

*Final Exegesis Paper*

Daniel Furuyama  
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Professor: Dr. Louis DeCarlo

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Apostle John describes the crucifixion and quotes the Old Testament: “Not one of his bones will be broken” (John 19:35, ESV). John does not specify what Old Testament passage he refers to, but the cross-references list Exodus 12:46, Number 9:12, and Psalm 34:20. I want to explore these three passages and see if the Old Testament context also has a clear Messianic understanding.

John focuses on how the Roman soldiers and the Jews confirmed Jesus’ death. “Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away” (John 19:31). Jesus was crucified the day before Passover Sabbath, so they wanted to expedite the process. The Jews were mindful of Deuteronomy 21:22, “And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his 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.” They recognized this law and did not want the dead body to remain overnight. They were more concerned about the consequence in Deuteronomy 21:23, “You shall not defile your land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance.” The Jews were concerned about their land being defiled because of the crucifixion.

Keener explains the time it may take to die from crucifixion, “Those bound with ropes often survived on the cross several days (e.g., Josephus, *Life* 420-21). The dying man could rest himself on a wooden seat (Latin *sedile*) in the middle of the cross. This support allowed him to breathe – and prolonged the agony of his death, until (often) blood loss or dehydration killed him.” (Keener, pg. 307). Without the aid of the Romans, the crucifixion may have remained for several days. MacArthur describes the process and reasons for breaking the leg. “Breaking the legs of crucified persons (a procedure known as *crurifragium*) was done when there was a reason to hasten a crucified person's death. It involved smashing the victim's legs with an iron mallet. That gruesome procedure hastened death, partly from the shock and additional blood loss, but more important by bringing on asphyxiation” (MacArthur, pg. 363-

364). The victims would suffocate because they could no longer raise themselves to breathe. Keener adds, “Romans might have allowed the bodies to rot on the crosses (and feed vultures), but Deuteronomy 21:23 and Jewish sensitivities about the sabbath require that these executions be speeded up, and Romans often accommodated Judean leaders' wishes particularly during the crowded festivals. (Josephus declares that Jewish people always buried crucifixion victims before sunset)” (Keener, pg. 307). Due to Jesus’ crucifixion the day before Passover, his death was accelerated to ensure He could be buried before sunset.

John continues, “So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs” (John 19:32-33). John clearly shows that Jesus’ legs were not broken because Jesus died before the need for crurifragium. Then John writes, “But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water” (John 19:34). Keener explains that “some scholars suggest, on some evidence, that Roman execution squads sometimes pierced victims to ensure that they were dead. Jewish tradition also required certification that a person was dead before the person could be treated as dead” (Keener, pg. 306). After these two pieces of evidence, the Romans and Jews are convinced that Jesus is dead. John adds a commentary, “He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe” (John 19:35).

John concludes with the significance of this detail by connecting the prophecy of Jesus’ death to the Old Testament “For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: ‘Not one of his bones will be broken.’ And again another Scripture says, ‘They will look on him whom they have pierced’” (John 19:36-37). The point of explaining the detail of Jesus’ legs not being broken and his side being pierced is to show that Jesus’ crucifixion was prophesized. Willard states John’s point, “When the soldiers come to Jesus, they see that he is already dead, so they do not break his legs. Jesus’ legs are not broken (John 19:33) just as the bones of the Passover lambs are not to be broken (Exod 12:10, 46; Num 9:12; cf. Ps 34:19-20). Even in this scriptural detail, Jesus is the unblemished Lamb slain for the sins of the people” (Willard, pg. 443).

Let us look at the context of Exodus 12, where the first cross-reference points. In Exodus 12, the

Lord instructs Moses and Aaron about Passover. They are to take a lamb, “without blemish, a male a year old” (Exodus 12:5) and “shall kill their lambs at twilight” (Exodus 12:6). With the blood that was spilled, “put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses” (Exodus 12:7, NIV). Then they are to eat the lamb roasted over the fire and unleavened bread without yeast (Exodus 12:8). God explains, “I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt... The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:12-13). The people obey all the Passover instructions, and God strikes the firstborn children throughout Egypt. Pharaoh summons Moses and Aaron and finally permits them to leave. It concludes with final instructions about Passover. No foreigner may eat the Passover meal (Exodus 12:45). The meal shall be eaten in one house, not outside, not break any of the lamb’s bones, and everyone in the community must partake (Exodus 12:46-47).

There is a range of what commentators take note of. Alexander notes that the four instructions in verses 46-47 are reiterated except for not breaking the bone of the lamb. “The only instruction not mentioned previously is the prohibition against breaking a bone of the sacrificial animal” (Alexander, pg. 245). But he concludes that “there is no reason to assume they were not spoken by YHWH to Moses and Aaron before the keeping of the Passover in Egypt.” (Alexander, pg. 245).

Merida connects Exodus 12 prophecy to Apostle John. “This was probably one of the texts John has in mind as being fulfilled in the death of Jesus on Passover (John 19:36; cf. Ps 34:20)” (Merida, pg. 73-74). Merida focuses more on the broader context of this section. “The main emphasis in these verses (vv. 43-51) was circumcision. This act was the sign that one belonged to the community of faith, and it qualified one to participate in the Passover meal. ‘Outsiders’ or ‘foreigners’ were not allowed to eat the meal, not because of their ethnic status or social status but because of faith and practice status” (Merida, pg. 74). Merida elaborates that Passover is meant for the people of God. To apply this in our modern context, those who can participate in communion are those who put their faith in Jesus and have a “practice status” of a follower of Jesus through the public demonstration of baptism.

Waldemar looks at the broader context and concludes with two purposes not breaking the bone. “The togetherness of Israel, expressed by staying inside its houses, is perhaps symbolized further by the prohibition of breaking any of the Passover lamb's bones, such as to take a portion elsewhere” (Waldemar, pg. 164). The first purpose is that they do not break the bone, so they will remain together in the same house, sharing the same meal. “Seen by itself, however, this prohibition is undoubtedly related to the requirement that the animal should be unblemished (12:5)” (Waldemar, pg. 164). The second purpose is for the preservation of the lamb, as noted in Exodus 12:5, “Your lamb shall be without blemish.”

Johnstone sees a chiasmic structure in verses 43-48. “The list has a certain chiasmic structure: it begins and ends with those excluded, foreigners and uncircumcised (vv. 43b and 48b); vv. 44 and 48a deal with outsiders who have undergone circumcision. The heart of the matter—Israel’s observance of the rite—stands at the heart of the section in vv. 46–47” (Johnstone, pg. 40). His observation highlights the importance of verses 46-47, which instructs how to properly partake of the Passover meal in the Israelites’ household. He considers Passover a blood sacrifice made on behalf of the Jews. “Since the rite protects each household by the sign of the blood on its lintel and doorposts on the night when the LORD ‘passes over,’ it is to be observed within the home. In contrast to the sacrifices offered in the sanctuary, the animal must be roasted whole; there is no cutting up of the carcass to lay it on the altar (v. 46)” (Johnstone, pg. 40). Johnstone helps to stress that the Passover sacrifice is not same as the traditional sacrifices at the temple. Due to the uniqueness of this sacrifice, there are particular qualities about the lamb, including keeping the lamb intact and not breaking any bones.

In Numbers 9, we see the second cross-reference. After one year of wandering in the wilderness, the Lord commands Moses to observe Passover (Numbers 12:1-5). But some men were unclean because they touched a dead body and inquired Moses what they should do (Numbers 12:6-7). Moses told them to wait until he heard from God (Numbers 12:8). God spoke to Moses and instructed them to observe Passover one month later (Numbers 12:9-11a). God reiterates the exact requirements as the original Passover (Numbers 12:11b-14), including not breaking the lamb’s bones (Numbers 12:12).

Two of the commentaries I read focused more on the general significance of Passover than the detail of the broken bones. Wiersbe comments on the graciousness of God for this special accommodation. “God's reply was gracious: anyone who was defiled or absent from home during Passover the first month could celebrate the feast on the fourteenth day of the second month, but they had to be careful to follow the same divine instructions given in Exodus 12” (Wiersbe, *The Pentateuch*, pg. 313). This suggests that Passover is of primary importance to the Jewish people. To clarify, “God wasn't establishing a different Passover; He was only permitting His original Passover to be celebrated at a different time” (Wiersbe, *The Pentateuch*, pg. 313). God desires for every Jew to participate and remember Passover for all time.

Stubbs summarizes the foundation that Passover set for the Jewish people. “The first Passover meal, celebrated during Israel's exodus from Egypt, marked the foundation of their life as a nation: the redemption by God of Israel out of the bitterness of Egyptian slavery” (Stubbs, pg. 100). The Passover meal was to remember their new foundation as a people of God. Stubbs explains the historical and theological foundation of the Passover. “It told them what kind of god YHWH is and who they were in relationship to God. God reached down to his people in their bitterness and provided a new life for them, rescuing them from a situation in which they were powerless to free themselves. But God does not merely free them: he also claimed them as his own people, his firstborn” (Stubbs, pg. 100). Stubbs draws attention to the fact that God is claiming Israel as his people, his firstborn, because of Passover. These commentaries do not go into much detail about the breaking of the bone but focus more on the significance of Passover.

Sprinkle begins with a similar remark, “The celebration of Passover in Numbers 9 begins the annual commemoration for ‘generations to come’ (Exod. 12:14) that continues among Jews to this day. It arguably marks the greatest act of salvation in the Old Testament” (Sprinkle, pg.

235). But Sprinkle elaborates on Numbers 9:12, “The first part of this directive repeats Exodus 12:10, and the second part repeats Exodus 12:46. Jesus as the Christian’s paschal lamb fulfilled this requirement (John 19:36; cf. John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7)” (Sprinkle, pg. 236). The first part comments, “They shall leave none of it until the morning” (Numbers 9:12a), which restates Exodus 12:10, “And you shall let none of it remain until the morning.” Numbers 9:12 combines two requirements of the Passover meal concerning the lamb that the lamb should not remain until morning and the lamb’s bones not breaking. When put together, perhaps John’s explanation, “so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away” (John 19:31b) may be John’s way of explaining the idea that “let none of it remain until the morning” (Exodus 12:10, Numbers 9:12). The concept of “let none of it remain until morning” may be a prophecy about Jesus and his length of death.

Sprinkle argues that Paul and John see “typology between Christ and the Passover” (Sprinkle, pg. 237). Paul makes explicit the antitype or fulfillment of the type in 1 Corinthians 5:7, “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.” Sprinkle explains, “Just as no bone of the Passover lamb was to be broken (Exod. 12:46; Num. 9:12), so no bone of Jesus as the unblemished Passover lamb was broken when he was crucified though the soldiers had intended to do so (John 19:31–36). Thus, for the Christian, the Passover is a reminder of the work of Christ” (Sprinkle, pg. 237).

Psalms 34 title explains that it was written after David pretended to be insane before Abimelech and was able to escape. Prior, Jonathan warned David that his father intended to kill him. He fled and ended up in front of Abimelech. The Psalm celebrates God’s goodness amid a difficult situation. Our proper response is to trust God. David reiterated the importance of

“fearing the Lord (vv. 7, 9, 11) and trusting His goodness (vv. 8, 10, 12)” (Wiersbe, *Wisdom & Poetry*, pg. 158). For our study, we are interested in verses 19-20, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.” The context is about the righteous receiving protection from physical danger. In David’s context, he probably fears dying from both Saul and Abimelech. Though David is confused about what to do, he can only trust the Lord. Wiersbe notes, “The Lord will take care of our physical safety (vv. 19-20) until our work is finished” (Wiersbe, *Wisdom & Poetry*, pg. 160). This would fit David’s context of being anointed the next king of Israel but simultaneously running for his life. His circumstances do not match his future call.

Wiersbe continues, “The word ‘keep’ means ‘to exercise great care over,’ as when Adam cared for the garden (Gen. 2:15) or Jacob cared for his sheep (Gen. 30:31). The apostle John quoted verse 20 in John 19:36 and applied it to Jesus, the Lamb of God (Ex. 12:46; Num. 9:12)” (Wiersbe, *Wisdom & Poetry*, pg. 160). Wiersbe emphasizes the importance to “keep” which can relate to David’s fear of death and physical violence. In this context, David seems inspired to write about God protecting him from broken bones, which would lead to his death and not fulfilling his purpose. Wiersbe does not explain the connection to John 19:36.

In his commentary in the book of Exodus, Hamilton suggests that Psalm 34:20 may be a good fit for John’s quotation.

Ps. 34 is about the power of God to save and deliver his followers from trauma and pain. So why would John take a text from a psalm celebrating the escape of the righteous from tribulation, and apply it to a Jesus who has just breathed his last? (On this text from John 19, see Moo 1983: 314–16.) This exalted One, who has just expired without a broken bone in his body, has in his death broken and shattered all the hellish powers of evil.

Hamilton explains how the context of Psalms about “celebrating the escape of the righteous before tribulation” connects to Jesus. Jesus’ celebration is based on God’s will

being accomplished and Jesus' completing everything required of him as he exclaims, "It is finished" (John 19:30). God protected Jesus even after his death from his bones breaking to fulfill this prophecy. We may need to change our perspective of seeing Jesus' death and crucifixion from defeat to victory over sin, death, and evil.

In my reading, I found one extreme interpretation of John 19:36. A scholar reading through the Pyramid Texts of Egypt in the hieroglyphics came across a passage about the life of Pepi II that read, "Not broken is a bone of Pepi II." His paper considered its connection to the John 19:36 passage. Professor W. Robertson Smith "regarded the Passover ritual as a modification of the older Semitic ritual, which was still practiced by the Arabs in the time of Nilus" (Barton, pg. 16). This Arab practice would eat a raw camel in haste before the rising sun, which has limited parallels to Passover. Barton asks, "Could we push further back to an earlier time in Semitic heathenism, it is altogether probable that we should find, not a camel, but a human victim devoured in a ritual similar to that described by Nilus" (Barton, pg. 17). Barton does not give any evidence of Semitic cannibalism, except a correlation that Smith makes to Arab practice of Nilus. Despite the lack of evidence, Barton suggests that "the quotation in the Fourth Gospel is a remote echo of a custom which originated in remote Semitic cannibalism — an echo so remote that it was transmuted and transfigured into a simple fulfillment of the sacred words of prophecy, but still an echo" (Barton, pg. 17). Without any evidence to his theory, it is hard to consider this as a possibility.

To conclude, Wiersbe comments on the significance of the Roman soldiers not breaking Jesus's legs and piercing Jesus' side. "It is remarkable that the Roman soldiers did not do what they were commanded to do – break the victims legs – but they did do what they were not supposed to do – pierce the Savior's side! In both matters, they fulfilled the very Word of God!"

(Wiersbe, New Testament Volume 1, pg. 385). Wiersbe explains that under normal circumstances, the Romans would have obeyed the Jews' requests. Still, Jesus died before their usual procedures, so the Roman soldiers responded by piercing the side of Jesus and fulfilling Scripture. In other words, Jesus' crucifixion was unusual and peculiar, so these details stand out from the usual crucifixion. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Apostle John can connect these unique details to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies. My studies on Exodus laid the groundwork for understanding the significance of the Passover lamb and how God bought these people through the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. As the most significant moment in Old Testament history, there is a lot of symbolism and foreshadowing of things to come built in the way of celebrating. I wonder if the unique details of the bone not being broken caused many to wonder why. But with so many points, it is hard to see the prophecy.

Numbers 9:12 made the prophetic claim of Jesus most explicit to me. When God reiterates the details of the Passover meal, God restates in a way that combines these two requirements: the lamb cannot remain overnight, and one cannot break any bones of the lamb. When John saw the events of Jesus' crucifixion, I believe the Holy Spirit reminded him of these verses and saw the prophetic meaning of the Passover lamb in Jesus. In contrast, Psalm 34 interpretation is the least direct in connecting to Jesus. I see a connection, but it would not be my first understanding of that passage. I would be curious to read Moo's explanation of John 19 in the future.

This paper shows that New Testament writers like Apostle John keep the meaning from the original context. Like Jesus on the road to Emmaus had to open the minds of the two travelers, the Holy Spirit helps open the minds of the New Testament writers and those reading the Bible today. In this study, Exodus 12:46 and Number 9:12 was clear, but Psalm 34:20 was

not as obvious to me. It might become more evident if I take more time to study and understand the text. Before the paper, I wondered if the prophetic claims about Jesus were apparent in the Old Testament or if they had to receive special revelation from God to see it. Through the process, I am convinced that the New Testament writers used good hermeneutics that we can use and mimic.

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