

April 22

Scriptures: Read Leviticus 20

Key Verse: “And you shall be holy to Me for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.” (Leviticus 20:26)

Overview

This chapter continues with the emphasis upon holiness and the Israelites’ responsibility, as the covenant people, to remain separated from the heathen and obey the laws of God. Many laws found in the preceding two chapters are reiterated, but here we find the penalty involved with the various violations, and in many cases it was death. These punishments may seem harsh, but we have to remember the time period in which they were given and the type of people and customs of those days. Also, the Israelites had agreed to enter into a covenant relationship with God, whom they had made their sole sovereign, agreeing to follow Him with unquestioning obedience. They were, so to speak, under contract.

As we see in this chapter, God would not tolerate the worship of idols, witchcraft, the cursing of parents, nor any form of immorality. The penalties for these transgressions were described in very harsh ways such as: “put to death”, “cut off”, “stone him with stones”, “burned with fire”. Capital punishment reflects the extreme seriousness of the offense. All sin is a serious matter, but some were so abhorrent as to warrant immediate death.

The worship of Molech, the god of the Ammonites, was accompanied by the detestable heathen practice of sacrificing children in the fire. This was revolting to God, and those Israelites guilty of this were to be stoned to death. If this was not done, God Himself would bring His judgment of death upon those who would “commit harlotry” (20:5). Overlooking such a terrible offense implied certain sympathy toward it, and this would lead to the rapid breakdown of the whole covenant community. In fact, this is what history records to have happened later and it led to their downfall (Ps. 106:34-43; Jer.7:30-31; 19:4; 32:31-36; Ezek.23:37).

Sin is described here as it actually is—something horrible which God abhors and which defiles Him, His sanctuary, and His name. It works like an infection and spreads to make uncleanness in every place. Some of the words used to describe the various offenses reflect the seriousness of sin: “harlotry” (v.5), “perversion” (v.12), “abomination” (v.13), “wickedness” (v.14), “disgrace” and “guilt” (NIV, v.17), “an unclean thing” or “an act of impurity” (v.21). The Bible does not try to cover up the horribleness of sin; rather it exposes it for what it is. The holiness of God is what we must attain, and that brings sin out into the open. We sometimes find people today, sadly even some believers, trying to put a sugar coating over something that is actually poison. Sin is sin, and no less. God sees every sin, and for the unrepentant there will indeed come punishment, whether in this life or the next. But thanks be to God for His great grace, for even the sins that deserve death can be forgiven because of the work Jesus wrought on the cross in bearing them away.

The regulations of the covenant were not meant to bring hardship to those God called His own, but rather joy and peace with Him and with the community of faith. Such laws and penalties,

however, were necessary to guide the people in the ways of holiness, as well as serving to warn and deter potential offenders. Being God's elect today also has many serious responsibilities, as well as many privileges. In the teachings of the New Covenant, separation from worldliness and following the way of holiness are still expected of those God calls His own. Like the Old Covenant, we find holiness is still clearly defined in following and obeying the Lord. Although it is a narrow and difficult path (Matt. 7:13-14), by God's grace; it is not impossible. We are exhorted to "pursue... holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

Prayer

O Holy God, by faith we join those around Your throne who worship You saying, "Holy, holy, holy". Enable us to walk in the light of Your holiness, not in an attitude toward others of "Holier than thou", but in humility as sinners who are forgiven because we've asked You and You promised You'd do it.