

Matthew 23 - Jesus Tees Off on the Pharisees; The Purpose/Tragedy/Triumph of all History

IV. Formal presentation and rejection of the King (Matt 20:29—23:39)

(4) Woes demonstrating Christ's rejection of the nation (23:1-39)

(A) Guilt of the Pharisees (23:1-12)

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(a) Three woes involving doctrine (23:13-22)

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Matthew 23

(4) Woes demonstrating Christ's rejection of the nation (23:1-39)

(A) Guilt of the Pharisees (23:1-12) (Cf. Mark 12:38-39; Luke 20:45-46)

1 Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples,

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1 Then Jesus told the crowds and his disciples,

1 Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,

- Jesus began to criticize the scribes and Pharisees to their faces about a year earlier (15:7); later He warned the disciples to beware of the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees (16:5-12)

— Now, He denounced them publicly, because the decision the crowds and His disciples faced was whether to follow Him or Israel's established religious leaders. They could not follow both.

2 saying: "The **scribes** and the **Pharisees** have seated themselves in the **chair of Moses**."

2 saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses;

2 "The scribes and the Pharisees administer the authority of Moses,

2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:

- "...scribes" - official teachers of the OT

- "...Pharisees" - a theological party within Judaism

- The two groups were different, but somewhat overlapping. Some scribes were Pharisees, but not all Pharisees were scribes.
- "...chair of Moses" - means that they put themselves in the position of Moses' authority. They would be the first to espouse Moses as an authority.
- They viewed themselves as Moses' successors, possessing his authority

3 Therefore, whatever they tell you, do and comply with it all, but do not do as they do; for they say *things* and do not do *them*.

3 therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say *things* and do not do *them*.

3 so do whatever they tell you and follow it, but stop doing what they do, because they don't do what they say.

3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, *that* observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

4 And they tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with *so much as* their finger.

4 They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with *so much as* a finger.

4 They tie up burdens that are heavy and unbearable and lay them on people's shoulders, but they refuse to lift a finger to remove them.

4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers.

- The rabbis of that day (i.e. Hillel and Shammai) increased the burden on the Jews by constantly adding to the Law

This entire chapter is devoted to a denunciation and condemnation of the Scribes and the Pharisees, the leadership of Israel, for various sins:

- In v1-12, they are condemned for their hypocrisy
- In v13-14, they are condemned for leading the nation in the rejection of Jesus' messiahship
- In v15, they are condemned for corrupting the proselytes
- In v16-22, they are condemned for making the Mosaic Law ineffectual through pharisaic traditions
- In v23-24, they are condemned for majoring in the minors
- In v25-28, they are condemned for being concerned with externals only
- In v29-36, they are condemned for rejecting the prophets

There are parallels with Jesus' rejection of Israel here, and the rejection of the wilderness generation after Kadesh Barnea (Num 13-14). That generation would not experience the blessing of participating in the inauguration of the Promised Land, just as the generation of Israelites in Jesus' time will not participate in the inauguration of the future messianic kingdom.

Chiastic Structure

Woe 1: Kingdom Postponement

Woe 2: Disastrous Practice

Woe 3: Erroneous Doctrine

Woe 4: Distortion of Priorities Resulting in Erroneous Doctrine

Woe 5: Erroneous Doctrine

Woe 6: Disastrous Practice

Woe 7: Kingdom Postponement

5 And they do all their deeds to be noticed by *other* people; for they broaden their **phylacteries** and lengthen the **tassels of their garments**.

5 But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments.

5 "They do everything to be seen by people. They increase the size of their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments.

5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

- "...phylacteries" - *tefillin*, small leather boxes containing Scripture verses that were strapped to the arm and forehead of orthodox Jewish men during their weekday morning prayers

— The Scripture verses were: Ex 13:1-10,11-16; Deut 6:4-9; 11:13-21. They tied these onto their foreheads or forearms with straps, to fulfill Ex 13:9,16; Deut 6:8; 11:18.

— Jesus' point is that the Pharisees are doing all of this for show

— He is not saying all that wear phylacteries are for show, nor is He indicting some of the observances were their cultural pattern of style of worship

— We all are victims of cultural background or style of worship

— Jesus is referring to the condition of their heart—they are doing these things to be seen of men, not because of their love for God

- "...tassels of their garments" - was a symbol of rank [see Tag: "Hems"]

— God had commanded the wearing of these "tassels" to remind His people of their holy and royal calling (Num 15:37-41; Deut 22:12)

— All Jews wore these tassels, including Jesus (9:20; 14:36). However, the religious leaders typically wore long ones to imply their great piety and attract the admiration of others.

6 And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the seats of honor in the synagogues,
6 They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues,
6 They love to have the places of honor at festivals, the best seats in the synagogues,
6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,
- The leaders wanted to sit as close to the law scrolls as possible in the synagogue

7 and personal greetings in the marketplaces, and being called **Rabbi** by the people.
7 and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men.
7 to be greeted in the marketplaces, and to be called 'Rabbi' by people.
7 And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.
- "...Rabbi" - originally a title of respect, but eventually it became a title of veneration
— The leaders in Jesus' day wanted the title to separate them as distinctive and superior to others

8 But as for **you**, do not be called Rabbi; for *only* One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers *and sisters*.
8 But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers.
8 "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' because you have only one teacher, and all of you are brothers.
8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, *even* Christ; and all ye are brethren.
- "...you" - in the emphatic first position while speaking to the disciples, implying that they would take the position of leadership over God's people that the critics currently occupied (Cf. 13:52)
— The disciples were not to be called "Rabbi" because they only had one teacher, God
— The were to regard themselves as learners, on the same level as others, rather than masters over the unlearned

9 And do not call *anyone* on earth your **father**; for *only* One is your Father, He who is in heaven.
9 Do not call *anyone* on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.
9 And don't call anyone on earth 'Father,' because you have only one Father, the one in heaven.
9 And call no *man* your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.
- "...father" - the spiritual predecessors of the present generation (Cf. 2 Kings 2:12)

— The change in verb tense between verses 8, 9 and 10 suggests this

10 And do not be called leaders; for *only One* is your Leader, *that is*, Christ.

10 Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, *that is*, Christ.

10 Nor are you to be called 'Teachers,' because you have only one teacher, the Messiah!

10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, *even* Christ.

- The only person worthy of the title of "Teacher" in the ultimate sense is Jesus

— He is the only One who can sit in Moses' seat to interpret and reveal the will of God correctly and authoritatively

Jesus' enemies, the certified teachers of Israel, could not answer basic biblical questions about the Messiah. Now Jesus, the Messiah, declares in the wake of that travesty that He Himself is the only One qualified to sit in Moses' seat—to succeed him as the authoritative Teacher of God's will and mind.

In this passage, Jesus did not erase the recognition of distinctions between leaders and their roles among His servants. What Jesus was condemning was seeking and giving honor that transcends what is appropriate. The teachers and leaders of God's people must remember that they are always fellow learners with the saints. They are always subject to Jesus Christ.

11 But the greatest of you shall be your servant.

11 But the greatest among you shall be your servant.

11 The person who is greatest among you must be your servant.

11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

- Jesus returns to the subject of humility (18:4; 20:20-28); Jesus taught that His disciples should be servants of others, not lords over them.

12 Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

12 Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

12 Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

- The reversal that Jesus predicted here will happen when the kingdom begins

- Jesus was the greatest example of what He taught here (20:26-28; Phil 5:11)

Jesus' Indictment of the Scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:13-36; Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47)

Jesus now directed His attention to the scribes and Pharisees in the temple courtyard. He announced a scathing indictment of them in seven parts, introducing each with the word "woe." Compare the six woes of Is 5:8-23 and the five woes of Hab 2:6-20. Jesus spoke of the scribes and Pharisees, but He spoke to the crowds and His disciples.

(B) Seven woes against the Pharisees (23:13-36)

(a) Three woes involving doctrine (23:13-22)

1st Woe

13 "But **woe** to you, scribes and Pharisees, **hypocrites**, because you shut the kingdom of heaven in front of people; for you do not **enter** it yourselves, nor do you allow those who are **entering** to go in.

13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

13 "How terrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door to the kingdom from heaven in people's faces. You don't go in yourselves, and you don't allow those who are trying to enter to go in.

13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in *yourselves*, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

- "...woe" - does not carry vindictiveness or spitefulness; rather, it's a judicial announcement of condemnation from Messiah, the Judge

— It is not a curse that calls down judgment, but a calm, true judgment and verdict given by the Judge Himself

— Each woe have the evidence for it attached with a "because" clause, giving the full reasoning for the verdict. Verse 16 does this through a varied form of expression.

- "...hypocrites" - they professed to teach God's will, but they kept people from entering the kingdom when it was God's will for His people to do so

- "...enter...entering" - it's always people entering the kingdom, not the kingdom entering people

— The Pharisees kept people from entering the kingdom by not preparing to enter it themselves, and by discouraging others from doing so (Cf. 18:6-7; 22:41-46)

— The poor in spirit enter the kingdom, but the proud in spirit keep themselves out and even keep others out

— The Greek verb indicates people trying to get in who cannot

- It is bad enough to keep yourself out of the kingdom, but worse when you stand in the way of others
- By teaching man-made traditions instead of God's truth, they "took away the key of knowledge" and closed the door to salvation (Luke 11:52)

Some interpreters believe the syntax of this verse assumes that the kingdom had already begun. However, the basis of this conclusion is the presupposition that it had already begun more than the Greek syntax. The syntax requires we understand the participle *tous eiserchomenous* ("them that are entering") and the present finite verb *oude aphiete* ("neither suffer ye") as action occurring simultaneously with the speaker's words. Both actions describe what the leaders were doing in anticipation with the inauguration of the kingdom.

14 [Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.]

14 [Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.]

14 "How terrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You devour widows' houses and say long prayers to cover it up. Therefore, you will receive greater condemnation!

14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

- While this verse is not in the earliest and best manuscripts of Matthew, it is found in Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47

- Instead of mourning over their own sins, and mourning with needy widows, the Pharisees took advantage of people in order to rob them

— They used their religion as a "cloak of covetousness" (1 Thess 2:5)

2nd Woe

15 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one **proselyte**; and when he becomes *one*, you make him twice as much a **son of hell** as yourselves.

15 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

15 "How terrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to make a single convert, and when this happens you make him twice as fit for hell as you are.

15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.

- "...proselyte" - a convert to a cause. The Pharisees were out to win others to their corrupt legalistic theology, yet they could not introduce these people to the living God.

- The Pharisees gave the oral tradition interpretations and teachings of the rabbis at least the same authority as the OT, if not more. They twisted the OT when it did not harmonize with the accepted teachings of the rabbis (Cf. 5:21-48).

- "...son of hell" - the equivalent of "child of the devil" which is what Jesus called the Pharisees (Matt 12:34; 23:33; John 8:44). A person who has rejected God's way of salvation (righteousness through faith in Christ) and chosen instead to follow man made laws in an effort to earn favor from God.

- This person parades his own self-righteousness through whatever religious system he belongs to

- The convert usually shows more zeal than his leader, and this "double devotion" only produces double condemnation. When a person believes that Scriptural authority extends beyond the statements of Scripture, there is no limit to what else may be authoritative.

- How tragic that people can think they are going to heaven, when actually they are going to hell!

3rd Woe

16 "Woe to you, **blind guides**, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, *that* is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.'

16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, *that* is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.'

16 "How terrible it will be for you, blind guides! You say, 'Whoever swears an oath by the sanctuary is excused, but whoever swears an oath by the gold of the sanctuary must keep his oath.'

16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!

- Here is a specific example of what Jesus condemned in the second woe (v15)

- "...blind guides" - a perfect description for the scribes and Pharisees, that must have brought a smile to the lips of the listeners. Jesus had used it before in Matt 15:14.

- By differentiating between what was binding on their oaths and what was not, the Pharisees and teachers of the law were encouraging evasive oaths that amounted to lying.

— Jesus point was that people should tell the truth

17 You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold?

17 You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold?

17 You blind fools! What is more important, the gold or the sanctuary that made the gold holy?

17 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?

- The Pharisees would take an oath and use some sacred object to substantiate that oath—the gold in the temple, for example, or the gift on the altar. But they would not swear by the temple itself or the altar. It was the temple that sanctified the gold and the altar that sanctified the gift.

18 And you say, 'Whoever swears by the altar, *that* is nothing; but whoever swears by the offering that is on it is obligated.'

18 And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, *that* is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.'

18 Again you say, 'Whoever swears an oath by the altar is excused, but whoever swears by the gift that is on it must keep his oath.'

18 And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever swarth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.

19 You blind men, which is more important, the offering or the altar that sanctifies the offering?

19 You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering?

19 You blind men! Which is more important, the gift or the altar that makes the gift holy?

19 Ye fools and blind: for whether *is* greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?

Jesus knew that the Pharisees wanted both the gold and the gifts on the altar. This is why the Pharisees practiced "Corban"—anything dedicated to God could not be used for others (Matt 15:1-9; Mark 7:10-13). These men were not seeking for the righteousness of God; they were greedy for gain. They worked out a "religious system" that permitted them to rob God and others and still maintain their reputations.

20 Therefore, the one who swears by the altar, swears *both* by the altar and by everything on it.

20 Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears *both* by the altar and by everything on it.

20 Therefore, the one who swears an oath by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.

20 Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.

- Verses 20-22 provide the rationale for Jesus' previous instruction on oaths (5:33-37)

— Whenever a Jew took an oath, he connected it in some way with God. All their oaths were therefore binding.

— Jesus disallowed all evasive oaths and viewed them as untruthful speech

21 And the one who swears by the temple, swears *both* by the temple and by Him who dwells in it.

21 And whoever swears by the temple, swears *both* by the temple and by Him who dwells within it.

21 The one who swears an oath by the sanctuary swears by it and by the one who lives there.

21 And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.

22 And the one who swears by heaven, swears *both* by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.

22 And whoever swears by heaven, swears *both* by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.

22 And the one who swears an oath by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it.

22 And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

(b) Transitional woe involving doctrine and character (23:23-24)

4th Woe

23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the Law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these *are the things* you should have done without neglecting the others.

23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

23 "How terrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your mint, dill, and cummin, but have neglected the more important matters of the Law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These are the things you should have practiced, without neglecting the others.

23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier *matters* of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

- The Mosaic law required Israelites to tithe grain, wine and oil (Deut 14:22-29). How far they had to take this was a matter of debate, and Jesus did not discourage detailed observance of this law.

- Jesus directed His condemnation of the leaders' failure to observe "more important matters" while they argued over which specific plants, spices and seeds to tithe.

- Jesus went back to Micah 6:8 for the three primary duties that God requires: justice, mercy, faithfulness.

24 You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

24 You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

24 You blind guides! You filter out a gnat, yet swallow a camel!

24 Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

- The Pharisees majored on the minors. They had rules for every minute area of life, while at the same time they forgot about the important things.

- It is usually the case that legalists are sticklers for details, but blind to great principles

- This crowd thought nothing of condemning an innocent man, yet they were afraid to enter Pilate's judgment hall lest they be defiled (John 18:28)

Justice, mercy, and faithfulness are the important qualities God is seeking. Obeying the rules is no substitute. While it is good to pay attention to details, we must never lose our sense of priorities in spiritual matters. Jesus did not condemn the practice of tithing. But He did condemn those who allowed their legalistic scruples to keep them from developing true Christian character.

(c) Three woes involving character (23:25-36)

5th Woe

25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the **cup and of the dish**, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence.

25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence.

25 "How terrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but on the inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

- Jesus condemned Pharisaic superficiality

- "...cup and of the dish" - the Pharisees and those they taught

- The Pharisees held the importance of being ritually clean by observing the dietary and cleansing ordinances of the Law, but they neglected internal purity.

- They put too much importance on minor matters, especially ritual and external matters, and not enough on major matters, especially those involving spiritual reality.

26 You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may also become clean.

26 You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.

26 You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that its outside may also be clean.

26 *Thou* blind Pharisee, cleanse first that *which is* within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

- Jesus used two illustrations: the cup/platter (v25-26) and the sepulcher (v27-28). They both stated the same truth: it is possible to be clean on the outside and at the same time defiled on the inside.

- The Pharisees were careful to keep the outside very clean, because that was the part that men would see; and they wanted the praise of men.

- But God sees the heart (1 Sam 16:7). When God looked within, He saw "greed and self-indulgence" (v25, NIV).

27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

27 "How terrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs that look beautiful on the outside but inside are full of dead people's bones and every kind of impurity.

27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men's* bones, and of all uncleanness.

- Jewish people were careful not to touch dead bodies or anything relating to the dead, because this would make them ceremonially unclean (Num 19:11ff)

- They would whitewash the tombs lest someone accidentally get defiled, and this was done especially at Passover season.

— What a graphic picture of the hypocrite: white on the outside, but filled with defilement and death on the inside!

"Blessed are the pure in heart" was our Lord's promise. "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life" (Prov 4:23, NASB). D.L. Moody used to say, "If I take care of my character, my reputation will take care of itself." The Pharisees lived for reputation, not character.

28 So you too, outwardly appear righteous to people, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and **lawlessness**.

28 So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

28 In the same way, on the outside you look righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

- "...lawlessness" - *anomia*, the Pharisees prided themselves on detailed observance of the Law. However, their failure to understand and apply the Law correctly made them lawless.

— *anomia* is a general word for wickedness in the NT. Jesus implied that the Pharisees' entire approach to the Law was wicked.

7th Woe

29 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs for the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous,

29 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,

29 "How terrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous.

29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,

- By building monuments to the prophets and other righteous people who their forefathers martyred, the Pharisees were saying that they would not have killed them if they had been alive at the time.

— These monuments were professions of their own spiritual superiority

The Pharisees and their kind are guilty of all the righteous blood shed in the name of "religion." The first martyr recorded in OT Scripture was Abel (Gen 4), and the last one recorded was the Prophet Zechariah (2 Chr 24:20-22).

What will be the result of this long history of murders? Terrible judgment! Not only would they be held accountable for the rejection of His Messiahship, but also for the blood of all the OT prophets. The reason was that everything God intended to say concerning the Messiah had already been said by the Jewish prophets. That generation possessed the entire OT canon. They also had the preaching of John the Baptist announcing the soon coming of the Messiah. And, they had the physical manifestation and presence of Jesus as the Messiah, along with all of the authenticating signs. For this reason, they would be held accountable for the blood of all the prophets who spoke about the Messiah.

30 and you say, 'If we had been *living* in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in *shedding* the blood of the prophets.'

30 and say, 'If we had been *living* in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in *shedding* the blood of the prophets.'

30 Then you say, 'If we had been living in the days of our ancestors, we would have had no part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'

30 And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

31 So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.

31 So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.

31 Therefore, you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets.

31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.

32 Fill up, then, the measure *of the guilt* of your fathers.

32 Fill up, then, the measure *of the guilt* of your fathers.

32 Then finish what your ancestors started!

32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.

- The OT idea here is that God will tolerate only so much sin before He acts in judgment (Cf. Gen 6:3,7; 15:16; Cf. 1 Thess 2:14-16)

— Jesus is saying that Israel had committed many sins, and incurred much guilt, by murdering the prophets. When the Pharisees killed Jesus and His disciples (Cf. v34), the cup of God's wrath would be full and He would respond in wrath.

— The destruction of Jerusalem and worldwide dispersion of the Jews resulted, in 70 AD

33 You snakes, you offspring of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?

33 You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?

33 You snakes, you children of serpents! How can you escape being condemned to hell?

33 Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

- When Jesus called the Pharisees "serpents...generation of vipers" He was identifying them with Satan who is *the* serpent.

— They were going to perish in hell for their failure to believe in the Messiah

34 "Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will flog in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city,

34 "Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city,

34 "That is why I am sending you prophets, wise men, and scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will whip in your synagogues and persecute from town to town.

34 Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute *them* from city to city:

- "Therefore" - the antecedent is the Jews' execution of the prophets that God sent them in the past (v29-30)

- "...I" - Jesus is doing the sending of the prophets (first person singular)

— Because the Jews rejected the former prophets, Jesus would send them additional men (prophets, wise men and teachers (scribes)) who the Jews would also reject, filling their measure of guilt to the full.

— This is a reference to the witnesses that followed Jesus and appealed to the Jews to believe in Him (Acts 3:19-21; 7:2-53; Cf. Matt 5:10-12; 9:37-38; 28:18-20)

— Jesus would not yet establish His kingdom because Israel rejected Him as her Messiah. In this verse, He revealed that God would punish the generation of Israelites that rejected

Him, and the apostles who would follow Him, in an additional way.

— This punishment included the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews from the Promised Land. Jesus clarified these events for some of His disciples in the Olivet Discourse that follows (Matt 24-25).

- "...crucify" - since the Jews did not have the authority to crucify a person, this is meant in the causative sense: they would cause others (Romans) to crucify them (Cf. 10:24-25)

35 so that upon **you** will fall *the guilt of* all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous **Abel** to the blood of **Zechariah**, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

35 so that upon you may fall *the guilt of* all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

35 As a result, you will be held accountable for all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of the righteous Abel to the blood of Berechiah's son Zechariah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.

35 That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

- "...you" - specifically refers to first century Israel

— Jesus was not saying that the Jews who rejected Him were responsible for the deaths of all the righteous martyrs throughout biblical history. They were simply the ones who would add the last measure of guilt that would result in the outpouring of God's wrath for all those murders.

- "...Abel...Zechariah" - the first martyr to the last martyr; encompasses all the OT prophets

-- Isaiah: sawed asunder

-- Jeremiah: imprisoned in filthy dungeon

-- Zechariah: slain between the porch and the altar (not Zechariah the prophet) (2 Chr 24:20-22 [Jehoiada was his grandfather])

36 Truly I say to you, **all these things** will come upon **this generation**.

36 Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

36 I tell all of you with certainty, all these things will happen to those living today."

36 Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

- This is Jesus' formal rejection of Israel for rejecting Him as Messiah

- He predicted their judgment for their rejection of the Messiah, the Unpardonable Sin (Matt 12)

- "...all these things" - refers to the outpouring of God's wrath just revealed (v33,35)

- "...this generation" - first century Israel; refers to Christ's contemporaries of that specific generation because of the context in which it is used; it is governed and controlled grammatically by the phrase "all these things" (Cf. Matt 24:33-34)
- They would lose the privilege of witnessing Messiah's establishment of the kingdom and entering it. Instead they would suffer the destruction of their capital city and the scattering of their population from the Promised Land in 70 AD.
- The whole generation would suffer because the leaders acted for the people, and the people did not abandon their leaders to embrace Jesus as Messiah
- The perversity of the religious leaders of Israel does not excuse the people of Israel. They were guilty of willfully following blind guides.

As we review these tragic woes from the lips of our Lord, we can see why the Pharisees were His enemies. He emphasized the inner man; they were concerned with externals. He taught a spiritual life based on principles, while the Pharisees majored on rules and regulations. Jesus measured spirituality in terms of character, while the Pharisees measured it in terms of religious activities and conformity to external laws. Jesus taught humility and sacrificial service, but the Pharisees were proud and used people to accomplish their own purposes. The holy life of Jesus exposed their artificial piety and shallow religion. Instead of coming out of the darkness, the Pharisees tried to put out the Light...and they failed.

(C) Christ's lament over Jerusalem (23:37-39) (Cf. Luke 13:34-35)

The Purpose, Tragedy, & Triumph of All History

The Basis of the Second Coming [Basis of the Second Coming](#)

37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who have been sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.

37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.

37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones to death those who have been sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were unwilling!

37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not!

- "Jerusalem, Jerusalem" - the "City of David" and "City of Peace"; it was the city God chose to reveal Himself to Israel through the temple, and to be the capital of His kingdom

on earth

— Jerusalem is a synecdoche for all of Israel (a synecdoche is a figure of speech where one part stands for the whole, or the whole stands for one of its parts)

— The repeating of "Jerusalem" shows the strong emotion Jesus felt (Cf. Luke 10:41; Acts 9:4)

- "...kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!" - Jesus just revealed this in parabolic form in the Parable of the Vineyard Owner (Matt 21:33-40)

— Stoning was the penalty for the worst crimes in Israel, including false prophecy. But the people used this form of execution on those who faithfully brought God's Word to them.

— Everyone who God sent to Israel, they rejected, including His own Son...

- "...How often" - many OT passages could be quoted, each by itself could explain Christ's statement. A few of His warnings, from Jeremiah include: Jer 2:2-3,13; 4:19-22; 7:13,25-26; 13:27; 19:3-13; 32:31-33, et al.

- "...gather" - *episynago*, from where we get the English word "synagogue." He wanted the people to take refuge in Him as chicks do under their mother hen.

— The purpose of all history: that God might gather His children together...

— Jesus wanted to have "synagogue" (fellowship) with them at His first coming, but they rejected Him; they would not accept Him on His terms

— He tried in His First Advent; He'll succeed at His Second Advent (Matt 24:31)

— This gathering together was His initial desire, if they would only accept Him. They didn't, so the result was scattering instead of gathering.

— The image of the mother bird gathering and covering her brood is a familiar one. Moses used it in his farewell sermon (Deut 32:11).

— It is a picture of love, tender care, and a willingness to die to protect others. Jesus did die for the sins of the world, including the nation of Israel: but "His own received Him not" (John 1:11).

- "...you were unwilling" - the tragedy of all history: God wasn't the problem, Israel was

— This counters the Calvinistic belief today that God is completely sovereign in salvation, and that people have no free will

— But this verse shows that Jesus did not bring in the kingdom promises to Israel because of their "will." If Calvinism was true, Jesus would've rammed His kingdom down their throats like He wanted to. It was Israel who was unwilling to exercise their will to acknowledge Him. God convicts people through the Holy Spirit, but people have to bend their will toward Him in order to be saved.

— God works this way because He made us in His image...He has free will, and because we're made in His image, we have free will. He will convict you about salvation or obedience, but He's not going to bend your free will. At some point, we have to make a choice unto Him. If He didn't do it that way, He wouldn't be respecting His creation.

38 Behold, **your house** is being **left to you desolate!**

38 Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!

38 Look! Your house is left abandoned!

38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

- "...your house" - the temple (Cf. 1 Kings 9:7-8); Jesus had previously referred to the temple as His house (Matt 5:35; 17:25-26; 21:12-16); now He refers to it as "your" house, the house of prayer that they had converted to a den of thieves

- "...left to you desolate" - God would leave the temple "desolate" by removing Jesus' presence from it

— A prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the temple, in 70 AD

— In the blessings and curses of the Mosaic Covenant, there are penalties for disobedience. One of the penalties is national dispersion and destruction, which was accomplished about 37 years later in 70 AD by the Romans.

— Instead of being the focal point of worship during the messianic kingdom, it would be devoid of Immanuel ("God with us") until He returns to it (1:23; Cf. Jer 12:7; 22:5; Ezek 43:1-5)

— Instead of bringing promised rest to Israel, Jesus would leave her desolate, uninhabited

— If Jesus' stopped here, you could logically think that God was through with Israel. But next he says v39...

39 For I say to **you**, from now on **you will not see Me until you say, 'BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'**"

39 For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

39 I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'How blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

39 For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

- This is a condition of salvation for the nation of Israel, at the end of the Tribulation period; it's not a condition of salvation for believers in the Church Age (Cf. Rom 10:9-10)

— Jesus is telling Israel that because they have rejected Him as their Messiah, and will put Him to death, He is not coming back for the nation of Israel until they recognize what they failed to recognize in His first coming (Cf. Joel 2:28-32; Rom 10:13).

- "...you" - Israel

- "...you will not see Me" - many people stop right here and say, See, Christ is rejecting Israel and transferring blessings to the Church. However, they need to read further...

— "not" - *ou me*, a very strong negative in Greek

- "...until" - *heos*, key word—implies contingency, that once met, allows something else to happen; He's opening the door to "future Israel" who will receive Christ and experience salvation

— Jesus is putting the kingdom into a state of postponement; the kingdom will not be inaugurated on the earth until Israel repents and accepts Jesus as their Messiah

— Once a future generation of Israel accepts their Messiah on His terms, the contingency Jesus lays out here will be fulfilled, and Jesus will come back for Israel and setup the kingdom

— It's clear from this verse that God still has a plan for Israel, and that Israel's hardening and current state of being out of fellowship with God is not permanent

— This verse affirms the fact that Christ will come again to a repentant nation to establish the promised kingdom. It also furnishes the condition through which Israel's final regathering will be achieved.

- "...you" - a collective, referring to Jerusalem, Israel

- "...BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!" - a quote from Ps 118:26 (Cf. 21:9) referring to His return to the temple in power and great glory, when He returns at His Second Coming: the Triumph of All History

— Until this condition of acceptance has been met, the kingdom cannot come to earth. When Israel fulfills the condition by accepting Jesus as the Messiah, the Kingdom will materialize.

— In this case, once Israel is redeemed and accepts their Messiah as King, they will see Christ again, and the kingdom will be established

— He's saying that He will not come back for the nation of Israel physically until they acknowledge Him as Messiah verbally

— Even the crowds had used those very words (Matt 21:9)

— Just as the Jewish leaders once led the nation to the rejection of His Messiahship, they will someday lead the nation to acceptance of this fact (Cf. Lev 26:40-42; Jer 3:11-18; Zech 12:10; Hosea 3:15)

Hosea 5:15: I will go away *and* return to My place Until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; In their distress they will search for Me.

Rom 10:9-10:

9 that if you **confess with your mouth** Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

10 for with the heart *a person* believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

- The “confession of the mouth” in Rom 10:9-10 is what future Israel will publicly say, which is “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Ps 118:6; Cf. Matt 23:39).

Jesus’ lamentation in v37-39 helps us realize two important concepts:

1. Pronouncing judgment on Israel, His chosen people, was not something that delighted Him. It broke His heart. Jesus spoke of the city in personal terms (“your children,” v37), not as an impersonal thing. He also spoke as Israel’s Savior (the hen protecting her chicks under her wings).
2. Jesus words show that He made a legitimate offer of the kingdom to Israel and that it was His desired will that they would respond. As a result of rejecting this contingent offer, their house would be destroyed. The time from His rejection to His return is the “mystery” phase of the kingdom, as described in Matt 13. The final phase of that period is outlined in Matt 24-25.

It is the Jews’ acceptance of Jesus Christ as their Messiah as a prerequisite condition to the Second Coming that explains Satan’s war against the Jews throughout history in general, and during the Tribulation in particular. Satan knows that once the Messiah returns, his freedom ends. Satan also knows that Jesus will not come back until the Jewish leaders ask Him to come back. So if Satan can succeed in destroying the Jews once and for all before they come to national repentance, then Jesus will not come back and Satan’s career is eternally safe. That is why once Satan is confined to his fourth abode and knows his time is short, he expends all of his energy to destroy the Jews once and for all. ***Anti-Semitism in any form, active or passive, whether it is racial, ethnic, national, economic, political, religious, or theological, is all part of the satanic strategy to avoid the Second Coming.***

This, then, is the two-fold basis of the Second Coming of the Messiah: first, Israel must confess her national sin; secondly, Israel must then plead for Messiah to return, “to mourn for him as one mourns for an only son.” See [Basis of the Second Coming](#) and extensive notes on **The Basis for the Second Coming** in Lev 26:40-42.