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**ISRAELITES APOSTASY AND DEATH PENALTY: A  
RESEARCH REVIEW**

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### ISRAELITES APOSTASY AND DEATH PENALTY: A RESEARCH REVIEW

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#### ABSTRACT

*Regarding the chain of Prophethood, Allah Almighty sent most of the Prophets to Banī Isrāīl. These prophets directed them to monotheism and prevented from disbelief and polytheism. The history of the ancient nations shows that the most disobedient nation was Banī Isrāīl which took the path of apostasy many times and they were severely punished for this crime. In relation to apostasy's penalty, both the Qur'ān and the Bible have a common statement. Both books are convinced of the death penalty for apostates. However, the critics mostly criticize Islam only and ignore the teachings and severe punishments of the Bible. This short article reviews the apostasy and punishment of the Children of Isrāīl and seeks to prove that the decision of both the Bible and the Qur'ān is the same when it comes to apostasy punishment.*

**Keywords:** Apostasy of Banī Isrāīl, Injunctions of the Old Testament, The New Testament teachings, Death Penalty for Apostasy, Islamic point of view.

#### What is apostasy?

Apostasy is such a crime through which not only the personality of an apostate is affected along with his family but also the authenticity of religion comes under a serious question. The word apostasy is derived from a Greek word “ἀποστασία” (apostasia) wherewith brings out the meaning of withdrawal, abandonment and defection.<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the Biblical Theological Dictionary apostasy is a term used to describe a turning away from or desertion from the true religion.<sup>2</sup> The Encyclopedia of Religion explains apostasy in the following words:

*“Originally denoting insurrection or secession....in the sense of ‘Rebellion against God.’”<sup>3</sup>*

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The Christians of the third century definitely fixed its usage to the meaning of abandonment of Christianity for another religion, especially paganism.<sup>4</sup> In the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia this term is described as standing apart from, also known as falling away, withdrawing, defecting, or giving up on one's beliefs.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, in accordance with Encyclopedia Britannica it is a term generally employed to elaborate a complete renunciation of the Christian creed, or even an exchange of one form of it for another, especially if the motive be unworthy.”<sup>6</sup> Apostasy, according to the essayist for The Encyclopedia Britannica, refers not only to abandoning one's beliefs but also to giving up one's monastic vows in the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>7</sup>

### **Apostasy and Islamic Commandments**

For human guidance, Allah Almighty established two types of series: messengers and texts. All the prophets that came into the world, from Adam to the Holy Prophet (ﷺ), Allah revealed full volumes to some and short scriptures to others. One of the core tenets of Islam is to believe in the Holy Qur'ān as well as all prior holy writings.<sup>8</sup> In terms of books and scriptures, the Holy Qur'ān only mentions four prophets, with the exception of the Holy Prophet, (ﷺ) in whom Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus are included.<sup>9</sup> For example, about David God Almighty states in the Qur'ān:

*“And to David We gave the Psalms.”<sup>10</sup>*

Further the Qur'ān states with regard to Jesus Christ, “We sent after them Jesus the son of Mary, and bestowed on him the Gospel.”<sup>11</sup> The Qur'ān is the hindmost and ultimate message of God in the continuation of divine texts, just as the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) is the last messenger in the Prophethood sequence. The Qur'ān continued to carry out many divine directions and acts because they were the best for the prosperity, usefulness and religious solidity of human society. One of those acts was about the chastisement of apostasy, which is the focus of much debate in the world today. Islamic viewpoint regarding the punishment of apostate is very clear. According to Islamic law, death penalty is for apostasy,<sup>12</sup> and it was under practice not only during the time of Prophethood but also during the time of his companions.

Prophetic parlance, after the holy Qur'ān, is the second origin of Islamic Sharī'ah through which we may get the bottom of Qur'ānic precepts and know the features of its recapitulatory. Nearly more than ten times in the Holy Qur'ān Allah Almighty has

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adjudicated to follow His messenger along with His submission.<sup>13</sup> So, with regard to apostasy, the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) maintained the death penalty for it.<sup>14</sup> By these Islamic injunctions, the believers are being actuated to be persisted in faith and forewarning from the denouement of apostasy. This penalty was not new, the Bible even before that had described very severe castigations for apostasy.

### **Apostasy and the Old Testament**

Only three religions in the world now claim to have inherited the sacred scriptures: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Old and the New Testament, which are the two halves of the Bible, are well-known to divine religion investigators. In Judaism, the New Testament has no value. The Jews do not believe in Jesus Christ nor in the New Testament, yet the Old Testament has been deemed hallowed by Christians since the beginning, and this is due to Jesus Christ's announcement that he will get through the law and the scriptures of the previous prophets.<sup>15</sup> Because of Jesus' declaration, the Old Testament is incorporated in Christian literature. This is not a single book, but rather a collection of thirty-nine writings. It is suffice to remark that the Old Testament is the most comprehensive collection of God's teachings that has coached mankind on monotheism, prophethood, and the afterlife. The Israelite prophets were the conduits for these beliefs to reach the human race. Because of the Israelites' stupidity, this Testament has been the target of change and modification, yet we can still see it in the doctrines that the Qur'ān, as the last divine word, confirms.<sup>16</sup>

The study of the Old Testament reveals that the Israelites have a long history of apostasy. Despite being messengers, the nation to which Allah Almighty sent the most glorious selected ones slipped into aberrancy. Whereas, the Israelites were commanded several times to avoid apostasy and to remain steadfast in their faith.<sup>17</sup> If someone does not abide by these orders, apostasy and its corollaries are mentioned in numerous places in the Old Testament.<sup>18</sup>

### **Worship of gods and Divine Torment**

Notwithstanding God's numerous warnings, the Israelites did not brought an end to apostasy, and they occasionally fell prey to God's wrath. The following are the gods that the Israelites worshiped, as well as the punishments they had to endure in exchange.

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## **Worship of Calf**

The Israelites came to the Sinai Valley after their exodus from Egypt, and Moses headed out for Mount Sinai to bring the canon to his people. The Israelites began to venerate the golden calf after he left, and God Almighty alerted Moses of their actions.<sup>19</sup> This incidence, and the penalty of the calf worshippers, is addressed in the Qur'ān as well,<sup>20</sup> and the Old Testament has also displayed the same consequence. It is mentioned in the Old Testament that three thousand men were sentenced on that occasion.<sup>21</sup>

## **Worship of Baal**

Baal is the most commonly described deity in Bible studies. The Israelites' deification of Baal and their denunciation are detailed in the Bible. Baal means "controller" and "possessor." It was regarded as the sun deity, and the Canaanites' Baal was known as 'Baal Shemaim'. According to the Bible Encyclopedia, it was the epithet of the exquisite and supreme god among the Canaanites.<sup>22</sup> It was worshiped as Baal-peor, Baal-berith, Baal-zebul, Baal-gad, Baal-hamon, and Baal-hermon. The Bible exposes the veneration and exaltation of the first three, as short detailed below:

### **Worship of Baal-peor**

According to the Book of Numbers, the Israelites had chance to cross paths with the Moabites while camping in the Shittim zone. The Israelites moved away from God and worshipped Baal-peor because of the Moabites' friendship.<sup>23</sup> The worship of Baal-peor is also revealed in the Psalms and Hosea, in addition to the Book of Numbers.<sup>24</sup> The Israelites deserved the same punishment for worshipping Baal-peor as they did for worshipping the calf even more than that. Three thousand were slaughtered for calf worship, but twenty-four thousand were decollated as a result of this transgression.<sup>25</sup>

### **Worship of Baal-berith**

The Israelites had always a proclivity to stick to God as long as they were afraid of the sword on their necks, but when there was no one to guide them, they quickly discarded God and began adoring idols of other gods. When Gideon, an Israelite ruler, aided the Israelites and freed them from the Midianites, the Israelites acknowledged him as their king. But, after forty years of enthronement, as soon as he passed away, the Israelites abandoned their faith and began to worship Baal-berith.<sup>26</sup> According to the Bible Encyclopedia this name is replaced by El-berith, "Covenant-god." The covenant was that

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made by the god with his worshippers, less probably between the Israelites and the native Canaanites.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Worship of Baal-zebub**

At Ekron, this was Baal’s third manifestation. It was envisioned as ‘the fly deity,’ according to the Bible Encyclopedia. The name of this Baal is generally ‘the Lord of flies,’ the Sun-god being associated with the flies that swarm in Pal during the earlier summer months. It is met with Assyr inscriptions. In the New Testament the name assumes the form of Beelzebul.<sup>28</sup> Ahaziah, Ahab’s son, was the one who started the worship of this Baal in Israel and led the Israelites away from Monotheism. For two years, he ruled over the Israelites in Samaria.<sup>29</sup> Ahaziah was a follower of which Baal? The answer can be found in the first verses of 2 Kings Chapter 1;

*“Then Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab. And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber that was in Samaria, and was sick: and he sent messengers, and said unto them, Go, inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease. But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron?”<sup>30</sup>*

### **Worship of Ashtaroth**

Because of their numbing, the Israelites did not image monotheism over head and ears and continued to love different divinities despite their prophets’ divine messages. After Joshua’s death, the Israelites wandered about, worshipping a goddess named Ashtaroth rather than the Lord. It is written in the book of Judges:

*“And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim: and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger. And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.”<sup>31</sup>*

The location of this deity is mentioned in the book of 1 Kings.<sup>32</sup> In his description of Ashtaroth's attributes, Gregory Elder notes that the goddess Ashtaroth, who was connected to sexuality and fertility, was a well-liked divinity at the time of the Bible. The same goddess is known as Astarte in the Hebrew Bible. She was worshipped with sexual fertility ceremonies, which is most likely why the ancient Hebrew prophets frequently opposed her cult.<sup>33</sup>

### **Worship of other Deities**

Regardless of these divinities, the Israelites worshipped a variety of gods mentioned in the Bible. It is referenced in Zephaniah's book that the remnant of Baal will be eradicated from this region, along with the name of the Chemarim priests, those who worship the host of heaven from rooftops, those who swear by the Lord, and those who swear by Malcham. I will also extend my hand to Judah and all the people of Jerusalem.<sup>34</sup> Aside from the celestial objects, the Book of Judges mentions a number of other gods like Baalim, the gods of the Philistines, the gods of the children of Ammon, the gods of Zidon, the gods of Moab, and the gods of Syria.<sup>35</sup>

The book of 1 Kings describes the names of some more deities which are as under; "Because that they have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways, to do that which is right in mine eyes, and to keep my statutes and my judgments, as did David his father."<sup>36</sup>

### **Torments on Worshipping Deities**

A research of Israelite dereliction in the above sections reveals that they got the same punishment which the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth have proclaimed in Islam. Apart from murder, the Old Testament also promotes another penalty: total obliteration, which is mentioned in the Book of Judges and Psalms. According to the Book of Judges, the Lord was furious with Israel and gave them up to spoilers who destroyed them as well as selling them into the crosshairs of their adversaries so that they could no longer stand up to them. Wherever they went, the Lord's hand was against them for bad, just as He had promised and as He had said. This caused them tremendous sorrow.<sup>37</sup>

The Book of Psalms states that they offered their daughters and sons as sacrifices to idols in Canaan, spilled innocent blood, including the blood of their daughters and sons,



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and tainted the landscape with human blood. As a result, they were polluted by their creations and engaged in whoring. As a result, the Lord's anger at his people grew to the point where he despised his inheritance. And he sent them over to the pagan people, who controlled them because they despised them. Additionally, they were subjected to oppression at the hands of their opponents.<sup>38</sup>

### Description of the New Testament

The Four Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Epistles, and Revelation make up the New Testament, which is the consecrated literature of Christianity. Truth be told, this is a collection of twenty-seven books. The Gospel (Injīl), which God Almighty revealed to Jesus son of Mary, is mentioned in the Qur'ān rather than the New Testament. When the Israelites saw the infant in Mary's lap and mocked her virtue, Jesus spoke to them in his mother's lap and reported his book.<sup>39</sup>

An apostate in Islam is defined as someone who departs from key convictions, similarly, according to Christian teachings, a Christian who gives up core convictions is expelled from Christianity. What are the essential beliefs of Christianity? The Trinity and the Atonement both are the foundational doctrines of Christianity, and those who believe in them are called true Christians. If a Christian rejects these convictions, he is not a Christian, and this is known as apostasy in Christianity. In the New Testament, Christians are continually warned and urged to remain faithful in this regard. Jesus Christ also urged believers to be solid in their faith, indicating that he would be a faithful disciple who knew both the Father and the Son. So it is recorded in John's Gospel;

*"And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you."<sup>40</sup>*

Jude's epistle makes it plain that such an individual is ungodly and deserves to be punished for refusing to believe in Jesus Christ. He composes:

*"For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>41</sup>*



Jesus Christ orders to put a millstone round the neck and hurl into the sea who tries to lure and mislead the Christians. It is mentioned in Matthew's Gospel;

*"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."<sup>42</sup>*

What was the purpose of Jesus Christ's crucifixion for such a person? According to John Albert's interpretation of this passage, the punishment of being cast into the sea was frequent among the Greeks, Romans, Syrians, and Phoenicians, hence Jesus Christ advocated this penalty.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, in his commentary, Morison explains this verse:

*"There is an awful and august irony in the literal expression. It is assumed that he who leads astray one of Christ's little ones had an end in view."<sup>44</sup>*

In his first letter to Timothy, St. Paul urges Timothians to preach just what he has been taught, because other doctrines can lead to mistake. As such, he writes:

*"As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: from which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling."<sup>45</sup>*

Paul also warns of the perils of heresy in Christianity in the future in the same epistle. He composes:

*"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron."<sup>46</sup>*

At the end of the epistle, Paul admonishes once more;

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*“O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: which some professing have erred concerning the faith.”<sup>47</sup>*

The New Testament verses above demonstrate the importance of safeguarding Christian faith. A person who is misled and tries to mislead others is not deemed good, and in Christianity, such a person merits punishment.

### Conclusion

Islam delivers a wide-ranging and faultless model of life in the form of Qur’ān and Ḥadīth that discriminates it, from other religions. It updates us basic rules and regulations about nomothetic concerned with all probable malefactions in human society those may be imagined. Apostasy is one of them. It is such a criminality through which not only the character of apostate is affected along with his domestic but also the authenticity of faith comes under a serious question. In the light of Islamic and Christian dogmas apostasy is such a crime against Allah Almighty that cannot be forgiven and both, being divine religions, have the same verdict in this matter.

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<sup>9</sup> Al-Qur’ān, 87:18-19

<sup>10</sup> Al-Qur’ān, 4:163

<sup>11</sup> Al-Qur’ān, 57:27

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