

# **Theology of War in Deuteronomy 20:12-13: Case Studies and Their Applications in Contemporary Church Life**

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**Abstract:** Deuteronomy 20 provides a significant biblical passage on the concept of war and its theological implications. This study aims to examine the meaning and message contained in Deuteronomy 20:12-13, exploring the historical, cultural, and theological context behind these verses. The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach, relying on a literature review and interviews with key informants to analyze the text. The findings suggest that these verses illustrate a complex divine approach to war, justice, and peace, offering valuable insights for modern Christian practice and understanding. The study also addresses common misinterpretations of these verses and proposes a clearer understanding of their relevance today.

**Contribution:** This study contributes to a deeper understanding of biblical interpretations related to war theology. It also provides insights into the implications of ancient teachings on modern Christian practices. Finally, it challenges misconceptions about the relationship between faith and violence in the context of historical biblical teachings.

**Keywords:** tradition; war; covenant; Israelites; Old Testament; implications

## **INTRODUCTION**

The word "war" is nothing new to hear. According to KBBI, war is a hostility between two countries (nations, religions, tribes, etc.). Broadly speaking, this is not a new thing that is known by the wider community, especially Indonesia. Even lately, almost all social media communication media are still rife discussing war in several places.<sup>1</sup> The word "war" has even been known since the days of the Old Testament Bible. At that time wars often occurred because when followers of certain religions were very enthusiastic in defending their religion. One of them is the Israelites who waged war in the name of

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Education and Culture, *Big Indonesian Dictionary* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2022).

God as a sacred thing, which initially began by giving burnt offerings to God before the war began with the intention of getting protection from God and getting victory (Judges 6: 20, 26).<sup>2</sup>

One of the most important and influential books of the Old Testament among the Hebrew books is Deuteronomy. The word Deuteronomy means "the restatement of God's law". It is a book that inspires the application of God's law to the second generation of Israelites. Deuteronomy 20:12-13 contains the covenant that God made with the Israelites regarding the laws of war. The book of Deuteronomy contains the ten commandments and 613 other laws, one of which deals with the laws of war. All of these laws were to be obeyed, carried out and placed on the forehead, hands and were to be continually spoken in every home at the time of rising, eating, sleeping and placed on the doorstep of every home.<sup>3</sup>

However, there is one weakness that is always repeated, which is that many people sometimes misinterpret Bible verses, such as Deuteronomy 20:12-13. Many people have a misunderstanding and end up misinterpreting the true meaning and message of this verse. Sometimes there are also Christians who interpret this verse based on their own understanding or may use logic to match their interpretation with other religious books, without communicating with God (prayer) and relying on the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. The book of Deuteronomy, on the other hand, is a book that provides a description of how interactions occur between God and humans (in this case discussing the Israelites). Some even state that the book of Deuteronomy is "*the biblical document of the covenant par excellence*".<sup>4</sup> It is very important for us to know the reason why the book of Deuteronomy is very contextual and is still often discussed today because it basically discusses many problems experienced by humans from ancient times and which are not much different from today, including those related to God's covenant.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, the general tendency is that many people just cherry-pick a few verses and ignore the whole Word. So, we are interested in making this paper. Based on these problems, we are interested in studying more deeply about what caused the

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<sup>2</sup> Robi Prianto, "The Tradition of Holy War in the Old Testament," *TE DEUM (Journal of Theology and Ministry Development)* 5, no. 1 (2021): 117-135.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew E. Hill & Jhon H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Malang: Gandum Mas, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Michael D. Guinan, *Covenant in the Old Testament* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1975), 34.

<sup>5</sup> Simanjuntak Ifran, I. F., Purba, D., & Harefa, O. "The Significance of Canaanite Land Ownership for the Israelites in the Old Testament." *Real Didache: Journal of Theology and Christian Religious Education*, 5, no.2 (2020): 37-53.

beginning of the law of war in Israel, then the meaning and purpose that God actually wants to convey through Deuteronomy 20: 12-13, is there any implication related to the law of war if it is related to the choices of believers today, and how believers should act in response to this verse.

## Literature Review

Barr wrote an article on the passage under discussion and aptly titled it: 'A riddle in Deuteronomy'.<sup>6</sup> In this article he points out the difficulties involved in the text and its translation. In his afterword, he does not claim to have solved the problem of translating the text, but simply considers it a contribution to the scholarly conversation. The discussion on the possible translations of Deuteronomy 20:19 is still ongoing and for reference, here is the translation of Deuteronomy 20:19-20 from the American Standard Version (ASV):

*"When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by wielding an axe against them; for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down; for is the tree of the field man, that it should be besieged of thee? <sup>20</sup>Only the trees of which thou knowest that they are not trees for food, thou shalt destroy and cut them down; and thou shalt build bulwarks against the city that maketh war with thee, until it fall."*

Lundbom<sup>7</sup> gives a similar translation for the difficult part of verse 19 which reads כִּי הַאֲדָמָה הַשְׁׁלֵמָה שֶׁבְּאַמְּפָנָה נִזְבְּנָה, i.e. '... for is that man a tree of the field who will come before you in the siege?'. This translation is motivated from the point of view of the LXX where כִּי is translated with μη and thus considered as a rhetorical question whose answer is negative. As far as the Hebrew text is concerned, *qameṣ* under נ is changed to *seghol* which makes it a question. The understanding is that the trees can be left standing as they pose no threat to the soldiers.

The result of the above-mentioned translation is that there is no adversarial relationship between man and the fruit trees. The only relationship is the provision of food and thus dependence. Therefore, the trees should not be seen as objects to be fought against.

However, there are some translations that make the connection between humans and trees. This was done by Ibn Ezra (1089 to 1164 CE) and followed by the King James

<sup>6</sup> James Barr, 'A puzzle in Deuteronomy', in C. Exum & H.G.M. Williamson (eds.), *Reading from left to right - Essays on the Hebrew Bible in honor of David J.A. Cline* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 23.

<sup>7</sup> J.R. Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 589.

Version which translates the phrase as: '(*for the tree of the field is man's life*) to *employ them in the siege*:' The reasoning behind this understanding does not take into account the LXX reading but only the Masoretic text where 'כִּי' is understood as an emphasis marker that strengthens the statement and not as an introduction to a rhetorical question.<sup>8</sup> According to Wolff<sup>9</sup> the majority of Jewish interpreters support this interpretation.

Regardless of how this verse is translated and understood, there is no denying that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between man and fruit trees. Even when no direct relationship between trees and humans is recognized, as depicted in the LXX-oriented translation of verse 19, verse 20 clarifies the issue. The phrase עַזְנָשָׁר-תְּדַעַךְ י-לֹא-עַכְלָזְמָאָכָל (trees that you know are not trees for food) establishes a direct relationship between fruit trees and sustainable food. Interpreted in this way, humans still have a responsibility towards fruit trees due to their dependence on them. Therefore, Schwartz<sup>10</sup> is correct when he states that the main point is that the trees provide fruit and therefore should not be cut down. From the above it can be concluded that fruit trees need to be protected and utilized regardless of the relationship between humans and fruit trees.

In this regard, Brueggemann<sup>11</sup> comments that the purpose was to protect the food chain, even leaving food supplies for the enemy after the battle when the Israeli forces had retreated. Such provisions can be incorporated into a theology of creation that recognizes that the created world has its own rights and privileges, and there are important limits imposed on human interference.

If Brueggemann is understood correctly, this means that a degree of separation is established between man and creation due to the rights of creation itself. If the structure of this chapter is studied in depth, other conclusions can also be made that not only point towards restriction due to rights, but also towards interdependent functionality.

It is known that the explanation of the laws in Deuteronomy 12-26 follows the order of the Decalogue. All the commandments are outlined in these chapters, but special

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<sup>8</sup> Chris van der Walt, "Humanity's perceived right to life and the impact thereof on the environment: A perspective from Deuteronomy 20:19-20." *In die Skriflig*, 50, no.4 (2016): 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v50i4.2079>.

<sup>9</sup> A. Wolff, "A closer examination of Deuteronomy 20:19-20." *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 39, no. 3 (2011): 147.

<sup>10</sup> E. Schwartz, "Bal Taschit." *Environmental Ethics*, 19, no. 4 (1997): 358. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics19971943>.

<sup>11</sup> W. Brueggemann *Deuteronomy* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 213.

emphasis is given to the explanation and application of the sixth commandment that prohibits killing. Thus, the preservation of life is paramount, whether it pertains to the removal of a piece of land and thereby hindering the production of sufficient food due to land use degradation, or falsely accusing someone of an offense that can be punished with death.<sup>12</sup> It is therefore not surprising that we find the same reasoning in chapter 20 which deals entirely with behavior during war.

The rationale for destruction, or not, depends on what contribution a particular modality can make to the quality of life of society at large, or how it will hinder the quality of life before Yahweh. This entire chapter is really about contribution and obstruction. If circumstances require service elsewhere, certain people need not contribute to the war (20:5-8). When fighting a war, a justification formula must be used, viz: קְרַא לְשָׁמָאֵל [call them to peace].<sup>13</sup> When this justification is accepted, no further action is required except to place the population in service/make them contribute to Israel's quality of life. If the justification is not accepted, war and siege must be carried out and upon success, only the object of hostility, i.e. the men must be punished with the sword thus neutralizing the origin of the military action.<sup>14</sup>

Value thus becomes the primary measure to determine what should be preserved or destroyed. What is to be preserved must be utilized functionally to contribute to society, whether it is humans used as labor or trees as a source of food. This can be seen from the use of the root word אָכַל in Deuteronomy 20 verses 14 and 19 which is a marker of utilization by God's people.<sup>15</sup>

The belief that some humans should be saved and others not, is not the norm in modern thinking. Today every effort is made to prolong the life of every human being even at the expense of other human lives and the environment. Deuteronomy 20 reflects a different attitude.<sup>16</sup>

Since all humans are not judged to have the same function, all trees are not judged equally either. Verse 20 allows trees that do not produce food to be cut down and used as

<sup>12</sup> G.J. Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: The Pentateuch* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2003), 137.

<sup>13</sup> L. Jonker, "קְרַא." In *New international dictionary of Old Testament theology & exegesis*, vol. 3, W. VanGemeren (ed.), pp. 971-973 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 971.

<sup>14</sup> A. Rofé *Deuteronomy: Issues and interpretations* (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 156.

<sup>15</sup> J.L. Wright, "Warfare and wanton destruction: A reexamination of Deuteronomy 20:19-20 in relation to ancient siegework." *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 127, no. 3 (2008): 423-458.

<sup>16</sup> Laura Quick, "Averting Curses in the Law of War (Deuteronomy 20)" *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 132, no. 2 (2020): 209-223. <https://doi.org/10.1515/zaw-2020-2001>.

timber for sieges. This follows the same pattern as mentioned earlier in the chapter where all people are not treated equally, with some to be set apart for God by total annihilation (חרם) while others are to be utilized functionally.

As such, Biblical thinking on the 'right' to life is not defined by the precept of 'man is alive' and therefore has the right to defend his life indefinitely by any means, but by the functionality of human life. As such, human life must be contemplated from a practical standpoint as can be found in the Halachic teaching of bal tashchit (do no harm) which will be briefly discussed.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative data analysis with a literature approach. Researchers use the perspectives of participants as the main picture in obtaining research results. In this qualitative method, the research techniques used include observation, experimentation, and open interviews. Literature study was conducted by reviewing various sources on the topic being discussed, using textbooks, scientific journals, and scientific articles sourced from the internet. In explanation, this research emphasizes more on the strength of data analysis taken from existing sources, relying on existing theories to be interpreted clearly and deeply to produce theses and anti-theses.<sup>17</sup> In addition, interviews were conducted with four resource persons who have an understanding of this topic, namely pastor SP from a Charismatic Protestant church, lecturer TN from a religious institute, student JS from an STT, and elder GS from a Charismatic Protestant church. These four speakers gave an in-depth look at the interpretation of Deuteronomy 20:12-13 and how it applies to today's life.

<sup>18</sup>In its application, this study used open-ended interviews with the interviewees to explore their views Deuteronomy 20:12-13. The data obtained from these interviews was used to enrich the researcher's understanding of the meaning contained in the verse and how Christians understand the teachings on war in the Old Testament. The interview process was conducted by asking each interviewee about their views on the context of war in Deuteronomy 20 and its implications for the lives of believers today. The

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<sup>17</sup> Slamet Riyantono & Aglis Andhita Hatmawan, *Research methods of quantitative research* (Sleman: Deepublis, 2020), 141.

<sup>18</sup> Soejono & Abdurrahman, *Research Methods: A Thought and Application* (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 1999), 67

researcher also linked the interview data with existing theories and interpretations in the literature, to provide a more holistic picture of the understanding of this verse and its implications in modern times.

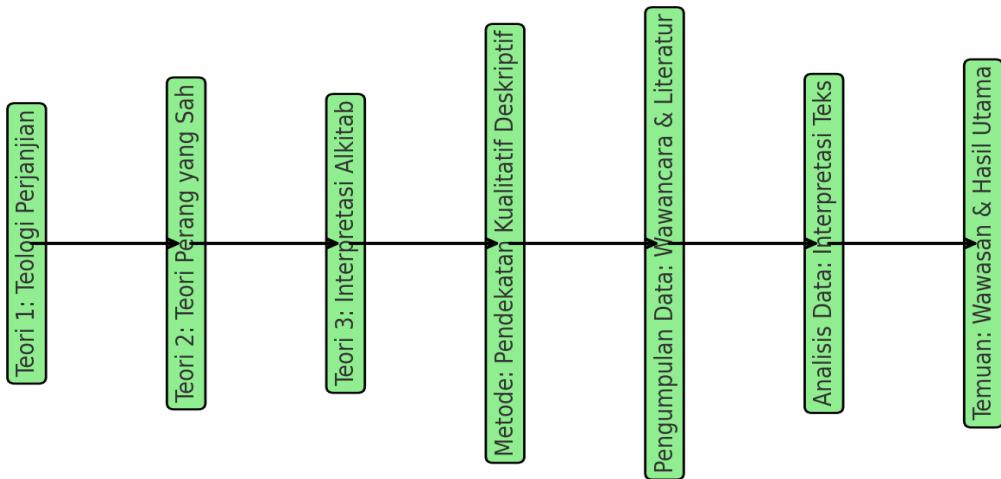


Figure 1: Flow of Research Study

## RESULTS

A cursory reading of Deuteronomy 20 reveals that this section is about the Law of War in OT times. Broadly speaking, the Law of War is one part of the Law contained in the structure of the Book of Deuteronomy. It explains how the Israelites actually conducted war, in terms of who was excluded from battle, how peace was offered, and when to plunder and destroy defeated cities and their inhabitants.

According to Kusumaatmadja, war is a situation where one or more countries are involved in an armed dispute, accompanied by a declaration of intent by one of the other parties. Then the question arises, how to respond to Deuteronomy 20 if it is carried across the times? Because it cannot be denied that some people misunderstand the true meaning and message contained in this passage 20. To clarify and further understand this section of Deuteronomy 20:12-13, there are several answers from several people we interviewed, namely, Pastor PS from one of the Charismatic Protestant churches, Lecturer TN from one of the Religious Institutes, Student JS from one of the STT, and Sintua GS from one of the Charismatic Protestant churches.

### Meaning and Message in Deuteronomy 20:12-13

According to our four speakers, Pastor SP, Lecturer TN, Student JS and Sintua GS, Deuteronomy 20:12-13 is about a nation's dispute with another nation, in the context of the time of war according to the OT. The passage clearly emphasizes that outside the Israelites were enemies. They did not just ask that question. This can be proven if we look further into the historical account or history of the Israelites, about God's provision for the Israelites, and other relevant decrees at that time according to the verse. First, we need to understand that the book of Deuteronomy is one of the books of the pentateuch that tells the story of how the Israelites traveled and the reason why there is a statement "outside the Israelites are enemies".

If we look at the history of the nation of Israel, this nation is truly God's chosen nation from his covenant with Abraham, God's chosen nation. This is the reason why the Israelites have always been defended by God, getting special treatment from God even when they are dealing with other nations. There is one passage that gives emphasis to this statement, namely in Deuteronomy 20:12, "*But if the city will not make peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it*". It is important to note that the word "you" in this verse does not refer to an individual but to the nation of Israel itself.

Verses 12-13 of passage 20 are often misunderstood. Sometimes some assume that this verse is meant to teach readers to wage war/resistance against other nations. On the other hand, it is true and we also need to understand that outside the Israelites are the majority of nations who do not know God, do not fear God, do not worship God. But if we look again at the sentence "*But if the city will not make peace with you....*", there is an emphasis like a command that tells the Israelites to first make peace before fighting back. The opinions of our sources are also in line with those of Walter Kaiser and Henrik van Oyen. They argue that the ancient Israelites were essentially a peace-loving people, although there is sometimes evidence of violence in their traditions. Johannes Hempel in his Old Testament Exegesis also gives his opinion that the Israelites were a nation that held dear the covenant, history and the God they worshipped. War in the Old Testament was also more dominantly about relations with foreigners or when retaliating for broken treaties.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Susan Niditch, *War In The Hebrew Bible, A Study In The Ethics Of Violence*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 7

As explained earlier, the nation of Israel is God's covenant nation with Abraham, God's chosen nation. Another reason God chose Israel was because of God's own will, which was accompanied by God's wisdom, power, vision and mission for the world. Through the nation of Israel, God wanted to reveal His love and grace to the world. God wanted the Israelites to be a blessing to other nations. God wants to use the Israelites not only to show that He has full power over all the nations on this earth, but also He wants the nations on this earth to know Him, to know the peace and salvation that He provides. On the other hand, Pastor SP also explained that there is one thing that is sometimes forgotten by readers. We need to know that the Israelites were a nation that was stiff-necked before God (Exodus 33:5). So that is why God will allow the wicked or a nation that does not know God to oppress the anointed nation.

### **Tradition and Law**

One of the verses in this chapter raises the question, "why only men? What about the women? The children?". This can be found in Deuteronomy 20:13b, "..... *Then you shall kill all its male inhabitants with the edge of the sword*". Based on the results of our interviews, our four informants think that this text in its context discusses the tradition in Israel that privileges men. The tradition at this time considered that those who could fight at that time were men. So when the men in a country are completely annihilated, then at that time the nation also experiences defeat. Here it is not women who fight but men. This is all inseparable from their culture, the traditions that prevailed at that time.

On the other hand, there are several reasons related to other traditions, namely:  
1) If all the men in a nation have been destroyed, it is the same as destroying the nation,  
2) it is always men who count and 3) those who fight in wars are basically men. Then comes another question. If the verse emphasizes men, were women and children spared? It is possible that women were also killed but not by the edge of the sword, it could have been by booty, enslaved, left, and ultimately so there was no special difference between men and women (Deuteronomy 20:15).

### **A command to make peace or to show His favor to the Israelites?**

Our interviewees responded that this passage is a kind of sign and warning as well as God's declaration of how He has an attitude towards the Israelites. God's main purpose in choosing and blessing the Israelites was so that the Israelites could be a bond for other

nations. This was already the law and had been prophesied by God. The embryo of Israel came from Abraham. Abraham was chosen, then God revealed His promise to Abraham, and Isaac (son of the covenant) was born. God also revealed his promise to Isaac, and Jacob was born. God reiterated his promise to Jacob, and finally in the course of Jacob's life, God revealed himself to Jacob "today your name is no longer Jacob, but Israel". So before Israel was *de facto* chosen by God, Israel was prophesied long before by God to be a blessing to others. So if the question arises of recognizing the command to make peace or to simply show His pleasure in the nation of Israel. Both are in line, and cannot be separated. How God desires peace.

### **Is it possible to experience misinterpretation?**

All four of our informants argued that there must be some misunderstanding when reading the verse, apart from the fact that there are many forms of interpretation, such as: textual, cultural, historical, near, far, allegorical, literal interpretations. On the other hand, one of the most fatal things that can cause misinterpretation is when someone just takes a verse without reading the whole Word. If you read God's word only in fragments, that can lead to misinterpretation. At first glance, the verse is about war and killing. It is as if God approves of the wars and killings that occur there. For this reason, we need a deeper understanding in knowing God. It needs to be emphasized again, that when talking about the Bible, there are several things that must be understood, namely: 1). The Bible is systematic. 2). The Bible is consistent. 3). The Bible has a purpose. So we should not be arbitrary in matching the Word to our needs. Remember, we also need to understand the history of Israel, just like talking about nations in general. We should also not relate this verse to the situation that is happening today, resulting in the misuse of the verse to commit crimes.

### **Does it often appear in sermons?**

Some of our interviewees had similar answers but with different reasons. Lecturer TN gave his response that he did not hear this verse very often, because he thought that usually in the church where he usually worships, the sermon text was immediately determined in the almanac. However, he thinks that the theme of warfare is common to hear in sermons. On the other hand, student JS thinks that it is true that this verse is rarely preached because the conference or the audience is not suitable or concrete to be applied

in daily life. He thinks that the reason this verse is rarely preached explicitly is because this verse is less interesting to discuss because basically this is no longer the age of physical warfare. On the other hand, Pastor SP believes that those who preach this are usually only those who are active in academics. Because basically this is a demand for them. Those who are involved in academics, especially theologians (lecturers), basically must have taken a lot of sermon material from here. Because they are required to be able to master and study the history of the Israelites and must also examine verse by chapter in the Bible, especially the Old Testament.

### **To whom were these words addressed?**

Our resource person Lecturer TN thinks that this verse needs to be conveyed to all humanity, especially to people who know Jesus Christ so that there is no misunderstanding about the meaning of this verse. This verse also needs to be conveyed to people who are experiencing warfare both spiritually and outwardly. Spiritual warfare is the same as external warfare, in the sense that many things must be prepared and those who are not ready must make themselves miserable. Without careful preparation, it is certain that we will lose before the fight. On the other hand, students think that this verse is more accurately addressed to people who often conduct warfare of the Spirit, because now it is no longer against the flesh but the rulers of the air.

In contrast to the second answer, our resource person Pastor SP thinks that if we want to bring this verse in the sermon, of course we cannot bring the thoughts of the congregation back to that time. However, the emphasis is on how we have a response/attitude towards God. He also thinks that this is one of the emphases to convince God's chosen people, so that they do not experience doubts about God's choice in their lives. It needs to be clearly emphasized again that when presenting this verse, we are not returning to talk about war, although basically the context of these words clearly talks about war. If we want to bring this verse in a sermon, then we don't need to focus on "war", but how we have confidence, confidence when God has chosen us, when God is on our side. Because through this verse we must realize that God in any way and under any circumstances will always defend us, and will reveal Himself under He is able to do all things for us.

## **DISCUSSION: The Implications of Deuteronomy 20:12-13 for the Lives of Believers Today**

The Geneva Conventions provide direct protection to the environment in times of war. However, there is no such protection for the natural environment during the daily activities of the human community resulting in damage that can be classified as 'widespread', 'long-term' and 'severe'. This is due to the uncontrolled increase of human population in the world and the encroachment on nature. In all of these systems of thought, human dependence on nature to ensure continued human existence is recognized, and that is something we can learn from societies that are not so 'alienated' from the natural environment as modern societies. Therefore, it makes no sense for *jus cogens* as *iudex* to apply only to human rights, because if it did, the balance that nature requires for human existence would be disrupted and neither nature nor humans would flourish.<sup>20</sup>

Christian teachings on war and peace have many assumptions and implications for the rejection of biblical teachings. Still, most Christians and Jews today in practice prefer to view the Bible as a revelation of God's will. It should be emphasized that choosing the Bible is still a major challenge for Jews and Christians today.<sup>21</sup>

It is expected for us who live in God to increasingly master ourselves and direct our lives in asking questions, seeking answers, and solving problems according to the teachings of the Bible. The Bible is the foundation and source that can change a person's life from bad to good, from losing direction in life to being full of hope for the future. People who are dissatisfied with their lives will feel enough and satisfied, and those who have problems in life will be facilitated.<sup>22</sup>

God emphasizes the importance of the vertical relationship between parents and Him, to love the Lord with all their heart, soul and strength. Furthermore, God commands parents to teach this to their children. Christian parents teach their children to love their neighbors and even their enemies. Thus, children as successors can avoid negative things

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<sup>20</sup> Chris van der Walt, "Humanity's perceived right to life and the impact thereof on the environment: A perspective from Deuteronomy 20:19-20": 6.

<sup>21</sup> Leo D. Lefebure, *God's Revelation, Religion, and Violence*, 96.

<sup>22</sup> Laura Quick. "Averting Curses in the Law of War (Deuteronomy 20)": 211.

such as promiscuity. Christian teenagers are expected to reflect the love of God who loves enemies and does not hold grudges.<sup>23</sup>

Looking at today's conditions, many people do not understand or misinterpret this verse. Therefore, to explain it, we can use the *problem-based learning* strategy, which focuses on identifying problems and analyzing to solve them. We can apply this strategy to our students by identifying problems that occur in society or among Christians.<sup>24</sup> As prospective religion teachers, we really need to study this verse well.

The younger generation, especially students studying theology, have an important task in fostering adults by delivering Christian religious education, providing an understanding of human maturity. Therefore, students must be equipped with knowledge and skills in managing maturity. One way to see how students manage maturity is to assess their perspective on Bible verses, whether they have been able to understand the text correctly or have misinterpreted it, as seen in Deuteronomy 20:12-13 (Marbun et al., 2022, p. 137; Sihombing et al., 2022, p. 145; Widiastuti, 2020, p. 225).<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, human existence should not be valued above violence, and there should be no attempt to extend human life indefinitely. The rationale behind this is the fact that God, as the giver of life, commands it to be taken away to ensure a future existence for human beings. It must be clearly stated that there is absolutely no propaganda being made in this article for taking human life. What is being called for is a paradigm shift in the minds of individuals. Our *vindex* should be that not only existence but also function and potential should be part of building our philosophy on the right to life.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, a new set of moral rules (as *iudex*) should be internalized to challenge the human perception of the right to live longer which is untenable at the expense of nature and humanity at large.

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<sup>23</sup> Casthelia Kartika, "Covenant Relationships as the Basis for the Formation of the Spiritual Life of the People According to the Book of Deuteronomy": 143-175; Susan Niditich, *War In The Hebrew Bible, A Study In The Ethics Of Violence*, 1993.

<sup>24</sup> Purba, R. I., Lumban Toruan, R., & Nababan, D. "Application of Problem Based Learning Strategy in Improving Student Motivation in Christian Religious Education": 104; Maria Widiastuti, "Principles of Christian Education in the Family According to Deuteronomy 6:4-9": 222-228.

<sup>25</sup> Rian E. Marbun, Redopri Ramayana Saragih, Morika Situmorang, Rahul Gabriel Hutabarat, Naomi Hotma Tiur Hutapea, & Damayanti Nababan. "Choosing to Become an Adult: Strengthening Christian Religious Education": 137; Cindy S. Sihombing, Friska Elisabet Tampubolon, Yuli Arta Simbolon, Bonatua Lumbansiantar, Joi Pasaribu, & Damayanti Nababan. "Problem Solving for Middle Adults Grounded in Christian Religious Education": 145.

<sup>26</sup> Chris van der Walt, "Humanity's perceived right to life and the impact thereof on the environment: A perspective from Deuteronomy 20:19-20": 6.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how the Bible addresses the concept of war and the divine purpose behind it through Deuteronomy 20:12-13. This passage presents a theological framework that emphasizes the importance of peace before engaging in war, calling on the Israelites to offer peaceful solutions to conflicts. This study emphasizes that although the Israelites were commanded to engage in warfare under God's instructions, there were strict limits on how they interacted with their enemies, focusing on justice and the preservation of life. This theological approach challenges modern misconceptions about God's approval of violence, leading to a more nuanced interpretation of God's instructions.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates the relevance of these ancient teachings for contemporary Christian practice. Although the historical context of these laws is specific to the nation of Israel, their ethical and moral implications extend to the world today, especially in discussions about conflict, justice and peace. This research emphasizes the importance of interpreting scripture with an understanding of both the historical context and the broader spiritual message. The research findings suggest that Christians today can apply the principles of justice, peace, and ethical behavior drawn from this passage to deal with issues of conflict in a spiritually responsible way, creating a faith that unites belief with action in the pursuit of peace and justice.

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