

## SIN

"Is it not true that if you do what is right, you will be fine? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. It desires to dominate you, but you must suppress it." Genesis 4:7 (1)

The Hebrew word *chatta ah* translated sin appears first in Genesis 4:7. That word or a variant of it appears over 250 times from Genesis through Malachi, and primarily means "to miss" or "to offend." The Scripture use of the term is figurative and is used in the sense of an offense against God or a person that requires expiation or payment of a penalty. (2)

An example of the word sin *chatta ah* being used in the sense of "miss" is the touching lines in Proverbs 8:36:

"But whoever fails to find me harms himself; all who hate me love death."  
(NIV)(3)

The Hebrew in Proverbs 8:36 could be translated "the one sinning against me." The word *chatta ah* is logically translated "miss" in this verse, for it forms a contrast with "find" in the Proverbs 8:35, forming a parallel poetic expression. The meaning is that one who misses wisdom is inviting disaster, he has missed the point of his life. The Hebrew term is used figuratively as an expression to mean sin, separation from God. The New English translation of the two verses read

For the one who finds me finds life and receives favor from the Lord.  
But the one who does not find me brings harm to himself;  
all who hate me love death. (4)

The recitation of the fifth commandment in Exodus 20 is followed by the line "so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you." The idea behind all of the laws was that the people would live; live in harmony with one another on the land and live in communion with God. Failure to keep the law meant that one was alienated from God and doomed to death.

Sins not only offends God, but also men made in God's image. The story of the priest Eli and his wicked sins illustrate how religious leaders can cause offense (stumbling). Thus sins not only separates the sinner from God, but also can lead to the alienation of a family, a community and even a nation.

"If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who will intercede for him?" (I Samuel 2:25) (5)

Sins could be the formal, deliberate neglect or breaking of God's commandments.

"If a person sins and violates any of the commandments of the Lord which must not be violated although he did not know it, but later realizes he is guilty, then he will bear his punishment for iniquity and must bring a flawless ram from the flock, convertible into silver shekels, for a guilt offering to the priest. So the priest will make atonement on his behalf for his error which he committed and he will be forgiven." Leviticus 5:17-18. (6)

Some sins were so heinous as to require the death penalty for the sinner; no offering could be made. One such sin is murder. Murder not only kills the physical body of the victim, it is an assault on the image of God dwelling in the person. Such a one could not go to the altar of God and make retribution, confession or sin offering. This is the Old Testament though that lead to the discussion of unpardonable sins in the New Testament.

Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate. But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from my altar and put him to death. Anyone who attacks his father or his mother must be put to death. Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him he is caught must be put to death." Exodus 21:19 (7)

Elaborate systems of confession, offerings, retribution and penalties were set up within the Levitical code to regulate both the priests and the people. However, very early in the history of Israel, God spoke through the prophet Amos indicating the need for the law to be written in the hearts of his people.

"For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings." (Hosea 6:6) (8)

The poetic vision of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 looks forward to a scapegoat capable of bearing the punishment for sins of all men.

"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. . . .my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. . . .he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors." (9)

The author of Hebrews takes up that vision of the Suffering Servant in describing the priestly work of Jesus Christ.

"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 5:7-10." (10)

In the succeeding chapters of Hebrews the author lays out the details of how the risen and ascended Christ remains a priest forever at the heavenly altar making intercession for the faithful. Christ is the mediator of a superior covenant and is both priest and sacrifice.

"so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." Hebrews 9:28) (11)

The Apostle Paul develops a lengthy argument in his Roman epistle that describes how "the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes," saving the faithful from "The wrath of God that is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men."

Paul testifies that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and that in spite of man's sinfulness, God's kindness leads toward repentance." He continues "hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. You see (says St. Paul) at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the

ungodly. . .we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we now have received reconciliation.

" Furthermore, because we have died with Christ, death and sin have no more dominion over us, we have been set free and live in communion with God, no more alienated by sin. (12)

In his vision of the renewed heavens and earth in Revelation chapters 20 and 21, St. John the Revelator shows us the ultimate end of death, the penalty for sin as death and hell are cast into the lake of fire. In heaven there is no separation from God, there is no more death and God will wipe tears off of all faces.

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#### Notes

- (1) Net Bible, New English Translation, Biblical Studies Press, 2001 p. 36
- (2) Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, Hebrew Appendix p. 42
- (3) Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, Greek Appendix p. 5
- (4) The New International Version Study Bible, Kenneth Barker Gen.Ed., Zondervan, p 956
- (5) op. cit., Net Bible, New English Translation, p.1082 and footnotes.
- (6) op. cit. The New International Version Study Bible, p.378
- (7) Ibid. p. 153
- (8) Ibid p. 117
- (9) ibid p. 1329
- (10) ibid pp. 1095-1096
- (11) Ibid p. 1864
- (12) Ibid p. 1869

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