

September 4
Lesson 1

THE PEACEFUL KINGDOM

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 72:1-7
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 11:1-9

ISAIAH 11:1-9

- ¹ A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
- ² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of
the LORD—
- ³ and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.
He will not judge by what he sees with his
eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the
needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the
poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his
mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the
wicked.
- ⁵ Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his
waist.
- ⁶ 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.
- ⁷ The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
- ⁸ The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.
- ⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.



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KEY VERSE

They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.—Isaiah 11:9

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the impact that the promised Branch was prophesied to have.
2. Contrast the peace that the Branch inaugurates with modern understandings of peace.
3. Suggest one way he or she can promote the peace that the Branch inaugurates and make a plan to do so.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Searching for Peace
- B. Lesson Background

I. The Just Ruler ([Isaiah 11:1-5](#))

- A. His Humanity ([v. 1](#))
Out of the Ashes
- B. His Divinity ([vv. 2, 3a](#))
- C. His Righteousness ([vv. 3b-5](#))

II. The Peaceful Rule ([Isaiah 11:6-9](#))

- A. Radical Change ([vv. 6-8](#))
Getting Along
- B. Global Change ([v. 9](#))

Conclusion

- A. Two Pictures of Peace
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Searching for Peace

Before there were GPS (Global Positioning System) devices, I used the set of maps in the back of the telephone book to find a location in my city. First, I had to look up the street name in the index. Then I had to find the correct map by referring to the code that accompanied the index entry. I had to make sure I ended up looking at the right map, otherwise I could find myself “running out of room” as the street trailed off the edge of the (wrong) map before I found the desired location.

Our world seeks many of the positive qualities described in today’s lesson text from the prophet Isaiah. Who in his or her right mind does not desire righteousness, justice, and peace? The problem is that the ethical maps that the world consults are too small—they are limited to this world’s sinful perspective, and they do not reflect God’s point of view. We will find righteousness, justice, and peace (along with many other blessings) only when we humble ourselves enough to consult Heaven’s GPS: God’s Promised Son. It is he who is at the heart of today’s study.

B. Lesson Background

The book of Isaiah appears in our Bibles as the first of the group known as the Major Prophets—so-called because of their length (the Minor Prophets are shorter books). Isaiah is known for his numerous prophecies of Jesus, many of which are quoted in the New Testament. Some of these prophecies will be highlighted in the first four lessons of this quarter, a unit titled, “The Sovereignty of the Father.”

The issue of God’s sovereignty likely was a hot-button topic in Isaiah’s day, since that was one of the more chaotic times in the history of God’s people. Isaiah’s call to prophetic service came “in the year that King Uzziah died” ([Isaiah 6:1](#)). That was about 738 BC, not quite two hundred years after God’s people had split into the two kingdoms of Israel to the north and Judah to the south. Uzziah (or Azariah; see [2 Kings 15:1, 13](#)) was one of Judah’s better kings, though he finished poorly as a result of pride ([2 Chronicles 26:16-21](#)).

[Isaiah 7](#) records the prophet’s confrontation with one of Judah’s worst kings, Ahaz (grandson of Uzziah). At the time, Judah was facing the rising threat of Assyria to the northeast. Ahaz rejected the counsel of Isaiah to trust in the Lord ([Isaiah 7:1-12](#)). The prophet warned the defiant

king of the folly of this course of action (or inaction) and declared that Assyria would indeed wreak havoc on Judah ([7:17-20](#); [10:5, 6](#)).

It is always a mistake, though, to underestimate God in the midst of a seemingly hopeless situation. Often that is when he does his best work! [Isaiah 10:10, 11, 22, 23](#) predicted that God’s judgment on his people would not leave much. But it would leave something: a remnant sufficient for God to carry out his sovereign purpose ([10:20, 21](#)).

God had informed Isaiah that his ministry would not appear to be that successful. The prophet was to proclaim God’s message “until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, ... and the fields ruined and ravaged” ([Isaiah 6:11](#)). The population of Judah would go into exile ([6:12](#)). Although God compared the people with a tree stripped of its leaves, “the holy seed” would remain from which new growth would come ([6:13](#)).

I. The Just Ruler

([ISAIAH 11:1-5](#))

A. His Humanity (v. 1)

^{1a}. A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;

Isaiah provides another picture of life emerging from unpromising conditions. Hindsight establishes that Jesus is the subject of the unfolding prophecy. But why would *Jesse*, the father of King David, be mentioned rather than David himself?

HOW TO SAY IT

Ahaz Ay-haz.

Assyria Uh-sear-ee-uh.

Azariah Az-uh-rye-uh.

Beatitudes Bee-a-tuh-toods (*a* as in *mat*).

Hosea Ho-zay-uh.

Uzziah Uh-zye-uh.

Zechariah Zek-uh-rye-uh.

In the case at hand, Isaiah is not prophesying the coming of a successor of David; Isaiah is announcing, rather, that another David will come. This is in keeping with prophecies such as those found in [Jeremiah 30:8, 9](#); [Ezekiel 34:23, 24](#); and [Hosea 3:5](#). About 270 years before Isaiah’s day, God raised up a shepherd boy (David) to become king over Israel; about 740 years after Isaiah, Jesus will come as the good shepherd who will “lay down [his] life for the sheep” ([John 10:14, 15](#)). The idea of humble origins suggested by the verse before us applies to both David and Jesus.

^{1b}. from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

The word *Branch* is used elsewhere in the Old Testament as a title for the coming Messiah ([Jeremiah 23:5](#); [33:15](#); [Zechariah 3:8](#); [6:12](#)). The Hebrew language has no uppercase letters, but the word is capitalized here to call attention to the divinity of the one being foretold.

The Hebrew word for Branch is *netzer*, a point that may help to illuminate a passage in the Gospels. [Matthew 2:23](#) states that Jesus resided in the town of Nazareth, “so was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.” Noticing how close in sound are the words *Nazareth* and *netzer*, perhaps Matthew has in mind the promise concerning the Branch. Jesus’ living in Nazareth (“Branchville”) fulfills Isaiah’s prophecy by describing the lowly village (compare [John 1:45, 46](#)) where Jesus grew up.

OUT OF THE ASHES

Peter Gladwin was barely a year old when his family’s house caught fire, leaving him scarred and disabled. Growing up in a rough neighborhood, he was frequently in trouble with the police. He lost the use of an arm in a knife fight. He eventually descended into a life of substance abuse.

Then Peter found the Lord. Peter eventually became a probation officer, working in dangerous communities, drug rehabilitation centers, and prisons. He founded a ministry called *Out of Ashes*, which uses the transforming power of the gospel to rescue people from the consequences of their poor, sinful decisions.

Isaiah predicted that the Messiah would come in the midst of a seemingly hopeless situation. But the Lord specializes in bringing hope out of hopelessness! When all options seem exhausted, he has ways of making the impossible happen. Gladwin discovered that the Lord remains our first and final hope. Have you?—D. C. S.

B. His Divinity (vv. 2, 3a)

². The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—

**the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—**

The Spirit of the Lord refers to the Holy Spirit, who came upon Jesus at his baptism ([Matthew 3:16](#)). The word *rest* implies a constant dwelling. [John 3:34](#) tells us that Jesus possessed the Spirit “without limit.” That is implied here as well, given that the Holy Spirit abounds in *wisdom ... understanding ... counsel ... might ... knowledge... and fear of the Lord*.

The qualities Isaiah lists call to mind passages that highlight their presence in Jesus. For example, Paul notes Jesus’ wisdom in [1 Corinthians 1:24](#) and [Colossians 2:2, 3](#). The word *counsel* suggests the prophecy of a “Counselor” in [Isaiah 9:6](#). *Might* could be linked to the title “Mighty God,” also in [Isaiah 9:6](#), since the words *might* and *mighty* come from the same Hebrew word.

What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to ensure that church plans, programs, and projects enhance rather than hinder the work of the Branch (Jesus)?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding the individual Christian

Regarding the church as a body

3^a. and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

The Hebrew verb translated *delight* occurs only 11 times in the Old Testament, with an aromatic sense in 8 of the other 10. If the same is intended here, the idea would be to perceive something in a positive sense (compare [Genesis 8:21](#)). This implies the promised Branch’s high degree of commitment to pleasing *the Lord*.

C. His Righteousness ([vv. 3b-5](#))

**3^b. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;**

The remainder of [verse 3](#) refers to two other senses of perception: seeing and hearing. The promised Branch will not be guided by visual, physical appearances or by opinions voiced by others. *His eyes* and *his ears* are to be governed by the will of his Father. Centuries hence, Jesus (the Branch) will say, “By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me” ([John 5:30](#)).

**4^a. but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.**

The Branch will be guided by God’s unchanging standards of right and wrong, not by the shifting whims of culture. The Branch will display the qualities of *righteousness* and *justice* on behalf of those most often neglected or mistreated: *the needy* and *the poor*. God requires his people in both Old and New Testament times to care for the poor and not become callous toward them ([Leviticus 23:22](#); [Deuteronomy 15:7, 8](#); [Psalm 41:1](#); [Galatians 2:10](#); [James 2:1-4](#)).

Isaiah’s words may be intended to acknowledge those who recognize their spiritual poverty and humbly admit that they depend on God for help. One should note Jesus’ language about “the poor in spirit” and “the meek” in the Beatitudes ([Matthew 5:3, 5](#)).

What Do You Think?

How can Christians model both the “do not judge” ([Matthew 7:1](#)) and “judge” ([1 Corinthians 5:12, 13](#); etc.) attributes Jesus expects?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Considering correct and incorrect ideas about judging

Considering context

Other

**4^b. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.**

This half-verse goes on to describe an aspect of the Branch’s judgment that is far more severe. Such language calls to mind the picture given elsewhere in the New Testament of Jesus’ final judgment ([2 Thessalonians 1:7-9](#); [Hebrews 10:26-31](#); [Revelation 19:11-15, 21](#)). We may note that during his earthly ministry, Jesus demonstrates both sides of judgment described by Isaiah. Jesus deals compassionately with the outcasts of his day, but some of his harshest words are reserved for those religious leaders who look at the “sinners” around them with great contempt. Such leaders frequently feel the sting of *the rod of his mouth*. Jesus does not mince words with them!

**5. Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.**

This verse offers another way of picturing what is to characterize the conduct of the promised Branch. A *belt* or *sash* is worn around an individual's *waist* in biblical times to hold clothing in place. Thus *righteousness* and *faithfulness* will support or sustain the promised Branch's character and conduct, specifically the justice highlighted in [verse 4a](#), above.

The word translated *waist* can also point to the inner organs where emotions and motives are believed to originate ([Psalm 7:9](#); [26:2](#); [73:21](#); [Jeremiah 20:12](#); [Revelation 2:23](#)). For faithfulness to be the sash of the Branch's waist implies that this quality is to be the prime motivation behind every phase of his conduct.

II. The Peaceful Rule

(ISAIAH 11:6-9)

A. Radical Change (vv. 6-8)

**6a. The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;**

This verse begins a very striking series of portrayals of the impact of the promised Branch's ministry. The changes described are radical—in fact, miraculous—in nature. Only the Creator himself can bring about the kind of transformation among his created beings that we see here. The *wolf*, the *leopard*, and the *lion* are predatory animals. The *lamb*, the *goat*, the *calf*, and the *yearling* (a young cow being raised for meat) do not stand a chance of survival before any of them under normal conditions. Here, however, are these creatures living at peace with one another, with no violence or aggressiveness whatsoever!

What Do You Think?

What can you do to address the causes of strife that result in people preying on (rather than praying for) others?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding strife resulting from differing religious convictions

Regarding strife between social classes

Other

6b. and a little child will lead them.

As if the unusual pairings of [verse 6a](#) were not remarkable enough, the leader of the menagerie is to be *a little child*! We would never place animals like wolves, leopards, or lions in a petting zoo for young children to touch them. Yet that is the picture Isaiah paints.

**7. The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.**

The prophet continues his depiction of peaceful surroundings. Again we see animals acting quite contrary to what we expect of them. A *cow*, with no worry of being attacked, shares a meal with a *bear*. Meanwhile, *their young* ones nap side by side. The carnivorous *lion* switches to a vegetarian diet (see parallel expressions in [Isaiah 65:25a](#)).

What Do You Think?

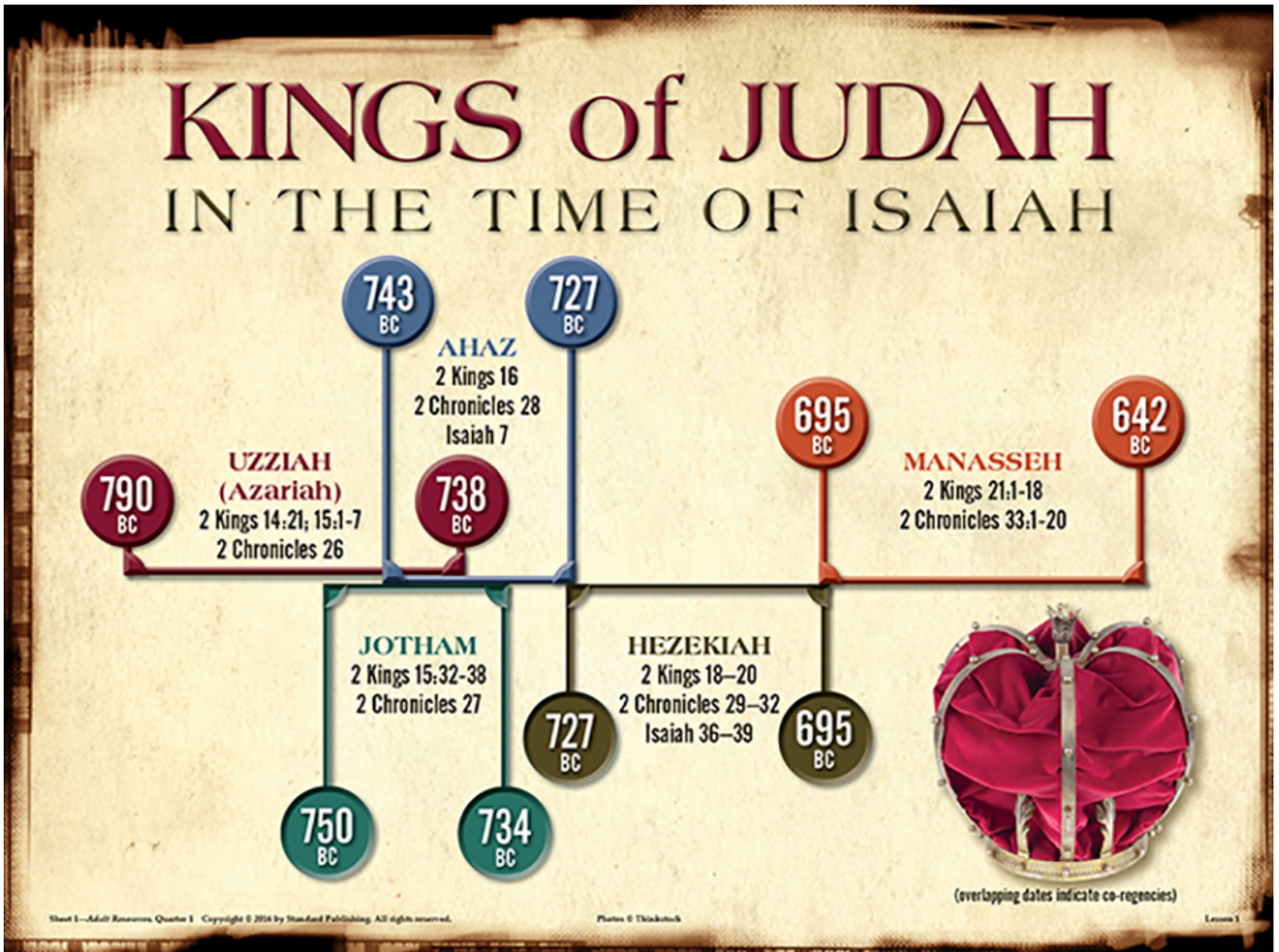
How can your church help move a fallen world toward the ideal picture painted by Isaiah?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Concerning evangelism and benevolence (outreach)

Concerning spiritual maturity of her members (inreach)

Concerning worship practices (upreach)



Visual for Lesson 1. Keep this chart on display for the first four Sundays of this quarter to give your learners a chronological perspective.

**8. The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.**

Once more, the degree of human interaction with deadly creatures is amazing: an *infant* (a nursing baby) need not be protected from *the cobra's den*. The last phrase offers parallel elements. *The young child* in view here is no longer an infant in the nursing stage, but is weaned (weaning normally occurs at around three years of age). Like the first child, this one is seen to do something that no conscientious parent would allow: explore an area known to be infested with deadly snakes, for that is what a viper is. See [Proverbs 23:32](#), where the word *viper* stands parallel with the word *snake*. The snake, or serpent, was humanity's first enemy ([Genesis 3](#)).

GETTING ALONG

A cheetah kitten named Sahara and a puppy named Alexa grew up together in the Cincinnati Zoo and became good friends. They maintained their playful relationship even a decade later. Perhaps you have seen YouTube® videos of house cats and parakeets, etc., lounging around together. Such “odd couples” amaze us because their behavior is not the norm.

Isaiah describes a time of peace where everything seems unnatural: lions eating grass; cows and bears grazing together; leopards and goats, wolves and sheep, babies and snakes—all getting along. Such peace will characterize humanity when Jesus returns to reign in all fullness. This peace will not just be a state of harmony between people, but also between people and God.

This kind of peace is not as the world gives, but as only God's Son can provide (compare [John 14:27](#)). The curse of sin will be lifted fully, never to return. How do we prepare for the great day when Jesus brings that final peace?—D. C. S.

B. Global Change (v. 9)

^{9a.} They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,

The phrase *holy mountain* occurs 21 times in the Hebrew Old Testament, with differing English translations (example: [Daniel 9:20](#)). The book of Isaiah features 6 of these 21, and this is the first. Of particular note among the others is [Isaiah 65:25b](#), which features identical wording in both English and Hebrew to what we see in the verse before us (compare [Isaiah 56:7](#); [57:13](#); [65:11](#); [66:20](#)).

^{9b.} for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

The conjunction *for* points us to the cause of the marvelous picture of peace that Isaiah paints up to this point. The fact that *the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord* is quite a positive thing ([Habakkuk 2:14](#) is very similar; compare [Jeremiah 31:34](#)). Two ways are suggested for understanding the fulfillment of this prophetic portrait of peace, each with biblical support.

One way is to view Isaiah's description as that of the literal "new heavens" and "new earth," mentioned in [Isaiah 65:17](#); [66:22](#). Between those two texts, [65:25a](#) is quite similar to [11:6](#), [7](#), and [9](#) in today's lesson. All this is seen to imply Isaiah to be depicting the complete elimination of the curse of sin (compare [Revelation 21:1](#)). According to Paul, the "whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth" ([Romans 8:22](#)) as it longs for the day of deliverance from the "bondage to decay" ([8:21](#)). The pain that we see in the created world—the violence that animals inflict on one another (and on humans)—will no longer be present when God re-creates the universe "where righteousness dwells" ([2 Peter 3:13](#)).

The other potential interpretation is to see the prophecies fulfilled in a more figurative sense, with the animals representing humans who clash with one another. In the Bible, human enemies are often compared with animals ([Psalm 22:12](#), [13](#), [16](#), [20](#), [21](#); [Acts 20:29](#); etc.). But because of the Branch's impact and the forgiveness and peace he brings about (through Jesus' death and resurrection), hatred and bitterness are no more.

Possibly Isaiah's words are intended to be understood both ways. Just as the words of [Isaiah 11:4](#) are descriptive both of Jesus' earthly ministry and what will occur at his return, so [verses 6-9](#) may be picturing the impact of the church's ministry as it takes the gospel to the world as well as what Jesus himself will bring to pass when he returns to usher in the new heavens and the new earth.

What Do You Think?

How does [verse 9](#) challenge you today?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding short-term goals of your life in Christ
- Regarding long-term goals of your life in Christ

Conclusion

A. Two Pictures of Peace

The story is told of two artists who were commissioned to paint a picture that conveyed the theme of peace. One painted a quiet rural scene featuring a beautiful country home in the center. Next to the home were fields with crops awaiting harvest. Contented cows loitered under trees. The sun was setting in the distance, with the skies tinted at just the right colors. The other artist drew an entirely different picture. In his, a storm was raging. Trees swayed on the mountainside and in the valley below. Flashes of lightning punctuated the dark and gloomy sky.

At first glance, the second painting seemed to depict the very opposite of a peaceful setting. But on a rock projecting from a cliff protected by an overhang, a small bird sat calmly on her nest. She remained at peace in spite of the storm.

In a day to come, everything that is destructive, harmful, painful, and sorrowful will be eliminated without exception. That is God's clear promise to us. Until then, we reside in a world that still suffers the brutal effects of sin. The circumstances of many Christians are especially stormy. Some are persecuted because of their faith; many are in anguish as they, family members, and/or close friends wrestle with intense pain, wondering how they can make it through another day.

Under such conditions, the peace that God promises becomes a cherished anchor for the soul. Pointing to the unceasing strife in the world, cynics note the lack of peace that Jesus came to bring (see [Luke 2:14](#)). But until Jesus returns, peace is not found in the *absence* of life's storms, but rather in the *midst* of life's storms. Jesus was very clear: "In this world you will have trouble" ([John 16:33b](#)). Anyone could say that, of course, but only Jesus could say what follows: "But take heart! I have overcome the world" ([16:33c](#)). And only Jesus could say, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace" ([16:33a](#)).

That peace is not of this world ([John 14:27](#)) just as Jesus' kingdom is not of this world ([18:36](#)). Jesus' peace sustains us when the world around us is coming to pieces. The way we model that peace can be a compelling witness to the stormy, broken world around us. There is a peaceful kingdom here and now. It is the church, whose Lord is the Prince of Peace.

B. Prayer

Father, we thank you that we are part of Jesus' unshakable kingdom of peace, a kingdom not of this world. Embolden us to invite others in as well. We pray this in the name of the Prince of Peace. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

We have the peace of Jesus now, with more to come.

VISUALS FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: [page 14](#)) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Fall Quarter. That packet also contains the very useful *Presentation Tools* CD for teacher use. Order No. 1629116 from your supplier.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Into the Lesson

Edward Hicks (1780-1849), American Quaker minister and folk painter, illustrated today's text more than 50 times. Most are labeled *Peaceable Kingdom*. Download one of these images from the Internet for use as an introduction to the lesson. Ask learners if they recognize the image and which Bible verse it relates to. After discussion, say "Hicks's view of the peaceable kingdom is different from the image of the peaceable kingdom described in today's text."

Alternative. Read the first two paragraphs of *War and Peace* by Tolstoy. Ask, "Can anyone identify what story this is?" If no one does, identify the title, with the comment, "Tolstoy knew of war and peace. The Napoleonic incursions into his beloved Russia had begun a long, hard period of oppression and then freedom, war, and peace. Isaiah, the author of today's text, knew also of war and peace." Use the Lesson Background on the conflicts of Isaiah's day between God's people and pagan conquerors and oppressors.

Into the Word

Ask your class to name qualities of the perfect monarch or ruler from an earthly, political perspective. Write the list on a board. Have someone read [Isaiah 11:1-5](#). Ask, "What attributes do you see in Isaiah's description of the ideal monarch?" Add this second list beside your initial list for comparison and contrast.

Such descriptors as the following may find their way into either or both lists: fears and reverences God; has and resembles the Spirit of God; is fully perceptive of the behaviors and motives of others; will condemn and punish wickedness; judges others with righteousness and fairness; will preside over a people who live in harmony in every way. Your list(s) may include elements such as: he tells the truth, she is well-informed on all matters of necessity, and others. Relate entries to the text.

Display these two words: *UTOPIA* and *SHANGRI-LA*. Note that these are writers' designations for fictional ideal kingdoms in which people and other creatures live in marvelous harmony and unity. Have someone read [Isaiah 11:6-9](#). Ask, "How does this picture of a fully harmonious existence of God's creatures reflect a sense of an ideal existence, an ideal kingdom?" The absolute absence of fear and death is at the heart of the desired answer.

Ask, "How do you see the absence of these elements in government leaders' and in species' interrelationships as reflective of the fact that sin is at work in the world?" Note the different concepts of peace as reflected in today's text and in today's world.

Emphasize that Isaiah is describing a "peaceable kingdom" that does not exist on the earth and will not. Have someone read [John 16:33](#); the emphasized truth is that peace is in Christ, who has overcome this world and its curse of sin. Say, "That is the peaceable kingdom we are looking forward to."

Option. Make copies of "The Family Tree" activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Assign half of the class to answer the first question by referring to the Matthew genealogy, and the other half to answer with the Luke genealogy. Complete the rest of the activity together.

Into Life

The Spirit's picture of the peaceful kingdom wherein animals and children get along regardless of what we consider to be "natural

tendencies” reveals much about God’s plan and the future. It is obvious that God’s Spirit and the Branch can create an idyllic existence such as today’s text and general biblical revelation suggest. Ask, “What can you do to bring about the peaceable kingdom?”

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “An Odd Zoo” activity from the reproducible page. Have students work in pairs. Ask for ideas on how to be a peacemaker.