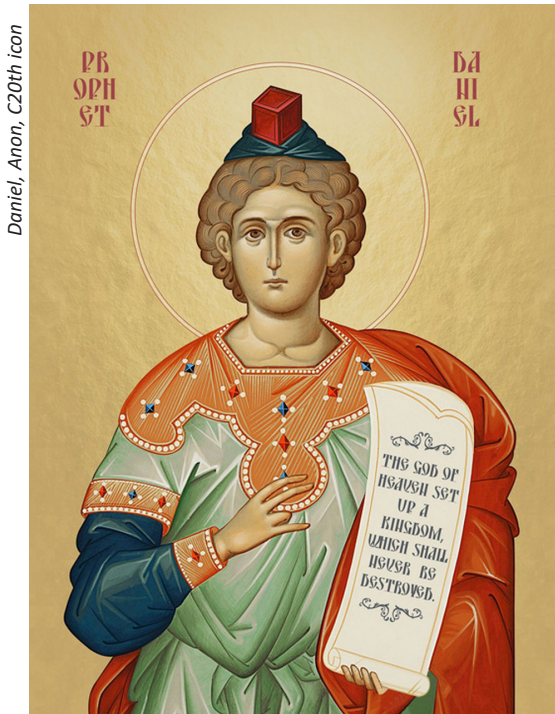


# God, Peace, and the Old Testament

## Study Three



Daniel, Anon, C20th icon

### A starter

When life's getting you down, where do you find your peace?

### Key verse

'So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God.' (Isaiah 41:10)

## Peace for God's People

(Read Daniel 10:14-19; Proverbs 3:13-18; Malachi 2:1-9)

Daniel had been praying that he might get an understanding of God's plan for his people. He sees a vision of a great war, the implications of which are enough to bring Daniel into a time of despair and mourning. Then, standing on the banks of the Tigris, another vision comes of a man with a face like lightning and eyes like torches, who talks of a conflict between spiritual powers, who does not want Daniel's prayer to be answered.

Daniel is overawed by the sight of this angelic figure, who talks of what will happen in 'a time yet to come'. Daniel, left speechless by what's happened, finds peace, reassurance and strength in the angel's touch and words.

Proverbs brings us a poetic hymn extolling the blessings of being right with God, which brings with it an inner peace and a sense of well-being that is beyond that which the world can

offer, and more precious than gold. The knowledge and wisdom of God in our lives is, says the writer, like 'a tree of life', a symbol of vitality and fullness of life.

The words of Malachi bring a warning to the priests of his day, who have forgotten their true role, and the covenant promises, which were a joint agreement between God and his people, and not a one-sided promise from God.

The priests lived off the tithes of the people and had responsibilities regarding behaviour and godly duties that they were obviously not meeting, having turned away from the path that Levi followed, that brought life, peace, and a reverence for God. Now, the people are stumbling from that same path, and God is clear as to the cause. Justice will follow.

## Discussion

- 1: How easy is it to despair of the way the world is heading, and where is inner peace to be found among the headlines we read and hear about on the news?
- 2: Where does the passage from Proverbs speak into your own faith journey?
- 3: How important is it to remember Scripture's words about God's relationship with his people through history, when we're thinking about our own lives and faith?
- 4: Daniel found peace within his vision. Have you experiences of finding peace through prayer, worship, pilgrimage, or perhaps a retreat, that you could share with the group?

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## A peace for God's Nation

(Read Deuteronomy 6:1-9; 1 Samuel 7:13-14; Isaiah 33:20-24)

The passage from Deuteronomy emphasises to its readers how important is a 'fear of the Lord', giving God the respect that is due, and keeping his commands, for their own peace and well-being, so they might enjoy a long life in 'a land flowing with milk and honey'. Verse 4 in Hebrew is the 'Shema', a declaration in an area of the world worshipping many gods, that there is only one Lord, he alone is God, and the people of Israel have a covenant relationship with him. And this, of course, is information well worth sharing.

In 1 Samuel we reach a point in the Israel's story where Samuel has, with God's help, brought about a tremendous victory over the Philistines, seriously weakening their power and ability to respond. The Amorites, who preferred to live in the hilly rather than coastal regions, were not a threat. This was not a vast area of land that Samuel controlled and acted as judge, with the named towns only a few miles apart, but we now read of a precious time of peace for the nation for the rest of Samuel's life.

Isaiah 33 is a psalm-like poem that expresses a longing for freedom. The people are waiting for the Lord to appear, scatter his enemies and establish his reign of justice and righteousness, and the language is quite pictorial. A time is coming when Jerusalem will be at peace, a place of broad rivers and streams. There's a Messianic hint in the phrase 'the Lord is our king; it is he who will save us' (v24). The description of Jerusalem is a picture of a tent so well pegged down that it will not move, hinting at a people who were previously nomadic, now having 'a peaceful abode'.



*A New Jerusalem, Cloisters Apocalypse, C14th*

## Discussion

- 5: How do you interpret the command and benefits of 'fearing the Lord'?
  - 6: Would you say that the governments of the world commit enough time and effort in promoting and encouraging peace, and if not, for what reasons?
  - 7: There are few truly nomadic people today, but plenty on the move seeking refuge. How important is that 'peaceful abode' that Isaiah talks about, and what are its benefits to all people?
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## The benefits of peace

((Read Isaiah 41:8-10; Jeremiah 29:4-7, 10-12; Isaiah 61:1-3))

Speaking through Isaiah, God has called out to all the nations and islands, asserting his sovereignty. Even Cyrus, leader of the Persian Empire, would find himself (unknowingly) in service to God's will. Which is why God's people, in exile in Babylon when it falls to Cyrus, need not fear. God has been with them on a long journey and chosen them for a purpose of service, which would be unfulfilled should they be destroyed!

God loves his people, his chosen people, despite their habit of drifting into sin. This continual love also honours the promises made to God's 'friend', Abraham, and therefore they should not be anxious, for God will be with them, their strength and comfort through good times and bad.

The prophet Jeremiah sent a letter from Jerusalem to the elders among the exiles and to all those carried by Nebuchadnezzar from the city to Babylon. Once again, there is an underlying assumption that the actions of Nebuchadnezzar were a part of God's purposes, and instead of becoming anxious about this time of exile, the people should settle down, live normal lives, and work toward peace and prosperity.

The people would be in Babylon awhile, and not as slaves or prisoners in this new land, so creating communities by building homes was to be encouraged. God would be with them, hear their prayers and, at the right time, bring them back home.

The closing passage from Isaiah 6 brings familiar words that Jesus used of himself, as the prophet talks of 'the year of the Lord's favour', and of a man anointed by the Spirit of God to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the broken-hearted, comfort those who mourn, free those in captivity, and bring a garment of praise where there is a spirit of despair.

The word 'peace' is not there, but its essence is throughout the prophet's words.



## Discussion

- 8: The struggles of life can sometimes seem overwhelming. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah encourage the people to trust God for daily strength, peace, and comfort, even when the timescale is long. How easy is that in your own life?
- 9: Jeremiah encourages the people to make good use of their time in exile, settling down, integrating with, and praying for the peace and prosperity of the place where God has placed them. Is this targeted prayer something churches, both local and national, could spend more time doing?
- 10: How do Isaiah's words concerning the Year of the Lord's Favour speak to you?

*'There is a sound that comes from gospel music that doesn't come from anything else. It is a sound of peace. It is a sound of, 'I'm going to make it through all of this.'*  
(Yolanda Adams)

*'All we are saying is give peace a chance.'*  
(John Lennon)

*'Did I offer peace today? Did I bring a smile to someone's face? Did I say words of healing? Did I let go of my anger and resentment? Did I forgive? Did I love? These are the real questions. I must trust that the little bit of love that I sow now will bear many fruits, here in this world and the life to come.'*  
(Henri Nouwen)

## Takeaway

Are there refugees in your local area, and if so, is there anything you or your church fellowship can do to offer support and friendship?