

MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT ASSEMBLY

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TORAH LAW EDUCATIONAL COURSE

THE 613 MITZVOT OF YAHWEH

Bereishit • Shemot • Vayikra • Bamidbar • Devarim | The Tanakh Writings

LESSON 16

Shemot (Exodus) 20:13 | Devarim (Deuteronomy) 5:17

לֹא תִרְצַח

Lo Tirtzach

"You shall not murder."

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

A Complete Exposition of the Prohibition of Murder

Including: When War Becomes Murder — A Covenant Witness to the World in 2026

FOUR SPHERES OF INSTRUCTION: INDIVIDUAL • COMMUNITY • NATION • WORLD

Authority: The Tanakh — The Word of Yahweh Alone

Standard: Devarim 19:15 — Two or Three Witnesses

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COURSE FRAMEWORK & METHODOLOGY

Purpose of This Course: This educational course expounds the 613 Mitzvot (commandments) of Yahweh as revealed exclusively through the Written Torah and confirmed by the Tanakh Writings and Prophets. Each lesson is built on Hebrew lexical analysis, two-to-three-witness corroboration, and a four-sphere application framework that reaches the individual, the community, the nation, and the world.

Authority Hierarchy: The Written Tanakh alone governs this course. Talmud, Church councils, and hadith are cited only as historical commentary — never as binding authority.

Research Standard: Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15 — Two or three independent witnesses confirm every claim. Primary lexical tools: BDB, HALOT, Gesenius, TWOT. Translations: JPS 1985; Robert Alter; Everett Fox (Schocken).

Why Lesson 16 — Do Not Murder? The sixth commandment — Lo Tirtzach — stands at the intersection of personal covenant ethics and global covenant witness. At the individual level it governs every act of violence against a human being. At the national and world level it speaks directly to the wars, targeted killings, and mass civilian casualties that define the geopolitical reality of April 2026. This lesson applies the covenant standard of Yahweh with equal force to the individual who kills in anger on a street corner and to the government leader who orders strikes that kill 1,600 civilians.

Yahweh's sixth commandment does not have a political exemption.

SECTION I — THE HEBREW TEXT

A. THE COMMANDMENT: SHEMOT (EXODUS) 20:13 | DEVARIM (DEUTERONOMY) 5:17

לֹא תִרְצַח

Lo Tirtzach

"You shall not murder."

Grammatical structure: The commandment consists of two Hebrew words: *lo* (לֹא) — the absolute negative particle, "not," expressing permanent, unconditional prohibition; and *tirtzach* — the Qal imperfect second person masculine singular of the root רָצַח (*ratzach*) — "you shall murder / you will murder." The imperfect with the negative particle expresses a categorical, ongoing prohibition: at no time, in no circumstance, shall the covenant person commit this act. It is two of the most decisive words in the entire Torah.

B. THE MOST CRITICAL HEBREW DISTINCTION IN THE ENTIRE COMMANDMENT

The commandment does not say: *lo tabarog* — "you shall not kill." Yahweh did not choose *harag* (הָרַג — H2026). He chose *ratzach* (רָצַח — H7523). This lexical choice is covenantally decisive — and it changes everything.

Hebrew Word	Strong's	Meaning	Covenant Scope
Ratzach (רָצַח)	H7523	Murder — intentional, unauthorized, premeditated killing of innocent life	The word of the sixth commandment — FORBIDDEN absolutely

Hebrew Word	Strong's	Meaning	Covenant Scope
Harag (הָרַג)	H2026	To kill, to slay — used for warfare, judicial execution, and general killing	Not the word of the commandment — context determines legitimacy
Mut (מוֹת)	H4191	To die, to be put to death — used broadly for death by any cause	General death terminology — not the commandment word
Shachat (שָׁחַט)	H7819	To slaughter — used for animal slaughter and judicial execution	Covenant slaughter context — not the commandment word
Dam naki (דַּם נָקִי)	H1818/ H5355	Innocent blood — the specific category ratzach targets	Shedding innocent blood — the defining characteristic of murder

C. PRIMARY LEXICAL ANALYSIS — ROOT רִצַּח (RATZACH) — H7523

BDB (Brown-Driver-Briggs): *Ratzach* — to murder, to slay with premeditation and without legal authority. BDB distinguishes *ratzach* from *harag* precisely: *harag* is the general verb for killing, while *ratzach* is specifically the illegal, unauthorized taking of human life. BDB notes that *ratzach* is used exclusively for: (1) premeditated murder; (2) manslaughter (accidental killing) which requires the cities of refuge; and (3) the act of the avenger of blood who kills the unintentional killer outside the city of refuge — which itself becomes murder. In every case, *ratzach* involves killing outside the authorized covenant framework.

HALOT: *Ratzach* appears 47 times in the Tanakh. HALOT confirms it refers specifically to the act of killing a person in a manner that is legally and covenantally prohibited — without authorization from Yahweh through His covenant law. The primary distinction HALOT establishes: killing authorized by Yahweh's covenant law (judicial execution, warfare commanded by Yahweh, self-defense) is not *ratzach*. Killing without Yahweh's authorization is *ratzach* — regardless of who performs it.

Gesenius: Gesenius connects the root to a cognate in Arabic meaning "to crush, to pound." The violence inherent in the word is not merely the act of killing but the crushing of what Yahweh has declared sacred: human life made in His image (tzelem Elohim — Bereishit 1:27). **Ratzach** is not merely the ending of biological function — it is the destruction of what bears Yahweh's image without His authorization.

TWOT: TWOT notes that the sixth commandment's use of ratzach rather than harag establishes a critical covenant principle: Yahweh does not prohibit all killing. He prohibits unauthorized, illegal killing. The same Yahweh who commands "you shall not ratzach" also commands judicial execution (Shemot 21:12–17), authorizes warfare (Yehoshua 1), and permits self-defense (Shemot 22:2). The commandment is therefore not an absolute pacifist prohibition — it is a covenant boundary on the unauthorized taking of human life.

D. THE TANAKH'S OWN MURDER VS. KILLING DISTINCTION — BEMIDBAR (NUMBERS) 35: THE CITIES OF REFUGE

Yahweh Himself drew the precise distinction between murder and killing in Bemidbar 35:9–34 — the most comprehensive Torah treatment of the ratzach question. The six cities of refuge — three on each side of the Jordan — were established specifically for the person who killed without premeditation:

"If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the evidence of witnesses... You shall not accept ransom for the life of a murderer, who is guilty of death, but he shall be put to death... You shall not pollute the land in which you live, for blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it." — Bemidbar (Numbers) 35:30–33

Category	Hebrew Term	Description	Covenant Response
Premeditated murder	Retzach b'tzediyah	Intentional killing — using an iron object, stone, or wood weapon with hostile intent	Death penalty — no ransom accepted. Blood atonement required.
Unintentional killing	B'shgagah	Accidental death — without enmity, without lying in wait, without premeditation	City of refuge — protection until the death of the High Priest
Authorized execution	Harag by mishpat	Judicial killing by covenant court authority — two or three witnesses required	Permitted and commanded — not ratzach
Avenger of blood outside refuge	Go'el hadam	Killing the manslayer outside the city of refuge becomes ratzach	No bloodguilt on the avenger within terms — but the manslayer's death outside refuge becomes murder

The cities of refuge framework establishes a covenant truth of foundational importance: intent, authorization, and the presence of innocent blood are the determining factors in whether a killing constitutes ratzach. Yahweh does not classify all killing as murder. He classifies unauthorized killing of innocent persons as murder — and He requires atonement for it: "blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it" (Bemidbar 35:33).

E. KEY TANAKH OCCURRENCES ESTABLISHING THE FULL SCOPE OF THE COMMANDMENT

Reference	Teaching / Witness
Bereishit (Gen.) 4:8–16	Qayin (Cain) murders Hevel (Abel) — the first ratzach in human history. Yahweh confronts: "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground." Blood cries. Yahweh hears.
Bereishit (Gen.) 9:5–6	The Noachide covenant: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for Elohim made man in His own image." The prohibition of murder is universal — binding on all humanity from the foundation of the post-flood world.
Shemot (Ex.) 20:13	The sixth commandment at Sinai: Lo tirtzach. Two words. Absolute covenant prohibition of murder.

Reference	Teaching / Witness
Shemot (Ex.) 21:12–14	"Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death. But if he did not lie in wait for him, but Yahweh let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee." The Torah's own murder/manslaughter distinction.
Shemot (Ex.) 22:2	"If a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no bloodguilt for him." Self-defense authorization — killing is not always ratzach.
Bemidbar (Num.) 35:9–34	The cities of refuge — Yahweh's complete framework distinguishing intentional murder from unintentional killing. "Blood pollutes the land."
Devarim (Deut.) 5:17	The sixth commandment repeated in the covenant renewal address — confirming its perpetual binding force across all generations.
Devarim (Deut.) 19:11–13	"But if anyone hates his neighbor and lies in wait for him and attacks him and strikes him fatally so that he dies... then the elders of his city shall send and take him from there, and hand him over to the avenger of blood, so that he may die. Your eye shall not pity him; you shall purge the guilt of innocent blood from Israel."
Devarim (Deut.) 27:25	"Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood." The covenant curse on those who authorize murder for financial or political gain.
Yeshayahu (Isa.) 1:15	"When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood." Worship from blood-stained hands is rejected by Yahweh.
Yirmeyahu (Jer.) 22:3	"Do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place." The covenant standard for national governance.
Yirmeyahu (Jer.) 22:17	"But you have eyes and heart only for your dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood, and for practicing oppression and violence." The prophetic indictment of leaders who murder for gain.
Michah (Mic.) 6:8	"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does Yahweh require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your Elohim?" The covenant alternative to the culture of violence.
Habakkuk (Hab.) 2:12	"Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity!" The covenant indictment of national leaders who build political power through murder.
Tehillim (Ps.) 94:21	"They band together against the life of the righteous and condemn the innocent to death." The psalmist's indictment of those who use legal and political power to murder the innocent.

SECTION II — WHAT THE LAW IS TEACHING

A. THE IMAGE OF YAHWEH — WHY MURDER IS THE ULTIMATE COVENANT VIOLATION

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for Elohim made man in His own image." — Bereishit (Genesis) 9:6

The foundational reason Yahweh prohibits murder is embedded in the creation account: the human being is made in the **tzelem Elohim** — the image of Yahweh. To murder a human being is not merely to end a biological life — it is to destroy the image of Yahweh in the created order. Murder is therefore not only a crime against the victim. It is an act of violence against Yahweh Himself — an assault on His image in creation.

This is why Bereishit 9:6 grounds the prohibition of murder not in human law but in Yahweh's own creative act: "for Elohim made man in His own image." The image of Yahweh — **tzelem Elohim** (תְּצַלֵּם אֱלֹהִים) — is the theological foundation of every human life's inviolability. Every human being — regardless of nationality, religion, political affiliation, gender or status — bears the image of Yahweh. The sixth commandment protects that image in the flesh of every person.

B. WHAT THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT PROHIBITS — AND WHAT IT DOES NOT

The commandment **PROHIBITS**:

- **Premeditated murder** — intentional, planned killing of another human being outside Yahweh's authorized covenant framework
- Killing driven by hatred, anger, jealousy, greed, or personal vengeance

- **Assassination** — the targeted killing of a specific named person by political or governmental authority outside covenant judicial process
- **The shedding of innocent blood** — **dam naki (דַּם נָקִי)** — the blood of persons not guilty of a capital offense
- **Killing for financial gain** — the murderer hired through bribery (Devarim 27:25 — "cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood")
- **Incitement to murder** — the person who incites another to kill bears covenant guilt for the resulting death
- **Systemic and structural murder** — Yahweh holds accountable those who build systems that routinely produce the death of innocent persons (Habakkuk 2:12)

The commandment does NOT prohibit — what Yahweh Himself authorizes:

- **Judicial execution** — the death penalty administered by a covenant court of law with two or three witnesses (Shemot 21:12–17; Bemidbar 35:30)
- **Self-defense** — protecting one's life and household from lethal attack (Shemot 22:2)
- **Yahweh-authorized warfare** — defensive war and warfare specifically commanded by Yahweh through His covenant authority (Yehoshua 1; Shoftim passim)
- **The avenger of blood** — within the specific covenant framework of Bemidbar 35 — pursuing the murderer who has fled justice

C. THE PROPHETIC EXTENSION — MURDER BEYOND THE PHYSICAL ACT

The Tanakh prophets extend the sixth commandment beyond the direct physical act of killing to encompass the systemic and institutional dimensions of murder:

Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 1:15 — Worship rejected because of blood-stained hands: "When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood." Yahweh declares that covenant worship — prayer, sacrifice, holy days — is rendered worthless by the shedding of innocent blood. The leader who kills and then prays has not atoned for the murder through the prayer. The blood on the hands is still present before Yahweh.

Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 22:3, 17 — The covenant standard for national leadership: "Do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place." And in verse 17: "But you have eyes and heart only for your dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood, and for practicing oppression and violence." The covenant indictment of political leaders who use the power of governance to murder for gain is explicit and unambiguous in the prophetic literature.

Habakkuk 2:12 — The woe oracle against war-based empire: "Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity!" Yahweh issues a covenant woe — a prophetic curse — against any leader or nation that builds its political power and national infrastructure on the foundation of murdered innocent persons.

Michah 6:8 — The covenant alternative: "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does Yahweh require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your Elohim?" The sixth commandment is not merely a prohibition. It is part of a covenant framework that calls human beings — and human governments — to the alternative of justice, lovingkindness, and covenant humility before Yahweh.

D. THE COVENANT LAW OF WARFARE — DEVARIM (DEUTERONOMY) 20

Yahweh did not merely prohibit unjust war. He regulated warfare through a specific covenant law code in Devarim 20 — establishing that even authorized warfare must be conducted within covenant boundaries:

- **Offer of peace before battle** — "When you draw near to a city to fight against it, offer terms of peace to it" (Devarim 20:10). Every siege must begin with an offer of peace. If the city accepts,

no killing occurs. This principle — peace first — is Yahweh's covenant mandate for all authorized warfare.

- **Non-combatant protection** — Devarim 20:13–14 distinguishes between combatants and non-combatants. The killing of civilian populations beyond what the covenant warfare framework specifically authorizes falls outside the scope of authorized killing and enters the territory of ratzach.
- **Environmental protection** — "You shall not cut down its trees..." (Devarim 20:19) — Yahweh prohibits the destruction of the food supply of the land under siege. The collective punishment of civilian populations through environmental destruction violates the Torah's warfare code.
- **The exemptions from military service** — Devarim 20:5–8 — the newly betrothed, the newly housed, the newly planted, the fearful — are sent home before battle. Yahweh does not demand the sacrifice of every male in the covenant community. The exemptions protect life even within the context of authorized warfare.

The Devarim 20 warfare code establishes a covenant standard: even in authorized warfare, Yahweh's rules of engagement govern the conduct of the battle. Warfare that violates these covenant rules — that kills non-combatants beyond what Yahweh authorizes, that destroys civilian infrastructure, that fails to offer peace before engaging — crosses from authorized killing into ratzach.

SECTION III — FOUR-SPHERE APPLICATION FRAMEWORK

SPHERE 1 — THE INDIVIDUAL

"The Covenant Person and the Sanctity of Every Human Life"

At the individual level, the sixth commandment establishes the absolute covenant protection of every human life. Every human being — bearing the tzelem Elohim — is inviolable. The covenant person's relationship with other human beings is governed by this foundational reality: the person before me bears the image of Yahweh, and I am prohibited by the direct word of Yahweh from taking that image out of the world through murder.

What the individual covenant person is prohibited from:

- **Direct murder** — taking another human life with premeditation and without Yahweh's covenant authorization
- **Anger as the root of murder** — the prophetic tradition recognizes that unchecked anger is the seed of ratzach. "Do not be eager in your spirit to be angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools" (Kohelet/Ecclesiastes 7:9). The covenant person disciplines the inner life that produces murder before the act of murder occurs.
- **Participation in murder** — assisting, financing, or inciting another person to commit murder. The covenant assigns guilt not only to the one who strikes the fatal blow but to those who enable, authorize, or arrange the killing.
- **Hatred as the foundation of murder** — Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:17: "You shall not hate your brother in your heart." The covenant addresses the interior disposition that produces murder — not merely the external act.

The individual covenant witness in 2025–2026:

US homicide data for 2025 records a historic decline: murders dropped approximately **20% compared to 2024** — the largest single-year decline in homicides ever recorded in the United States. A study of 35 cities by the Council on Criminal Justice showed a 21% decrease. Chicago: 28% decline.

Washington, DC: nearly 28% decline. Mass killings fell to a 20-year low. The nationwide homicide rate is projected at approximately 4 per 100,000 — potentially the lowest in over a century.

From a covenant perspective: this domestic decline is a movement — however partial — toward the covenant standard of Yahweh at the individual and community level. The covenant community recognizes and affirms this direction while noting that 4 murders per 100,000 is still 4 violations of the sixth commandment per 100,000 people. The covenant standard is not a reduced murder rate. The covenant standard is *lo tirtzach* — not one.

"You shall not murder." — Shemot (Exodus) 20:13 The absolute covenant prohibition: every human life, bearing the image of Yahweh, is inviolable. The covenant person does not murder. Not one. Ever. Under any personal justification.

Reference	Teaching / Witness
Bereishit (Gen.) 1:27	"So Elohim created man in His own image" — the <i>tzelem Elohim</i> that makes every human life inviolable.
Bereishit (Gen.) 9:5-6	"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for Elohim made man in His own image." Universal prohibition.
Shemot (Ex.) 20:13	<i>Lo tirtzach</i> — you shall not murder. The absolute covenant prohibition.
Vayikra (Lev.) 19:17	"You shall not hate your brother in your heart" — the covenant addresses the inner disposition that produces murder.
Kohelet (Eccl.) 7:9	"Anger lodges in the heart of fools" — the covenant discipline of the inner life that precedes murder.

SPHERE 2 — THE COMMUNITY

"The Covenant Community's Responsibility for Blood"

The sixth commandment creates covenant obligations at the community level that go beyond individual behavior. Yahweh holds the covenant community responsible for the blood shed within its boundaries and for the systems and structures it maintains or tolerates that produce murder.

The expiation of innocent blood — Devarim 21:1–9: If a murdered body is found in the field and the killer is unknown, the elders of the nearest city must perform the covenant ritual of expiation: breaking a heifer's neck over running water and declaring: "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it shed. Accept atonement, O Yahweh, for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed, and do not set the guilt of innocent blood in the midst of Your people Israel." The community is responsible before Yahweh for the innocent blood shed within its territory — even when the killer is unknown. Innocent blood defiles the land. The community must seek atonement.

The covenant court — the authorized response to murder: The community's covenant response to murder is the establishment and maintenance of a just judicial system — courts that apply the standard of two or three witnesses (Devarim 19:15), that do not accept bribes (Devarim 27:25), and that pursue the murderer without pity (Devarim 19:13). A community that fails to pursue justice for the murdered has become complicit in the murder through its inaction.

The community that tolerates murder: Yeshayahu 1:21–23 delivers a covenant indictment of a community whose leadership has become murderous: "How the faithful city has become a whore, she who was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. Your silver has become dross... Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not bring justice to the fatherless, and the widow's cause does not come to them." A community whose leaders are companions of murderers becomes a city of murderers before Yahweh.

Reference	Teaching / Witness
Devarim (Deut.) 19:11–13	The community must hand over the intentional murderer to the avenger of blood — "your eye shall not pity him."
Devarim (Deut.) 21:1–9	The community is responsible for the innocent blood shed within its territory — even unsolved murders require communal atonement before Yahweh.
Devarim (Deut.) 27:25	"Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood" — covenant curse on corruption that enables murder.
Yeshayahu (Isa.) 1:21–23	The community whose leadership is murderous and corrupt is a "faithful city become a whore" in Yahweh's covenant assessment.
Tehillim (Ps.) 94:21	"They band together against the life of the righteous and condemn the innocent to death" — the covenant indictment of community-level murder through judicial corruption.

SPHERE 3 — THE NATION

"National Accountability for the Blood of the Innocent"

The sixth commandment holds nations accountable to Yahweh for the blood shed within their borders and through their military and political power. The prophets speak extensively to national leaders and governments in the language of the sixth commandment — establishing that Yahweh does not grant political authority a moral exemption from the prohibition of murder.

The prophetic standard for national leaders: "Thus says Yahweh: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place"

(Yirmeyahu/Jeremiah 22:3). Yahweh addresses this covenant standard directly to the king of Judah — establishing that the national leader's primary covenant obligation is not military victory, economic growth, or political power, but justice and the protection of innocent life.

The national indictment for shedding innocent blood: "But you have eyes and heart only for your dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood, and for practicing oppression and violence" (Yirmeyahu

22:17). The national leader who pursues wealth and power through the shedding of innocent blood is under prophetic covenant indictment from Yahweh. This is not a political opinion — it is the word of Yahweh through His prophet to the governing authority.

The national defilement of bloodshed: "Blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it" (Bemidbar 35:33). The nation that sheds innocent blood defiles its own land before Yahweh. This is a covenant principle that operates at the national level: the accumulated innocent blood shed by a nation's political and military actions defiles the nation before Yahweh and demands atonement.

Reference	Teaching / Witness
Yirmeyahu (Jer.) 22:3	The covenant standard for national leadership: do justice, protect the innocent, shed no innocent blood.
Yirmeyahu (Jer.) 22:17	The prophetic indictment of national leaders who shed innocent blood for dishonest gain.
Habakkuk (Hab.) 2:12	"Woe to him who builds a town with blood" — the covenant woe oracle against empires built on murder.
Bemidbar (Num.) 35:33	"Blood pollutes the land" — the nation that sheds innocent blood defiles its own territory before Yahweh.
Yeshayahu (Isa.) 1:15	"Your hands are full of blood" — national worship rejected by Yahweh because of blood-stained national leadership.
Devarim (Deut.) 20:10	"Offer terms of peace to it" — the covenant warfare standard: peace must be offered before battle. War is the last resort, not the first.

SPHERE 4 — THE WORLD

"The Universal Covenant Prohibition of Murder Across All Nations"

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for Elohim made man in His own image." — Bereishit (Genesis) 9:6

The prohibition of murder is not uniquely Israelite. It is embedded in the Noachide covenant of Bereishit 9 — the universal covenant Yahweh established with all humanity after the flood. Every human being on earth, as a descendant of Noach, is party to the covenant that declares: the shedding of human blood is answered by Yahweh.

The 20th century — the most murderous in human history: The 20th century stands as the most catastrophic violation of the sixth commandment in the history of the human race. Estimated war-related deaths range from 100 million to over 231 million — when military deaths, civilian casualties, and democide (governments murdering their own citizens) are combined:

Conflict / Category	Estimated Deaths	Covenant Assessment
World War II (1939–1945)	62–78 million	The single most destructive armed conflict in human history. Includes the Holocaust — the systematic murder of 6 million Jewish people — the most explicit mass ratzach of the 20th century.
World War I (1914–1918)	15–25 million	Industrial-scale warfare producing unprecedented civilian casualties. Poison gas — chemical weapons designed exclusively to kill without military objective — represents ratzach at industrial scale.
Korean War (1950–1953)	~1.2 million military deaths	The conflict on the Imjin River — where SFC Terry Gilman Arcemont, Purple Heart, Silver Star, Bronze Star, was killed in action. Every name behind these statistics is a tzelem Elohim — a person bearing the image of Yahweh.
Vietnam War (1965–1973)	~1.2 million military deaths + civilian casualties	Extensive civilian casualties from bombing campaigns, chemical defoliation (Agent Orange), and ground warfare. The civilian toll is a direct ratzach question under the Devarim 20 warfare code.
Democide — governments killing own citizens	40+ million (excluding battle deaths)	Stalin, Mao, Hitler, Pol Pot, and others — governments using state power to murder their own populations. This is ratzach at national governmental scale — exactly what Yahweh’s prophets indicted in the kings of Israel and Judah.
Total 20th century war-related deaths	100–231 million	"Blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made except by the blood of the one who shed it" (Bemidbar 35:33). The 20th century left a debt of blood before Yahweh that no human tribunal has fully addressed.

The 20th century's 100–231 million war deaths represent the most catastrophic mass violation of the sixth commandment in human history — the industrial application of ratzach at civilizational scale. Yahweh's covenant declares: lo tirtzach — you shall not murder. The 20th century answered with 200 million deaths. The covenant witness against this record is the most urgent prophetic calling of the 613 Laws course.

"Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity! Behold, is it not from Yahweh of hosts that peoples labor merely for fire, and nations weary themselves for nothing?"
— *Habakkuk (Habakkuk) 2:12–13*

The 21st Century — Gaza: A Covenant Indictment Under the Ratzach/Dam Naki/Tzelem Elohim Standard

The Gaza conflict represents the most extensively documented mass civilian casualty event of the early 21st century. It is examined here under the same ratzach/dam naki/tzelem Elohim covenant standard applied to the 20th century table above — with equal force, without political exemption, and without national preference. The covenant witness of Miqdash Bethel does not grade innocent blood by nationality or religion.

As of **April 6, 2026**, the confirmed death toll in the Gaza Strip since October 7, 2023 has exceeded **72,302 Palestinians**, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health, with **172,090 injuries** recorded (Gaza Ministry of Health; Reuters). Independent studies published in *The Lancet Global Health* estimate the actual death toll is significantly higher due to unrecovered bodies and indirect deaths. One study placed violent deaths at over **75,200** by January 2025 — 34.7% above the official count at that time. Researchers from *The BMJ* warn that thousands more have died from famine, disease, and the collapse of the healthcare system — indirect deaths not captured in the official trauma-based toll.

Documented casualty data — as of April 6, 2026 (Sources: Gaza Ministry of Health; Reuters; *The Lancet Global Health*; *The BMJ*; PBS; UNRWA):

Category	Documented Figure (Sources: Gaza Ministry of Health; Reuters; <i>The Lancet</i> ; <i>The BMJ</i> ; PBS; UNRWA)
Direct fatalities (Gaza Ministry of Health)	72,302 deaths confirmed as of April 6, 2026.
Total injuries	172,090 Palestinians reported injured.
Independent estimate (The Lancet Global Health)	Violent deaths estimated at over 75,200 by January 2025 — 34.7% above the official count at that time. The current actual total is likely higher.
Demographic breakdown	Women and children consistently make up more than half of those killed — approximately 56.2% of violent deaths per reliable victim identification data.
Deaths since ceasefire (Oct. 11, 2025 onward)	At least 723 Palestinians killed and 1,990 injured due to ongoing violations and periodic hostilities through early April 2026.
Journalists killed	Between 248 and 300 journalists and media workers killed.
Aid workers killed	At least 578 aid workers killed, including 391 UNRWA personnel.
Health workers killed	Approximately 1,722 health workers killed since the start of the conflict.
Palestinians killed — West Bank	Over 1,000 additional Palestinian deaths in the West Bank since October 7, 2023.
October 7, 2023 — Israeli deaths	Approximately 1,195–1,200 deaths, the majority of whom were civilians.

The covenant examination — applying the ratzach/dam naki/tzelem Elohim standard:

On the 72,302+ deaths and the tzelem Elohim: Bemidbar 35:33 declares: “blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it.” Over 72,000 persons bearing the **tzelem Elohim** — the image of Yahweh — have

been killed in Gaza since October 7, 2023. Women and children constitute more than half of those killed. **The sixth commandment’s protection of innocent blood — dam naki — applies to every one of these persons regardless of their nationality, religion, or political association.** The October 7 attacks on Israel — in which approximately 1,200 civilians bearing the tzelem Elohim were killed — are likewise ratzach before Yahweh. **Yahweh applies the ratzach standard to every killing of the innocent. He does not net one side’s deaths against the other’s.**

On the destruction of civilian infrastructure: The Devarim 20 warfare code (Devarim 20:19) prohibits the destruction of food supplies. The documented collapse of Gaza’s healthcare system, the destruction of the majority of housing, and the elimination of functioning food supply chains — producing mass famine, disease, and indirect deaths not captured in official counts — constitute collective punishment of a civilian population. **Yahweh’s warfare code does not permit the use of environmental and infrastructural destruction as an instrument of warfare against civilian populations.**

On the aid workers, health workers, and journalists killed: The covenant community takes note that **578 aid workers — including 391 UNRWA personnel — approximately 1,722 health workers, and between 248–300 journalists** have been killed. These are not combatants. They are persons bearing the tzelem Elohim whose calling is to protect life, heal the wounded, and bear witness. Their deaths under the **dam naki** standard require the same covenant accounting as the deaths of any other civilian.

On the use of religious justification: Any framework that invokes the covenant promise of the land as authorization for warfare producing these casualty figures must be measured against Yahweh’s own prophetic standard: “Do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place” (Yirmeyahu 22:3). **The Torah does not grant any state — including a state associated with the biblical covenant — a religious exemption from the sixth commandment’s prohibition of innocent bloodshed.** Yahweh applied His prophetic indictment to the kings of Judah and Israel with the same force He applies it to all nations.

“Thus says Yahweh: Do justice and righteousness... do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place.” — Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 22:3

The 20th century’s 100–231 million war deaths and the documented Gaza civilian casualty record — 72,302+ confirmed, actual total likely substantially higher — together represent the most catastrophic sustained violation of the sixth commandment across two centuries. Yahweh’s covenant declares: *lo tirtzach* — you shall not murder. **The covenant witness of Miqdash Bethel stands before both centuries with equal force: the blood of the innocent cries to Yahweh from the ground — from the Imjin River in 1967 to the rubble of Gaza in 2026. He hears it all.**

SECTION IV — COMPLETE APPLICATION TABLE

Level	Sphere	Application	Torah Witness
INDIVIDUAL	Prohibition	Every covenant person is absolutely prohibited from taking human life through premeditated, unauthorized murder.	Shemot 20:13; Devarim 5:17
INDIVIDUAL	Inner Life	The covenant addresses hatred and anger as the roots of murder — before the act occurs.	Vayikra 19:17; Kohelet 7:9
INDIVIDUAL	Self-Defense	Yahweh authorizes the protection of life and household from lethal attack.	Shemot 22:2
INDIVIDUAL	Tzelem Elohim	Every human life bears the image of Yahweh — the theological foundation of the prohibition.	Bereishit 1:27; 9:6
COMMUNITY	Judicial Responsibility	The community must maintain a just court system that pursues murderers without pity and accepts no bribes.	Devarim 19:11–13; 27:25
COMMUNITY	Communal Atonement	The community is responsible before Yahweh for unsolved murders within its territory.	Devarim 21:1–9
COMMUNITY	Structural Justice	Communities that tolerate murder through corrupt leadership become murderous communities before Yahweh.	Yeshayahu 1:21–23
NATION	National Leadership	National leaders are held by Yahweh to the covenant standard: do justice, protect the innocent, shed no innocent blood.	Yirmeyahu 22:3
NATION	Prophetic Indictment	Leaders who shed innocent blood for gain are under prophetic covenant indictment from Yahweh.	Yirmeyahu 22:17; Habakkuk 2:12
NATION	Warfare Code	Authorized warfare must follow Yahweh's rules: peace offered first, non-combatants protected, no environmental destruction.	Devarim 20:10–20
NATION	Land Defilement	Innocent blood shed by national authority defiles the nation's land before Yahweh and demands atonement.	Bemidbar 35:33
WORLD	Universal Covenant	The prohibition of murder is binding on all humanity through the Noachide covenant of Bereishit 9 — not only on Israel.	Bereishit 9:5–6
WORLD	20th Century	The most murderous century in human history: 100–231 million war-related deaths — the industrial application of ratzach at civilizational scale.	Habakkuk 2:12; Bemidbar 35:33
WORLD	Current Conflicts	The 2026 US-Israel war on Iran: 3,500+ deaths, 1,600+ civilians — examined under Yahweh's ratzach standard in Section VI.	Yirmeyahu 22:3; Devarim 20:10

Level	Sphere	Application	Torah Witness
WORLD	Covenant Alternative	"Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with your Elohim" — the world covenant standard Yahweh requires of all nations.	Michah 6:8

SECTION V — THREE-RELIGION AUDIT

Where Each Tradition Upholds Torah and Where Each Departs

JUDAISM

Upholds Torah:

The Jewish legal tradition has maintained the sixth commandment's prohibition of murder with extraordinary theological sophistication. The distinction between ratzach (murder) and harag (authorized killing) is foundational to the entire halachic discussion of violence in Jewish law. The Mishnah (Sanhedrin 4:5) elevates the sixth commandment to its ultimate expression: "Therefore, Adam was created alone, to teach you that whoever destroys a single soul, Scripture accounts it as if he had destroyed an entire world; and whoever saves a single soul, Scripture accounts it as if he had saved an entire world." Jewish tradition holds every human life — not only Jewish life — as a complete world. This is the tzelem Elohim principle in its fullest halachic expression.

The cities of refuge framework, the two-or-three-witness requirement for capital punishment, and the extensive rabbinic discussion of when killing is authorized versus when it constitutes ratzach all reflect serious, sustained covenant engagement with the sixth commandment's full scope. The Talmudic principle that a Sanhedrin that executes one person in seven years is called a "bloody Sanhedrin" — (here cited as historical commentary, not binding authority) — reflects the Jewish tradition's extreme caution about the application of the death penalty, consistent with the Torah's protection of innocent life.

Departs from Torah:

Where certain modern Israeli governmental and military decisions have been made under religious frameworks that apply the covenant promise of the land as justification for military actions producing

large civilian casualties, the prophetic Torah standard must be applied with equal force: "Do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place" (Yirmeyahu 22:3). The Torah does not grant the modern state of Israel — or any state — a covenant exemption from the sixth commandment's prohibition of innocent bloodshed. Yahweh applied His prophetic standard to ancient Israel's kings with equal force. He applies it today.

CHRISTIANITY

Upholds Torah:

The Christian tradition has broadly maintained the prohibition of murder as a foundational moral standard — rooted in the sixth commandment and in the New Covenant affirmation of the tzelem Elohim as the basis for human dignity. The Just War tradition — developed through Augustine (354–430 CE), Aquinas (1225–1274 CE), and subsequent theologians — represents a sustained Christian attempt to apply the Tanakh's distinction between authorized killing and ratzach to political and military contexts. While the Just War criteria were developed outside the direct Tanakh framework — and are therefore presented here as historical reference rather than binding covenant authority — the underlying impulse — to distinguish authorized killing from murder — is consistent with the sixth commandment's lexical structure.

Pope Leo XIV's Easter 2026 statement — a partial covenant convergence: On April 5, 2026, Pope Leo XIV — born Robert Francis Prevost in Chicago, the first American pope — used his first Easter Urbi et Orbi address to deliver what stands as the most direct papal condemnation of contemporary warfare in recent memory:

"Let those who have weapons lay them down! Let those who have the power to unleash wars choose peace! Not a peace imposed by force, but through

dialogue! Not with the desire to dominate others, but to encounter them! We are growing accustomed to violence, resigning ourselves to it, and becoming indifferent. Indifferent to the deaths of thousands of people." — Pope Leo XIV, Urbi et Orbi, April 5, 2026

Pope Leo added: "We cannot continue to be indifferent! And we cannot resign ourselves to evil!" He has stated that Christian political leaders who start wars should go to confession and assess whether they are following the teachings of Jesus. He specifically condemned efforts to surround war "with a kind of religious approval" — describing this as "very dangerous." Leo called for President Trump to find an "off-ramp" from the Iran conflict, stating: "Hopefully he's looking for a way to decrease the amount of violence."

From a Miqdash Bethel covenant perspective: Pope Leo XIV's Easter 2026 statement is notable precisely because it emerges from a tradition — Roman Catholicism — that has historically endorsed, blessed, and even initiated military violence, from the Crusades to colonial conquest to the blessing of opposing armies in the World Wars. The current pope's prophetic cry against indifference to killing and against the religious justification of war is a partial convergence with the covenant standard of Yahweh — honored as such. However, the authority for this standard does not rest on papal declaration. It rests on *lo tirtzach* — spoken at Sinai three thousand years before Robert Francis Prevost was born in Chicago.

Departs from Torah:

The Christian tradition has at multiple points in its history: blessed warfare on behalf of Christian political powers; developed the Just War doctrine in ways that expanded rather than restricted the authorization for killing; applied a territorial or religious-superiority framework to justify the killing of non-Christian peoples (Crusades, colonial conquest, forced conversion enforced by violence). Where

the Christian tradition has used religion to sanctify political violence — exactly what Pope Leo XIV now condemns — it has departed from the covenant standard of the sixth commandment.

ISLAM

Upholds Torah:

The Quran explicitly prohibits murder in terms that directly parallel the sixth commandment: "Do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden, except in the course of justice" (Surah Al-Anam 6:151). "And do not kill yourselves. Indeed, Allah is to you ever Merciful" (Surah An-Nisa 4:29). The Quran's declaration that killing one innocent person is as if killing all of humanity — and saving one person is as if saving all of humanity — (Surah Al-Maidah 5:32) echoes the same principle found in the Mishnah's treatment of the sixth commandment: every human life is a complete world bearing the image of Yahweh (*tzelem Elohim*). The Islamic concept of *harb* (authorized warfare) and *qatl* (unauthorized killing/murder) parallels the Torah's *harag/ratzach* distinction. Islamic jurisprudence extensively addresses when killing is authorized (defense, just war) versus when it constitutes prohibited murder — consistent with the sixth commandment's underlying structure.

Departs from Torah:

Where certain Islamic jurisprudential traditions have been used to justify: the killing of non-Muslim civilians as part of jihadist ideology; the use of suicide bombing targeting civilian populations; the religious authorization of warfare for the expansion of political Islamic governance — these represent departures from the sixth commandment's protection of the *tzelem Elohim* in every human life regardless of religious affiliation. The sixth commandment says *lo tirtzach* — not "*lo tirtzach* unless the person is an unbeliever." Yahweh's protection of the image He placed in every human being does not carry a religious exemption in the Torah text.

SECTION VI — WHEN WAR BECOMES MURDER

The Covenant Standard Applied to the World in 2026

This section applies the covenant standard of Yahweh’s sixth commandment directly to the most urgent geopolitical context of April 2026: the US-Israel war on Iran, the global epidemic of state violence, and the prophetic witness of Miqdash Bethel to the leaders and nations of the world.

A. THE COVENANT FRAMEWORK: WHEN DOES KILLING BECOME RATZACH?

The Torah does not prohibit all killing. It prohibits *ratzach* — the unauthorized, premeditated taking of innocent human life. Drawing from the complete Tanakh framework established in Sections I and II, the covenant standard for determining when war becomes murder is:

Covenant Question	Torah Standard	When It Becomes Ratzach
Is the war authorized by Yahweh’s covenant law?	Yahweh-commanded warfare (Yehoshua 1) or clear self-defense (Shemot 22:2)	War waged for economic interest, political power, preemptive ideology, or national vengeance without clear covenant authorization
Was peace offered before battle?	"When you draw near to a city to fight against it, offer terms of peace to it" (Devarim 20:10)	Military strikes launched without diplomatic offer of peace — bypassing Yahweh’s required first step
Are non-combatants protected?	Devarim 20:13–14 distinguishes combatants and non-combatants	Killing of civilians, children, and non-combatants beyond what covenant warfare authorizes is ratzach
Is innocent blood being shed?	"You shall not pollute the land... blood pollutes the land" (Bemidbar 35:33)	Civilian casualties from airstrikes, targeted killings of leaders without judicial process, destruction of civilian infrastructure = ratzach
Are proper legal/covenant processes followed?	Two or three witnesses; covenant court authority required for judicial killing (Bemidbar 35:30)	Targeted assassination by military authority without judicial process = ratzach, regardless of political justification
Is religion being used to justify the killing?	Yahweh’s warfare is commanded explicitly by Him — not inferred by political leaders for national interest	Claiming divine mandate for warfare driven by political, economic, or ideological goals = the sin Yahweh indicted in the prophets

B. THE 2026 US-ISRAEL WAR ON IRAN — A COVENANT EXAMINATION

The facts: The 2026 US-Israel war on Iran began with airstrikes on February 28, 2026. As of early April 2026:

- Over 3,500 total deaths recorded
- Over 1,600 of those deaths are civilians — persons not engaged in military combat
- Over 340 children reported killed
- At least 1,900 killed in Iran, over 10,000 injured per NPR and HRANA reporting
- Israeli strikes specifically targeted Iranian government officials and leaders — targeted assassination of specific named persons
- The conflict expanded to Lebanon causing massive displacement and destruction of civilian infrastructure
- Over 100 legal experts signed an open letter stating the initial strikes violated the UN Charter
- Legal experts have cited the killing of civilians and targeted killing of leaders as potential war crimes under international humanitarian law

The covenant examination — applying the ratzach standard:

On the 1,600+ civilian deaths: Bemidbar 35:33 declares: "blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it." Over 1,600 civilians — persons bearing the *tzelem* Elohim — have been killed in this conflict. Over 340 of them are children. The sixth commandment's protection of innocent blood — *dam naki* — applies to every one of these persons regardless of their nationality, religion, or political association. The Devarim 20 warfare code requires the protection of non-combatants. A warfare strategy that produces 1,600+ civilian deaths and 340+ child deaths in weeks of airstrikes cannot be reconciled with the covenant warfare standard of Yahweh without direct, explicit authorization from Yahweh Himself through His covenant prophets. That authorization has not been given and cannot be assumed.

On the targeted killing of Iranian leaders: Israeli strikes specifically targeted Iranian government officials — named persons killed by deliberate military action. Under the Torah's covenant framework,

the authorized killing of a person requires: (1) clear evidence of a capital offense; (2) two or three witnesses; (3) judicial process by a covenant court of law. Military targeting of government officials — outside any judicial process, on the authority of a political-military command structure — is the covenant definition of *ratzach*. The fact that the targeted person is an official of an adversarial government does not constitute Yahweh's authorization for their death. Devarim 27:25 declares: "Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood." The political calculation that makes a foreign official's death strategically advantageous is not a covenant basis for taking that life.

On the claim of preemptive defense: Proponents of the strikes describe the conflict as preemptive defense against Iran's nuclear and military capabilities. The Torah permits self-defense — Shemot 22:2. But the Devarim 20 warfare code requires peace to be offered before battle. The covenant standard is not "strike first if you believe an attack is possible." It is "offer peace, and if peace is refused, then engage under Yahweh's covenant rules of warfare." The question Miqdash Bethel places before the covenant community, the political leadership, and the watching world is: Was peace genuinely offered and genuinely refused before the February 28 airstrikes? Were diplomatic alternatives exhausted? Did the strikes honor the covenant protection of non-combatants? The 1,600+ civilian deaths and 100+ legal experts citing UN Charter violations suggest these questions require serious covenant examination.

On the use of religious justification: Any attempt to frame the US-Israel strikes on Iran as a covenant-authorized, biblically justified act of warfare must be measured against Yahweh's own prophetic standard. The Torah does not permit national leaders to infer divine mandate from political calculation. Yahweh communicated His warfare instructions explicitly — through direct divine speech and through His prophets. The claim that modern geopolitical warfare is divinely authorized because it serves the interests of a nation associated with the biblical covenant is precisely the error that Pope Leo XIV identifies as "surrounding war with a kind of religious approval" — which he calls "very dangerous." Miqdash Bethel agrees — on the authority of the Torah itself: Yirmeyahu 9:25–26 demonstrates that Yahweh does not protect even His own circumcised people from His covenant

standard when they violate it. "All the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart." Religious identity does not grant immunity from the sixth commandment.

C. POPE LEO XIV'S EASTER 2026 WITNESS — WHERE HIS VOICE ALIGNS WITH THE COVENANT

Pope Leo XIV's Easter 2026 Urbi et Orbi address represents the most significant international religious voice raised against the current wave of global warfare since the conflict began. Miqdash Bethel — whose authority is the Tanakh, not the papal office — acknowledges the convergence between Pope Leo's prophetic cry and the covenant standard of Yahweh on the following specific points:

Convergence 1 — "We cannot resign ourselves to evil": Pope Leo's declaration that the world is "growing accustomed to violence" and "becoming indifferent to the deaths of thousands" is the contemporary voice of the prophetic tradition of the Tanakh. Yirmeyahu wept over Jerusalem. Habakkuk cried out: "O Yahweh, how long shall I cry for help, and You will not hear? Or cry to You 'Violence!' and You will not save?" (Habakkuk 1:2). The refusal to become indifferent to mass killing is a covenant posture — and Pope Leo's Easter cry recovers it from within his own tradition.

Convergence 2 — Against the religious approval of war: Pope Leo's specific concern about efforts to surround war "with a kind of religious approval" directly addresses the most dangerous dimension of the current conflict: the use of biblical and religious language to justify military action producing mass civilian casualties. This is precisely what Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 7:9–11 condemns: "Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered!' — only to go on doing all these abominations?" Religious confidence that Yahweh endorses one's violence is not faith. It is the abomination Yahweh indicts through His prophets.

Convergence 3 — Peace through dialogue, not domination: Pope Leo's call for "a peace through dialogue, not a peace imposed by force" resonates with Devarim 20:10–11: "When you draw near to a city to fight against it, offer terms of peace to it. And if it responds to you peaceably and it opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall do forced labor for you and shall serve you." The Torah's warfare code requires the offer of peace and dialogue before combat. Leo's Easter call recovers this covenant principle — even if he does not ground it in Devarim 20.

Where the covenant witness goes further than Leo: Pope Leo XIV speaks from within a theological framework that still maintains the legitimacy of "just war" — the Christian doctrine that warfare can be morally justified under certain conditions. Miqdash Bethel applies the Tanakh standard directly: the authorization for killing in the covenant framework comes from Yahweh's explicit command, not from human political-theological calculation about justice and proportionality. The Tanakh's six cities of refuge — Yahweh's own framework for distinguishing authorized from unauthorized killing — requires two or three witnesses, covenant court authority, and specific criteria for capital offense. These conditions are not met by a government's strategic assessment that a military strike is necessary and proportionate. The covenant standard is higher than the Just War standard. And the covenant standard says: 1,600+ civilians killed without Yahweh's explicit authorization is 1,600+ counts of ratzach.

D. THE COVENANT INDICTMENT — THE WORD OF YAHWEH TO THE NATIONS

"Thus says Yahweh: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place." — Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 22:3

Miqdash Bethel Covenant Assembly issues this covenant witness to all parties in the 2026 conflict and to all national leaders who order the shedding of blood in the name of security, defense, national interest, or religious mandate:

To the governments who ordered these strikes: The covenant word of Yahweh holds you accountable for every civilian death your military operations have produced. "Blood pollutes the land" (Bemidbar 35:33). Political necessity does not atone for innocent blood. Military strategy does not atone for innocent blood. National security justifications do not atone for innocent blood. "No atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it." The covenant is not interested in your strategic rationale. It is interested in the 340+ children who bore the *tzelem* Elohim and are now dead.

To those who use the Bible to endorse this warfare: "Your hands are full of blood" (Yeshayahu 1:15). "When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen." Religious endorsement of warfare that produces mass civilian casualties is not covenant faith. It is the abomination Yahweh addressed through Yirmeyahu in the Temple itself: standing in the house of Yahweh and claiming His protection while engaging in the murder of the innocent. The covenant does not work this way. It has never worked this way. Yahweh's prophets have said so at every generation.

To all nations watching: The globalization of indifference that Pope Leo XIV identifies — the numbing to the deaths of thousands — is a covenant warning. "We cannot continue to be indifferent," Leo declared. The covenant community of Miqdash Bethel agrees: indifference to the violation of the sixth commandment at national and global scale is itself a covenant failure. *Lo tirtzach* is not merely a personal ethic. It is the covenant standard Yahweh established for all nations through the Noachide covenant of Bereishit 9. Every government, every military, every political leader, every person of faith who endorses, enables, or becomes indifferent to the mass shedding of innocent blood is answerable to

the Yahweh who declared: "the voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground" (Bereishit 4:10).

E. GENERAL COVENANT APPLICATION PRINCIPLES — TIMELESS STANDARDS FOR EVERY GENERATION

Beyond the specific witness to the 2026 Iran conflict, the following covenant principles from the sixth commandment apply to every generation, every nation, and every political context in which human governments choose violence over covenant justice:

- Principle 1 — Peace first, always: Yahweh's own warfare code (Devarim 20:10) requires the offer of peace before combat. Any government that launches military strikes without exhausting diplomatic alternatives has violated the covenant warfare standard before the first shot is fired.
- Principle 2 — Non-combatants are inviolable: The civilian population — the elderly, the children, the sick, the uninvolved — bear the tzelem Elohim equally with soldiers. Warfare strategies that knowingly produce mass civilian casualties as acceptable collateral damage are, under the sixth commandment, mass ratzach.
- Principle 3 — Leaders who kill for gain are covenant criminals: "Woe to him who builds a town with blood" (Habakkuk 2:12). The political leader who initiates warfare for economic advantage, resource control, geopolitical dominance, or domestic political gain — rather than for covenant-authorized defense of innocent life — is a murderer at national scale before Yahweh.
- Principle 4 — Religious justification of murder is the most dangerous form of ratzach: Yahweh's prophets reserved their most severe indictments for those who committed murder while claiming His name. The perversion of covenant faith into a weapon of war is not merely political — it is the highest form of covenant betrayal.
- Principle 5 — Innocent blood cries to Yahweh from the ground: From Hevel to the 340 children killed in Iran in 2026, the blood of innocent persons cries to Yahweh. Yahweh heard Hevel's blood (Bereishit 4:10). He hears every death. Political authority does not silence the cry of innocent blood before Yahweh.
- Principle 6 — The covenant community cannot be indifferent: The people of Yahweh are called to be a prophetic voice against the murder of the innocent — in every generation, in every geography, regardless of which political power is doing the killing. Indifference to ratzach at national scale is a covenant failure. The covenant community of Miqdash Bethel issues its

witness to the world without political partisanship, without national loyalty that supersedes Yahweh's covenant standard, and without the fear of human authority that silences the prophetic voice.

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does Yahweh require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your Elohim?" — Micah (Micah) 6:8

STUDY REVIEW & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

1. Yahweh chose the word *ratzach* (רצח) rather than *harag* (הרג) for the sixth commandment. What is the covenant significance of this lexical choice — and what does it establish about the scope of what Yahweh prohibits versus what He permits?
2. Bereishit 1:27 establishes that every human being is created in the *tzelem Elohim* — the image of Yahweh. How does this theological reality change your personal understanding of the prohibition of murder? Does it extend your sense of who is protected by the sixth commandment?
3. Vayikra 19:17 addresses the inner disposition: "You shall not hate your brother in your heart." The sixth commandment addresses the act of murder. The Torah addresses its root — hatred. What covenant disciplines does the individual covenant person practice to address the inner disposition that can lead to murder?
4. US homicide rates dropped 20% in 2025 — the largest single-year decline ever recorded. From a covenant perspective, what produces a decline in murder rates — and what covenant principles, if applied at the community level, would continue that decline toward the covenant standard of *lo tirtzach*?

COMMUNITY LEVEL

5. Devarim 21:1–9 holds the covenant community responsible for unsolved murders within its territory — requiring communal atonement before Yahweh even when the killer is unknown. What

does this covenant requirement say about community responsibility for the conditions that produce murder? Is passive non-participation in murder sufficient for a community before Yahweh?

6. Yeshayahu 1:21–23 describes a community whose leadership has become murderous through corruption, bribery, and injustice — calling it a "faithful city become a whore." At what point does a community's tolerance of corrupt leadership that enables murder make the community itself guilty before Yahweh of covenant violation?

7. Devarim 27:25 declares: "Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood." In what ways do modern communities financially enable murder through political, legal, and economic structures — and what covenant responsibilities does this create for the covenant community within those structures?

NATIONAL LEVEL

8. Devarim 20:10 commands: "When you draw near to a city to fight against it, offer terms of peace to it." How does this covenant requirement for peace before combat apply to the 2026 US-Israel strikes on Iran? Were the conditions of Devarim 20 met before the February 28, 2026 airstrikes began?

9. Yirmeyahu 22:3 establishes the covenant standard for national leadership: "Do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place." Over 340 children were killed in the 2026 Iran conflict. Over 100 legal experts cited violations of the UN Charter. How does Yahweh's covenant standard for national governance assess the leadership decisions that produced these deaths?

10. Habakkuk 2:12 declares: "Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity!" Is it possible for a nation that has produced 200 million war deaths in the 20th century and continues to wage warfare producing large civilian casualties in the 21st century to escape Yahweh's covenant woe oracle? What would national covenant repentance look like in practice?

WORLD LEVEL

11. Bereishit 9:5–6 establishes the prohibition of murder as a Noachide covenant — binding on all humanity, not only on Israel. On what basis does Yahweh hold nations outside the Sinai covenant accountable to the sixth commandment? How does this universal covenant accountability apply to the nations involved in the 2026 Iran conflict?

12. Pope Leo XIV declared: "We cannot continue to be indifferent! And we cannot resign ourselves to evil!" He specifically condemned the use of religious justification for warfare. The Torah's prophetic tradition reaches the same conclusion. What is the covenant community's responsibility when secular and religious leaders — from different traditions — converge on a shared prophetic witness against mass killing?

13. The 20th century produced between 100–231 million war-related deaths — the most murderous century in human history. Bemidbar 35:33 declares that innocent blood pollutes the land and demands atonement. What does it mean for the world to be living in the aftermath of 200 million unaddressed murders? What does covenant atonement for this record look like at the global level?

14. Michah 6:8 offers the covenant alternative to violence: "Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with your Elohim." How does this three-part covenant standard — justice, lovingkindness, covenant

humility — function as a practical alternative to the cycle of violence, retaliation, and war that defines the current global moment?

15. Bereishit 4:10 records Yahweh declaring: "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground." Over 340 children died in the 2026 Iran conflict. Over 1,600 civilians. Their blood cries to Yahweh from the ground. What does it mean — practically and covenantally — for the covenant community of Miqdash Bethel to hear that cry and respond with prophetic witness rather than political silence?

SCRIPTURE INDEX — LESSON 16: SHEMOT 20:13 | DEVARIM 5:17

Reference	Teaching / Witness
Bereishit (Gen.) 1:27	"So Elohim created man in His own image" — tzelem Elohim: the theological foundation of every human life's inviolability.
Bereishit (Gen.) 4:8–16	Qayin murders Hevel — the first ratzach. "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground."
Bereishit (Gen.) 9:5–6	"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed" — the universal Noachide covenant prohibition of murder.
Shemot (Ex.) 20:13	Lo tirtzach — the sixth commandment. You shall not murder.
Shemot (Ex.) 21:12–14	The Torah's own murder/manslaughter distinction — intent and premeditation determine ratzach.
Shemot (Ex.) 22:2	"There shall be no bloodguilt" for killing in self-defense — authorized killing is not ratzach.
Vayikra (Lev.) 19:17	"You shall not hate your brother in your heart" — the covenant addresses the inner disposition that produces murder.
Bemidbar (Num.) 35:9–34	The cities of refuge — Yahweh's complete framework distinguishing murder from authorized killing. "Blood pollutes the land."
Bemidbar (Num.) 35:33	"No atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it."
Devarim (Deut.) 5:17	Lo tirtzach — the sixth commandment repeated in the covenant renewal address.
Devarim (Deut.) 19:11–13	The premeditated murderer must be handed over to the avenger of blood — "your eye shall not pity him."
Devarim (Deut.) 20:10–20	The covenant law of warfare — peace offered first, non-combatants protected, no environmental destruction.
Devarim (Deut.) 21:1–9	The community's responsibility for unsolved murders — communal atonement required before Yahweh.
Devarim (Deut.) 27:25	"Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood" — covenant curse on enabling murder for gain.
Tehillim (Ps.) 94:21	"They condemn the innocent to death" — the covenant indictment of judicial corruption enabling murder.
Yeshayahu (Isa.) 1:15	"Your hands are full of blood" — worship rejected by Yahweh because of blood-stained national leadership.
Yeshayahu (Isa.) 1:21–23	"How the faithful city has become a whore" — the community whose leadership is murderous and corrupt.

Reference	Teaching / Witness
Yirmeyahu (Jer.) 7:9–11	Standing in Yahweh's house claiming His protection while committing murder — the covenant abomination Yahweh indicts.
Yirmeyahu (Jer.) 22:3	"Do no wrong or violence... nor shed innocent blood" — Yahweh's covenant standard for national leadership.
Yirmeyahu (Jer.) 22:17	"You have eyes and heart only for your dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood" — the prophetic indictment of murderous leaders.
Habakkuk (Hab.) 1:2	"O Yahweh, how long shall I cry for help, and You will not hear? Or cry 'Violence!' and You will not save?" — the prophet's cry against mass killing.
Habakkuk (Hab.) 2:12–13	"Woe to him who builds a town with blood" — the covenant woe oracle against empires built on murder.
Michah (Mic.) 6:8	"Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with your Elohim" — the covenant alternative to the culture of violence.

"Thus says Yahweh: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place." — Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 22:3

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does Yahweh require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your Elohim?" — Michah (Micah) 6:8

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