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Capital Punishment and Other Grave Crimes

20: 1-27

Chapter 20 supplements and reinforces **Chapter 18**, emphasizing the punishments for various offenses. Whereas the commandments in **Chapters 18** and **19** are addressed to would-be offenders and prohibit specific actions. Those in **Chapter 20** are addressed to the covenant community and explain the punishments for specific crimes. Except for **verses 19-21**, the crimes identified in this chapter receive **the death penalty** (see the commentary on **Exodus**, **to see link click [Ea](#) - A Life for a Life, an Eye for an Eye**). Though seemingly harsh, this was essential to prevent **sin** from infecting the community life of **God's people**.



The gravest public **sins** against life, religion, and the family were those which carried the maximum penalty of **death**, such a premeditated **murder** (**Exodus 21:12; Numbers 35** and **Deuteronomy 19**), **kidnapping** (**Exodus 21:16** and **Deuteronomy 24:7**), **adultery** (**Leviticus 20:10** and **Deuteronomy 22:22**), **homosexuality** (**Leviticus 20:13**), **blasphemy** (**Leviticus 24:13-16** and **23**), **idolatry** (**Deuteronomy 13:6-10**) and **persistent disobedience against authority** (**Deuteronomy 17:12** and **21:18-21**). The method of inflicting **capital punishment** is given twice as **stoning** (**Leviticus 20:2** and

27), and once as **burning (Leviticus 20:14)**, **understood by Jewish tradition as hot lead being poured down the throat!** The most severe expression of the death penalty, however, is found in **verses 3, 5-6, and 17-18**, the guilty person would be **cut off** from the covenant community.³⁴⁴

The basic principles of **the Ten Commandments** (see the commentary on the **Deuteronomy Bk - The Ten Words**) are incorporated into **Chapters 18** through **20**, though not in the same order and not always with the same emphasis.

The Ten Commandments	Leviticus
1-2 No other gods	18:2 and 19:4
3 Misuse the Name	19:12
4 Observe Shabbat	19:3b
5 Honor father/mother	19:3a
6 Do not murder	19:16b
7 No adultery	18:20 and 20:20
8 Do not steal	19:11a
9 No false witness	19:16a
10 Do not covet	19:18