

Whoever Sheds Man's Blood Must Not Die

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(*Genesis 9:5-6*)

Whoever Sheds Man's Blood Must Not Die
(*Genesis 4:15*)

The death penalty for murder was meant to teach the seriousness of taking another person's life. It was to reinforce that each human life is precious and highly valued (Mt. 10:31; Lk. 12:7). Also, its intent was to remind mankind that only God has the authority to take life because He alone created it. No one else has that sovereign right. When the death penalty is properly administered, it contributes to a more peaceful society. Conversely, if it is ignored, a society eventually becomes more violent (Eze. 7:23; 8:17).

The responsibility to administer the death penalty originally fell to a close friend of the victim or a relative during the first covenant. These close friends or relatives were referred to as "avengers of blood," Speak to the children of Israel saying, 'Appoint for yourselves cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you through Moses, 3 that the slayer who kills anyone accidentally or unintentionally may flee there; and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood (Jos. 20:2-3; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted; emphasis added).

As societies with judiciary systems developed, the administration of the death penalty became the responsibility of judges, elders, and priests. However, no one accused of murder could be put to death, under God's system of justice, unless there were at least two witnesses able to confirm

they saw the crime (cf. Dt. 17:6; 19:15; Heb. 10:28).

And when he (the manslayer) flees to one of those cities (of refuge), and stands at the entrance of the gate of the city, and declares (states) his case in the hearing of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city as one of them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them (Jos. 20:4; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

In the case of Cain versus Abel, Cain was guilty of murder and the death penalty would apply to him in accordance with God's commands.

For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, 12not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous (1Jn. 3:11-12; emphasis added).

Although Cain should have forfeited his life immediately, the only family members alive at the time were his father and mother and God's law regarding the avenger of blood did not specify that the parents of a murderer had to kill their child. In fact, the only time that God asked a parent to kill their child was in the case of Abraham and Isaac. The command to kill Isaac was a test of faith and Almighty God already knew Abraham would obey His word, and as a result Isaac would not be killed (see study: God Accepts Human Sacrifices).

A second scriptural witness to the fact that parents are not expected to participate in the execution of their children is found in the book of Deuteronomy. In the example that follows, if a young adult still living with his parents broke the fifth commandment (Ex. 20:12), the parents were to bring that young person to the elders of

the town or city. If the youth was found guilty of sin and was unrepentant, the people of the town or city were to stone the individual to death. There is no mention whatsoever of the parents participating in the execution.

If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, ¹⁹then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. ²⁰And they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.' ²¹Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil person from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear (to do evil) (Dt. 21:18-21; Ed. note in parenthesis).

So God in His love and mercy judged and sentenced Cain, which removed any responsibility from Adam and Eve. Cain's punishment was in many ways worse than the death penalty. It meant that Cain would no longer have access to his parents and he was also banished from God's presence.

And Cain said to the Lord, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear! ¹⁴Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me' (Gen. 4:13- 14; emphasis added).

After God passed sentence on Cain, Cain realized he was no longer going to be under God's protection and there must have been other beings present on the earth at that time, who were not related to Adam's family, because Cain was fearful of them. According to the Bible's symbolic language, the trees in the Garden of

Eden represented angelic beings that Adam had fellowshiped with until he and Eve sinned (Gen. 2:16; 3:6-7). At the same time that Adam and Eve sinned, these angelic beings also sinned (Eze. 31:16-18; see studies: Symbolism). As the penalty for sin is death (Rom. 6:23), these angelic beings would have been sentenced to death, at the same time as Adam and Eve, by becoming mortal flesh and blood. To prevent these angels who were now flesh and blood from harming Cain, God placed a mark that would deter them from killing him.

And the Lord said to him (Cain), 'Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.' And the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him (Gen. 4:15; Ed. note in parenthesis).

After Cain was driven away from his parents, he got married (Gen. 4:16-17). Presumably, the only beings that Cain could marry would have been the flesh and blood angels who sinned. So although angels do not marry in the spirit realm, they must have been transformed into male and female flesh and blood beings after they sinned,

For in the resurrection (from the dead) they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but exist as the angels in heaven (Mt. 22:30; RNT; cf. Mk. 12:15; Lk. 20:35; Ed. note in parenthesis)

Scripture indicates that some of the angels who became flesh and blood eventually began marrying the daughters of Adam and Eve,

Now it came to pass, when men (mankind) began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, ²that the sons of God (those who were previously loyal angels) saw the daughters of men (descendants of Adam), that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose

(Gen. 6:1-2; cf. Jude 6; Ed. notes in parentheses).

In conclusion, as Cain shed the blood of his brother Abel (Gen. 4:10), and as it was murder (1Jn. 3:12-15), God's law allowed a close friend or relative to kill him. In the absence of a close friend or relative, other than Cain's own father and mother, God took responsibility for Cain's judgment. God did not spare his life. Instead, He temporarily postponed Cain's death. Although Cain eventually died, God gave him time to repent.

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us (you), not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2Pet. 3:9; Ed. note in parenthesis).

So there is no contradiction in scripture. Unless God personally intervenes in a person's judgment, His law regarding the consequence for murder stands and it should be administered accordingly. In most societies today the judicial authorities, who have a responsibility to carry out the death penalty for murder, have rejected God's law. Therefore justice is not served and many victims, their families, and by extension entire nations, suffer in many ways as a result.

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