

Deuteronomy 21:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

Analysis

Burial requirement: 'His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.' Executed criminals hung on trees/poles must be buried same day. The phrase 'he that is hanged is accursed of God' (קִלְלַת אֱלֹהִים תָּלוּ, qilelat elohim talui) indicates divine curse on the sin/criminal. Leaving corpses overnight defiles the land. This shows even criminals retain human dignity—created in God's image. Quick burial limits public shame while maintaining justice. Paul applies this to Christ: 'cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree' (Galatians 3:13)—Jesus bore covenant curse for sinners, becoming cursed on the cross.

Historical Context

Ancient warfare often displayed enemy corpses as deterrent. Israel was forbidden such practice. Joshua hung five kings but removed them at sunset (Joshua 10:26-27). Jesus's crucifixion occurred before Passover; Jews requested removal before Sabbath (John 19:31), fulfilling this law. Christ's burial before nightfall satisfied Deuteronomic requirement. His bearing the curse ('he that is hanged is accursed') means believers escape curse—He took our condemnation. The law's

mercy (burial requirement) foreshadowed gospel grace (Christ bearing curse so we're blessed).

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does even criminals requiring dignified burial reflect universal human dignity as image-bearers?
2. What does Christ becoming 'cursed' on the tree mean for believers' legal standing before God?
3. How does the cross transform the symbol of ultimate curse into the means of ultimate blessing?

Interlinear Text

לֹא תִּשְׁאַל כֵּל יְהוָה עַל נְבָלַת זֶה

H3808 shall not remain all night H3885 His body H5921 upon the tree H3588

תַּקְבִּיכֶن נְבָל תַּקְבִּיכֶנּוּ בָּרֵךְ

bury

H6912

אֵלֶּה יְבָלֶל תַּקְבִּיכֶנּוּ בָּרֵךְ

bury him that day is accursed of God

H6912 H3117 H1931 H3588 H7045 H430

אֵלֶּה יְבָלֶל תַּקְבִּיכֶנּוּ בָּרֵךְ

for he that is hanged be not defiled that thy land

H8518 H3808 H2930 H853 H127

אֵלֶּה יְבָלֶל תַּקְבִּיכֶנּוּ בָּרֵךְ

which the LORD of God giveth thee for an inheritance

H3068 H430 H5414 H0 H5159

Additional Cross-References

Galatians 3:13 (Curse): 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:

John 19:31 (Parallel theme): The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (References God): For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Romans 9:3 (Curse): For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:

Leviticus 18:25 (Parallel theme): And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants.

Numbers 25:4 (References Lord): And the LORD said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel.

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