



SAVED TO SERVE
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**DOES THE BIBLE SUPPORT
THE DEATH PENALTY?**

1. In this Sabbath School Lesson, will study to see if the Bible supports the death penalty and if there will be a death penalty for faithful Christians in these last days. In some religious circles such as Roman Catholicism, the death penalty is discussed amongst its leadership and parishioners. Although not widely practiced in every U.S. state or around the world, the death penalty is still a punishment executed by various governments. Let's see what the Bible's stance is on the death penalty.
 2. Does the Bible support the death penalty in the Old Testament? See Genesis 9:6; Exodus 21:1, 23-25. Write down accounts in scripture where we see the death penalty enforced.
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- a) **Note:** In many cases where the death penalty was applied in the Old Testament, Israel was under a theocracy. A theocracy is a system of government where God rules and executes punishment through priests, prophets, and judges. However, for the purposes of this study, we want to see if provision is given in the New Testament for the death penalty and under which circumstances.
 3. Romans 13 is the chapter in the New Testament that teaches us what powers the civil government can enforce. Who does Paul say we are to be subject to and why? Romans 13:1
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- a) The higher powers mentioned here by Paul point to civil authorities or the civil magistrates - See Titus 3:1.
 4. What will a person receive who resists or disobeys civil authorities? Romans 13:2
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5. What does damnation mean? Mark 16:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; Matthew 23:14, 33
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6. What are the rulers a "terror" against? Romans 13:3
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7. Read Romans 13:4. What weapon is born by the civil government? For what purpose is it given to them? **Answer:** They wield a sword to revenge and execute wrath upon evil doing. A sword is used to kill; therefore, the civil government does have the right to execute the death penalty.
 8. Read this next verse and answer this question carefully. Over which of the Ten Commandments does the civil government have power to enforce? Romans 13:8-10 **Answer:** The last six commandments dealing with our relationship with our fellow men.
 9. **Note:** Based on scripture, the civil government has power to enforce the last six commandments dealing with our relationship to our fellow man, and they have power to enforce the death penalty. The Bible does not give the civil government permission to enforce the death penalty over the first four commandments dealing with how we worship God. **Do not miss this point:** the state has discretion to decide which breeches of the law warrant the death penalty. They set different thresholds or degrees of guiltiness. For example, a person wouldn't be given the death penalty for merely cheating on their spouse but that person could potentially receive the death penalty in certain states if they were a serial rapist, infecting scores of people with HIV and also killing them afterwards.
 10. What other reason does Paul give for us to obey the higher powers in Romans 13:5? **Answer:** For conscience sake. This means we should do it not only because we fear punishment but also so that we can have a clear conscience that were are doing right before God. It's similar to the gospel: we should obey God because it is right (and out of love) and not only because we fear the punishment of hell.
 11. Read Romans 13:6-7 to get a second evidence for why we should obey the civil authorities and why they have power to enforce the last six commandments. Whose words was Paul referencing when he said to pay tribute and render dues to the higher powers? Matthew 22:17-21; Mark 12:14-17
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12. Now that we have set that foundation, let's examine how the Jews convinced the civil government of Rome to crucify Jesus. Read John 18:29-31. The Jews said that it was unlawful for them to put any man to death yet, they wanted Pilate to kill Jesus. What did the Jews find Jesus guilty of in Matthew 26:63-66?
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- a) In principle, which table of the Ten Commandments did they find Jesus guilty of: the first table (first 4) or the second table (last six)? Exodus 20:3; Matthew 22:37-38
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13. The Jews charged Jesus with being guilty of breaking the first table of the commandments dealing with our relationship toward God but that wasn't enough to convince the Romans to kill Jesus (John 18:37-38). They knew they had to persuade Pilate that Jesus was also guilty of breaking civil laws. What charges did they accuse Jesus of in Luke 23:1-3? See also John 19:12, 15
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14. **Note:** The Jews accused Jesus of being a perverter of the nation and threatening Cesar's throne when in reality, Barabbas was the one guilty of sedition; however, the Jews had him released and had Jesus crucified (Luke 23:18-19). So, the Jews had Jesus killed on the premise of trying to overthrow Cesar and his government - which is outlined under the last six commandments.

15. As another evidence, what charges were brought against the apostle Paul? Which table of the Ten Commandments would these charges fall under? Acts 24:1, 5-6
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16. Notice this clip of Michael Knowles, a popular conservative and catholic political commentator, saying that we need to bring back the death penalty for heretics. **YouTube:** Catholic vs. Protestant: "Did We See A Miracle?" YES or NO With Ruslan KD | 10/20/2025
[YouTube.com/watch?v=Mh0UzX6uRWA&t=1088s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mh0UzX6uRWA&t=1088s)

17. Notice what Thomas Aquinas, a very influential theologian of the Catholic Church, said regarding the death penalty.

Capital Punishment

"Therefore if a man be dangerous and infectious to the community, on account of some sin, it is praiseworthy and advantageous that he be killed in order to safeguard the common good" *ST IIa-IIae, q. 64, a. 2.*

Aquinas does believe that it *may be necessary* to kill heretics since they threaten the faith of believers, but he is not very definitive, even on what is for him the worst case scenario. (See the essay, [Tolerance.](#))
<https://aquinasonline.com/capital-punishment/>

18. Who are some examples of Protestant Reformers that received the death penalty by the Catholic Church for speaking truth?

"He [John Huss] was now delivered up to the secular authorities and led away to the place of execution. An immense procession followed, hundreds of men at arms, priests and bishops in their costly robes, and the inhabitants of Constance. When he had been fastened to the stake, and all was ready for the fire to be lighted, the martyr was once more exhorted to save himself by renouncing his errors. "What errors," said Huss, "shall I renounce? I know myself guilty of none. I call God to witness that all that I have written and preached has been with the view of rescuing souls from sin and perdition; and, therefore, most joyfully will I confirm with my blood that truth which I have written and preached."—*ibid.*, b. 3, ch. 7. When the flames kindled about him, he began to sing, "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me," and so continued till his voice was silenced forever. GC 109.2

"Are the traditions of men more worthy of faith than the gospel of our Saviour?" **replied Jerome.** "Paul did not exhort those to whom he wrote to listen to the traditions of men, but said, 'Search the Scriptures.'" GC 114.6

His last words, uttered as the flames rose about him, were a prayer. "Lord, Almighty Father," he cried, "have pity on me, and pardon me my sins; for Thou knowest that I have always loved Thy truth."—*Bonnechose*, vol. 2, p. 168. His voice ceased, but his lips continued to move in prayer. When the fire had done its work, the ashes of the martyr, with the earth upon which they rested, were gathered up, and like those of Huss, were thrown into the Rhine. GC 115.1

Other Reformers who were condemned and killed

- John Wycliffe was posthumously condemned as a heretic in 1415, and his remains were later exhumed and burned.
- William Tyndale was betrayed, imprisoned, strangled and burned at the stake for translating the New Testament.
- The Waldenses as a group were severely persecuted and killed over centuries for their beliefs.

And the list goes on and on...

19. Notice this article where the Catholic apologized for the crimes they have committed over the the past 2,000 years.

Pope says sorry for sins of church

Saving one of his most audacious initiatives for the twilight of his papacy, John Paul II yesterday attempted to purify the soul of the Roman Catholic church by making a sweeping apology for 2,000 years of violence, persecution and blunders.

From the altar of St Peter's Basilica in Rome he led Catholicism into uncharted territory by seeking forgiveness for sins committed against Jews, heretics, women, Gypsies and native peoples.

Fighting through trembles and slurrings caused by Parkinson's disease, **the Pope electrified ranks of cardinals and bishops by pleading for a future that would not repeat the mistakes. "Never again," he said.**

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/mar/13/catholicism.religion>

20. Which animal is the beast of Revelation 13:2 (the Papacy) largely made of? Can and will it change its ways based on scripture? Jeremiah 13:23

21. In scripture who did the same as the Catholics by persecuting people based on their preaching of truth and not because they violated one of the last six commandments which are enforced by the civil government? Mark 6:17-19

a) Who did similar to Herod and Herodias in persecuting the faithful man of God in the Old Testament? 1 Kings 18:4-5; 1 Kings 19:1-3

22. The beast of Revelation 13:1-2 had a mouth like a lion. The lion is a symbol of ancient Babylon (Daniel 7:4; Jeremiah 50:17). In Daniel 3, why did King Nebuchadnezzar enforce the death penalty on the three Hebrews? Daniel 3:1, 5-7, 12

23. The beast of Revelation 13:1-2 had feet like a bear. The bear represents the Medo-Persian kingdom (Daniel 7:5; Daniel 5:28, 30-31). Over which issue did the presidents and princes accuse Daniel of breaking the law of Persia? Daniel 6:1-8

24. **Note:** The same happened under the Persian Empire in the time of Esther. Haaman wanted to kill or inflict the death penalty on all the Jews because Mordecai wouldn't bow down and worship him (Esther 3:1-13). The same will be repeated in these last days; the Papacy will unite with the Protestants of America to enforce a death penalty on all those who don't worship on Sunday when it becomes the law of the land - which is the mark of the beast (Revelation 13:11-17).

25. Like the three Hebrews, what should our stance be when the state forces us to worship falsely? Daniel 3:17-18

26. What experience do we need, like Daniel, in order to choose to worship God according to scripture and not how the government mandates? Daniel 6:10; Psalm 55:17

27. Like Esther, what should we mingle with our prayers? Esther 4:15-16
