

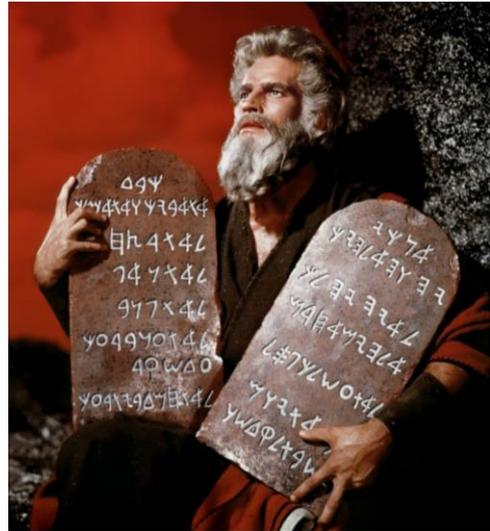
## “Thou Shall Not Kill” or “Thou Shall Not Murder”?

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**Question:** Why does the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment say “Thou shall not kill” when God told Israel to kill their enemies when they entered into the land of Canaan?

**Answer:** The 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment in the King James Version says, “Thou shalt not kill” (Ex. 20:13, Deut. 5:17). However, the Hebrew word in those verses should be translated “murder.” The correct translation is “You shall not murder.”

Not all killing is murder. The 6<sup>th</sup> commandment does not prohibit killing as punishment for crimes, or a soldier killing the enemy in war. Two different Hebrew words are used for the taking of life—kill (*harag*) and murder (*ratsach*). The word used in the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment is *ratsach* and implies the premeditated taking of human life, typically out of malice. The word *harag* is the term generally used for the killing of animals and the ruthless personal violence of man against man.



The Old Testament recognizes the distinction between premeditated murder and manslaughter, which is the unintentional killing of another person. The Law provided several cities of refuge to protect a person who unintentionally killed someone. The manslayer could flee to that designated city for protection from an avenger (Num. 35, Deut. 19, Joshua 20-21). “Now if the avenger of blood pursues him, then they shall not deliver the manslayer into his hand, because he struck his neighbor without premeditation and did not hate him beforehand” (Joshua 20:5).

God instituted the military and police with the right to kill in order to protect its citizens. Romans 13:4 says, “For government is God’s servant to you for good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For government is God’s servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong.” In other words, the military protects a country against invaders and the police protect its citizens against criminals.

If a policeman shoots a criminal who is trying to murder someone, the police officer isn’t committing murder, but is preventing the attacker from murdering an innocent victim. The same can be said for a property owner who shoots an intruder who has broken into the house. In that case, the killing is in self-defense and is not murder.

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