



# Teaching for Shalom

John Shortt set the scene for our study of the theme of wholeness and wellbeing by introducing us to the biblical concept of shalom.

'Shalom' (šālôm) is the Hebrew word for 'peace'.

## Old Testament meaning

Old Testament scholars tell us that 'shalom' signifies salvation, *wholeness*, completeness, integrity, soundness, community, connectedness, righteousness, justice and *well-being*. It has the idea of right relationship with God, right relationship with others and right relationship with God's good creation.

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## New Testament meaning

The Greek word for 'peace' is *eirené* (from which we get the words 'irenic' and 'irenical' and the name 'Irene'). Whereas the Greeks were content to think of *eirené* either as freedom from strife or as an inner state, the NT writers followed the Septuagint (the LXX or Greek version of the OT) which translated shalom as *eirené* and gave it the relational nature and full content of shalom. The breadth of its meaning is especially apparent in its linking with such key words as grace, life and righteousness and its use in greetings and benedictions. It is *never* linked with words like wickedness or injustice! True peace cannot exist in a state of injustice!

## Ordinary language meaning

This biblical usage is much richer and fuller than our ordinary language use of the word 'peace'. If you look in the Concise Oxford Dictionary you would find this:

"Peace *n.* 1. Freedom from or cessation of war. 2. Freedom from civil disorder. 3. Quiet, tranquillity (in and after Bibl. use)."

The main emphasis here is on freedom *from* war, strife, disorder etc. and it is closer to the way that the Greeks used it but the biblical usage is much more pregnant with meaning and

positive connotations and this is hinted at here in the third definition. It is not a mere absence of something - it is more positive.

Something of this more positive sense is found in a verse from 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree':

*'And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,*

*Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;*

*There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,*

*And evening full of the linnet's wings.'*

This is fuller and more positive than the ordinary language sense and, although lacking the elements of relatedness with God and with other people, it does have that of relatedness with the world He made.

*"... In the Bible shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight..."*

## 'Webbing together ...'

Dr Neil Plantinga of Calvin Theological Seminary in the United States, in an excellent article entitled 'Educating for Shalom' on the Calvin College website, writes this:

"The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfilment, and delight is what the Old Testament prophets called *shalom*. We call it peace, but it means far more than mere peace of mind or cease-fire among enemies. ..."

## 'Universal flourishing'

"... In the Bible shalom means *universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight* - a rich state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Saviour opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights."

We will now move on to think about how this shalom can be an aim for our teaching in our schools and what it can mean for our practice.

