

## Further Information for Leaders and Facilitators

### General Guidance

General tips and guidance about how to organize an event and facilitate discussion are contained in the *Scripture & Violence Event Leader's Guide*, available at [www.scriptureandviolence.org](http://www.scriptureandviolence.org).

While the current module can be used on its own, it may help the quality of your discussion to have your group watch the introductory videos on our website first, or to read some of our other introductory resources. Scriptural interpretation is a complex process, and the relationship between scriptural texts and real-world actions is multi-faceted. Our introductory resources give a brief overview of key concepts and ideas.

### Tips and Guidance on Module Questions

Here are some tips and guidance on the questions posed in this module.

In order to allow participants to make their own discoveries, it is best to read the scriptural passage and discuss the questions in an open-ended manner first, before referencing these notes. Often, group members will come up with these ideas themselves, as well as many other interesting thoughts and questions that are not discussed below.

This guidance is not meant as a set of “answers” that participants need to reach, but is designed to help leaders feel confident facilitating discussion. Leaders do not need to be “experts.” The group can have a stimulating discussion, even if some questions arise that no one in the group is able to answer.

Participants should generally be allowed to discuss freely. Leaders should draw upon the material in these notes primarily when the conversation gets stuck.

### *Getting Familiar with the Text*

1. *What are the Israelites instructed to do in the passage?*

Question 1 can be answered simply by reading the passage.

2. *What reason or reasons are given in the passage for the acts of violence that are described?*

Question 2 can be answered simply by reading the passage.

### *Digging Deeper*

3. *In the world today, nations often assert that acts of war or violence against other nations – or groups within nations – are necessary or justified in pursuit of a greater goal, such as protecting some people against others who might harm them. Sometimes non-combatants are also killed in the process, a result that is often described as “unintended” and “collateral damage.” How are these modern*

*ways of talking and justifying acts of war similar to Deuteronomy 20:16-18, and how are they different?*

Question 3 invites participants to think about the passage from Deuteronomy in light of modern warfare. As participants may realize, some of the potentially disturbing aspects of Deuteronomy, such as the killing of non-combatants, continue to be a feature of war today.

4. *In many descriptions of ancient warfare, including other passages in the Bible, conquering armies take women, children, and other people captive as a form of “war booty.” In contrast, Deuteronomy 20:16 says, “You shall not let a soul remain alive.” In your view, could the command in Deuteronomy 20 be seen as more merciful, or less unjust, than a command that said, “Kill the men and take the women and children as slaves”?*

In the ancient world, conquering armies normally did not kill everyone in cities they attacked. Instead, many of the conquered people were taken as slaves. For women, this usually also meant being repeatedly raped. Without denying the disturbing nature of the passage from Deuteronomy, participants can discuss whether some conquered peoples might have considered enslavement a fate even worse than death.

### ***Exploring Later Interpretations***

5. *How do the first two approaches – “This command applied only to Joshua and his generation” and “You’ll never meet an identifiable Canaanite” – differ from one another, and how are they similar?*

Question 5 invites participants to think about the first two approaches. Neither of these approaches expects faithful adherents to carry out the command in the present day, but for different reasons. The first approach (i) treats the command as something only one specific generation was ever supposed to carry out. The second approach (ii) does not see the command as time-limited, but thinks it is impossible to identify any present-day people as belonging to one of the targeted groups.

Participants could also compare the risks and benefits of these approaches. Does one approach seem more risky or more disturbing than the other?

6. *How does Ezra Stiles’ use of the passage differ from the first two approaches?*

Question 6 invites participants to reflect on a third approach to the passage. Stiles treats the passage as applicable to conflicts in his own day. He does not seem to see the command as limited to Joshua’s generation, or to see particular difficulties in being able to identify “Canaanites.”

7. *Is your reaction to Deuteronomy 20:16-18 different if you think of it as describing a command for specific people to kill other specific people in a specific geographical area at a specific time in the past, rather than as an ongoing command to be carried out by all generations of Israelites or all worshippers of Israel's god throughout history? Which of these approaches is most similar to how you tend to understand scripture yourself?*

Question 7 builds on Questions 5 and 6. Participants are invited to reflect on how their own emotional response to passage from Deuteronomy might reflect their assumptions about whether it should be understood as conveying a specific, time-limited command or a general, ongoing command. For many participants, their approach to this passage will reflect their approach to scripture more generally, and they can be encouraged to think about why they tend to read scripture in one way rather than another.