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**THE
ULTIMATE
PEACE
PRIZE**

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THE ULTIMATE PEACE PRIZE

*His people will live in safety because people all
over the earth will acknowledge his greatness,
and he will bring peace.* Micah 5:4,5 TEV

One of the supreme ironies that has accompanied the earnest striving for peace in the Middle East has been that from time to time the Nobel Peace Prize has become part of the picture. The prize was actually awarded, near the end of 1978, to both Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin. As it turned out that award was somewhat premature. And later, when the President of the United States became instrumental in bringing about the signing of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, it was the Prime Minister of Israel who suggested that the American President should be nominated for the Nobel honor as well. Well, maybe that is appropriate, I don't know. I surely hope that the efforts of all these men will contribute to the establishment of peace in that part of the world. But considering the history of that region and some of the uncertainties we all see in the future there is a possibility that whatever awards are given may be mocked by new outbreaks of hostility in the future.

The whole matter of peace in the Middle East is proving to be a very frustrating matter for people all over the world, and really that should be no surprise. For the region that stretches from the Persian Gulf to the Nile River has been notorious throughout the centuries for its bloodshed and turmoil. Anyone who is the least bit acquainted with the Old Testament part of the Bible knows that the conflicts between Israel and her enemies were often very fierce. For that matter the conflicts between warring elements within ancient Israel itself were fierce as well.

Since all of this is true it may surprise you to learn that I know something about the peace of that region that is very sure and certain. In fact I know the person to whom the ultimate peace prize should be given, for He is the one who is most surely going to establish peace for that region. I don't claim to be an expert on politics, and I don't know very much about all the situations that contribute to peace or the lack

about the cosmos call the cosmos *the creation*. The exciting space probes that have given us new insights into the nature of Venus and the mammoth planet Jupiter have opened up new ways of talking about the universe. And there is a growing willingness to suggest that an appropriate name for the galaxies, for the black holes, and for the quarks and pulsars and all the rest is *the creation*. All this is the creation. Here is a typical sentence from an article describing the wonders of the cosmos:

Physicists aim at nothing less than understanding creation in all its diverse forms, and in recent years they have amassed an astonishing record of success.

Indeed, those who have come very close to unravelling the secret of the universe have often spoken about God and about the creation. The greatest of them all is Albert Einstein. To be sure, Einstein's view of God would not fit very well into an orthodox Jewish theology, nor into a Christian view of the world. His god was, as he said, Spinoza's god, a god who reveals himself in the "order and harmony that exists." Einstein explicitly rejected an idea of a God who was concerned with the souls and fates of individual human beings. Yet, within his mind there was a steadfast grasp of an idea of God. When his theories clashed with what he envisioned God to be, he tended to doubt his theories.

All of this supports one of the important messages which the Bible communicates to us, and that is this: "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork." The Bible, which makes this announcement in Psalm 19 in the Old Testament, goes on to describe an inaudible speech and a wordless language which declares for all to hear that there is a glorious God behind all of creation.

If the man who wrote Psalm 19 was astonished by the glory of creation which pointed him to the God who stood behind creation, there is every reason for us to speak of the universe as a glorious creation that points us to God, for we know so much more about the creation. We have discovered at least some of the secrets that explain the very structure of matter, and

about peace for his country, just as we are worried about peace in our day. Micah was a very intense prophet from the southern part of Judah, and he was very much aware of the devastation that had befallen the kingdom of northern Israel. Because the people in the north had become idolatrous and injustice had filled the land, God punished them by an invasion of the Assyrians. Within the land to the north of Micah's country the debris and squalor that follow warfare could be found everywhere. And the prophet was scared because he saw the same conditions in his country that had caused God's punishment in northern Israel. The southern kingdom, where he lived, was just as idolatrous and unrighteous as the north had been, and the prophet knew that it wouldn't be long and his country would be punished too.

For this reason he warned his fellow countrymen of the judgment that was going to befall them. But he did more than that. Prophesying by the Spirit of God he looked beyond the destruction that was going to strike his nation, and he saw a new day coming when the special man would come and bring peace. He would rule Israel, and He would rule all of Israel's enemies. Who was this great man going to be? As we look at all this now we ask, Who is the man who will qualify for the ultimate peace prize?

Today when we read Micah's prophecy the answer to that question seems clear. The man to whom Micah pointed is none other than Jesus Christ, the very person most of us have heard about. When we review what we know about Jesus we see that He answers Micah's description exactly.

In the first place, Micah foretold that the great peacebringer was going to be born in Bethlehem. Everyone knows, of course, that that is where Jesus was born. For this reason the prophecy found in Micah 5 is often associated with Christmastime. At Christmastime much of the world remembers Bethlehem, and that small town in Judah becomes the focal point of great celebration.

But there is another holiday that is celebrated by the Christian church which also tends to show that Jesus Christ fits into Micah's prophecy. And that

son in a very awkward situation.

And so it is good that more and more people are seeing that this is so. More and more people want to be counted among the God-believers. They do not want to be called atheists. And this is good for all of us because it enables many more of us to stand together. We can react in wonder and in awe to the glory of the creation around us, and we can feel emotions that move us in the direction of worship. In this sense, Muslims, Buddhists, believers in Judaism, and Christians are united. Belief in a supreme being who has made the world is not without its value. And we can be thankful that the swift collection of all kinds of new and astonishing facts about the universe is causing more and more people to be awestruck and amazed. More and more people are able to look at our world, turn their eyes upward and say, "How great Thou art!"

But unfortunately this kind of faith, though good, though better than atheism, is not good enough. For this kind of faith does not offer the believer very much support, encouragement, and comfort. There is value in acknowledging that God is real and that He is great, but there is little personal advantage that can be gained from this basic confession. To refer to Einstein once more, he explicitly stated that he did not believe that God really cared about him. God might be interested in physical law, but He was not interested in Albert Einstein.

The Bible brings us beyond a mere faith in God's existence and gives us information about God that is reliable. Agnosticism, which says that it is impossible to know anything about God even though He exists, is an improvement over atheism, but it is not necessary to stop there. The great message contained in the Bible is that it is possible to know God. The Bible's message is not only that there is a God, but also that it is the very nature of God to reveal Himself to people like us. It is not necessary to be in the dark about Him. The God who has created the astonishingly complex and immense universe we are learning more and more about is a God who takes great delight in telling us about Himself.

I guess it is this great fact that makes the Christian

That is the record of the fact of Jesus' ascension into heaven, and I would like to say that it is presented in a very straightforward manner in the Bible. It's a fact along with His birth, His crucifixion, His resurrection. If the others are true, this fact is true too—the Bible talks about Jesus' ascension in the same way it talks about the other events. And did you notice that Jesus did not view His ascension into heaven as a desertion of the world? He did not consider this the end of His cause. Not at all. Just before He ascended, on the very mountain of ascension, He told His disciples that He was going to send them His Holy Spirit who would qualify them to preach the gospel to the entire world. You see, the same vision that Micah had about a person who would one day receive the honor of all the nations around Israel was evidently operating there on the mountaintop.

Indeed. This is one of the great revelations of the Bible. Jesus Christ came into our world; He suffered, died, and rose again, and ascended into heaven so that finally all the world would come under His rule. We see this theme expressed in the book of Philipians which talks about Jesus' humiliation on the cross and His exaltation to heaven in terms of the great goal it would accomplish: the conquering of all the nations. Notice this from Philipians:

And being found in human form [Jesus] humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (2:8-11).

I'm not going to review all the sentences in the New Testament that emphasize the same movement that we find described in Philipians. This is Jesus' movement from heaven to earth, to the depths of hell, to new life, and back to heaven, so that all men will believe in Him. But this is a recurring theme. And as the nations of the world are united in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, then, and then only, can there be real peace in the world. Micah, the Old Testa-

ment prophet, was looking forward to the day, still future for us as it was for him, when the great peacemaker would finish His work, and Israel and all of Israel's enemies would worship the same Lord. Then there will be peace. Then there will be, as the Jewish people say, *shalom*. Then there will be, as the Arabic people say, *salaam*.

Do you think I have tricked you? I started out talking about the prophecy of Micah and gave you the impression that there was real hope for peace in the world, and then I concluded with this neat little trick of getting Jesus Christ involved in all this. Do you feel let down? Are you saying, "If peace depends on everyone believing on Jesus, it's never going to happen"? Let me talk about this a little more. I'll try to show you how it's going to happen.

In the Old Testament era, speaking prophetically through the Spirit of God, Micah showed that the peace of Israel will occur when all the nations will acknowledge the greatness of Jesus Christ. And this is true. Israel's peace depends on this; so does the peace of the entire world. And this is true because what Jesus did had everything to do with peace.

The description of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is not a description of the career of a private person who endured certain difficulties and finally triumphed over them. No. It is the description of the Son of the living God who came into a creation that had been torn apart by sin and evil and who through His suffering and death laid the foundation for a new world. The fearsome wars that rage across the earth's surface like the storms that rage across the surface of Jupiter are the result of the catastrophic entrance of sin into our world. The hatred, malice, envy, selfishness, and downright perversity of humankind which cause robbery, murder, and war are rooted in the sin that has wrapped itself around all of our lives.

Now, you can accuse me of being simplistic. I can understand that. But the fact is that the deadly corruption of the human personality that causes war is rooted in sin. And Jesus Christ is *the only person* who has done anything about sin. That happened at the cross. And the ascension of Jesus is the great proof that Jesus was entirely successful; He has

has revealed Himself to us in words. That in itself is very significant. But now this: God has revealed Himself in His only begotten Son. This is a fact that is mind-boggling and stunning. But the Bible insists that this is exactly the way it happened. The opening verses of Hebrews in the New Testament put it this way:

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

Now this Son of God is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Yet, this is the message from the Bible that comes to us as we marvel at the glories of creation: God who made all this is the God who comes to us in Jesus Christ, His Son. And the Bible emphasizes that there is a connection between the glorious creation that astonishes us and this Jesus. It is not as if God made the world and He sent someone to us as His representative. No. The person who came to reveal God to us is the person through whom God made the world. Did you notice that that is what Hebrews said: "He has spoken to us by a Son... through whom also he created the world."

There are several places in the Bible that explicitly connect the Jesus Christ of Nazareth with the creation—He is the one who was present at the creation and He participated in it. The opening of the Gospel According to John calls Jesus the Word of God which has become flesh, and the relation of this Word become flesh to the creation is described this way:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

There you have a clear declaration that Jesus was involved in the very creation that excites our wonder and admiration now when we are learning so very much about it.

The book of Colossians, also in the New Testament, describes the relationship of Jesus to creation

of God who filled the church with the power to bring the gospel to all the nations of the earth. And you know what is happening today? The gospel of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ is being announced everywhere, and all kinds of people are believing in Christ as their Savior. Many of them are children of Israel according to the flesh, many of them are from nations that are Israel's enemies. Jesus' gospel is a power that is able to attract all kinds of people—Jews and Gentiles; it can unite them.

Oh, it's happening. The radio broadcast that produces the very printed message you are reading right now is heard all over the world, and I have proof that people are turning to Jesus in America, in Canada, in Australia, in Great Britain, in Africa, and in the Middle East because of it. And this message is part of a worldwide outreach that is being carried on in other languages besides English: Arabic, Spanish, French, Indonesian, Portuguese, Japanese, and Chinese. And all over the world there are people who are humbling themselves at the throne of the great peacemaker. Christ's ascension into heaven has made this possible. Micah saw it coming centuries ago: "His people will live in safety because people all over the earth will acknowledge his greatness."

How can it be, you say, that something written so many centuries ago could have bearing on what's happening today? I know, it's hard to grasp, but that's the way the Bible is. It is a glorious book that in itself spans centuries, and there is a marvelous unity in its great message. What happened in Jesus' life and in His ascension which we are talking about now was foretold in various ways in the Old Testament, long before these things actually occurred. And what we read in the Bible points forward to a great day when the lordship of Jesus will be revealed for all the peoples of the world to see and confess. It's all there, and today when we think about the ascension of Jesus into heaven we observe a fact that makes Jesus entirely worthy of our worship and the worship of all the nations of the world.

At the center of the Bible there is this illustrious and magnificent person: Jesus Christ of Nazareth. He is the one born in Bethlehem; He is the great shep-

who is like Spinoza's god—the kind of god that Albert Einstein had? If the only God we have is an unfeeling god who gets his kicks out of making a universe work but who doesn't care one wit about the destiny of people like us, then the more we learn about the universe, the more we discover that we are living in a cold, unsympathetic environment. This idea is utterly depressing.

But those who know and believe the Bible's great message know that it's not that way. The Creator God has come to us in the person of His only begotten Son Jesus Christ who was so involved in the creation that the Bible goes so far as to call Him the creator of all. God comes to us in Jesus, and when we see Jesus we see God willing to die for us, willing to go to the cross so that the sin that has smitten this creation through and through could be destroyed.

Yes, we haven't even talked about that yet, but the fact is that the universe has felt the damaging impact of sin. What God had created perfect became imperfect. Jesus' cross corrected all this; Jesus came to bring renewal, and someday the Jesus who was present at the beginning of our universe and at the beginning of our history will come back and establish new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness will dwell.

As I tell you this, I am well aware of the magnitude of what I am saying. I am telling you that right now when we know so much more than we ever did about the universe in which we live, right now we must remember that Jesus Christ of Nazareth who suffered, died, and was buried, and who rose again from the dead, who ascended into heaven, this Jesus made it all. Don't worship the creation, or some vague god that you think you see who just must have made everything. But worship Jesus who is most assuredly the creator and who is clearly identified as such in the Bible.

I am asking you to believe something magnificent, enormous, and grand. But really, I am not asking you. The whole authority of the Bible stands behind me as I tell you that Jesus is the creator. Really, God is asking you to believe in His Son. Don't be satisfied with agnosticism. You can know something impor-

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