

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.

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. *According to the passage, why are the king of Egypt and other Egyptians concerned about the Israelites? What do the king and other Egyptians do as a result?*

Question 1 can be answered simply by reading the passage.

2. *According to verse 17, why don't the midwives carry out the king's order? How does this differ from the explanation the midwives give the king in verse 19?*

Question 2 can be answered simply by reading the passage.

Digging Deeper

3. *How do you feel about the explanation the midwives give the king in verse 19?*

Question 3 builds on Question 2. In some contexts, people choose not to explain their real reasons for failing to follow commands. Question 3 invites participants to discuss whether they view the midwives' explanation to the king – which in some contexts might be considered “untruthful” – as ethically justified in the midwives' particular situation.

4. *Why might a king in this situation order only Israelite boys to be killed, while allowing Israelite girls to live?*

The passage does not explain why only the boys are to be killed. In ancient contexts, boys and men from enemy nations – or potential enemy nations – were sometimes killed to reduce the number of men available to fight in future wars. In a patrilineal society – in which cultural and religious identity follows the father's household – killing boys would also gradually reduce the size of the group. If there are no more men from the group to be heads of families, the group would die out. Participants may also come up with other possibilities.

5. *From the king's perspective, the Israelites seem to represent a threat – threatening his ability to keep the country safe and secure. From the point of view of the Egyptians, could one argue that the midwives are “endangering public safety” by not obeying the king's orders?*

Question 5 encourages participants to think about the midwives' disobedience from the perspective of the Egyptians and of the king. An action that might seem good from one person's perspective – for example, from the perspective of an Israelite – might seem bad from someone else's perspective – for example, from the perspective of an Egyptian.

If an invading army were to attack Egypt some years later, and Israelite men joined with Egypt's enemies to overthrow the nation, an Egyptian might say that the midwives had contributed to the downfall of Egyptian society by not killing the baby boys.

This is actually a common type of thinking, including in modern societies. For example, it contributed to US citizens of Japanese descent being put in concentration camps during World War 2. Governments might also use this same type of thinking in other contexts. In countries that require “vaccine passports” for entry into certain business, for example, some business owners who view the requirement as unethical and discriminatory might refuse to check customers' certification status – and might be accused by the government of “endangering public safety” as a result.

6. *There are various ways one could read the king's command to kill the Israelite boys. Is the main motivation for the command arbitrary hatred and prejudice against the Israelite refugees? Or is the king sincerely concerned about what will happen if Egypt is attacked by an invading army, and taking strategic steps to protect Egypt's interests – just as many other rulers have done over the course of history? How would it affect your view of the passage to read it in these two different ways?*

People often think of violent actions as motivated only by hatred or prejudice, but there can also be social, economic, or political factors involved. If the king in the passage is motivated simply by hatred or prejudice, the whole situation might appear very black-and-white from an ethical perspective. But if the king is sincerely seeking to protect the interests of his society, and honestly views the Israelites as a danger, ethical evaluation of the situation becomes more complex. While one might still not conclude that the king's actions are justified, one might at least acknowledge that they are understandable in the circumstances, and that the midwives' actions could have negative consequences for some people in Egypt.

7. *In what sorts of circumstances do you think it is appropriate or good for people who "fear God" to disobey rules set by their government?*

Question 7 invites participants to build upon their discussion of the Exodus passage and think about situations one might encounter in the contemporary world. In what sort of circumstances might religious people today feel called to disobey government rules? One can think about circumstances where individual or collective actions might lead to someone else – at home or abroad – being imprisoned, tortured, oppressed, harmed, etc.