

SHALOM: THE GOAL OF THE KINGDOM AND OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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The Editor concludes this collection of WCIU faculty, student, and alumni articles with a biblical perspective.

The Kingdom of God is ... righteousness, peace, and joy (Romans 14:17).

They made my brother hold a flashlight and watch while they took turns raping me. They were like animals. When he refused their order to rape me, they stabbed him to death in front of my eyes, just as they had done with my parents a year ago.”

For eight months this Congolese woman was a slave to the Congolese rebel army, raped multiple times every day, until she finally managed to escape. Reunited with her children, whom she had thought dead, she is now raising her new baby, Hope, the child of one of her rapists, while she participates in a job training program designed for women like herself. This woman’s plight is common in the Congo, where in some rural villages 90% of the women have been raped, ages 3 to 73. The only doctor in the only hospital on the “front lines” of this civil war, who does his best to repair torn and broken bodies, is the only man the women who come to him have been able to trust. Their husbands often leave them, this doctor recognizes, because they have been humiliated by being powerless to defend their women.

In a resource-rich country, this systematic destabilization of the society through violent acts against the women, enables certain interest groups to rape the natural resources of the land for their own benefit.¹

The Need for Shalom

Compare the condition of this society to that described by the prophet Isaiah in 59:4-11: No one calls for justice; no one pleads his case with integrity. ... They conceive trouble and give birth to evil. ... Their deeds are evil deeds, and acts of violence are in their hands. Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks in them will know peace. So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows. Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like men without eyes. At midday we stumble as if it were twilight; among the strong, we are like the dead. ... We look for justice, but find none; for deliverance, but it is far away.

Questions

1. What is wrong with these two societies? How do societies get to the place where such unrestrained violence and corruption break out?
2. What does God want human life to look like?
3. What are the essential conditions for a society to experience wholeness, peace and safety?
4. What is the responsibility of the body of Christ to those in harm's way? What should be the role of Kingdom-minded workers in addressing the roots of human problems around the world and what opposition should they expect to face?

Shalom Word Study

Before setting out to “solve” the problems of the world it is important to know the goal toward which one is working. What does God want human life to look like? One way to approach

answers to that question, and the others above, is to survey the connotations of the Hebrew word, “*shalom*,” commonly translated “peace,” but which implies much more: wholeness and wellness in the context of right relationships with God, people, and nature. This article seeks to further the understanding of what it means to see the advance God’s Kingdom, through a survey of the context of the occurrences of the word, “*shalom*,” in the Old Testament, with some comparisons to the New Testament. The usage and context of several Greek words for “*shalom*” that were used by the translators of the Septuagint, will be the basis for this study. (See a comprehensive list at the end of this article, “*Shalom*: Right Relationships with God, People, and Nature.”) The descriptions of *shalom* will be seen to correspond with descriptions of God’s will for people and all creation. But there is an enemy actively opposing God’s will. The theme of the Bible is the battle for the rulership of this world. In John 12:31 Jesus says of his upcoming death, “now the ruler of this world is being driven out.” A summary in 1 John 3:8 of the purpose of Jesus’ appearing on earth says, “the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil.” Those who participate with the Son of God in this battle will face the conditions the enemy seeks to impose: “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). The plight of those lying in the evil one’s power are described in the Old Testament, although the enemy’s presence was not well recognized, in passages where the opposite of *shalom* is described.

Descriptions of the Absence of Shalom

Question 1. What is wrong with these two societies? How do societies get to the place where such unrestrained violence and corruption break out?

Many of the occurrences of the term, *shalom*, in the Old Testament are in the context of conditions in which peace, safety and well-being are absent. These passages describe the opposite of God’s will and illustrate principles for understanding what has gone wrong in societies experiencing violence and danger.

- *God judges evil societies*

Old Testament history shows that God turns his back on those who do evil. He allows evil societies to be overthrown and destroyed, whether by the violence of other evil societies or by natural disasters, or both (see Jeremiah 33:4-6 and 4:22-26). Ralph Winter has commented that it shows God's commitment to free will that innocent people and even believers suffer while God is allowing evil cultures and societies to burn themselves out and destroy one another.² Jeremiah pointed out to the people of Jerusalem, regarding the disasters and lack of *shalom* he prophesied were coming to them, "Your own conduct and actions have brought this upon you. This is your punishment" (4:18).

- *God deals with societies according to their own standards*

In a land full of violence, God said he would deal with the people according to their conduct and judge them by their own standards (see Ezekiel 7:23-27). In seeking to understand the judgment of God against a society, questions such as these might be helpful:

What signs can be found in the history of the society of God's activity or redemptive analogies?

In what ways have the people, particularly the leaders, disobeyed and rebelled against what was right according to their own culture's traditional values?

What are the society's own expectations of justice and judgment?

- *Nature is cursed when a society turns away from God*

A person or group that presumes to think they are "safe and blameless" (Hebrew: *shalom*/ Greek: *hosia*) when in reality they are persisting in going their own way, contrary to God's way, will bring disaster on the land. "All the curses written in this book," listed in Deuteronomy 28:15ff, will come against that person or

society, Moses warned (see Deut. 29:18, 19). Among the curses for those not following God's commands are "wasting disease, with fever and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, with blight and mildew, which will plague you until you perish" (Deut. 28:22).

Descriptions of the Presence of Shalom

Question 2. What does God want human life to look like?

In contrast to the descriptions of the absence of *shalom*, descriptions of the presence of *shalom* illustrate God's will for people and the land. In a presentation to the staff of the U.S. Center for World Mission on February 14, 2008, Paul Pierson asked the question, "What does God want human life to look like?" He answered his own question with a good description of *shalom*, which is also a good description of the goals of Kingdom mission: grace, health, education, safety, well-being for all people.

These qualities flow from being in right relationship with God, as seen in Jeremiah's prophecy that tied the concept of "prosperity" (Hebrew: *shalom*/ Greek *eirene*) to God's forgiveness of sins of rebellion. "I will ... forgive all their sins of rebellion against me. Then this city will bring me renown, joy, praise and honor before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it; and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it" (33:8, 9).

From this passage, it is clear that *shalom* is a quality that is observable. A visible evidence of *shalom* in the realm of nature was understood by one of Job's comforters as including the wild animals being at peace (Hebrew *shalom*/ Greek *eirene*) with humans (Job 5:24). Isaiah elaborated on this concept in describing the reign of the Messiah: "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. ... They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (11:6, 9).

In his list of animal life that will no longer harm or destroy when the Lord's *shalom* is being experienced, Isaiah's lack of knowledge prevented him from including harmful micro-organisms that cause disease in humans, animals, and plants. But knowing in the 21st century that disease is caused by bacteria and viruses, and knowing that disease is one of the curses that is an evidence of the lack of *shalom* (see Deut. 28:22 and Jer. 32:23), it seems reasonable to include the "taming" (or eradication) of these types of "animal" life in a contemporary application of the understanding of *shalom*. This is a frontier of Kingdom mission that missiologist Ralph Winter strongly urges in order to glorify God by making known to the world that He is not the author of disease and suffering.

Rather, God's will is demonstrated by another observable sign of *shalom*: health and healing. To a formerly wicked city and the people in it, God says through the prophet Jeremiah, "I will bring health and healing to [the city]; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace/*eirene* and security (Greek *pistin*—the root word for faithfulness)" (Jer. 33:6). This passage demonstrates that there is no dichotomy between social and spiritual healing or between physical and spiritual healing. *Shalom* is holistic.

Conditions for Experiencing Shalom

Question 3. What are the essential conditions for a society to experience the wholeness, peace and safety described in these passages of Scripture?

When a society repents and turns to God, Scripture shows, He is willing to restore and bless the people with *shalom/eirene* (see Ps. 30:11; Jer. 33: 6, 9). A concordance study shows there seem to be two conditions for a society or person to experience *shalom*. One is the intention to follow God's laws and principles. The other is acceptance of God's provision of a substitute punishment for *not* following God's laws and principles. In both cases opposition should be expected from the enemy whose goal is the opposite of God's will.

1. The principle of keeping God's requirements as a condition for blessing and *shalom* was specifically stated to Isaac shortly before he encountered Abimelech, king of the Philistines (see Genesis 26:1-5). It is through following God's guidelines that a society can function well. In fact, all nations on earth willing to function according to the will of God as revealed through His chosen people, will end up being blessed materially and spiritually (*shalom*). This is seen in Genesis 26:4, 5 where God repeated the promise to Isaac that was originally given to Abraham: "through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws." Immediately following this promise is an illustration of one of the nations, the Philistines, being blessed by the presence of Isaac's family, in spite of various problems, and sending him away in peace/*shalom/eirene* (Gen. 26:29, 30), without further quarreling or fighting.

When God's principles are followed, peace results. This is also seen in the encounter between Moses and his father-in-law. Jethro showed Moses how to satisfy the peoples' need for justice, without wearing himself out, by delegating some of the work to others. Jethro specifically stated that if "God so commands" that the principles of delegation be followed, and if Moses did follow them, then Moses would be able to stand the strain of leadership and the people would go home satisfied (*shalom*/"in peace"). (See Exodus 18:7-23.)

But *shalom* does not come easily. A spiritual enemy has it as his goal to prevent *shalom*; to prevent God's will from being done. Broken relationships among people and with God characterize the activities of people and nations throughout the Old Testament. A pattern seen throughout the Major and Minor Prophets is the repeated description of God allowing one nation to punish another for their evil ways, with the focus on the people of Israel and Judah who had the most opportunity to know God's expectations, yet failed to follow Him. As God

would withdraw His presence and hand of protection, the evil one, the “ruler of this world” (John 12:31) would step in and create havoc. The Old Testament prophets, without specifically acknowledging this enemy, recognized that God was somehow using or allowing one evil nation to punish another. Then the instrument of punishment of one group of people would in turn experience punishment for their own evil ways, in a seemingly never-ending cycle. (See, for example, Hosea 8:3-8; Joel 3:1-7.)

But a climactic statement by the prophet Isaiah points toward the possibility of a break in this vicious cycle. Speaking of the coming Messiah, Isaiah prophesied: “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace (*shalom/eirene*) was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Is. 53:5). Jesus brought an end to the cycle of one society punishing another for the evils it commits in its rebellion against God. Jesus took the final punishment on behalf of any person or society that will accept his peace offering. This was the defeat of the evil one’s schemes against humanity (1 John 3:8—“the Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil”). By accepting this substitute punishment, people and societies can break out of a vicious cycle and experience healing of broken relationships with God, people, and nature.

The Battle for Shalom

Question 4. What is the responsibility of the body of Christ to those in harm’s way? What should be the role of Kingdom-minded mission workers in addressing the roots of human problems around the world?

Jeremiah seemed to be saying, in his plea to Israel, that if God’s people will obey him, the rest of the world will be blessed: “If you put your detestable idols out of my sight and no longer go astray, and if in a truthful, just and righteous way you swear, ‘As surely as the Lord lives,’ then the nations will be blessed by him and in him they will glory” (4:1,2). The challenge to be God’s obedient people, who are experiencing some of that blessing,

becomes very personal if we dare to ask ourselves the question from the Lord through the prophet Haggai: What are we doing building our paneled houses and elaborate landscapes when God's "Temple," the intended Body of Christ, is in shambles around the world? (see Haggai 1:3); when there are people from many nations in harm's way whom God wants to redeem for his glory (Is. 11:9)? What is the part of 21st-century believers in the battle for the planet?

Quoting again from Paul Pierson's presentation on February 14, 2008, "we are called to call people to become followers of Jesus as authentic disciples of Jesus in their culture and to show something to the world of what the Kingdom of God means, and what are its values." Pierson added, "What passion has God given you? If he gives you a passion He'll give you the gifts to go with it."

The Body of Christ contains people with the gifts to "do" or "make" *shalom* in many different areas: justice, peace-keeping, skill-building for economic independence, health, fighting and eradicating disease, etc. All of these peace-making activities can potentially demonstrate the values of the Kingdom and bring *shalom* into the lives of troubled people and societies. Jesus concluded his farewell speech to his disciples by promising *shalom* in the midst of trouble: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace/*eirene*. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). In 1 John we see that believers in Jesus also overcome the world and the evil one who rules it (1 John 2:13, 14; 5:4). As a result they are able to enjoy and pass on to others the *shalom* of God, as seen in the greetings of 2 John and 3 John. Compare the Greek words in these greetings with the list of words found at the end of this article showing how the Septuagint translated *shalom*:

"Grace/*charis*, mercy/*eleos* and peace/*eirene* from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love" (2 John 3).

“Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health/*hugiainei* and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well” (3 John 2).

Concluding Challenge

What will it take for a society that is not enjoying “good health,” that is engulfed in evil and experiencing the absence of God’s presence, to get to the place where it experiences *shalom*? What would *shalom* look like in the Congo, in Sudan, in Iraq, in Myanmar? Contrast the unjust and violent conditions in such societies with Zechariah’s prophesy, as he sings and prophesies to his baby son, John the Baptist, in Luke 1:68-79:

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people.

He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most high: for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God,

to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace/eirene.

Zechariah sang about salvation from human enemies, about serving God without fear in holiness and righteousness, forgiveness, mercy, peace—the same *shalom* spoken of throughout the Old Testament. In the context of similar justice,

righteousness and faithfulness, Isaiah described “salvation” from feared enemies in the realm of nature (which can also represent disease micro-organisms that were unknown at that time): “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, ... and a little child will lead them. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord” (Is. 11:6, 9).

In the holistic nature of *shalom*, there is no dichotomy between physical and spiritual health and well-being. *Shalom* is the description of God’s will for the earth and everything living in it. *Shalom* is the goal of God’s Kingdom: “Our Father in heaven ... your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Believers need to be ready for serious opposition in the spiritual battle for the rulership of this world. Jesus came and “made peace” by his death on the cross. Believers should expect no less opposition than he faced when they join him as “sons of God” in making (waging) peace in a broken war-torn world.

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

Shalom: Wholeness and Right Relationships with God, People, and Nature

Occurrences and Usage in the Septuagint of the Greek Words Used to Translate the Hebrew, Shalom

bugiainei 10x

Wellness, physical health Gen. 29:6; 37:14; 43:27,28; 2 Sam.
20:9; Esther 9:30; Is. 9:6

Greeting (I wish you well, peace to you, good health to you,
prosperity to you) Ex. 4:18; 1 Sam. 25:6

Farewell (go in peace/health) 2 Sam. 15:9

sotarias 3x

Safety (“salvation”) Gen. 26:31; 41:16; 44:17

hileos 1x

God deal mercifully with you, fear not Gen. 43:23

hosia 1x

Let good happen to me Deut. 29:19

anepause 1x

God has given me rest round about (no one is plotting against
me) 1 Kings 4:24

euthenousi 1x

Their houses are safe (good condition; no rod of punishment
from God is upon them) Job 21:9

chairein 3x

No joy to the wicked Is. 48:22; 57:21

Go out with joy, and be led forth with peace/gladness Is. 55:12

teleian 1x

Wholly carried away (Hebrew: peacefully exiled) Jer. 13:19

eirenes 169x

Peaceful Gen. 15:15; 2 Kings 22:20; 2 Chron. 34:28; Jer. 34:5

Endnote

1. Summary of a “60 Minutes” segment, televised in the summer of 2008.
2. Comment in a private conversation with the author on February 14, 2008.