What the Bible Says
About the Consequences of Breaking
God’s Laws

I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction.  
(Deuteronomy 30:15)

Uh-oh, there’s a flag on the play. The referee picks up the football, and the 
players reluctantly march fifteen yards back. Now it’s second down and twenty-five. 
When you don’t play by the rules, penalties are imposed. When you don’t 
live by the rules, consequences are sure to follow. God is Judge and Referee; he 
knows the rule book front to back, and he doesn’t miss a thing.

In a post-Christian world casually guided by cultural relativism, preachers 
make jokes about “the Ten Suggestions.” Nonbelievers, nonetheless, instinctively 
know that God means business. They pull down the commandments from 
courtroom walls and carry them out of their classrooms. Like the ancient 
Israelites, they don’t want to be told—not by Moses, or God, or anyone else— 
how they should live. And like the Israelites, they will soon find themselves in 
plenty of trouble for playing by their own rules and stubbornly resisting the laws 
of God.

Laws are instituted to govern men. Penalties make laws enforceable. 
Retribution or restitution demanded by law sends this message to the lawbreaker: 
“You will not end up better off than the victim of your crime.” And so we find 
the penalties imposed by the law of Moses—eye for eye, tooth for tooth, and so 
forth—are an exact fit for the crimes committed against one’s fellow man. “You 
must purge the evil from among you,” Moses wrote. “The rest of the people will 
hear of this and be afraid, and never again will such an evil thing be done among 
you.” (Deuteronomy 19:19-20)

But what of the crimes committed against God? Israel habitually violated the 
first and second commandments; they could not resist following social trends and 
worshiping the gods of their neighbors. For this they were punished severely, 
“cursed” by God and sent away into exile. The law, in fact, is so demanding, and 
its penalties so devastating, that a new covenant between God and man had to be 
drawn up. Under the new covenant, all the curses of the law under the old 
covenant were placed upon the Son of God, who redeemed humanity from the 
ultimate penalty imposed by law: death. In Christ we are now free, as the 
psalmist has said, “to run in the path of his commands,” without fear of 
condemnation.
The law of Moses include penalties to be imposed on those who disobey its commands. The law became a curse to Israel, for they failed as a nation to faithfully follow God’s ways.

No small penalty is assigned to God’s first command given to mankind in the Garden. The death penalty, we find as we read through the Pentateuch, is prescribed for various infractions of the law, such as murder and kidnapping. Equitable penalties are applied to lesser violations. God abounds with compassion and forgiveness; still, he says, because he is also just and fair, he does not let the guilty go unpunished.

God is not soft on the Israelites, even though they are his people. They are also the ones, you recall, who wanted to dump Moses and go back to slavery in Egypt. They are the ones who talked Aaron into building a golden calf for them to worship. God therefore lays out a terrorizing list of consequences for the nation if they continue to disobey him and go looking for other gods. Economic ruin, plagues and afflictions, oppression and destruction at the hands of their enemies—these are just a sampling of the curses in store for them if they turn from God’s commands.

The law is particularly hard on those who commit crimes against their fellow men. Show no pity, Moses writes: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. Approaching 120 years of age, Moses stands before the people, scrolls in hand, and reiterates the importance of keeping the law, that they might become a blessed nation and not cursed. See, he warns them, I set before you life and prosperity, death and destruction—now choose life!

Solomon pens a little piece on wisdom at the beginning of the book of Proverbs that aptly fits today’s lesson. Wisdom laughs at those who suffer calamity on account of of their own foolishness, he writes. They will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes. In this same vein, Paul later offers the axiom: A man reaps what he sows.

The prophet Jeremiah describes the destruction he witnesses in his own lifetime due to the waywardness of his people. God says, I brought on them all the curses of the covenant that I had commanded them to follow but that they did not keep. Then we find Daniel in exile, down on his knees confessing all that the Israelites had done in violation of God’s laws.

In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus warns us that there are still penalties attached to breaking God’s commands. Then Paul, on a positive note, tells us that God’s wrath fell upon Jesus on the cross in order that Christ might redeem us from the curses of the law, allowing God’s grace to be poured out, not only on Jews, but on Gentiles as well.
The Consequences of Breaking God’s Laws

- **Gen 2:15-17** eat of it you will surely die
- **Exo 21:12-19** strikes a man and kills him
  - 34:1-7 not leave the guilty unpunished
- **Lev 20:1-10** adulteress must be put to death
  - 24:10-23 he must be put to death
  - 26:14-26 if you reject my decrees and
- **Num 15:30-36** camp and stoned him to death
- **Deut 19:15-21** You must purge the evil from
  - 21:18-21 who does not obey his father
  - 27:9-26 Cursed is the man who does not
  - 28:15-48 All these curses will come upon
  - 30:11-20* death, blessings and curses
- **Josh 23:1-16** will bring on you all the evil
- **2 Ch 34:14-25** the curses written in the book
- **Prov 1:20-33** will eat the fruit of their ways
- **Jer 9:12-16** they have forsaken my law
  - 11:1-17 all the curses of the covenant
- **Dan 9:1-14** curses ... have been poured
- **Zec 5:1-4** This is the curse that is going
- **Matt 5:17-20** Anyone who breaks one of the
- **Rom 4:13-15** because law brings wrath. And
- **Gal 3:10-14** the law are under a curse, for
  - 6:7 A man reaps what he sows.
- **Heb 10:26-31** of Moses died without mercy
- **Jas 2:8-11** yet stumbles at just one point
To Think About

God laid on Christ “the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). Each time we, as believers, grieve God with our words or our behavior, we add retroactively to Christ’s suffering on the cross.

Memory Verse

The LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness ... forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.... (Exodus 34:6-7)