

# Frequently Asked Questions About the Old Testament

## SESSION 5 – EXODUS 21-40

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**If God values life, why did he direct the Israelites to totally destroy the people of the neighboring nations (particularly in light of the commandment, “You shall not murder”)?**

Much confusion has arisen from the misleading translation of Exodus 20:13 that occurs in most English versions. The Hebrew original uses a specific word for murder (*rasah*) in the sixth commandment and should be rendered “You shall not murder” (as opposed to many English versions which read “kill”). This is not a prohibition against capital punishment for capital crimes, since it is not a general term for the taking of life, such as our English word “kill” implies. Exodus 21:12, in the very next chapter, reads: “Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death.” This amounts to a specific divine command to punish murder with capital punishment, in keeping with Genesis 9:6: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.”

Violence and bloodshed are occasionally mentioned in the record of man’s history throughout Scripture, but never with approval. Yet there were specific situations when entire communities (such as Jericho) or entire tribes (such as Amalekites) were to be exterminated by the Israelites in obedience to God’s command. In each case these offenders had gone so far in degeneracy and moral depravity that their continued presence would result in spreading the dreadful cancer of sin among God’s covenant people.

–*Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*

**Why would God make provision for a husband and wife not to leave together when the husband is freed as a slave (Exodus 21:4)?**

First, it would be helpful to consider why God allowed Hebrews to enslave other Hebrews. Though they had all been slaves in Egypt and were now set free, Moses permitted a sort of voluntary slavery to continue. Individuals could sell their services for up to six years to repay debts or make restitution. Hebrew slaves were regarded more as hired hands. The seventh year, their debts were canceled, and they received their freedom.

Second, with regard to why God would make provision for a husband and wife not to leave together when the husband was no longer a slave. This would make more sense to us if we could see through the lens of their culture. Their customs required a man to “purchase” a wife by paying a bride-price to her father. If a slave owner purchased a bride for his servant, however, she technically belonged to the one who paid the price. This policy seems harsh, but it was softened by other provisions (see Exodus 21:8,11,26-27).

–*The Quest Study Bible*

## **Who are the “poor” that are referred to in Exodus 23:3 (i.e., are these slaves)?**

The Hebrew word used in this passage is *dal*, which can be literally translated as “weak, thin, lean, or needy.” Thus, while this could refer to a slave, what is intended here are the “poor” in general.

–Don Porter

## **Exodus 24:13 seems to indicate that Joshua accompanied Moses up the mountain. Wasn't Moses instructed to go alone?**

While it is true that only Moses was to “approach the Lord,” there were others who were to accompany Moses to the mountain. In light of verse 24:18, it seems clear that only Moses went up the mountain in accordance with God's instructions (“and *he* stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights”).

–Don Porter

## **What does it mean when we read that the Lord spoke to Moses “face to face” (Exod. 33:11)?**

The phrase “face to face” is a metaphor that, along with the phrase “as a man speaks with his friend,” suggests spiritual communion and intimacy. The image should not be taken literally, especially in view of the fact that God said no one, including Moses, could see his face and live. It describes God's

straightforward and deep communication with Moses, not his physical presence (Numbers 12:6-8).

–*The Quest Study Bible*

## **What was Moses asking for when he said to the Lord, “Show me your glory” (Exod. 33:18)?**

The glory of God is the worthiness of God—the presence of God in the fullness of his attributes in some place or everywhere (Exodus 16:10; 29:43; 33:19-34:8; Isaiah 6:3). Thus, Moses wanted to see the character of God. In a sense, Moses' prayer was answered on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:30-32), where he shared a vision, however brief, of the Lord's glory with Elijah and three of Jesus' disciples.

–*NIV Bible Dictionary*

## **Why was the face of Moses “radiant” after he came down from the mountain (Exodus 34:30)?**

Some think this radiance was the glory Moses prayed for during his second 40 days (33:18). Others believe that Moses' anger when he first descended the mountain (32:19) canceled out any glory that would have appeared on his face. When Moses descended the second time, he was not angry.

–*The Quest Study Bible*

## **How did the Lord “speak” to Moses?**

On occasion it seems Moses actually heard an audible voice (7:89). Other times he may have experienced a mystical inner sensation or had a mental impression. God communicated with Moses more directly than with the other prophets who received visions or dreams (Numbers 12:6-8). In more than 20 ways and over 150 times, Numbers records that God spoke to Moses.

–*The Quest Study Bible*

## **Why were there multiple marriages in Israel after the giving of the Ten Commandments?**

The fact of the matter was that while polygamy was contrary to God's intention and ideal, nevertheless, because of what Christ called “the hardness of men's hearts” (Matthew 19:8). This practice was tolerated especially in the case of a political leader whose dynasty would fail if he were unable to produce a son by

his first wife.

*–Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*

## **Why would God be so concerned about the priestly garments (Exodus 39)?**

Some of the pieces of the priestly garments were not only beautiful but also significant. For example, one part of the high priest's uniform was the breastpiece. On the front of the breastpiece were attached 12 precious stones, each inscribed with the name of a tribe of Israel. This symbolized how the high priest represented all the people before God. The breastpiece also contained pockets that held two stones or plates called the Urim and the Thummim, which were consulted to determine God's will for the nation.

*–NIV Life Application Study Bible*