WE HAVE A LAW

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The charge for the crucifixion of Jesus in the Gospel of John is presented to Pilate in John xix 7: "We have a law and by that law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God" 1). This law is usually interpreted to relate to the law of blasphemy which we find in Lev. xxiv 16. Such an interpretation is rightly based on John x 33 where it expressly says that the Jews sought to kill Jesus because he blasphemed, "making himself God."

Our purpose is to explore this situation further showing there were other grounds from the Mosaic Law on which Jesus ought to be put to death in the eyes of the unbelieving Jew. These grounds are particularly significant in the light of the Johannine usage of the word στόματια.

In John v 18, the first reference in the gospel to the Jews' compulsion to kill Jesus, we read: This was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath but also called God His father making himself equal with God." The first cause for their seeking to kill him, the breaking of the sabbath, is usually treated as of much lesser importance than the second 2). Yet according to the text both stand as motives for the Jews' plot

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2) The sabbath-breaker was also punished by stoning and is listed in the same section of the Mishnah, Tractate Sanhedrin 7.4, as blasphemy which was also worthy of such a punishment.
against Jesus. The breaking of the sabbath takes on greater implications when we consider it in relation to the sign connected with this statement in chapter v.

The law found in Deut. xiii 1-5 would be applied here. This law states:

If a prophet arises among you, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder which he tells you comes to pass and if he says, "Let us go after other gods" which you have not known, and "let us serve them," you shall not listen to the words of that prophet . . . . But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to make you leave the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk.¹)

The Johannine emphasis on the signs makes Jesus a false prophet in the eyes of those who reject his message. In John ii 23 and iii 2 the Evangelist records signs as being done in Jerusalem. In addition further attention to the signs of Jesus must come with the healing of the infirm man in this chapter v. This act must be considered a sign ²). There can be no doubt that the Jews interpreted the breaking of the sabbath as an attempt to turn the people away from the "way in which the Lord their God commanded them to walk". This is especially true if J. BERNARD and B. WESTCOTT are correct in asserting that λύω means a total abrogation of the duty of the sabbath observance and not merely a violation of the legal code dealing with the sabbath ³). By his interpretation of the event Jesus made himself God (v 18): thus calling the Jews to "go after other gods". We see the compulsion of the Jews to destroy him as a "false prophet" who would bring signs and lead the people astray.

This motivation is further emphasized in vii 31, 32. Here both elements appear in the first attempt by the Jewish authorities to arrest Jesus. The people say: "When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?" Such murmurings

¹) Note also Deut. xviii 18-22.
