

JEHOVAH SHALOM

THE LORD IS PEACE

Turmoil. It's a word that accurately describes our present day. Another tragic school shooting, a bombing at a public event like the attack on the capitol, or any number of other tragic occurrences...we can't seem to get through a week without hearing new reports of devastation and carnage somewhere. Our world is rife with war, terrorism, and crime. Closer to home, we often see conflict in our own churches through socioeconomic, denominational, or racial divides. Sometimes turmoil appears in our work situations simply because we get overwhelmed trying to meet the needs and demands of so many people with so many expectations. Our homes are also full of turmoil, as evidenced by the divorce rate. Many couples today seem to be married by the secretary of defense rather than the justice of the peace, creating a battleground where arguments, misunderstandings, neglect, and even physical and emotional abuse take place.

Yet the worst turmoil of all often takes place in one's own soul. This happens when you can't seem to live with yourself, when your own pain, anxiety, depression, and regret eat you up, leaving you with an unsettled ache. You are at war within. Whether it's in the heart, the home, the church, or the broader society, turmoil rules today. It threatens the structures of normalcy, burdening our emotions, our finances, or our ability to cope with the pressure.

Some people don't use the word "turmoil" these days. They just say "drama." We live in a world of unending drama. Our lives are full of drama—our own or other people's. We don't desire this drama, but once it's here, we are not quite sure how to get rid of it. Things seem to have gotten so bad for so many people that clinical depression and other emotional disorders are on the rise as people search for escape—some way to numb the pain, remove the anguish, and discover some momentary peace. Even though we experience turmoil on so many levels in our contemporary world, turmoil itself is nothing new. The search for peace and tranquility spans ages and cultures.

God's name that we are going to get to know in this lesson speaks directly to our need for calm, security, and stability. It is the name Jehovah Shalom, which means, "the Lord is peace."

Chaos or Peace

Many places in Scripture could serve as the backdrop for our understanding of God as the Lord of peace, but I want to look at the only place that the name Jehovah Shalom actually appears. It's found in the book of Judges. Understanding the context of Judges will help us comprehend the meaning of this name. The previous book, Joshua, tells the story of Joshua leading the Israelites into the Promised Land. Even in the land of promise, the people experienced drama. They had been delivered into their destiny, yet they continued to face chaos. Evidently, you can arrive at the place God has for you and still have turmoil. The book of Judges is a cyclical book. We see a pattern repeat itself over and over again.

- The Israelites rebel against God through sin.
- Their sin leads to their punishment and discipline.
- This discipline drives them back to repentance.
- God responds to their repentance with deliverance.

The succession is fairly straightforward in Judges: sin, punishment, repentance, deliverance. Over and over, again and again. We discover the name Jehovah Shalom as Israel is caught in this very sequence. Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years. The power of Midian prevailed against Israel (Judges 6:1-2).

Israel had once again rebelled against God, and the result was enslavement to the very enemies they were to triumph over. God had told them He was sending them into the Promised Land, where they could expect to have victory over their enemies. Yet as it turned out—due to their own disobedience—the enemies they were supposed to be defeating were actually defeating them. The tables had turned because they had rebelled against God by doing evil in His sight. As a result, He allowed their enemies to triumph over them. The principle is clear: Disobedience disrupts peace (Isaiah 57:20-21), but obedience brings peace (Isaiah 48:18), and peace accompanies righteousness (Hebrews 7:2; James 3:18).

One of the biggest misconceptions about our personal promised land is that we will have no challenges there. The truth is, you can be in the Promised Land and at the same time be outside of the will of God. You can be where you are supposed to be yet still function outside of God's ordained plan.

Reaching your destination does not fulfill your destiny. Your destiny includes your heart and your actions in that destination. You can reach your goal and yet remain defeated simply because you have taken your eyes off God. The Israelites found themselves in that situation. The Midianites were enemies of God, yet God allowed them to hold His people hostage for seven long years. Year after year, the Israelites faced defeat after defeat. It became so bad that they had to run and hide for protection. "Because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds" (Judges 6:2).

In fact, the Midianites made the Israelites do more than just hide. They made them hungry, discouraged, and stripped of their resources. So they [the Midianites] would camp against them [the Israelites] and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, they would come in like locusts for number, both they and their camels were innumerable; and they came into the land to devastate it (verses 4-5).

In other words, there were so many Midianites coming against the Israelites that they seemed like locusts; they couldn't even be counted. They overran Israel's crops. They devastated their farmland. They undid years' worth of planting, toiling, and cultivating in just a short time. The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of God, so He removed His protective hand from them and allowed the Midianites to take control. The Midianites didn't overpower them on their own. God let them bring His people low as a consequence of Israel's rebellious actions against Him. He let them hit rock bottom, just as He sometimes lets us hit rock bottom when we have walked away from Him in our hearts and in our actions.

As a result, the Israelites eventually did what God had hoped. They remembered Him. “So Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried to the LORD” (verse 6).

Often, people finally cry out to God when they are seriously in turmoil. Prayers are no longer cute religious rituals. They aren’t routine recitations or spiritual serendipities anymore. Communication with God becomes more than merely going through the motions. God recognizes this as well, and He responds. In the next verses, we read what He has to say to Israel once He knows He has their ear.

Now it came about when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD on account of Midian, that the LORD sent a prophet to the sons of Israel, and he said to them, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘It was I who brought you up from Egypt and brought you out from the house of slavery. I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hands of all your oppressors, and dispossessed them before you and gave you their land, and I said to you, “I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites in whose land you live. But you have not obeyed Me” ’ ” (verses 7-10).

God reminds His people that He was the one who saved, delivered, released, sustained, and protected them. Yet despite His gentle hand, they turned away from Him and adopted the culture’s foreign gods. The Old Testament refers to this as idolatry. The New Testament often refers to it as worldliness. Worldliness is conformity to the god of culture rather than to the one true God. An idol is never just a tree stump, a cow, or a piece of metal. An idol is that thing you ultimately count on for your provision, direction, and satisfaction. The Israelites had stopped looking to God as the one who made the universe. Instead, they had added Him to their collection of gods. They hadn’t given up their religion. God was still there. He was still part of the equation. They had just dropped Him into the plethora of deities to whom they appealed. The Israelites had neglected to realize that the God who was good enough and powerful enough to get them out of Egypt could also sustain them in Canaan. They did what many of us do without thinking. Too many of us worship the one true God on Sunday, but on Monday we worship something else—money, prestige, fame, comfort, relationships, ourselves...anything that supersedes God’s demands and dictates. Its voice becomes louder than His does. We begin to doubt that the one who redeemed and rescued us is big enough to sustain us.

To Be like Mike

Such was the situation for the Israelites. They had become like today's cultural Christians. They wanted to be like Mike. They wanted to be like the Amorites and the Hittites. Thus, God turned them over to those who sought to dominate them. As a result, the prophet informed them that their present turmoil wasn't a social problem, a political problem, or a financial problem. Theirs was a spiritual problem resulting from their departure from God. It was the "mystery of lawlessness" (2 Thessalonians 2:7). God had allowed them to get so low that He became their only option. Sometimes God lets the same thing happen to us if we are turning our backs on Him. He lets us go so low that we will know He is our only way back up.

The Israelites cried out to God because they were in a mess. So the Lord sent an angel to a young man named Gideon. As the angel of the Lord sat beneath the oak tree, Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress in order to hide it from the Midianites. No one separates chaff from wheat in a winepress. A winepress is where people make wine. Yet this is where Gideon chose to do his chores because he was trying to survive. He was attempting to do the best he could in his difficult situation, and he felt that the Midianites would be less likely to discover his wheat in the winepress.

In this story line of Israel's struggle to survive, the angel of the Lord appears to Gideon and tells him, "The LORD is with you, O valiant warrior" (Judges 6:12). Have you ever had someone see something in you before you did? Maybe it was a parent, a teacher, a mentor, a spouse, or even a friend. But they saw a talent, skill, or ability in you that you didn't even know you had, and they told you about it. It's nice when that happens because you are empowered to live up to their expectation. You rise to a higher level simply because someone believes in you. The angel of the Lord addressed Gideon as a valiant warrior. Yet Gideon had fought no battles and won no wars. In fact, he was hiding out in a winepress, simply trying to survive. Still, God Himself believed in Gideon and sent the angel to let him know. Gideon's doubtful response echoes our own when we hear God's plans for our lives and the promises He holds for a future and a hope. Gideon questions God.

O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, “Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?” But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian (verse 13).

Gideon wants to know if God is for him, then where is He? If God says He is going to be his God, then why can't he find Him? If He can do miracles, why is there such a mess? It is not enough for Gideon to hear that God is the wheel in the middle of a wheel or that He is a way maker, the rose of Sharon, and the balm of Gilead. All of that is nice when there's no drama. But Gideon didn't need a rose of Sharon or a balm of Gilead. He needed a rose of Gideon and a balm of the Israelites. He needed more than a church service, a three-point sermon, and a song—as evidenced by his accusation, “But now the LORD has abandoned us.”

Gideon needed God. And God needed Gideon. He planned to deliver the Israelites from the Midianites through this young man. Of course, God could have raised up anyone or even delivered the Israelites through no person at all. But in this particular case, God chose to throw His eggs in this basket hidden in a winepress—Gideon. “The LORD looked at him and said, ‘Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?’ ” (verse 14). Gideon's response gives us a special insight into his view of himself. “He said to Him, ‘O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house’ ” (verse 15). Basically, Gideon let God know he wasn't “all that.” He was insignificant. He didn't have a diploma, a degree, or a high-paying job. Gideon hadn't been born with a silver spoon in his mouth. But then again, maybe that's why God chose him. God often calls the ordinary man or woman to do the extraordinary thing. This is because the ordinary man or woman knows that he or she can't do it alone—as demonstrated by Gideon's next request: “If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who speak with me” (verse 17).

Gideon then gathers some meat and unleavened bread, along with some broth. He makes a stew and sets it in front of the angel of the Lord. Then the angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. When Gideon saw that he was the angel of the LORD, he said, “Alas, O

Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face.” The LORD said to him, “Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die.” Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and named it The LORD is Peace [Jehovah Shalom] (verses 21-24). Gideon experienced this name of God, Jehovah Shalom, when he experienced God’s presence. He found peace knowing God was near. He built an altar and named it peace.

What Is Peace?

Which raises a question: What is peace? We can begin to answer that question by saying what peace is not. It is not a truce or a cease-fire. Many people in a cease-fire live in a cold war. They may not be fighting or fussing at each other, but that does not mean they are talking to each other either. Unfortunately, too many people equate a cold war with peace. That is merely a truce.

Peace is bigger than calm. The word shalom means “wholeness, completeness, or well-being.” It means having things properly aligned and ordered. Or as we say today, peace means no more drama. It means harmony and balance. It means more than just feeling good at a particular moment. It even means more than happiness. Happiness depends on what happens. For example, someone could govern your happiness by the information they share with you. If they gave you enough bad or negative information, they could steal your happiness. Or if they gave you enough believable good information, they could increase your happiness. Not so with peace because peace is not tied to circumstances. That is why in Israel even today, you will hear the greeting shalom despite the nation being a continual war zone. Peace has to do with well-being regardless of circumstances. A person who is at peace is stable, calm, orderly, and at rest within.

One day two artists were requested to paint a picture of peace. The one who painted the best picture would win \$250,000. As you can imagine, both painters attempted to paint the finest painting they could. The first painter set to work by creating a serene portrait of a lake with the sun glistening off of it at just the right angle so that it sparkled across the top of the water. The purest blue shade lay across the top of the water, complementing the blue sky. The artist added a young girl skipping near the lake with a yellow balloon securely fastened to her wrist. Trees towered gracefully on one side of the lake with birds gathering in their tallest branches.

After completing his painting, the painter leaned back and took a deep breath of satisfaction. In his mind, he had portrayed peace and was sure to win the prize. The second artist had a very different idea in mind when he painted his image. In his painting, the sky was pitch-black. Lightning zigzagged through the air in unpredictable movements. This painter also had water, but the waves in his painting roared as if they were somehow awakened from a terrible dream. Trees bent and bowed, whining in the wind. The painting looked more like a portrait of disaster.

But all the way down at the bottom on the left-hand side, just near the very edge of this horrific scene, a little bird stood on a rock. The little bird had its mouth open, singing a beautiful song. One faint light shone down on the bird as it sung in spite of the situation all around it. The second painter won the competition. The judges chose him as the winner because he showed the truest manifestation of peace—a well-being that resonates from within despite what’s going on all around. Being at peace does not mean being calm when everything around you is calm. When all is calm, you are supposed to be calm. Being at peace means, you are at rest even when everything else seems to be all wrong. Thunder and lightning might be chasing each other all around you. The wind could be blowing unexpected and unpleasant circumstances into your life. Nothing looks right. Nothing looks promising. All is dark. But in those situations, true peace wins the battle. This is because the tranquility on the inside eases your mind despite the chaos on the outside. Jesus said clearly, “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” (John 16:33).

We are to expect bad days, weeks, or even months in this life. It comes with being on a fallen earth with fallen humanity as a fallen child of the King. Jesus reminds us of what the angel reminded Gideon—peace is not defined by our circumstances. It’s one thing for the world to be falling apart. It’s another thing for you to be falling apart with it. Sometimes we can’t control the world, but we can always control our response to it. We can have peace even when we have problems. But when we have peace, our problems won’t have us. Relationships may falter. Jobs may cease. Health may decline. The economy could continue to dip and turn. “But take courage,” Jesus says. “I have overcome the world.”

How do we enter into this name of God, Jehovah Shalom? We enter by standing firmly in faith in our connection to Jesus Christ as we see Him usher in light where there once was darkness. When He overcomes your situation, you overcome it as well—in Him. Like Peter, you walk on the water when you focus on Christ and are not distracted by the wind and waves all around you. For those who know this name, Jehovah Shalom brings about something that eludes so many who face trials today—rest. Do you ever seem to be working harder yet still not finding a way to get everything done? We now have access to innumerable gadgets that are supposed to make our lives easier and more carefree. Yet in spite of these gadgets, we often find ourselves burdened with more meetings, more deadlines, and a longer to-do list.

Shalom tells us that the secret to victory over life’s drama is God Himself. We find this kind of peace in the presence of Christ: **“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden,”** Jesus invites, **“and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”** (Matthew 11:28-29). If Jesus had called it an iYoke, would we download the latest version more often than we do? Christ’s iYoke brings peace and rest because Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), and He has left His peace with us (John 14:27). His peace is downloadable through intimate abiding with Him. And by wearing Christ’s yoke in faith, you will find shalom in His sufficiency to “will and to work” all of God’s good pleasure in you and through you.

Just as Gideon met Jehovah Shalom in the midst of personal, familial, and national conflict and turmoil, you can meet Jehovah Shalom in the middle of your own personal turmoil. Gideon discovered the way to possess inner well-being despite ongoing outer drama. And he did this by simply knowing that the Lord was with him. Knowing the truth and aligning our thoughts with the truth—these are powerful ways to experience peace. Often, our own thoughts disrupt our peace. And something as simple yet profound as realigning our thoughts with the truth of a situation can change everything. It can change our outlook, our courage, and our trust.

In order to transform what you do, you must first transform what you think. For Gideon, that meant knowing that God was not only with him but was also for him. God hadn’t moved away from Israel at all. The Israelites had left His presence through their disobedience and sin.

Gideon hadn't yet fought the Midianites. He hadn't yet solved the problem of the enemy. They were still an issue, yet before Gideon dealt with that issue in the physical realm, he made an altar to worship the Victor in the spiritual realm. And on that altar, he praised God for His peace—not because his situation had changed, but because God had showed up in the midst of the situation.

With God, you can experience peace in any situation. Without Him, you can spend whatever you want, go wherever you want, do whatever you want...but you won't have peace. The best you'll get is a deflection of life's anxieties or a diversion or distraction from them. If you want to know true well-being and wholeness despite life's circumstances, you must be in God's presence. In His presence, all odds change. All expectations change. All outcomes become dependent on Him and are not limited to what you can rationalize.

Once Gideon accepted his role as warrior and leader of God's army, he put together an army of more than 30,000 men. Yet when God saw Gideon's army, He told him it was too big. Three hundred men were all God needed, so He had Gideon reduce his numbers. And in the process of doing so, once again God gave Gideon His peace. He did this by imparting His wisdom and insight. He told Gideon a secret; He gave him the inside scoop.

Now the same night it came about that the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hands. But if you are afraid to go down, go with Purah your servant down to the camp, and you will hear what they say; and afterward your hands will be strengthened that you may go down against the camp"...

When Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship. He returned to the camp of Israel and said, "Arise, for the LORD has given the camp of Midian into your hands" (Judges 7:9-11,15).

God gave Gideon His peace despite circumstances that looked chaotic. He did this through a unique insight into the mind of the enemy, who had become afraid of the upcoming battle. Which raises a question for each of us—how do we, like Gideon, discover that God is near? If His presence is the key to our peace, how do we abide in it? In Paul's letter to the church at Rome, he tells us the secret to experiencing Jehovah Shalom.

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace (Romans 8:5-6).

Paul instructs us that if we want to have peace, we have to adjust our thinking. Peace begins by having a proper mindset. It's tied to God's divine presence, which presents itself through our mind as we set it on the Spirit. God promises to keep those in perfect peace whose minds are stayed on Him (Isaiah 26:3 KJV). When the right mindset is followed up with the appropriate action, peace is the outcome (Leviticus 26:3,6; Isaiah 48:18).

During daylight savings time, you reset your clock one hour forward. When you turn your clock back one hour in the fall, you wind up with an extra hour of sleep. You don't have to get up as early as you would have if you had kept the same time. In order to access and enjoy this additional hour of sleep, though, you have to choose to reset your clock.

The mind set on the Spirit—that which seeks to align your thoughts underneath God's point of view—is the mind full of peace. You must set your mind there, as Paul states, or the alarm of life will jolt you up at the wrong time. Choosing where to set your mind, just like choosing when to set your clock, will determine your response. A mind set on God's presence, just as Gideon's was, brings life and peace—shalom. But the mind set on the flesh is set on death. Death is ultimately a separation from God. So the mind set on the human point of view (the world's perspective) is a carnal mind. It's a mind that doesn't bring peace.

When you continue to set your mind on the Spirit, you develop a habit of abiding in Him. The effect is similar to what many call our internal clock. For example, I don't have to set an alarm clock anymore. When it's time for me to wake up in the morning, my eyes open, and I'm awake. There was a time when I had to set an alarm in order to get up on time. But with enough years of waking up early, my body does it naturally now. I have gotten used to functioning that way.

If you're not used to hanging out with God—setting your mind on the Spirit—you will need to proactively seek Him, His Word, and His ways in order to abide in His peace. Yet in time, the process of setting your mind on the Spirit will become more natural and less forced. Personal and relational peace becomes a way of life rather than a place you visit from time to time.

Do you want peace? Only one person can give it—Jehovah Shalom. But He gives it only on His terms. Before the conductor of an orchestra walks onto the stage, the sounds coming from the instruments are in discord. But when he arrives, the chaos is stilled. He raises his baton, and the musicians' submission to his direction results in beautiful harmony.