

**“Accursed is Everyone who is Hung on a Tree”:
Understanding Paul’s Appeal to Deut. 21:23 in Gal. 3:13
J. Webb Mealy**

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, “Accursed is everyone who is hung on wood/a tree.” (Gal. 3:13, quoting Deut. 21:23 as translated from the Hebrew by Paul)

Preparatory Questions and Answers about Curses and Cursing

What is a curse? A curse is more than one thing.

1. First, a curse is a form of words that wishes a bad experience upon someone. Curses are sometimes used as a way of expressing a wish for retribution to encounter someone who has done the speaker wrong, as in “May the person who stole my lunch have a terrible stomach ache from eating it!” Curses are often employed where the offender is not known, because there is no other way to strike out and get revenge on the offender. But one may also know who committed the offense.
2. Another very common use for a curse is to dissuade someone from doing something wrong in the future when one does not have the power to ensure, by one’s ordinary human efforts, that they do not do it. For example, in the ancient world, curses would be found on many tombs, to protect them from being robbed. A standard Jewish formula is “May all the curses written in the book [i.e. the curses of Deut. 28:15-68] come upon the person who disturbs this tomb.” In this kind of case, a curse functions as a *deterrent* to bad behavior.
3. Finally, a person or group can *become* a curse. To *become a curse* is to have an experience so horrible that your case comes to mind when someone wants to curse someone. Your experience is so bad that it becomes famous, and “an object of cursing”: “May the same thing happen to you as happened to so and so!” For example, Jeremiah prophesies, “I will make [the rebels of Judah] a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, an insult, a catchphrase, a taunt, and a curse (Heb. *qēlalah*) in all the places where I shall drive them” (Jer 24:9).

4. To be *accursed*, in a literal sense, is to be a person who has been cursed by someone, the target of someone's cursing. But the more important and far more common sense is not literal. To be accursed is to have an experience that is so bad, so catastrophic, so ill-fated, that one would think, looking at you and your experience, that someone must have severely cursed you and had their curse come true. In biblical language, both Hebrew and Greek, *being a curse* (see 3 above) is equivalent to this latter meaning of *being accursed*.

Interpreting Deuteronomy 21:23

²²If a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, ²³his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance. (Deut. 21:22-23)

This command stands within a lengthy section of laws and commands given to the fledgling nation of the Hebrews as they are about to cross over the Jordan River into Canaan. Many of the commands surrounding Deut. 21:22-23 concern the proper humane treatment of various classes of people and even animals (see, for example, Deut. 15:1-18; 21:10-17; 22:1-8; 23:15-16, 19-20, 24-25; 24:6; 24:10–25:19). This is the broad context of the command.

It is clear that there are a number of “capital offenses,” that is, offenses for which the penalty is death, decreed in the Law of Moses and elaborated in Deuteronomy. Moses here (in Deut. 21:23) anticipates a situation in which someone has done some particularly outrageous crime deserving of death, and the authorities hang the executed person's corpse up for public display on a stake or on a tree (the Hebrew word *'etz*, [Strong's #H6095](#), can mean either timber, such as a stake of wood, or a tree). The rationale(s) for this hanging would presumably be either or both of the following: (1) it would provide a satisfaction for the public's outrage against the person, and/or (2) it would provide a public example and warning to all against doing what the person has done.

Moses commands in this situation—where someone's executed corpse has been hung for public display—that the person's corpse must be taken down before nightfall. Why? Because from God's perspective, to be executed and to have your corpse hung up for public viewing is to experience the ultimate degradation. It is the worst thing that can happen to you—you have *become a curse*, in the exact sense that God uses the word when he speaks through Jeremiah, warning that the rebels of Judah will become “a horror...a reproach, a byword, a taunt, and a curse” (Jer. 24:9),

and “an execration, a horror, a curse, and a taunt” (Jer. 42:18). The Hebrew noun [*qēlalah*, Strong’s #H7045](#), “a curse,” is used in each of these passages from Jeremiah as in Deut. 21:23. Moses is saying in Deut. 21:23 that to leave such a destroyed, accursed person’s corpse hanging overnight—a person who has become, in God’s eyes, *a curse*—will desecrate the land the LORD God is giving the Israelites as an inheritance.

As an alternative to this interpretation, it could be suggested Deut. 21:23 says *God has cursed* the hanged person. That is, in fact, how the Septuagint translators understood the verse, because they render it “Because a person who is hanged on a tree/stake has been cursed by God.” But two problems make this interpretation very unlikely. First, it does not suggest any reason why *leaving the person’s corpse hung up overnight* might defile the land. Secondly, it does not notice the close parallel between the wording of this verse and the wording of the nearby passage Deut. 24:4:

For it is an abomination in the presence of the LORD, and you are not to bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.

Let’s look at these issues.

kiy to ‘abah hiwh liphney YHWH

For an abomination [is] this before YHWH (Deut. 24:4)

kiy-qilelath ’elohiym taluwy

For a curse [to] God is a hanged person (Deut. 21:23)

wělo ’ tachatiy’ ’eth-ha’aretz ’asher YHWH ’eloheyka nothen lěka nachalah

And you are not to bring sin upon the land that YHWH your God is giving you as an inheritance. (Deut. 24:4)

wělo ’ tětamme’ ’eth-’admathēka ’asher YHWH ’eloheyka nothen lěka nachalah

And you are not to defile your land that YHWH your God is giving you for an inheritance. (Deut. 21:23)

In each of these passages, there is something that is not to be done, and two reasons are given why it is not to be done: (1) Something about it offends God, and (2) doing it will besmirch the land of promise. If it is assumed that Deut. 21:23 says God curses the hanged person, then the parallelism breaks down between these passages, because there does not seem to be anything that God is offended by. If God is the one doing the cursing, then desecrating the person’s corpse would seem to be in line with, rather than in conflict with, God’s posture towards the person.

Note that the words *YHWH 'elohiym*, YHWH God, can come right behind the thing which is an abomination, without the intervening words *liphney*, “in the presence of,” and the meaning remains the same. The sense is still that the thing is an abomination to God, or in God’s view. Compare the following passages to Deut. 24:4 and 21:23:

kiy tow'avath YHWH 'eloheyka huw'

For it is an abomination to the LORD your God. Deut. 7:25

kiy tow'avath YHWH nalow

For the devious person is an abomination to the LORD. Prov. 3:32

In these three cases where *liphney* (“in the presence of,” literally “before the face of”) is not present, Deut. 21:23, Deut. 7:25, and Prov. 3:32, we have the same grammatical pattern:

1. *kiy* (for, because)
2. a noun expressing the condition of the person or situation in God’s eyes (curse, abomination)
3. name or names of God (*'elohiym*, *YHWH 'eloheyka*, *YHWH*)
4. a noun or pronoun for the person or situation that God is reacting to

We also see this exact pattern in Deut. 17:1; 22:5; 23:18; 25:16. In the various cases other than Deut. 21:23, Christian translators use the preposition “to” to express the relationship between the abomination and God; but they inconsistently paraphrase “under God’s curse” for Deut. 21:23, rather than “is a curse to God,” the most reasonable sense of which is, “For God looks upon a hanged person as a curse,” in the particular biblical sense of that word: God looks upon a person who is executed and hanged as a person suffering the worst possible form of humiliation and catastrophe. This command seems to be saying,

Enough is enough. Your authority to punish extends to the death penalty, but do not go beyond that to desecrate the executed person’s corpse, because that is cruelly dehumanizing, and it will make a stain on the land that I have given you as a holy inheritance.

One of the famous rabbis of the early second century CE, Rabbi Meir, uses a parable to explain his interpretation of this verse:

This [Deut. 21:23] can be understood through a parable: two identical twins were living in the same city, one was righteous and the other was a scoundrel. The first was made king of the city, the other committed robbery. Then the

king ordered him to be hanged on the tree. But when he heard that all those passing by the executed shouted in distress: “The king is hanging on the tree,” he ordered the body to be taken down (*b. Sanh.* 46b).

The point of the parable is that if we humans would feel a deep sense of wrongness at seeing even a criminal person who was our close relative degraded and dehumanized, so all the more does God, who feels grief at the death and degradation of sinners. Whatever sins humans commit, they are created in God’s image and likeness, and to dehumanize them is to insult their maker (see also Rabbi Meir’s comment in *m. Sanh.* 6, and Targum Jonathan on this verse, which makes this idea explicit).

Rashi, the beloved 11th century Hebrew Bible commentator, takes a closely related approach to Deut. 21:23:

For a hanging [human corpse] is a blasphemy of God: Heb. קללת אלהים. This is a degradation of the King in whose image man is created, and the Israelites are God’s children.

Rashi reads *kiy-qilelath ’elohiym taluwy* as “A person hung on a tree/pole is an insult to God.” It is not, in other words, the person, but the degradation visited upon the person by hanging their corpse in disgrace, that is insulting to God.

The (Jewish Publication Society) translations of 1917 and 1985 clearly take the verse in this way:

²²And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree; ²³his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt surely bury him the same day; for he that is hanged is a reproach unto God; that thou defile not thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance. (JPS 1917)

²²If a man is guilty of a capital offense and is put to death, and you impale him on a stake, ²³you 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. (NJPS 1985)

You can see from these renderings that the JPS translators are so impressed with the close parallel in language between Deut. 21:23 and 24:4 that they are taking *qilelath ’elohiym*, “a curse to God,” as meaning “an insult to God,” making this expression roughly equivalent to *tow’avah YHWH*, “an abomination to the LORD.” The clear assumption of the JPS translators, which they share with Rabbi Meir and Rashi, is

not that God is disgusted by the person (and definitely not that God curses the person), but rather that God is insulted by the degradation visited upon the person. This traditional Jewish reading has the benefit of being sensitive to the closely parallel phraseology in Deut. 24:4 and of putting the command squarely in the larger context of humane treatment of people, but it has a problem: if God is insulted by seeing someone being hung on a pole or tree, this ought to result in forbidding the practice altogether, and not simply in stating a limitation on how long it goes on.

Summary on Deuteronomy 21:23 in its Own Context

Deut. 21:23, read in its own context and in sensitivity to the workings of Hebrew grammar, forbids the desecration of the corpse of an executed criminal (by exposure to the elements and to the depredations of scavengers). In the Hebrew language and in the OT thought world, to be executed and have your dead body displayed hanging from a pole or from a tree is already the epitome of degradation and catastrophe. Such a person has “become a curse” in the specific biblical sense. God commands the Hebrews not to visit further insult upon the corpse of an executed human being, because exposing a human body to rot in the open air (or be eaten by wild animals) is insulting to humanity and to God, and will pollute the ground of the land that God is giving them.

This interpretation has a number of advantages:

1. It reads this command squarely in the broader context in which it sits. This portion of Deuteronomy (chs. 15–25) contains more than two dozen commands that concern the humane and respectful treatment of people and animals.
2. It is sensitive to the special biblical curse terminology, in which a person who experiences a total catastrophe—whether deserved or not—is said to have *become a curse*.
3. It is sensitive to the particularly close grammatical similarities that this passage shares with Deut. 24:23.
4. It makes good sense of the logic that relates the command to its explanation.
5. It makes theological sense: God is humane, therefore God forbids grossly inhumane practices.

It absolutely does not work to read this passage as saying that God curses a person who is hanged on a stake or tree. It makes no sense in relation to the broader context, it has no grammatical justification, it makes no sense of the logic that relates the command to its explanation, and it makes no theological sense.

Reading Galatians 3:13

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”—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. (Gal. 3:14 ESV)

Gal. 3:13 stands within an argument Paul is making to the Gentile Christians in Galatia that it is no advantage to them at all to convert to Judaism. The letter as a whole has been written in the midst of a sharp controversy. The controversy began when some influential orthodox Jewish believers in Judea heard that Paul and Barnabas had preached Jesus Christ to the Gentiles (non-Jews) in Antioch in Syria and in some major towns in southern Galatia (Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, see Acts 13:4–14:1-25). Paul and Barnabas, following the Spirit-led policy they had in Antioch in Syria, had fully accepted new believers into the faith without requiring them to convert to Judaism (see Acts 10–11; 15:1-5). Paul believes that Jesus Christ has specifically revealed to him that God’s plan is to accept the Gentiles *as Gentiles*, rather than to incorporate them into the community of God by making them convert to Judaism (see Rom. 1:16-17; Gal. 1:11-16; 3:26-29; Eph. 2:11–3:7; Col. 1:25-27; 3:11).

Some of the Jewish believers—especially some who are Pharisees—have disagreed so strongly with Paul that they have sent people from city to city along the path of Paul’s first missionary journey to tell the converts that they have not received the full truth about the gospel. These traveling Jewish-Christian teachers (known as “the Judaizers”) have been trying to persuade the Gentile believers of Galatia that they all must convert to orthodox Judaism in order to be first-class members of the new covenant community. Paul is furious. His view is that these “Judaizing” Jews who have come along behind him are taking away the grace and freedom of God and substituting complicated religious requirements in order that they will retain a sense of supremacy over the Gentiles (Gal. 4:17; 6:12-13).

Paul’s purpose in this letter is to explain, in a way that both Jews and Gentiles can understand, that God makes no such demands on the Gentiles. He uses quite a few scriptural arguments, and our passage, Gal. 3:13, is part of one of them. Let’s look at the entire argument of Gal. 3:5-14.

So—when God¹ gives out the Spirit to you, and does displays of power among you—does that come from doing what the Law requires, or from hearing with faith? It’s like Abraham, who “believed God, and it was credited

¹ Lit. “So the one who.”

to him as being in the right.”² ⁷So understand that it’s the people who live on the basis of faith who are Abraham’s children. ⁸And scripture sees ahead of time that God will find the Gentiles³ innocent on the basis of faith. It tells the good news to Abraham ahead of time:

All nations are going to be blessed through you.⁴

⁹The result is that those who live on the basis of faith are blessed along with Abraham, who believed. ¹⁰After all, those who operate on the basis of doing what the Law requires are under a curse. Because scripture says:⁵

Everyone who doesn’t hold to all the things written in the book of the Law, by doing them,⁶ will be under a curse.⁷

¹¹Yes,⁸ it’s clear that that no one is found innocent by God through the Law, because “The person who is innocent will live by faith.”⁹ ¹²But the Law isn’t based on faith. No, “The person who does these things¹⁰ will live because of it.”¹¹

¹³Christ has paid the price to set us free from the curse of the Law. He became a curse for us. Because the scripture says,¹²

Everyone hung on a stake¹³ is accursed.

¹⁴In this way¹⁴ the blessing of Abraham could go to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, so that we could receive the promise of the Holy Spirit through faith.¹⁵

Paul is convinced that if you depend on perfect obedience to the Law as your basis for being “justified,” which is to say, being found innocent or in the right with God, you turn away from the original Abrahamic principle of being blessed and found acceptable *by faith* (Gal. 3:6, 12; cf. Rom. 4:1-25), and you condemn yourself. Paul is convinced that no one adequately performs the weightiest requirements of the Law, and, as he points out in Gal. 3:10-11, failing to live by the Law, if you have

²Traditionally: “it was credited to him as righteousness.” See Gen. 15:6.

³ The Greek word for “Gentiles” is the same word as the word for “nations.”

⁴ Gen. 12:3; see Gen. 18:18.

⁵ Lit. “For it is written”—the standard way of citing scripture.

⁶ Lit. “to do them.”

⁷ Deut. 27:26.

⁸ Lit. “And.”

⁹ Hab. 2:4. I think that in Paul’s reading of that passage, the great test is whether a person trusts God, or whether they rely on their pride in themselves.

¹⁰ Lit. “them.”

¹¹ Lit. “because of them,” Lev. 18:5.

¹² Lit. “Because it is written.”

¹³ Or “on a tree” (see Deut. 21:23).

¹⁴ Lit. “so that,” referring all the way back to “Christ paid the price to set us free” (v. 13).

¹⁵ This quotation from Galatians is from *The Spoken English New Testament*, © 2017 J. Webb Mealy.

bound yourself to it, subjects you to a whole raft of curses. His general point is that Jesus has released even the Jews from the unbearable burden of the Law's curses by becoming a curse on behalf of all—so that all, Jews and Gentiles alike, can come to God on the level ground of grace and faith.

Let's examine how the "curse" part of the argument works. In v. 10, speaking of all who bind themselves to the Law as their means of being right with God, he says, quoting Deut. 27:26, "Accursed (Gr. [epikataratos](#), [Strong's #G1944](#), a stronger word than "cursed," Gr. *kataratos*) is everyone who doesn't hold to all the things written in the book of the Law, by doing them." But then he says, "Christ has paid the price to set us free from the curse of the Law. He became a curse (Gr. [katara](#), [Strong's #G2671](#)) for us. Because the scripture says, 'Everyone hung on a stake is accursed.'" As we saw in our examination of the concept of *being accursed* and *being a curse* in the Old Testament, the two ideas are more or less interchangeable. In each case the idea is that the person so described is in such a terrible, devastated, catastrophic situation that their experience might easily become infamous, proverbial—and their case would even suggest itself as a template to use when thinking up a curse to put on someone. The interchangeability of the two terms, "a curse" (Gr. *katara*) and "accursed" (Gr. *epikataratos*) provides Paul with a clear verbal link between "the curse of the Law," that is, the whole sequence of self-curses that the community of the Israelites laid on themselves if they would not obey the whole Law (Deut. 27:9-26; 28:15-68), on the one hand, and Christ's death on the cross for the redemption of sinners, on the other hand.

Part of the sophistication of Paul's argument lies in the fact that the original generation that received the Law *called down the curses upon themselves* (see Deut. 27:9-26). This is normal and even expected in the ancient near-eastern world in which the Hebrews lived. In a cultural setting in which there might well be no police and no law courts, it was traditional for the parties to a binding agreement—such as a covenant—to lay upon themselves contingent curses, curses spoken in such a way as to activate if any party broke the covenant. This was the accepted method of deterring covenant parties from secretly or openly breaking the terms of the agreement. Paul, by drawing attention to this feature of the Law as a covenant, makes the point that the Gentile believers, far from accessing important blessings by converting to Judaism, actually bring down curses upon themselves. *In Christ, by faith, they already have the blessing given to Abraham, which is explicitly international* (Gal. 3:8-9).

Actually, says Paul, Jesus, by suffering the covenant curses on behalf of all, Jew and Gentile alike, has redeemed all people from them. The concept of "redemption" has

a specifically commercial basis. If a person is in debtors' prison, for example, someone, by paying the person's debt, can release them from prison. This transaction is called *redemption*. Paul's statement that Christ "redeemed us (Gr. *exagorasen*, from [exagorazō](#), Strong's #G1805) from the curse of the Law" (Gal. 3:13) literally means Christ *bought us out from* the curse of the Law. By framing the matter this way, Paul does two things. First, he makes his point that converting to Judaism is equivalent to sending yourself into bondage under a curse—something that no person in their right mind would do. Secondly, he asserts that if you subject yourself to the curse from which Christ redeemed you, you are in effect renouncing the salvation that has been given to you (see explicitly Gal. 5:1-4). Paul underlines the grave seriousness of this matter by employing extremely harsh language for anyone who dares to try to persuade the Galatians to subject themselves to the Law (see Gal. 1:6-9; 5:10-12).

Let's talk now about the explicit content of the curses of the Law. What is the accursed state that threatens God's Israelite covenant partners if they break the conditions of the covenant? In summary (see Deut. 28:21-63): intense pain all over the body, victimhood, deprivation, humiliation, oppression, capture by hostile foreign powers, disgrace, ridicule, scorn, hunger, thirst, anguish, and finally death. Jesus Christ suffered every single one of these conditions. He was betrayed by Judas Iscariot to the Jewish authorities, and then betrayed by them to the occupying Roman authority, under which he was tortured nearly to death with the 39 lashes, then literally tortured to death, by the most fearsome punishment then known: the slow death that comes from being publicly hung on a stake (Gr. [stauros](#), Strong's #G4716), pinned in place with nails through your feet and hands.

Jesus redeemed all, Jew and Gentile alike, from the covenant curses, willingly and intentionally making himself vulnerable to *finding himself accursed* and to *becoming a curse*—in the specific biblical sense and context of each of these terms—on behalf of all.

Appendix 1: Hebrew Grammatical Forms Similar to Deut. 21:23

Text of Deut. 21:23:

יְיָ קִלְלֵת אֲלֵהֶם תְּלוּי *kiy-qilelath 'elohiym taluwy*, LXX ὅτι κεκατηραμένος ὑπὸ θεοῦ
πᾶς κρεμύμενος ἐπὶ ξύλου (LXX “Because a person who is hanged on a tree/stake
has been cursed by God”). Paul in Gal. 3:10 translates differently: ἐπικατάρατος
πᾶς ὁ κρεμύμενος ἐπὶ ξύλου “for every person who is hanged on a tree/stake is
accursed.”

Grammatical Analogues to *qilelath 'elohiym* (Deuteronomy 21:23) in the Hebrew OT

1. Deut. 7:25 הָיָה אֲלֵהֶיךָ הוּא *kiy tow'avath YHWH 'eloheyka huw'*
LXX ὅτι βδέλυγμα κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ σου ἐστίν, “because it is an abomination
to the LORD your God”
2. Deut. 12:31 כָּל-תּוֹעֵבֹת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר שָׂנֵא עָשׂוּ *kol-tow'avath YHWH 'asher sane'*
τὰ γὰρ βδελύγματα ἃ κύριος ἐμίσησεν “every abomination to the LORD,
which he hates”
3. Deut. 17:1 הָיָה אֲלֵהֶיךָ הוּא *kiy tow'avath YHWH 'eloheyka huw'*
LXX ὅτι βδέλυγμα κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ σου ἐστίν, “because it is an abomination
to the LORD your God”
4. Deut. 22:5 כָּל-עֹשֶׂה אֵלֶּה *kiy tow'avath YHWH 'eloheyka kol-'oseh 'eleh*, LXX ὅτι βδέλυγμα κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ σου ἐστίν πᾶς ποιῶν
ταῦτα, “for everyone who does this is an abomination to the LORD your
God”
5. Deut. 23:18 גַּם-שְׁנֵיהֶם *kiy tow'avath YHWH 'eloheyka gam-sheneyhem* ὅτι βδέλυγμα κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ σου ἐστίν καὶ ἀμφοτέρω “For
both of them are an abomination to the LORD your God”
6. Deut. 24:4 כִּי-תוֹעֵבָה הוּא לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְלֹא תַחֲטִיֵּא אֶת-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָּךְ *kiy tow'avath hiw' liphney YHWH welo' tachatiy' eth-ha'aretz 'asher YHWH 'eloheyka nothen leka* ὅτι βδέλυγμά ἐστιν ἐναντίον κυρίου τοῦ
θεοῦ σου καὶ οὐ μianεῖτε τὴν γῆν ἣν κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν δίδωσιν ὑμῖν ἐν
κλήρῳ “For it is an abomination in the presence of the LORD, and you are
not to bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God has given you as an
inheritance.”

7. Deut. 25:16 כִּי תוֹעֲבַת יְהוָה אֵלֶיךָ כָּל-עֲשֵׂה אֵלָה כָּל עֲשֵׂה עֲוֹל *kiy tow 'avath YHWH 'eloheyka kol-'oseh 'eleh kol 'oseh 'awel* ὅτι βδέλυγμα κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ σου πᾶς ποιῶν ταῦτα πᾶς ποιῶν ἄδικον “For everyone who does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God, everyone who does injustice.”
8. Prov. 3:32 כִּי תוֹעֲבַת יְהוָה נָלוּז *kiy tow 'avath YHWH nalowz* ἀκάθαρτος γὰρ ἔναντι κυρίου πᾶς παράνομος ἐν δὲ δικαίοις οὐ συνεδριάζει “For the devious person is an abomination to the LORD.” See similarly Prov. 12:22; 15:9, 26; 20:23.

It seems reasonable to make a grammatical analogy between these formulations and Deut. 21:23, and if it is indeed proper to make such an analogy, the latter ought to mean that God looks upon an executed and hanged person as a curse—which is to say, God looks on a person who has been executed and hanged as a person who is suffering a more or less completely cursed fate—just as God looks upon the person who does certain prohibited things as an abomination, i.e. as a disgusting thing. If the analogy holds, Deut. 21:23 *ought not to mean* that God makes the executed and hanged person become a curse by cursing the hanged person.

Appendix 2: Biblical Examples of Being a Curse (Heb. *qēlalah*, [Strong's #H7045](#))

Huldah the prophetess sends this message to the king of Judah: “Because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the LORD, when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse (Heb. *qēlalah*), and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the LORD.” (2 Kgs 22:19)

I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a reproach, a byword, a taunt, and a curse (Heb. *qēlalah*) in all the places where I shall drive them. (Jer 24:9)

Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a desolation and a waste, a hissing and a curse (Heb. *qēlalah*), as at this day... (Jer 25:18)

...then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse (Heb. *qēlalah*) for all the nations of the earth. (Jer 26:6)

"For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: As my anger and my wrath were poured out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so my wrath will be poured out on

you when you go to Egypt. You shall become an execration, a horror, a curse (Heb. *qēlalah*), and a taunt. You shall see this place no more. (Jer 42:18)

Why do you provoke me to anger with the works of your hands, making offerings to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have come to live, so that you may be cut off and become a curse (Heb. *qēlalah*) and a taunt among all the nations of the earth? (Jer 44:8)

I will take the remnant of Judah who have set their faces to come to the land of Egypt to live, and they shall all be consumed. In the land of Egypt they shall fall; by the sword and by famine they shall be consumed. From the least to the greatest, they shall die by the sword and by famine, and they shall become an oath, a horror, a curse (Heb. *qēlalah*), and a taunt. (Jer 44:12)

The LORD could no longer bear your evil deeds and the abominations that you committed. Therefore your land has become a desolation and a waste and a curse (Heb. *qēlalah*), without inhabitant, as it is this day. (Jer 44:22)

For I have sworn by myself, declares the LORD, that Bozrah shall become a horror, a taunt, a waste, and a curse (Heb. *qēlalah*), and all her cities shall be perpetual wastes." (Jer 49:13)

And it will be that, just as you were a curse (Heb. *qēlalah*) among the nations... (Zech. 8:13)