

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. *What do the Roman governor Pilate and the soldiers do and say in the passage?*
2. *What do the chief priests and elders do and say?*
3. *What do the crowds do and say?*

The purpose of Questions 1-3 is to encourage participants to pay attention to the details of the text, as well as setting the stage for Question 4.

Digging Deeper

4. *When an act of violence takes place, there are often many different factors and circumstances that contribute to it, involving a range of people. How does the passage from Matthew about the execution of Jesus illustrate this phenomenon?*

Question 4 builds on Questions 1-3. In modern societies, there can be a tendency blame any given act of violence on a lone individual – the “person who pulled the trig-

ger” – or to blame some specific group within society who are seen as particularly “violent.” In reality, however, there are usually many different factors and circumstances that lead up to an act of violence, involving a wide range of people over a long period of time. (For more on this topic, see the video called *Should we stop talking about “religious violence”?* at scriptureandviolence.org.)

This complexity is also evident in the story of Jesus’ death in the book of Matthew. Question 4 is designed to help participants notice that a variety of different people are involved in the process that eventually leads to Jesus’ death, including the Roman governor Pilate, Roman soldiers, chief priests and elders, and the crowds.

5. *Does the passage from Matthew encourage its audience – the people for whom the story was written in the first century CE – to act violently against anyone? (Note: The intended audience probably consisted of members of Jesus-following communities, at least some of whom considered themselves Jewish.)*

Question 5 draws attention to the fact that the passage from Matthew does not actively encourage its audience to engage in acts of violence. This is designed to set the stage for Question 6.

6. *Some Christians over the centuries have used Jesus’ death to justify violent actions against Jews in their own day, saying, “The Jews killed Jesus,” or calling Jewish people “Christ-killers.”*
 - c. *After studying the passage from Matthew, how would you respond to someone who said, “The Jews killed Jesus and should be punished for it”?*
 - d. *Does it surprise you that Christians have sometimes invoked the story of Jesus’ death to justify action against Jews? Why or why not?*

(Note: The book of Matthew seems to have been written by someone who was Jewish himself, as well as being a member of a Jesus-following community. In the story, Jesus and his first followers are also Jewish, and remain Jewish throughout the story. Some other characters in the story object to Jesus’ teaching and actions, but this is not depicted as a broader conflict between “the Jews and Jesus” or between “Jesus and Judaism.” Rather, it is depicted as a conflict among Jews.)

While the passage from Matthew does not encourage its audience to act violently against Jewish people, this has not stopped some Christians over the centuries from citing this story as justification for actions against Jews. This example illustrates how people in later centuries sometimes use scriptural passages in ways that were not intended or foreseen by the authors themselves.

Since the author of Matthew seems to have been Jewish himself, consistently portrays Jesus and his followers as being Jewish, and speaks positively of the Jewish law (see, e.g., Matthew 5:17-20 and 23:23), he probably would have been very disappointed to find out that later followers of Jesus were using his story as justification for violence against Jews. (Note: When discussing Question 6, some participants may assert that

either the author of Matthew or Jesus' early followers "converted from Judaism to Christianity." This is inaccurate, and facilitators should correct this idea. The book of Matthew portrays Jesus' early followers as remaining Jewish even after becoming followers of Jesus, a situation that presumably also applies to the author himself.)

For Question 6a, possible responses could include the following:

- The idea that "the Jews killed Jesus" is not supported by the passage from Matthew. According to the passage, the Roman governor and soldiers are materially involved in the process. Furthermore, not all Jews in the story are against Jesus, even if certain local leaders play a role in bringing about his execution. In fact, Jesus and his followers are Jewish themselves.
- The idea that "The Jews killed Jesus and should be punished for it" weirdly suggests that all Jews throughout all of history were involved in killing Jesus – an event that happened in the first century CE.
- The passage from Matthew does not encourage its audience to take action against anyone.

Question 6b could lead to discussion about the various historical, political, and social factors that may have led people over the centuries – including some Christians – to carry out violence against Jews, and to go looking for ways to justify such actions.