

# Why Is It A Curse To Hang On a Tree?

By Melanie Stone

*Galatians 3:13 "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.'")"*

In Galatians 3:13, the Apostle Paul writes about the freedom we have from death because of the debt Jesus paid for our sin. Not only did Jesus die our death; but Paul writes that Jesus also became a curse. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 21:22, 23 from the law that Moses gave to the Israelites,

*"(22) If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, (23) his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, for he who is hanged is accursed of God."*

The Israelites didn't kill criminals using the method of hanging, but they would at times hang the criminal's body after they applied a capital punishment. This action was to show the curse that came from breaking God's Law. The Hebrew word for curse is *qalal* (#7043) and it means something that is lifted or lightened, as in, making it little or contemptible.<sup>1</sup> A curse is the opposite of a blessing. When someone was given a blessing, they were shown favor, or value. When someone was hung, it signified that they were despised, without honor.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus described the kind of death He would die in John 12:32, 33. Verse 32 says, "Jesus said, 'And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.'" In verse 33 it explains that Jesus was signifying what type of death He would die, which was crucifixion. He knew that He was not only going to be killed, He was not only going to be punished, but He was also to become sin and a curse.<sup>3</sup>

God operates within covenants, where He binds Himself to us through promise. In covenant terms, an oath or a curse would be spoken so that if the covenant were to be broken, the curse would come on the one who broke it. God needed to break the first covenant in order to establish a second covenant. Under the Old Covenant, there was cursing for anyone who broke the Law. When Jesus became a curse, the first covenant was broken, making way for a new covenant to be made.<sup>4</sup>

John 3:14 says, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man *be lifted up*." John is writing about the incident in Numbers 21:5-9 where God permitted the consequences of sin to come on the Israelites through poisonous serpent bites. When they called out to God, He had mercy on them and instructed Moses to put up a pole with a bronze serpent on it. When the people looked on the serpent, they were healed. This incident pointed to the day when God's Son would bring us life by becoming a curse, lifted up from the earth as one despised and guilty under the Law.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Hanging on a tree was a way to belittle or despise someone who broke the law of a covenant. Jesus became a curse in order to break the old covenant law, making way for a better covenant, a covenant that reconciled the human race in relationship with God through grace. May we treasure Jesus as our brother and honor Him as our Lord for what He has done for us.

---

<sup>1</sup> An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words by W.E. Vine, M.A.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 53:3

<sup>3</sup> II Corinthians 5:21

<sup>4</sup> Romans 7:1-4; Hebrews 8:6, 7; 9:16-18, 10:5-10