

The Attackers: The Problem with the KJV Translation of Luke 2:14: Works v. Grace; “Peace on earth, good will toward men”: Delusion or Prophecy? Henry Wadsworth Longfellow & the Faith-Rest Drill: the Story behind Poem “Christmas Bells”; Carol: “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day”

- (9) By expressing faith alone in Christ alone the barrier that exists between God and the individual is removed. The resultant imputation of divine righteousness to that individual replaces enmity with peace.
- (10) Although Jesus’ substitutionary sacrifice on the cross removed sin as an issue for the entire human race, only those who believe in Him – His Person and His work – are saved and acquire peace with God.
- (11) This leads us to the last word in the verse which has been unfortunately translated in the King James Version by the phrase “good will.”
- (12) The Greek word that is so translated is **εὐδοκίας (eudodias)**, the genitive singular of the noun **εὐδοκία (eudokia)**.
- (13) The implication in the King James translation is that God will grant His peace to men of goodwill. This contradicts the principle of divine grace which regarding salvation requires nothing of anyone but faith.
- (14) Salvation is made available to all mankind by means of the good pleasure of God. It is God’s volition that makes peace possible for the elect.
- (15) Although the volition of man is implied since one must freely accept God’s grace offer of His Son, the volition in view is that of God’s in offering eternal peace through Christ.
- (16) The key to translating the word and understanding the verse is found in the analysis of the word *eudokias*:

**In the King James Version “good will” is the nominative εὐδοκία (eudokia). However, the oldest manuscripts have an added sigma (ς), indicator of the genitive case (εὐδοκίας, eudodias).<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Walter L. Liefeld, “Luke,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1984), 8:847n14.

At Bethlehem, a large company of the heavenly host praised God, saying, “Glory to God in the highest and upon earth peace *en anthrōpois eudokias*.” If it is certain that *eudokias* is a genitive of quality, it is difficult to understand it as a reference to a human sentiment, and all the more difficult to translate it “good will,” in the sense that salvation is to be granted only to well-intentioned folk, thus limiting its range, whereas God “wishes to save all people” [1 Tim 2:4]. Doubt is no longer possible after the discovery at Qumran *lkum-rān*<sup>2</sup> of the expressions “the multitude of his mercies toward the sons of his good pleasure” [etc.]. In Luke 2:14, the angels celebrate the peace granted to the whole earth, thanks to the saving reconciliation of all humankind by God’s absolutely free favor. There is no restriction on the beneficiaries of this salvation. They are all sinners; God gives this gift to all. This paradox or scandal depends on the good pleasure and sovereign will of the Lord of heaven and earth and is explained by his infinite kindness.<sup>3</sup>

- (17) The New English version has an excellent translation of this verse:

**Luke 2:14** - “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people with whom he is pleased!”<sup>4</sup> (NET)

**Luke 2:14** - “Glory to God in the highest and on the earth peace to the elect by means of God’s good pleasure.” (corrected translation)

#### IX. “Peace on earth, good will to men”: Delusion or Prophecy?:

##### a. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and the Faith-Rest Drill

1. Viewed through the prism of biblical theology, Longfellow’s refrain, “Peace on earth, good will to men” needs some work since it obviously contains both prophecy and delusion.
2. Peace for the individual human soul becomes a reality simply by believing in Jesus Christ as one’s personal Savior.
3. It is from the source of God’s good pleasure that the Messiah and His salvation are available to whosoever will believe in Him.
4. Unfortunately the King James translation has been used by Lucifer to foment a human-works campaign to bring about political peace. However, political peace is not the subject of Luke 2:14.
5. There is a political peace that will come to men but only through the agency of our Lord at His Second Advent.
6. The First Advent brings peace to men individually through the good pleasure of God the Father.
7. Lucifer, through demon influence, distorts this to imply political peace through the works and efforts associated with human good and evil.

<sup>2</sup> City located on the West Bank, Israel, near the caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947.

<sup>3</sup> Ceslas Spicq, “εὐδοκέω, εὐδοκία,” in *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. James D. Ernest (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 2:104–106.

<sup>4</sup> The idea of *people with whom he is pleased* alludes to those who are marked out by God as objects of his gracious favor. It is not a reference to every single person, so the phrase should not be translated “good will toward people” (*NET Bible* [Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2001], 1839n25).

8. Longfellow was confused about this subject himself but he worked it out through the rationales of the Faith-Rest Drill.
9. When Longfellow heard that his son had been seriously wounded in a battle during the War Between the States, he wrote a poem that was at once both melancholy and hopeful.
10. The story behind Longfellow's poem "Christmas Bells" reveals the tragic circumstances that led to his composition:

#### **The Story Behind "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day"**

**by Tom Stewart**

One of America's best known poets, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882), contributed to the wealth of carols sung each Christmas season, when he composed the words to "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" on December 25th 1864. "Glory to God in the Highest, and on Earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14). The carol was originally a poem, "Christmas Bells," containing seven stanzas. Two stanzas were omitted, which contained references to the American Civil War, thus giving us the carol in its present form. The poem gave birth to the carol, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day," and the remaining five stanzas were slightly rearranged in 1872 by John Baptiste Calkin (1827-1905), who also gave us the memorable tune. When Longfellow penned the words to his poem, America was still months away from Lee's surrender to Grant at Appomattox Court House on April 9th 1865; and, his poem reflected the prior years of the war's despair, while ending with a confident hope of triumphant peace.

As with any composition that touches the heart of the hearer, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" flowed from the experience of Longfellow— involving the tragic death of his wife Fanny and the crippling injury of his son Charles from war wounds. Henry married Frances Appleton on July 13th 1843, and they settled down in the historic Craigie House overlooking the Charles River in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

They were blessed with the birth of their first child, Charles, on June 9th 1844, and eventually, the Longfellow household numbered five children-- Charles, Ernest, Alice, Edith, and Allegra. Alice, the Longfellow's third child and first daughter, was delivered, while her mother was under the anesthetic influence of ether—the first in North America.

Tragedy struck both the nation and the Longfellow family in 1861. Confederate Gen. Pierre G. T. Beauregard fired the opening salvos of the American Civil War on April 12th, and Fanny Longfellow was fatally burned in an accident in the library of Craigie House on July 10th. The day before the accident, Fanny Longfellow recorded in her journal: "We are all sighing for the good sea breeze instead of this stifling land one filled with dust. Poor Allegra is very droopy with heat, and Edie has to get her hair in a net to free her neck from the weight." After trimming some of seven year old Edith's beautiful curls, Fanny decided to preserve the clippings in sealing wax. Melting a bar of sealing wax with a candle, a few drops fell unnoticed upon her dress. The longed for sea breeze gusted through the window, igniting the light material of Fanny's dress-- immediately wrapping her in flames. In her attempt to protect Edith and Allegra, she ran to Henry's study in the next room, where Henry frantically attempted to extinguish the flames with a nearby, but undersized throw rug. Failing to stop the fire with the rug, he tried to smother the flames by throwing his arms around Frances--severely burning his face, arms, and hands. Fanny Longfellow died the next morning. Too ill from his burns and grief, Henry did not attend her funeral. (Incidentally, the trademark full beard of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow arose from his inability to shave after this tragedy.)

The first Christmas after Fanny's death, Longfellow wrote, "How inexpressibly sad are all holidays." A year after the incident, he wrote, "I can make no record of these days. Better leave them wrapped in silence. Perhaps someday God will give me peace." Longfellow's journal entry for December 25th 1862 reads: "'A merry Christmas' say the children, but that is no more for me."

Almost a year later, Longfellow received word that his oldest son Charles, a lieutenant in the Army of the Potomac, had been severely wounded with a bullet passing under his shoulder blades and taking off one of the spinal processes. The Christmas of 1863 was silent in Longfellow's journal. Finally, on Christmas Day of 1864, he wrote the words of the poem, "Christmas Bells." Lt. Charles Longfellow did not die that Christmas, but lived. So, contrary to popular belief, the occasion of writing that much loved Christmas carol was not due to Charles' death.

Longfellow's Christmas bells loudly proclaimed, "God is not dead." Even more, the bells announced, "Nor doth He sleep." God's Truth, Power, and Justice are affirmed, when Longfellow wrote: "The wrong shall fail, the right prevail." The message that the Living God is a God of Peace is proclaimed in the close of the carol: "Of peace on Earth, good will to men."<sup>5</sup>

#### **b. Carol: "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day"**

There are seven verses to Longfellow's poem although only five are typically found in church hymnals. Why five I don't know because the fifth stanza is actually the third verse of the poem while the fourth stanza is its seventh and final verse. The hymn should conclude where Longfellow ended it, so here are the four that make up carol:

#### **I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day**

I heard the bells on Christmas day  
Their old, familiar carols play,

<sup>5</sup> Tom Stewart, "The Story behind *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*,"

[http://www.whatsaiththescrpture.com/Fellowship/Edit\\_I.Heard.the.Bells.html](http://www.whatsaiththescrpture.com/Fellowship/Edit_I.Heard.the.Bells.html)

And wild and sweet  
The words repeat  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,  
The belfries of all Christendom  
Had rolled along  
The unbroken song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;  
“There is no peace on earth,” I said:  
“For hate is strong,  
And mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!”

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:  
“God is not dead; nor doth He sleep!  
The Wrong shall fail,  
The Right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good-will to men!”<sup>6</sup>



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<sup>6</sup> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “Christmas Bells,” December 25, 1864.