

This transcript accompanies the *Cambridge in your Classroom* video on 'Do violent-sounding scriptural texts justify war?'.
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Do violent-sounding scriptural texts justify war?

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War in the Bible, Jewish tradition, and beyond

In the Jewish and Christian scriptures, God commands the ancient Israelites to go to war against people living in the Land of Canaan.

The texts of classical rabbinic Judaism treat these verses as sacred scripture – but they think that this type of violence cannot be legitimately carried out in their own day.

These rabbinic texts include the Babylonian Talmud and date from the third to sixth centuries CE. They argue that God's people can only wage war in God's name if they receive a direct command from God telling them to do so.

The rabbinic texts say that the ancient Israelites mentioned in the Bible did receive direct commands from God, so they were justified in going to war.

But communities in their own day, the classical rabbis said, were no longer in a position to receive these sorts of direct commands from God, because the Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed, authoritative prophecy had ceased, and the Urim and Tumim – special objects used by the ancient Israelites to discern God's will – had been lost.

Basically, the rabbis thought that to wage war in God's name, you needed the equivalent of a text message directly from God – but the whole network had gone out of service, so no text message would be coming through.

What would it look like today if societies made going to war dependent on these types of restrictions?