

# Misconception: Islam and The Quran orders hands to be cut off for theft



**Background:** Some think that Muslims cut the hands off a thief for stealing, and this is in The Koran.

All punishments relating to members of a society, they are only enforceable if such a society is governed by the laws of The Quran. In such a society, it is a requirement for believers to provide for those in need [2:177, 2:215, 2:219, 5:89, 59:7].

The male thief, and the female thief, you shall mark, cut, or cut-off their hands/means as a recompense for what they earned, and to serve as a deterrent from God. God is Noble, Wise. Whoever repents after his wrongdoing and makes amends, then God will relent on him. Truly, God is Forgiving, Merciful. [5:38-39]

The above verses are commonly translated to mean physical cutting off the thief's hand or hands, however whilst this understanding is a theoretical possibility, when all the information is reviewed it is only one of several possibilities, hence the above translation. Firstly, it should be noted that the verse makes clear whoever commits theft but repents after and makes amends, then this is acceptable to God, thus no punishment can be administered in this case. This of course would only apply to those who do this before they have to be tried and found guilty. To prove this, see the verse below in which being punished is contrasted to relenting:

There are some who await God's decree whether He will punish them or relent on them. God is All Knower, All Wise. [9:106]

And whoever repents and takes corrective action, certainly he turns toward God with true repentance. [25:71]

Based on the Arabic it is possible to understand the punishment for thieves in three alternative ways, (1) cutting off their hands, or (2) cutting or marking their hands, or (3) cutting their means to steal, or cutting their hands from committing the crime. It is up to the society to choose one of these meanings or a combination of them depending on the severity of the crime and their ability to enforce the penalty.

It should be said however that the only working example given in The Quran of theft and its punishment is in the story of Joseph, in which option 3 is done by detaining the one guilty of theft, so that they can work to repay/compensate for the theft. See 12:79 . If a Muslim in authority, like Joseph was, were to apply the punishment for theft like Joseph did, then they would be following the example of one of the guided and a good doer, as stated by The Quran.

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