



6th Commandment: No Killing

Video Transcript

Chapter 1: The Meaning of *Ratsakh*

0:00-1:31

Tim: All of our contemporary English translations render this sixth command as, “You shall not murder.” Two words in Hebrew. *Lo’* is the Hebrew word for “not” or “no.” And then it’s just the single verb, *ratsakh*. So the word *ratsakh* is used in 1 Kings chapter 21 to describe when Ahab took the life of this guy, Navot, to get his land.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So *ratsakh* can describe premeditated murder, but almost half of the times that *ratsakh* appears, occurs talking about the cities of refuge.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And so these are six cities in ancient Israel that were set apart as, like, an asylum so that a *rotseakh*—the killer, who has struck a person unintentionally—can flee there.

Jon: Hmm. We wouldn’t call that “murder.”

Tim: No.

Jon: We’d call that “manslaughter.”

Tim: Exactly. So I think our English word “kill” can refer to intentional or unintentional.

Jon: So don’t kill.

Tim: Yeah. Because that is what *ratsakh* means—just ending a life, unrelated to purpose or premeditation.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Apparently, a human life is so valuable that it's worth this kind of blanket prohibition—don't end a life. Don't do it.

Jon: There's something so foundational and important and valuable about life that the baseline is, you do not take it.

Tim: Do not do it. Yeah.

Chapter 2: Complexities of the Command

1:31-2:51

Tim: However, after the 10 Commandments, we also get another collection of commands to ancient Israel—this is in Exodus chapters 21 to 23—and these fill out and expand the 10 words. And there we find more laws about killing that qualify the sixth command.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So what if you accidentally kill someone? What if you're defending yourself or your home?

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: You know, these commands get into all of these complexities.

Jon: Okay, but the first time the topic of killing comes up, it's a simple two-word prohibition: Don't kill. Don't do it.

Tim: Right. So there's something about the value of human life that should always make us slow down and just stop and make sure that the first priority that we have is protecting life. It's like the baseline. And so maybe, you know, it's just good to say you and I are not, in this moment, trying to make official declarations about legitimacy of capital punishment.

Jon: Yeah, or when you can defend your family.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Or—

Tim: That's right.

Jon: What does it mean to be a soldier? And all that stuff.

Tim: Yeah, that's downstream. And you got to think that through. Like, we all have to think those questions through in our communities, in our context. In other words, the sixth command is a form of wisdom literature.

Chapter 3: Protect Life

2:51-3:25

Jon: Hmm. Okay, so flip this command around, and it's a charge to protect life.

Tim: Yeah. The purpose of God's commands is for life, and the sixth command here—of the 10—just makes that perfectly clear. It's meant to direct that the best of our thinking, the best of our energies, our greatest wisdom and moral conviction is most aligned with God when we aim all of that at the preservation and the flourishing of life.