

STONING

Stoning (also called lapidation) was a brutal and gruesome way to die. Depending on the method used, the criminal could die fairly quickly, but more often, it would take anywhere from twenty minutes to two hours to die. Obviously, this would be more like torture.

In the Bible, Yahveh ordered people to be stoned to death for twelve reasons.

- 1 Touching Mt Sinai: (Exod. 19:12-13)(Hebr. 12:20-21)
- 2 Breaking the Sabbath: (Num. 15:32-36)
- 3 Child Sacrifice: (Lev. 20:2)
- 4 Being a medium or wizard: (Lev. 20:27)
- 5 Cursing God Or Blaspheming: (Lev. 24:10-16,23)
- 6 Idolatry: (Deut. 17:2-5)
- 7 Someone Who Entices Another To Commit Idolatry: (Deut. 13:6-11)
- 8 Rebellion Against Parents: (Deut. 21:18-21)
- 9 A Woman Who Proclaimed To Be A Virgin At Marriage, but Wasn't: (Deut. 22:13-21)
- 10 Sex With A Betrothed Virgin: (Deut. 22:23-24)



- 11 Adultery: Both man and woman to be stoned (Lev. 20:10; Implied by John 8:3-5).
 - 12 An ox that gored someone to death was also to be stoned: (Exod. 21:28,32)
- No one in the Bible was to be stoned unless their sin could be verified by two or more witnesses. In addition, the witness (or witnesses) were to be the first to cast a stone at the condemned, followed by all of the people (Deut. 17:6-7). (Also see: Deut. 19:15, Num. 35:30, John 8:17, Lev. 24:14)

The stoning usually took place outside of the camp or city walls (Lev. 24:14,23) (Numb. 15:35)(Acts 7:58), and was usually done by the "men of his (or her) city" (Deut. 21:21, 22:21).

Several innocent people were stoned to death in the Bible: Stephen (Acts 7:54-60), Naboth (1Kgs. 21), Zechariah (2Chr. 24:20-22).

Paul was stoned as well, but did not die (they thought he was dead)(Acts 14:19-20) (2Cor. 11:25).

The Orthodox Jews sought to stone Yeshua at one point for what they believed was blasphemy (Yeshua claiming to be Elohim), but He escaped them (John 10:22-39).

The Bible doesn't tell us exactly how people were stoned, but we do have accounts over the centuries that tell us some of the methods used. One account is given to us in the Jewish Mishnah (multiple oral Jewish traditions combined into a single work). In (Sanhedrin, ch. 6, Mishnah 4) it says this on how a person was to be stoned:

1 When people were stoned they were made to stand on the edge of a place (cliff) that was a minimum of twice a man's height (with rocks below).

2 One of the witnesses pushed him by the hips, [so that] he was overturned on his heart (fell face first on the rocks).

3 He was then turned on his back.



4 If that caused his death, he had fulfilled [his duty]; but if not, the second witness took a (large) stone and threw it on his chest.

5 If he died thereby, he had done [his duty]; but if not, he [the criminal] was stoned by all Israel.

Stoning was not only confined to the offences for which the Bible had expressly prescribed it (Maim., Yad, Sanhedrin 15:10), but instead of having all the people kill the convicted person by pelting stones at him a "stoning place" was designed from which he was to be pushed down to death (Sanh. 6:4). This must not be too high, so that the body should not be mutilated falling down (Rashi, Sanh. 45a), and not too low, so that death

would be instantaneous. One of the hermeneutical reasons given for this change of the law was the scriptural rule that "the hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death" (Deut. 17:7); it is true that "the hand of all the people [should be on him] afterward" (*ibid.*), but it is the hand of the witness which is to put him to death. A mode of "stoning" had therefore to be devised in which the witness would not only be assured of the first chance to lay hands on the convicted person, but also of the certainty of thereby putting him to death (Sanh. 6:4). Talmudic jurists may have been influenced by Roman law (Saxum Tarpeium of the Twelve Tables 8:13f., 8:23) or by Syrian or Greek laws (cf. II Macc. 6:10), or perhaps by a single biblical precedent with prisoners of war (2Chron. 25:12) – what they attained was a more humane substitute for the biblical stoning, by which the danger of mutilation was considerably reduced and death accelerated. Maimonides justifies the talmudic method with the reflection that it really made no difference whether stones were thrown at one or one was thrown on the stones (Maimonides, Comment. to Sanh. 6:4). A great penal reform was achieved with the exclusion, contrary to biblical command, of the general public from the execution of death sentences and the elimination therefrom of all traces of *vindicta publica*. The participation of witnesses – and perhaps also the blood avenger – was not eliminated because they were regarded as a lesser evil in comparison with professional executioners.

STONING TODAY IN THE MID EAST

Stoning is still practiced in some countries even today (i.e. Iran and Iraq). They use another method today.

1 Hands are tied behind the back.

2 The criminal (many are not really criminals) is wrapped with 3 pieces of shroud from head to toe.

3 A hole is dug, then the criminal is placed in the hole. A man is buried up to his waist, a woman to just under her breasts.

4 The sentencing judge is to then throw the first stone (about tangerine size, not too big to kill with one blow, nor as small as a pebble). If a witness is involved, they are to throw first, then the judge. Afterwards, everyone is to throw until the criminal is declared dead.

Other accounts tell us that some criminals were tied to a post, then stoned; tied hands and feet, then stoned; thrown from a high place so they were injured and couldn't run, then stoned; or just surrounded by a large crowd so they couldn't escape, then stoned.

(Mar 19/16) Jerry Hennig