Matthew 5 Quotations from the Hebrew Bible

2021-10-03

1. Matthew 5: 21: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.'
2. Exodus 20: 13: "You shall not kill.
3. Deuteronomy 5: 17: "'You shall not kill.
4. This is one of the Ten Commandments, which are recorded in two places – Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 – with small variations.
5. This is the RSV translation. The word, “kill,” is translated as “murder” in other translations, including NRSV, NIV, and JPS.
6. The argument is that the Hebrew word רָצַח refers to illicit killing. Other Hebrew words, מוּת , הָרַג , and נָכָה, are more common and seem to be broader in meaning.
7. Exodus 2: 12, 14: He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed ( נָכָה ) the Egyptian and hid him in the sand… He answered, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill (הָרַג) me as you killed (הָרַג ) the Egyptian?"…
8. 2 Sam 3: 30: So Jo'ab and Abi'shai his brother slew ( נָכָה ) Abner, because he had killed (מוּת ) their brother As'ahel in the battle at Gibeon.
9. More than half the verses that use the same word for “kill” as the Commandment ( רָצַח) involve cities of refuge.
10. For example, Numbers 35: 12: The cities shall be for you a refuge from the avenger, that the manslayer ( רָצַח) may not die (מוּת ) until he stands before the congregation for judgment.
11. Therefore, these scholars argue that the Commandment, “You shall not kill” does not preclude war or capital punishment.
12. Matthew 5: 27: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.
13. Exodus 20: 14: "You shall not commit adultery.
14. Deuteronomy 5: 18: "'Neither shall you commit adultery.
15. This is another of the Ten Commandments.
16. The Commandment applies to both men and women but is probably not completely symmetrical.
17. Men were permitted more than one wife (and concubines if he could afford them!), but women were not.
18. A married woman is commanded to have no men other than her husband, while a man is commanded not to violate another man’s marriage.
19. This fits in with Jesus’ words in Matthew 5: 32: But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.
20. The Commandment takes what could be a private, family matter, and makes it an offense against God and the community. The Hebrew word for adultery, נָאַף, is also used figuratively for idolatrous worship.
21. Jesus’ extension of the Commandment is related to another commandment against coveting:
22. Exodus 20: 17: “You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's."
23. Deuteronomy 5: "'Neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife; and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.'
24. One of small differences between the Ten Commandments in Exodus and Deuteronomy: Deuteronomy sets “your neighbor’s wife” apart from the neighbor’s goods.
25. Matthew 5: 31: "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'
26. Deuteronomy 24: 1: "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house,
27. This is the beginning of a long sentence that continues (Deuteronomy 24: 2-4): and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter husband dislikes her and writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring guilt upon the land which the LORD your God gives you for an inheritance.
28. Taken in context, this is not so much giving permission to divorce, or requiring a certificate of divorce, but an ordinance putting a constraint on a husband remarrying a woman he has divorced.
29. The term for bill of divorce (סֵפֶר כְּרִיתֻת ) literally means “document of cutting off.”
30. The Septuagint translates this as ἀποστασίου, which is the same term Jesus uses in Matthew.
31. In other places, the Greek scriptures use a different word for divorce, ἀπολύω, which can be translated send away or release.
32. For example, Matthew 1: 19: and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her [or send her away] quietly.
33. The Hebrew scriptures are silent about women who initiate divorce, but the practice was known in the ancient near east.
34. Matthew 5: 33: "Again you have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.'
35. Leviticus 19: 12: And you shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.
36. Scholars call this part of Leviticus, chapters 17-26, “the Holiness Code.”
37. Leviticus 19: 1-2: And the LORD said to Moses, "Say to all the congregation of the people of Israel, You shall be holy; for I the LORD your God am holy.
38. Compare Matthew 5: 43: You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
39. The first part of Leviticus 19: 12 is close to one of the commandments
40. Exodus 20: 7: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.
41. Deuteronomy 5: "'You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.
42. However, Leviticus 19: 12 gives a different reason: to swear falsely in the LORD’s name brings disgrace on the Jewish people and their God. That is, instead of bringing down guilt on the individual, it profanes the name of God.
43. Matthew 5: 38: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.
44. Leviticus 24: 19-20: When a man causes a disfigurement in his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has disfigured a man, he shall be disfigured.
45. The Holiness Code again. Jesus quotes from it three times in this part of the Sermon on the Mount.
46. Exodus 21: 22-25: "When men strive together, …If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.
47. An example from the justice system: Deuteronomy 19: 16-21: If a malicious witness rises against any man to accuse him of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days; the judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother; so you shall purge the evil from the midst of you. And the rest shall hear, and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you. Your eye shall not pity; it shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.
48. An example of battlefield retribution: Judges 1: 6-7: Ado'ni-be'zek fled; but they pursued him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes. And Ado'ni-be'zek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and their great toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has requited me." And they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there.
49. 0ne interpretation: The earliest law codes consider offenses against another person private matters to be resolved privately. The law set a limit on the compensation an injured person could demand. The community did not punish crimes except when they affected the community (for example, blasphemy or treason).
50. W. Gunther Plaut:
51. “According to a literal reading, this law sets a maximum penalty while equating rich and poor.
52. “There is strong reason to believe that the biblical law did not envision literal physical retaliation but rather the payment of money damages.”
53. “There is no record of a single instance where a rabbinic court carried out physical retaliation; and Jewish tradition all but unanimously understood the language as referring to financial compensation.”
54. The rabbis were humane, but Jesus took this to a whole new level.
55. Matthew 5: 43: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'
56. Leviticus 19: 17-18: "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason with your neighbor, lest you bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.
57. The nouns used in these verses of Leviticus – brother (אָח), neighbor (עָמִית), sons of your own people (בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ), neighbor (רֵעַ) suggest that object of the commandment to love and not hate is your fellow Israelites.
58. The Hebrew Scriptures do not command – anywhere – that you hate your enemy.
59. Proverbs 25: 21: If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;

Sources:

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* The Torah: A Modern Commentary, 2005
* Robert Alter, The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary, 2019
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Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version (RSV) except where noted.