

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN JUDAISM

Mishnah: How were the witnesses inspired with awe? Witnesses in capital charges were brought in and warned (thus): Perhaps what you say is based only on conjecture, or hearsay, or is evidence from the mouth of another witness, or even from the mouth of a trustworthy person: Perhaps you are unaware that ultimately we shall scrutinize your evidence by cross examination and inquiry? Know then that capital cases are not like monetary cases. In civil suits, one can make monetary restitution and thereby effect his atonement. But in capital cases one is held responsible for the accused's blood and the blood of his (potential) descendants until the end of time. For thus we find in the case of Cain, who killed his brother, that it is written: "The bloods of thy brother cry unto me" (Genesis 4:3ff). Not the "blood" of thy brother, but the "bloods" of thy brother, i.e. his blood and the blood of his (potential) descendants. For this reason only one human being was created at the beginning to teach that whosoever destroys a single soul, Scripture imputes (guilt) to him as though he had destroyed a complete world; And whosoever preserves a single soul, Scripture ascribes (merit) to him as though he had preserved a complete world. Furthermore, only one human was created for the sake of peace among people that one might not say to his fellow, 'My father was greater than yours'; and that heretics might not say, 'There are many ruling powers in heaven.' Also, to proclaim the greatness of the Holy One, the Blessed One: For if a human strikes many coins from one mold, they all resemble one another, but the Supreme King of Kings, The Holy One, the Blessed One, fashioned every person in the stamp of the first human, and yet not one of them resembles his fellow. Therefore, every single person is obliged to say: The world was created for my sake!

Gemarah: Our rabbis taught: What is meant by BASED ON CONJECTURE? He (the Judge) says to them: Perhaps ye say him running after his fellow into a ruin, ye pursued him, and found him sword in hand with blood dripping from it, whilst the murdered man was writhing (in agony): If this is what ye say, ye saw nothing.

It has been taught: R. Simeon b. Shatah said: May I never see comfort. If I did not see a man pursuing his fellow into a ruin, and when I ran after him and saw him, sword in hand with blood dripping from it, and the murdered man writhing, I exclaimed to him: Wicked man, who slew this man? It is either you or I! But what can I do, since thy blood (i.e. life) does not rest in my hands, for it is written in the Torah, "At the mouth of two witnesses etc., shall he that is to die be put to death" (Deuteronomy 17:6)? May He who knows one's thoughts exact vengeance from him who slew his fellow! It is related that before they moved from the place a serpent came and bit him (the murderer) so that he died.

Mishna Makkot 1:10: A Sanhedrin which executes (a criminal) once in seven years is known as bloody. Rabbi Eleazar son of Azariah says: "Once in seventy years." Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akiba say: If we had been members of the Sanhedrin no person would have ever been executed. Rabban Simeon b. Gamiel retorted: They (R. Tarfon and R. Akiba) would have been responsible for the proliferation of murderers in Israel.

The Christian Anti-Judaic Tradition

They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do what Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God; this is not what Abraham did. You do what your father did." They said to him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God; I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But, because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."

Gospel of John

"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: "The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Revelations

...the temple of demons devoted to idolatrous cults...the refuge of brigands and debauchees, and the cavern of devils." The synagogue, he told his congregations in another sermon, was "a criminal assembly of Jews...a place of meeting for the assassins of Christ...a house worse than a drinking shop...a den of thieves; a house of ill fame, a dwelling of iniquity, the refuge of devils, a gulf and abyss of perdition." And he concluded, exhausted at length by his eloquence: "Whatever name even more horrible could be found, will never be worse than the synagogue deserves."

**St. John Chrysostom
(3rd Cent.)**

Slayers of the Lord, murderers of the prophets, adversaries of God, haters of God, men who show contempt for the law, foes of grace, enemies of their father's faith, advocates of the devil, brood of vipers, slanderers, scoffers, men whose minds are in darkness, leaven of the Pharisees, assembly of demons,... wicked men, stoners, and haters of righteousness.

**St. Gregora of Nyssa
(3rd Cent.)**

We admonish your Highness that you must cease to suffer the Jews to rule over Christians and exercise authority over them. For to allow Christians to be subordinate to Jews, and to be subject to their judgment, is the same as to oppress God's Church and to exalt the synagogue of Satan. To wish to please the enemies of Christ means to treat Christ himself with contumely.

Pope Gregory VII (1081)

I should wish that you were more inclined to Greek than to those Hebrew studies of yours, though I find no fault with them. But I see that nation filled with the coldest fables and producing nothing but smoke, Talmud, Cabala, Tetragrammaton, Portae Lucis – empty names. I had rather see Christ infected by Scotus than by that rubbish.

Erasmus (1518)

When Judas hanged himself and his bowels gushed forth, and, as happens in such cases, his bladder also burst, the Jews were ready to catch the Judas-water and the other precious things, and then they gorged and swilled on the merd among themselves, and were thereby endowed with such a keenness of sight that they can perceive glosses in the Scriptures such as neither Matthew nor Isaiah himself...would be able to detect; or perhaps they looked into the loin of their God "Shed," and found these things written in that smokehole..."

The Devil has eased himself and emptied his belly again – that is a real halidom for Jews and would-be Jews, to kiss, batten on, swill and adore; and then the Devil in his turn also devours and swills what these good pupils spue and eject from above and below...The Devil, with his angelic snout, devours what exudes from the oral and anal apertures of the Jews; this is indeed his favorite dish, on which he battens like a sow behind the hedge...

Martin Luther (16th Cent.)