* 1. **Did Mattathias Violate the Sixth Commandment?**

“*You shall not murder*.” (Exodus 20:13)

On the face of it, the answer to the questions posed above is simple – yes, Mattathias did. Before we unpack this more, it is important to note what the sixth commandment is *not* saying. The sixth commandment does not prohibit “killing”. Huh?

The word “murder” is used 13 times in the Old Testament. We are forbidden to murder each other or to kill another person without authorization (like a government). In other words, this commandment does *not* prohibit (in all times and in all circumstances) the taking of life, but it puts severe restraints on it.

This commandment was a way to establish a rule against the taking of human life when the taking of that life was not authorized by God, or by God’s instrument (a government, for example). In some ways, this command wasn’t difficult – all you had to do to fulfill this command was to refrain from murder.

Killing becomes murder when (and only when) it is not properly justified, and the justifications are clear: you can use whatever force is necessary to protect your own life from a hostile aggressor, or to save the life of an innocent person from life-threatening danger (e.g. a police officer using lethal force to protect school children from a violent intruder). The main difference between legal and illegal use of force is a matter of motive and intent. The Old Testament provided these guidelines:

Accidental Killing is *not* Murder:

“*Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God allows it to happen, he is to flee to a place I designate*.” - Exodus 21: 12-13

“*But if he pushed him suddenly without enmity, or hurled anything on him without lying in wait or used a stone that could cause death, and without seeing him dropped it on him, so that he died, though he was not his enemy and did not seek his harm,**then the congregation shall judge between the manslayer and the avenger of blood, in accordance with these rules. And the congregation shall rescue the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to his city of refuge to which he had fled, and he shall live in it until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil.”* – Numbers 35: 22-25

Killing Performed in Self-Defence is *not* Murder:

*“If a thief is caught breaking in and is struck so that he dies, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed.”* – Exodus 22:2

A Killing Performed to Save the Life of an Innocent Person is *not* Murder:

*“One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.” –* Exodus 2: 11-12

“*When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people*.” – Genesis 14: 14-16

So what about Mattathias?