

An Exploration of חרם as ἀνάθεμα Beyond the Old Testament

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to explore the reception of the idea of חרם in Second Temple Jewish literature, in the New Testament, and in the early patristic era, through an exploration of the usage of the primary Greek rendering of חרם: the word ἀνάθεμα. The choice of this Greek word for חרם is peculiar because in the Greek world it was exclusively used to describe offerings given by worshipers to their gods. The word ἀνάθεμα had no negative connotations, as חרם does in some biblical texts where the object that is handed over to God is considered an abomination to be destroyed. The Septuagintal choice of ἀνάθεμα for חרם has thus caused a significant expansion in the spectrum of meaning of the Greek word, and from Second Temple times onwards, we encounter the word ἀνάθεμα in both positive (as an offering) as well as in negative contexts where חרם is either in the foreground (alluding to stories of the Israelite conquest) or in the background (enacting חרם in different ways for different contexts). The article focuses on the negative usage of ἀνάθεμα in order to see whether the understanding of חרם was transformed and how it might have been reinterpreted in ways that do not demand the physical annihilation of its object.

Keywords: *Anathema, Herem, Warfare, ban*

Introduction: The Equivalency of חרם and ἀνάθεμα

חרם is a form of warfare most clearly described for us in Deuteronomy 7 and 20, in connection with the annihilation of the Canaanites from the promised land. The חרם root refers to “the status of that which is separated from common use or contact either because it is proscribed as an abomination to God or because it is consecrated to Him In the second sense it is similar to *qodesh*, ‘sanctity,’ from which it differs only in being irredeemable.”¹ According to this definition, we have two semantic domains for the חרם root: the domain of destruction and the domain of the sacred. Scholars have debated whether sacredness is the common element between these two domains (e.g., raising the question of whether the destruction of a population should be considered a form of sacrifice),² but at a minimum we may say that the notion of *separation* is the overlapping sense between the two.³

¹ Greenberg, “*Herem*”, 8:344. Trimm, *Fighting for the King and the Gods*, 391–92, warns against a simplistic definition of חרם since we see a variety of uses in biblical literature.

² Stern, *Biblical Herem*, 1, says that it has long been considered as a “consecration-to-destruction.” Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, 49, recognizes that the notion of חרם as sacrifice is absent in Deuteronomy.

³ Versluis, “Devotion and/or Destruction?”, 237. Versluis argues that the two domains are not to be combined. What is destroyed is not what is sacred or consecrated but what is abominable to God and destruction

The חרם root was transferred into the Greek language, at least in a written record, as early as the 3rd century BCE with the birth of the Septuagint in Alexandria, Egypt. The חרם root was mostly translated by the Greek word ἀνάθεμα / ἀνάθημα or the verb ἀναθεματίζω (around 35 times).⁴ Although there were other renderings as well, the ἀνάθεμ* group is not used to translate *any* other root except חרם.⁵ The following table demonstrates the different forms of חרם and its Greek equivalents:

Table 1: חרם forms and Greek equivalents (based on Muraoka's Hebrew/Aramaic Index to the Septuagint).

Form of חרם	Verse	Greek Equivalent	English Translation
חָרַם I hi.	Lev 27:28	ἀναθῆ	To dedicate
	Num 21:2	ἀναθεματιῶ	To anathematize
	Num 21:3	ἀνεθεματίσεν	To anathematize
	Deut 2:34	ἐξώλεθρεύσαμεν	To utterly destroy
	Deut 3:6	ἐξώλεθρεύσαμεν	To utterly destroy
	Deut 3:6	ἐξώλεθρεύσαμεν	To utterly destroy
	Deut 7:2	ἀφανισμῶ	Obliteration
	Deut 7:2	ἀφανιεῖς	To obliterate
	Deut 13:15 [16]	ἀναθέματι	Anathema
	Deut 13:15 [16]	ἀναθεματιεῖτε	To anathematize
	Deut 20:17	ἀναθέματι	Anathema
	Deut 20:17	ἀναθεματιεῖτε	To anathematize
	Josh 2:10	ἐξώλεθρεύσατε	To utterly destroy
	Josh 6:18	ἐνθυμηθέντες	To ponder
	Josh 6:21	ἀνεθεματίσεν	To anathematize
	Josh 10:1	ἐξώλεθρεύσεν	To utterly destroy
	Josh 10:28	ἐξώλεθρεύσαν	To utterly destroy
	Josh 10:35	ἐφόνευσαν	To murder
	Josh 10:37, 39	ἐξώλεθρεύσαν, ἐξώλεθρεύσαν	To utterly destroy
	Josh 10:40	ἐξώλεθρεύσεν	To utterly destroy
	Josh 11:11	ἐξώλεθρεύσαν	To utterly destroy
	Josh 11:12	ἐξώλεθρεύσαν	To utterly destroy

is not a means of consecration. He argues against viewing the Mesha Stele and its use of חרם as an act of consecration as parallel to OT use (pp. 237–41).

⁴ Lohfink, “חָרַם *hāram*”, 182.

⁵ Muraoka, *Hebrew/Aramaic Index to the Septuagint*, 9.

	Josh 11:20	ἐξολεθρευθῶσιν	To utterly destroy
	Josh 11:21	ἐξωλέθρευσεν	To utterly destroy
	Judg 1:17 A ⁷	ἀνεθεμάτισαν	To anathematize
	Judg 1:17	ἐξωλέθρευσαν	To utterly destroy
	Judg 21:11	ἀναθεματιεῖτε	To anathematize
	1 Kgdms 15:3	ἀναθεματιεῖς	To anathematize
	1 Kgdms 15:3?	ἐξολεθρεύσεις	To utterly destroy
	1 Kgdms 15:3	A ἱερεῖμ B ⁸ ἱερίμ	-
	1 Kgdms 15:8	ἀπέκτεινεν	To kill
	1 Kgdms 15:8 A	ἐξωλέθρευσεν	To utterly destroy
	1 Kgdms 15:8?	A ἡρεῖμ, B ἱερεῖμ	-
	1 Kgdms 15:9	ἐξολεθρεῦσαι	To utterly destroy
	1 Kgdms 15:9	ἐξωλέθρευσαν	To utterly destroy
	1 Kgdms 15:15	ἐξωλέθρευσαν	To utterly destroy
	1 Kgdms 15:18	ἐξολέθρευσον	To utterly destroy
	1 Kgdms 15:18 B	ἀνελεῖς	To destroy
	1 Kgdms 15:20	ἐξωλέθρευσαν	To utterly destroy
	3 Kgdms 10:22 B, 9:21 A	ἐξολεθρεῦσαι,	To utterly destroy
	4 Kgdms 19:11	ἀναθεματίσαι	To anathematize
	1 Chr 4:41	ἀνεθεμάτισαν	To anathematize
	2 Chr 20:23	ἐξολεθρεῦσαι	To utterly destroy
	2 Chr 32:14	ἐξωλέθρευσαν	To utterly destroy
	Mic 4:13	ἀναθήσεις	To dedicate
	Isa 11:15	ἐρημώσει	To make desolate
	Isa 34:2	ἀπολέσαι	To destroy
	Isa 37:11	ἀπώλεσαν	To destroy
	Jer 25:9	ἐξερημώσω	To make desolate
	Jer 27:21 [50:21]	ἀφάνισον	To obliterate
	Jer 28:3 [51:3]	ἀφανίσατε	To obliterate
	Dan TH 11:44	ἀναθεματίσαι	To anathematize
	Dan LXX 11:44	ἀποκτεῖναι	To kill
םך I ho.	Exod 22:20 (19) A	ἐξολεθρευθήσεται	To be utterly destroyed

⁷ A stands for Codex Alexandrinus.⁸ B stands for Codex Vaticanus.

	Exod 22:20 (19) B	θανάτῳ ὀλεθρεύεσθαι	To utterly destroy
	Lev 27:29	ἀνατεθῆ	To be dedicated
	II Es 10:8 [Ezra 10:8]	ἀναθεματισθήσεται	To be anathematized
חָרָם II qal	Lev 21:18	κολοβόριν	Slit-nosed
חָרָם I, חָרָם (“ban”)	Lev 27:28	ἀνάθεμα	Anathema
	Lev 27:21	ἀφωρισμένη	Set apart
	Lev 27:28	ἀνάθεμα	Anathema
	Num 18:14	ἀνατεθεματισμένον	Anathema
	Deut 7:26	ἀνάθημα	Anathema
	Deut 7:26	ἀνάθημα	Anathema
	Deut 13:17 (18)	ἀναθέματος	Anathema
	Josh 6:17	ἀνάθεμα	Anathema
	Josh 6:18	ἀναθέματος	Anathema
	Josh 6:18	ἀναθέματος, ἀνάθεμα	Anathema
	Josh 7:1	ἀναθέματος	Anathema
	Josh 7:1	ἀναθέματος	Anathema
	Josh 7:11	ἀναθέματος	Anathema
	Josh 7:12	ἀνάθεμα	Anathema
	Josh 7:12	ἀνάθεμα	Anathema
	Josh 7:13	ἀνάθεμα	Anathema
	Josh 7:13	ἀνάθεμα	Anathema
	Josh 22:20	ἀναθέματος	Anathema
	1 Kgdms 15:21	ἐξολεθρεύματος	Utter destruction
	3 Kgdms 21:42 [20:42]	ὀλέθριον	Destructive
	1 Chr 2:7	ἀνάθεμα	Anathema
	Zech 14:11	ἀνάθεμα	Anathema
	Mal 4:6	ἄρδην	Utterly
	Isa 34:5	ἀπωλείας	Destruction
	Isa 43:28	ἀπολέσαι	To destroy
	Isa 45:24 [חַרָּה]	ἀφορίζοντες	To set apart
	Ezek 44:29	ἀφόρισμα	Set apart
חָרָם II (“net”)	Ecc 7:27 [26]	σαγήναι	Dragnet
	Hab 1:15	ἀμφιβλήστρω	Casting net
	Hab 1:16	σαγήνη	Dragnet

	Hab 1:17	ἀμφίβληστρον	Casting net
	Ezek 26:5	σαγηνῶν	Dragnet
	Ezek 26:14	σαγηνῶν	Dragnet
	Ezek 32:3	ἀγκίστρω	Hook
	Ezek 47:10	σαγηνῶν	Dragnet
חֲרָמָה	Num 21:3	ἀνάθεμα	Anathema
	Jdg 1:17 B	Ἀνάθεμα	Anathema
	Jdg 1:17 A	Ἐξολέθρευσις	Utter destruction

What is curious with ἀνάθεμα is that in Greek literature the word refers to offerings given to the gods, animate or inanimate, but never to the destruction of them. As Katell Berthelot explains,

To sum up, ἀναθήματα consisted of objects, territories or even individuals that were irrevocably dedicated to one or several god(s), without the donor's ever being able to retrieve the consecrated item. The ἀναθήματα, though, were never destroyed; on the contrary, they were carefully preserved within the holy place they generally adorned. In some cases, the names of the donors were even written down in records that were kept in the sanctuary. Similarly, as the passage from Aeschines' *Against Ctesiphon* shows, a dedicated place was guarded in order to prevent people from using it to their own advantage. Finally, nowhere in Greek literature or documents is it implied that individuals who became ἀνάθημα were put to death, as it is the case in the Septuagint.⁹

The equivalency of ἀνάθεμα and חֲרָם resulted in the broadening of the semantic domain of the Greek word in Judeo-Christian texts since ἀνάθεμα was now used to describe destruction.¹⁰ As a result, Judeo-Christian texts (Greek compositions as well as translations of the Second Temple period and beyond) use ἀνάθεμα with the common meaning it had in Greek literature, but, we also observe cases where the word is used with its broadened Septuagint-influenced meaning that carries negative connotations of destruction. In this article we shall focus only on the negative connotations of the ἀνάθεμα* group, leaving out any cultic references.

The Language of חֲרָם / ἀνάθεμα in Second Temple Judaism

In Second Temple Judaism, ἀνάθεμα* is generally not widely used in Hellenistic Jewish texts, probably due to the restricted meaning ἀνάθεμα* had in non-biblical usage. When ἀνάθεμα* derivatives with

⁹ Berthelot, "Notion of Anathema", 40.

¹⁰ Ibid., 46, uses the example of LXX Zech 14:11 and Theodotion Dan 11:44 where "massacre" is intended and the context has no connection to a ritual act or the conquest of Canaan, and yet the translator uses ἀνάθεμα or ἀναθεματίζω.

negative connotations are encountered, they are restricted to the biblical stories relating to the land conquest.¹¹ Philo, for example, describes:

Having thus captured them by the might of their assault, in fulfilment of their vows of thank-offering, they took none of the spoil for themselves, but dedicated the cities, men and treasures alike, and marked the fact by naming the whole kingdom “Devoted” (ἀνάθεμα).¹²

Likewise, Josephus uses the verbal form when he relates God’s instructions to annihilate Amalek:

He thereupon announced that God had spoken thus: “ ... you shall deal death to all of every age, beginning with the women and infants, and in this wise take vengeance for what they did to your forefathers; thou art to spare neither beasts of burden nor any cattle at all for private profit or possession, but to devote (ἀναθεῖναι) all to God and, in compliance with the behests of Moses, to blot out the name of Amalek.”¹³

One exception is the book of 1 Maccabees where the connotations of war are brought into the author’s or translator’s contemporary world and are used to describe battles of their own time. In 1 Macc 5:5 Judas Maccabeus declared the Idumeans to be ἀνάθεμα and burned them with fire:

And they were confined by him to the towers, and he marshaled his troops against them and anathematized (ἀνεθεμάτισεν) them and burned their towers with fire together with all those who were inside. (NETS)

The use of ἀνάθεμα* here is not describing the ancient conquest of Canaan, nor is it used metaphorically. It signifies physical violence in the author’s day.¹⁴ While 1 Maccabees may be a translation from a Hebrew original no longer available to us, the choice of the verbal form of ἀνάθεμα for whichever Hebrew word was present achieves a connection between the OT חרם and what Judas Maccabeus is enacting in 2nd century Palestine. The contemporizing of the non-metaphorical use of the ἀνάθεμα* is important here, as this will sharply contrast with the absence of physical referents in the NT and other Jewish texts when this root is present.¹⁵ Another text that possibly applies חרם language to contemporary enemies, even though a rendering other than ἀνάθεμα* is used, is Jdt 5:14–16. The Greek word used is ἐξωλέθρευσαν which is a common equivalent for the חרם root, even though no Hebrew original has been recovered to confirm this.¹⁶

¹¹ See *ibid.*, 52.

¹² Philo, *De vita Mosis I*, 1:253, translation by F. H. Colson, 407.

¹³ Josephus, *Ant.* 6.132–33.

¹⁴ The book is believed to have been written somewhere between 100 BCE and 63 BCE, and the events described range from 175 BCE to 134 BCE; see Williams, “1 Maccabees”, 261, 263.

¹⁵ See Versluis, “Early Reception History”, 315.

¹⁶ Even though the prevalent view has been that there was a Hebrew original to the Greek text of Judith, current scholarship argues that Judith is an original Greek composition that echoes Septuagintal wording; see Corley, “Judith”, 227–28.

A modified sense of חרם/ἀνάθεμα* is first seen in the book of Ezra. The *belongings* of the transgressor become ἀνάθεμα, meaning that their property is forfeited but the transgressor himself is *not* put to death. Rather, they are *banned* from the congregation:

Anyone who does not come within three days, as the council of the rulers and the elders demands—all his property will be anathematized (ἀναθεματισθήσεται), and he himself banned from the assembly of the exile. (LXX 2 Esdras / Ezra 10:8 NETS)

While the materiality or physicality of ἀνάθεμα* applies to inanimate objects, we see in Ezra the first indication of the חרם operating as a way of excommunication.¹⁷

In Qumran non-biblical writings, the extermination of the Canaanites is hardly mentioned. Remarkably, as Versluis notes, given the many non-biblical texts from Qumran relating to war, it has not been demonstrated with certainty that the command to exterminate the Canaanites was extended to contemporary nations and/or enemies of the community.¹⁸ Unfortunately, ἀνάθεμα* derivatives do not appear in the limited number of Greek manuscripts recovered in the Judean Desert.¹⁹ Most of the manuscripts are Semitic and only 3% of those found in Qumran are Greek.²⁰

Of course, we should keep in mind that even when texts describe ancient events, they may describe them for a reason that serves their contemporary community, expecting them either to imitate or be averted from such behaviour. It has been said of the book *Wisdom of Solomon*, for example, that even though it describes the depravity of the Canaanites that called for their punishment (12:3–22), the author embellishes this description with elements of orgies and cannibalism that are reminiscent of Dionysian cultic practices, thus attacking the cult that was apparently known to the author.²¹ When texts simply describe the ancient conquest of Canaan, we cannot be certain whether or in what way the authors would be expecting their audience to actualize the examples of the stories they are hearing since no explicit directives are given.

The Language of חרם / ἀνάθεμα in the New Testament

Very few texts in the New Testament mention the extermination of the Canaanites, and none of them use words related to חרם (Acts 7:45; 13:19; Heb 11:31). However, the ἀνάθεμα* group occurs

¹⁷ Greenberg, “Herem”, 8:350. Of course, exile could be seen as substituting capital punishment in general in various occasions; see Theodorou, “The Image of God and Justice”.

¹⁸ Versluis, “Early Reception History”, 311–14.

¹⁹ 4Q119–122 are Greek fragments from the Pentateuch, but none of these contains the word חרם; see Martínez and Tigchelaar, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 293–94. 17 of the 19 Greek mss in cave 7 are unidentifiable, and the two identified fragments come from Greek Exod 28:4–7 (7Q1) and the Letter of Jeremiah 1:43–44 (7Q2), both dated around 100 BCE. None of them include ἀνάθεμα related words; see Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 472–73.

²⁰ Tov, “Nature of the Greek Texts”.

²¹ Gill, “Greek Sources of Wisdom xii 3–7”, 383–86; Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 238–40; Versluis, “Early Reception History”, 319.

in interesting ways, and I have divided the occurrences into 3 categories: *ἀνάθεμα* against the self, *ἀνάθεμα* against others, and *ἀνάθεμα* in the eschaton.

1. חרם / *ἀνάθεμα* Against the Self

In Mark 14:71 after Peter is cornered three times about being “with the Nazarene” (see v. 67), he began to “anathematize” (*ἀναθεματίζειν*) and swear that he did not know Jesus:

But he began to curse (*ἀναθεματίζειν*), and he swore an oath, “I do not know this man you are talking about.”²² (NRSV)

This is usually translated as “cursing” (e.g., NRSV, ESV, NIV), and it is understood that Peter placed himself under curses, committing to bear the consequences if what he was claiming was untrue.²³ Similarly, in the book of Acts, Paul’s persecutors place themselves under a “curse” if they fail to kill him:

In the morning the Jews joined in a conspiracy and bound themselves by an oath (*ἀνεθεμάτισαν*) neither to eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. (Acts 23:12 NRSV)²⁴

The common word for the noun “curse” is *κατάρα* and the adjective is *ἐπικατάρατος* or *ἐπικαταρώμενος*.²⁵ The verb *ἐπικαταράομαι* (“to bring down curses on someone”) is what the Moabite King Balak, for example, asked the prophet Balaam to do to Israel (Num 22:17 and 23:7). It is a rare verb, possibly because it was believed that only gods could effect a curse (e.g., idols, LXX Ps 151:6; Yahweh, LXX Mal 2:2), but we do not find any cases where an Israelite is the subject of this verb. By contrast, humans commonly pronounced the adjective *ἐπικατάρατος* over others (e.g. Noah, LXX Gen 9:25; Jacob, LXX Gen 49:7; the Israelite tribes, LXX Deut 27). In some cases, though, the curse is effected by the one who pronounces it (e.g. King Saul, 1 Sam 14:24, 28; Joshua, Josh 9:23).

While the *κατάρα* word group is widespread in the OT, we find little use of it in the NT (usually when the OT is quoted, e.g., Gal 3:10, 13).²⁶ In fact, Jas 3:10 condemns the act of pronouncing a curse (*κατάρα*). Also, Paul forbids cursing in Rom 12:14,²⁷ as well as Jesus in Luke 6:28.²⁸ Since the “cursed be” formula is completely absent in the NT, I suspect that the *ἀνάθεμα** group may not have been identical to the act of “cursing” or it would have been met with the same disapproval.²⁹

²² The Matthean version (26:74) uses a variant verb, *καταθεματίζειν*.

²³ *BDAG*, s.v. “ἀναθεματίζω”. Behm, “ἀνάθεμα”, 1.355, sees the lack of an object for the verb as an indication that Peter himself is the object.

²⁴ See also 23:14, 21.

²⁵ The latter is found only in Numbers 5 (6 times).

²⁶ The noun *κατάρα* is found only 3 times in the NT. Once in Jas 3:10 where its use is discouraged for Christians, once in Heb 6:8 where it speaks about the danger of being cursed faced by those who have rejected Christ, and once in 2 Pet 2:14 where “sons of a curse” is used about false teachers who corrupt the church.

²⁷ “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse (*καταρᾶσθε*) them” (Rom 12:14 NRSV).

²⁸ “Bless those who curse (*καταρωμένους*) you, pray for those who abuse you” (Luke 6:28 NRSV).

²⁹ Contra Zawadsky, “Anfänge des ‘Anathema’”, 511–13, who equates the two words.

The Greek nuances of ἀνάθεμ* that emphasize handing someone or something over to God's hand must have made this word more appropriate than cursing.³⁰ I also suspect that the associations of κατάρα with Jesus hanging on the tree (ἐπικατάρατος, Gal 3:13) may have contributed to this word being much stronger and more final than ἀνάθεμ*. It is possible that the use of κατάρα is avoided so as not to relativize Christ's definitive dealing with the OT covenant curses.

So far, we see that “handing over one's self to the judgment of God” is a more appropriate meaning for ἀνάθεμ* than “curse,” and this sense is made even more obvious in Paul's words because he actually mentions who has the authority to effect it. In the book of Romans, Paul wishes that he would be ἀνάθεμα from Christ for the sake of his fellow Jews:

For I could wish that I myself were anathema (ἀνάθεμα) from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. (Rom 9:3 NRSV modified by author)

Many scholars note the parallel of Moses's dialogue with God in Exod 32:31–33,³¹ where Moses asks God to be blotted out of God's book (ἐξάλειψόν LXX) in the place of the people for their worship of the golden calf.³²

Being ἀνάθεμα has the function of banning someone—by death or expulsion—from a religious congregation, and being ἀνάθεμα from Christ would mean a separation from Christ's body, a reversal of the integration into Christ that was achieved through baptism.³³ This wish does not seem to have been accepted by Christ, for a few verses prior to this statement Paul exclaimed that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:39 NRSV). However, the severity of the statement stands, as Paul is willing to be placed in the category of other groups he “anathematized” elsewhere: those who do not love Jesus Christ (1 Cor 16:22), and those who preach another gospel (Gal 1:8).³⁴

So far we saw the use of ἀνάθεμ* on one's own person, and the meaning does not seem to be cursing one's self but handing over one's self to the judgment of God when one is not able to prove the veracity of their words (e.g., Peter) or in case one fails to carry out an oath (e.g., Paul's persecutors). Paul's example is rhetorical, alluding to Moses's intercession for the sin of his people, but stressing the seriousness of being separated from Christ. However, the enactment of חרם is Christ's jurisdiction, not that of humans.

³⁰ Behm, “ἀνάθεμα”, 1:354, notes that the meaning of ἀνάθεμα as a curse is found only in a tablet of curses from Megara dating from the 1st or 2nd century CE (IG, III, 3, App., XIVb, 17). A curse tablet where the verb ἀνατίθημι is presumably used (Michel, *Recueil d'inscriptions grecques*, 880, no. 1327), is questioned by Berthelot, “Notion of Anathema”, 50 n. 79, since the word is not even part of the inscription but is simply reconstructed in a lacuna.

³¹ Church fathers already note this connection; see, e.g., Chrysostom, *De cruce et latrone* (PG 49:416, l. 33).

³² Bartlett, *Romans*, 85–86; Jewett and Kotansky, *Romans*, 560; Matera, *Romans*, 220.

³³ Jewett and Kotansky, *Romans*, 560–61.

³⁴ Gaventa, *Romans*, 269.

2. חרם / ἀνάθεμα Against Others

Twice we see ἀνάθεμα* used against others. In 1 Cor 16:22, ἀνάθεμα is pronounced at the closing of the letter, after the greetings and the holy kiss, on anyone who does not love Christ:

Let anyone be [ἀνάθεμα] who has no love for the Lord. Our Lord, come!" (NRSV modified by author).

Some scholars treat this saying as an element of the church's early eucharistic liturgy. Bornkamm, for example, sees 1 Cor 16:22 as the primitive Lord's supper formula parallel to the one in Did. 10:6. He tabulates them as follows:

1 Cor 16:22	Did. 10:6
If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!	If anyone is holy, let him come; If anyone is not, let him repent Our Lord, come; amen. ³⁵

On the basis of this parallel, and by letting Didache inform his understanding of 1 Cor 16:22, Bornkamm argues that this formula:

contains no disciplinary direction for any kind of human initiative (the congregation or a college of judges) to practice the office of the keys against this or that unworthy person. Rather, it expresses the decision as coming from God for the given situation and leaves the transgressor to the judging punishment of God. In this the responsibility falls entirely on the one addressed and the Anathema represents the summons to self-examination.³⁶

If this theory is correct, then Paul's use of ἀνάθεμα against another here does not involve a human action against an individual. It does not even name the individual.³⁷ The construction is also vague, though scholars such as Konrad Zawadski understand it to refer to those who are active haters of Jesus, opposing him in a demonic fashion.³⁸ Regardless of the identity of the unnamed, I do not think this was a call to the church to start screening people, but quite the opposite. It was encouraging them to hand over such decisions to God.³⁹ Its dual purpose is to be a wake-up call for repent-

³⁵ Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience*, 169–70.

³⁶ Ibid., 170–71; see also Conzelmann, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 300.

³⁷ White, "Rod as Excommunication", 389, understands this to be Paul's rhetorical device of periphrasis or "non-naming" to confront individuals in opposition to him.

³⁸ Zawadsky, "Anfänge des 'Anathema'", 499–500.

³⁹ The use of *maranatha* as a wish for the Lord to come, reinforces the idea that Christ needs to come in order to implement the ἀνάθεμα rather than humans in the here and now; see Zawadsky, "Anfänge des 'Anathema'", 500. Cases such as the incestuous relationship in 1 Corinthians 5, however, require a different treatment; see Collins, "Function of 'Excommunication'".

ance to those who hear and examine themselves,⁴⁰ while at the same time it removes from human hands the task of divine judgment.⁴¹

In Gal 1:8, Paul uses *ἀνάθεμα* against anyone who preaches a different gospel.⁴²

“But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be [*ἀνάθεμα*]!” (NRSV modified by author)

Craig Keener connects this use of *ἀνάθεμα* with Deuteronomy 13, where false prophets who pollute an entire community are to be put under *חרם*, suggesting that preachers of a different gospel belong in the same category and are therefore to be handed over to God’s judgment.⁴³ Keener also argues that in Asia Minor, the most frequent appeal to the gods was through imprecations, which would make Paul’s “hyperbole”, as he calls it, be taken seriously.⁴⁴

Unlike the Deuteronomic case where the people are expected to put to death the false prophets, Paul’s use of *ἀνάθεμα* invokes that case, but at the same time demonstrates a different course of action. He does not ask for the elimination of these teachers, and he does not even name them. He hands their punishment over to God. If, as I have already argued, *ἀνάθεμα** is not identical to cursing, then Paul is not imitating the imprecations of his non-Christian context but instead hands over all judgment to God. J. Louis Martyn, despite maintaining the rendering “curse”, makes an important clarification on Paul’s choice of *ἀνάθεμα*, distancing the word from an actual curse: “Both the Greek and the Israelite know that a human being does not truly have the power to curse something. The most one can do is to deliver it to God, so that, in accordance with his own purposes, God can curse it.”⁴⁵ As was the case in 1 Cor 16:22, I believe the *ἀνάθεμα* functions more as a warning to the listeners to come to their senses, rather than as a magical curse against his opponents, in a congregation that, as Keener says, may have been accustomed to hearing this wording as an imprecation.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Zawadowsky, “Anfänge des ‘Anathema’”, 503–4, does not see any connection between Paul’s *ἀνάθεμα* and repentance. I find that since the entire church is addressed, the *ἀνάθεμα* has a rhetorical function not only on those who do not love Jesus or spread false teaching but also on those who are tempted or influenced by it.

⁴¹ Even though the word *ἀνάθεμα* is missing, Paul may have dealt with acts deserving capital punishment or corporal punishment by way of excommunication, as the practice was common in Roman associations but also in Judaism; see White, “Rod as Excommunication”. Whether excommunication was implemented by Paul and what form that would take is outside the scope of this article. Nevertheless, it is worth noting the absence of corporal punishment as a stark departure from both Roman and Jewish practices.

⁴² Martyn, *Galatians*, 110, imagines the different gospel preached by Paul’s opponents to have been something like this: “The gospel is the tradition faithfully preserved in the Jerusalem church about the Law that was spoken by a glorious angel to Moses, that was observed even earlier by Abraham our father, and that is now both confirmed by the Messiah, Jesus, and, by his authority, extended as God’s good news to the Gentiles.”

⁴³ Keener, *Galatians*, 65.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁵ Martyn, *Galatians*, 114.

⁴⁶ Zimmerman, “Anathema und Übergabe”, sees a continuity between the Pauline use of anathema and later Christian grave curses.

There is also no indication that ἀνάθεμα is a technical term for calling the congregation to excommunicate said teachers, although this statement may have been a warning before action was taken.

In 1 Cor 12:3, in the course of discussing spiritual gifts, Paul speaks of the impossibility of uttering nonsense or blasphemy against Jesus when one is led by the Spirit of God:

Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says
“Let Jesus be Ἀνάθεμα!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.”
(1 Cor 12:3 NRSV modified by author)

Ecstatic phenomena may accompany the Spirit’s presence but never at the expense of truth. The fact that there are inspired utterances during the spiritual phenomena experienced by the Corinthian church is not necessarily evidence of the Spirit. Gordon Fee, who takes ἀνάθεμα as “curse” here, says that “what counts is the intelligible and Christian content of such utterances.”⁴⁷ The ultimate true utterance coming from the Spirit is that “Jesus is Lord” (Κύριος Ἰησοῦς), the church’s earliest confession,⁴⁸ while the starkest antithesis to this truth that Paul could possibly imagine as an example would be “Jesus is anathema” (Ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς).⁴⁹

It has been difficult for scholars to envisage a context where such a shocking proclamation, understood as a “curse” by them as by most English translations (e.g. KJV, NKJV, NIV, NLT, ESV), could have been uttered. Some think this may have been a pagan practice, others argue that this was a requirement by Gnostic groups, or even that Romans in Corinth may have been forcing Christians to revile Christ.⁵⁰ Others argue that the phrase is hypothetical and created by Paul for its shock value.⁵¹ Berthelot, who rejects the translation “curse”, argues that “it is sounder to suppose that ἀνάθεμα here means someone who is doomed to destruction because he leads Israel into idolatry, as in Deuteronomy 13.”⁵² If Deuteronomy 13 is indeed the background of this utterance, as Keener had suggested for Gal 1:8,⁵³ then the proclamation equates Jesus with a false prophet, and it should therefore be located in Judeo-Christian circles. Berthelot sees affinities here with the rabbinic Tole-dot Yeshu.⁵⁴ Whichever background is assumed, it goes without saying that if Jesus is Lord, their God requiring their full allegiance, then by definition he cannot be ἀνάθεμα, but would be the only one who could effect ἀνάθεμα (cf. ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, Rom 9:3). Ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς is indeed an oxymoron incompatible with the Spirit of truth, and, as Zawardsky argues, may even be derived from the influence of a demonic spirit.⁵⁵

⁴⁷ Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 578.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 582.

⁴⁹ Conzelmann, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 204–5.

⁵⁰ Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 454–56.

⁵¹ For an evaluation of different interpretations, see Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 579–82; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 454–56.

⁵² Berthelot, “Notion of Anathema”, 51.

⁵³ Keener, *Galatians*, 65.

⁵⁴ Berthelot, “Notion of Anathema”, 51.

⁵⁵ Zawardsky, “Anfänge des ‘Anathema’”, 498.

3. חרם / ἀνάθεμα in the Eschaton

Finally, in Rev 22:3, the word *κατάθεμα* is used, which is a variation of *ἀνάθεμα*:

No *κατάθεμα* will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. (Rev 22:3 NRSV modified by author)

The sense here is that in the eschatological New Jerusalem nothing abominable to God will be present.⁵⁶ If we take *κατάθεμα* as a reference to the act of *חרם*, its absence in the New Jerusalem implies that no one deserving of *חרם* will be present in this city. What was known to be the primary target of *חרם* was the idolatrous nations due to their seductive powers over Israel, and what was known to be the means of getting rid of abominations was annihilation or expulsion from the land. Revelation, however, does not describe the nations as being eliminated from the New Jerusalem, since the previous verse describes the *healing* of the nations through the leaves of the tree of life (Rev 22:2 NRSV).⁵⁷ The text seems to be pointing to a different way of removing *κατάθεμα*, and that is by way of healing.

Gregory Beale recognizes Zech 14:11 behind Rev 22:3:⁵⁸ “And it shall be inhabited, for never again shall it be doomed to destruction (*חרם*); Jerusalem shall abide in security” (Zech 14:11 NRSV). LXX Zechariah has οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι with *ἀνάθεμα* rather than *κατάθεμα* but the sense is clearly the same.⁵⁹ In Zechariah 14, it is sinful Jerusalem that was under the ban by means of God directing other nations against her. At the same time, those nations become the target of God’s judgment as well, but the end result is the cleansing of both Israel and the nations in order for both of these groups to be able to worship together in a purified Jerusalem. Mark Boda says that 14:11 “refers to the cessation of the destruction of foreigners from the land because they now live under Yahweh’s rule.”⁶⁰

The chapter closes with a statement analogous to 14:11: “And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD Almighty” (14:21 NIV).⁶¹ While various scholars see כְּנַעֲנִי here as a reference to merchants, the LXX translator renders it as the gentilic masculine name Χαναναῖος (“Canaanite”),⁶² the traditional category of sinful idolaters who should be under *חרם*. In the context of the chapter, a “Canaanite” would be any unpurified member of either Israel or the

⁵⁶ Berthelot, “Notion of Anathema”, 51 n. 87.

⁵⁷ This image is very different from what Jewish tradition had come to expect. According to a variety of Jewish texts no one had the right to touch the tree of life until the end of time when only the chosen would be given from its fruit; see Koester, *Revelation*, 835.

⁵⁸ Beale, *Revelation*, 1112.

⁵⁹ κατοικήσουσιν ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ οὐκ ἔσται ἀνάθεμα ἔτι καὶ κατοικήσει Ἱερουσαλὴμ πεποιθότως.

⁶⁰ Boda, *Book of Zechariah*, 396.

⁶¹ LXX: καὶ οὐκ ἔσται Χαναναῖος οὐκέτι ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ κυρίου παντοκράτορος ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ.

⁶² The LXX has Χαναναῖος even in Zech 11:11, where it is absent from the Hebrew text.

nations.⁶³ To sum up, Zechariah 14 envisages a time when Jerusalem will be cleansed from sin and idolatry so that no threat of separation from God will exist.

For the sake of completeness of this category, the early Christian text of the Didache uses *κατάθεμα* eschatologically as well, to refer to the last days when people will fall prey to the anti-Christ but those who remain faithful will be saved from this *חרם*:

Then human creation will enter the fire of testing, and many will fall away and perish.
But those who persevere in their faith will be saved from this *καταθέματος*.⁶⁴

חרם / *ἀνάθεμα* in the History of the Church

In the post-apostolic age, the Church Fathers who struggled with Christological controversies took license from St. Paul's *ἀνάθεμα* on those who preached a different gospel to speak likewise concerning those who opposed the faith articulated by the 318 bishops who had gathered at the council of Nicaea in 325 CE.⁶⁵ Church councils, in general, "regularly included a list of anathemas . . . in their official acts as a means of specifying the theological positions that its positive definitions are meant to exclude."⁶⁶ Ian McFarland refers to C. Morse who argues emphatically that "the positive significance of the gospel is best revealed through the anathema, by identifying what Christians refuse to believe."⁶⁷

Cyril of Alexandria is famous for issuing his twelve anathemas, appended to his third letter to Nestorius. The use of the word *ἀνάθεμα* in his twelve propositions communicated that they were uncompromisable. But scholars have noted that these anathemas were *not* a final word about Nestorius's condemnation—instead, they were intended for self-examination.⁶⁸ As Norman Russell writes, "Cyril's intention was to force Nestorius to abandon the provisos and nuances he had expressed hitherto and either accept the christological position set out in the chapters and thus bring an end to the controversy or else reject it and prove himself a heretic."⁶⁹

John Chrysostom uses the *ἀνάθεμα** group mostly when quoting Paul. At times, he wants to highlight Paul's example of caring for those outside the Christian faith to the point of wishing himself *ἀνάθεμα*. Elsewhere, Chrysostom claims that Paul's strong language signifies the danger of the subject he discusses. He says that Paul "would not have anathematized both himself and an angel had

⁶³ "The term 'Canaanite' represents and is repeatedly connected with mandatory *חרם* in the OT (Deut 7:1; 20:17; Josh 3:10; etc.)" (Park, *Finding Herem?*, 125). Similarly, in Theodotion's Susanna 1:56 Daniel calls the elders of the Jews "you offspring of Canaan and not of Judah" (*σπέρμα Χανααν καὶ οὐκ Ιουδα*).

⁶⁴ Did. 16:5, translation mine.

⁶⁵ Didymus the Blind, *De Trinitate Liber Secundus* (PG 39:688, l. 15–31); Athanasius, *Epistula ad Afros episcopos* (PG 26:1032, l. 15); *Epistula Catholica* (PG 28: 84, l. 20).

⁶⁶ McFarland, "Anathema", 12.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Pusey, "Appendix", 157.

⁶⁹ Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 175.

this issue been harmless”⁷⁰ and also that “through this single word he alarmed them all.”⁷¹ For example, when Christians from his congregation fasted with the Jews, attended their synagogues, and celebrated Jewish festivals, Chrysostom had to remind them of Paul’s warning that “whoever does not love Jesus, let them be anathema.”⁷² Chrysostom’s aim was to effect a change in the character and practice of his audience, perhaps a renewal of their exclusive allegiance to Christ, but there is no indication that he wanted his audience to act upon others, especially their weaker members. No expulsion of others is encouraged, but removal of one’s self from others, in this case the synagogues and associated Jewish practices, is obviously in mind.

St. Augustine’s view of ἀνάθεμα is also worth mentioning. He argues against the Donatists who contend that lapsed Christians should not be part of the Church but that the Church should remain pure. Augustine uses texts such as the parables of the weeds and the wheat, or the bad and good fish that are caught together in the same dragnet and only separated later when drawn to the shore. Augustine understands that the “bad” Christians will be removed from the saints at the end of time by Christ the judge. For the time being, though, we must tolerate the “bad” fish. However, this did not mean that Augustine was against ἀνάθεμα—i.e., excommunication—in this case. He did, after all, support the excommunication of the Pelagians. But ἀνάθεμα for Augustine, which meant removal of the sinner from the sacraments, “was a test rather than a punishment, since God will make the final and correct decision.”⁷³ One would not expect excommunication to be a loving act, but Augustine declares: “Let us love our enemies, and correct them, punish them, excommunicate them, even cast them out from our society, provided we do so in love.”⁷⁴ The use of ἀνάθεμα intended a correction; “the sinner remained within the Church but shunned, although in a healing and not destructive manner.”⁷⁵ True to the parable of letting God separate the weeds at the eschaton, Augustine advises the Church not to remove evil from good, but remove good from evil, i.e., disassociating, in the hope of leading those in error to repentance and reconciliation.

Unfortunately, the limits of this article do not permit a full exploration of later developments in the understanding and implementation of ἀνάθεμα in the history of the church. A more radical view of ἀνάθεμα comes later when a distinction is made at the Council of Tours in 461 CE between excommunication and ἀνάθεμα. There, the Roman Catholic church equates ἀνάθεμα with “the curse of Judas” and, after three warnings, it was recited that the unrepentant one “may die not only excommunicated, but anathematized, and that he may be stricken by the sword of Heaven.”⁷⁶ This distinction is also evident in a letter of John VIII (872–882) stating: “Know that Engeltrude is not only under the ban of excommunication, which separates her from the society of the brethren, but under

⁷⁰ Chrysostom, *De profectu evangelii* (PG 51:313 l. 37).

⁷¹ Chrysostom, *Homiliae in epistulam i ad Corinthios* (PG 61:376, l. 61).

⁷² Chrysostom, *Adversus Iudaeos* (PG 48:862, l. 11).

⁷³ Dunn, “Augustine”, 208.

⁷⁴ Augustine, *En. Ps.* 54.9, quoted by Dunn, “Augustine”, 212.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁷⁶ Gignac, “Anathema”, 456.

the anathema, which separates from the body of Christ, which is the Church.” These new dimensions, however, remain to be explored further.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to examine the reception of the idea of חרם in Second Temple Jewish literature, in the New Testament, and in the early patristic era, through an exploration of the usage of the primary Greek rendering of חרם: the word *ἀνάθεμα*. The choice of this Greek word for חרם is peculiar because in the Greek world it was exclusively used to describe offerings given by worshipers to their gods. The word *ἀνάθεμα* had no negative connotations, as חרם does in some biblical texts, where the object that is handed over to God is considered an abomination to be destroyed. The Septuagintal choice of *ἀνάθεμα* for חרם has thus caused a significant expansion in the spectrum of meaning of the Greek word, and from Second Temple times onwards, we encounter the word *ἀνάθεμα* in both positive (as an offering) as well as in negative contexts where חרם is either in the foreground (alluding to stories of the Israelite conquest) or in the background (functioning as a reinterpreted way of enacting חרם).

The article has focused on the negative usage of *ἀνάθεμα** in order to see whether the understanding of חרם was transformed and how it might have been reinterpreted in ways that do not demand the physical annihilation of its object. While we do encounter cases during the Second Temple era where the use of *ἀνάθεμα* was intended to be physically enacted during the author’s time, the dominant use of the word, especially in the New Testament, was not equated to “cursing,” as some scholars argue, but communicated the “handing over” of individuals to the judgment of God rather than taking action against them. Even in later instances of practicing excommunication, the primary goal of *ἀνάθεμα* was to bring one to repentance and restoration to the community of God’s people.

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