

Bible Studies

These two studies have been designed for use by small groups although they are also suitable for individual study.

1. Solomon the Arms Trader

Introduction

Begin by asking members of the group what, if anything, the Bible has to say on the arms trade.

Text

1 Kings 10: 14-29

Commentary

- Solomon, the son of King David, was the last ruler (970-931 BCE) of the united kingdom of Israel.
- His wisdom and wealth was greater than all the kings of the earth and everyone came to hear his wisdom (1 Kings 10: 23-25) most notably amongst them, the Queen of Sheba (10: 1-13).
- He was accomplished in diplomacy, forging an alliance with the Israelites' former oppressors, Egypt, by marrying the Pharaoh's daughter (3: 1).
- He had built up a large military machine, in particular his cavalry of 12,000 horses and 1,400 chariots, and now ruled over a land at peace (4: 24-26; 10: 26). The language of social and political stability (grapevines and vineyards) employed by the writer here remind us of the words of the prophets (Micah 4: 4; Zechariah 3: 10).
- He was responsible for building the first temple in Jerusalem that lasted until the conquest of the city by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. It is interesting to note that Solomon's splendid palace took almost twice as long to build as the Temple (7: 1 cf 6: 38) and both involved the use of foreign forced labour (9: 15, 20-21).
- The prime cause of the downfall of Solomon's kingdom and subsequent division was apostasy, his turning away from God (1 Kings 11: 3-8; Deuteronomy 17: 17).

For discussion

1. From these verses, can you identify the points in Solomon's reign where he strayed from God's path?
2. What impact do you think Solomon's army had on Israel's political stability?
3. Read the following verses: Deuteronomy 17: 16; Isaiah 31: 1; Psalms 20: 7; 33: 16-17; 147: 10. Do you think that Solomon's reliance on military strength and weapons deals with Egypt contributed to the ultimate downfall of his kingdom?
4. Read the following passages: Psalms 46: 9-11; Isaiah 2: 4; 9: 5-7a; Ezekiel 39: 9; Micah 4: 3; 5: 10 and Zechariah 9: 9-10. What kind of vision do they describe?
5. What parallels could we draw, if any, with the global trade in arms today?

Prayer, reflection and action

What positive action(s) might you take as a result of the time you have just spent together. Pray about it, committing yourselves to one another and asking for the encouragement, guidance and support of the Holy Spirit in what you feel led to do.



2. "Pie in the Sky?"

Introduction

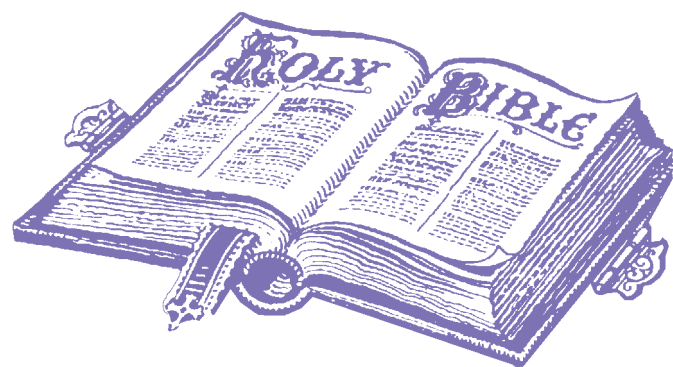
Begin by asking members of the group whether they know anywhere in the four Gospels or the Book of Acts where Jesus or Paul advocated or used violence.

Texts

Matthew 5: 1-12, 43-48
Romans 12: 9-21

Commentary

- The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 – 7) begins with the eight beatitudes (beautiful attitudes) of which the last two focus on peace and conflict.
- Peacemakers are called children of God (5: 9) and paradoxically we are blessed when we are insulted, lied about and persecuted for being one of Jesus' disciples (5: 10-12).
- Although there was a command for the Jews to love their neighbours (Leviticus 19: 18) there was no specific instruction to hate their enemies (Matthew 5: 43). However, Jesus' listeners, living under occupation by an imperial power and weighed down by an oppressive religious establishment, were well aware of their enemies.
- Jesus, in redefining 'neighbour' in one of his most well known parables (Luke 10: 25-37), included one of the Jews' historical enemies in his new definition.



- In Matthew 5: 43-48 Jesus tells his disciples to love and pray for their enemies. Anyone can love their friends, but Jesus expects far more of his followers.
- Paul, writing to the Church at Rome some 30 years after Jesus' earthly ministry, instructs the Romans to bless their persecutors (Romans 12: 14), not to seek revenge (12: 17, 19), to live in peace with everyone (12: 18) and hate evil and conquer it with love (12: 9, 21 also 1 Peter 3: 9) by doing good to their enemies (12: 20).

For discussion

1. Do you think that Jesus' peace ethic and its application by the apostle Paul can be practised in a fallen world, and, if so how?
2. Who might be your 'enemies' that Jesus is calling you to love?
3. Does the pursuit of righteousness and peace, following after Jesus, inevitably bring persecution?
4. War and peace – just war and pacifism is an area where Christians often disagree. How far do you think campaigning against the arms trade can become a focus for all Christians and successfully unite those from these different traditions?

Prayer, reflection and action

What positive action(s) might you take as a result of the time you have just spent together. Pray about it, committing yourselves to one another and asking for the encouragement, guidance and support of the Holy Spirit in what you feel led to do.

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