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Family Sins Deserving of Capital Punishment 20: 9-26

Family sins deserving of capital punishment DIG: Why doesn't YHVH see the death penalty as "cruel and unusual punishment?" What is the meaning of being cut off? Has the death penalty been eliminated because of Romans 8:1? Why is living in the world so dangerous?

REFLECT: Since the Torah is our blueprint for daily living, why do you think ADONAI went into such detail regarding these disgusting sins within the family? Are these sins forgivable? Why or why not? What do you think about the different levels of punishment?

ADONAI separated His people from other pagan nations. Now that they were ready to move into the world of the Canaanites, they had to maintain significant distinctions in every aspect of their lives. Is it any different for us today? Who are the Canaanites for you?



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.[356] 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.[357]

The punishment for serious offenses was death (20:9-16): Leviticus next condemns the kinds of **sins** that were common in **the pagan** world and threatened to invade the lives of the people of **God**. It called for the covenant community to obey his commands. Thus, the argument of the whole chapter is, "Do not worship falsely, but obey **ADONAI**; do not live like **the pagans**, but obey **Ha'Shem**." A natural connection is made between the two. Those who might give way to false worship, eventually found themselves in the spiritual gutter.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **Your** perfect **love** and complete **holiness**. It is **Your love** that leads me to live a **holy** life that **You** want me to have. **I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly (John 10:10c)!** Thank **You** for **Your Holy Ruach's** abiding presence within me. **However, you are not in the flesh but in the Ruach – if indeed the Ruach Elohim dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Ruach of Messiah, he does not belong to Him (Romans 8:9)**. **He** helps me to be victorious over **temptations (1 Corinthians 10:13).***

> **Cursing parents:** The first violation of the divine order is **cursing parents**. Honoring parents is commanded in the Ten Words (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Bp – Honor Your Parents**). Thus, **a person who curses his father or mother must be put to death; having cursed his father or his mother.** The word **cursing** (Hebrew: *qalal*) can refer to treating **parents** as if **they** are of little importance, or stronger cursing, wishing the deity to do **them** harm (see the commentary on **the Life of David Ds – Shim'i Curses David**). The stronger meaning must apply here since the **sin** brought the **death penalty**. Moreover, **cursing** is more serious if it invokes **God** (or gods) to bring evil upon **the parents**. This is a serious attempt by some people to discredit or destroy their **parents**. In explaining the punishment **YHVH** says: **his blood is on him (20:9).** As a justification for the **death penalty**, this means that whoever committed the crime knew the consequences and

therefore bore the sole responsibility **(Ezeki'el 18:20)**. It also meant that **the blood** could not be avenged by a relative (see **Deuteronomy Dm – Six Cities of Refuge**).[358]

Adultery: The second major disruption of **God's** blueprint for living is the destruction of the family through **adultery**. It is forbidden in the Ten Words (see **Deuteronomy Br – Do Not Commit Adultery**). As its punishment makes clear, it was a very serious wrong, being an act of treachery against one's spouse **(Jeremiah 3:20; Malachi 2:14)**, as well as a **sin** against **ADONAI (Genesis 20:6** and **30:9)**, who created marriage between **a man** and **woman** as the cornerstone of a stable human society **(Genesis 2:18-24)**. **If a man commits adultery with another man's wife, that is, with the wife of a fellow countryman, both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death (20:10).** As its punishment makes clear, this mitzvah addresses cases of mutual, consensual, **sex**. In cases of rape, **the woman** is not held liable **(Deuteronomy 22:25-27)**.[359] Significantly, the B'rit Chadashah focuses on the intent of the **sin** and not just the act. **Yeshua** said that **a man who even looks at a woman with the purpose of lusting after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:28).** That **adulterer** may not have ruined a family by carrying out his desire, but as far as **Messiah** is concerned, **he** is guilty of the same **sin**.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for making guidelines that help me find joy in my life. **You** desire to fill my life with so many good things; though sometimes the forbidden apple does look so very good, but one bite is poison to the soul. Everyone **sins** sometimes, but praise **You** that when I **repent** – **You** so graciously **forgive (First John 1:9-10)**. Even though I **sin**, **Your Spirit** lives within me to convict me and counsel me to avoid **sin** and embrace righteousness. I love **You** and desire to obey **You**; I want to please **You** by my thoughts and actions. In **the Name** of **the One** who sits on **Your right hand**. Amen*

Incest: **The man who goes to bed** (Hebrew: *shakab,* indicating mutual consent, that is why both people received the **death penalty**) **with his father's wife** (another **wife**, not **his** own mother) **has disgraced his father sexually** (literally "uncovered the nakedness of the father")**, and both of them must be put to death.** Because **the father** and **his wife** were one flesh, violating **his wife** violated **him**. **their blood is on them.** In the other case, to sleep with a **daughter-in-law** was **a perversion** because it

introduced confusion into **God's** order. **YHVH** set up boundaries for marital relationships, and violating them for any reason, whether for power or lust, is wrong. More than that **it** is **sinful**. Therefore, **if a man goes to bed with his daughter-in-law, both of them must be put to death; they have committed a perversion, and their blood is on them (20:11-12).** The B'rit Chadashah records the case where **Paul** found **a man** guilty of having such a relationship with **his father's wife and delivered him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh (First Corinthians 5:1-5). Pagan** societies like ancient **Corinth** might have allowed such practices, but in the eyes of **Ha'Shem**, they were **sinful**.[360]

Homosexuality: The Torah clearly prohibited **homosexual** acts as violations of the divine order for life (see **Ae – The Bible and Homosexual Practice**). **If a man goes to bed with a man as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination.** These are other words and phrases that **God** uses to describe this deviant practice: **cut off, detestable, wicked, vile, an outrageous thing, godlessness, without excuse, fools, sinful desires, impurity, degrading their bodies, shameful lusts, unnatural relations, penalty, deceived, sexually immoral, sinful, the unholy, irreligious, perversions, a lie exposed as a warning of the everlasting fire awaiting those who must undergo punishment.** And the B'rit Chadashah confirms that it is an **abomination** (see the commentary on **Romans An – The Depraved Mind of the Pagan Gentile**). Thus, **they must be put to death; their blood is on them (20:13).** In an effort to justify the **homosexual** lifestyle, various modern writers try to revise the interpretation of passages regarding this **abomination** in **Leviticus**. However, we must remember that **Homosexuality**, like all the **sins** listed here, is not the unforgivable **sin** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Em – Whoever Blasphemes Against the Holy Spirit Will Never Be Forgiven**).

Sexual relations with a woman and her daughter: This mitzvah next addresses **a man** who took two **women** to live with, **a mother** and **her daughter** together. **If a man marries a woman and her mother, it is depravity** (Hebrew: *zimmah,* or *wickedness*)**,** and all three **are to be put to death by fire, so that there will not be wickedness among you (20:14). Death by fire** bore a special relationship to forbidden **sexual** behavior. According to **21:9**, if **the daughter of a priest defiled herself by becoming a prostitute, she must be burned in the fire.** In the account of

Genesis 38:24, Judah threatened **his daughter-in-law Tamar** with **death by fire** when **he** learned that **she** had become **pregnant** with awaiting levirate marriage, an offense synonymous to **adultery**.[361] The **burning** of the corpse would represent complete removal from **the LORD's** people: not even the bones are left **(Second Kings 9:36-37)**. In today's language, **they** have no tombstone and are not even in an unmarked grave. The method of punishment suggests that this type of incestuous relationship was particularly vile.[362] It was used so infrequently that the specifics of how it was carried out seems to have been forgotten by the time **the Oral Law** was written (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ei – The Oral Law**).

Bestiality: In the case of the **sin** of bestiality, it is a clear case of violating the divine order of creation. It brought about confusion because it was contrary to the laws of nature. The one who committed the crime and **the animal** involved were both put to **death**. **If a man has sexual relations with an animal, he must be put to death, and you are to kill the animal. If a woman approaches an animal and has sexual relations with it, you are to kill the woman and the animal; their blood will be on them (20:15-16). According to Jewish tradition, the reason the animal was to be put to death was because the sight of the animal would have been a constant reminder of the heinous union.** Although the manner in which the **death penalty** was to be carried out for both is not stated, it was most likely **stoning**, the common method of execution.[363]

The Torah's demands of capital punishment for certain **sins** seems objectionable to many today because they are not willing to admit the seriousness of **sin**. Though believers are typically willing to theologically accept the idea that **sin** merits eternal punishment, they are frequently unwilling to accept the idea that it might merit a **death penalty**. Yet, if we apply the standard of equal weights and measures, we will have to acknowledge that the **death penalty** in this life is far more lenient than an eternity in hell separated from **the love** of **God**. If we can stomach eternal damnation, then who are we to object to a simple **death** sentence which, at the most, merely shortens one's life on this earth.

Often it is inferred by many that the **death** penalties have all been removed because: **There is now no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Yeshua (Romans 8:1).** Undoubtedly, **the condemnation Paul** speaks of is

not **condemnation** in this world, but in the world to come. Otherwise, how could justice be served? The idea that justice would be overturned or **death penalties** revoked because a guilty person is a believer is indefensible. Justice must be served. If a believer is found guilty of murder, although saved (see **The Life of Christ Ms – The Eternal Security of the Believer**), he must face the punishment for his crime like any other **man**. However, if he has repented and clung to the hem of **Messiah**, he may go to his punishment with the certainty that the punishment in this world is adequate. He will only face the loss of rewards in heaven (see the commentary on **Revelation Cc – We Must All Appear Before the Bema Seat of Christ**).[364]

The punishment for some violations was to be cut off (20:17-19): With the next section comes a change in the way the mitzvot were enforced, which may indicate a different kind of **sin** or level of seriousness. Up to this point, for each violation of Torah the guilty were put to **death** by the community after a proper trail from the Great Sanhedrin. For the next few violations, the Bible simply says that the guilty **are to be cut off publicly** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Fb – The Destruction of Babylon and the Restoration of Isra'el: three degrees of excommunication**).

Sexual relations with a sister (20:17): If a man takes his sister, his father's daughter or his mother's daughter. Here, the expression probably means that **the man married his sister**, or at least that **they** lived together as **husband** and **wife**. This is confirmed by the fact that **he** had **sexual relations with her, and she consented. ADONAI** declares that **it is a shameful thing. They are to be cut off publicly – he has had sexual relations with his sister, and he will bear the consequences of their wrongdoing.** The act is a violation of the boundary of the family.[365]

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.[366]

Sexual relations with a menstruating woman (20:18): Having **sexual** relations with **a woman** during **her period** is also included here was a serious violation of **God's** order of marital relations. **Sexual relations** during **menstruation** was ruled out in **Leviticus 15:19** and 24, where the punishment was only a period of uncleanness for the couple followed by the ritual cleansing in a mikvah. Here, the punishment was more severe. They would be **cut off**. If **a man goes to bed with a woman in her menstrual period and has sexual relations with her, he has exposed the source of her blood, and she has exposed the source of her blood; both of them are to be cut off from their people. Ha'Shem** dealt with **the couple** because it was impossible to take **them** to court. **Leviticus 15** dealt with all kinds of incidental contact with things unclean, but **Leviticus 20** deals with the deliberate violations of the Torah. If the violation was due to merely an accident of timing, then uncleanness and ritual impurity were in order. But if it was done intentionally, that meant those involved knowingly violated the **holiness** code of **God** (see **Cy – The Holiness Code**).

Sexual relations with a close relative (20:19): In the final violation in this section, **ADONAI** said: **You are not to have sexual relations with your mother's sister or your father's sister; a person who does this has had sexual relations with his close relative; they will bear the consequences of their wrongdoing. God** would deal with **them** in **His** own time and way. Like the other two violations in this section, they too would be **cut off**.

Lesser violations were punished with childlessness (20:20-21). In the next cases, the punishment changes to **childlessness**, a form of divine punishment that was not as strong as **death** by **stoning** or being **cut off** from the covenant community, but indicated **God's** disapproval just the same. The word for **childless** (Hebrew: *ariri*, means *stripped*). It is used in the sense of posterity, like in **Genesis 15:2**, where Abraham says: **What will You give me since I remain childless.** The word is also used in a curse on **King Jehoiachin** (Hebrew **Coniah**, a shortened form of **Jeconiah**, also called **Jehoiachin**) in **Jeremiah 22:30: Record this man as if childless . . . for none of his offspring will prosper, nor sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah.** From these we see that the curse of **childlessness** did not mean someone had no **children**. Indeed, **Jehoiachin** had **children (First Chronicles 3:17-18).** For **him**, a king, it was as if **he** had no child, no true son (of a full **wife**) to keep **his** memory alive or provide a legitimate place in

the genealogy. **He** was "struck off the list," as it were. In this chapter, then, illegitimate marriage relationships might have produced children, but in **ADONAI's** sight they were not legitimate and would not benefit the family. In the ancient world, this was a great calamity.[367]

> **Sexual relations with an aunt (20:20):** If **a man** had **sexual relations** with **an aunt**, the punishment was **childlessness**. **If a man goes to bed with his uncle's wife, he has disgraced his uncle sexually.** Because **a woman's** nakedness is **her husbands** – **they** are one flesh – **he dishonored his uncle**. **They will bear the consequences of their sin and die childless.** The **sin** violated **her** relationship to **him** as well.
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> **Sexual relations with a sister-in-law (20:21): If a man takes his brother's wife, it is uncleanness.** Here, the expression probably means that **the man married his sister-in-law**, or at least that **they** lived together as **husband** and **wife**. **He has disgraced his brother sexually,** and as a result, **they will be childless (20:21). The couple** would face the punishment for **adultery** (**death** at the hands of the Earthly Court) in addition to the added punishment of **childlessness**. In other words, **they** would not only face **the death penalty**, but **they** would leave no heir to carry on **their** family line (divine justice administered by the Heavenly Court). **Rashi suggests that if they already had children, their children would die childless.**[368] **People** who choose to violate **God's** boundaries of **marriage** cannot expect **God's blessing** on **their** union.

God's people are called to holy living (20:22-26): You are to observe all my regulations and rulings and act on them, so that the Land to which I am bringing you will not vomit you out. Do not live by the regulations of the nation which I am expelling ahead of you; because they did all these things, which is why I detested them. But to you I have said, "You will inherit their land; I will give it to you as a possession, a land flowing with milk and honey." I am ADONAI your God, who has set you apart from other peoples. Therefore, you are to distinguish between clean and unclean animals and between clean and unclean birds; do not make yourselves detestable with an animal, bird or reptile that I have set apart for you to regard as unclean. Rather, you people are to be holy for me; because I, ADONAI, am holy; and I have set you apart from the other peoples, so that you can belong to me.

The instruction for the people of **Isra'el** was that **they** sanctify **themselves** and be **holy**. **Leviticus 20:22** states the message very graphically, they must keep all the mitzvot or **the Land** would **vomit them out**. Put negatively **(20:23)**, **they** had to avoid the customs of **the Gentile nations**, for it was because of those corrupt practices that **YHVH** expelled the Canaanites from **the land**. Stated positively, the motivation for loyalty was that **Isra'el** was **God's** elected **nation. She** existed because of the covenant, and lived in anticipation of the fulfillment of the divine purposes **(20:24)**. **ADONAI** separated **His people** from other **pagan nations**. Now that **they** were ready to move into the world of the Canaanites, **they** had to maintain significant distinctions in every aspect of **their** lives. **They** were **holy**, because **the LORD** who **set them apart** is **holy**.

This message is important for both **Jewish** and **Gentile** believers. **The Jew** must remember that **he** is **a Jew**, and not one **the nations**. **He** must not seek to emulate the ways of **the Gentiles**. In addition, **he** must not seek to hide **his** identity. **The Gentile** must no longer consider **himself** as a child of **a pagan nation**, but **one** as born again and **grafted into the** cultivated **olive tree**, or **Isra'el** (see the commentary on **Romans Cz – The Illustration of Isra'el's Future**), set apart from **the Gentile** world. Thus, **Peter** tells the **Gentile** believers of today to **be holy**, regarding **themselves** as part of **Isra'el**, no longer a part of the **Gentile** world. Instead, **they** are to regard **themselves** as **aliens and strangers** among **the nations, "Dear friends, I urge you as aliens and temporary residents not to give in to the desires of your old nature, which keep warring against you; but to live such good lives among the pagans that even though they now speak against you as evil-doers, they will, as a result of seeing your good actions, give glory to God on the Day of His coming" (First Peter 2:11-12).**[369]

Haftarah K'doshim reading (Amos 9:7-15 (A); Ezeki'el 20:19-20 (S):

(see the commentary on Deuteronomy Af – Parashah)

Zadokites ruled as **High Priests** from the time of **David** to the Hasmoneans, who threw off Seleucid rule **(First and Second Maccabees). Zadok** sided with **David** when **Absalom** rebelled against **his father** and **king (Second Samuel 19:11)**, and **he** sided with **David** when **Adonijah** tried to seize **Solomon's** crown **(First Kings 1:8)**. Now, yet another **Zadokite** preaches to those facing exile from Jerusalem. **Ezeki'el** warned his generation not to live by the rules and customs of

their parents, but rather to shed their idolatries **(Ezeki'el 20:18)**. According to a standard of strict justice, the nation should have perished for worshiping **the idols** of **Egypt (Ezeki'el 20:7-8; Joshua 24:14)**. A pattern develops. **Isra'el** rejected **ADONAI's mitzvot** and **profaned His Shabbats (Ezeki'el 20:13). Isra'el's** disobedience defamed **God's Name** and hindered **His** efforts to redeem **the Gentile nations (Ezeki'el 20:9** and **14)**. Yet, in **His** grace, **YHVH** continued to extend compassion **(Ezeki'el 20:17)** and resisted **finishing them off in the desert**. What began during the exodus continued during the exile.

B'rit Hadashah reading (Matthew 5:48):

Therefore, be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48). Holiness includes being **loving** in godly ways. **Yeshua** set the standards for **His disciples** when **He** said: **Unless your righteousness is far greater than that of the Torah-teachers and Pharisees, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:20 CJB)! Messiah** extended the standard of **love** for one's neighbor and the stranger in the Land to one's enemies. Application of a principle of strict justice (apart from mercy) would have destroyed **Isra'el** for practicing **idolatry** in **the wilderness (Ezeki'el 20:18)**. **God** used **Jewish** disobedience for **His** own purposes. But, in contrast with that, **Gentiles** now have the opportunity to be the conscious and intentional means of **blessing** to **Isra'el**. **ADONAI** has **blessed the Gentiles** by choosing **them** as **His** instrument for willingly **blessing Isra'el** and **the Jews** (see the commentary on **Romans Da – The Redemption of Isra'el**). **YHVH** calls **Gentiles** to imitate **His holy love** for **Isra'el** and to **perfect** that **love**.[370]