

Wisdom of the Bible ~ Punishment is Death ~ Scripture Verses

In the Old Testament what are the sins for which the punishment is death?

1. Exodus 19:12-13 Touch Mt. Sinai
2. Exodus 21:12, Leviticus 24:17 Strike and kill (murder) a person
3. Exodus 21:14 Scheme to kill (murder) a person
4. Exodus 21:15 Strike your father or mother
5. Exodus 21:16 Kidnap a person
6. Exodus 21:17, Leviticus 21:9 Vilify (opposite of honor) father or mother
7. Exodus 21:28-29 Criminal negligence allowing an animal to kill a person
8. Exodus 22:18 Practice witchcraft
9. Exodus 22:19, Leviticus 20:15 Sexual relations with an animal (sodomy)
10. Exodus 22:20 Make a sacrifice to any god but the Lord
11. Exodus 31:14-15, 35:2, Numbers 15:32-35 Work on the Sabbath
12. Leviticus 10:1-2 Unauthorized ritual before the Lord
13. Leviticus 16:2, Numbers 18:3 Approach Lord's alter or most holy place
14. Leviticus 20:1-2 Sacrifice children to a god
15. Leviticus 20:10, Deuteronomy 22:22 Adultery
16. Leviticus 20:11-12, 14 Incestuous sexual relations
17. Leviticus 20:13 Homosexual relations
18. Leviticus 24:16 Blaspheme (curse) the Lord
19. Numbers 4:15 Touch sacred objects of worship
20. Numbers 4:20 Look at sacred objects
21. Numbers 18:7 Come too near the sanctuary
22. Deuteronomy 13:5-9 Lead others away from the Lord
23. Deuteronomy 17:2-5 Worship gods other than the Lord
24. Deuteronomy 18:20 Prophet speaks words not given by the Lord
25. Deuteronomy 21:18-21 Rebellious son
26. Deuteronomy 22:20-21 Promiscuous woman
27. Joshua 1:17-18 Rebel against God's chosen leader

Wisdom of the Bible ~ Punishment is Death ~ Leader's Guide

1. We must be careful to not dismiss many of these sins as outmoded or irrelevant today. Yes, touching Mt. Sinai, coming too near to holy objects, or sodomy are not sins we are likely to commit. However, consider the practice of witchcraft (#8). Is promoting the power of crystals any different? Consider this incomprehensible paragraph: "As a clairvoyant channel, Melchizedek Method and Holographic Sound Healing facilitator, my encoded Earth Keeper crystal and crystal bowl amplify my merkabah field a 1000-fold which enable me to contact the fifth dimension where the spirit world is and amplify my distant healing treatments a 1000-fold." — Yogi Sharanananda [<http://www.holisticwebs.com/crystal/crystal1.html>] Do a search for "Crystal Power" on the web and you'll get 94 million returns!

How about an "unauthorized ritual before the Lord" (#12)? Have you ever seen anything done in a church, Bible study, or on a missions trip of which God would not approve?

4. Are all sins equal in God's sight or are some worse than others? (James 2:10, Matthew 5:21-28, 12:34, Romans 6:23)

James 2:10 – For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

In Matthew 5:21-28, Jesus equates committing adultery with having lust in your heart and committing murder with having hatred in your heart. However, this does not mean the sins are equal. What Jesus was trying to get across to the Pharisees is that sin is still sin even if you only want to do the act, without actually carrying it out. The religious leaders of Jesus' day taught that it was okay to think about anything you wanted to, as long as you did not act on those desires. Jesus is forcing them to realize that God judges a person's thoughts as well as his actions. Jesus proclaimed that our actions are the result of what is in our hearts. In Matthew 12:34, Jesus says "You brood of snakes! How could evil men like you speak what is good and right? For whatever is in your heart determines what you say." [NLT]

So, although Jesus said that lust and adultery are both sins, that does not mean they are equal. It is much worse to actually murder a person than it is to simply hate a person, even though they are both sins in God's sight. There are degrees to sin. Some sins are worse than others. At the same time, in regard to both eternal consequences and salvation, all sins are the same. Every sin will lead to eternal condemnation (Romans 6:23). All sin, no matter how "small," is against an infinite and eternal God, and is therefore worthy of an infinite and eternal penalty.

Further, there is no sin too "big" that God cannot forgive it. Jesus died to pay the penalty for sin (1 John 2:2). Jesus died for all of our sins (2 Corinthians 5:21). Are all sins equal to God? Yes and no. In severity? No. In penalty? Yes. In forgivability? Yes. [<http://www.gotquestions.org/sins-equal.html>]

5. Okay, murdering a person is clearly bad. But leading someone astray (#22); how is that as bad as murder?

In some respects leading someone away from the Lord, especially if it involves worshipping other gods (Deut 13:6-7), is worse than murder. Why? Because you have doomed that person to eternal damnation. If you murder someone and that person had by faith committed to being a Christ follower, he will be welcomed into heaven and God's eternal life. However, if you lead someone away from the Lord, he has no chance at salvation.

6. Many people say that our attitudes toward sex are clearly more enlightened today than in Biblical times. Gay marriage is okay, right? And studies show that 25% to 50% of all men have an extramarital affair (commit adultery). Big deal?

Big deal? Yes! God does not bid and forbid just to be bossy. Out of compassion for people, God warns of the dangers of adulterated sex. People cannot improve their sex life by these forbidden practices. They will only destroy something precious.

Today, same-sex marriage is legal in 6 states, Canada, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, Sweden, South Africa, and several other countries. God regards this as absolutely *wrong* and in the Old Testament it was punishable by death.

Actually, a number of Islamic countries still punish homosexual acts by death, among them Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Yemen, Mauritania, parts of Nigeria and Sudan. And sanctions are tightening in Burundi, Russia, and Uganda.

Christ warned that remarriage after divorce amounts to adultery, a sin which is explicitly forbidden by God's seventh Commandment. Both divorce and remarriage, therefore, are extremely serious steps, and both violate the divine principle of permanent union and faithfulness in marriage.

Fortunately this is not the whole story. "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. ... for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust." (Psalm 103:8, 14). "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9). This promise is specifically for Christians, and includes even the sin of adultery, if there is genuine repentance. The Lord made this very clear in His dealing with the woman who "was taken in adultery, in the very act" (John 8:4). He reminded her accusers that they also were sinners and had no warrant to punish her. Then He told the woman: "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:11).

More than 2 million web sites focus on just Christian adultery. Take a look at some of them. I'm not going to add more to the fray here.

7. What exactly does blasphemy (#18) mean? Is exclaiming "Oh my God!" blasphemy? How about "Goddamnit!" Or is it cursing God? Or is it swearing falsely by God's name?

Bible commentators today are not at all in full agreement on this question. The strictest interpretation is explained by Robert Alter in *The Five Books of Moses* in which Leviticus 24:15-16 appears as, “And to the Israelites you shall speak, saying, “Should any man vilify his God, he shall bear his offense. And he who invokes the Lord’s name shall be doomed to die, and the community shall surely stone him, sojourner and native alike; for his invoking the Name he shall be put to death.” In this last phrase, “and vilifying it” is merely implied. This act of *lèse-majesté* (a criminal offense against the dignity of the reigning ruler) aimed at God, who is the very rationale for the existence of the community, is understood to be a threat to the community itself, and so all are involved in the execution. In any case, this formulation, which appears to hold the mere invoking of the Name as a sin, led later on to a general ban against pronouncing the name YHWH except by the high priest on the Day of Atonement in the Holy of Holies.

At the other end of the spectrum, the NIV Life Application Study Bible opines that “this punishment for blasphemy (cursing God) seems extreme by modern standards. But it shows how seriously God expects us to take our relationship with him. Often we use his name in swearing, or we act as though he doesn’t exist. We should be careful how we speak and act, treating God with reverence.”