

# What The Bibles Says About Capital Punishment

## The Bible says a LOT about capital punishment:

Here are many (38), but certainly not all the references in the Bible to capital punishment (i.e. the death penalty) as commanded by God. Note that the first few verses from Exodus chapter 21 coincidentally follow the verse “thou shalt not kill” from Exodus chapter 20 verse 13 which many anti-death penalty people often quote to try to justify their belief that the death penalty is a bad thing, even unbiblical from their perspective.

Exodus 21:12 - “He that smiteth a man, so that he die, **shall be surely put to death.**”

Exodus 21:15 - “And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, **shall be surely put to death.**”

Exodus 21:16 - “And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he **shall surely be put to death.**”

Exodus 21:17 - “And he that curseth his father, or his mother, **shall surely be put to death.**”

Exodus 21: 28 - “If an ox gore a man or a woman, that they die: then the ox shall be surely stoned, and his flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox *shall be* quit. 29 But if the ox were wont to push with his horn in time past, and it hath been testified to his owner, and he hath not kept him in, but that he hath killed a man or a woman; the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also **shall be put to death.**”

Exodus 22:19 - “Whosoever lieth with a beast **shall surely be put to death.**”

Exodus 31:14 - “Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it **shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.**”

Exodus 31:15 - “Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth *any* work in the sabbath day, he **shall surely be put to death.**”

Exodus 35:2 - “Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the LORD: whosoever doeth work therein **shall be put to death.**”

Leviticus 20:2 - "Again, thou shalt say to the children of Israel, Whosoever *he be* of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, that giveth *any* of his seed unto Molech; he **shall surely be put to death**: the people of the land shall stone him with stones."

Leviticus 20:9 - "For every one that curseth his father or his mother **shall be surely put to death**: he hath cursed his father or his mother; his blood *shall be upon him*."

Leviticus 20:10 - "And the man that committeth adultery with *another* man's wife, *even he* that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress **shall surely be put to death**."

Leviticus 20:11 - "And the man that lieth with his father's wife hath uncovered his father's nakedness: both of them **shall surely be put to death**; their blood *shall be upon them*."

Leviticus 20:12 - "And if a man lie with his daughter in law, both of them **shall surely be put to death**: they have wrought confusion; their blood *shall be upon them*."

Leviticus 20:13 - "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they **shall surely be put to death**; their blood *shall be upon them*."

Leviticus 20:15 - "And if a man lie with a beast, he **shall surely be put to death**: and ye shall slay the beast."

Leviticus 20:16 - "And if a woman approach unto any beast, and lie down thereto, thou shalt kill the woman, and the beast: they **shall surely be put to death**; their blood *shall be upon them*."

Leviticus 20:27 - "A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, **shall surely be put to death**: they shall stone them with stones: their blood *shall be upon them*."

Leviticus 24:16 - "And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he **shall surely be put to death**, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name *of the LORD*, **shall be put to death**."

Leviticus 24:17 - "And he that killeth any man **shall surely be put to death**."

Leviticus 24:21 - "And he that killeth a beast, he shall restore it: and he that killeth a man, he **shall be put to death**."

Leviticus 27:29 - "None devoted, which shall be devoted of men, shall be redeemed; *but* **shall surely be put to death**."

Numbers 1:51 - "And when the tabernacle setteth forward, the Levites shall take it down: and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up: and the stranger that cometh nigh **shall be put to death.**"

Numbers 3:10 - "And thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall wait on their priest's office: and the stranger that cometh nigh **shall be put to death.**"

Numbers 3:38 - "But those that encamp before the tabernacle toward the east, *even* before the tabernacle of the congregation eastward, *shall be* Moses, and Aaron and his sons, keeping the charge of the sanctuary for the charge of the children of Israel; and the stranger that cometh nigh **shall be put to death.**"

Numbers 15:35 - "And the LORD said unto Moses, The man **shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp.**"

Numbers 18:7 - "Therefore thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest's office for every thing of the altar, and within the vail; and ye shall serve: I have given your priest's office *unto you* as a service of gift: and the stranger that cometh nigh **shall be put to death.**"

Numbers 35:16 - "And if he smite him with an instrument of iron, so that he die, he is a murderer: the murderer **shall surely be put to death.**"

Numbers 35:17 - "And if he smite him with throwing a stone, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: the murderer **shall surely be put to death.**"

Numbers 35:18 - "Or *if* he smite him with an hand weapon of wood, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: the murderer **shall surely be put to death.**"

Numbers 35:21 - "Or in enmity smite him with his hand, that he die: he that smote *him* **shall surely be put to death; for he is a murderer: the revenger of blood shall slay the murderer, when he meeteth him.**"

Numbers 35:30 - "Whoso killeth any person, the murderer **shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die.**"

Numbers 35:31 - "Moreover ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he **shall be surely put to death.**"

Deuteronomy 13:5 - "And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, **shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God**

commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee.”

Deuteronomy 17:6 - “At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, **shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but** at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death.”

Deuteronomy 24:16 - “The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man **shall be put to death for his own sin.**”

Joshua 1:18 - “Whosoever *he be* that doth rebel against thy commandment, and will not hearken unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he **shall be put to death: only be strong and of a good courage.**”

## **What about the commandment “thou shalt not kill”?**

In Exodus 20:13 one of the ten commandments is: “Thou shalt not **kill.**” No sooner do we read this command, then we find in Exodus 21:12 one of many Bible verses having to do with capital punishment: “He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to **death.**” Is God contradicting himself here? Not at all.

In the Hebrew, the word used for kill in Exodus 20:13, is “ratsach”, which means to put to death, kill, or murder. When we compare this to the word “death” mentioned in

Exodus 21:12 and elsewhere in the Bible to indicate capital punishment, we find the Hebrew word “muwth” which means to cause to kill, to put to death, worthy of death, or destroy:

So God was NOT talking about capital punishment when He said “thou shalt not kill”.

## **Why is there so much talk of judgment, especially capital punishment, in the Old Testament?**

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, GOD HATES SIN. **His hatred for sin is as great as His love for righteousness.** Read the book of Revelation in the New Testament if you think that God is no longer a god of judgment and wrath.

## **Isn't capital punishment strictly an Old Testament law?**

The practice of God continually exercising judgment in the Old Testament is

not merely an Old Testament phenomenon, but rather, it is put there by God as an example for us to take heed to today:

1 Corinthians 10:5-12 - "But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as *were* some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

## **God has appointed those that rule over you:**

Romans 13:1 - "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God."

It is God that allows rulers to be raised up and brought down. Godly rulers are a blessing to godly people, because they promote peace through the exercising of just laws:

Proverbs 29:2 - "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn."

The only truly "just" laws are BIBLICAL laws and capital punishment is one of those biblical laws.

## **Jesus came to fulfill the law, not abolish it. Who are we to ignore nor it or go against it?**

Matthew 5:17-20 - "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

James 2:10 - "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

## **Jesus MAGNIFIED the Old Testament law, emphasizing the seriousness of sin:**

Matthew 5:27-28 - "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

Matthew 5:21-22 - "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you,  
That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire."

Again, murder is the issue here, not the exercising of capital punishment, else those 38 plus verses commanding murderers (and others) to be put to death would not be in the Bible.

## **What about Matthew 5:38 which says:**

Matthew 5:38-39 - "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."

People misunderstand what the Lord is saying here. He is NOT talking about capital punishment, which is something that He EXPECTS the governing authorities to do to maintain justice and order in society. In Matthew chapter 5, Jesus is talking to individuals and how they are expected to treat each other, so that sin will not escalate and so that governing authorities will not have to get involved in their lives. This point was brought out just a few verses earlier in the same passage:

Matthew 5:25 - "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison."

## **Who is your God? Is He the God of the Bible?**

Many people do not understand the biblical teaching on capital punishment because they have a god of their own imagination. Their god is missing many of the divine attributes of the living and true God. Their god is a god of **false love** who winks at sin and has little or no love for holiness or righteousness. Such a god is a false god and not the God of the Bible. The real God who rules heaven and earth loves righteousness. He cannot love a sinner until and unless something is done about that sinner's sin:

Isaiah 59:1 - "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: 2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."

## **There are things that the true God hates:**

Hatred is an attribute of God that people rarely talk about and few even recognize. There are some things that are perfectly OK for God to hate. In fact, his character demands that he hates certain things. God hates the deeds of the wicked (the unsaved) and he hates the wicked:

Psalm 5:5-6 - "The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the LORD will abhor the bloody and deceitful man."

Psalm 11:5-6 - "The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup. For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright."

Proverbs 15:9 - "The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the LORD: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness."

## **The God of the Bible is a God of vengeance and wrath:**

We see clearly in the New Testament, many statements about God's vengeance and wrath. We can't just sweep these verses under the carpet:

Romans 9:22-23 - "*What* if God, willing to shew *his* wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory"

Romans 2:5-6 - "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds"

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 - "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;"

The true God may NOT have a wonderful plan for a person's life. In fact, as the above verses state, God may have a plan for your life that you may not like in the least - especially if you are not among God's elect.

## **A case of capital punishment in the New Testament:**

Acts 5:1-5 - "But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back *part* of the price, his wife also being privy *to it*, and brought a certain part, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back *part* of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things."

God exercised capital punishment on Ananias and Sapphira in the above passage. Why didn't He punish them less severely? Because He is God and He does what He pleases and He does what His standards of righteousness demand:

Psalm 2:1-5 - "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, *saying*, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure."

Ephesians 1:9 - "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself"

We must never forget that if God were to be truly fair, He would send EVERYONE to HELL for ALL eternity. No one deserves to be in glory with the Lord for all eternity. Such an honor is not a right but rather a privilege that God grants to those He chooses according to His sovereign will. That is why the Bible declares that salvation is granted to the elect by the grace of God and not according to any human merit whatsoever.

## **The seriousness of sin**

Jesus didn't downplay the seriousness of sin, but rather he sought every opportunity to emphasize how sinful sin is to a thrice-holy God. By downplaying sin, we trivialize the work of Christ on the cross, whether we wish to admit it or not. Sin was and is so serious, that its consequences resulted in the full fury of the wrath of God the Father being poured out on God the Son at Calvary, for those He came to save. For those who die lost, it will be a punishment that is far more terrible than capital punishment:



Matthew 13:41-42 - "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Revelation 14:11a - "And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night"

## **So why do so many people think that capital punishment is wrong?**

Proverbs 12:15 - "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise."

We often think our ways are more fair than God's ways. This is bound to be the case with our sin-tainted minds that can never fully comprehend the holiness and righteousness of God Almighty.

Hosea 4:6 - "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children."

A society that is drifting away from God starts to think that it has all the answers, apart from God, apart from the Bible. Even when that wayward society reads the Bible they cannot interpret it properly. As the moral decline of society progresses, a pattern develops, where the society enacts new laws that it thinks are fairer than those in the past (and that it thinks are fairer than God's laws), and yet the new laws are more and more unbiblical than the previous laws. We see this phenomenon occurring throughout America and throughout the world as laws are enacted to protect the sinner and defend the criminal, rather than protect the victims. Such laws include laws that make it a hate crime to speak out against homosexuals and to discriminate in hiring them. Then you have laws that make it a citizen's "right" to kill unborn children and make it a crime to even protest against such abominations. And you have laws to protect animals at the expense of humans, even though the Bible says it is man that God has given dominion over the earth, not the animals. So we now have suburbia being overrun by animals such as deer and predatory animals. And we have stiffer fines and swifter punishment for people who attack dogs than for people who attack humans. You also have people in the highest places in government who cannot even rule their own children or maintain their own marriages. And in a democratic society, these rulers are a reflection of the people that elected them into office.

### **"Punishing the innocent" argument:**

What about the "crime" of accidentally executing an innocent person who was

wrongly convicted?

First of all, in our society, if there is any reasonable doubt, a jury is not to convict that person, although there is no guarantee that a jury will be 100 percent right all the time. The chance of executing an innocent person is very real but it is not a valid excuse for violating God's law regarding capital punishment. God's biblical prescription for capital punishment has a built in safeguard. At least two witnesses are required in order to justify putting someone to death:

Deut 17:6 - " At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death."

Second of all, if we follow the reasoning that we should not punish someone with the death penalty for the crime of murder because they might really be innocent, then we should abolish all punishments for all crimes, since we don't ever want to make a mistake by punishing someone who was really innocent but wrongly convicted.

Have the anti-death penalty people ever stopped to consider how many violent crimes have occurred because convicted murderers were not swiftly executed and so they had ample opportunity to injure and kill inmates and guards and to even escape and murder people outside of the prison again? Or worse yet, what about those murderers who have been paroled and tortured or murdered additional people while out on parole? Taking this into consideration, I have to say that the anti-death penalty folks are accessories to murder and have plenty of innocent blood on their hands for having hampered the swift execution of repeat murderers.

## **Summary:**

Violating God's commandment to put murderers to death is a sin that further victimizes law abiding members of society on the pretense that capital punishment is a cruel or unnecessary punishment for a murderer.