

LEVITICUS CHAPTER 20

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

All the offences prohibited in this chapter have already been established as being sinful in Leviticus 18-19. The difference here is that the penalties for disobedience are now revealed. Nearly all the crimes listed here are regarded by God as being so serious that they should be punished by death. Many people today believe that these penalties are quite barbaric and that Leviticus 20 is quite contrary to the spirit of Jesus and the New Testament. This is quite wrong as the N.T upholds the principle that the "wages of sin is death" and that the "wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men". The physical punishments that are inflicted in this life will be as nothing compared with the eternal torments of the second death.

Structure of Chapter

Penalties for religious crimes	v1-6
A call to consecration	v7-8
Penalties for family crimes	v9-21
A call to holiness	v22-26
The penalty for religious crimes	v21

Leviticus 20 and the New Testament

Does the New Testament fully endorse the teaching of Lev 20? The answer would appear to be yes! Jesus quoted with approval Lev 20v9 and appears to agree with the death penalty for dishonouring parents (Matt 15v4, Mark 7v10). Paul sums up the list of grievous sins in Rom 1v18-32 with the words, "those who practise such things are deserving of death". He also informs us in Rom 13 that God has appointed the state to avenge evil and does not bear the sword in vain. There is however, one fly in the ointment. Jesus did not insist on the death penalty for the woman taken in adultery (John 8). We also need to bear in mind that many of these laws in Leviticus are civil laws that applied to Israel as a theocracy. In the N.T there is a clear separation of Church and State.