

Peace

Hebrew *shalom*

Of the six Hebrew words translated "peace" in the Old Testament, only two relate to our modern concept of peace. The other four have to do with "holding your peace" or keeping quiet. These Hebrew words are unrelated to *shalom*. The other word is *shelem*, which is always used in connection with a "peace offering." In the earliest Hebrew, vowels did not exist, so *shalom* and *shelem* would be the same. As the language developed, accent marks (called vowel pointers) were added to words to indicate the vowels, so *shalom* and *shelem* became different, the latter always being used in connection with that special offering under the Law.

Shalom is used in 213 different verses in the Old Testament. Fifty or so of them refer to the absence of strife, such as peace as opposed to war (Ecclesiastes 3:8). In another 25 cases, *shalom* is used as a greeting or farewell (e.g., Judges 19:20, 1 Samuel 25:6). The context surrounding the other two-thirds imply a peace that is more than a lack of war, but rather a peace of mind.

Even in the instances when *shalom* imparts the idea of an absence of strife, more than a lack of war is understood (Numbers 6:24-26, 1 Kings 4:25,5:4; 1 Chronicles 22:9-10, Lamentations 3:7). Peace is a work of righteousness (Psalm 34:14, Isaiah 32:17). After Phineas stopped the plague on the Plains of Moab, God made a Covenant of Peace with him, promising not to remove the High Priestly line from his descendents (Numbers 25:12, cf, Malachi 2:5). After the Captivity, a psalm celebrated that God would speak peace to His people again (Psalm 85:8, cf, Ezekiel 34:25). The Messiah was to usher in a Covenant of Peace (Isaiah 9:6, 54:10). Dying in peace is a blessing (Genesis 15:15).

Remarkably, "peace" was so important in the Hebrew culture that it became the standard greeting.

Greek *eirene* εἰρήνη

Five Greek words are translated "peace" in the New Testament, but only εἰρήνη pertains to our modern concept of peace. Again, all the others refer to "holding your peace."

The Greek equivalent of *shalom* was also used as a salutation and a blessing (Mark 5:34, Luke 7:50). Jesus gave the greeting special significance for the disciples (Luke 10:5, Matthew 10:13). Paul used peace at the beginning of every letter of his. James noted that the salutation can be empty (James 2:16).

Angels promised the peace of God in announcing the Messiah (Luke 2:14), although Jesus did not promise peace for all (Matthew 10:34), but for Christians (John 14:27, John 16:33, Ephesians 6:15), not political peace but peace between the faithful. The gospel was to be characterized by peace between ethnic groups (Ephesians 2:14). The coming of

the Messiah portended peace in heaven (Luke 19:38). The Father is called the God of peace (Hebrews 13:20). Melchizedek, a symbol of the Christ, is called the king of peace (Hebrews 7:2).

This εἰρήνη is also used to describe our relationship to God when we are forgiven (Romans 5:1, Colossians 1:20). But that peace is more than a release from judgment (Philippians 4:7). Making peace is an act of righteousness (Matthew 5:9, Hebrews 12:14).

Peace is the opposite of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33) and the desired normal state. Understanding brings peace. Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, contrasts peace with darkness and the shadow of death (Luke 1:79). The mind set on the Spirit is life and peace (Romans 8:6).

Peace is a gift from God (Romans 15:13) and mysteriously guards our hearts (Philippians 4:7). Yet it is something we pursue (2 Timothy 2:22, 1 Peter 3:11, 2 Peter 3:14) and which must rule in our hearts (Colossians 3:15). It is the peace of being reconciled to God.

Finally, this peace extends to the relationship between Christians, overcoming discord caused by issues which might seem important at the time, but, by comparison to brotherly love, are not. Peace characterizes times when the faithful assemble (Romans 14:17). When we have done all we can, but the other person will not reconcile, then peace, not beating a dead horse, is the answer (1 Corinthians 7:15). Unity happens because of peace, rather than the other way around (Ephesians 4:3, James 3:18).