

society

extra thought and discussion

• Going to court

Jesus strongly advised us to sort out matters before we get to court (Matt 5:25-26).

Paul explains that it is absurd for Christians to take each other to court and be tried by unbelievers (1 Cor 6:1-6). Conflicts should be settled in the church. Jesus lays down a simple procedure for settling a dispute (Matt 18:15-17) — first try to settle it between the two of you, if that fails take some witnesses along and try again, and if that fails take the matter to the church.

• What type of government?

In the world there are monarchies, republics, democracies, dictatorships, communists, socialists, capitalists etc. God is able to use various systems of government, such as the prophetic leadership of Moses or Samuel, as well as the more ordered monarchies of David and other kings. It seems that the particular system is less important than whether the leaders seek the will of God.

Some Christians are socialist, concerned for the welfare of those who are disadvantaged and the sharing of resources, while others favour the right wing, being concerned about individual responsibility and order. Whatever our view it is important as Christians to take our voting responsibility seriously.

• War or peace

War was a common feature in the Old Testament as nations defended or claimed land. God used armies for his judgments on nations, eg the conquest of Canaan by Joshua (Gen 15:16, Lev 18:24-28, Deut 7:1-6, Josh 5:13-15). Heroism is not always approved of (1 Chron 28:2-3). In the New Testament the emphasis is on the spiritual battle and Christians are called to peace. The role of soldiers, however, is respected and not condemned (Matt 26:52, Luke 3:14, John 18:36, Acts 10:1-4, Rom 13:4).

• Capital punishment

Capital punishment for murder is one of the first justice laws in the Bible (Gen 9:5-6). The laws of Moses include the death sentence for blasphemy, false religion, dishonouring God, sexual immorality, dishonouring parents and murder. It is worth considering that these laws were made for nomadic people living in tents with no facility for imprisonment.

• A tale of two cities

Much of Bible history can be seen as the conflict between the city of the world, typified by Babylon, and the city of God, typified by Jerusalem.

Early Babylon — The first wicked city in the Bible is

that of Cain (Gen 4:17) and the wickedness of the society surrounding this city was eventually judged in the flood. Babel (=Babylon), characterised by pride and false religion (Gen 10:8-10, 11:1-9) was judged by confusion of languages. Sodom and Gomorrah are cities in the same mould (Gen 18:16-19:38). Babylon itself, on the River Euphrates, continued to develop into a large and civilised city.

Babylonian empire — In 612 BC Babylon became the capital of an empire which lasted for around 70 years. In October 539 BC Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians (Dan 5:1-31). Babylon was the archetype of worldly kingdoms and empires. Chapters 2 and 7-11 of Daniel have descriptions of more empires which can be identified as Medo-Persian, Greek, Roman, an end time anti-Christ kingdom and the final triumphant kingdom of God.

End-time Babylon — The book of Revelation describes a Babylon in the end-time which contains the evil elements of earlier Babylon types and an anti-Christ world leader. There are many prophecies in the Bible which describe the sins and destruction of Babylon (Is 13:1-14:32, 21:1-10, 43:14, 46:1-47:15, Jer 25:12, 50:1-51:64, Rev 14:8, 16:19, 17:1-18:24). It is characterised by:

- Pride, rebellion, self-sufficiency and godlessness.
- Political and military power oppressing the weak and the people of God.
- Desire for world domination.
- Economic power, wealth and trade.
- False religion, sorcery and astrology.
- Sin and immorality.

The city and empire of Babylon is a graphic description of the world system in which we live.

Jerusalem — The first mention is when the king of Salem (=Jerusalem) blesses Abraham and receives tithes from him (Gen 14:18-20). About 1000 BC Jerusalem (also called Zion) was established as the political and worship centre of the Israelites by King David (2 Sam 5:6-6:19), and a magnificent temple was built there by his son Solomon. The city remained in the hands of the Israelite tribe of Judah (from which we get the word *Jew*) for about 400 years until 587 BC when it was razed to the ground by the Babylonians. The Jews (including Ezekiel and Daniel) were taken into captivity in Babylon where they lived as exiles. After the fall of Babylon the Jews were allowed to return to their city (Ezra and Nehemiah), but they never became politically powerful again. A large temple was completed shortly before Jesus was born. Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD by the Romans. This physical Jerusalem has been a visual aid for the New Jerusalem.

New Jerusalem — The heavenly Jerusalem is the company of all God's people through the ages (Gal 4:25-26, Heb 12:22-24). They are the people of the kingdom of God. The Bible finishes with the destruction of Babylon and the triumphant appearance of the eternal, perfect new Jerusalem (Rev 21:1-22:5).

society

● The world

* Galatians 3:22 * Ephesians 6:12 * 1 John 5:19 * Rev 12:9

The word "world" is often used in the Bible for human beings and their activities here on earth. How is the world described in these verses?

* John 3:16-19 What is God's attitude to the world? _____

What did he do to show it? _____

* John 16:28 Jesus came from _____ to _____

* John 1:9-11, 15:18-19

What is the world's response to Jesus and Christians? _____

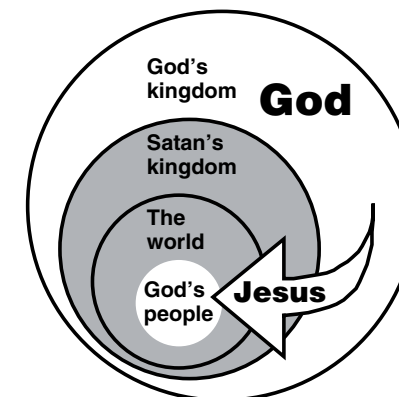
* John 17:14-19

Did Jesus want his followers to escape from the world? _____

What did Jesus mean when he said his followers are *not of the world*? _____

* John 9:5 * Matthew 5:14-16, 28:18-20

What should God's people do in the world? _____



Jesus came into the world to bring the kingdom of God (Mark 1:15). It is the task of God's people to continue to work for the extension of the kingdom of God and to rescue our fellow human beings from the influences of the world and Satan. This will be achieved by our witness and conduct in the power of the Holy Spirit.

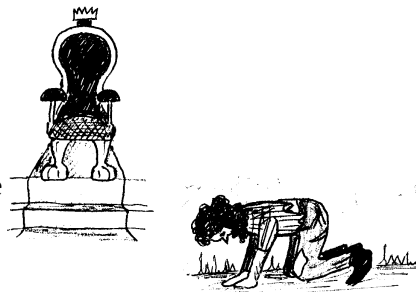
The rebellious activities of Satan and the world are permitted at the moment by God for reasons known to him. God is, however, ultimately in charge and can intervene at any time. All evil will be destroyed in the end (Rev 20:10, 14-15).

● Human governments

* Daniel 4:1-37

What was Nebuchadnezzar's sin?

What did he need to acknowledge before his sanity was restored?



* 2 Chronicles 20:6 * Psalm 22:28, 47:2, 103:19 * John 19:10-11

Who is the ultimate ruler of the nations?

* Revelation 19:11-16 Who is King of Kings?

* Romans 13:1-7 * 1 Peter 2:13-14

What should be our attitude to the governing authorities?

Why should we obey them?

* Matthew 17:24-27, 22:15-22 What should we do?

* 1 Timothy 2:1-2 What else can we do?

* Jeremiah 29:7 * Psalm 72:1-20 What can we pray for?

How would you describe your attitude to your national and local government? You may tick more than one.

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| ☐ obedient | ☐ supportive | ☐ encouraging |
| ☐ prayerful | ☐ co-operative | ☐ complaining |
| ☐ rebellious | ☐ disobedient | ☐ unco-operative |

Are there any changes you could make in your attitude?

Heartsearch

● Active members of society

We are called to be law-abiding, good citizens of our country. Paul was a Roman citizen and took advantage of the fact (Acts 22:22-29, 25:11). Joseph, Daniel and Mordecai were godly men in high positions in secular government and as politicians were able to influence the nations they were serving (Genesis 41:41-49, Daniel 2:48-49, Esther 9:4, 10:1-3).

Are there ways which Christians can influence or serve their society and government?

Think!

● Dual citizenship

* Philippians 3:20-21

Where is our permanent citizenship?

* 1 Peter 2:11-12

What are we in the world?

* Hebrews 11:10-16, 13:14 * Rev 21:2

What is the difference between our city here and the city of God?

As Christians we may feel out of place and like foreigners in this world because we actually belong to another kingdom. We have temporary passports in this world - *we are in the world but not of the world*.

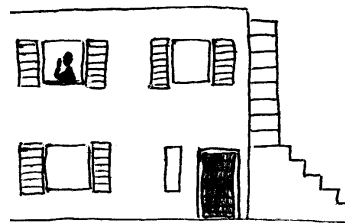
● Standing out and standing firm

* Daniel 6:1-28

On what issue did Daniel find it necessary to disobey his earthly king?

* Acts 4:1-22, 5:25-32, 5:40-42

On what issue did Peter and John find it necessary to disobey their rulers?



Only in certain circumstances such as these can a Christian be justified in disobeying earthly authorities and obeying God rather than men.

* Psalm 82:3-4 * Proverbs 31:8-9 * Isaiah 1:17

On what other issues might we confront earthly authorities?

* Amos 2:6-8, 4:1, 5:4-27

See how Amos boldly exposes sin, injustice and false religion. He stands firm for God's principles of righteousness and truth.

Are you prepared to defend the poor and needy? Do you stand up for justice in your nation and in the world at large? Are there things you can do or say?

Heartsearch

