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GREAT PEACE HAVE THOSE WHO LOVE YOUR LAW: A CONCISE QUAKER GUIDE TO THE BIBLE

Introduction

On 4 October 2026, Friends will celebrate the World Quaker Day under the theme “Let Peace Be Among Us”. On this occasion, the Institute of Peace and Law offers a concise guide for reading the Bible, inspired by Psalm 119:165 – “Great peace have those who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble”. It is crafted through the lens of Quaker theology and centered on our testimony of peace, truth, the inward Light, and the continual leading of the Spirit.

To understand general narrative of the Bible, it might be helpful to think that the Old Testament show how the people of chosen nation obeyed (2 Chronicles 20:21) and disobeyed (1 Kings 22:29) the Lord, while New Testament show how teaching of Christ helped His disciples to be more faithful (Matthew 5:17, 5:43–48), become peacemakers and sons of God (Matthew 5:9) transcending the national distinctions (Ephesians 2:14), uniting in universal church as a beginning of the new heavenly world to come without wars and sufferings (Revelation 21:3–4).

As customary among Friends, we read the Scriptures not as a static or terrifying dogma to be understood and obeyed literally, but as a record of spiritual experience of imperfect people inspired by the Spirit, seeking to discern God’s presence, striving for perfection by following the leading of the Spirit (John 16:13; Romans 8:14; 2 Corinthians 3:6), a model how we could discern and follow the divine guidance today in our own lives. As George Fox challenged us in 1652: “Thou wilt say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this; but what canst thou say?”. And when the spiritual wisdom is said, in the Bible or in other good sources, we accept the gift remembering the advice given in the Epistle from the Elders at Balby in 1656: “in the light walking and abiding, these things may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not in the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.”

The Bible also told us how the people understood (Genesis 22:12) and misunderstood (Genesis 4:8) God, so the things said in the Bible traumatic to certain people that must be treated equally in human dignity in modern society should be understood as wrong interpretation coming not from God but from outdated social customs, even if it was wrongly declared “God’s will”; the same regarding any “commandments” to kill, or wage war, or commit genocide wrongly attributed to God. For any such false interpretations we could find in the Bible a good response, true account of the Lord’s will that always requires to avoid violence. Where ancient authors misattributed violence to the divine will, we test those historical errors

against the living Spirit of Christ, who calls us away from violence and toward universal love. In 1660 Declaration, Friends wrote: "Our principle is, and our practices have always been, to seek peace, and ensue it, and to follow after righteousness and the knowledge of God, seeking the good and welfare, and doing that which tends to the peace of all. All bloody principles and practices we do utterly deny, with all outward wars, and strife, and fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretence whatsoever, and this is our testimony to the whole world."

The guide for Bible reading offered in this document includes passages dear to Quakers, especially related to pacifism (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3; Psalm 46:9), personal relation with God through conscience and inward Light, that of God in everyone (Genesis 1:27), the divine guidance and presence in the life and worship of individuals and faith community, the Friends of Christ (John 15:15), His Church, the Religious Society of Friends (Luke 17:21; Matthew 18:20), the silent worship (Revelation 8:1; Habakkuk 2:20) with ministries and prophecies (Acts 2:17), with love, and grace, and joy coming to one accord (Acts 15:25).

This Bible study guide explicitly grounds every single book in the Bible in at least one key scripture passage dear to Friends – reflecting our Peace Testimony, the Inward Light, silent waiting, equality, integrity, and the continually unfolding guidance of the Spirit.

OLD TESTAMENT (39 BOOKS)

The Law / Pentateuch (5 Books)

1. Genesis: God creates the universe, establishes a covenant with humanity, and initiates His chosen nation through Abraham and his descendants. God creates humanity with the divine image in every person (1:27). Though human misunderstanding led to early tragedy (4:8), God calls us to walk faithfully (17:1) and learn to hear the true, non-violent leading of the Spirit (22:12).

2. Exodus: God rescues Israel from Egyptian slavery, makes a covenant with them at Mt. Sinai, and provides His law and Tabernacle. God hears the cries of the oppressed (3:7) and liberates Israel from bondage, showing that the Divine Spirit desires justice and freedom over tyranny. Through the Ten Commandments (20:1-17), a community begins learning covenantal responsibility, even as their social customs still shadowed their understanding of God's mercy.

3. Leviticus: God establishes laws of holiness, worship, and sacrifice so His redeemed people can dwell safely in His presence. Amid complex ancient ritual laws, the heart of the Spirit breaks through in the command to "love your neighbor as yourself" (19:18). It challenges us to cultivate personal holiness so that our daily conduct reflects the inward purity of the Divine.

4. Numbers: Israel wanders in the wilderness for forty years due to their unbelief, experiencing God's discipline and faithful preservation. Israel's wilderness

journey reveals the struggle to trust the Inward Light when God promises, "My Presence will go with you" (14:14). It records both the failures of human rebellion and the patient grace of God preserving a seeking people.

5. Deuteronomy: Moses delivers final sermons to the new generation of Israelites, urging them to love and obey God as they prepare to enter the Promised Land. Moses urges the people to write God's words upon their hearts (6:6) rather than relying solely on external rituals. It sets before us the fundamental spiritual choice: "I have set before you life and death... therefore choose life" (30:19).

Historical Books (12 Books)

6. Joshua: God leads Israel to enter and settle the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership, fulfilling His ancient promise. This narrative reflects an early human understanding that wrongly attributed conquest and war to God (6:21). As Friends, we test these violent accounts against the Peace Testimony, holding fast instead to Joshua's spiritual resolve: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (24:15).

7. Judges: Israel cycles through sin, oppression, repentance, and deliverance through God-raised leaders during a dark era of moral chaos. A turbulent record of a society caught in cyclic violence when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (21:25). It starkly illustrates the tragic consequences when individuals ignore the inward whisper of conscience and divine guidance.

8. Ruth: A faithful Moabite woman chooses the God of Israel, finding redemption and becoming a key ancestor of King David and Jesus Christ. A radiant witness to love and inclusion that transcends national boundaries, as Ruth declares, "Where you go I will go, and your people shall be my people" (1:16). Her story shows how divine grace operates through quiet acts of faithful relationship.

9. 1 Samuel: Israel transitions from a loose tribal confederation under judges to a monarchy under its first two kings, Saul and David. Israel demands an earthly king, turning away from direct divine governance (8:7). The text highlights the tension between worldly power and the quiet voice of divine leading heard by the child Samuel: "Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears" (3:10).

10. 2 Samuel: King David reigns over a unified Israel, experiencing great spiritual victories as well as devastating personal and political fallout from his sin. King David's life shows both deep spiritual sensitivity (22:2-3) and catastrophic moral failure when power overrides conscience. Nathan's prophetic confrontation – "You are the man!" (12:7) – reminds us that no leader is above the inward promptings of truth and repentance.

11. 1 Kings: Israel reaches its peak of splendor under Solomon, split into two kingdoms after his death, and declines as idolatry spreads. Israel experiences external splendor and deep division, culminating in Elijah discovering that God was not in the wind, earthquake, or fire, but in the "still, small voice" (19:12). Here we learn the foundation of silent waiting upon the Lord.

12. 2 Kings: Both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms collapse under persistent rebellion, ending in destruction and exile by foreign empires. The tragic collapse of both kingdoms demonstrates the futility of relying on military alliances and political violence rather than spiritual faithfulness (17:7-18). It echoes Elisha's vision of spiritual protection beyond physical weapons: "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (6:16).

13. 1 Chronicles: A retelling of David's reign focused on the spiritual foundation, worship, and temple prep to encourage exiles returning home. A reflective re-telling of Israel's story that emphasizes spiritual worship and communal praise (16:11). It invites us to "seek the Lord and His strength" as we build a worshipping community.

14. 2 Chronicles: A spiritual history of the kings of Judah, emphasizing that obedience brings God's blessing while rebellion leads to ruin. This record highlights how trust brings spiritual peace (20:20-21), while warmongering leads to ruin (22:29). It affirms the promise of communal humility: "If My people... will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face... I will heal their land" (7:14).

15. Ezra: God providentially returns Jewish exiles to Jerusalem to rebuild the destroyed Temple and restore faithful worship. Returned exiles seek to rebuild their worshipping community and restore faithful practice (3:11). While it reflects the legalistic exclusivity of its era, it calls us to focus on rebuilding spaces where the truth of God can be faithfully lived.

16. Nehemiah: Nehemiah leads the returned exiles to rebuild Jerusalem's walls in the face of intense opposition, renewing their covenant with God. A story of practical ministry and community restoration accomplished through prayer, persistence, and shared labor: "The cup of the Lord is our strength" (8:10). Nehemiah's work shows how spiritual leading translates into tangible care for community.

17. Esther: God providentially preserves His people living under Persian rule from total annihilation through a brave Jewish queen. Set in a foreign empire, this book reveals divine providence working quietly through non-violent courage without ever mentioning God's name explicitly: "Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (4:14).

Wisdom & Poetry (5 Books)

18. Job: A righteous man suffers unimaginable hardship, confronting deep questions about human suffering and divine sovereignty. A profound wrestling with human suffering that rejects simplistic religious dogmas. Job moves beyond hearsay about God to an immediate, transformative experience of the Living Presence: "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You" (42:5).

19. Psalms: A rich collection of 150 prayers, praises, and songs reflecting the full range of human emotion in relationship with God. Among them are timeless visions of absolute peace, where God "makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two" (46:9).

20. Proverbs: Practical, divine wisdom for navigating everyday choices, relationships, and moral living in the fear of the Lord. Practical guidance for living a life of simplicity, integrity, and quiet discernment: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding" (3:5).

21. Ecclesiastes: An honest exploration of life's meaninglessness when lived purely from a human perspective, concluding that fearing God is what truly matters. A candid meditation stripping away the illusions of worldly ambition: "To everything there is a season..." (3:1). It directs us toward a simple, present-centered life of reverence, concluding that "God requires an account of what is past" (3:15).

22. Song of Solomon: A poetic celebration of love, desire, and commitment within marriage. An unashamed celebration of human love and mutual delight: "Set me as a seal upon your heart... for love is as strong as death" (8:6). Friends recognize here both the goodness of affection and an allegory of the soul's communion with the Divine.

Major Prophets (5 Books)

23. Isaiah: A powerful vision of God's holiness, warnings of judgment, and glorious promises of a coming Messiah and new creation. A magnificent prophetic vision anticipating the Gospel of Peace, declaring that nations shall "beat their swords into plowshares... neither shall they learn war anymore" (2:4).

24. Jeremiah: Known as the "weeping prophet," Jeremiah warns rebellious Judah of impending judgment while promising a coming New Covenant. Jeremiah confronts corrupt power and foretells a New Covenant written not on stone, but directly upon human hearts: "I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts" (31:33). It grounds our conviction that divine law is inwardly known by every seeker.

25. Lamentations: A heartbreaking poem mourning the destruction of Jerusalem, while holding fast to God's steadfast love and mercy. A poignant, silent grieving over the trauma of war. Even in heartbreak, it holds fast to the quiet assurance that "the Lord's mercies are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (3:22-23).

26. Ezekiel: Apocalyptic visions of God's departure from Jerusalem's corrupt temple, followed by promises of ultimate spiritual restoration and renewal. Apocalyptic imagery promising a spiritual rebirth where God says, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh" (36:26).

27. Daniel: Stories of faithful believers enduring exile in pagan empires alongside visions of God's ultimate kingdom overcoming all earthly powers. Stories of faithful individuals who practice quiet, non-violent resistance (3:17-18). Its visions assure us that earthly force will yield to God's eternal reign: "Not by power nor by human strength, but by spiritual truth" (4:34).

Minor Prophets (12 Books)

28. Hosea: God commands a prophet to marry an unfaithful woman as a vivid picture of His persistent love for His unfaithful people. God's enduring love frames divine justice as redemptive mercy rather than punishment, declaring, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (6:6).

29. Joel: Devastating locust plagues serve as a warning of the coming "Day of the Lord," accompanied by a call to repentance and a promise of God's Spirit. A promise that God will pour out the Spirit upon all flesh—sons, daughters, young, and old alike (2:28). This grounds our Quaker conviction that prophetic ministry is given freely to everyone.

30. Amos: A fiery critique of Israel's social injustice and hypocritical religion, calling for righteousness to flow like a river. A passionate critique of religious hypocrisy that ignores social inequality, insisting that true worship means letting "justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream" (5:24).

31. Obadiah: A short prophecy condemning the nation of Edom for its pride and cruelty toward Israel. A brief warning against pride, violence, and taking advantage of a neighbor's downfall: "As you have done, it shall be done to you" (1:15).

32. Jonah: A reluctant prophet tries to run from God's command to preach to his enemy city, highlighting God's universal mercy. A story challenging nationalist prejudice and religious narrowness, revealing God's universal mercy extended even to enemies: "Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city?" (4:11).

33. Micah: A call for true justice and humility, coupled with the prophecy that the promised ruler will be born in Bethlehem. A stirring call to "do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (6:8), echoing the vision where every person sits safely under their own vine and fig tree, free from fear (4:3-4).

34. Nahum: A prophecy predicting the ultimate fall and judgment of Nineveh, the brutal capital of Assyria. A reflection on the collapse of militaristic empires, reminding us that systems built on bloodshed contain their own ruin: "Woe to the bloody city!" (3:1).

35. Habakkuk: A dialogue where a prophet wrestles with God's plan to use wicked Babylon for judgment, ultimately learning to trust in God's sovereignty. A prophet stands upon his watchtower, waiting in silence to hear what the Lord will speak within him (2:1, 2:20). It teaches us that "the just shall live by faith" (2:4).

36. Zephaniah: Urgent warnings of imminent judgment on Judah and surrounding nations, concluding with a promise of joyful salvation for a humble remnant. A call for the humble to seek the Lord, foretelling a peaceful remnant (3:12) and concluding with the beautiful image that God "will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing" (3:17).

37. Haggai: A call to the returned exiles to stop delaying and prioritize rebuilding God's temple. A challenge to realign our priorities, reminding us that true peace comes from putting spiritual community first: «“The glory of this latter temple

shall be greater than the former,” says the Lord of hosts, “And in this place I will grant peace”» (2:9).

38. Zechariah: Apocalyptic visions assuring God's people of future redemption through a humble, victorious Messiah-King. A vision declaring that divine work is accomplished "not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit" (4:6), foretelling a humble King who "will speak peace to the nations" (9:10).

39. Malachi: God's final Old Testament message confronting cold-hearted religion and promising the coming of a messenger to prepare the way for the Lord. Confronting spiritual apathy, it promises a coming messenger of reconciliation: "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?" (2:10).

NEW TESTAMENT (27 Books)

The Gospels (4 Books)

40. Matthew: Written for a Jewish audience, this Gospel presents Jesus as the promised Messiah and King who fulfills the Old Testament. Matthew presents Jesus transforming ancient laws through the Sermon on the Mount (5:17). Jesus redefines holiness around active peacemaking, calling us to "love your enemies... that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (5:9, 43-45). Through parables of the Kingdom, Christ reveals an inward reality present wherever "two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (18:20).

41. Mark: A fast-paced narrative portraying Jesus as the suffering Servant who gives His life as a ransom for many. A fast-paced narrative portraying Jesus as the suffering Servant who rejects earthly dominance: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (10:45). Mark emphasizes the inward spiritual baptism over outward ritual (1:8) and calls us to servant-leadership: "Whoever desires to be first shall be last of all and servant of all" (9:35).

42. Luke: A detailed historical account highlighting Jesus as the compassionate Son of Man who came to seek and save the lost. Luke highlights Christ's compassionate mission to the poor and marginalized, making clear that "the kingdom of God is within you" (17:21). Jesus rejects retaliatory violence when rejected by a village, rebuking His disciples: "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them" (9:55-56).

43. John: A deep theological account emphasizing Jesus as the eternal Son of God who gives eternal life to all who believe. John presents Jesus as the Eternal Light that "gives light to every person coming into the world" (1:9). Moving beyond rigid dogmas, Jesus promises the Spirit of Truth who "will guide you into all truth" continually (16:13). He transcends servant roles to call His followers "Friends" (15:15), commanding them: "Love one another as I have loved you" (15:12).

Early Church History (1 Book)

44. Acts: The story of the Holy Spirit's arrival and the explosive spread of the Church from Jerusalem across the Roman Empire. The dynamic history of the early Church as the Holy Spirit is poured out upon all people (2:17). It shows believers coming "to one accord" through Spirit-led consensus (15:25) and affirming that God "from one man made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth" (17:26).

Pauline Epistles (13 Books)

45. Romans: Paul's foundational treatise on salvation by grace through faith, explaining how God makes both Jews and Gentiles righteous. Paul's treatise on grace, explaining that righteousness is an inward reality of the heart (2:29) for those "led by the Spirit of God" (8:14). It provides a foundational guide for living peacefully: "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (12:18, 21). It also says, "Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God" (6:13), which teaches the faithful not to become instruments of violence, war, and armies, but instead to achieve justice and peace through nonviolent action.

46. 1 Corinthians: Practical instructions addressing spiritual gifts, overcoming division, immorality, and church disorder in a morally chaotic city. Paul stresses that the church is one body made of diverse members, all possessing gifts of the Spirit (12:4-7). It insists that even the most impressive spiritual talents are worthless without patient love (13:1-3) and calls for quiet order in corporate worship: "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace" (14:33).

47. 2 Corinthians: Paul defends his apostolic authority and shares how God's power is made perfect in human weakness. Paul speaks of ministry born out of vulnerability, reminding us that "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (3:6). He outlines the ministry of reconciliation (5:18), showing that divine power is "made perfect in weakness" (12:9).

48. Galatians: A passionate defense of Christian freedom, warning against legalism and trusting in human effort over faith. A defense of spiritual freedom against legalism, declaring that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; for you are all one in Christ" (3:28). It calls us to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (5:22-23).

49. Ephesians: An uplifting letter exploring God's eternal plan to unite all things in Christ and how the Church should walk in that reality. A vision of Christ as our peace, who "has broken down the middle wall of separation" to create one new humanity (2:14). It encourages us to "walk in love" (5:2) and put on the spiritual

armor of truth and gospel peace rather than carnal weapons tearing flesh and spilling blood (6:12-15).

50. Philippians: A joy-filled letter written from prison, encouraging believers to find strength and unity through Christ's humble mindset. Written from prison, this letter radiates deep joy and humility: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (2:5). It promises "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds" (4:7).

51. Colossians: A letter exalting Jesus as supreme over all creation and sufficient for every spiritual need. An exaltation of Christ as the image of the invisible God (1:15), in whom all things are reconciled in peace. It instructs believers: "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body" (3:15).

52. 1 Thessalonians: Encouragement for a young church facing persecution, pointing them toward hope in Christ's return. Encouragement to a young faith community to "see that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all" (5:15). It urges believers to "pray without ceasing" (5:17) and "test all things; hold fast what is good" (5:21).

53. 2 Thessalonians: Clarifying confusion about the Lord's return and urging believers to stay steadfast and work diligently. A call to steadfastness, reminding the community to remain grounded in daily work and peace: "Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way" (3:16).

54. 1 Timothy: Advice to a young leader on church organization, sound teaching, and healthy leadership. Advice on nurturing a healthy community centered on "love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith" (1:5). It warns that "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (6:10) and urges us to pursue righteousness and gentleness.

55. 2 Timothy: Paul's final letter before his execution, urging Timothy to stay faithful to the gospel at all costs. Paul's final testament, encouraging Timothy to "rekindle the gift of God which is in you" (1:6), reminding us that "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (1:7).

56. Titus: Instructions on establishing healthy leadership and good works in a challenging culture. A guide on organizing community life around integrity and grace: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all" (2:11). It emphasizes living sober, upright, and peaceful lives.

57. Philemon: A personal plea asking a Christian master to forgive and welcome back his runaway slave as a brother in Christ. A tender letter demonstrating gospel reconciliation as Paul pleads for a runaway slave to be received "no longer as a slave, but more than a slave—a beloved brother" (1:16).

General Epistles (8 Books)

58. Hebrews: A call to Jewish Christians to hold fast to Christ, demonstrating that He is superior to the Old Covenant angels, priests, and sacrifices. A meditation on Christ opening direct access to God for every believer, inviting us to "draw near

with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (10:22). It calls us to "pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (12:14).

59. James: Practical wisdom emphasizing that genuine faith naturally produces visible good works and righteous living. Practical wisdom emphasizing that "faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (2:17). James warns that war and strife stem from selfish inward desires (4:1) and declares that "the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (3:18).

60. 1 Peter: Encouragement for exiled believers suffering for their faith, reminding them of their living hope in Christ. Guidance for a suffering minority, encouraging them to respond to hostility with non-retaliation: "Not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing" (3:9). It reminds us to "seek peace and pursue it" (3:11).

61. 2 Peter: Warnings against false teachers and an assurance that the Lord will return in His own time. A call to grow in divine nature (1:4) and hold fast to God's patience, reminding us that the Lord is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (3:9).

62. 1 John: A warm letter reassuring believers of their salvation through love, obedience, and truth. A warm, luminous letter asserting that "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1:5) and "God is love" (4:8). It teaches that "there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear" (4:18).

63. 2 John: A brief reminder to walk in Christian love while remaining vigilant against deceivers. A reminder to walk according to truth and love: "This is love, that we walk according to His commandments" (1:6), exercising wise discernment in community life.

64. 3 John: A note commending hospitality toward true ministers of the gospel while warning against selfish leadership. A note celebrating hospitality and faithful service: "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God" (1:11).

65. Jude: An urgent appeal to contend for the faith against immoral teachers who distort God's grace. An appeal to remain grounded in spiritual love: "Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And on some have compassion, making a distinction" (1:21-22).

Apocalyptic / Prophecy (1 Book)

66. Revelation: An apocalyptic vision revealing Jesus' ultimate victory over evil, the end of human suffering, and the establishment of a new heaven and earth. Through vivid imagery, this book unveils the triumph of the Lamb who overcomes not through force, but through faithful love. It includes a dramatic moment of silent waiting in heaven (8:1) and culminates in a vision where God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying" (21:4).