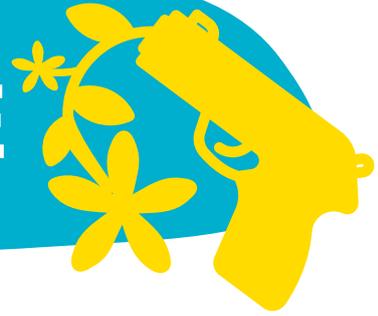


WAR AND PEACE



The issues of war and peace can raise important questions for Christians. Can war ever be right? What do the Bible and Christian tradition teach about how to respond to conflicts?

Working in pairs or small groups, discuss how a war might affect

- A country
- A family
- An individual

You could use the pictures below as a focus for your discussion.

Make a list of the effects you can think of. Which of them would affect people during the war, and which would still have effects after the war was over?

Which has the worst consequences of all? Remember to think about the effects of wars on those who fight in them, as well as on the innocent victims of war.



Photography by BalkansCat / Shutterstock



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Photography by Mrs Brown / pixabay

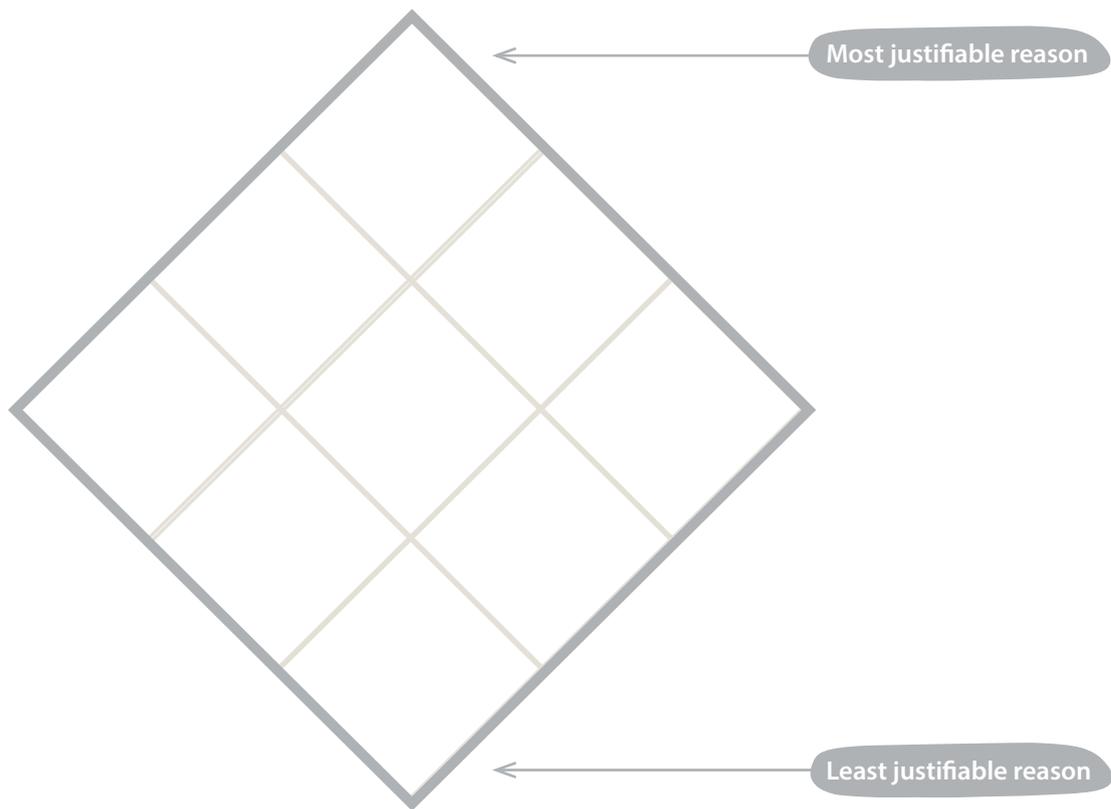
To help them consider the morality of war, Christians may look to the teachings of their church and its leaders, and they will also use their own consciences. They also believe that the Bible helps them to understand how they ought to make decisions about war and peace in their lives today.

The Bible has a lot to say about war and peace. The Bible is a collection of books which was compiled over 1,000 years by about 40 different authors, so there are many different attitudes to war and peace within its pages, reflecting changes during the time it was written and its different authors.

Under what circumstances do you think it is justifiable to fight a war? Choose from the list below and write the letters into the boxes on the diamond in order of importance from most (top box) to least (bottom box).

- A. To defend your own nation from attack
- B. To acquire wealth/resources from other countries
- C. To defend your nation's wealth and resources
- D. To defeat an evil ruler in your own country
- E. To defend another person's right to follow a religion
- F. To extend your control over others
- G. To defend human rights
- H. To defend those who are too weak to defend themselves
- I. To defeat an evil ruler in another country

Reasons for fighting in a war – diamond 9 activity



I put ___ at the top of my diamond because

I put ___ at the bottom of my diamond because



What does the Old Testament say about war and peace?

In the Old Testament stories, Israel is a nation which is often caught up in war, both as an instigator and as the victim of the aggression of others.

The book of Exodus includes the story of how, when the Israelites were escaping from slavery in Egypt, God parted the Red Sea. They could cross to freedom whilst their former slave owners, the Egyptians, drowned when the waters returned. It describes how Moses and the Israelites sang a song to celebrate this, which includes the following:

The LORD is my strength and my might,
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him.
The LORD is **a warrior**;
the LORD is his name.

Pharaoh's chariots and his army he cast into the sea;
His picked officers were sunk in the Red Sea.
The floods covered them;
they went down into the depths like a stone.
Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power –
your right hand, O LORD, shattered the enemy.

Exodus chapter 15 verses 2-6 (NRSV)

Notice that it says the LORD is 'a warrior' - this suggests that God fought on behalf of the Israelites. They gave the credit for their rescue from the Egyptians to God.

Pharaoh was the title used by the kings of Egypt.

In this passage, highlight where warlike or violent language is used.

What type of writing is this Bible passage?

What is the context (background) to this song?

Choose three adjectives to describe the different emotions it contains.

What would it have meant for the Israelites if God hadn't been 'a warrior', fighting on their behalf?

What do you think was the purpose of including this song in the book of Exodus?



One of the themes of the Old Testament is that God promised to be in a relationship with the Israelites; and that the Israelites promised to honour God in their lives and worship. In the Bible, this is called a covenant. God had promised the Israelites a land of their own, but this often required them to fight the tribes who lived there originally, in order to conquer it. As Israel moved into the promised land, the Israelites' victories in battles, such as the capture of the city of Ai, were seen by the writers of the Old Testament to be proof that God was with them.

Elsewhere in the Old Testament, we can see a very different attitude to war. Some of the prophets talk about a forthcoming widespread peace in which people will live in harmony with each other. They call this peace 'shalom'. The prophet Micah wrote this in the seventh century BC.

Zion is a place name which is used to mean either Israel or Jerusalem.

To **arbitrate** is to settle an argument.

Many nations shall come and say:
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the **house of the God of Jacob**;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths;
For our of **Zion** shall go forth instruction
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between many peoples,
and shall **arbitrate** between strong nations
far away;
**they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more;
but they shall all sit under their own vines and
under their own fig trees,
and no-one shall make them afraid;**
for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

Micah chapter 4 verses 2-4 (NRSV)

The **house of God** was often used to mean the temple in Jerusalem.

Jacob is an Old Testament character, an ancestor of the Israelites Micah was writing to.

'They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.' What would this look like today? Re-write the highlighted part of the passage using modern-day language and items.

Write a tweet of no more than 280 characters to summarise the different Old Testament ideas about war and peace.



Photography by Lee Nanjoo / Shutterstock

What does the New Testament say about war and peace?

The New Testament includes a lot of teachings of Jesus about peace. Look at this selection of his teachings taken from the Gospel of Matthew:

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.'

'You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But **if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.**'

'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.'

Matthew chapter 5 verses 9, 38-39 and 43-44 (NRSV)

'If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.' Do you think that Jesus meant for people to literally let someone slap them on both cheeks? If not, what do you think Jesus did intend his followers to do?

How might these teachings influence a Christian when thinking about war and peace?

Compare and contrast these sayings of Jesus with what the Old Testament says about war and peace.

Some Christians have concluded that Jesus' teachings about the importance of peace and love for both your neighbours and your enemies make fighting in a war impossible for a Christian.

Others have argued that this teaching only affects individual Christians, and that when it comes to their nation or the international community, sometimes not fighting to defend yourself or others from attack might only encourage more violence.

To find out more about how Christians have responded to the problem of war and the use of violence, watch the video at:

[biblesociety.org.uk/e/war-and-peace](https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/e/war-and-peace)



What is pacifism?

Pacifism is the belief that violence and fighting can never be right, and that all problems should be solved by peaceful means. Many of the early Christians were pacifists and refused to fight, and some modern-day Christians hold the same view.

For example, the church known as the Quakers (or the Society of Friends) believe that non-violent confrontation of evil and peaceful reconciliation are always superior to violent measures. This was expressed in one of their earliest writings, from just after the end of the English Civil War, in which they were not prepared to fight for either side.

'That Spirit of Christ by which we are guided is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil, and again to move unto it. And we do certainly know, and so testify to the world that the Spirit of Christ which leads us into all Truth will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the Kingdom of Christ nor for the kingdoms of this world.'

Quaker Peace Testimony 1660

What are the key characteristics of pacifism?

Can a war ever be just?

In an attempt to answer the questions posed by the wrongness of violence, but the need to sometimes fight for justice, Christians might use the Just War theory. This theory was developed by the Christian theologian Thomas Aquinas, drawing on older thinking by the early Christian leader Augustine. It outlines certain conditions which, if met, can make a war just or moral to fight in.

- It must be for a good cause.
- It must be declared by a lawful authority such as the government, not by an individual or a small group.
- It must be the case that when the war is over, the outcome will be better than if the war hadn't been fought.
- Fighting the war must have been the last resort – all other ways to stop fighting have been tried.
- Only the minimum amount of force which is necessary should be used.
- There must be a reasonable chance of winning the war, so that it doesn't cause destruction for no purpose.



Look back to the diamond 9 you did at the start of this topic. Do the same task again, but this time use the Just War theory as your criteria. Here is the list again.

- A. To defend your own nation from attack
- B. To acquire wealth/resources from other countries
- C. To defend your nation's wealth and resources
- D. To defeat an evil ruler in your own country
- E. To defend another person's right to follow a religion
- F. To extend your control over others
- G. To defend human rights
- H. To defend those who are too weak to defend themselves
- I. To defeat an evil ruler in another country

How does your new diamond compare to your original?

Many Christians have become critical of the idea of the Just War. With weapons of mass destruction it is possible to do damage on a huge scale, and the after-effects can last for generations. With advances in technology, drones can be used to destroy targets remotely.

Can weapons of mass destruction and drones be used in a war that is just? Look at the terms of the Just War and explain whether they match or contradict the use of weapons of mass destruction and drones.

Forgiveness and reconciliation

Christians are not just concerned with the rights and wrongs of going to war and of how a war is fought, they also need to think about the aftermath of wars. Then, they might think about how to bring about reconciliation and to help those who have suffered during the war.

Research one of these organisations, and find out what they do to bring about forgiveness and reconciliation, and why they do it.



Summing up what you have learned about how Christians think about war and peace

Reach a balanced judgement about this quotation:

'Christians should never fight in wars.'

What do you think? Give reasons for your opinion. Make sure that you refer to parts of the Just War theory and various different Christian views of war, including pacifism and the teachings of the Bible.

To help you, use the following sentence stems:

The idea of the Just War is that . . .

Christians might use the Old Testament and the New Testament parts of the Bible to develop their thinking by . . .

Some Christians are pacifists because . . .

Overall, Christian responses to war . . .

