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Religious Sins Deserving of Capital Punishment 20:1-8 and 27

Religious sins deserving of capital punishment DIG: What was the Jewish form of capital punishment? When was it taken away and by whom? Why was the punishment against those who worshiped Molech so severe? What did it mean for someone to be cut off?

REFLECT: How do you feel about capital punishment? Do you think it is unfair or justified? When you read that "The wages of sin is death," do you think of it in terms of spiritual death or physical death? Is the death penalty a deterrent to wrong behavior or punishment?

God's people must shun pagan beliefs and develop lives of holiness to the LORD.



The transgression of certain **commandments** carried the **death** penalty. **For the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Virtually all these sins have been described before. The new aspect is the punishment.** Though capital crimes have previously appeared, here, the Bible introduces the punishment of **stoning** for the first time. **The** whole **community** participated, and therefore, symbolically

made a statement that it had removed the uncleanness from its midst.[345] The methods of execution are described in **the Oral Law** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click Ei – The Oral Law**). None of them are pleasant. Only the Great Sanhedrin (see **The Life of Christ Lg – The Great Sanhedrin**), the Jewish Supreme Court, had the authority to issue the **death** sentence.[346]

God's people must avoid false religion (20:1-6): ADONAI said to Moshe, "Say to the people of Isra'el, 'If someone from the people of Isra'el or one of the foreigners living in Isra'el sacrifices one of his children to Molech, he must be put to death (20:1-2a). The offering of **children** to **Molech** was previously mentioned (see **Dd – Incest and Other Uncleanness: Molech**). There, the offense was equated with profaning **God's** name. Here, the punishment for this crime is given. Any **Israelite** or stranger living in **the Land** who **offered his child** up to **Molech,** trying to gain favor with the deity, was to be **put to death**. Offering **children** to **Molech** not only involved horrendous treatment of one's offspring but also constituted idolatry in that the offering was a sacrifice being made to a pagan god **(Deuteronomy 18:21; Second kings 23:10)**.[347]

The people of the Land are to stone him to death (20:2b). The hofal form of the verb *yummat,* meaning *he shall be put to death,* points to execution by human hand **(Exodus 21:15-17** and **29)**. The Hebrew verb *r-g-m* is used specifically to describe what is done with **stones**. **They** are to be **thrown** or **hurled (Leviticus 24:14; Numbers 15:35-36** and **21:21).** The question arises as to how the sentence was to be carried out (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Dg – Judges: Crime against the covenant**). Witnesses for the prosecution **threw** the first **stones**, then they were followed by others of **the** covenant **community**.[348] In most circumstances **the stoning** would be performed outside the camp **(Leviticus 24:14; Deuteronomy 22:24; First Kings 21:13)**. **Stoning** was still carried out during New Covenant times **(John 10:31; Acts 7:59-60, 14:5)**.[349]

There are those today to say that capital punishment should be abolished because it has been proven that it does not discourage people from committing horrific crimes. But that is a worldly view because the Bible teaches just the opposite. Capital punishment is not meant to be a deterrent for other crimes, it is meant to be a punishment for the crime committed.

Additionally, **Ha'Shem** said: **I too will set myself against him and cut him off from his people, because he has sacrificed his child to Molech, defiling my Sanctuary and profaning My holy name (20:3).** Impurities pollute. The **holy**

and the impure are contagious states that don't mix.[350] Being **cut off** was the punishment for mixing unclean and common (see **Bj – The Mitzvot of Purification**) with that which is **holy**. **In rabbinic literature the penalty is called *karet*, or "cutting off." In priestly literature, the penalty of *karet* was understood to include a series of related punishments at the hand of God, ranging from the immediate death of an offender, as in 20:17, to his premature death at a later time, and even to the death of his descendants. In Mishnah Sanhedrin 9:6 and Mishnah Keritot 1:2, this penalty was characterized as *mitah biydei shamayim*, or "death at the hands of heaven." Since in 7:20-21 *karet* is mentioned in the context as childlessness, there is the implication that it took that course as well.**[351]

The **death** penalty of Torah functions on two levels. When a **sin** was charged against someone, the Great Sanhedrin was to investigate the matter, hold a trial, examine the witnesses and arrive at a verdict. If the person accused was found guilty, the Human Court was to carry out the verdict. If, however, there were no witnesses or there was not adequate evidence to convict, then the sentence was thought to be administered by the Heavenly Court.[352] In other words, **Ha'Shem** had to punish those who were truly guilty.

Ha'Shem held **the community** responsible if **they** did not punish the offender. This theme of corporate responsibility came from the nature of **the community** as the **holy** people of **God**. When there was **sin**, **the community** no longer enjoyed the fellowship with **YHVH** because its **holiness** had been compromised. In the B'rit Chadashah, **the people of God** are the sanctuary and its **holiness**. The uncleanness of idolatry receives mention by the apostle Paul because he advocated faithfulness and resistance to **sin** (see the commentary on **Second Corinthians Bi – Do Not be Unequally Yoked with Unbelievers**).[353]

They too faced the sentence of being **cut off** from **YHVH** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Fb – The Destruction of Babylon and the Restoration of Isra'el: three degrees of excommunication**). **If the people of the land look the other way** in negligence **when that man sacrifices his child to Molech, and fail to put him to death, then God Himself will set myself against him, his family** members who are equally to blame should **they** hide **their eyes, and everyone who follows him to go fornicating after Molech, and cut them off from their people (20:4-5).** If **the people** would turn a blind eye toward the **sin**, so to speak, **and look the other way,** and allowing **it** to go unchecked, **God** warns

that **He Himself** would intervene and administer justice.

When the Bible talks about **fornicating after Molech**, it is speaking of spiritual **adultery**. **Isra'el** is pictured as **the wife of ADONAI**. **For your husband is your Maker, ADONAI-Tzva'ot is His name. The Holy One of Isra'el is your Redeemer. He will be called the God of all the earth (Isaiah 54:5). Isra'el** would constantly go lusting after idols, as if **committing** spiritual **adultery (Ezeki'el 23:1-21). YHVH** said: **I supplied all their needs, yet they** ran **to the houses of prostitutes,** or the shrines of other gods **(Isaiah 5:7)**.

The **death** penalty was also punishment for consulting **spirit-mediums and sorcerers**. By seeking them out, **the Israelites** would be committing spiritual **adultery** and violating **her** covenant with **her husband, ADONAI**. **The person who turns to spirit-mediums and sorcerers to go fornicating after them – I will set Myself against him and cut him off from his people. A man or woman who is a spirit-medium or sorcerer must be put to death; they are to be stoned to death; their blood will be on them (20:6** and **27).** The phrase **blood will be on them** draws attention to the seriousness of the offense and is to be equated with the **death** penalty, which is the stated punishment for these offenses.

God's people are called to holiness (20:7-8): Safeguarding the **holiness** of the Tabernacle, **God's** house, dominates the world of **Leviticus**. **Isra'el** needed to purify **its** House, because a **holy God** demands **a holy** House.[354] **Therefore consecrate yourselves – you people must be holy, because I am ADONAI your God. Observe my mitzvot, and obey them; I am ADONAI, who sets you apart to be holy (20:7-8). ADONAI commands the Israelites** to make **themselves holy**. The only other place in the book where **YHVH commands Isra'el, "consecrate yourselves,"** is **11:44,** which concerns eating kosher. **Leviticus 20:7** repeats this because, as with the clean and unclean animals, **Isra'el's holiness** required distinction from the practices of the Gentile nations and adherence to a separate way of life, whether in diet, worship, or sexual practices. By avoiding activities that would tie **Isra'el** with the deities of other peoples, **they** would be recognizing that **ADONAI** was **their God** alone.[355]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that in **Your** great wisdom **You** are completely **holy** and completely loving. We so enjoy thinking about **Your** love, but the truth is that in order to be loving, **You** must also hate evil. It is such a comfort that when **You discipline, because God disciplines the one He loves (Hebrews 12:5-6).***

Your holiness *demands* ***discipline*** *for wayward believers; but* ***You*** *keep calling them so tenderly to repent and to come back to* ***You****.*

How it grieves my heart and your heart that some people think they do not need ***You****. They think they can live life for themselves, but what a lie it is to think that eternal happiness can be found anywhere other than in trusting* ***Your*** *grace and loving* ***You*** *with our whole heart* ***(Matthew 22:37-40)****.*

Some of my friends and family know in their heads that ***You*** *are the one true* ***God****; but they have no fear of* ***You*** *and no love for* ***You****. Dear heavenly* ***Father****, praise* ***You*** *for being the Awesome Almighty* ***King*** *of the Universe! Please touch the hearts of my friends and family. Open the eyes of their hearts to see that they will get the death penalty of eternity in hell if they do not choose to love you.* ***He who trusts in the Son has eternal life. He who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him (John 3:36).*** *In* ***Yeshua's holy*** *name and power of* ***His*** *resurrection. Amen*