



GO DEEPER

SESSION 12: IS RELIGION THE CAUSE OF MOST WARS?



Aim

To explore whether religion is the cause of most wars and to consider human involvement in the inception of wars.



Starter

Quiz

1) In the past 3,400 years humans have been entirely at peace for how many of them?

a) 2,472; b) 1,527; c) 268

Answer: c (which equals 8% of recorded history)

2) What is the deadliest war that has ever been fought?

Answer: World War II, with over 70 million lives being lost

3) How long was the shortest war in history?

a) 45 minutes; b) 100 days; c) 11 months

Answer: a - The Anglo-Zanzibar War was a military conflict fought between the United Kingdom and the Zanzibar Sultanate on 27 August 1896. The conflict lasted between 38 and 45 minutes.

4) Name two countries which have not been to war in the last 200 years.

Answer: Sweden and Switzerland. Both these countries are militarily neutral, which they maintained throughout World War I and World War II. The Swiss and the Swedes each have a long history of neutrality: they have not been in a state of war internationally since 1815 and 1814, respectively.

A new '**geography of violence**' map reveals where in the world major battles in the past 4,000 years have taken place. If you can show this on a screen, it could be an interesting discussion starter.



Video

Watch the video **Is Religion the Cause of Most Wars?** (Running time 4:00)



Questions

Encourage pupils to write any questions on sticky notes as they occur to them.

Answer questions of understanding about the video straight away unless these will be answered later in the session. If there is not time for a question, confirm you will answer it another time. Consider using the 'car park' so pupils know you will not forget.



Exploring the Bible

Read James 4:1-10

Discuss

What do these verses give as reasons for wanting to kill?

Desires that battle within us: we want what we do not have, we are jealous of what others have.

Most wars have been conducted in the pursuit of profits or power or fought over land or for tribal supremacy – we want what we do not have and are jealous of what others have (1 John 2:16). Religion has clearly been caught up in those pursuits on occasions, but we must not forget that religious conviction often stands as the sole reason for refusing to kill and that the common factor in any war has at its heart the will of man, as these verses from James suggest.

What are the contrasts given in these verses for how God views us?

(1) Friendship with the world / being an enemy of God (v.4) versus God jealously longing for us (v.5)

(2) God opposes the proud (v.6) versus God shows favour to the humble (v.7)

Why does James refer to the recipients of the letter as ‘adulterous’, that is, unfaithful to God, in verse 4?

God wants us to follow him completely, to love him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. He is jealous in his love for his people.

What does the passage suggest our response should be to fights and quarrels?

v.3 Ask God

v.7 Submit yourself to God

v.7 Resist the devil

v.8 Come near to God

v.8 Purify your heart

v.10 Humble yourself

What does God promise us when we respond in these ways?

v.3 As we draw near to God, we will have Spirit-led desires, we will ask with pure motives and we will see answered prayer

v.6 God shows favour to the humble

v.7 Submit to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you

v.8 Come near to God and he will come near to you

v.9 Wash your hands and purify your hearts

v.10 Humble yourselves before God and he will lift you up

To suggest that Christianity is the cause of war is to remove the very heart of what Christianity is and to replace it with a different set of values. The story of Jesus gives no warrant for violence. Any believer behaving that way is disobeying the one they claim to be following.



Reflection

Allow a time of reflection that is most appropriate to your group.

You may wish to reflect quietly or discuss the following:

- ◆ Does the offer of a new heart, and a new start, appeal to you?
- ◆ If Jesus does not respond to violence with violence, how much trust should we have in those who claim to speak in his name but do not exhibit the same sort of character?



Further resources

"Religion Causes Wars" An article from bethinking.org