Doctrine of Capital Punishment

1. Under the Mosaic Law the death penalty was administered for at least twenty-one reasons.

- Premeditated murder Genesis 9:5,6; Numbers 35:16-21, 30, 33; Deuteronomy 17:6
- Adultery Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:24
- Incest Leviticus 20:11, 12,14
- Bestiality Exodus 22:19; Leviticus 20:15,16
- Sodomy (Homosexuality) Leviticus 18:22; 20:13
- Certain forms of promiscuity Deuteronomy 22:21-24
- Rape of a betrothed virgin Deuteronomy 22:25
- Perjury Zechariah 5:4
- Kidnapping Exodus 21:16; Deuteronomy 24:7
- Upon a priest’s daughter who committed fornication Leviticus 21:9
- Witchcraft Exodus 22:18
- Offering human sacrifices Leviticus 20:2-5
- Striking a parent Exodus 21:15,17
- Disobedience to parents Deuteronomy 21:18-21
- Stealing Zechariah 5:3,4
- Witchcraft Leviticus 24:11-14, 16, 23
- Violation of the Sabbath Exodus 35:2; Numbers 15:32-36
- Falsely prophesying Deuteronomy 13:1-10
- Sacrificing to false gods Exodus 22:20
- Refusing to abide by legal decisions Deuteronomy 17:12
- Treason 1 Kings 2:25; Est. 2:23

2. The modes of execution varied.

- Burning Genesis 38:24; Leviticus 20:14; 21:9; Jeremiah 29:22; Ezekiel 23:25; Daniel 3:19-23
- Stoning Leviticus 20:2, 27; 24:14; Numbers 14:10; 15:33-36; Deuteronomy 13:10; 17:5; 22:21, 24; Joshua 7:25; 1 Kings 21:10; Ezekiel 16:40
- Hanging Genesis 40:22; Deuteronomy 21:22,23; Joshua 8:29

3. Minor offenses were punishable in less severe ways.

- Scouring Leviticus 19:20; Deuteronomy 22:18; 25:2,3; Proverbs 17:10; 19:29; 20:30
- Imprisonment Genesis 39:20,40
- Confinement within a given area 1 Kings 2:26,36-38
4. The administration of ultimate divine and social justice was to be done by the witnesses (Deuteronomy 13:9; 17:7) or by the congregation. (Numbers 15:35, 36; Deuteronomy 13:9).

5. Capital punishment could not be inflicted except on the testimony of two or more witnesses (Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15).

6. The principle under-girding the administration of punishment is that individuals are accountable and will be dealt with according to their deeds (Job 34:11; Psalm 62:12; Proverbs 12:14; 24:12; Isaiah 59:18; Jeremiah 17:10; Ezekiel 7:3, 27; 16:59; 39:24; Zechariah 1:6).

7. Sometimes the administration of a just form of punishment is delayed or reserved for a future time (Psalm 50:21; 55:19; Proverbs 1:24; Ecclesiastes 8:11-13; Habakkuk 1:2).

8. The primary purpose of punishment is to secure righteous obedience and to administer a just penalty in payment for personal transgressions (Genesis 2:17; Exodus 20:3; Leviticus 26:14-39; Deuteronomy 13:10,11; 21:21; Proverbs 19:25; 21:11; 26:3).

9. There will be no escape from divine justice (Job 11:20; Proverbs 1:24-31; 11:21; 16:5; 29:1; Jeremiah 11:11; 15:1; 25:28, 29; Amos 2:14; Zeph. 1:18).