

Deuteronomy 21:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree:

Analysis

And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree—The Hebrew chet mishpat-mavet ("sin worthy of death," literally "sin of judgment of death") indicates capital crimes under Mosaic law. Talita oto al-ets ("hang him on a tree") describes post-execution public display, not execution by hanging. Ancient Israel executed by stoning or the sword; hanging the corpse on a tree was additional public disgrace.

This law directly prefigures Christ's crucifixion. Paul declares: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Galatians 3:13), quoting verse 23. Jesus bore the covenant curse—public shame, divine rejection, substitutionary death—to redeem lawbreakers. Peter likewise references this: "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24).

The phrase ets (tree/wood) connects Eden's tree of knowledge (rebellion's origin) to Calvary's cross (rebellion's remedy). The cursed tree becomes the means of blessing, as the bronze serpent lifted up brought healing (Numbers 21:9; John 3:14-15).

Historical Context

Hanging executed criminals on trees or posts served as public warning in the ancient Near East. Assyrian, Persian, and Roman sources describe similar

practices. For Israel, this wasn't the method of execution but post-mortem display amplifying shame and deterring crime. The reference to "a tree" (ets) could mean a living tree or a wooden stake/pole. Roman crucifixion, developed later, combined execution and hanging on wood in one act. When Jesus was crucified, Jewish authorities recognized the Deuteronomic curse being enacted, unknowingly fulfilling prophetic typology (John 19:31).

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does the typology of the cursed tree deepen your understanding of Christ's substitutionary atonement—bearing not just our sins but the covenant curse itself?
2. In what ways does the transformation from curse to blessing, from death tree to life-giving cross, illuminate the gospel's power to reverse the effects of the fall?

Interlinear Text

מִתְּהִלָּה יְהִי הַיּוֹם
H3588 H1961 And if a man

בָּאָשָׁם

וְעָשָׂה

וְעָשָׂה

מִשְׁפָט מִתְּהִלָּה

מִתְּהִלָּה

מִתְּהִלָּה

H376

H2399

H4941

H4194

וְהִנֵּם תִּהְיֶה
and he be to be put to death

H4191

וְתַּחֲנַתְּתָּךְ אֶת זֶה
and thou hang

H8518

H853

H5921

וְתַּחֲנַתְּתָּךְ אֶת זֶה
him on a tree

H6086

Additional Cross-References

Acts 23:29 (Parallel theme): Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.

Acts 26:31 (Parallel theme): And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.

Matthew 26:66 (Parallel theme): What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death.

Deuteronomy 22:26 (Sin): But unto the damsel thou shalt do nothing; there is in the damsel no sin worthy of death: for as when a man riseth against his neighbour, and slayeth him, even so is this matter:

Luke 23:33 (Parallel theme): And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.
