

Protests, pandemics and politics top online Bible searches

December 3, 2020

WASHINGTON (RNS)—In the midst of a strange and stressful year, people turned to the same place they have for decades in their search for answers.

The internet.

But once online, many looked to a much older source: the Bible.

[Bible Gateway](#), a website that allows users to read and search the text of multiple translations of the Bible, saw unusual spikes in related searches around the first COVID-19 lockdowns last spring, the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police and the protests that followed in the summer and the U.S. presidential election this fall, according to Bible Gateway's Year in Review.

Users searched for Bible verses related to politics, social issues, the end times and—perhaps not surprisingly—pandemics at least 10 times more this year than they did in 2019, according to the website.

It's not unusual to see current events reflected in the website's search results, Bible Gateway content manager Jonathan Petersen said.

"People are trying to find answers in situations that are difficult to see the answers. They do tend to turn to the Bible for whatever answers they can find," Petersen said.

Justice, plague and government hot topics

Searches for terms such as racism, justice, equality and oppression multiplied by more than 100 after Floyd's death.

Search results for those terms include such verses as Proverbs 21:15:  "When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers," and Isaiah 1:17: "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow."

Pandemic was the second major search theme Bible Gateway identified this year, including searches for what the Bible has to say about such topics as disease, pestilence and plague. Those searches spiked sharply in March, according to the website, when many places across the United States enacted measures to slow the spread of COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus.

The site also saw a surge in searches related to politics—such as praying for government and obeying government authority—that came around the U.S. presidential election in early November.

Looking for love, peace and hope

Some things, even amid uncertainty, never change, though.

The most-read verses on Bible Gateway have remained the same for years: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16), and "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope" (Jeremiah

29:11).

Its top two most-searched terms have also remained unchanged: “love” and “peace,” but “hope” moved up the list to No. 3 in 2020, according to the website.

“You could say people are looking for hope more this year than they have in the previous couple years,” Petersen said.