



Lecture # 2 Part 1

The Ten Commandments, The Laws Governing Man's Duty To Others (Part 6):

Commandment Six Concerns Man's Life—Never Murder, Exodus 20:13

The Sixth Commandment Sanctity of Human Life

“Lo Tirtzah” (Exodus 20:13) “Thou shalt not murder”

Exodus 20:13 (BHS)

¹³ לֹא תִרְצַח: ס

“Lo Tirtzah”

Exodus 20:13 (KJV)

¹³ “Thou shalt not **kill**.”

Exodus 20:13 (NASB)

¹³ “You shall not **murder**.”

The prohibition against felonious homicide is given in the **Decalogue (Ten Commandments)**, and the penalty is made clear in the demand, the murderer shall surely be put to death (Numbers 35:16-18).

Numbers 35:16-18 (NASB)

¹⁶ “But if he struck him down with an iron object, so that he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death.

¹⁷ If he struck him down with a stone in the hand, by which he will die, and *as a result* he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death.

¹⁸ Or if he struck him with a wooden object in the hand, by which he might die, and *as a result* he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death.”

Numbers 35:15-18 (BHS)

¹⁵ לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלַגֵּר וְלַתּוֹשֵׁב בְּתוֹכְכֶם תִּהְיֶינָה שְׁשֵׁי־הָעֵרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְמִקְלַט לְנוֹס שָׁמָּה כָּל־מִפְּהֶיגֶפֶשׁ בְּשֹׁגְגָה:

¹⁶ בְּרִזְלוֹ הִקְהוּ וַיָּמָת רִצְחָהּ הִוא מוֹת יוֹמָת הָרִצָּח: וְאִם־בְּכֶלִי

¹⁷ וְאִם בְּאֶבֶן יָד אֲשֶׁר־יָמוּת בָּהּ הִקְהוּ וַיָּמָת רִצְחָהּ הִוא מוֹת יוֹמָת הָרִצָּח:

¹⁸ “הִוא מוֹת יוֹמָת הָרִצָּח: אִוּ בְּכֶלִי עֵצִי־יָד אֲשֶׁר־יָמוּת בּוֹ הִקְהוּ וַיָּמָת רִצְחָהּ”

The biblical requirement is unequivocal, and it is for this reason that biblical law denies a court or other human institution the authority to pardon a murderer, or to commute the death penalty into ransom, as clearly stipulated in the injunction:

Numbers 35:31 (NASB)

³¹ “Moreover, you shall not take ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death.”

Numbers 35:31 (BHS)

³¹ “רִ־הִוא רִשְׁעֵ לְמוֹת כִּי־מוֹת יוֹמָת: וְלֹא־תִקְחוּ כֹפֶר לְנַפְשׁ רִצְחָהּ אִשׁ”



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However, the text hastens to clarify that competent witnesses must attest to the guilt of an alleged murderer, the murderer shall be slain at the mouth of witnesses; but one witness shall not testify against any person that he die ([Numbers 35:30](#)).

Numbers 35:30 (NASB)

³⁰ “If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death at the evidence of witnesses, but no person shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness.”

Numbers 35:30 (BHS)

³⁰ “כְּלִי-מִכָּה-נֹפֵשׁ לְפִי עֵדִים יִרְצָה אֶת-הַרֹצֵחַ וְעַד אֶחָד לֹא-יִעֲנֶה בְּנֶפֶשׁ לְמוֹת:”

The biblical concern for justice is thus not only reflected in the demand that society avenge the murdered but also that the alleged murderer not be subjected to any miscarriage of justice caused by a false witness. Accordingly, it requires that there be two corroborating witnesses and Jewish jurisprudence sets forth a process for the interrogation of witnesses designed to assure that the testimony they give is valid and corroborated and at the same time preclude collusion.

In Judaic jurisprudence and tradition, the commandment “**Thou shalt not murder has been understood to encompass illicit killing both by hand and by mouth, and would thus include providing false testimony that led to the execution of an innocent person, as well as the case in which a person is in possession of information which if revealed might save another person’s life but fails to do so.**”⁴¹⁴

The prohibition is also held to apply to a variety of other misdeeds short of felonious murder but that are nonetheless considered illicit bloodshed. Thus the rape of a betrothed woman is considered equivalent to murder ([Deuteronomy 22:26](#)).

Deuteronomy 22:26 (NASB)

²⁶ “But you shall do nothing to the girl; there is no sin in the girl worthy of death, for just as a man rises against his neighbor and murders him, so is this case.”

Deuteronomy 22:26 (BHS)

²⁶ “לְנִעֲרָה” חֲטָא מָוֹת כִּי כַּאֲשֶׁר יָקוּם וְלִנְעָרָה וְלִנְעָרָה לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂה דְבָר אֵין לְנִעֲרָה “ “
”אִישׁ עַל-רֵעֵהוּ וְרָצַח וְנָפֵשׁ כֹּן הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה:”

The sages also considered a person who caused another’s death by preventing the supply of food and water as though he had killed him.⁴¹⁵

End Notes

405. Mendelsohn, Criminal Jurisprudence, pp. 58-78.
406. B.T. Makkot7b.
407. Mendelsohn, Criminal Jurisprudence, pp. 60-61, note 117.
408. B.T. Makkot7b.
409. B.T. Sanhedrin 46a, 81b; B.T. MoedKatan 16a.
410. Midrash Aseret haDibrot 31, p. 456.
411. Pesikta Rabbati, Piska 24:1. See also Augustine, City of God, 1:20.
412. The following discussion is drawn in part from my Reading Genesis Politically, pp. 111-113.
413. Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, “Bahodesh” 8.
414. Ibn Ezra, Perushei haTorah on Ex. 20:13.
415. B.T. Yevamot78b.



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Martin Sicker (2007-12-28). *The Ten Commandments: Background, Meaning, and Implications: From A Judaic Perspective.*

Exodus 20:13 (BHS)

¹³ לֹא תִרְצַח: ם

“Lo Tirtzah”

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(Exodus 20:13) Introduction— Media— Murder— Violence— Lawlessness: murder, lawlessness, and violence are sweeping the earth. Hundreds of thousands of people are being murdered and slaughtered year after year. The value of human life is almost worthless in some societies.

1. Society after society considers human beings, even young children, to be nothing more than chattel property, laborers existing only for the ruling class and the wealthy.
2. Society after society allows the constant barrage of violence and lawlessness to be shown in films and other media, shown even to small children—despite the undeniable impression printed upon the human mind and its terrible consequences.

People have become desensitized and hardened to lawlessness, violence, and killing. The front pages of newspapers and news reports of television and radio are usually filled with terrible crimes. In addition, the entertainment industry—television, movies, video games, music, books, magazines—focuses upon lawlessness, violence, and killing as well as immorality.

The point is this: life is pictured as cheap by both the media and the entertainment industry of society. The mind of a person is bombarded by act after act of lawlessness, violence, and killing every day of his life—if he reads the newspaper, watches television, listens to the radio, or picks up a magazine.

Think about what has just been said: every day of a person’s life is filled with images and thoughts of lawlessness, violence, and killing if he reads the newspaper, watches television, listens to the radio, or picks up a magazine.

No wonder we have become desensitized and hardened to violence and murder. No wonder life is so cheap and means so little to so many people. No wonder so many have become lawless and violent. No wonder there are so many assaults and killings. We just see and hear so much about violence and killing every day of our lives.

This is the important subject of this commandment, a commandment so desperately needed: *Commandment Six Concerns Man’s Life—Never Murder, Exodus 20:13.*



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1. Who is to obey this commandment (v.13)?
How Long was this commandment to be in force (v.13)?
2. What is forbidden by this commandment (v.13)?
3. What is the decision required by this commandment (v.13)?

1. (Exodus 20:13) Commandments, The Ten— Murder— Killing: Who is to obey this commandment? How long was this commandment to be in force?

Exodus 20:13 (BHS)

¹³ לֹא תִרְצַח: ס

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Was it only to govern Israel and the ancient world? Was murder—lawlessness and violence—only a problem in the ancient world? The answer is obvious. One of the most terrible social ills down through history has been murder and the lawlessness and violence that surround murder. God gave this commandment to govern civilization, the societies of every generation of man. God gave this commandment to make communities and streets safe, our homes and businesses secure.