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## Reward and Punishment

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# **Reward and Punishment**

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## REWARD AND PUNISHMENT

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Reflection on divine judgment and retribution for human deeds is rooted in an implicit doctrine of free will. Legislation in the Torah took extenuating circumstances into account for the human court but God's judgment follows a penetrating probe into intentions behind deeds. Pious teachers hoped that justice favoring the innocent would prevail against the wicked within the context of this life (Ps 37), but this presumption was questioned in Job and Qoheleth. The doctrine of eternal life and resurrection developed in the context of faith that the fullness of life is communion with God and a maturing response to the evidence that wickedness is not always punished promptly.

The nomadic experience of solidarity led to a sense of corporate retribution for good or evil deeds. Indeed decisions of one generation may have an effect on those of later times, but Jeremiah (30:29-30) and Ezekiel (18:1-32) fought against the shirking of personal responsibility because of the burdens from past crimes. Tragically the concept of corporate responsibility was applied by Christians over the centuries to all Jews for culpability of the priests and their followers in the trials and death of Jesus. This was never an explicit doctrine of any council, but was a popular theme in preaching and teaching, with devastating results.

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