

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. *How is the rider on the white horse described in verses 11-16?*

The goal of Question 1 is to help participants pay attention to the details of the text. It is better simply to note the words used in the text itself, rather than offering interpretations of the imagery.

2. *What types of battlefield imagery appear in the passage?*

Question 2 is best answered simply by noting the words used in the text itself.

3. *Is this how you normally imagine Jesus?*

Question 3 invites participants to note ways in which the portrayal of Jesus in Revelation 19 might differ from the ways they normally think about Jesus.

Digging Deeper

4. *When one reads violent-sounding scriptural texts, it is important to think about the historical context in which they were written. At the time of the book of Revelation, Christians represented a tiny minority within the Roman Empire, with no political or military power. They would not have been in a position to wage battles on God's behalf. From the book of Revelation, it also seems that the author felt his community was being persecuted by more powerful persons in Roman society.*
 - a. *How might the idea that God and his agents (Christ, angels, etc.) would kill God's enemies as part of a final judgment scenario be encouraging to people who were part of a persecuted and powerless minority?*

Question 4a invites participants to reflect on some of the effects Revelation 19 might have had on an early Christian audience. It may be difficult for participants who come from powerful majority groups to put themselves in the shoes of an early Christian, but they should try the best they can. For example, someone who was persecuted and powerless might have found it comforting to think that God would someday ensure that justice was done, even if they had to continue experiencing injustice during their own lifetime.

- b. *How might the passage from Revelation 19 have encouraged Christians in the first century not to give up their Christian identity or practices in the face of social pressures to do so?*

Question 4b can be approached in various ways. For example, some first-century Christians might have thought, "I don't want to end up on the wrong side of the battle mentioned in this passage, so I will remain faithful even though it is difficult," or "My difficult experiences have been making me wonder whether this God I serve is really powerful after all, but this passage reminds me that God may just be waiting until later to show his power and establish justice in the world."

- c. *Do you feel differently about Revelation 19 if you understand it as a message for people from a persecuted minority, as opposed to people from a more powerful segment of society?*

Question 4c builds on 4a and 4b. People who are part of majority groups, especially in nations with military and political power on the international stage, sometimes react negatively to scriptural passages like Revelation 19, because they read the text as if it was written by someone in their own social and political situation. They think, "If someone from my group wrote this, I would be disturbed." Question 4c draws attention to the fact that scriptural passages can sound quite different to us depending on how we imagine the author's circumstances.

5. *Some people today draw contrasts between the New Testament and other scriptures, such as the “Old Testament” or Hebrew Bible, and the Qur’an. Some people say that the New Testament is about love and peace, while these other scriptures are “harsher” or more violent.*
- a. *Do you think these sorts of statements take passages like Revelation 19 into account? More broadly, do you think they are usually based on a comprehensive awareness of the entire contents of the New Testament, Hebrew Bible, and Qur’an?*
 - b. *Do you think these sorts of statements adequately consider other relevant factors, such as the historical contexts in which the texts found in the Hebrew Bible and Qur’an were produced? For example, do they consider whether some violent-sounding passages in the Hebrew Bible and Qur’an may also have been written for people who were part of a persecuted minority?*
 - c. *Why do you think people (e.g., Christians) sometimes make statements like these?*

Question 5 invites participants to think critically about the negative contrasts that people today sometimes draw between the New Testament and the “Old Testament” or Hebrew Bible, and the Qur’an.

With regard to Question 5a, the people who draw such contrasts often do not have a comprehensive knowledge of the entire contents of the New Testament, Hebrew Bible, and Qur’an. They are often not aware of violent-sounding passages in the New Testament, such as Revelation 19, or of passages in the Hebrew Bible and the Qur’an advocating peace and non-violence.

As Question 5b suggests, negative contrasts drawn between the New Testament and other scriptures often do not consider the historical contexts in which particular passages in the Hebrew Bible and the Qur’an were produced. Many violent-sounding texts in the latter scriptures were also written for people who were part of a persecuted minority, and raise the same sort of questions that are raised in this study guide about Revelation 19.

Question 5c asks why some people might draw negative contrasts between the New Testament and other scriptures. “Why” questions are difficult to answer, but some ideas to think about include:

- Many Christians are much more familiar with New Testament texts than with texts in the Hebrew Bible and the Qur’an. Studies of human psychology suggest that people tend to feel more positive about things that are familiar to them.
- In Christian worship services, there can be a tendency to avoid reading or preaching on violent-sounding passages. Some Christians may therefore be honestly unaware that such passages exist in the New Testament.

- The labels “old” and “new” that have gotten attached to different parts of the Bible in the Christian tradition may affect how Christians today think of various texts, since the word “new” tends to have more positive connotations than the word “old” in most modern contexts.
- Some Christians tend to associate the Hebrew Bible with Judaism and the New Testament with Christianity. For some Christians, feeling that Christianity is somehow superior to Judaism also seems to be important for their sense of self, and this may be reflected in their attitudes toward the Hebrew Bible. (Note: These attitudes are problematic. The Hebrew Bible is considered sacred scripture by almost all Christian traditions. In addition, most or all authors of New Testament texts were Jewish themselves, and wrote at a time when “Christianity” did not exist yet.)
- Negative portrayals of Islam in the media may contribute to negative attitudes toward the Qur’an.