

it, kill both the woman and the animal. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads."

Warfare that is commanded by God

Numbers 21:32-35 -- "After Moses had sent spies to Jazer, the Israelites captured its surrounding settlements and drove out the Amorites who were there. Then they turned and went up along the road toward Bashan, and Og king of Bashan and his whole army marched out to meet them in battle at Edrei. The Lord said to Moses, 'Do not be afraid of him, for I have handed him over to you, with his whole army and his land. Do to him what you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon.' So they struck him down, together with his sons and his whole army, leaving them no survivors. And they took possession of his land."

Numbers 31:1-7 -- "The Lord said to Moses, 'Take vengeance on the Midianites for the Israelites. After that, you will be gathered to your people.' So Moses said to the people, 'Arm some of your men to go to war against the Midianites and to carry out the Lord's vengeance on them. Send into battle a thousand men from each of the tribes of Israel. So twelve thousand men armed for battle, a thousand from each tribe, were supplied from the clans of Israel. Moses sent them into battle, a thousand from each tribe, along with Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, who took with him articles from the sanctuary and the trumpets for signaling. They fought against Midian, as the Lord commanded Moses, and killed every man."

These two categories -- capital punishment and warfare commanded by God -- are clear exceptions to the obligation to preserve human life.

As far as the category of capital punishment is concerned, it could be argued that capital punishment of those who take away human life unlawfully is a deterrent to others who would seek to take away human life unlawfully, and thus in the larger sense actually serves to preserve life. However, since there are other actions for which capital punishment is stipulated, it should probably be viewed primarily as a punishment for transgressing some weighty commandments of the Law of God.

And as far as the category of warfare commanded by God is concerned, it should be noted that God's maintenance of His redemptive plan through His covenant people was crucial to their salvation (and ours), and thus this exception to the obligation to preserve human life really speaks of an even higher obligation--the preservation of the human soul in salvation.

6. Some obligations take precedence over others. The obligation to preserve human life takes precedence over the obligation to preserve possessions, but does not take precedence over the obligation to preserve the truth of God.