

Joshua 10:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And afterward Joshua smote them, and slew them, and hanged them on five trees: and they were hanging upon the trees until the evening.

Analysis

And afterward Joshua smote them, and slew them, and hanged them on five trees: and they were hanging upon the trees until the evening.

The execution sequence is described with stark brevity. The verb "smote" (וַיַּךְ, vayachem) likely indicates a killing blow, while "slew" (וַיַּמִּיתֵם, vayemitem) confirms death. The phrase "hanged them on five trees" (וַיִּתְּלֵם אֶל-חֲמִשָּׁה עֵצִים, vayitlem al-chamishah etsim) describes public display of corpses as warning to others. This wasn't execution by hanging (strangulation) but impalement or suspension of already-executed bodies—a common ancient practice (Deuteronomy 21:22-23; 2 Samuel 4:12; Esther 2:23).

The detail "they were hanging upon the trees until the evening" indicates compliance with Deuteronomy 21:22-23, which required that bodies displayed as deterrent be taken down before nightfall to prevent defiling the land. The Hebrew עַד-הָעֶרֶב (ad-ha'arev, "until the evening") shows Joshua's scrupulous adherence to Torah even in executing judgment. This wasn't barbaric lawlessness but covenantal obedience—harsh judgment executed within legal boundaries.

Paul quotes Deuteronomy 21:23 in Galatians 3:13: "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." The five kings hanging under God's curse prefigure Christ hanging on the cross, bearing the curse we deserved. But whereas these

kings died for their own sins, Christ died as sinless substitute for His people's sins (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24).

Historical Context

Public display of executed criminals' bodies was widespread in the ancient Near East, serving as deterrent and demonstration of authority. The Code of Hammurabi prescribed such display for certain crimes. Assyrian reliefs show impaled bodies outside conquered cities. The Romans later perfected this terror tactic through crucifixion, lining roads with crucified rebels as warnings. The practice combined punishment with psychological warfare—seeing the fate of resisters discouraged others from rebellion.

The five trees (עֲצֵי, etsim) were likely stakes or poles rather than living trees, though the text allows either interpretation. Archaeological evidence from the ancient Near East shows various methods of corpse display: impalement on stakes, hanging from gallows, or suspending from tree branches. The important element wasn't the specific mechanism but the public visibility and shameful exposure.

Joshua's adherence to the Deuteronomy 21:22-23 requirement for burial before nightfall distinguished Israelite practice from surrounding nations. While pagans might leave corpses exposed indefinitely for maximum deterrence and humiliation, God's law balanced justice with human dignity—even executed criminals received burial. This principle undergirded Joseph of Arimathea's request for Jesus' body (John 19:38-42), ensuring the crucified Christ received proper burial before sunset on Preparation Day.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does the execution of these five kings under the curse of hanging prefigure Christ's substitutionary death for sinners?
2. What does Joshua's careful adherence to Torah regulations even while executing judgment teach about the relationship between justice and mercy, righteousness and compassion?
3. How should Christians understand Old Testament accounts of divinely commanded capital punishment in light of New Testament teaching about forgiveness and enemy love?

Interlinear Text

וַיַּכּוּ smote H5221	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ Joshua H3091	אַחֲרָיו And afterward H310	כֵּן H3651	וַיָּמִיתוּ them and slew H4191	וַיִּתְּלוּ and they were hanging H8518	
עַל H5921	חֲמִשָּׁה them on five H2568	יָם trees H6086	וְהָיָה H1961	וַיִּתְּלוּ and they were hanging H8518	עַל H5921	יָם trees H6086
עַד H5704	הָעֶרֶב: until the evening H6153					

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 8:29 (Parallel theme): And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until eventide: and as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his carcase down from the tree, and cast it at the entering of the gate of the city, and raise thereon a great heap of stones, that remaineth unto this day.