

*“When the Israelites were in the wilderness they found a man gathering wood on the Sabbath day. Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and to the whole community. They put him in custody, because there was no clear instruction about what should be done to him. Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘The man must surely be put to death; the whole community must stone him with stones outside the camp.’ So the whole community took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, just as the LORD commanded Moses.” Numbers 15:32-36.*

In order to fully understand why God would “command” such a sentence we need to look at the historical context.

As you may recall, during the time of the Exodus God had given Moses two tablets of stone engraved with the Ten Commandments. Both the tablets and the writing were the work of God. A little later Moses, in an angry rage against the Israelites, threw these tablets down breaking them. As a result God told Moses to make a new set of tablets and He would write on them what He had written on the first set. As a result we now have a set of tablets made by Moses (man) and writing from God. **This is to show that the Law (instructions) have two purposes working like a mirror which would reflect both divine attributes and fallen humanity’s attributes.** It represents the Old Covenant mindset of man trying to perform the works of God instead of allowing God to do His work within us.

Like a mirror the Torah (Law) not only reveals God’s character but also fallen man’s. Paul said, “I would not have known sin except through the Law.” (Rom. 7:7), because “sin, seizing the opportunity through the Commandment, produced in me all kinds of wrong desires. For apart from the Law, sin is dead.” (Vs. 8). And then concluded, “So I found that the very Commandment that was intended to bring life brought death!” (Vs. 10). Upon careful reading you will notice that throughout Scripture God commands things that fallen man desires. He does this because He will not interfere with man’s freedom of choice and “... that through the Commandment sin would become utterly sinful.” (Rom. 7:13).

Many are confused by the love of God when they read such commands to His people to “destroy” the inhabitants of other lands including women and children. Some try to defend this by saying the people who are killed must be cut off like a cancer to save His people. But this would mean God is willing

that some should perish when Scripture says just the opposite (see, 2 Pet. 3:9). The command to “Go destroy” is a reflection of our hearts and character. God is exposing the sins of His professed people just as much as exposing the unbeliever’s. He’s allowing sin to destroy sin. Consider another example.

*“And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying, ‘Send men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall you send a man, everyone a ruler among them’” Numbers 13:1-2.*

Reading this text in the immediate context it appears that God desired Israel to spy out the land of Canaan. But when we read in a wider context we see something different.

*“And you came near unto Me every one of you, and said, ‘We will send men before us, and they shall search out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come.’” Deuteronomy 1:22.*

It was Israel that wanted to spy out the land so God commanded them to do what they wanted. Again, why does God do this?

*“Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” Romans 5:20.*

**When a person has sin in their heart the first work of God is to show the person their sin.** The human heart has the capacity to deceive itself. It is blind to its own sinfulness. **When we are outside of the desires of God, He will command the things that we desire in order for them to grow and that we might begin to see why they are sinful.** But He does not do these things without the opportunity for the person to know that these things are wrong. **The commands are interpreted by men to mean God desires them because men are blinded to their own sinfulness.** They also choose to believe this because then it makes God look like them and this justifies their sinfulness. (See, Ps. 50:16-21).

Instead of condemning and judging the man who was gathering wood upon the Sabbath the Israelites should have gone to him and inquired about his reasoning as to why he was doing this. Then, if found to be in disobedience to God’s design, instruct him in the ways of God to bring reconciliation. But because they had the condemning mindset they puffed themselves up, and God gave them over to their own desires

according to their own perverted view of justice. This would cause their own sin of self-righteousness to abound and then hopefully they repent seeking their own reconciliation.

Just remember how Jesus, our perfect example, responds to the same scenario in Jn. 8:2-19. Instead of the leaders bringing to Him a Sabbath breaker they bring to Him a woman accused of adultery. They do this in order to try and trap Jesus on matters of the Torah (Vs. 6). However, He exposes (magnifies) their own sins by writing in the dust (cf. Jer. 17:13) and commands, “Let the person among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” This complies with Deut. 17:7 which says, “Let the witnesses be the first to begin the execution.” Unlike the Israelites of old, these Pharisees were convicted of sin and chose not to condemn and stone the woman, and then Jesus, displaying His Father’s character, says to her, “Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more.” **This is the same outcome God was seeking when the accusers picked up stones to kill the Sabbath breaker.** Jesus was not abolishing the instruction against adultery but was bringing out the true intent of the statute of stoning.

In an article on *theblaze.com* entitled, *fact-check: does the bible really condone stoning?*, they asked Rabbi Aryeh Spero concerning this statute:

“... When it comes to perceived Biblical mandates or issues like stoning, the rabbi noted that **it’s important to view the holy book through a specific lens.** ‘It is our duty to, with reverence and humility, demarcate between that which God intended as eternal and that which was a time-period-necessity later to be eased-out—animal sacrifices, for example ... Things regarding human nature and sexual discipline and limitations undoubtedly are eternal, as are the Sabbath and need for holiness. ... **Certain procedures were never meant to be permanent and were, instead, based on the habits and mindsets of the original society that God spoke to. The culture, thus, had a major impact on how these procedures were implemented and played out.**”

The mindset of the Israelites concerning stoning during the time of Moses did not come from God, but from Egypt. Moses told Pharaoh: “If we make sacrifices that are an abomination to the Egyptians right before their eyes, **will they not stone us?**” (Ex. 8:25-26).

Later, the Israelites themselves, being brainwashed into this form of justice for 100’s of years while in slavery, desired to stone Moses:

“... and the people murmured against Moses and said, ‘Why in the world did you bring us up out of Egypt – to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?’ Moses cried out to the LORD, ‘What will I do with this people? – **a little more and they will stone me!**’” Exodus 17:3-4.

Just as Jesus spoke the minds of the disciples by calling the Canaanite woman a “Gentile dog” in Matthew 15:26, God was speaking their minds by commanding stoning in hopes that their eyes will be opened to such a horrific scene of punishment. God said, “I gave them over to statutes that were not good, and judgments by which they could not live.” (Ez. 20:25). Their sin of brutally condemning (sacrificing) others to excuse themselves would abound to the point of reaching out and taking hold upon God’s grace, receiving His forgiveness and walk in His mercy. They were to remember, “the one who has shown no mercy will be judged without mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” (Jas. 2:13).

God had told them, “I will surely do to you just as you have spoken in My hearing” (Num. 14:28), which again shows **the judgment that falls upon man will be the judgment that man decided for himself**. God has said, “**When anyone from the house of Israel erects his idols in his own heart ... I the LORD will answer him according to the multitude of his idols ...**” (Ez. 14:4-5).

Unified in Christ, however, we will love our neighbor as ourselves realizing that “all have sinned, and fall short of the glory [character] of God.” (Rom. 3:23) and yet, “while we were still helpless ... Christ died for the ungodly.” (Rom. 5:6). **Let us all bear in mind that we are dealing with souls that Christ has purchased with infinite cost to Himself.**

Like Isaiah, the closer we come to Christ the more sinful we will appear in our own eyes and yet knowing that He will not condemn us; for His judgment is mercy. (Is. 6:5-7; Ps. 89:14). Won’t you live by our heavenly Father’s standard? “**For you will be evaluated by the same standard as you evaluate others.**” (Matt.7:1-2). Most everyone today would agree that stoning is barbaric, but believing God will burn billions of people in endless torture is somehow an attribute of holiness and love ... But that’s another study!

Many people ask why Christians do not stone Sabbath breakers or adulterers today since it is “demanded” by God in the Old Testament. But is this really the type of justice that God has designed? Does a God of love desire those who do not following His instructions to die? Or are we reading something into the Scriptures that reflects our own desires which stems from our own justice system?

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## **Why Did God Command Stoning?**



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