

Jesus – Prince of Peace, or Conflict?

Aim: To determine from the scriptures as to whether **Matthew 10:34** contradicts **Isaiah 9:6** on the subject of Jesus being “*Prince of Peace*”.

Reading: Matthew 10:34-36¹ “...I have come to set a man against his father...”

Introduction:

In **Isaiah 9:6** we read;

*“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder, and His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*²

This is a Messianic prophecy talking about Jesus³. In this verse, we can see that one of the characteristics of the “*Child*”, the “*Son*”, is that He would be a “*Prince of Peace*”. A similar idea of Jesus being the “*Prince of Peace*” is seen in **Luke 2:14** - the context is the birth of Jesus, and an Angel of the Lord (verse 9) is proclaiming to the shepherds;

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men”.

The message being presented from the above verses (*i.e.* **Isaiah 9:6** and **Luke 2:14**) is that Christ brings peace and goodwill to mankind – something that certainly sounds desirable.

But how do you rationalise these verses with the passage selected as the reading for this lesson (**Matthew 10:34-36**)? Jesus said;

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

Is Jesus contradicting the verses we saw earlier about Him being the “*Prince of Peace*”? Is this “*sword-wielding*” Jesus the same Jesus who loves us some much that He came and bled and died on a cross so that we could have salvation? How can this apparent contradiction be so?

This lesson will look deeper into what the Bible teaches regarding Jesus being the “*Prince of Peace*”, and also what He is referring to when He talks about coming with a sword.

LESSON

1) What type of “peace” are Isaiah and Luke referring to?

The meaning of the term “*peace*” depends on the context in which it is being used. For example, it can refer to the opposite of “*fighting, or conflict*”. But is this what Isaiah and Luke were referring to? Certainly, God doesn't want

¹ In verses **35-36**, Jesus is quoting words from **Micah 7:6** to illustrate His point. The context of **Micah** is dealing with the corruption and distrust that existed in Israel around 725 – 701BC.
- see **Micah 2:1-2; 3:1-7; 7:2-3**

² All Biblical quotes are from the New King James Version (NKJV) Bible.

³ For example, consider **Isaiah 9:1-2** and **Matthew 4:12-17** to confirm that this is a prophecy about Jesus.

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people, particularly His people, to be engaged in fighting with each other or with our neighbour. In **Romans 12:18**, Paul writes;

“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceable with all men”.

In passages such as **James 4:1** and **1 Corinthians 1:10-13**, we can readily see that God does not want fighting and divisions existing amongst His people. In fact, we are to be prepared to suffer a loss in order to keep the peace with brethren (**1 Corinthians 6:1-8; 8:8-13**)⁴.

However, a closer examination of the scriptures shows that the “*peace*” being referred to in Isaiah and Luke relates to spiritual peace, and not so much to “physical” peace.

The most important struggles that we will go through in our lives are the ones that relate to temptation and sin. Temptation and sin is something that affects us all (**Romans 3:23; James 1:13-15**). The reason that these struggles are the most important is because of the eternal consequences – unforgiven sin results in death (**Romans 6:23a**) – separation from God (**Isaiah 59:2; Colossians 1:21a**). It seems that no matter how hard we try to do the right thing, there are always occasions when we fail. Even the apostle Paul struggled with this in his own life (**Romans 7:15-24**).

As Jesus went about His ministry, He looked at the people of Israel and had compassion on them (**Matthew 9:36**), for they were spiritually lost (**Matthew 15:24**). They had the Law⁵, but the Law didn't save them. The Law made them aware of their sins (**Romans 7:7**), but it did not provide salvation (**Galatians 3:10; Hebrews 10:1-4; Romans 3:20**). As a result, spiritually minded people realised that they were sinners (**Luke 5:8**), and were burdened with guilt and the knowledge that they stood condemned⁶ before God (**Luke 7:36-50; 18:13**). The fear of death and subsequent judgement (**Hebrews 9:27**) weighed heavily upon them (**Hebrews 2:15**). Jesus came to offer spiritual peace to the sinner (**John 14:27; 16:33a**).

2) Jesus is the Prince of Peace

While the Law was a part of God's eternal plan, it was only ever meant to be an interim step until the “*Seed*” (*i.e.* the Christ) should come (**Galatians 3:19, 24-25**) With Christ, God brought in a new covenant - one that He had prepared before the foundation of the world (**Ephesians 1:3-4**). This was to be a covenant where God would remember people's sins no more (**Hebrews 8:12**).

But how did God do this?

He did it by sending His only Son (**John 3:16; Galatians 4:4**), Jesus Christ. Coming in the form of a man (**John 1:14**), He took the punishment for our sins through His death on the cross. Rather than us having to bear the burden and guilt of our sins, He took that burden upon Himself. (**Isaiah 53:4-5**). He paid

⁴ This does not mean that we are to compromise the Truth in order to keep the peace – e.g. **Galatians 2:3-5**.

⁵ The Law of Moses, the Old Covenant.

⁶ Implied from **Romans 8:1**.

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the penalty that was due to us. This was His primary purpose in coming – to “*seek and save the lost*” (**Luke 9:56; 19:10**). As a result, we no longer have to suffer what we deserve. We are now presented to God as being “...*holy, blameless, and above reproach...*” (**Colossians 1:22**). The burden of guilt has been taken away from us. We now have peace with God because of His death on the cross (**Romans 5:1; Colossians 1:20**). And that “peace” is real peace, lasting peace (**2 Thessalonians 3:16**), a peace that “...*surpasses all understanding...*” (**Philippians 4:7**).

For those who are weighed down under the bondage of sin, Christ offers relief – He offers freedom (**John 8:32**). In **Matthew 11:28-29** He says;

“Come unto me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

Jesus truly is the Prince and “...*Lord of Peace*” (**2 Thessalonians 3:16**).

3) What of the Sword in Matthew 10:34?

While the Word of God is intended to bring people together in reconciliation to God the Father (**Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 1:20**), the result is often division because of the choices people make.

The ways of God are not the same as the ways of the world (**Isaiah 55:8**). In fact, the ways of the world are in conflict with the ways of God (**1 John 2:15-16**). Jesus Himself declared that His kingdom is “...*not of this world...*” (**John 18:36**). His Kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, not a physical one, and those in His kingdom wrestle against “...*principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places...*” (**Ephesians 6:12**).

His Word is described as being a “*sword*” (**Ephesians 6:17**) – a sword that is “*living and powerful.....piercing even to the divisions of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*” (**Hebrews 4:12**). This sword gets to the very core of our thoughts, our attitudes and our actions. It challenges us. It reveals to us what type of people we ought to be (**Ephesians 4:20-21; 1 Timothy 3:15; Matthew 5:48**), and when we consider our own lives, we realise and confess that we fall so far short. (But God still loves us, anyway – **2 Peter 3:9**).

When we read the Word, we come to a knowledge of what is Truth (**1 Timothy 2:4**). We start to see the falseness and futility of the world (**Ephesians 4:17-21**). We see things in a different light;

- our thought processes change (**Philippians 4:8**),
- our attitudes change (**Philippians 2:5**),
- our priorities change (**Matthew 6:33**), and,
- our actions change (**Romans 12:1-2**).

However, we live among people who either do not know the ways of God (**Ephesians 4:18**), or choose not to follow the ways of God (**Romans 1:25, 28a**). When people come to know the Truth, they have to make a choice

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between living by the flesh, or living by the Spirit (**Romans 8:5**). They have to choose between obeying the Truth and seeking righteousness, or continue to serve sin and self (**Romans 6:16**). God has given us the ability to choose (**Joshua 24:15**) - He doesn't force us one way or the other⁷. Some will choose righteousness (**Romans 6:17-18**), but most will choose the world (**Matthew 7:13; John 3:19**).

For the Christian, God is to have the first priority in our lives (**Matthew 6:33a; 22:36-38**). All other relationships take second place. When a choice has to be made between our relationship with God, and our relationship with others – even the close relationship of family members – God is to come first⁸.

Note: This is not to say that family relationships are not important. They are important – **Ephesians 5:22 – 6:4; Colossians 3:18-21**. But they do not take priority over our relationship with God (**Matthew 10:37**).

There will be times when our allegiance to Christ will be tested (**2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 1:6-7**). There will be times when we will have to choose between doing what God wants, and doing what others want (**Acts 4:19-20**). The result of those decisions will sometimes mean division and opposition takes place – even amongst those closest to us.

Conclusion:

Therefore, does **Matthew 10:24** contradict **Isaiah 9:6** and **Luke 2:14** on the topic of “peace”? No it doesn't. The “peace” referred to in **Matthew**, and the “peace” referred to in **Isaiah** and **Luke** are two different things.

- The “peace” mentioned in **Isaiah** and **Luke** refers to the (spiritual) peace that the sinner can have through Jesus Christ. This peace is available to all who choose to take it up.
- The lack of peace mentioned in **Matthew** refers to the opposition and conflict that can result because some oppose the Truth. There are many examples in the New Testament that show such conflict – e.g. **Acts 7:54 – 8:1; 13:45, 50; 14:2, 19; 2 Corinthians 1:8**.

Jesus is the “*Prince of Peace*” to those who obey Him. For those who abide in Him (**John 15:7**), they have comfort (**2 Corinthians 1:3-4**), they have rest for their souls (**Matthew 11:29**), they have peace (**John 14:27a; 16:33a**).

When Jesus said, “*I did not come to bring peace but a sword*” (**Matthew 10:34**), He is telling us that His primary aim in coming to earth was not to bring peace and harmony amongst mankind, but to bring a “sword”, the Word of God. And that sword will divide those who choose to obey it from those who choose to reject it.

⁷ While God allows us to make that choice, we will ultimately have to bear the consequences of our decision (**Romans 2:5-11**).

⁸ Ultimately, it is to God to whom we must give account (**2 Corinthians 5:10**) – not to our family, not to our friends, not even to our church family (although we do have responsibilities towards them).