

HANGED ON A TREE AND CURSED BY GOD:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE USES OF
DEUTERONOMY 21.22-23 IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The uses of Deuteronomy 21.22-23 by New Testament writers provides students of the Bible with a good example of application of an Old Testament text in the development of early Christology. In its Old Testament context, what is proscribed by the Mosaic Code is a limit to the display of a corpse in a case of capital punishment. The body or corpse of any Israelite so executed that is hanged “on a tree . . . must not remain all night upon the tree.” This is because “anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse.” And to allow the body to stay overnight on the tree would “defile the land that the Lord your God is giving you for possession.”¹ In the New Testament, this proscription may be reflected indirectly in the passion narratives of the Gospels and in the early preaching of the apostles in Acts. In the letters, it may be alluded to by Peter, and it is quoted explicitly by Paul in his letter to the Galatians. These uses seem to indicate an early and striking development, based on an Old Testament statute, in the understanding of the death of Jesus by his followers.

Observations on the Old Testament proscription in Deuteronomy 21.22-23. Capital punishment, as part of *lex talionis*, is an important aspect of ancient Mesopotamian legal systems and, in its Hebrew context, reflects the character of the Lord who is just and who cares for his people.² Attempts to soften the force of these statutes, as valid in some measure for modern societies, are unconvincing.³ The God who created all things certainly has “no pleasure in the

¹Unless indicated otherwise, scripture quotations are from NRSV (English), Lanier and Ross (Greek OT), Brown and Comfort (Greek NT), and Elliger and Rudolph (Hebrew).

²See Gane (2017), 37, 43-44.

³For example, Megivern (1997), 10-16.

death of anyone” (Ezekiel 18.32). But this same God is just, and he is merciful and righteous in that justice.⁴ The sense of the Mosaic provision about the burial of a criminal’s corpse is that God, in his justice and mercy, requires for Israel a chronological limit and a determinate resolve to the double violence of the guilty perpetrator and the executors of judicial punishment, that is, “you shall bury him that same day.”

The overall structure of Deuteronomy, the so-called “Second Law,” need not concern us, since the organizational pattern of Deuteronomy 12–26 “has so far defied solution.” Nicholson argues that the material in chapters 21–25 “does not seem to follow any orderly arrangement” and contains “a miscellany of laws” that pertain to a variety of topics, including capital punishment.⁵ This “copy” or “repetition” of the Law (see 17.18) in its arrangement, however, bears striking resemblance to the ancient Near East suzerainty treaty. Such suggests that this collection of legal edicts, in its present canonical shape, reflects a second millennium B.C. origin and background that is compatible with Moses as author.⁶

In the Pentateuch, the death penalty is specified for a number of serious offences that include intentional homicide, kidnapping of a slave, grave sins against God (i.e., blasphemy, idolatry, sorcery), grave sins against parents, and various sexual sins (i.e., adultery, bestiality, sodomy).⁷ De Vaux explains:

⁴See verses 21-31 of Ezekiel 18.

⁵Nicholson (1967), 32-33. Cf. Rendtorff (1986), 150-157.

⁶See Woods (1972), 195-199, for Deuteronomy’s adaptation of the suzerainty treaty format and an extended outline of the book. Cf. Childs (1979), 202ff.; Merrill (1991), 62-86. See too “The Literary Context of the Law in the Pentateuch” in Walton (2018), 274-276, and De Vries (1975), 99-100, who characterizes Deuteronomy as a “strange book” in the OT canon that “occupies a mid-place between historiography and prophecy,” since it crystallizes God’s word (i.e., “repeated parenetical appeal”) for a period much later than that of Moses.

⁷Vaux (1965), Volume 1, 158-160.

Israelite law, unlike other Eastern laws, limits capital punishment to offences against the purity of worship, against the sanctity of life and the sources of life. This religious motive is usually expressed in the laws, and it is a consequence of the peculiar character of Israel's legislation. . . . The law was the charter of the covenant with God. Because it is designed to safeguard the Covenant, it enjoins severe penalties for all crimes against God, idolatry and blasphemy, and for crimes which tarnish the holiness of the chosen people, e.g., bestiality, sodomy, and incest. And it is further distinguished from other Eastern codes (even the Hittite, which is the most lenient) by the humaneness of its sentences.⁸

This humaneness seems evident in the provision for burial of the body of one who has been found guilty of a crime or “sin” (*chet*)⁹ that is “worthy of death” (*mish 'pat maweth*),¹⁰ subsequently executed or “put to death” (*w'humath*), then “hanged on a tree” (*w'thaliath 'al 'ets*).¹¹ Barth notes, “Sentences had to be executed in a just and honorable manner, not merely for the sake of the weak, but in the interests of justice itself.”¹²

In ancient Israel, there were four ways to execute an offender—by stoning, burning, the sword or decapitation, and strangulation.¹³ De Vaux comments, “The penalty could be increased by exposure of the bodies of the condemned . . . [as a] mark of infamy and an example.”¹⁴ Hertz concurs, “Hanging was sometimes added after death, in token of infamy, or as a further

⁸Ibid., 158, 149.

⁹See Knight (1959), 124-127, for various OT terms for evil, sin, and wickedness.

¹⁰Cf. *mish 'pat maweth* (i.e., “sentence of death”) in OJB at Jeremiah 26.11, 16; Matthew 26.66; Mark 14.64; Luke 23.15; 24.20; John 5.24; 1 Corinthians 4.9; 2 Corinthians 1.9; 6.9.

¹¹JPS uses “impale” and “stake” for *talah* (“to hang”) and *'ets* (“tree”): “If a man is guilty of a capital offense and is put to death, and you impale him on a stake, you must not let his corpse remain on the stake overnight, but must bury him the same day. For an impaled body is an affront to God: you shall not defile the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess.”

¹²Barth (1991), 147. Cf. Deuteronomy 24.16; 25.1-4.

¹³Strangulation is not mentioned in OT, but it is presumed by the rabbis in the Mishnah in certain cases as the unspecified punishment for adultery. See D. W. Amram, “Adultery,” JE. Cf. Gane (2017), 322-323.

¹⁴Vaux (1965), Volume 1, 159. See too Numbers 25.4; 2 Samuel 21.8-13.

deterrent.”¹⁵ Death by impalement or crucifixion, attested among the Persians and other “barbarian” peoples, was a punishment unknown in the Old Testament.¹⁶ Here, in Deuteronomy 21.22, the hanging or impalement on a tree, or wooden pole, is done after the execution. This was allowed under the law, but the corpse had to be taken down before nightfall. Even in the criminal, Hertz says, “the dignity of humanity must be respected . . . therefore, his body shall, at the earliest moment, receive the same reverent treatment that is due to any other deceased.”¹⁷

According to the statute, respect for the criminal’s body and its burial by sunset is based on two reasons. First, the one who is hanged on a tree is “under God’s curse” (*ki qil’lath ’elohim*). The Hebrew *q’lalah* can be understood as “a reproach” unto God or “an insult” to God.¹⁸ And in rabbinic thought, the curse could be “the cursing of the judges” by the criminal’s relatives (so Rashbam) or “a slight to the King” who created man in his image (so Rashi).¹⁹

About the curse, Craigie elaborates:

The body was not *accursed of God* because it was hanging on a tree; it was hanging on a tree because it was accursed of God. And the body was not accursed of God simply because it was dead (for all men die), but it was accursed because of the reason for the death. To break the law of God and live as though he did not matter or exist, was in effect to curse him; and he who cursed God would be accursed of God. To break the law of God and incur thereby the penalty of death was to die the worst possible kind of death,

¹⁵Hertz (1971), 842. See Joshua 8.29; 10.26-27; cf. 1 Samuel 31.10-13; 2 Samuel 4.12.

¹⁶Hengel (1977), 22ff.; cf. Vaux (1965), Volume 1, 159; and Elgvin (1997), 14ff., who argues otherwise.

¹⁷Hertz (1971), 842. Cf. Vaux (1965), Volume 1, 159, who says, “Bodily mutilation as a consequence of the *lex talionis* is fairly common in the Code of Hammurabi and the Assyrian laws, but it is found in Israelite law only in the special case of Deuteronomy 25.11-12, where it is a symbolic retaliation.”

¹⁸Hertz (1971), 842; M. Greenberg, “Hanging,” IDB, Volume 2, 522. Cf. “object of curse” in Brown, Driver, and Briggs (1951), 887. See also Berstein (1983), 23-24; J. A. Selbie, “Hanging,” HDB, Volume II, 298.

¹⁹See Hertz (1971), 842.

for the means of death was a formal and terminal separation from the community of God's people.²⁰

But this circumlocution fails to explain why a hanged, as opposed to an unhanged, corpse of a criminal is "under God's curse." At best, the text states the reality of God's curse but does not provide any rationale.²¹

Second, to not bury the criminal's body before dark would "defile the land" (*th'tame' 'eth 'admath'ak*). The corpse itself, however, as a defiling object was a danger to the living. Contact with the dead brought about ritual impurity (see Numbers 5.2; 19.11-13). But "the Deuteronomic laws are seldom concerned with matters of ritual purity and polluting elements. . . . It may be that the sense of 'desecrating' the land is based on either the sight or the smell of an exposed and decaying body."²² If left to decay or become food for birds and wild animals, a dead body could spread disease. As a practical matter, it was important for the body to be buried on the same day as the execution. And, in ancient Israel, to be left unburied as prey for birds and beasts was one of the worst of all curses.²³

²⁰Craigie (1976), 285-286; cf. elaboration of Craigie's comments by Caneday (2014), 125.

²¹It is important, though, to see 21.22-23 as part of the overall emphasis on blessings and curses in the book of Deuteronomy (e.g., 11.26, 28, 29; 21.23; 23.4, 5; 27.13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26; 28.15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 45; 29.20, 21, 27; 30.1, 7, 19); see footnote 158 below. For different Hebrew and Greek words translated "curse," see R. K. Harrison, "Curse," ISBE, Volume One, 837-838; cf. entries in Brown (1975), Volume I, 413-418.

²²Walton, Matthews, Chavalas (2000), 194. Cf. comments in Thompson (1974), 232, and, to the contrary, in Keil and Delitzsch (1973), 408, "The land was defiled not only by vices and crimes (cf. Leviticus 18.24, 28; Numbers 35.34) but also by the exposure to view of criminals who had been punished with death, and thus had been smitten by the curse of God, inasmuch as their shameful deeds were thereby publicly exposed to view. We are not to think of any bodily defilement of the land through the decomposition consequent upon death . . . so that there is no ground for speaking of any discrepancy between this and the old law."

²³See Jeremiah 16.4; 22.19; Ezekiel 29.5; 39.17-20. On death and funeral rites in Israel, see Vaux (1965), Volume 1, 56-61. Cf. Borowski (2003), 83-84.

The passion narratives of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In their portrayal of the crucifixion of Jesus, all four Gospels tell about the judgment and execution of a supposed criminal, his hanging on a tree, and his burial before sunset the same day. Jesus was put on trial and found to be guilty of a capital offence. He was executed summarily according to the Roman method of crucifixion. And, after his death, his body was taken from the cross and buried the same day in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. In their “good news” narratives, do these early followers of Jesus of Nazareth reflect the statute in Deuteronomy 21.22-23?

*The arrest, trials, and humiliation of Jesus (Matthew 26.47–27.31; Mark 14.43–15.20; Luke 22.47–23.25; John 18.1–19.16).*²⁴ The Gospels indicate that Jesus was “betrayed” (from *paradidomi*)²⁵ by one of his close followers, Judas Iscariot.²⁶ Roman “soldiers” and “police” from the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem went to Gethsemane at night and “laid hands on Jesus and arrested him.”²⁷ He then was taken to the assembled Sanhedrin where “the chief priests and the whole council” heard testimony against Jesus “so that they might put him to death.”²⁸ When the high priest himself examined Jesus about the testimony against him, Jesus at first refused to

²⁴For a detailed treatment of these very complex proceedings, see Schnabel (2018), 223-307; cf. McDonald and Porter (2000), 147-158.

²⁵The word means “to hand over” or “to deliver” in the sense of “subjecting a person to custodial procedure, which could involve various stages and numerous parties in the judicial process.” It often connotes the idea of betrayal to an authority or penalty “by someone filled with animus.” Danker (2009), 266.

²⁶The cognomen of Judas could mean the one from Kerioth, a town in Judea (i.e., not in Galilee), or it could be from the Latin *sicarius*, a brigand or terrorist. Court (2007), 185.

²⁷In 18.3, John’s “combination of *chief priests and Pharisees* refers to the Sanhedrin, or governing council, which had at its disposal a small force of *police*, mainly for keeping order in the temple. . . . The *detachment*, literally, a cohort, [was] a unit of six hundred men, though it is debatable whether all of them would have been present. Only John mentions the presence of Roman soldiers at Jesus’ arrest. He is also the only one to mention the *Pharisees*.” David K. Rensberger, “The Gospel according to John,” NRSV, 2027, 2047-2048.

²⁸Matthew 26.59; cf. Mark 14.55.

answer. But when the high priest put him under oath—"I adjure you by the living God" (Matthew 26.63; RSV)—Jesus affirmed that he was "the Messiah, the Son of God" and stated, "You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.'"²⁹ With this confession, the Sanhedrin stopped the proceedings, charged Jesus with blasphemy, and unanimously agreed, "He deserves death."³⁰

The question of whether Jesus, according to the Jerusalem authorities, had violated Jewish law and deserved punishment by death is relevant to establish a connection between the Gospels and the statute in Deuteronomy 21.22-23. Matthew and Mark note this clearly when they say of the Sanhedrin, "All of them condemned him as deserving death."³¹ Luke, through his account of Jesus before Pontius Pilate and Herod Antipas, affirms the negative of what the Jerusalem authorities believed about Jesus.³² Judea's Roman governor found "no basis for an accusation against" Jesus, even though the Jewish leaders accused him of "perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king."³³ After sending Jesus to Herod, the tetrarch over Galilee which was the home province of Jesus, Pilate again convened "the chief priests, the leaders, and the people" and told them plainly:

²⁹On Jesus as Messiah, Son of Man, and Son of God, see Cullmann (1963), 109-192, 270-305; cf. Brown (1994), 71-102.

³⁰Matthew 26.66; cf. 27.1. On the oath formula, the messianic question, the response of Jesus, and the charge of blasphemy in Matthew, see Keener (2009), 649-652.

³¹Mark 14.64; the Greek reads *hoi de pantes katekrinan auton enochon einai thanatou*. The Greek of Matthew 26.66 reads *hoi de apokrithentes eipan enochos thanatou estin*. "Deserve" is from *enochos* indicating "subject to" or "guilty of" a specified punishment. For other NT uses, see Kittel (2006), Volume II, 828.

³²Luke 23.1-16; cf. Matthew 27.1-14; Mark 15.1-5.

³³These charges were tainted with political implications designed to interest the Roman procurator.

“You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. I will therefore have him flogged and release him.”³⁴

And later when he offers to release one of the prisoners for the Passover festival,³⁵ Pilate repeats this judgment of the innocence of Jesus—“I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death.”³⁶ The Sanhedrin believed Jesus to be worthy of death; he was a blasphemer. Pilate and Herod did not think Jesus to be worthy of death; blasphemy, which was no threat to Rome, was not insurrection. But, due to the pressure put on Pilate by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, Jesus was given the sentence of death nevertheless.

This contrast between the Jewish leaders and Pilate about whether or not Jesus deserved to be put to death comes out clearly in the writing of John (18.28ff.). According to John, it was the high priest Caiaphas who advised the Jerusalem leaders that “it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.” And the apostle explains:

He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to put him to death (11.50-53; cf. 18.14).

When pressed on this issue by the Jews, Pilate initially refused to consider the matter and told them, “Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.” To this they replied, “We are

³⁴The Greek of Luke 23.15 reads *idou ouden axion thanatou estin pepragmenon auto*, literally, “behold nothing worthy of death has been done by him.” Brown and Comfort (1990), 307. Cf. Luke’s use of *axios*, “worthy, meriting, deserving” [Danker (2009), 38] in 23.41.

³⁵See Luke 23.18-25; cf. Matthew 27.15ff.; Mark 15.6ff.

³⁶The Greek of Luke 23.22 reads *ouden aition thanatou heuron en auto*, literally, “no crime of death did I find in him.” Brown and Comfort (1990), 308. Danker (2009), 12, notes that *aitios*, cause or reason, with *thanatou* means “reason for imposing the death penalty.” Cf. Luke 23.4, 14; also the use of *aitia*, cause or case for indictment or punishment, thus, crime [Danker (2009), 11], in Matthew 27.37; Mark 15.26; John 18.38; 19.4; Acts 13.28.

not permitted to put anyone to death.” John comments, “This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.”³⁷ John also highlights, more than the Synoptic Gospels, the accusation or reason for seeking the death of Jesus, that is, his claims to be a king as opposed to the Roman emperor.³⁸ On this issue, the contrast between Pilate and the Jews in the Gospel of John is understandable.

Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.” The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.”

From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.”

Pilate asked them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but the emperor.”³⁹

Ironically, this accusation, that Jesus claimed to be a king, rather than blasphemy, became the capital offence of Jesus, the “cause” or “judgment” or “reason” for his Roman execution.⁴⁰ Pilate accordingly had this posted—“King of the Jews”—above his cross.⁴¹

All the Gospel narratives agree on this capital offence of Jesus, the Galilean, as construed by the Jerusalem authorities and reluctantly permitted by Pilate. These Gospels, written after the fact, were constructed with a view toward the death of Jesus, that is, his crucifixion, with hints as

³⁷On John 18.32, cf. 12.33. Bruce (1983), 352, aptly notes, “What John means, then, is that the obligatory referring of Jesus’ case to Pilate’s jurisdiction made it possible for sentence of death by crucifixion to be passed on him; by the execution of this sentence he would be literally ‘lifted up from the earth’.”

³⁸See David K. Rensberger, “The Gospel according to John,” NRSV, 2049.

³⁹See also Luke’s statements in Acts 3.13 and 13.27-29 about Pilate’s role and his trying to release Jesus; cf. similar statements in Acts 25.25 about Paul.

⁴⁰Cf. the LXX of Deuteronomy 21.22 which reads “judgment of death” (NETS, 162; Greek *krima thanatou*). See also Luke 23.40; 24.20.

⁴¹See Matthew 27.37; Mark 15.26; Luke 23.38; John 19.19-22.

well as explicit statements all along the way. In comments about the journey of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem, Filson states:

The ministry of Jesus did not conform to the usual success story. His busy life of preaching, teaching, and healing did not climax in a general triumph. To be sure, numerous signs show that Jesus was widely popular and eagerly sought both because of his new teaching and especially for his healing power. But the Gospels, whose dark hints of gathering opposition undoubtedly were written in light of the passion story, rightly suggest that this popularity was not universal. The Galilean ministry was of limited duration; it was not an unqualified success; there followed, it seems, a period of undefined length in which Jesus withdrew from his itinerant ministry and was not yet ready to go to Jerusalem for the final decision on his message and claim.⁴²

This final decision, or “hour” as Jesus expresses it in the Gospel of John, was his suffering and death that he predicted at least three times.⁴³ Strauss argues that for Mark:

While Jesus’ rejection and death have been hinted at earlier in the narrative (2.20; 3.6; 6.4),⁴⁴ from this point on, his suffering mission becomes the primary focus of the narrative. Indeed, so much of Mark’s story is concerned with the cross that the Gospel has been called a passion narrative with an extended introduction [so M. Kaehler]. Three times Jesus predicts his death (8.31; 9.31; 10.33-34). Each time the disciples fail to get it, responding with pride and incomprehension (8.32; 9.33-34; 10.35-41). Three times Jesus must teach that the true path of discipleship is one of suffering and sacrifice (8.33-38; 9.35-37; 10.42-45).⁴⁵

⁴²Filson (1965), 107.

⁴³See “Jesus Foretells His Passion” (Matthew 16.21-23; Mark 8.31-33; Luke 9.22), “Jesus Foretells His Passion Again” (Matthew 17.22-23; Mark 9.30-32; Luke 9.43-45), and “The Third Prediction of the Passion” (Matthew 20.17-19; Mark 10.32-34; Luke 18.31-34); and “Jesus’ Death is Premeditated” (Matthew 26.1-5; Mark 14.1-2; Luke 22.1-2; John 11.47-53), in Aland (1993), 151, 157, 224-225, 276. Bock (2002), 306, notes that Luke 18.31-34, the parallel to the “third prediction” in Matthew and Mark, is his sixth allusion to the death of Jesus (cf. 9.22, 44-45; 12.49-50; 13.32-33; and 17.25). Cf. “Jesus’ Teaching About His Death” in Hunter (1950), 91-100.

⁴⁴Cf. Matthew 12.14.

⁴⁵Strauss (2007), 184-185.

And Kingsbury goes so far to say that in Mark “one discovers that the entire flow of the story of Jesus is governed by the cross and resurrection (8.31; 9.31; 10.33-34).”⁴⁶

It is in these sections of the Synoptic Gospels that “the Son of Man” began “to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering” from the Jewish leaders there. So intense was this teaching of Jesus—he uses words such as “suffer” (*pascho*), “be rejected” (*apodokimadzo*),⁴⁷ and “be killed” (*apothnesko*)—that Peter “took him aside and began to rebuke him.” But Peter himself, mistaken and without understanding, was rebuked sharply by Jesus.⁴⁸ Contrary to what Peter and the others thought, it was necessary⁴⁹ for “the Son of Man” “to be betrayed” (*paradidomi*)⁵⁰ to men who would “kill him” (*apokteino*).⁵¹ And in his third and last “passion prediction” as recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus openly and starkly tells the twelve, “We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.” He then talks about being “handed over to the Gentiles.” He will be “mocked” (*empaidzo*), “insulted” (*hubridzo*), “spat upon” (*emptuo*), “flogged” (*mastigoo*), and “crucified” (*stauroo*).⁵² Unmistakeably, the Gospels stress the significance of

⁴⁶Kingsbury (1981), 1. Blomberg (2009), 466, highlights that, in each prediction, Jesus also stated that he would “be raised” or would “rise again” after his death.

⁴⁷Danker (2009), 45, says that “addition of *apo* [to *dokimadzo*] indicates rejection after examination.”

⁴⁸Note Peter’s rejoinder afterwards, Matthew 26.35; Mark 14.31; cf. John 11.16.

⁴⁹This is the force of *dei* in Matthew 16.21.

⁵⁰The basic meaning is “hand over” or “deliver,” but see footnote 25 above.

⁵¹This verb means “kill, murder” and in its intensive form “to kill off” or “put an end by force to the existence of someone or something.” Danker (2009), 47.

⁵²In the third prediction, only Matthew adds the detail about crucifixion. See Danker (2009), 125, 223, 327, for definitions of Greek verbs.

the suffering of Jesus by these foreboding utterances⁵³ about his humiliation by Gentile soldiers⁵⁴ as well as his death that was orchestrated by “elders and chief priests and scribes.”

The crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus (Matthew 27.32-66; Mark 15.21-47; Luke 23.26-56; John 19.17-42). The climax of each Gospel story is the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.⁵⁵ The usual words for the execution of criminals by use of a *stauros* (a wooden “cross”),⁵⁶ something perfected by the Romans, are prevalent in all Gospel accounts.⁵⁷ After the “flogging” (*phragelloo*), the Roman governor “handed him over to be crucified.”⁵⁸ On the way to the place of crucifixion, Golgotha, the soldiers noticed a passer-by from the countryside. This was Simon

⁵³For similar statements in John, see 5.18; 7.1, 19, 20, 25; 8.37, 40; 11.50, 51, 53; 12.33.

⁵⁴On the physical abuse of Jesus by the soldiers, see Matthew 27.26-31; Mark 15.15-20; Luke 23.16, 22, 36-37; John 19.1-3; cf. the mockery of the Jewish leaders, Matthew 26.67-68; 27.41-43; Mark 14.65; 15.31-32; Luke 22.63-65; 23.10-11, 35. On “humiliation” (*tapeinosis*) of Jesus, see Acts 8.33; cf. Philippians 2.8.

⁵⁵Weber (1979), 97, remarks, “Nowhere else do the four Gospels coincide as closely as in the passion story. This is particularly true of the crucifixion narrative.” Cf. Brown (1986), 21ff.

⁵⁶Danker (2009), 327, defines *stauros* as “structure used in carrying out a death sentence.” See Kittel (2006), Volume VII, 572ff.; Hengel (1977), 22-32, 46-50; Verbrugge (2000), 1190ff. For the crucifixion of Jesus, see Reicke (1974), 184-188; Schnabel (2018), 307ff.

⁵⁷On the verb form, *stauroo*, see Matthew 20.19; 23.34; 26.2; 27.22, 23, 26, 31, 35, 38; 28.5; Mark 15.13, 14, 15, 20, 24, 25, 27; 16.6; Luke 23.21, 23, 33; 24.7, 20; cf. Acts 2.36; 4.10; John 19.6, 10, 15, 16, 18, 20, 23, 41. For the noun *stauros*, see Matthew 10.38; 16.24; 27.32, 40, 42; Mark 8.34; 15.21, 30, 32; Luke 9.23; 14.27; 23.26; John 19.17, 19, 25, 31. McDonald and Porter (2000), 158, note that crucifixion was “a hated form of death among the Jews, and the reference in Deuteronomy 21.23 (see also Galatians 3.13) helps explain why a crucified Messiah was a stumbling block to them (1 Corinthians 1.23).”

⁵⁸See Matthew 27.26; Mark 15.15. Cf. Luke 23. 25, “he handed Jesus over as they wished”; John 19.16, “he handed him over to them to be crucified.” All four writers use *paradidomi* (“deliver” or “hand over”; cf. footnote 25 above). Just like Judas, Pilate, the emperor’s arbiter of justice in Judea, betrayed Jesus to those who wanted to kill him. Cf. Filson (1950), 47, who notes that Pilate misunderstood Jesus but formed an opinion of him. “He was clear that Jesus did not deserve condemnation as a rebel, but he also saw that Jesus had no political support and was a ‘visionary idealist’ whom political expediency might safely sacrifice.” See too the assessment by McDonald and Porter (2000), 168-171, of why Jesus was believed to be a threat and was crucified.

from Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. They “seized” Simon and “compelled” him to carry the cross behind Jesus.⁵⁹ When they got to the Place of a Skull, “they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.”⁶⁰ Of those crucified with Jesus, the appellation in Luke that is translated “criminal” by NRSV is *kakourgos* or “evildoer.”⁶¹ Matthew and Mark both use the word *lestes* that is translated “bandit” by NRSV.⁶² John, in a nondescript way, simply has “two others” (*allous duo*). By being crucified between two criminals, Jesus in his death “was counted among the lawless.”⁶³

While “hanging” (*kremannumi*)⁶⁴ on the cross between two criminals, Jesus is “derided” (*blasphemeo*) by “those who passed by,” “mocked” (*empaidzo*) by “the chief priests . . . along with the scribes and elders,” and “taunted” (*oneididzo*) by “the bandits who were crucified with

⁵⁹John omits the detail about Simon and states, “and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha” (19.17). Cf. Matthew 27.32-33; Mark 15.21-22; Luke 23.26ff.

⁶⁰Luke 23.33; cf. Matthew 27.38; Mark 15.27; John 19.18.

⁶¹Danker (2009), 185. This word is used only by Luke (23.32, 33, 39) and in 2 Timothy 2.9 in the NT.

⁶²The *lestes* was “one who engages in forceful and illicit seizure of property, robber, bandit.” So Matthew 21.13; 26.55; 27.38, 44; Mark 11.17; 14.48; 15.27; Luke 10.30, 36; 19.46; 22.52; John 10.1, 8; 2 Corinthians 11.26. From this sense comes the secondary meaning of “one who engages in violent activity against established social order, revolutionary, insurrectionist.” So John 18.40. Cf. Mark’s use in 14.7 of *stasis* (“rebellion”) and *stasiastes* (“rebel”). Danker (2009), 215, 327.

⁶³Luke 22.37, quoting from Isaiah 53.12.

⁶⁴In the crucifixion story, only Luke 23.39 uses this word, not about Jesus, but for one of the criminals (i.e., aorist passive participle, “having been hanged” [with Jesus]). It is the same word used in LXX of Deuteronomy 21.22-23 (i.e., hanged “on a tree”). Plummer (1922), 534, notes, “When used of hanging on a cross or gibbet, *epi xulou* is commonly added (Acts 5.30; 10.39; Galatians 3.13; Genesis 40.19, 22; Deuteronomy 21.22, 23), but [in Luke] the context is sufficient.” See Arndt and Gingrich (1957), 451; cf. Kittel (2006), Volume III, 915-921. Cf. also with Matthew 27.5 that highlights the remorse of Judas with a different word, i.e., he “hanged himself” (from *apagcho*, “to squeeze, strangle”), Danker (2009), 39.

him.”⁶⁵ Luke records that the crowd stood by and “watched” (*theoreo*), the Jewish leaders “scoffed” (*ekmukteridzo*) at their King, and only one of the criminals “derided” (*blasphemeo*) the Messiah. The other criminal “rebuked” (*epitimaio*) the blasphemer.⁶⁶ “Do you not fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.”⁶⁷ His words, as given by Luke, highlight that the two criminals were both worthy of or deserved to be “under the same sentence of condemnation,” but Jesus did not deserve to be put to death and was suffering unjustly.⁶⁸

Due to the brutality of his punishment, unjust according to the Gospels, and the severity of the abuses he received, it could be said that the Galilean, in the words of Deuteronomy 21.22-23, certainly had been “cursed by God.” But none of the writers uses that exact language in his story.⁶⁹ Even so, in some way for Jesus, God had “forsaken” him. Only Matthew and Mark

⁶⁵Matthew 27.39-44; cf. Mark 15.29-32. See Danker (2009), 72, 125, 252, for definitions of Greek words and other NT uses.

⁶⁶Luke 23.35-41. See Danker (2009), 72, 118, 146, 169, for definitions of Greek words used by Luke.

⁶⁷Verse 41 is *kai hemeis men dikaios, axia gar hon epraxamen apolambanomen, houtos de ouden atopon epraxen*, literally, “and we indeed justly, for things worthy of which we did, we are receiving, but this one nothing wrong did.” Brown and Comfort (1990), 310.

⁶⁸NRSV translates *en to auto krimati* as “under the same sentence of condemnation.” Used in LXX of Deuteronomy 21.22 (i.e., *krima thanatou*, “judgment of death,” so NETS), *krima* here means “judicial verdict, condemnation,” so Danker (2009), 208. Note too that the Gospels reflect a period earlier in the development of Christological thinking that provides the foundation for later reflection by writers such as Peter and Paul.

⁶⁹On the cursing by Peter, though, see Matthew 26.74; Mark 14.71. Of Peter, Matthew uses *katathematidzo*, “curse, in the sense of uttering a malediction inviting harm to oneself,” and Mark uses *anathematidzo* (cf. Acts 23.12, 14, 21), “invoke a curse, to invoke consequences if one says what is not true.” In Deuteronomy 21.23, the word for “cursed” by God in LXX is from *kataraoimai*, “call down curses on someone” (cf. Matthew 25.41; Mark 11.21; Luke 6.28; Romans 12.14; James 3.9). Danker (2009), 24, 190, 193; Arndt and Gingrich (1957), 54, 411, 418.

preserve the variations of the Aramaic, or Hebrew, words of Jesus, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”⁷⁰ Luke and John have no parallel to this feeling of God-forsakenness by Jesus while he was dying. But its inclusion in the story of the crucifixion indicates a certain disfavor of the whole event (i.e., cursed) by God.⁷¹ Jesus apparently uttered this saying, which some bystanders mistook as a call for the prophet Elijah, just before he died. After about four or five hours on the cross,⁷² Jesus “cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.”⁷³ From the above, it is clear according to the Gospels that Jesus was tried in a formal manner, found guilty of a capital offence under both Jewish (and Roman) law, sentenced and put to death. But no Gospel writer explicitly quotes Deuteronomy 21.22-23.⁷⁴ Luke 23.39 does allude perhaps to the

⁷⁰Matthew 27.46 and Mark 14.34, quoting from Psalm 22.1. See comments by Keener (2009), 682-683; also Schnabel (2018), 558, note 957. The Greek word translated “forsake” (*egkatalaipo*, meaning “forsake, abandon, desert”), is the word used in LXX of Psalm 21(22).1. See Arndt and Gingrich (1957), 214-215; cf. Acts 2.27, 31. The Hebrew word in the Psalm derives from ‘*azab* (“leave, forsake, loose”). Brown, Driver, and Briggs (1951), 736-738.

⁷¹On the use of Psalm 22 by the Gospels in their crucifixion stories, see section on “the suffering righteous one” in Weber (1979), 30ff.; cf. “the crucified Messiah” in Hengel (1981), 39ff.; also see comments by Schnabel (2018), 327-330.

⁷²The chronological notes of Mark’s narrative (15.1, 25, 33, 42; 16.1; cf. Matthew 27.1, 45, 57, 62; 28.1; Luke 23.44, 54; 24.1; John 18.28; 19.14, 31, 42; 20.1) frame the crucifixion between nine in the morning (i.e., “the third hour”) and three in the afternoon (i.e., “the ninth hour”). In John, the crucifixion begins around noon (i.e., “the sixth hour”; 19.14). The Synoptic Gospels concur that darkness came over the land from noon until about three in the afternoon. On explanations of the discrepancy between Mark and John, see Schnabel (2018), 147-148.

⁷³Matthew 27.50; cf. Mark 15.37; Luke 23.46; John 19.30. Literally, Matthew has “gave up [from *aphiemi*, ‘release, let go’] the spirit”; John has “gave up [from *paradidomi*, ‘hand over, deliver’] the spirit.” Mark and Luke have, “he breathed out [from *ekpneo*, ‘breathe out/forth, expire’].” Danker (2009), 64, 119, 266-267. These euphemisms, as many commentators have pointed out, highlight the voluntary aspect of the death of Jesus.

⁷⁴It could be argued that the Mosaic stipulation functions as a paradigm or template for the story of the passion narratives. Thus, the contextual difference between hanging on a tree as cause of death or execution (as in the case of Jesus and the two criminals) rather than after death or execution (as in the Mosaic statute) is not pertinent to the writers.

statute with its use of *kremannumi* (“to hang”) of one of the criminals crucified next to Jesus.⁷⁵

But this is uncertain. What is certain, however, is the record of the burial of Jesus that same day by all four writers.

The account of the burial of the body of Jesus is crucial to the veracity of the physical death of Jesus as well as his subsequent resurrection.⁷⁶ Thus, the burial is noted carefully by each of the four Gospels. After drawing attention to the various witnesses to the crucifixion of Jesus, especially the women,⁷⁷ each Gospel narrative describes the burial of Jesus in the nearby garden tomb that belonged to Joseph from Arimathea. Joseph, a disciple of Jesus and a just and respected member of the Sanhedrin, did not agree with the council’s decision to have Jesus put to death. He went to Pilate and asked for “the body of Jesus” in order to bury him.⁷⁸ Nicodemus, according to John, also assisted Joseph in preparing the body for its burial with linen cloths and spices. Once prepared, the body of Jesus was laid in the tomb that recently had been cut from rock and never had been used. Matthew adds the detail about the “guard” (*koustodia*)⁷⁹ placed at

⁷⁵See footnote 64 above; cf. use of *kremannumi* in Matthew 18.6; 22.40.

⁷⁶Matthew 27.57-66; Mark 16.42-47; Luke 23.50-56; John 19.38-42. Aland (1993), 323. On Joseph’s request for and burial of the body of Jesus, see details in Schnabel (2018), 338ff.; also McDonald and Porter (2000), 160-168; and comments by Blomberg, “Matthew,” NTUOT, 98, on the connection to Deuteronomy 21.22-23.

⁷⁷Luke 23.49 summarizes, “But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.” Cf. Matthew 27.55-56; Mark 15.40-41; John 19.25-27. Aland (1993), 322.

⁷⁸All four Gospels mention *to soma tou Iesou* (“the body of Jesus”), Matthew 27.58, 59; Mark 15.43; Luke 23.52, 55; cf. 24.3, 23; John 19.38, 40; cf. 19.31; 20.12. John alone records the piercing of the side of Jesus, as proof that he had died sooner than the other two who had been crucified and before the request of Joseph for his body (John 19.31-37; cf. Mark 15.44-45). In LXX of Deuteronomy 21.23, the statute reads *ouk epikoimethesetai to soma autou epi tou xulou*, “his body shall not sleep upon the tree” (NETS).

⁷⁹See Matthew 27.62-66; cf. 28.11-15. *Koustodia* indicates “a military group posted for sentry duty, guard,” Danker (2009), 206.

the tomb to protect against any theft of the body. And all four Gospels indicate that the body of Jesus was buried that same day, on the Jewish “day of Preparation, that is,” as Mark explains, “the day before the Sabbath.”⁸⁰

Mark places the note about the day of Preparation at the beginning of his remarks on the burial of Jesus: “When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph . . . asked for the body of Jesus.” Matthew and Luke place the note about the day of Preparation at the end of their sections on the burial of Jesus. Matthew uses it to transition to his reference to the guard at the tomb: “The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priest and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate . . . [to request a guard at the tomb].” And Luke uses it to transition to his description of the resurrection of Jesus:

It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment. But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared.⁸¹

Of the writers, John pays the most attention to this Jewish custom of “Preparation.” He refers to it in connection with Pilate’s rendering of judgment on Jesus at The Pavement (19.14); he cites it when talking about the request of the Jewish leaders to hasten the death of Jesus and the other two by breaking their legs, so that they could be taken away and buried before sunset (19.31);⁸²

⁸⁰Mark 15.52; cf. Matthew 27.62; Luke 23.54; John 19.14, 31, 42. Danker (2009), 269, observes that *paraskeue* is used “in NT only of period of preparation for a festival, [so] day of preparation.” Cf. Arndt and Gingrich (1957), 627.

⁸¹The other word for “prepare” in Luke 23.56 and 24.1 is from *etoimadzo*, “put in a state of readiness, make ready, prepare,” Danker (2009), 152; cf. Kittel, Volume II, 704-706.

⁸²Although not referenced by John, the request that the bodies be taken down from the crosses before the beginning of the sabbath (i.e., at sunset) was made in light of Deuteronomy 21.22-23. Death by crucifixion sometimes could take several days; the process could be hastened and made more merciful by breaking the legs of the victim. This was not needed for Jesus, since he already had died. See Schnabel (2018), 338-340; Kostenberger, “John,” NTUOT, 502.

and he uses it to conclude his comments about the burial of Jesus and as the reason he was buried nearby (19.42). John comes the closest here of any of the Gospels to a direct reference to Deuteronomy 21.22-23, but he most likely is reflecting the current practice among the Jews in Judea that was consistent with the Mosaic statute.

All the Gospels, though, use great care when they describe the work that is done to bury the body of Jesus. But they seem to avoid use of the words in the Mosaic statute about burying the corpse of a capital offender.⁸³ Instead of using the word *thapto* (“to bury”), they prefer to recount the event with various grammatical forms of *tithemi* (“to put, place, lay”) and *keimai* (“to lie, recline”).⁸⁴ The “tomb” where the body of Jesus “was laid,” and the “place” where the body of Jesus “had been laid” are stated sharply in each of the Gospels.⁸⁵ The Greek word for “tomb” is *mnemeion* (“burial place, grave, tomb”) and is used often in the passion narratives.⁸⁶ Less frequent is another Greek word, *taphos* (“grave, tomb”), used only by Matthew.⁸⁷ The compound verb *entaphiazō* (“to prepare for burial, to bury”) and its cognate noun *entaphiasmos*

⁸³The LXX of Deuteronomy 21.23 reads *alla taphe thapsete auton en te hemera ekeine*, translated “but with burial you shall bury him that same day” (NETS). The Hebrew text reads *ki qabor tiq’b’renu bayom hahu’* (“you shall bury him that same day,” NRSV). On OT uses of *qabar* (“to bury”), see Brown, Driver, and Briggs (1951), 868.

⁸⁴Arndt and Gingrich (1957), 352, 427, 823-824. For *tithemi*, see Matthew 27.60; Mark 15.46, 47; 16.6; Luke 23.53, 55; John 19.41, 42; 20.2, 13, 15; for *keimai*, see Matthew 28.6; Luke 23.53; John 20.5, 6, 7, 12. For NT uses elsewhere of *thapto*, see Matthew 8.21, 22; 14.12; Luke 9.59, 60; 16.22; Acts 2.29; 5.6, 9, 10; 1 Corinthians 15.4.

⁸⁵In their resurrection narratives, the writers make special reference to the “place” where the body of Jesus had been laid.

⁸⁶See Danker (2009), 235; cf. Verbrugge (2000), 538-539. For use of *mnemeion* with reference to Jesus, see Matthew 27.60; 28.8; cf. 27.52, 53; Mark 15.46; 16.2, 3, 5, 8; Luke 23.55; 24.2, 9, 12, 22, 24; John 19.41, 42; 20.1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 11; also Acts 13.29.

⁸⁷See Matthew 23.27, 29; and of Jesus in 27.61, 64, 66; 28.1. Cf. the feminine form, *taphe*, used only in Matthew 27.7 in NT. It can mean “burial” in LXX but means “burial place” or “burial plot” in NT. Arndt and Gingrich (1957), 813-814; Danker (2009), 349.

(“preparation for burial, burial”), both infrequent in the New Testament, are used to describe the anointing of Jesus at Bethany in preparation for, or prior to, his burial.⁸⁸ Only John makes use of a word that is similar to what is found in the Greek translation of the Mosaic statute when he tells how the body of Jesus was wrapped with spices in linen cloths “according to the burial custom of the Jews.”⁸⁹ Did the writers, in their careful wording of the burial of Jesus and with knowledge of the Mosaic proscription, choose to avoid certain terms and dissociate Jesus from the guilt of the two criminals with whom he shared the sentence of death?⁹⁰

Early proclamations about Jesus of Nazareth in Acts of Apostles. The proclamation of the early Christians about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth⁹¹ is an important part of Luke’s story concerning the empowerment of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the apostolic witness “in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (1.8).⁹² In summary statements and more lengthy recitations by the disciples about the life and work of

⁸⁸See Matthew 26.12; Mark 14.8; John 12.7. Arndt and Gingrich (1957), 267; Danker (2009), 130.

⁸⁹John 19.40, *kathos ethos estin tois Ioudaiois entaphiadzein*, literally, “as is custom with the Jews to bury,” Brown and Comfort (1990), 400. The point of correspondence is the use of *taphe* (“burial”) in Deuteronomy 21.23 and *entaphiadzo* (“to bury”) in John 19.40.

⁹⁰This is an argument from silence, but it seems that the Gospels speak euphemistically of the burial of Jesus. Cf. the language about the death of Jesus in footnote 73 above.

⁹¹In Acts, Luke uses “Jesus of Nazareth” five times (2.22; 6.14; 10.38; 22.8; 26.9) and “Jesus Christ of Nazareth” two times (3.6; 4.10). Cf. Matthew 26.71; Mark 1.24; 10.47; 16.6; Luke 4.34; 18.37; 24.19; John 18.5, 7; 19.19.

⁹²Geographical references are an important part of Luke’s narrative. For example, he refers to “Jerusalem” sixty-four times in Acts (i.e., 25 times as *Hierosoluma* and 39 times as *Hierousalem*). Cf. about thirty occurrences of “Jerusalem” in the Gospel of Luke, so that together Luke’s books account for sixty percent of NT uses. See Moulton and Geden (1978), 473, 474; Danker (2009), 174, 175.

Jesus, Luke refers to “Jesus” approximately seventy times in Acts.⁹³ Luke is careful not to repeat what he has outlined in his earlier work (i.e., his Gospel), but connections to what “Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven” (1.1-2) are apparent. But in the telling of “good news”⁹⁴ by the apostles, there is emphasis on the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah.⁹⁵ It is not that the early preaching neglected the “deeds of power, wonders, and signs” (2.22) that God worked through “his servant Jesus” (3.13; cf. 4.27, 30). Rather, as Luke relates the story of the beginning and spread of “the Way”⁹⁶ of Jesus, he focuses the message of those early followers on the arrest of Jesus, his betrayal and rejection, his suffering and death by crucifixion, and, the most important occurrence of all, his resurrection.⁹⁷

⁹³Compare references to Jesus with Luke’s sixty or so uses of “Spirit” (about forty of these are “Holy Spirit”); see Moulton and Geden (1978), 480-481, 820-821.

⁹⁴*Euangelidzomai* (“pass on information that spells good tidings to the recipient, bring, announce good news”), a favorite word of Luke (e.g., used ten times in his Gospel), is used in Acts 5.42; 8.4, 12, 25, 35, 40; 10.36; 11.20; 13.32; 14.7, 15, 21; 15.35; 16.10; 17.18. Cf. Luke’s use of *euangelion* (“in NT only in the specific sense ‘God’s good news to humans,’ good news”), see Acts 15.7; 20.24. Danker (2009), 152.

⁹⁵Luke uses *Christos* (“Christ” or “Messiah”) twenty-eight times in Acts; cf. only twelve occurrences in his Gospel. Moulton and Geden (1978), 1011-1012.

⁹⁶See 9.2; cf. 18.25, 26; 19.9, 23; 22.4; 24.14, 22.

⁹⁷According to Luke in Acts, Jesus was arrested (*sullambano*, “in legal sense, to seize, apprehend,” 1.16), was betrayed (*prodotes*, “traitor, betrayer,” 7.52), was handed over to Pilate (*ekdotos*, “handed over, delivered up,” 2.23; *paradidomi*, “hand over, deliver,” 3.13; 4.27; 13.28), and was rejected (*arneomai*, “disown, deny,” 3.13, 14; *exoutheneo*, “treat with contempt, discredit, reject,” 4.11). He suffered (*pascho*, “focus on experience of pain or death, suffer,” 1.3; 3.18; 17.3; 26.23), was killed by means of crucifixion (*anaireo*, “remove by causing death, kill,” 2.23; 10.39; 13.28; *apokteino*, “kill, murder,” 3.15; *diacheiridzo*, “lay violent hands on, kill,” 5.30; *prospegnumi*, “make fast by attaching to [a cross], crucify,” 2.23; *stauroo*, “cause to undergo physical crucifixion, crucify,” 2.36; 4.10), and he died (*thnesko*, “die physically,” 25.19; *thanatos*, “death, in the natural physical sense,” 2.24; 13.28). But God raised him up from the dead (*anistemi*, “to cause to rise up, raise up,” 2.24, 32; *egeiro*, “if the context indicates sleep or death, then awaken, rouse, raise,” 3.15; 4.10; 5.30; 10.40; 13.30, 37; *anastasis*, “a rising from the condition of being dead, resurrection,” 1.22; 2.31; 4.2, 33; 17.18, 32; 26.23; cf. 23.6, 8; 24.15, 21). On definitions, see Danker (2009), 333, 298, 115, 266, 54, 134, 275, 25, 47, 94, 305, 327, 170, 166, 34, 106, 28.

Peter and the apostles before the Sanhedrin (Acts 5.17-42). In three passages that outline the work of God in the events of the passion of Jesus (i.e., his death, resurrection, and subsequent appearances to many witnesses), Luke seems to allude to the Mosaic statute of Deuteronomy 21.22-23. In two places, Luke condenses what is said by Peter; in one other, he describes what is said by Paul and Barnabas. In the first instance, “Peter and the apostles” make a formal reply to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem after they had been arrested, shut in prison, and then released by “an angel of the Lord” who “opened the prison doors” and told them, “Go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life.” When they continued their teaching about Jesus the next day in the temple area, they once again were apprehended by the temple police and brought before the assembled Sanhedrin. Luke tells us:

The high priest questioned them, saying, “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man’s blood on us.” But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.” When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.

Gamaliel, a respected Pharisee of the Council, persuaded the rest to avoid any violence. He advised them, “In the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them—in that case you may even be found fighting against God!” As a result, they punished the apostles by having them flogged, “ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus,” and released them. After their departure from the Council, these witnesses of Jesus “rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name,” and they continued daily, in public (i.e., the temple area) and in private (i.e., in dwellings and homes), “to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah.”

In the phrase quoted above from the apostle Peter—“God . . . raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree”—Luke appears to give what is a normal part of the early Christian kerygma. There is no introductory formula (e.g., “it is written”),⁹⁸ and there is nothing in the assertion about Jesus being “killed by hanging him on a tree” that is forced or out of place. The language parallels other phrases that Luke attributes to Peter about Jesus being “crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law.”⁹⁹ But the wording strikingly is similar to what is in the Mosaic statute—“hanged on a tree.”¹⁰⁰ The points of correspondence are Luke’s use of the verb *kremannumi*, which is infrequent in the New Testament, and his use of the common word for “wood” or “tree” (*xulon*).¹⁰¹ And the context certainly concurs with that of the Mosaic proscription, that is, the death of one who was regarded to be a criminal and then was executed

⁹⁸On Luke’s use in Acts of *gegraptai* (perfect of *grapho*, “write, inscribe . . . frequent in reference to Israel’s scriptures . . . conveying an aspect of finality,” Danker [2009], 82), see 1.20; 7.42; 13.33; 15.15; 23.5. See too Kittel (2006), Volume I, 746-749.

⁹⁹Acts 2.23; cf. 3.15; 4.10; 10.39.

¹⁰⁰The Greek in Acts 5.30 reads, *hon humeis diecheirisasthe kremasantes epi xulou*, literally, “whom you killed having hung on a tree.” Brown and Comfort (1990), 429. Here, Bengel (1877), Volume II, 561, remarks, “In a tree (the tree of knowledge of good and evil) was the beginning of sin; in a tree was the atonement for it.” LXX of Deuteronomy 21.22-23 repeats “on a tree” three times, *kai apothane kai kremasete auton epi xulou . . . ouk epikoimethesetai to soma autou epi tou xulos . . . pas kremamenos epi xulou*, “and he dies and you hang him on a tree, his body . . . upon the tree, . . . anyone hanging on a tree . . .” (NETS).

¹⁰¹On *kremannumi*, see Luke 23.39; Acts 5.30; 10.39; 28.4; Galatians 3.13; cf. Matthew 18.6; 22.40. For *xulon* (“product of a fibrous plant, wood, . . . by extension of things made of wood, club, cudgel, . . . stocks, . . . cross”), see Matthew 26.47, 55; Mark 14.43, 48; Luke 22.52; 23.31; Acts 5.30; 10.39; 13.29; 16.24; Galatians 3.13; 1 Peter 2.24; Revelation 2.7; 18.12 (twice); 22.2 (twice), 14, 19. Cf. NT uses of *dendron* (“tree of various species and varieties”), Moulton and Geden (1978), 188. For definitions, see Danker (2009), 86, 245; cf. Verbrugge (2000), 890-891. See also Marshall, “Acts,” NTUOT, 555; and Wilcox (1977), 85ff.

by Jewish (and Roman) authorities.¹⁰² Luke assigns no special meaning to this phrase, so it could be that he simply reflects the word choice, or emphasis, of the apostle Peter in his preaching and teaching (cf. 1 Peter 2.24).

Peter at the house of Cornelius in Caesarea (Acts 10.34-48). In the second instance, Luke again narrates a speech of Peter in which the apostle says, “They put him to death by hanging him on a tree.” In this setting, Peter has been summoned by both human and angelic messengers to Caesarea Maritima to the house of a Gentile, “a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort” (10.10). Luke goes to great lengths to detail a remarkable (i.e., Spirit directed) convergence of events that prods Peter to act contrary to what he believed about the *goyim* or Gentiles.¹⁰³ In his message to those who had gathered at the home of Cornelius, “his relatives and close friends” (10.24), Peter outlines the good news about Jesus in a basic and familiar way that now is nuanced by his new perception. He begins, “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (10.34-35).¹⁰⁴ As Gaventa states, “Peter’s speech succinctly summarizes the

¹⁰²This is the point that Peter makes and Luke emphasizes in his narration. Even though the Romans crucified Jesus of Nazareth, the Council was responsible for his death, i.e., “whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.” That members of the Sanhedrin understood this from the teaching of Peter and the apostles is evident in their assertion, “you are determined to bring this man’s blood on us.” They surely would have understood Peter’s statement—“by hanging him on a tree”—as a reference to Deuteronomy 21.22-23.

¹⁰³See, for example, his statement in Acts 10.28 and the discussion in Fletcher (2015), 30-33.

¹⁰⁴On Luke’s use of *katalambano* in the sense of “perceive, comprehend,” compare Acts 4.13; 25.25. Luke emphasizes this point with *ep’ aletheias* (“indeed, truly, no doubt about it, certainly”). On extrabiblical uses of *prosopolemptes* (“one who shows favoritism or partiality”), only here in NT, see Kittel (2006), Volume VI, 779-780. On Luke’s use of “every nation,” cf. 2.5. *Ethnos*, translated “nation” by NRSV, more properly means “a group of people viewed as an entity, people, group; specifically, of geographically determined people; of people determined by custom and tradition; the plural frequently used [in NT] of people outside Israel’s traditions.” See Kittel (2006), Volume II, 369-372. Definitions from Danker (2009), 191, 16, 307, 108.

gospel in the context of Peter's new understanding of God's impartiality, suggesting that Peter's conversion to the Gentile mission is as central here as is Cornelius's conversion to the Christian faith."¹⁰⁵ But this new understanding about the Gentiles as worthy recipients of the gospel does not alter what is central to Peter's good news about Jesus.

Peter relates to the Gentiles, who were Godfearers,¹⁰⁶ how God "sent to the people of Israel" a "message" that he describes as "preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all." Peter notes how "that message"¹⁰⁷ began in Galilee with the "baptism" of Jesus by John and the "anointing" of Jesus "in the Holy Spirit." Jesus, with the "power" of the Spirit and of God (i.e., "God was with him"), "went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil." Afterwards, Jesus finished his work "in Judea and in Jerusalem." In this succinct overview, Peter lays stress on the death and the resurrection of Jesus in Judea and the role of the apostles as witnesses, especially their witness to the resurrection.¹⁰⁸ Peter then concludes his words to the

¹⁰⁵Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "The Acts of the Apostles," NRSV, 2078.

¹⁰⁶Danker (2009), 374, comments, "The term *hoi phoboumenoi* occasionally specifies non-Israelites with interest in Israel's deity, Acts 10.2, 22; 13.16, 26."

¹⁰⁷NRSV obscures the distinction between *logos* ("word, statement, message, speech") and *hrema* ("a communication consisting of words, frequently with nuance of importance or special significance, statement, pronouncement, declaration") by translating both as "message." *Hrema* "in Hebrew manner and in a species of metonymy [can mean] something that arouses talk because it is remarkable or noteworthy, a matter, thing, event; Matthew 18.16; Luke 1.37, 65; 2.15, 19, 51; Acts 5.32; 10.37; 2 Corinthians 13.1." Danker (2009), 217, 314.

¹⁰⁸This, in the passage (vv. 39-41), is the significance of Peter's use of "we" and "us" as witnesses, since he adds, "not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead." Luke tells us that "some of the believers from Joppa accompanied" Peter to the house of Cornelius (10.23), but they are not the ones Peter refers to here. Whether other apostles were present on this occasion is unlikely. The plural references appear to be the structure of the early Christian kerygma.

Gentiles by stressing God’s work through Jesus as impartial and universal.¹⁰⁹ In a concise way, this speech of Peter (vv. 37-43) recounts some key themes of Luke in the book of Acts.¹¹⁰ And, as in Peter’s speech to the Sanhedrin, he points out that the death of Jesus was brought about “by hanging him on a tree,” but he does not elaborate or put any stress on that fact. Although the crucifixion of Jesus was an integral part of the early preaching, it was beyond dispute. It did not need to be explained. Cornelius, the Roman centurion, and his Gentile relatives and friends would have understood Peter’s words—“by hanging him on a tree”—as a clear reference to crucifixion. But, even though they were Godfearers, it is uncertain that they would have made any connection to the Mosaic statute in Deuteronomy.

Paul and Barnabas in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13.13ff.). In the third instance, “Paul and his companions” (e.g., Barnabas, see 13.2, 7, 42, 46, 50), who recently had been “set apart” for the work of the Holy Spirit by the church in Antioch of Syria, gave a “word of exhortation” to the local Jewish synagogue in a different Antioch in central Asia Minor.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹In vv. 42-43, this work involved: (1) the preaching of the apostles “to the people” (i.e., to all people; here the Greek word is *laos*); (2) the testimony of the apostles about God as “judge of the living and the dead” (i.e., all humans; cf. 2 Timothy 4.1); and (3) the witness of “all the prophets” (*pantes hoi prophetai*; cf. Acts 3.18, 24) about “forgiveness of sins” (*aphesin hamartion*; cf. Acts 2.38; 5.31; 13.38 26.18) through the name of Jesus to “everyone who believes in him” (i.e., both Jews and Gentiles; *panta ton pisteuonta eis auton*; cf. Acts 13.39).

¹¹⁰For example, “the ministry of John, the Spirit’s presence in Jesus, the apostles as witnesses, the death and resurrection of Jesus, Jesus’ postresurrection appearance to the apostles, the prophetic witness, forgiveness of sins.” Gaventa, “The Acts of the Apostles,” NRSV, 2078. Note too how Peter’s message to the Gentiles parallels his message to the Jews (Acts 2.22ff.) in its particulars concerning the good news about Jesus. Peter preaches the same gospel to the Gentiles as he does to the Jews. This universality of the work of God in Jesus is another important theme in Acts which Luke highlights in his keynote that is taken from the prophet Joel (i.e., God will pour out his Spirit on “all flesh” and “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved,” 2.17, 21). See Fletcher (2015), 29-35.

¹¹¹Here Luke illustrates Paul’s evangelistic method to preach good news first to fellow Hebrews and then to the Gentiles. See Fletcher (2015), 33-35, 36-37. On the ancient site, see Mark Wilson, “Pisidian Antioch,” ESV, 1635.

This is Paul's first speech in the book of Acts, and it "traces God's saving actions on Israel's behalf and places Jesus in that tradition, concluding with a call to forgiveness."¹¹² Paul quickly brings his summary of Israelite history to King David and says, "Of this man's posterity God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised."¹¹³ Then he tells the gathered "descendants of Abraham's family, and others who fear God" that "to us the message of this salvation has been sent." Paul explains:

"My brothers . . . Because the residents of Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognize him or understand the words of the prophets that are read every sabbath, they fulfilled those words by condemning him. Even though they found no cause for a sentence of death, they asked Pilate to have him killed. When they had carried out everything that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead; and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they are now his witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising Jesus . . ."

Paul continues by quoting from the Psalms and Isaiah and then concludes with words similar to those of Peter about Jesus (13.34-37; cf. 2.29-36) and the offer of "forgiveness of sins" through Jesus.¹¹⁴ On this last point, Paul is emphatic and makes an important contrast to those gathered in the synagogue. He says, "Let it be known to you therefore, my brothers, that through this man

¹¹²Gaventa, "The Acts of the Apostles," NRSV, 2083.

¹¹³Williams (1957), 164, remarks, "The pattern of the kerygma is adapted here [by Luke] to the speaker; whereas Peter had hinted that Jesus is Son of Man, 10.34ff., here Paul maintains that He is Davidic king, cf. Romans 1.1-3."

¹¹⁴On Luke's use in Acts of *aphesis* ("letting go, frequently of cancelled penal liabilities or indebtedness . . . forgiveness of, release from, with the genitive *hamartion*," Danker [2009], 63), see 2.38; 5.31; 10.43; 13.38; 26.18; cf. Luke 1.77; 3.3; 24.47; see too Luke 4.18; Acts 8.22; cf. Matthew 26.28; Mark 1.4; 3.29; Ephesians 1.7; Colossians 1.14; Hebrews 9.22; 10.18. See Kittel (2006), Volume I, 509-512.

forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you; by this Jesus everyone who believes is set free from all those sins from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.”¹¹⁵

In this message to his Jewish brothers, Paul is certain that forgiveness from sins (i.e., justification before God) comes not by the law of Moses but through belief in Jesus.¹¹⁶ This Jesus, descendant of David whom John introduced to Israel as their Savior, was not “recognized”¹¹⁷ by the inhabitants and leaders in Jerusalem. Paul explains that this Jesus was “condemned” under a baseless “sentence of death” and was executed or “killed” under the jurisdiction of Pilate.¹¹⁸ And “when they had carried out everything that was written about him,

¹¹⁵The Greek of verses 38 and 39 shows the contrast more clearly, *hoti dia toutou humin aphasis hamartion katangelletai kai apo panton hon ouk edunethete en nomo Mouseos dikaiothennai, en touto pas ho pisteuon dikaioutai*, “that through this one to you forgiveness of sins is proclaimed, and from all things of which you were not able by law of Moses to be justified, by this one everyone believing is justified.” Brown and Comfort (1990), 465. On insertions of the Western text here, see Metzger (1994), 366. Luke uses *dikaioo* (“justify, set right . . . in connection with forgiveness of sins mediated through Jesus,” Danker [2009], 94) only here in Acts. On “law of Moses” in Acts, cf. 15.5; 28.23; also “law of the Jews” (*ton nomon tou Ioudaion*) in 25.8. For other uses of *nomos* (“law”) in Acts, see Moulton and Geden (1978), 667-668.

¹¹⁶On Luke’s numerous uses of *pisteuo* (“to believe”) and *pistis* (“faith, trust, confidence,” Danker [2009], 285) in Acts, see Moulton and Geden (1978), 807-809.

¹¹⁷In verse 27, the verb *agnoeo* (“to be without knowledge of something, be ignorant, be uninformed,” Danker [2009], 4) seems to define both *touton* (“this one”) and *tas phonas* (“the voices” of the prophets); so NRSV but see other variations in R. J. Knowling, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in Nicoll (1961), Volume II, 27. On textual differences for verse 27, see Metzger (1994), 360-361; cf. Bruce (1952), 267.

¹¹⁸In 13.27-28, “condemned” is from *krino* (“to judge”), Danker (2009), 208; cf. other uses in Acts, Moulton and Geden (1978) 561. “Sentence of death” comes from *medemian aitian thanatou hurontes*, literally, “without a reason for death having found,” Brown and Comfort (1990), 464; cf. footnotes 36, 40, and 68 above. For *aitia* (“the basis for something . . . reason, cause, circumstance . . . [often] as a legal term, cause or case for indictment or punishment” Danker [2009], 11); cf. Acts 10.21; 22.24; 23.28; 25.18, 27; 28.18, 20. “Killed” is from *anaireo* (“take up . . . remove by causing death, kill,” Danker [2009], 25); cf. Acts 2.23; 5.33, 36; 7.28; 9.23, 24, 29; 10.39; 12.2; 16.27; 22.20; 23.15, 21, 27; 25.3; 26.10.

they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.”¹¹⁹ On the Old Testament connection here, Bruce remarks:

In spite of His innocence, they asked Pilate to have the death sentence carried out, and carried out it was—by crucifixion. Once again the cross is described as “the tree,” in order to emphasize the connection with Deuteronomy 21.23. When all was over, and the prophecies of His passion had been fulfilled, His body was taken down and buried. The explicit mention of the tomb in which they laid Him may be intended to emphasize the reality of His death, and consequently His resurrection; besides, the burial of one who has been hanged on a tree is specifically enjoined in Deuteronomy 21.23, and Paul may wish to indicate that everything was carried out in accordance with Old Testament scripture.¹²⁰

Paul continues, though, to tell those gathered in the synagogue about the resurrection of Jesus and his appearances “to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem” who now give testimony or “witness” about this “to the people.”

Paul’s summary here of the passion of Jesus follows in its outline what Peter gives earlier in Acts and what each of the Gospels relates. And, interestingly, this overview includes details that could be seen as referring to the Mosaic proscription in Deuteronomy. Jesus, whom Paul mentions by name three times in this narrative, was judged and pronounced guilty of a crime deserving death; he was handed over to the proper authorities for execution and was put to death;

¹¹⁹Paul introduces this segment of the passion story with an interesting but general statement about the fulfillment of prophecy in the passion of Jesus, in verses 27, 29, literally, “they fulfilled . . . and when they finished all the things about him having been written” (*eplerosan . . . hos de etelesan panta ta peri autou gegrammena*), Brown and Comfort (1990), 464. Luke’s Greek here is abrupt, so he probably is giving a summary of what Paul said; see Keener (2014), 360, 325. On *teleo* (“to complete, to end”), cf. Luke 2.39; 12.50; 18.31; 22.37. On *pleroo* (“to fulfill”), see Acts 1.16; 3.18; cf. Luke 1.20; 4.21; 7.1; 9.31; 21.24; 22.16; 24.44. On *grapho* (“to write”), see Acts 1.20; 7.42; 13.33; 15.15; 23.5; 24.14; cf. Luke 2.25; 3.4; 4.4, 8, 10, 17; 7.27; 10.26; 18.31; 19.46; 20.17, 28; 21.22; 22.37; 24.44, 46.

¹²⁰Bruce (1977), 275.

he was hanged on a tree; and then he was removed from the tree and buried in a tomb.¹²¹ Of course, these occurrences serve as a prelude for the most important event (i.e., the resurrection of Jesus), which Paul ably describes to his listeners. Like the sermons of Peter and the passion narratives of the Gospels, Paul does not stress any connection with the Mosaic statute. But he tells the story about the suffering of Jesus in a way that has an amazing resemblance to the situation that we find in Deuteronomy 21.22-23.

The letters of Peter and Paul. In letters to Christians, 1 Peter 2.24 states of Jesus that “he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree” (ESV), and Galatians 3.13 affirms, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’” (ESV). Peter seems to allude to the Mosaic proscription, while Paul explicitly quotes the Old Testament passage. Neither writer elaborates on this Old Testament scripture, but each gives deeper meaning to the Old Testament edict by highlighting the substitutionary work of the Messiah (i.e., the Christ) in his suffering and death.

Peter’s encouragement and exhortation to Christian slaves (1 Peter 2.18-25). In his letter “to the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,” the apostle writes to Christians whom he considers to be “aliens” or “exiles” in the world. As such, they live in a strange place as resident foreigners or sojourners. But they have a select status, since they have been “chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be

¹²¹Paul’s expression, “they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb,” implies the hanging or crucifixion of Jesus, since it was the Roman procurator Pilate who had him killed. For “take down,” Luke uses *kathaireo* (“take down from a position, take down . . . destroy by taking down, destroy,” Danker [2009], 181); cf. Acts 13.19; 19.27; Luke 1.52; 12.18; 23.53. “From the tree” is *apo tou xulou* (see footnotes 100, 101), and “in a tomb” is *eis mnemeion* (see footnote 86). As in Acts 5.30 and 10.39, there are several points of correspondence with LXX of Deuteronomy 21.22-23.

obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood.”¹²² In light of the trials that Peter’s readers are going through, or will encounter,¹²³ the apostle wants to make sure that his fellow believers in Jesus understand that these persecutions are temporary and that they are not alone in their suffering. So the apostle underscores the truth that followers of Jesus, as the Lord himself said, “do not belong to the world” and should expect conflict and resistance to their way of life.¹²⁴

After his greeting and prayer of thanksgiving (1.1-12) and before his conclusion (5.1-14), the author encourages his readers (or hearers), who live in the five Roman provinces of Asia Minor, to stand fast in the “true grace of God” (5.12). He exhorts them to be transformed to holy living, reverent fear, and mutual love by the work of God through Jesus Christ (1.13–2.10), to exhibit good conduct among the Gentiles as befits their new and honorable calling (2.11–3.12), and to endure persecution and suffering for the name of Christ for doing the right things (3.13–4.19). In his exhortation to good conduct, Peter urges his fellow aliens and exiles “to abstain from the desires of the flesh” and to live “honorably among the Gentiles” (2.11-12). He enjoins believers to a way of life that emphasizes orderliness and proper respect for those in society who have authority (2.13–3.12).¹²⁵ Thus, as “servants of God,” Christians should “for the Lord’s sake accept the authority of every human institution.” Christian slaves should “accept the authority of [their] masters with all deference.” Christian wives should “accept the authority of [their] husbands.” Christian husbands should “show consideration for [their] wives.” And every believer should “have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a

¹²²1 Peter 1.1-2; cf. 2.11; Acts 7.6, 29; Ephesians 2.19; Hebrews 11.13. See too treatment of Peter’s introduction in Fletcher (2020), 35-36.

¹²³See 1 Peter 1.6; 3.13-17; 4.12-19; 5.9.

¹²⁴See John 15.19; 17.14, 16.

¹²⁵See Keener (2014), 690-694, for a good summary of the text and its background.

humble mind.” It is in his comments to slaves (2.18-25) that the apostle calls up the example of Christ as the perfect model to emulate—how “in his body on the tree” he suffered abuse for the wrongdoings of others and received the approval of God.¹²⁶

In his section concerning “household” duties,¹²⁷ Peter’s instructions to slaves are more extensive than to others, although, as suggested by Balch, “Christ’s example and sacrifice are for all Christian readers.”¹²⁸ The percentage of slaves in early Christian communities across the Roman Empire is uncertain, but the problem for slaves of suffering abuse, in all situations, was a reality.¹²⁹ Peter admonishes that Christian slaves should make no distinction with regard to their masters.¹³⁰ “God’s approval,” he says, is on those who “do right and suffer for it.” If you “endure pain while suffering unjustly,” if “you are beaten” for doing what is right, God will

¹²⁶Peter’s word for “example” in 2.21 is *hupogrammos*, used only here in NT (cf. 1 Clement 5.7; 16.17; 33.8), which means “pattern or model followed in the process of learning to form letters, in imagery of a guideline for living, model, example.” On use of *oiketēs* (“slave belonging to a householder, house slave”), see too Luke 16.13; Acts 10.7; Romans 14.4. Danker (2009), 364, 247.

¹²⁷1 Peter 2.13–3.7 is “a household code (cf. Ephesians 5.21–6.9; Colossians 3.18–4.1) focusing on the duties of subordinate members of patriarchal Greco-Roman households.” Balch, “The First Letter of Peter,” NRSV, 2281. On “the household scheme of exhortation,” see Elliott (1981), 208ff.

¹²⁸Balch, “The First Letter of Peter,” NRSV, 2281. Keener (2014), 691, distinguishes house, field, and mine slaves, the latter two being the more oppressed, and thinks Peter’s comments refer only to house slaves. With a touch of a modern twist, Reicke (1964), 98-100, understands Peter to address slave-laborers.

¹²⁹See helpful overviews of slavery in Roman times by Scott Bartchy in Green and McDonald (2013), 169-178, in Simmons (2008), 306-322, and Veyne (1987), 51-69. For primary documents, see Wiedemann (1988). See also Martin (2005), 221ff.

¹³⁰The Greek of verse 18 is *hoi oiketai hupotassomenoi en panti phobo tois despotais ou monon tois agathois kai epieikesin alla kai tois skoliois*, literally, “household slaves, be submitting yourselves in all fear to the masters, not only to the good ones and gentle but also to the harsh ones.” Brown and Comfort (1990), 812.

“credit” that.¹³¹ Christ, the Messiah, leads the way. And this is the calling of the Christian slave, and of every believer in every circumstance, to follow the Lord. The apostle reminds his fellow believers:

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

“He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

In this overview of the passion of Jesus,¹³² Peter quotes from Isaiah 53 and presents a message that would get the attention of any slave with its emphasis on pain, suffering, abuse, wounds, and the cross (i.e., the tree).¹³³ He alludes to the crucifixion in a way that expresses stark brutality. To have one’s “body” wounded and suffer “on the tree” was the vicious and

¹³¹In verses 19-20, NRSV (cf. NIV here) obscures Peter’s use of *charis* (“favor, grace”) two times with the sense of God’s favor or approval. The word translated “credit” (*kleos*, only here in NT) occurs only once with the meaning of “merit” or “what sort of claim to fame” (*poion kleon*), so Danker (2009), 201. See also comments by Best (1971), 116-119, and Kelly (1969), 114-119.

¹³²On whether or not this section of 1 Peter derives from an earlier Christian hymn, see Best (1971), 119-120. Carson, “1 Peter,” NTUOT, 1034, calls this section “a Christology of suffering.”

¹³³In verses 18-25, Peter uses *lupe* (“pain”), *loidoreo* (“insult, revile, abuse”), and *molops* (“bruise, welt, wound”; from LXX of Isaiah 53.5) one time each. He uses *pascho* (“suffer”) four times (2.19, 20, 21, 23; cf. 3.14, 17, 18; 4.1, 15, 19; 5.10). Danker (2009), 218, 274, 217, 238. On Peter’s use of Isaiah 53, see Moyise (2015), 171-172; cf. Weber (1979), 53-58. Dunn (2019), 166, notes, “The passage is principally a reflection on the great Servant Song of Isaiah 53, and in the New Testament it is the most powerful expression of the theology which was focused on Isaiah’s figure of the suffering servant.”

violent treatment for criminals, even slaves, under the jurisdiction of Roman authority.¹³⁴ But Peter, in recalling the passion of his Lord, paradoxically turns all this into a pathway for freedom, righteousness, and healing.¹³⁵ The key for the follower of Jesus, however, is “to endure” as the Lord himself endured great pain and suffering.¹³⁶ Glancy appropriately highlights this with reference to the body of slaves and writes:

1 Peter links the bodily violations to which slaves were subject with the bodily violations of Jesus in his passion and death. The author of 1 Peter invites slaves to contemplate the wounds of Jesus in order to give them strength to endure their own wounds. In his acknowledgment that slaves suffer excessive cruelty from their owners and in his invitation to slaves to view their own suffering in light of the suffering of Jesus, the author of 1 Peter exhibits a compassionate appreciation for the vicissitudes of life among domestic slaves. He emphasizes the physical violation of the tortured and crucified Jesus as he encourages Christian slaves to persevere. . . . Moreover, since the author of 1 Peter enjoins the entire community to endure suffering in a Christlike manner, enslaved Christians whose bodies absorb unwarranted abuse serve as a model for the entire Christian community to emulate.¹³⁷

¹³⁴“Body” (*soma*) is used only here in 1 Peter. On crucifixion as punishment for slaves, see Hengel (1977), 51-63. Kelly (1969), 122, remarks that Peter’s word for “tree” (*xulon*, literally “wood”) “is an archaic expression for the cross (properly *stauros*, a term not found in 1 Peter) used in speeches in Acts (5.30; 10.39; 13.29) and in Galatians 3.13 (quoting Deuteronomy 21.23, where it means ‘gallows’). Both in classical Greek and in Deuteronomy 21.22f. it had associations with the punishment of malefactors, and as applied to the crucifixion it already contained a theology of the atonement.” Cf. Wand (1934), 83, who states that 2.24 has “so much symbolism packed into” it and refers to Isaiah 53.12, Deuteronomy 21.23, and Leviticus 16.21f.

¹³⁵Peter notes in verse 16 that all believers are “free” or “independent” (*eleutheroi*; only here in 1 Peter), but that as “God’s slaves” (*hos theou douloi*) they should use that “freedom” or “liberty” (*eleutherian*; cf. 2 Peter 2.19) wisely (i.e., not as a “cloak” or “pretext” for evil). Certainly, this play on the words for freedom would resonate strongly with Christians who were slaves. On his use of *dikaiosune* in verse 24 (“uprightness, righteousness, justice” from a socio-moral perspective; cf. 3.14; 2 Peter 1.1; 2.5, 21; 3.13) and the contrast in 2.19, 23 between *dikaios* (“uprightly, fairly, justly”; cf. 3.12, 18; 4.18) and *adikos* (“unfairly, undeservedly”; cf. 3.18; 2 Peter 2.9), see Danker (2009), 97, 7. On NT uses of *iaomai* (“to heal”; from LXX of Isaiah 53.5), see Moulton and Geden (1978), 466-467.

¹³⁶“Endure” is from the Greek *hupomeno* and is used only at 2.20 in 1 Peter; cf. other NT occurrences, Moulton and Geden (1978), 979-980.

¹³⁷Glancy (2006), 149.

And in this, the apostle concurs with early Christian teaching about the crucifixion as a work of substitution for sinners (i.e., those who do wrong).¹³⁸ So the hanging on a tree, which in Deuteronomy was a curse, is transformed in Christian thought and becomes a source of God's blessing. This connection or development, with reference to the Deuteronomic precept, is not expressed explicitly by Peter in his letter, even though the idea is present. But the apostle Paul, however, certainly makes this connection to Deuteronomy 21.23 in his message to believers in Galatia.

Paul's argument about justification by faith in Christ based on the promise of God to Abraham (Galatians 3.6-14). Paul's quotation of Deuteronomy 21.23 in Galatians 3.13 is the only straightforward use of this Old Testament proscription in the New Testament. It occurs in a section of the apostle's letter that highlights God's promise to Abraham as proof for his message about justification by faith in Christ Jesus.¹³⁹ As with the allusions to Deuteronomy 21.22-23 in other New Testament books, Paul in Galatians does not focus on the Old Testament text except to emphasize, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree." Paul's Greek here is very terse. He

¹³⁸The idea of substitution is clear in Peter's phrase in 2.24 (cf. 3.18), *hos tas hamartias hemon autos anenegken en to somati autou epi to xulon*, "who the sins of us himself bore in the body of him on the tree." Brown and Comfort (1990), 812-813. On sacrificial connotations of *anaphero* ("bring up, offer up, bear [of sins]," Danker [2009], 30), see 2.5; Hebrews 7.27; 9.28; 13.15; James 2.21; and LXX of Isaiah 53.12; cf. its use in Matthew 17.1; Mark 9.2; Luke 24.51. Note also comments by Konrad Weiss in Kittel (2006), Volume IX, 61, that in 1 Peter are "two ideas, first, the doing away or setting aside of sins, which Christ has taken up with Him when He hangs in His body on the cross, and secondly, the self-offering of Christ *en to somati autou* for our sins. In Hebrews 9 the combining of the two ideas is clearly expressed in parallel formulations." Cf. Kelly (1969), 122-123, for variations on the exegesis here.

¹³⁹This is only one of several proofs or arguments set forth by Paul who uses ancient rhetorical discourse in the major section of the letter (i.e., 3.1-4.31). See outline adapted from Betz (1979), vii.-ix., in Fletcher (2019), 69. On the destination of Paul's letter "to the churches of Galatia," see Thomas W. Davis, "Ancient Galatia," ESV, 1737.

introduces the quotation with the typical “for it is written” (*hoti gegraptai*)¹⁴⁰ and provides the substance of the Old Testament passage with six words—*epikataratos pas ho kremamenos epi xulou* (literally, “cursed [is] everyone having hung on a tree”).¹⁴¹ He omits the phrase “by God” (i.e., “cursed by God”) that is in both Hebrew and Greek texts of Deuteronomy, but that is of no consequence as he and other New Testament writers often amend the scriptures to make the point that they are trying to convey to their audience.¹⁴² The main point for Paul in this context seems to be his focus on “curse,” how that relates to “the law,” and how the work of Jesus “on a tree” changed that. Admittedly, though, the passage is difficult. Hays observes that “Paul begins [at 3.6] a complex argument from scripture to show that God always intended the salvation of Gentiles.”¹⁴³ Moyise comments, “It is widely agreed that Galatians 3.10-14 is one of Paul’s most difficult passages. It consists of quotations from Deuteronomy 27.26, Habakkuk 2.4,

¹⁴⁰On *gegraptai* in Galatians, cf. 3.10; 4.22, 27. Paul also uses this expression sixteen times in Romans and ten times in the Corinthian letters. See BG online, and “Special Use of *gegraptai*” by Gottlob Schrenk in Kittel (2006), Volume I, 746-748.

¹⁴¹Brown and Comfort (1990), 659. The LXX reads *hoti kekateramenos hupo theou pas kremamenos epi xulou*. The Hebrew reads *ki qil’lath ‘elohim taluy*.

¹⁴²Different methods of understanding scripture, based on Jewish hermeneutics of the first century, are to be discerned. See “Paul and the Old Testament” in Longenecker (1975), 104-132; “Paul and His Bible” and “Paul and Judaism” in Ellis (1981), 10-84. Remarks by Johnson (2005), 91, based on Paul’s omission of “by God” (e.g., “the passage from Deuteronomy does not really mean that a man was cursed by God because he was executed, but the execution was the outward sign of a cursed man”) are untenable. Cf. similar quote from R. Alan Cole, cited in Stott (1986), 81; the ambiguity of Silva, “Galatians,” NTUOT, 797-798, on the omission; and the discussion in Streett (2015), 189ff. Pfeiffer (1966), 75, observes that even Jerome who noticed “that Paul omitted the mention of God in quoting Deuteronomy 21.23 in Galatians 3.13, could seriously deem it possible that the Jews had added the reference to the deity in Deuteronomy 21.23 to insult the Christians.” Morris (1983), 57-58, rightly suggests that any “sharp antithesis” in Paul’s omission of *hupo theou* is unlikely.

¹⁴³Cf. Romans 3.27–4.25. Richard B. Hays, “The Letter of Paul to the Galatians,” NRSV, 2186.

Leviticus 18.5, and Deuteronomy 21.23, in a highly compressed argument.”¹⁴⁴ And Stanton admits, “It is difficult to be certain about Paul’s line of argument in verses 10-12.”¹⁴⁵ For the purposes of this paper, however, we briefly will consider the two main points that Paul makes by quoting this Old Testament passage.

Of course, the argument of Paul is extended and interwoven in this part of his letter. It starts in 3.1-5 with his focus on the experience of the Holy Spirit by the Galatians.

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so much for nothing. Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?

Then he resumes his discussion of “the law” in 3.19ff., but not until he revisits how “the promise” of the Holy Spirit was received by the Galatians (verses 14 and 18).¹⁴⁶ So the chief idea of the immediate context (verses 6-9 and 15-18) for his statements in 3.10-14 seems to be plain. He is speaking to those who are familiar with the “covenant”¹⁴⁷ to Abraham, as he emphatically

¹⁴⁴Moyise (2015), 131. Moyise continues to note the “catch-words” that tie together the OT quotations, e.g., *epikataratos* (“cursed”) in Deuteronomy 27.26 and 21.23, *zesetai* (“shall live”) in Habakkuk 2.4 and Leviticus 18.5, and *poiein auta* (“to do them”) in Deuteronomy 27.26 and Leviticus 18.5. Cf. Silva, “Galatians,” NTUOT, 792ff.

¹⁴⁵G. N. Stanton, “Galatians,” 161, in Muddiman and Barton (2010).

¹⁴⁶Keener (2018), 124, 126, titles 3.6-14 as “Either Abraham’s Blessing or the Law’s Curse” and proposes a “basic chiasmic structure” for Paul’s thoughts here.

¹⁴⁷Paul uses *diatheke* (“covenant”) twice in this passage (3.15, 17) and one other time in Galatians (4.24); cf. Romans 9.4; 11.27; 1 Corinthians 11.25; 2 Corinthians 3.6, 14; Ephesians 2.12. See too entry in Kittel (2006), Volume II, 106-134; and Gale (1964), 41-46.

states that “the blessing”¹⁴⁸ of justification “by faith”¹⁴⁹ belongs also to the Gentiles. This is “the promise”¹⁵⁰ that God made to Abraham, and in doing so he “declared the gospel beforehand”¹⁵¹ to him. Thus, “the law”¹⁵² which “came four hundred thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.” In this way, the Gentiles by their faith, not by the law, become descendants of Abraham and inheritors of God’s promise and blessing in Christ Jesus.¹⁵³ This is consistent with what Paul has said in other places.¹⁵⁴ Whatever, then,

¹⁴⁸Paul uses the compound verb *eneulogeo* here in 3.8 (“to bless”; cf. Acts 3.25; LXX in Genesis 12.3; 18.18; 22.18; 26.4). In 3.9 he uses the simple verb *eulogeo* (“to bless”; cf. Romans 12.14; 1 Corinthians 4.12; 10.16; 14.16; Ephesians 1.3). In 3.14 he uses the noun *eulogia* (“blessing” or “gift”; cf. Romans 15.29; 16.18; 1 Corinthians 10.16; 2 Corinthians 9.5, 6; Ephesians 1.3). This seems to be Paul’s way of introducing what he says next in 3.10, 13, by way of contrast, about the *katara* (“curse”; cf. Hebrews 6.8; James 3.10; 2 Peter 2.14; and *kataraomai*, “to curse,” in Matthew 25.41; Mark 11.21; Luke 6.28; Romans 12.14; James 3.9). See entries in Kittel (2006), Volume II, 754-765, Volume I, 448-451.

¹⁴⁹In chapter 3, Paul uses *pistis* (“faith”) fourteen of its twenty-two occurrences in Galatians. Cf. also his use of *pistos* (“believing with commitment”; Danker [2009], 285) in 3.9; and *pisteuo* (“to have faith” or “to believe”) in Galatians 2.7, 16; 3.6, 22. Moulton and Geden (1978), 808, 809, 811.

¹⁵⁰Paul seems to interchange “the blessing” and “the promise” as he focuses on the priority of each, in relation to Abraham, to “the law.” He uses *epangelia* (“promise”) eight times in Galatians 3 in verses 14, 16, 17, 18 (two times), 21, 22, 29 (cf. 4.23, 28; Romans 4.13, 14, 16, 20; 9.4, 8, 9; 15.8; 2 Corinthians 1.20; 7.1; Ephesians 1.13; 2.12; 3.6; 6.2; 1 Timothy 4.8; 2 Timothy 1.1), and the verb *epangello* (“to promise”) in 3.19 (cf. Romans 4.21; 1 Timothy 2.10; 6.21; Titus 1.2). See Kittel (2006), Volume II, 576-586.

¹⁵¹The compound form *proeuangelidzomai* (“announce good news in advance,” Danker [2009], 299), occurs only here in NT. Cf. Moulton and Milligan (1980), 539.

¹⁵²Paul uses *nomos* (“law”) twenty-eight times in Galatians (fourteen times in chapter 3); cf. fifty-four uses in Romans and twelve occurrences in all his other letters. Moulton and Geden (1978), 668-669. See too Kittel (2006), Volume IV, 1069-1078.

¹⁵³Fittingly, Seid (2019), 121-122, uses “Abraham and the Gentile Peoples” and “Promise to Abraham Not Superseded by Law” as his titles for 3.8-14 and 3.15-18, respectively.

¹⁵⁴See, for example, the concise overview of Paul’s thoughts on law and covenant in Barrett (1994), 74-87. Cf. the parallels in Wilson (2009), 266-269. Also, it is important to note the role of the Holy Spirit as a guiding principle for Paul’s ideas about “the law.” For an excellent integrative approach to these themes used by Paul, see Keener (2016).

Paul means about “the law” and “the curse” in verses 10-14 highlights his major premise—“in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”¹⁵⁵

Paul’s first point, in verses 10-12, is a negative one. Simply put, reliance on “the works of the law” for justification “before God” puts a person “under a curse.”¹⁵⁶ Paul uses scripture to back up this assertion and quotes from Deuteronomy 27.26 and 28.58. Then he claims, “It is evident that no one is justified before God by the law,” and he cites another scripture (i.e., Habakkuk 2.4) to emphasize this point. And, he continues, “the law does not rest on faith; on the contrary,” quoting Leviticus 18.5, “Whoever does the works of the law will live by them.” Paul, in a sense, is using shorthand for these negative assertions about the law.¹⁵⁷ This is not all that the apostle will say to the Galatians about the law. He has much more to say that he will amend and refine. But here he is plain in his assertion about the law putting “under a curse” those who try to use it as a means of right-standing (i.e., justification) before God. Paul does not

¹⁵⁵This is the force of Paul’s use in verse 14 of *hina* (“in order that”), that is, to bring his discussion to the significant point about the promise to Abraham and the reception of the Spirit, namely, it is “in Christ Jesus . . . to the Gentiles . . . through faith.” On this point, cf. Weber (1979), 90-94.

¹⁵⁶Much has been written about Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith, especially in Romans. For a good comprehensive overview, see chapters on “The Life in Sin” and “The Revelation of the Righteousness of God” in Ridderbos (1975), 91-181. In Galatians, Paul uses *dikaïos* (“upright, just”) at 3.11; *dikaïosune* (“uprightness, righteousness, justice”) at 2.21; 3.6, 21; 5.5; and *dikaïoo* (“to justify, set right”) at 2.16 (three times), 17; 3.8, 11, 24; 5.4. Danker (2009), 97; cf. Kittel (2006), Volume II, 202-210, 215-219.

¹⁵⁷It is helpful on this note to read verses 10-14 without the OT quotations: “For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse. . . . Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law. . . . But the law does not rest on faith. . . . Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

go further to elaborate what he means by “under a curse.”¹⁵⁸ He states the fact so that he can highlight the redeeming work of Christ to counteract or reverse “the curse” in order that all, including the Gentiles, might receive “in Christ Jesus” the blessing given by God to Abraham and “through faith” the promise of the Holy Spirit. On this observation, Stanton is worth quoting at length. He writes:

It is difficult to be certain about Paul’s line of argument in verses 10-12. He claims that reliance on observance of the law brings a curse, not a blessing, and quotes Deuteronomy 27.26 in support. Why does the law bring a curse? Paul seems to be implying that it is impossible to carry out the requirements of the law; since those who try to do so fail to keep the law completely, they are accursed. There is a solemn warning to the Galatians here: beware of the law’s siren voice, for it brings a curse, not a blessing. If this is Paul’s main point in verse 10, then verses 11 and 12 make a rather different point. They are concerned once again with the contrast between faith and keeping the law as the basis of one’s standing before God. In verse 11, Habakkuk 2.4 underpins Paul’s argument concerning faith; in verse 12, Leviticus 18.5 is cited to confirm that the law has to do with carrying out the requirements of the law and living by them. Living by faith (v. 11) leaves no room for living by the requirements of the law (v. 12). Paul’s comments on the law in verses 10-12 are negative and harsh. The other side of the coin is expressed positively in verses 13-14: ‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law . . . so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.’ This section ends where it began (vv. 2-5) with a reference to the importance of God’s bestowal of the Spirit. But what does ‘Christ became a curse for us’ mean (v. 13)? ‘The thought is of Jesus acting in a representative capacity . . . the law printing its curse on Jesus, as it were, so that in his death the force of the curse was exhausted, and those held under its power were liberated’ (Dunn 1993, 177, who rightly refers to 2 Corinthians 5.21 as an important parallel).¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸Paul could be asserting the entire weight of the stipulations of the Torah as a curse. This is the context of what he quotes from Deuteronomy 27.26. Note the comments by Woods (1974), 276, “The last curse, in generalizing fashion, is directed against the revolt of disobedience to the revealed law. By his last ‘amen’ the Israelite would bind himself under oath to be loyal to the entire covenant. Paul probes implications of this oath and the deliverance Christ affords from its curse in Galatians 3.10-14.” See too comments by Fung (1953), 147-153, on Paul’s interpretive method here; cf. also Dunn (1993), 168-180; and Silva, “Galatians,” *NTUOT*, 796-797.

¹⁵⁹Stanton, “Galatians,” in Muddiman and Barton (2001), 161. See also comments by Guthrie (1981), 466, who concludes, “We are undoubtedly faced with a mystery, but we nevertheless cannot fail to see the substitutionary implications of statements like 2 Corinthians 5.21 and Galatians 3.13.” Moyise (2015), 134, confesses, “It is perhaps easier to understand what Paul is trying to say in this passage than follow his actual argument.” But he adds a bit later, “It is unclear how Deuteronomy 21.23 helps his case.”

Paul's second and most important point, in verses 13-14, is the positive one. The apostle does not draw out any meaning here from his quotation of Leviticus 18.5. He leaves it, so to speak, hanging or unfinished. He will return to this later, since here he wants to punctuate the positive point about the work of Christ "on a tree" that reversed "the curse of the law." He begins, "Christ redeemed us."¹⁶⁰ And from what did he redeem us? He "redeemed us from the curse of the law."¹⁶¹ How did he do this? He became "a curse for us." What is the apostle's proof for this assertion? He quotes from the Mosaic proscription in Deuteronomy 21.23, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree." As Keener suggests:

Again linking texts by shared terminology, Paul offers a second "curse" text from Deuteronomy. If the sufferings ascribed to curses in Deuteronomy 27 represent judgments, then the same could be understood of Jesus's suffering of crucifixion, since it is also a cursed state in Deuteronomy.

In Deuteronomy, what was hanged was the corpse, adding posthumous shame to the execution. Later, however, some peoples would hang a person to death on a stake, a custom adopted widely by Rome. Some Jewish interpreters viewed this action in light of Deuteronomy 21.23.

. . . Jews would not think someone necessarily cursed by God simply because he was crucified by Romans. This association may have originated directly from some of Paul's interlocutors in synagogues that emphasized the Sanhedrin's verdict against Jesus (cf. Acts 13.27-28), or possibly from Paul's own preconversion polemic based on the same premise. But good argumentation turned the perceived advantages of opponents to one's own advantage.

Paul indicates that if they want to view matters purely under the law, then they will have to proclaim Jesus accursed (an ungodly declaration, 1 Corinthians 12.3)! But even though Jesus was innocent (Acts 1.28), there was a sense in which, under the law (cf. Galatians 4.4), he did embrace the curse, to free others from it (3.13).¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰Here Paul introduces the idea of purchase from the marketplace (i.e., *agora*), "to buy out, redeem" (Greek *exagoradzo*; in NT only here, in 4.5; Ephesians 5.16; and Colossians 4.5) with the implications of deliverance or manumission. Danker (2009), 132. Cf. *agoradzo* ("to buy" or "to purchase") at 1 Corinthians 6.20; 7.23, 30, and other NT uses, Moulton and Geden (1978), 15; see also Kittel (2006), Volume I, 124-128. On Christ's death as atonement (i.e., propitiation and redemption), see Cottrell (2002), 265-272; cf. Murray (1977), 142-150.

¹⁶¹See Keener (2018), 138-139; cf. Beker (1980), 182ff.

¹⁶²*Ibid.*, 140. Cf. also Keener's comments about the death of Christ as a sin offering (e.g., 1 Corinthians 5.21; Romans 8.3) or as a condition of wretchedness (e.g., 1 Corinthians 12.3).

But Paul does not digress here to contemplate or discuss this paradox. He does not find any incongruity in applying Deuteronomy 21.23 to the crucifixion of Jesus, even though in its original context it refers to the postmortem hanging of a criminal.¹⁶³ Nor does he need to explain what he means by “everyone who hangs on a tree.” All his readers (i.e., hearers) in the Galatian churches, both the Jewish believers familiar with the Torah as well as the Gentile believers, would understand “hangs on a tree” as a reference to the Roman practice of crucifixion. So in this section, it is sufficient for Paul to state the positive (i.e., the curse of Christ rescues us from the curse of the law) and to affirm the outcome (i.e., so that all, including Gentiles, may benefit from the blessing to Abraham and the promise of the Spirit).

Some concluding thoughts about New Testament uses of Deuteronomy 21.22-23. It is inconclusive whether the four Gospels allude to the Mosaic statute in Deuteronomy 21.22-23.¹⁶⁴ But the statute, as stated earlier, could be seen as a paradigm or template for the passion narratives.¹⁶⁵ It seems that the disciples had to be aware of this, either by familiarity with the statute itself or the custom of burial before sunset in Judea, when they experienced the crucifixion of Jesus their Master. There is an uncanny resemblance of the death of Jesus to the circumstance envisioned by Deuteronomy 21.22-23, and this does come out sharply when one reads the stories about the crucifixion in the Gospels in light of the Mosaic proscription.

¹⁶³Ridderbos (1953), 127-128, nuances this in his comments and infers that “the reference to hanging here is not to death on the cross, something unknown to ancient Israel. The reference is rather to the hanging of executed persons on the tree of shame.” But it is hard to so understand Paul as making such a distinction here, since his remarks about the proscription in Deuteronomy are so brief.

¹⁶⁴See, though, the points of correspondence above in footnotes 40 (Luke 23.40; 24.20), 64 (Luke 23.39), 68 (Luke 23.40), 78 (references to the body of Jesus), 82 and 83 (John 19.31), 87 (Matthew 27.7), and 89 (John 19.40).

¹⁶⁵See footnote 74 above.

As recorded by Luke in Acts of Apostles, the early preaching of good news by Peter and Paul included an emphasis on Jesus being arrested and handed over to authorities, wrongly sentenced to death, and then “hanged on a tree” (Acts 5.30; 10.39; 13.29).¹⁶⁶ The correspondence between the wording of the Mosaic proscription in Deuteronomy and the wording used by Luke does not seem to be inconsequential.¹⁶⁷ This appears to be a normal part of the kerygma or proclamation about Jesus that was voiced by the apostles and the early church. They—the apostles and some of the women who had followed Jesus—had witnessed the events surrounding his crucifixion, his death, and his burial.¹⁶⁸ So there was nothing unusual about telling others what they themselves had experienced (i.e., he was crucified on a cross or hanged on a tree). It is unclear, however, whether the early church used the proscription in Deuteronomy as part of an early collection of Old Testament texts about the Messiah that they believed to be fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁶⁹ Nevertheless, these statements in Acts about the death of Jesus were expressed by the early church soon after his resurrection and ascension.

¹⁶⁶See footnote 97 above; cf. comments on the text by Bruce (1952), 143; Jackson and Lake (1965), Volume IV, 59, 121; Williams (1957), 92; Williams (1985), 94, 181, 223-224.

¹⁶⁷See footnotes 100 and 101 above. Cf. comments by Dunn (2016), 69-70, 143; and Keener (2014), 332, 352.

¹⁶⁸Especially notable are those women in his inner circle such as Mary his mother (see Acts 1.14).

¹⁶⁹Note, though, the comments on Acts 10.39 by Dunn (2019), 83, “‘Hanged on a tree.’ That this was part of early polemic against belief in a crucified Messiah may be implied by Galatians 3.13–‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’ (cf. 1 Corinthians 1.23). This polemic was possibly part of Paul’s motivation as a persecutor. Such a play on Deuteronomy is not developed elsewhere.” On the possibility of a “testimony book” used by early Christians, see Ellis (1981), 98-197; cf. the brief discussion of testimonia by Ellis, “How the New Testament Uses the Old,” in Marshall (1977), 201. See also “The Death of Jesus in the Early Church” in Beker (1980), 202-204.

Luke in the book of Acts does show, though, a preference for the resurrection of Jesus in the teaching of the early disciples. Dunn notes this for the early kerygma in Acts and states, “The principal focus falls on the resurrection of Jesus.” And he adds:

An important corollary to the Acts sermons’ concentration on the resurrection is the absence of any theology of the death of Jesus. His death is mentioned, but only as a bare fact (usually highlighting Jewish responsibility). The historical fact is not interpreted (2.23, 36; 3.13-15; 4.10; 5.30; 7.52; 10.39; 13.27f.). It is never said, for example, that “Jesus died on our behalf” or “for our sins”; there are no suggestions that Jesus’ death was a sacrifice. The few brief allusions to Jesus as the Servant (of Second Isaiah) pick up the theme of vindication following suffering, not of vicarious suffering as such (3.13, 26; 4.27, 30; so also 8.30-35). Similarly the allusions to Deuteronomy 21.22f. in Acts 5.30 and 10.39 (“hanging him on a tree”—cf. 13.29) seem to be intended (by Luke) to highlight Jesus’ shame and disgrace, and so to serve the same humiliation-vindication motif; to draw the theology of Galatians 3.13 from them is to read more into the text than sound exegesis permits. And even 20.28 (“the church of the Lord—or of God—which he obtained with his own blood—or with the blood of his own”), not properly speaking part of an evangelistic proclamation, remains more than a little puzzling and obscure. In short, an explicit theology of the death of Jesus is markedly lacking in the kerygma of the Acts sermons. . . . So far as the kerygma of the Acts sermons is concerned, we have to say that it lacks a theology of the cross, it makes no attempt to attribute a definite atoning significance to the death of Jesus.¹⁷⁰

But Luke, in his record of events coming soon after Pentecost, does not seem to dissociate completely the suffering of Jesus on the cross from possible connections that are made later by Paul and Peter.

Luke certainly highlights the innocence of Jesus (e.g., as a sacrifice) in his suffering and crucifixion (e.g., 3.13-15; 13.27-31). And, in light of the descent of the promised Holy Spirit, he lays emphasis on the resurrection and the exaltation of Jesus. This focus is not an aberration from the apostolic witness to the sacrificial significance of the death of Jesus.¹⁷¹ Rather, Luke chooses to link the saving benefits of the cross to the post-passion resurrection and ascension of

¹⁷⁰Dunn (1990), 17-18; cf. too Dunn’s observations on Deuteronomy 21.22f. and the death of Stephen.

¹⁷¹Dunn argues this as part of his diversity in the New Testament thesis.

Jesus. In Acts, Luke asserts that God has exalted Jesus and “has made him both Lord and Messiah” (2.36). Luke is not unfamiliar with Jewish sacrificial categories in his message about the death of Jesus. His connection of forgiveness and purification with the exaltation of Jesus indicates his understanding of the key ideas of sacrificial atonement. In a recent article about sacrificial atonement in Acts, Moffitt argues:

[Luke] is aware of the sacrificial aspects of Jesus’ work. Jewish sacrifice consists of a hierarchically structured ritual process that cannot be reduced to the slaughter of the victim. In Leviticus, the culminating elements of this process occur as the priests convey the materials of the sacrifice into God’s presence (i.e., offer the sacrifice) by approaching and serving at the various altars. Such a perspective on sacrifice is suggestive for interpreting Luke’s emphasis on Jesus’ exaltation in Acts. Luke has not stressed the sacrificial aspects of Jesus’ death, but has highlighted the atoning benefits of Jesus’ exaltation because he understands Jesus to have offered his atoning sacrifice as part of his exaltation to the right hand of God.¹⁷²

Thus, Luke’s statement about Paul’s message to the overseers at Ephesus, that they are “to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son” (20.28), is not inappropriate.¹⁷³ The notion of “purchase”¹⁷⁴ with “blood”¹⁷⁵ definitely carries with it the idea of sacrifice, and Luke had to be aware of this connection with regard to the death of Jesus. So Luke reflects an early Christology in Acts of Apostles that includes the idea of sacrifice with respect to

¹⁷²Abstract for Moffitt (2016); available online at: <www.cambridge.org/core/journals/new-testament-studies/>.

¹⁷³Admittedly, Acts 20.28 is challenging because of textual variants, but Dunn seems to dismiss the importance of two words not in dispute (i.e., “purchase” and “blood”) as non-Lucan based on other difficulties in the text. On the textual problem, see Metzger (1994), 425-426.

¹⁷⁴The Greek word is from *peripoieo* and is used in NT only in the middle voice, *peripoieomai*, meaning “secure for oneself.” Danker (2009), 281. Cf. Luke 17.33; 1 Timothy 3.13.

¹⁷⁵On NT passages that use *haima* (“blood”) with reference to Jesus, see Matthew 26.28; 27.4, 6, 8, 24, 25; Mark 14.24; Luke 22.20, 44; John 6.53, 54, 55; 19.34; Acts 1.19; 5.28; 20.28; Romans 3.25; 5.9; 1 Corinthians 10.16; 11.25, 27; Ephesians 1.7; 2.13; Colossians 1.20; Hebrews 9.12, 14; 10.19, 29; 13.12, 20; 1 Peter 1.2, 19; 1 John 1.7; 5.6, 8; Revelation 1.5, 9; 7.14; 12.11; 19.13.

the death of Jesus. This sacrificial connection is not emphasized by Luke in Acts when he recounts how Peter and Paul in their early preaching told others about Jesus of Nazareth who died “on a tree” (i.e., a cross). But some years later, Peter and Paul in letters to instruct and encourage fellow believers in Jesus would emphasize both the sacrificial and substitutionary work of Jesus “on the tree” (i.e., the cross). And this suffering and death of Jesus “on the tree” resembled in large measure the situation envisioned by Moses in Deuteronomy 21.22-23.

By the time he wrote to the Galatians, Paul understood the death of Jesus “on a tree” (i.e., crucifixion) to be a curse that in some way “redeemed us from the curse of the law.” Paul does not define this in a clear way, except that he quotes Deuteronomy 21.23 as the prooftext for his assertion.¹⁷⁶ But he does indicate plainly that this accomplishment by Christ was “for us,”¹⁷⁷ since “no one is justified before God by the law.” So Paul reminds the Galatian believers about

¹⁷⁶Johnson (2009), 137, remarks that the way by which Jesus died “could be taken as confirmation that he was cursed by God, [since] Deuteronomy 21.23 declared cursed anyone hanged on a tree (see Galatians 3.13). For believers to proclaim Jesus as ‘Christ crucified,’ therefore, was to present a ‘stumbling block’ (*skandalon*) to fellow Jews, as well as something foolish (*moria*) to fellow pagans, even if to those inside the community this proclamation seemed ‘the power of God and the wisdom of God’ (1 Corinthians 1.24). The cognitive dissonance created by the declaration concerning the crucified Jesus that ‘God has made him both Lord and Christ’ (Acts 2.36) was part of the generative matrix for the composition of the New Testament and would continue to fuel theological disputes within Christianity for centuries. The earliest Christian experience and conviction, in sum, was itself deeply ambiguous and capable of being led in different directions.” On criticism of Christianity based on this “cognitive dissonance” of a crucified Messiah, see “death of Christ” in Court (2007), 72; “the ‘folly’ of the crucified Son of God” in Hengel (1977), 1-10; “Celsus’s challenge to the Christian faith” in Novak (2001), 83-84. Cf. Johnson (1986), 136-137, 246, 309, 311; Pfeiffer (1966), 75. For an excellent summary of issues and evidence for the early separation of Judaism from Christianity, see “Ways that Parted: Jews, Christians, Jewish Christians (ca. 100-150)” in Cohen (2014), 231ff.

¹⁷⁷Paul writes in Galatians 3.13 that Christ redeemed “us” (*hemas*) from the curse of the law, “having become on behalf of us” (*genomenos huper hemon*) a curse. Brown and Comfort (1990), 659. Note the strong statement and comments of Dunn (2019), 107-109, about Paul’s belief in the atoning death of Christ, “Certainly, the atoning death of Jesus was at the heart of the gospel for Paul.” Cf. “The Old and The New Obedience: The Death of Jesus” in Davies (1948), 227ff.

their redemption from the curse and Christ's substitution as a curse on the cross. Whether Paul himself came to this conclusion about the death of Jesus or had it revealed to him or was taught such by others is uncertain.¹⁷⁸ But we do know that Peter, sometime later in his letter to believers in Asia Minor, reflects on the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 and voices similar ideas about the crucifixion of Jesus.

While Paul's emphasis on "the curse" may be obscure, Peter's statement about the death of Jesus is very plain. The apostle states, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross [i.e., the tree], so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2.24). As stated above, this clearly portrays the death of Jesus as a substitution,

¹⁷⁸In Galatians, Paul emphatically states that he did not "receive" (*paralambano*; 1.9, 12) nor "was taught" (*didasko*; 1.12) by anyone else "the gospel" (*euangellion*; 1.6, 7, 11; 2.2, 5, 7, 14) that he preached; it was "through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (*di' apokalypseos Iesou Christou*; 1.12; cf. 2.2). Paul here does not specify the particulars of his gospel, as he does in other places (e.g., 1 Corinthians 15.1ff.; Romans 1.16-17). It could be that Paul through his vision of the Lord while traveling to Damascus (Acts 9.1-19; 22.1-21; 26.1-23) and then from revelations in Arabia (Galatians 1.17) came to know Jesus as both Son of God and Messiah. Later, when he conferred with the apostles and other believers in Jerusalem and elsewhere, he gained additional understanding about the death of Jesus. Note Paul's language in 1 Corinthians 15.3, "For I handed on to you among the first things, 'that which also I received' [*ho kai parelabon*], that Christ died for the sins of us according to the scriptures, and that he was buried and that he was raised." Brown and Comfort (1990), 615. See comments by Dunn (1993), 51-54; cf. Betz (1979), 64-66. On "Christ died for our sins" (*hoti Christos apethanen huper ton hamartion hemon*), cf. Romans 5.8; Galatians 1.4; 1 Thessalonians 5.10. On Paul's use of *apokalupsis* ("making fully known, uncovering, disclosure, revelation"), cf. Romans 16.25; 1 Corinthians 14.6, 26; 2 Corinthians 12.1, 7; Ephesians 1.17; 3.3; and for *apokalupto* ("to cause to be fully known, disclose, reveal, make known"), cf. Romans 1.16-17; 1 Corinthians 2.10; 14.30; Galatians 3.23; Ephesians 3.5; Philippians 3.15. For definitions, see Danker (2009), 46; cf. Kittel (2006), Volume III, 580ff. For Paul's many uses of "gospel" (*euangellion*), see Moulton and Geden (1978), 397-398; cf. Kittel (2006), Volume II, 729ff.

that is, “he himself bore our sins.”¹⁷⁹ Could it be that this is a “softer” reading by Peter of the Mosaic statute in Deuteronomy that he weaves into his interpretation of the prophet Isaiah, since he mentions both “body” and “tree” and avoids use of the harsher idea of being cursed by God? Regardless, the idea of the Lord bearing our sins on the cross seems to be a very early way of thinking for the followers of Jesus. In this regard, the connection of the crucifixion of Jesus to Deuteronomy 21.22-23 is apparent. But whether Peter or Paul or one of the other New Testament writers first identified this connection is uncertain.¹⁸⁰ Jesus himself, according to the Gospels, made many statements about his death and its benefits for his followers and even the

¹⁷⁹Cf. 1 Peter 3.18, “the righteous for the unrighteous” (*dikaios huper adikon*), where the idea of substitution is emphatic even though it does not refer to “the cross” (i.e., the tree). That Peter here means the death of Jesus is plain (i.e., “Christ also suffered” [*hoti kai Christos . . . epathen*] and “he was put to death in the flesh” [*thanatotheis men sarki . . .*]). This was done “in order to bring you to God” (*hina humas prosagage to theo*). Balch, “The First Letter of Peter,” NRSV, 2283, notes, “Greek and Jewish heroes suffer for other worthy persons and for the law (see 2 Maccabees 6.28; 7.37; 4 Maccabees 6.27; see also Romans 5.7-8) but Christ *suffered for sins* (see 2.21).” But cf. Wand (1934), 100, who denies here any idea of substitution in the sense of atonement. On 1 Peter 3.18-22 as derived from an earlier Christian hymn, see Best (1971), 135-137; Kelly (1969), 146-147.

¹⁸⁰Given the statements of Peter and Paul that certainly connect the cross (i.e., the tree) with atonement, something that seems to be less prominent in the Gospels and Acts of Apostles, it is interesting to conjecture an application to the dates of the NT documents (e.g., a dating for the Gospels earlier than writings by Paul or Peter). Robinson (1976), 352, who argues that the early church’s canonical literature was produced between AD 40 and 70, states, “The notion that all the Pauline epistles, with the theology they imply, were prior to all the gospels, with the theology they imply, is not one that we should derive from the documents themselves. . . . What has emerged is a more credible pattern.” Cf. Hengel (1981), 34ff., who states, “The fact that soteriological formulae of this kind retreat right into the background in the synoptic tradition is quite another matter. . . . The fact that they are otherwise lacking is no indication that they were unknown to the authors of the synoptic gospels. The reason for their lack of prominence is rather that understandably they do not play a central role in the proclamation of Jesus.” For an older but useful study, see “The Atonement in Primitive Preaching and Belief” in Taylor (1940), 15ff.

whole world.¹⁸¹ Such pronouncements would have become more fully understood by the disciples after the death of Jesus and his subsequent resurrection and ascension.

¹⁸¹See Strauss (2007), 503-504; cf. “the atoning death of Jesus in the earliest community” in Hengel (1981), 47ff.; also “Why Did Jesus Think He Had to Die?” in Green (1984), 33-41. See too Murray (1977), 151-157, on the crucifixion as “the supreme act of obedience” by Jesus.

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