



Jesus' Use of Old Testament Themes in Matthew 23:34-39

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Introduction

The issues concerning the nation Israel, its current relationship to God, and its future in God's plan of redemption continue to be central in some of the most prominent debates among theologians. With the complexity of the issues involved, it is likely that this debate will probably stay with us for some time—maybe even until the end of time when someone will finally be proven right. In the mean time, this issue continues to be a challenge for the theological community and the search for answers continues.

The purpose of this study is to stimulate such searching for answers by analyzing the Old Testament themes that lie at the heart of Jesus' statements in Matthew 23:34-39. A correct understanding of the textual connections between the testaments is crucial to the study of any issue in Scripture, and is even more important in dealing with issues concerning Israel. Thus, in light of the themes of judgment and Israel central to this passage, this study will attempt to determine what Jesus intended to communicate on this issue by examining his use of the Old Testament.

The Setting of Matthew 23

In the context of Matthew, this pericope comes at the conclusion of the list of woes that Jesus issues to the scribes and Pharisees, condemning them for their pride and hypocrisy. He tells the disciples and multitudes to listen to what the scribes and Pharisees *teach*, for they are teaching many of the truths of God but he warns them not to do what they *do*. Jesus' main complaint against the Jewish leaders is that they have "neglected the weightier provisions of the law" and that although outwardly, they "appear righteous to men" inwardly they are "full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."¹ It is clear through these condemnations that Jesus is pointing out the "false" righteousness of these men due to their lack of obeying the more significant aspects of God's Law. Furthermore, by using a series of "woe" statements, Jesus is implying a deserved judgment on the part of the Jewish leaders for this disobedience.

The last woe in 29-33 provides an important bridge to Jesus' proclamations of judgment in the remainder of the chapter. It is a woe against the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy in condemning those Israelites of the past who murdered the prophets. By using their own words, Jesus calls them the "sons" of these men and tells them to "fill up the measure of the guilt of their fathers."

¹ All Bible quotations in English are taken from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise stated.

He concludes this section by calling them "a brood of vipers" and warning them of the sentence of hell to which their evil actions will lead them. This woe culminates Jesus' condemnation on the scribes and Pharisees by connecting them to evildoers of the past and the judgment they deserve. It is at this point that he proceeds to the judgments of verses 34-39.

This passage is paralleled in Luke but there is divided into two separate sections (Matt. 23:34-36 ~ Luke 11:49-51; Matt. 23:37-39 ~ Luke 13:34-35). In light of this, it is possible that Jesus made these statements on two separate occasions, thus supporting a distinction between the two judgments. Both sections in the gospels are very similar, although slight differences do occur. The more significant distinctions especially pertinent to this study are the following:

1. Matthew describes the blood that will fall on the scribes and Pharisees as the **παῦν αἵμα δικαίων**, "all innocent blood" while Luke describes it as **τοῦ αἵματος πάντων τῶν προφητῶν** "the blood of all the prophets" (Matt. 23:35, Luke 11:50).
2. Matthew adds **τοῦ δικαίου**, "the righteous" in his description of Abel and specifies Zechariah as the **υἱοῦ Βαρακίου**, "son of Berechiah" while Luke omits these (Matt. 23:35, Luke 11:51).
3. In reference to Zechariah, Matthew uses **οὓς ἐφόνευσάτε**, "whom you murdered" while Luke uses **τοῦ ἀπολομένου** "who perished" (Matt. 23:35, Luke 11:51).
4. In describing the relationship between "all these things" and "this generation," Matthew uses **ἡκεῖ**, "shall come" while Luke uses **ἐκζητηθήσεται** "shall be required" (Matt. 13:36, Luke 11:50).
5. In reference to "the house" being left desolate Matthew adds **ἐρημόν**, "desolate" while Luke leaves this out, most likely finding the verb to be sufficient to convey this sense (Matt. 23:38, Luke 13:35).²

Jesus' Use of the Old Testament

Jesus' judgments recorded in Matthew 23:34-39 are steeped with Old Testament themes. His use of the Old Testament is primarily thematic with one explicit quotation from Psalm 118 in verse 39: **Εὐλογημένος ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου**, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!". Although Jesus' use of the Old Testament is mainly of allusion, his use of specific words and phrases (such as **τὴν γενεὰν ταύτην** in verse 36) show direct connection to several specific passages in the Old Testament.

As for allusions, they can be grouped into two main ideas. The first is an allusion to the "righteous blood shed on earth" from Abel to Zechariah and the attributing of the guilt of this and similar crimes in the future to the scribes and Pharisees. Connected to this is the use of the phrase **τὴν γενεὰν ταύτην** which he uses to refer to the rebellious Israelites mentioned throughout the Old Testament. The second is Jesus' lament over Jerusalem: his desire to "gather" her "children" and his judgment upon her "house" being left "desolate." The ideas Jesus draws from can be seen in a number of Old Testament passages, especially those pertaining to the Mosaic covenant, including the prophetic warnings and judgments to enforce it.

² Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28. Word Biblical Commentary*. (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 674-75, 679. This source provides a more complete analysis of the distinctions between the two gospel accounts.

Finally, the entire passage itself seems to be patterned after the prophetic announcements as recorded in the Old Testament. In fact, throughout this entire chapter, Jesus' language resonates with the voice of the prophets. The "woe" statements that Jesus makes to the scribes and Pharisees were commonly spoken by the prophets, either individually or in groupings as they are here. These were essentially statements of displeasure in which judgment on the recipients was implied.³ These statements can be seen in Isaiah 3:9-11; 5:8-22; 10:1,5; 33:1; Jeremiah 13:27; 48:46 and Habakkuk 2:6-20. In fact many of the statements in the woes here are similar to the woes of the Old Testament, dealing with many of the same themes of unrighteousness. Furthermore, many of the woe statements made by the prophets are immediately followed by warnings of judgment (cf. Isa. 5:24-30; 33:1; Hab. 2:16,17).

In addition to the woe statements, other things allude to the fact that this passage is intended to be a prophetic announcement. The idea of bringing a witness against the guilty party who will be judged is present as it was present in many of the prophetic announcements (Matt. 23:31; cf. Isa. 3:9; 30:8; 43:9-12; Jer. 29:23; 42:5; Mic. 1:2; 2:14; 3:5). Moreover, the theme of judgment is central to Jesus' announcement just as it is in those warnings given by the Old Testament prophets. Finally, as will be argued in this study, Jesus' statement ends with the hope of a future restoration, which was also a central part of almost all the messages of the prophets to Israel.

Jesus as Prophet

With the prophetic overtones inherent in this passage, it seems best then to see Jesus speaking in the role of a prophet, thus communicating a message directly from God. Certainly, Jesus' being divine himself allows him to speak with divine authority. However, it is critical to understand Jesus' words as *prophecy* from the triune God, not simply that of Jesus himself. This is important for two main reasons. First, this understanding will clarify a few critical issues in the text where a correct interpretation is necessary for a proper analysis of the passage (primarily 23:34 and 37). Secondly, it will help to clarify the intention of this message for the scribes and Pharisees and for the nation of Israel.

Thus, it is important to understand that here Jesus is functioning in his prophetic role and is carrying out the functions of a prophet. Thus, one can see him predicting the future through his announcement here of coming events. Furthermore, as many prophets of the Old Testament, he is also serving as a "divinely appointed preacher" offering exposition and interpretation on the Mosaic law, which included admonishment, rebuking of sin, warnings of judgment, and a call to repentance.⁴ In this role, it is clear that Jesus is serving as a "prosecuting attorney" bringing a case against the scribes and Pharisees for violations of their covenant with God.

The Judgment on the Scribes and Pharisees

Jesus' Reference to the Old Testament Theme of Bloodguilt

After laying out the hypocrisy with which the scribes and Pharisees condemn their forefathers for their murder of the prophets, Jesus warns them that they will incur the same guilt

³Hagner, 668.

⁴J. Carl Laney., "The Role of the Prophets in God's Case Against Israel," *BSac* 138, no. 552 (1981): 313-24. He cites three roles of a prophet from Hobart Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago, Moody Press, 1968), 26, 315-16.

through their future killing and persecution of the ones God sends them. Not only that, but Jesus tells them that the guilt for these previous murders will also fall on them as a result of their evil actions. They will be held guilty for the crimes they will commit *and* for crimes their "fathers" committed: all the guilt for the murders of God's righteous ones "from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah" will fall on them.

The main Old Testament theme that Jesus is referring to by this incurring of guilt by the Jewish leaders is the issue of bloodguiltiness in the Jewish law. The law stated that when a person was murdered unjustly, there would need to be a price paid for that deed and that price was the life of the murderer himself. In the case of a murder, the law required a blood avenger to carry out the corporal punishment of the murderer (Exo. 21:12, Num. 35:15-34). In a sense, this avenger was not simply carrying out a punishment, but was in many ways carrying out a redemptive act of atoning for the guilt of the crime before God (Num. 35:34). Not only was justice needed before God, but the shedding of blood was also directly connected with the defilement of land: "So you shall not pollute the land in which you are; for blood pollutes the land and no expiation can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it" (Num. 35:33).⁵ Thus, in the law, the crime of murdering the innocent was taken very seriously and the need for atonement for such an act was explicitly set forth.

That Jesus had this law in mind is supported by specific connections between Matthew 23 and passages where this law is clearly set forth, specifically Exodus 21 and Numbers 35. Most apparent is Jesus' repetitive use of αίμα, "blood" that is shed as well as the idea of the *guilt* of this bloodshed, which is described as blood falling "upon" (ἐπι) the scribes and Pharisees. Furthermore, these men are accused of "murder" as those in Exodus and Numbers (Matt. 23:31, 35). The LXX shows this connection in its use of the same word used here in Matthew, φονεύω as a translation of X[ρ in these passages for this act of murder.⁶ Furthermore, Jesus tells the scribes and Pharisees that they μαρτυρεῖτε, "bear witness" against themselves (Matt. 23:31). In Numbers 35:30, the text also discusses the "evidence of witnesses" in the event of a murder (LXX: μαρτυρῶ). Deuteronomy 19 and 21 may be other possible sources for Jesus' ideas and based on other possible references to Deuteronomy may be a more direct link to Matthew 23. Here God reminds Israel before they entered the promised land of the need for them to provide for the atonement of guilt for the shedding of man's blood. In his instructions, he gives commands and makes provisions in relation to this issue, stating his reasoning being "so innocent blood will not be shed in the midst of your land which the LORD your God give you as an inheritance, and bloodguiltiness be upon you" (19:10). Thus, connections between this passage and passages in the Mosaic Law concerning bloodshed is highly tenable. Therefore, Jesus' reference to this would have served to warn the Jewish leaders of the guilt for which they would be held accountable by their future crime of shedding the blood of the innocent.

The Blood of the Prophets

Jesus' specific reference to the murder of the "prophets" of the past as well as the "prophets, wise men, and scribes" being sent by God is significant in that throughout history, God has always taken a special responsibility to atone for the shed blood of his people, especially those specifically

⁵ James E. Priest, "A Comparative Study of Bloodshed in Bible and Talmud," *JETS* 31, no. 2 (1988): 225-60.

⁶ In contrast, τῷ (translated with qanatnow or apokteίνω) is almost always used in reference to the blood avenger's activities of putting the murderer to death (two exceptions are in Numbers 35:27 and 30).

sent to do His will. The foundation of God's commitment to do so can be seen in the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. In fact, this song and its context deserve some attention as there seem to be several parallels between it and the passage in Matthew 23. It also merits attention in relation to this study due to its foundational role in God's covenant with Israel.

The command to write the song was given by God to Moses immediately before his death. It was to be taught to the people of Israel and was to go with them in order to serve as what God called "a witness for Me against the sons of Israel" for when Israel forsook the Lord after entering the promised land (31:19). The idea that the song will be a *witness against* the sons of Israel (לעֵיֶךָ יִבְיֵאֵל) shows the testimonial function this would play in God's judgment. Verses 20-21 repeat this idea with a slightly different wording, "this song will testify before them as a witness" (דְּלִי וְיִבְיֵאֵל וְהָיָה לְעֵיֶךָ).⁷ The song was probably intended to be part of the covenant renewal ceremony of Israel through following generations. Thus, it would serve as a continuing reminder of the covenant and the implications that would follow if the Israelites broke any aspect of this covenant.⁸

The song has been classified by some to be a "lawsuit speech." This is defined by Limburg as a "prophetic speech in which Yahweh and the people are represented as participants in some form of legal process." There are several elements that frequently occur in this type of speech. These include a summons to the heavens and earth to be witnesses (32:1), a description of the historical benefits conferred on Israel by God (32:7-14), the primary accusation against the one who breaks the covenant (32:15-18), the futility of appealing to other gods (32:16-18) and the sentence of judgment (32:21b-25).⁹ This classification emphasizes the role this song played as a witness for God against the sons of Israel.

While the exact structure of the song is debated, most see the same pattern of ideas similar to the outline above. It begins first of all with a reference to the creation (1-3) and then proceeds to a section which contrasts the faithfulness of God with the unfaithfulness of His people (4-6). The next section consists of a description of what God has done for the nation Israel and his goodness toward them (7-14), proceeding to a prediction of their rebellion in spite of God's goodness (15-18). The second half of the song consists of a prediction of the coming of God's judgment on them (19-27), a further description of the people's sins (28-33), and his intention to again show compassion to them (34-38). The song concludes with an affirmation of the certainty with which God will administer justice (39-43).¹⁰ It is in the conclusion of the song that the idea of impending punishment for those guilty of murdering his servants is set forth. He states that he will "avenge the blood of his servants," "render vengeance on His adversaries," and "atone for His land and His people."¹¹ Thus from this

⁷ While the witness certainly includes punishment, this latter shift in wording may hint at it also being a witness to God's subsequent restoration and blessing on them after their punishment. See Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch. Commentary on the Old Testament*, 460.

⁸ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy. NICOT*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 373-74.

⁹ Carl L. Laney, "The Role of the Prophets in God's Case Against Israel," *BSac* 138, no. 552 (1981): 321.

¹⁰ See Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy. NICOT*, 373-89 and Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch. Commentary on the Old Testament*, 464-92 for alternate ways of rendering the structure.

¹¹ It is clear here that God is expressing his intention to see to justice by bringing punishment on all who deserve it, whether within or without Israel, and the context makes clear that some Israelites will incur such judgment (see p. 12 of this study). See also Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch. Commentary on the Old Testament*, 492 for corroboration. Some more recent commentators see this as a reference to God taking vengeance only on the *enemies* of Israel (Craigie, *The*

song God made it clear that he would avenge the blood of his servants, thus serving as a blood avenger for his people. This forewarning would be enough to serve as a witness against anyone who violated this statute.

Thus, God spoke through the prophets throughout the remainder of Old Testament times to remind them of this vow made by God at the time of Moses. When Elisha sends a young man to anoint Jehu as king over Israel, he passes on the word of the Lord to strike the house of Ahab "that I may *avenge the blood of My servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD* at the hand of Jezebel" (2 Kings 9:7). The command was to avenge the death of the prophets whom Jezebel his wife had murdered (1 Kings 18:4). What is important to note in this instance is that God is using the king of Judah to bring vengeance against *Israel*, showing his willingness to issue this judgment even against Israelites. Joel 3 gives another picture of this when God pronounces a judgment on Edom "because of the violence done to the sons of Judah, in whose land they have shed *innocent blood.*" It is at this same time that he also promises the restoration of Judah, "But Judah will be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem for all generations. And I will *avenge their blood which I have not avenged*, for the Lord dwells in Zion" (Joel 3:20-21). Zechariah the son of Jehoida, who was killed by the Jews after warning them to repent, also acknowledges this avenging by the Lord of the blood of his people. In the midst of his murder, he cries out, "May the Lord see and avenge!" (2 Chr. 24:22). The Old Testament makes clear that the murder of God's messengers incurs guilt, and that this guilt deserved punishment by God.¹² Jesus' reference to this theme thus makes it clear that the scribes and Pharisees would incur guilt deserving of punishment carried out by God, for they would be held guilty for the shedding of the blood of God's special servants.

The Blood of Abel to the Blood of Zechariah

Upon referencing the theme of bloodguiltiness, Jesus makes an astounding statement. He tells the Jewish leaders that "the guilt for *all* the righteous blood shed on earth" (*παῖν αἵμα δικαίων ἐκκυνόμενον ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς*) will fall upon them. Thus, they will not only be held accountable for the guilt of those they murder, but in committing those crimes, they would incur guilt for crimes they did not commit.¹³ Jesus elaborates on what he means by "all the righteous blood shed on earth" by making a reference to Abel and Zechariah, two innocent servants of God who were killed unjustly.

The connection with Abel has often raised questions for several reasons. First of all, he was not a prophet nor is he ever spoken of in Scripture as one sent by God. Luke especially highlights this prophetic idea by describing this blood as that "of all the *prophets.*" It seems best to see the use of "prophet" here as perhaps carrying a more general connotation such as one who proclaims God's truth and righteousness rather than the specific office of prophet. Abel served in such a role for his

Book of Deuteronomy. NICOT, 389 and J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), However, the context does not support this idea.

¹² The *persecutions* of God's servants, in addition to their murders, will also require a definite judgment (cf. Psa. 119:84 and 143:12).

¹³ The word here for "shed" is the present participle *ἐκκυνόμενον* which seems to have a gnomic sense, "all the righteous blood which is shed on earth." Furthermore, guilt for future crimes of all those whom they will persecute and kill in the future is also included.

deeds testified of his faith in God and his commitment to righteousness, even without words (Heb. 11:4).¹⁴

Although the context does address the murder of prophets, the emphasis here in Matthew is not on those *prophets* who were killed, but on those *righteous ones* who were killed. Jesus' emphasis on this righteousness is clear. Not only has he just finished rebuking the Jews for their lack of inward "righteousness" (Matt. 23:28), but in this verse he describes the blood that has been shed as "righteous" and Abel as "the righteous Abel." In all three places, the root is the same: *dikaioj*.¹⁵ As Hebrews 11:4 states, Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain and through that act of faith, "he obtained the testimony that he was righteous." Furthermore, it is apparent that Abel was murdered because of his righteousness. Cain, filled with jealousy toward Abel because he and his offering were regarded by God, while he and his own offering were not, killed Abel. So, Abel then was killed not just because of Cain's sin, but more directly because of *his own righteousness*. The apostle John states this clearly in his own epistle: "...Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous (1 John 3:12-13)." Thus, Abel's death was the murder of an innocent one who honored God by his faith by one who proved himself to be evil by his crime.

Another problem concerning Abel is that neither he nor Cain were technically part of the nation of Israel. Thus, Jesus was issuing guilt upon the Jewish leaders for murders done by non-Israelites. Jesus' reference to "*all*" (*pan*) innocent blood shed on earth seems also to imply bloodshed by those outside the nation of Israel. This is significant to note that the scribes and Pharisees are not only held accountable for bloodshed by those of their own nation, but they are held accountable for all the bloodshed of the innocent.

Thus, Jesus' reference to Abel is quite significant. First, his being "righteous" points to the crime of the shedding of *innocent* blood, the guilt of which is being laid upon the Jewish leaders. Secondly, his being the *first* of God's righteous ones killed unjustly points to the scope of the guilt for which the scribes and Pharisees would be held accountable, that since the beginning of creation. Third, his being a non-Israelite killed by a non-Israelite points to the fact that the guilt is not only that of the murders committed by the nation Israel but that of those murders committed by the entire race of mankind. Finally, the connection of this murder to the Jewish leaders also connects them to the murderer, Cain, one who had become a symbol for a murderer and the evil behind his actions.

As for Zechariah, which Zechariah Jesus was referring to in making this statement has been the subject of much debate. In Matthew, he is specified as the "son of Berechiah." Three primary options exist. One is that Jesus was referring to Zechariah who is designated in Zechariah 1:1 as the son of Berechiah. However, nowhere does scripture record this Zechariah as having been murdered by the Israelites on the temple grounds. The second option is that Jesus is referring to Zechariah, son of Jehoiada the priest, who is written of as being murdered in the court of the temple (2 Chr. 24:20-22). Some arrive at this last option based on commonalities between the context of this judgment in Matthew and the account of his death. This view held by the majority of commentators, would lead to Jesus' reference to blood shed from "Abel to Zechariah" being a reference not necessarily

¹⁴ Genesis 4:8 also alludes to a conversation that took place between Cain and Abel seemingly just prior to Cain's crime. Abel could certainly have exhorted Cain to righteousness in this conversation, thus serving as a messenger of God to warn Cain to repent. It may indeed have been this exhortation that may have added to the provocation of Cain to murder his brother. Albeit an argument from silence, in this way, Abel may indeed have served as a prophet to Cain.

¹⁵ The best translation would probably render "righteous blood" as "innocent blood." However, the repetition of this word may add to the emphasis on righteousness here.

chronological according to *time*, but according to the Old Testament *text*. Thus, *υἱὸν Βαρακίου* may be a later addition to the text, although there are no textual variants or other evidence of such an addition.¹⁶ Another option is that Jesus is referring to someone in his lineage other than his immediate paternal father.¹⁷ However, others have disputed the theory on Chronicles being the last book of the older form of the Old Testament canon. Those who argue this opt for the first option or a third option that Jesus is referring to another Zechariah, as Berechiah was a common name in Judaism.¹⁸

What usually tips the scales in favor of this being the son of Jehoida is the striking similarities in context between this account and Jesus' words in Matthew with the reference to the stoning taking place in the house of the Lord and Zechariah's cry for God to avenge his blood. Furthermore, the record of Zechariah's death became the symbol for the way Israel treated the prophets. In fact, Edersheim states that there was a Jewish legend that Zechariah's blood "did not dry up those two centuries and a half, but still bubbled on the pavement, when Nebuzar-adan entered the Temple and at last avenged it."¹⁹ It is likely, then, in light of the similarities in context and the way this Zechariah's death was thought of in Jewish tradition, that Jesus was intending to make reference to this prophet in stating that his blood would fall on them.²⁰ This may also explain his description of

¹⁶ Hagner, 677. Among those who hold this view are John Lightfoot, F. F. Bruce and R. Beckwith (see R. Laird Harris, "Chronicles and the Canon in New Testament Times," *JETS* 33, no. 1 (1990): 75, 78-9). If indeed Chronicles was the last book of the Old Testament canon, an explanation for such a scribal addition is defensible. Luke does not have this phrase in his account. It would make sense that after the Hebrew canon was organized into its present form, this addition could have been inserted into the text by a scribe who, in trying to clarify the text, reasoned that it must have been the son of Berechiah based on the current order.

¹⁷ Alfred Edersheim. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1993), 759.

¹⁸ Harris, 75-84 and J. Barton Payne, "Zachariah Who Perished," *Grace Journal* 8 (1967): 33-35. See also Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 337-38. Harris' studies show that evidence from Jewish tradition is mixed on whether Chronicles was the last book of a fixed canon. He supports Josephus' classification of the books that does not leave Chronicles at the end, along with evidence from the general Septuagintal tradition which is in harmony with this notion. Furthermore, he points out that textual evidence at the end of Chronicles shows a connection with the beginning of Ezra-Nehemiah which works against this previous argument (Harris, 75-84). Payne argues by some of the same reasoning. He holds to this being Zechariah the minor prophet based on Luke's designation of him as a "prophet," Jesus' statement being seemingly chronological in reference to time, and to evidence from Jewish tradition, including a Targum on Lamentations 20 which identifies Zechariah the minor prophet as "the priest and prophet slain in the "miqdash" (sanctuary) of Yahweh" (Payne, 33-35). Hagner discounts this last bit of evidence, as a conflation by the Rabbis of Zechariah the minor prophet with Zechariah, son of Jehoida (Hagner, 677). One option stated by Josephus is that this is in reference to a Zechariah who was killed during the last siege of Jerusalem in 69 AD Edersheim refutes this, 759.

¹⁹ Edersheim, 759. He cites Sanh. 96b; Bitt. 57b; the Midrash on Ecc. 3:16 and 10:4 and on Lam. 2:2 and 4:14.

²⁰ If, however, Jesus was referring to the other Zechariah, he may have intended to make a reference to the context of the book of this prophet. In the book, immediately after Zechariah is introduced as the "son of Berechiah," God tells Zechariah to appeal to the Israelites to repent and return to God and not to be like their "fathers" who rejected the message of the prophets and incurred God's judgment. This is similar to Jesus' statement against the scribes and Pharisees who have been just like their "fathers" and thus are incurring judgment. Furthermore, the many Messianic allusions in Zechariah may also support such a connection. While it is not clear whether by making a reference to Zechariah, Jesus was intending to bring to mind Zechariah's *message* as well, it is a possibility that should be taken into account. Robert H. Gundry also makes a similar connection in relation to the Messianic character of the book in his commentary on Matthew, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 471. Gundry also takes a unique approach to this issue, stating that Matthew "conflates" the two Zechariahs "for the literary-

him being killed "between the temple and the altar" having the intention of pointing out which Zechariah he was indicating.

There may be other reasons Jesus pointed out where Zechariah was killed. One is that by using this description, he intended to allude to his righteousness just as he had done with Abel. Zechariah being of a priestly line may have been performing some priestly duties in the temple or some other act of worship, both signifying his righteousness. A second possibility is that he intended to point out the horrific unrighteousness of those who killed him. That a prophet sent from God would be killed in the courtyard of the temple shows how far the Jews had strayed from God. Moreover, as Numbers 35:34 points out, when a murder takes place in a certain place, it "pollutes the land." For the Israelites, this was a serious crime against God, for as he states in verse 34, "And you shall not defile the land in which you live, *in the midst of which I dwell*; for I the LORD am dwelling in the midst of Israel." The connection between the land and the murder is clear, which makes the killing of God's righteous at God's dwelling place, even more detestable and deserving of punishment.

More importantly, however, is that the killing of Zechariah is attributed to the scribes and Pharisees, for he describes him as one whom "you murdered" (*efoneusate*). Not only has he already stated that they would be held responsible for all those who were killed between Abel and Zechariah, but now he accuses them of one of the murders! Clearly, then, just as he did in verses 31-32 when he characterizes them as "sons" of those men, he is joining them together corporately with those in the past who turned against God, disobeyed his commandments, and killed those whom he sent to them. Thus, they will join with those people in judgment.

The Judgment on "This Generation"

What about the scribes and Pharisees warrants such judgment? Certainly, Jesus makes reference to the unrighteousness of those he is addressing throughout the woe statements and afterward. In fact, his calling them "serpents" and a "brood of vipers" points out their evil character and is clearly a reference to their partnership with Satan, the serpent of Genesis 3 and thus partakers of his evil character (cf. Matt. 3:7, 12:34). Their evil character will inevitably lead to their incurring a severe judgment, the judgment Jesus lays out as the "sentence of hell."²¹ First, however, they will take part in the murder of those whom God sends to them and as a result, will incur the guilt of these and all the innocent ones of God who have been murdered unjustly. Their incurring of this guilt plays a significant role in their being sentenced to hell.

This is not the only time, however, that Jesus' has mentioned such a judgment for this group of people. In Matthew 12:38-45, Jesus refers to the scribes and Pharisees as an "evil and adulterous generation" and uses two Old Testament illustrations to shed light on the judgment of the Pharisees. Jesus explains that at the judgment, the men of Ninevah and the Queen of Sheba will condemn this "generation." He places them in the role of those who will condemn the scribes and Pharisees because the former repented and turned to God upon the testimony of Jonah and the latter recognized the wisdom of God in Solomon. The people whom the scribes and Pharisees represent will be

theological purpose of correlating the betrayal of Jesus' innocent blood, which fulfilled the prediction by Zechariah the son of Barachiah, with the shedding of the righteous blood of OT martyrs, which culminated in the murder of Zechariah the son of Jehoida."

²¹ For an analysis of *geenna*, "hell" referring to the final punishment place for the wicked, see Hans Scharen, "Gehenna in the Synoptics," *BSac* 149, no. 596 (1992): 454-470.

condemned because they failed to recognize the thing that is greater than Jonah and Solomon, namely Christ as the Messiah.

It is important to note that not only did the Jewish leaders fail to recognize Christ as Messiah and heeding his message, but they went as far as to become his murderers. Clearly, if Jesus is speaking in the role of a prophet here in Matthew 23, the "prophets and wise men and scribes" that are being sent are those sent not simply by Jesus but by God Himself and thus would include Jesus the Messiah. Clearly, the most significant murder the Jewish leaders will commit is that of the Messiah (cf. Acts 7:52,53). Furthermore, their refusal to repent and accept the atonement of Jesus' blood for their guilt results in their being held accountable for their guilt and headed for judgment (cf. Heb 9:22; 12:24).

Jesus concludes this section by ensuring that this judgment will occur with an important statement: "all these things shall come upon this generation." It seems best to understand "all these things" (*tauta panta*) being in reference to what Jesus has just previously stated would come upon these people—their persecution and murder of the prophets, wise men, and scribes he sends and therefore, the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, and the resultant judgment of hell. Jesus is ensuring that this judgment will come upon them for their guilt.²²

It is in relation to this judgment then that Jesus' reference to *thn genean tauthn*, "this generation" should be understood. This phrase shows a clear connection to the Old Testament, and specifically to Deuteronomy 32, thus providing another connection to the song of Moses. As previously mentioned, in Matthew 12:39, Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees "an evil and adulterous generation" (*genea. ponhra. kai. micalij*). It is essential to remember the context of this title being in reference to the final judgment. As Jesus has given this title to the scribes and Pharisees in other contexts, it is likely that his reference to *thn genean tauthn*, "this generation" is a shortened phrase for this title. Here again, Jesus refers to "this generation" as the one upon whom will come "all these things." We see this *genea*, clearly in two places in Moses' song. The first place is in verse 5: "They have acted corruptly toward Him, they are not His children, because of their defect; but are a *perverse and crooked generation*." It is clear in the context of the song that these people who he is saying are "not his children" are those who have forsaken God's commandments and have gone to serve other gods. In the immediate context, this verse follows an ascription in verse 4 to God of his justice, faithfulness, and righteousness: "The Rock! His work is perfect, for all his ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He." Here a contrast is set forth between the "perverse" (*vQFI*) and "crooked" (*lTtp*) generation and God who is "righteous" (*qyDc*) and "upright" (*rvy*).

This contrast in fact sets the stage for the rest of the song. A perverse and crooked generation has forsaken a righteous and upright God. Yet, besides being upright and righteous, he is also described as a just God. A justice, which, in fact, requires him to "avenge the blood of his servants," "render vengeance on his adversaries," and "atone for his land and his people" (32:43). This justice results in judgment which is seen in the second instance where this *genea*, in the song is mentioned:

You neglected the Rock who begot you, and forgot the God who gave you birth. The LORD saw this and spurned them because of the provocation of His sons and daughters. Then He said, 'I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be; for they are a *perverse generation*, sons in whom is no faithfulness.' (Deut. 32:18-20)

²² Luke uses the term *ekzhthqsetai* "it shall be charged" instead of *hpei...epi*. "shall come upon."

One of the intriguing things in this song is the interplay between God's calling this generation his "children" or "sons" and yet also stating that they are not *truly* his children. Here, he states that he "gave them birth" and that they are "sons." Verse 36 also makes reference to God being their "Father who has bought" them. Yet in verse 5 he denied their right to be his children and in verse 19 he seems to separate another class of "sons and daughters" from them. Clearly, as this song is referring to unfaithful Israelites, God is pointing to the fact that those of this "generation" *were* sons but that because of their unfaithfulness, God has disowned them as such. They are separate from a group of people whom he describes as "His children" and his "sons and daughters," the children of his who have remained faithful. That is why this song is described by God to be a witness *against* the "sons of Israel." Some will be rejected for their unfaithfulness, becoming his adversaries and the ones held guilty at the final judgment.

So this connection to the song of Moses in relation to the judgment on the scribes and Pharisees further sheds light on "this generation" to whom Jesus is referring. Clearly, it is not the Jewish nation as a whole. As the song of Moses shows, God distinguishes the rebellious Israelites from the faithful Israelites and the nation as a whole. The rebellious Israelites are considered the "perverse generation." Although the nation as a whole also suffered judgment because of the wicked Israelites, God does not issue the *same* judgment on these two groups. In the Old Testament, a distinction is made, and here in Matthew, Jesus makes a distinction as well. The judgment on 'this generation' is the judgment of Gehenna, which is certainly not the judgment given to the Jewish nation as a whole.

This generation Jesus is referring to also does not seem to be just the generation of Jews living at the present time of the Messiah as France and others assert.²³ Nelson, who has studied this word in both Old and New Testament contexts argues for *genea*, also including the meaning, "kind of people" who in Matthew are "characterized...as unbelieving and headed toward eschatological judgment." In his article, he sights several passages in Scripture which support this view. While his argument is focused mainly on the use of *genea*, in Matthew 24:34, his study also sheds light on the meaning of *genea*, here. His argument is that in Matthew 24:34, *genea*, means "that type of consummately evil and unbelieving people who deceive and persecute the disciples of Christ until the time of *parousia*, when the true followers of Christ are vindicated and this generation passes away in judgment." His reference to Old Testament passages is especially important, for he makes reference to the Song of Moses and Moses' description of the perverse "generation." Furthermore, he cites Psalm 12:7 in which the same phrase for *genea*, is used in the LXX as it is used here in Matthew 23: th| *genea*| tauth| (**hZk; rAD**). The verse reads "Thou, O LORD, wilt keep them; Thou wilt preserve him from *this generation* forever." As Nelson points out, this generation in context is described as wicked and here when David states that God will save him from "this generation," he is referring to this type of people.²⁴ Furthermore, the psalm seems to be stating a general, timeless principle that God would preserve godly men from "this generation" forever. Thus, it would be awkward for David to be referring only to those who lived during the time he lived. Thus, Nelson's understanding of Matthew 23:36 is similar to that set forth here:

...the scribes and Pharisees...comprise a corporate kind of evil generation...with their fathers who killed the prophets...and with those who would murder Jesus' messengers

²³ R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1998), 232.

²⁴ Neil D. Nelson, "'This Generation' in Matt 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective," *JETS* 38, no. 3 (1995): 374. See this article for a fuller treatment of this issue.

until the time of the parousia....Those who comprise "this generation" are hypocritical,...self-exalting,...spiritually blind,...lawless,...foolish,...and they are sentenced to hell....²⁵

Nelson's argument is indeed convincing on the use of *genea*, throughout Matthew, and the context surrounding the text in Matthew 23 certainly supports this understanding. Furthermore, there are three other instances in the Old Testament that use the word *genea*, in this manner. Some describe the "generation" with adjectives including "the righteous generation" which is contrasted with wicked men in Psalm 14:5, "the generation of those who seek Him" who are the ones "who may stand in His holy place" in Psalm 24:6, and "the generation of the upright" in Psalm 112:2. Such use of adjectival expressions which seem to qualify what kind of "generation" is referred to seems to support this rendering of *genea*. Furthermore, these all seem to be general, timeless principles that are applied through each time period. Some are considered in that time period to be the "righteous" generation and others, therefore, comprise what could be considered the "wicked" generation..²⁶

Thus, there is much evidence to support th~~e~~ *genea* ~~taut~~ referring to a wicked *kind* of people and not the Jews living at that time period. In summary, at least four major factors work against the latter interpretation. First, the use of the word *genea*, throughout Scripture shows that it does not always mean a group of people living at a specific time in history, but can refer to a *kind* of people. Secondly, Old Testament connections with Matthew 23:36 support the latter understanding as the scribes and Pharisees are connected to rebellious Israelites as the same *genea*, he is sentencing to hell. Third, other factors in the context of this passage seem to imply the joining of the scribes and Pharisees with these previous unfaithful Israelites into one group, one *genea*, that will bear both guilt and punishment. Fourth, the incurring of guilt is not just for the killing of Jesus, but also for the killing and persecution of all the others whom God will send. Thus, it would not only be the killing of Jesus that would cause all this bloodguilt to be laid upon "this generation" but also the killing of his other messengers, probably until the end of time. Thus, he does not seem to be pointing *only* to the especially hideous crime of crucifying the Messiah done by the Jews at that time, but the killing of all his servants...even those killed after the Jews of that time period died. Furthermore, that God would lay all the bloodguiltiness of millions of murders only on one group of people who happened to live at a bad time for being rebellious hardly seems consistent with his justice.

Thus the best way of understanding "this generation" in this context is as a kind of people: rebellious and unregenerate Israelites. Through the use of this word, Jesus is referring to all the wicked individual Israelites of *all* time, those before the Messiah and those after. These individuals are grouped together *corporately* in guilt and in judgment. In this way, the latter Israelites would "fill up the measure" of the guilt of their fathers and then become one with them in their guilt and in their

²⁵ Nelson, 374-376.

²⁶ This meaning has been recognized by several other commentators. R. D. Culver considers *genea*, to be a Hebraism and has what he considers a "metaphorical sense." He points to the previously mentioned passages in Psalms as well as other passages which support this interpretation (Prov. 30:11-14; Jer. 2:31; 7:29). See R. D. Culver, "dor," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. L. Harris et al. (Chicago: Moody), 1.187. ?Also, W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison also describe this term being in reference not to "chronological duration but to character, and it is pejorative." See W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew*. ICC (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1991), 2.260-261. See also R. H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 612-613; R. Stein, *Luke* (Nashville: Holman, 1993), 527 and L. Sabourin, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Rome: St. Paul Publications, 1982), 827-828.

corporate sentence to hell. Thus, the guilt for the rejection and murder of Jesus and the gospel messengers would also be laid upon the rebellious Jews of the past. Therefore, Jesus' words ring true when he says "*all these things* shall come upon this generation." This generation is in essence the same generation that God warned Israel about before they even entered the promised land. It would be the portion of Israelites who would forsake God and his commandments, persecute and murder his prophets and righteous ones, crucify his Messiah, reject his salvation and be condemned for their guilt to eternal punishment.

The Lament Over Jerusalem

Jerusalem and Her Children

After issuing his judgment on the unfaithful Israelites represented by the scribes and Pharisees, he then turns to another recipient of judgment: Jerusalem and her children. As previously mentioned, Luke's separation of this passage from the one beforehand supports this being a separate judgment than that on the scribes and Pharisees. Furthermore, the text itself shows a clear shift in thought as Jesus addresses a different group of people with the vocative, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem." Clearly, Jesus is making reference to the city of Jerusalem whom he now turns to address.

Clearly, this passage shows typological correspondences with several places in the Old Testament where the prophets announce coming judgment on Jerusalem. For example, Jeremiah speaks of judgment coming against the city of Jerusalem for the evil in her midst (Jer. 4:10ff; 6:8ff; 13:27; 15:5ff; 19:15ff). Isaiah also speaks of the city of Jerusalem in relation to judgment, although in Isaiah, the restoration and redemption of Jerusalem is the more common theme (Isa. 1:21ff; 10:11; 44:26-28; 52:9). Other prophets also prophesied of judgment against Jerusalem (cf. Eze. 16:1ff.). These verses point to the judgment on the city itself, brought on due to the evil actions of its inhabitants.

Jesus' reason for the judgment against Jerusalem is made clear by his characterization of her being the one "who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her." Obviously, then, the specific sin in the midst of Jerusalem for which she will be judged is the sin committed by the wicked generation Jesus spoke of earlier in his judgment against the scribes and Pharisees. The issue here is of their persecution of God's servants and the bloodguiltiness of innocent blood shed in the midst of Jerusalem. This may be a reference to the idea previously mentioned that the shedding of innocent blood pollutes the land, and thus the place where the blood is shed becomes subject to judgment. Isaiah 4:4 makes reference to this when God promises redemption for the city after he has "purged the bloodshed of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning." Jewish tradition also supports this connection between the shedding of innocent blood and judgment on cities and nations. The crime of bloodshed was viewed in Judaism as a cause for the bringing down of dynasties, exile of the nation, and the temple's destruction. Rabbinic writings quote: "Through the crime of bloodshed the Temple was destroyed and the Shechinah departed from Israel" and "Why was the first Sanctuary destroyed? Because of three things which prevailed there: idolatry, immorality, bloodshed."²⁷

In addition, as the Old Testament prophets clearly show, other evils committed in the city also caused judgment to come against her. For example, Jeremiah states the reasoning for the destruction of Jerusalem being due to the fact that Israel did not heed God's words (Jer. 19:15) and "because they [the Israelites] forsook the covenant of the LORD their God and bowed down to other

²⁷ Priest, 147. Quotations are cited from b. Šabb. 33a and Yoma 9b respectively.

gods and served them" (Jer. 22:8). Thus, Jerusalem suffered punishment not only for innocent blood that was shed in her, but also due to the abandonment of God and his commands by her inhabitants.

These passages reveal three kinds of judgment in reference to Israel. One is on the wicked, rebellious Israelites, one is on Jerusalem the city, and the other on Israel as a nation. Here in Matthew, Jesus shows a similar pattern, although he joins the last two together more specifically. First, he gives judgment on the rebellious Israelites, the scribes and Pharisees, then he turns to the city of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel ("her children"). The prophecy of Isaiah 1 concerning the judgment on Judah and Jerusalem shows such a pattern of judgment against Judah. First, God warns of coming judgment on the *individuals* who turn away from God and secondly, he proclaims judgment on the city of Jerusalem itself:

How the faithful city has become a harlot, she who was once full of justice! Righteousness once lodged in her, but now *murderers*...your rulers are rebels and companions of thieves....Therefore the Lord God of hosts, The Mighty One of Israel declares, "Ah, *I will be relieved of My adversaries, and avenge Myself on My foes. "I will also turn My hand against you,* and will smelt away your dross as with lye, and will remove all your alloy. "Then I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning; after that you will be called the city of righteousness, a faithful city." Zion will be redeemed with justice, and her repentant ones with righteousness. But transgressors and sinners will be crushed together, and those who forsake the LORD shall come to an end. (1:21,23a, 24-28).

It is probable, based on the context here that when God speaks of his adversaries and foes, that he is referring to the murderers and rulers in the city who are committing iniquity against God, those who he describes in verse 28 as transgressors and sinners. Apparently, this is a reference to the song of Moses, for God says he will come against his adversaries and avenge himself on his foes, just as he warned the Israelites in Deuteronomy 32:43. Then God goes on to give an *additional* judgment, that on the city: "I will also turn my hand against you...." Here the "you" is a feminine singular object which corresponds to "the faithful city" (~~hnhk h'raj~~) in verse 21. Here, it is clear that God while God has one kind of punishment for the transgressors and sinners of Jerusalem, he has another kind of punishment for the city, which is also judged for the crimes of its inhabitants. Here in Isaiah, it is also important to note that God promises a redemption for the city after its judgment.

As to the identity of Jerusalem's children, it likely refers to the nation Israel. Jerusalem, being the capital of Israel, is often used symbolically for the nation.²⁸ Thus, it would make sense that the reference to her children is more than just the literal inhabitants of the city, but the nation Israel as a whole. Many times throughout the Old and New Testaments, Jerusalem is personified as a woman with children. Isaiah 60:4 and 60:9 speak of Jerusalem's "sons" and "daughters" who will gather together and come to Jerusalem. Isaiah 6:7ff also speaks of Jerusalem as a nursing mother of her children (cf. Also Lam. 1, Luke 19:44, Gal. 4:25). The apocryphal book of Baruch also uses this picture, as Jerusalem personified states: "I have been left desolate through the sins of my children" (4:12). Based on the centrality of the city in the identity of Israel, and the context of this statement in Matthew, it seems best to understand the "children" being a reference to the nation of Israel.

Jesus' address of Jerusalem shows his love and care for the city and her "children." The repetition of the name of Jerusalem emphasizes the compassion that God had for his city and the nation it represents.²⁹ It presents a striking contrast with the previous passage where he called the

²⁸ William Hendrickson, *Matthew. New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973): 839.

²⁹ Dwight D. Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981): 394.

objects of his judgment a "brood of vipers." Jesus expresses the long-felt desire he has had to gather her children "the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings." Clearly, this is an illustration which Jesus, speaking prophetically, is using to express God's desire to offer security to Jerusalem and her children. This desire voiced by Jesus is not simply the desire of Jesus himself during his time on earth, but it is the desire of God throughout the history of Israel. The term here for how often, *posakij* is used to express an iterative, continual action stressing the number of times that God wished to provide this security throughout the history of Israel.

This image Jesus used is clearly a reference to domestic security and aspects of this illustration were used in the Old Testament of God's act of providing security for his people. In Psalm 91, a psalm that focuses on God's faithfulness to protect his people, the psalmist states that "under His wings you may seek refuge." Deuteronomy 32:11 also describes God's relationship to his people with a similar illustration: "Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, That hovers over its young, He spread His wings and caught them, He carried them on His pinions." (32:11).³⁰ Through this picture Jesus expresses God's love and care for the city and her children.

Although the primary emphasis here is on the security that God desired to offer to Israel, Jesus' reference to "gathering" (*episunagw*) may hold some significance as it is related to the promise God made to Israel through Moses of his "gathering" them back to their land. After God tells of the coming judgment for Israel's disobedience as recorded in Deuteronomy 32 (their scattering among the nations), God tells them that upon their repentance, "the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will *gather* you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you" (30:3).³¹ Thus, the latter prophets spoke often of this ingathering of the Jews, awaiting the promise that God had made to them through Moses. We see these prophetic announcements primarily in Isaiah (11:12; 43:5-7; 49:5), Jeremiah (23:3) and Ezekial (11:17; 28:25; 34:13; 38:8; 39:27). This idea is also carried through the Psalms (106:47; 147:2) and other places in the Old Testament (cf. 1 Chr. 16:35). Oftentimes, this idea of gathering is concurrent with the idea of security offered to Israel. For example, Ezekial 39:27 speaks of a time when God will gather the house of Israel so that they may live "securely" on their land.

Besides the gathering spoken of in Jeremiah 23:3, this passage provides several other interesting parallels to the passage in Matthew 23. God issues a "woe" to the "shepherds" who are driving his "sheep" away from him. He then warns them that he will attend to them for their evil deeds.³² Then he states that he will gather the "remnant" of his flock. It is in this context that Jeremiah prophecies of the "righteous Branch" and that "in His days, Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely." Clearly, the Jews were awaiting the coming of the Messiah, where Israel would have the security that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 23:37. What many of them didn't realize was what Jesus made clear in 23:35, that the "shepherds" of Israel would be punished for their evil deeds.

These passages show plainly the expectation the Jews had of a future "gathering." That this was the gathering that Jesus was referring to is likely, especially with Jesus' prior reference to Moses' instructions to the Israelites in Deuteronomy where this promise is first set forth. In the passage in

³⁰ The similarities between the LXX text of this and Matthew 23 are limited to *toij neossoij autou* for "his young" and *taj pterugaj autou* for "his wings."

³¹ The LXX renders the Hebrew with the related form *sunagw* as it does in many other places in the Old Testament.

³² This "woe" is translated with *ouái*, the same word used in the series of woes on the Pharisees in Matthew 23.

Matthew, he repeats *episunagw* twice in the verse, and furthermore, the idea of "gathering" is not found together with any other Old Testament reference where God uses the picture of a bird, its young, or its wings to describe his being a refuge for the nation. If his intent was only to speak of the security he had longed to give Jerusalem's children, he probably would not have used a term that would bring so quickly to mind the Israelites' hope of one day being gathered together from among the nations. Furthermore, the Old Testament passages referring to this future act have further parallels to the ideas that Jesus lays before the Pharisees in this passage.

However, in spite of God's wishing, Jesus implies that this has not yet been accomplished because Israel was "unwilling."³³ This is clearly a reference to Israel's stubborn Spirit as manifested many times throughout the Old Testament in their rebellious attitude towards God. They were often unwilling to trust in God (Deut. 1:26, Isa. 30:15), walk in his ways (Isa. 42:24) and listen to God (Eze. 3:7, 20:8). Because of their obstinate Spirit, they were unwilling to allow God to offer them the security He so often desired to give them. Clearly, this spirit of Israel was yet another reason for their coming judgment and was certainly the primary factor leading to their killing of the Messiah and those who spread His message.

The Desolation of "Your House"

The judgment on Israel is made clear by Jesus' words: "your house shall be left to you desolate!" Jesus' continuing use of second plural pronouns (*uimih* and *uimwh*) shows a connection to his reference to the Israelites' unwillingness and that this is a judgment on both the city and the nation. There are four main possibilities often set forth as to the content of this statement. One is that Jesus is referring to the "house" of David from which the Jews were awaiting their coming King. The second is that Jesus is referring to the temple and prophesying about the coming destruction of the temple in 70 AD Third, Jesus may have been referring to the destruction of the city itself. Finally, it may be a reference to the nation as a whole.³⁴

In the Old Testament, the bringing of desolation was often the bringing of punishment by God. In Leviticus 26, one can see the warnings by God against the Israelites' disobedience including the bringing of "desolation" (*erhmj*) on their sanctuaries, their cities, and their land. It also was accompanied by the scattering of the Israelites out of their land and into other nations. This desolation did indeed happen to the Israelites when they did not follow after God as Jerusalem is laid *erhmj* (Neh. 2:17). Isaiah 1:7 also speaks of the desolation that was to come to Jerusalem, here the land of Israel is described as *erhmj* but the city as well is included in such. Psalm 69, a psalm that Jesus referred to many times as a clear reference to himself is another place where desolation is mentioned. It is written from the perspective of one suffering and in it are pleas for justice to come on that person's adversaries including "may their camp be desolate" (25). There is not a direct parallel between the Greek texts of this nor between the Masoretic Text and Jesus' statement. The only common word is that for "desolate" (a form of *erhmow* or *erhmj*). However, the idea is consistent with that of Matthew, in that desolation is a judgment against those who kill the suffering one.³⁵

³³ It is clear that the referent here is to both Jerusalem and her children by the use of the second person *plural* verb *huelhsate*

³⁴ Pentecost, 394.

³⁵ This verse was quoted in Peter's speech in Acts 1:20 in reference to Judas Iscariot pertaining to his betrayal of Jesus.

It is best in light of the context of this passage and the gospels overall to see this house that Jesus is referring to as the temple in Jerusalem. In the immediate context, the strong connection between verses 37 and 39 (linked with *gar*) seem to imply that the desolation of the "house" will be closely connected with the "seeing" of God (*me idete*). Thus, it seems to make the most sense for Jesus to be referring to the desolation of what Jews considered the dwelling of God. God's calling it "your" house instead of "my" house as he usually refers to the temple is most likely a reference to the fact that he is no longer dwelling there. Other Old Testament references support this house being the temple as well. In Isaiah 5 a judgment by Isaiah is written, that "many houses shall become desolate, *great* and fine ones, without occupants." In the context, the judgment is related to man's houses, but it shows that the desolation of a house was thought of as including the removal of its occupants. If this is true for the temple in Matthew 23 as well, part of the judgment would have included the absence of God's dwelling in the temple, now that Christ had come. There are several other passages that speak of the temple being desolate also. Haggai 1:4 (*o` de. oikoj outoj exrhmwntai*) and 1:9 (*o` oikoj mou, estin erhmj*) both refer to the temple becoming "desolate." Also, Ezekiel 8:6 is a reference to the desolation (*erhmj*) of the temple.

Two passages in Jeremiah seem to form a close parallel with the judgment by Jesus in Matthew 23. The first (Jeremiah 22:1-9) is where Jeremiah prophesies to the king of Judah that if they do not obey the commands of the Lord including "do not shed blood in this place" then "this house will become a desolation" (*eij erhmwsin estai o` oikoj outoj*). Here, Jeremiah seems to be making reference to the king's palace.³⁶ The second parallel can be found in Jeremiah 26:6. God commands Jeremiah to stand in the court of the temple and warn the Israelites of their impending judgment if they do not turn back to God: "If you will not listen to the words of My servants the prophets, whom I have been sending to you again and again, but you have not listened; then I will make *this house* like Shiloh, and this city I will make a curse to all the nations of the earth."³⁷

Thus, here the "house" is a reference to the temple. As with the many other prophets, the people began plotting to kill Jeremiah for his pronouncement of judgment against the temple and the city. Jeremiah escapes with the following warning: "Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood on yourselves, and on this city, and on its inhabitants; for truly the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing." Consequently, We see the fulfillment of both of these prophecies in Jeremiah 39:8 and 52:13 where the house of the LORD, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem are destroyed by fire.

It seems likely, then, in light of the greater context, that these passages, especially the latter concerning the attempted murder of one of his prophets may have been in the mind of Jesus as he made his statement. Jesus, as well, issues a judgment on Jerusalem and upon the temple due to the murders of more of God's sent ones that the Jews will commit. This idea connects back to the bloodguiltiness of the Jews. The shedding of blood in Jerusalem, as Moses warned previously in Deuteronomy, "defiles the land." Jeremiah confirms this by stating that the murder of him would bring "innocent blood... on this city." In Ezekiel's prophecy about the destruction of the Jerusalem

³⁶ The judgment was spoken in the palace of the King. Some think that the reference may have been to the temple, since the prophecy was given by God to Jeremiah in the temple. See Peter C. Craigie, *Jeremiah 1-25. Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 294-97.

³⁷ The mention of Shiloh is a reference to Jeremiah 7:12. For the temple to be made like Shiloh involves three things: removal of cultic implements, delegitimation or demolition of the sanctuary, and the withdrawal of God's name. See Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise and Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52. Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 16.

during the Babylonian captivity, the role of bloodshed is mentioned several times in relation to Jerusalem's destruction. He describes the "rulers of Israel" and "slandering men" being in Jerusalem "for the purpose of shedding blood" (Eze. 22:6,9) and calls Jerusalem "the bloody city" (Eze. 24:6,9). Thus, the shedding of blood by the wicked individuals in Jerusalem caused a judgment to be placed on the city as well.

Thus, the judgment of Jesus on Jerusalem is warranted due to the killing of himself (and his sent apostles) that will be done by the Jews there. There will need to be judgment not only on the murderers themselves, but also on the city of Jerusalem where the murders take place (cf. 19:13, 21:7-9). This also is supported by Jesus' expressed need to be killed in Jerusalem in Luke 13:33, the verse immediately preceding this parallel passage so that judgment would come against the city. Jerusalem would have to suffer punishment for the killing of another of God's messengers, the Messiah himself.³⁸

If indeed Jesus had these passages in mind, it would lend further weight to the idea that the "house" Jesus is speaking of is the temple and that its desolation would be part of the judgment against Jerusalem and the Jews. The destruction of the temple would indeed inflict punishment on the city itself, as the temple was what gave ultimate significance to the city. The Old Testament does not primarily describe the house of Israel or Judah as nations becoming desolate (*erhmj*). Instead, the direct punishment for the "house of Israel" and the "house of Judah" is usually exile, and only indirectly the desolation of their houses, cities, and land. Neither are there strong connections which would point to this desolation being in reference to the house of David. Also, the city itself is not called a "house" and thus it seems Jesus is being more specific than just making a reference to the desolation of the city. Thus, the evidence overwhelmingly supports the "house" Jesus is referring to being the temple in Jerusalem.

Furthermore, the desolation spoken of quite likely contains some spiritual significance as well. Not only was the temple at the very heart of Israel's identity and worship, but it was their avenue to God himself, as God dwelt there. It was in essence a symbol representing the presence of God. As Exodus 25:8 shows this significance: "Make for Me a sanctuary and I shall dwell in their midst."³⁹ As previously mentioned, this may also explain the direct connection between verses 38 and 39: the temple will be destroyed *for (gar)* "you shall not see Me until..."⁴⁰ Thus, there would be a significant change in the Jewish religion, God would not dwell in the temple as he has in the past. Thus, the desolation of the temple may also include the removal of God himself from the midst of the temple.

The Judgment on Israel and Future Blessing

Jesus concludes his judgment with another judgment and a prophecy, "...from now on you shall not see me until you say "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." There seems to be an obvious time element here that Jesus is referring to which is made apparent by his use of *apV*

³⁸ See J. Bradley Chance, *Jerusalem, the Temple and the New Age in Luke-Acts* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1988), 20-21 for corroboration. Chance affirms the punishment on Jerusalem, the temple, and the people of God for bloodguiltiness but holds that this disqualifies them from being the center of eschatological fulfillment.

³⁹ Joshua Berman, *The Temple: Its Symbolism and Meaning Then and Now* (London: Jason Aronson, 1995), xx.

⁴⁰ Luke's account has *de*, instead of *gar* here. Since both of these conjunctions can serve as explanatory conjunctions, it is probably best to see verse 39 giving additional information about the desolation of the "house."

arti ełwj ah, “from now until...” Thus, it seems best to understand that there will come a time in the future when Israel will see God, but there will be a time intervening when they will not. Jesus does not say that you will not see me “*unless* you say...”, but he tells them they will not see him “*until* you say...” Thus, Jesus tells them that the nation Israel *will* see him when they speak these words.

As to what Jesus is referring to by “you will not see me,” it is significant to understand whether Jesus is speaking as the Messiah or whether he is still speaking as a prophet sent from God. Some have taken this as a reference to the second coming of the Messiah, based on the fact that it is Jesus himself who is speaking the words.⁴¹ However, if indeed Jesus is speaking as a prophet of God, his reference to the person they will not see again may be more primarily God himself. However, Jesus’ being God, he could still be making reference his to his second coming.

Again, an examination of possible Old Testament parallels may make this more clear. The most likely idea to which Jesus seems to be making reference is the idea of “God hiding his face” from Israel and Jerusalem. We see this phrase three times in Deuteronomy in reference to the Song of Moses where God warns that he will hide his face from Israel when they rebel against him (Deut. 31:16,17). This idea also carries through the prophets (Isa. 30:19-20; 54:7,8; Jer. 33:5-7; Eze. 39:23-29; Micah 3:4; 7:19,20). The Hebrew expression in each instance is similar (a form of the verb **rtś**, “hide” with **~yP**, “face,” each with corresponding suffixes). This hiding of God’s face is a part of God’s judgment on his people. It is usually a temporary period of time that is followed by the restoration and blessing of Israel.

Thus, it seems best to understand Jesus’ statement “you shall not see me” in Matthew 23:39 to be referring to the fact that God will “hide his face” from the nation of Israel as part of his judgment on the nation for their wickedness. Jerusalem and her children, the nation Israel, will not “see God” for he will hide his face from them. In these passages, God’s “hiding of his face” seemed to refer to the withdrawal of his presence, his protection, and his blessings.⁴²

The Use of Psalm 118:26

As occurred many times before in Israel’s history, the idea that the hiding of God’s face is a temporary period of judgment followed by restoration is likely the same idea Jesus is referring to here. In fact, this future restoration may be tied to Jesus’ direct quotation from Psalm 118:26. This quotation as found in both Matthew 23:39 and Luke 13:35 is identical to the Septuagint and is in complete harmony with the Masoretic text:

Matthew 23:39 Euloghmenoj o`ercomenoi en onomati kuriouA

LXX Psalm 117:26 euloghmenoj o`ercomenoi en onomati kuriou

MT Psalm 117:26 `hwhy>tyBai ~kMkrBehwhy~vB. aBh; %WB'

Psalm 118:26 was not just a verse from any psalm, but was one that had a special place in the worship of the Jews. Psalm 118 was the concluding psalm of the “Hallel” which was the collection of

⁴¹ Hagner, 681 and Louis A. Barbieri Jr., “Matthew.” In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 13-94. (n.p.: Victor Books, 1983), 75.

⁴² This idea may also be related to the concept in Deuteronomy 29:4 and other places in reference to Israel: “Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor *eyes to see*, nor ears to hear.” (Cf. Isa. 6:9,10; 42:19,20; Jer. 5:21; Psa. 69:22; Matt. 13:13-16). This may also correlate with the “hardening” which Paul speaks of in Romans 11:8 that happened to the Jewish nation so that salvation could be brought to the Gentiles.

psalms 113–118 sung at the Jewish Passover celebration.⁴³ It was a psalm used in liturgy to commemorate God’s past goodness to Israel and specifically to the Davidic dynasty. Allen states that this psalm was probably originally composed as a song of military victory. Its use in Jewish liturgy was primarily as a processional psalm, with the singers beginning it outside the temple gates and continued singing it as they entered into the temple.⁴⁴ Keil and Delitzsch classify it as a post-exilic psalm that may in fact have been written at the dedication of the new temple. The temple allusions are certainly prominent throughout.⁴⁵ Opinion is mixed on how exactly this was used in worship. Some believe the original sense of the psalm consisted of verse 26 being sung by the Levites and priest who were receiving the congregation of worshipers as they ascended to the Temple.⁴⁶ The Midrash states that the people of Jerusalem sang it as they greeted the pilgrims who came to worship.⁴⁷ According to this view, verse 25-28 were chanted together with the latter party responding to the first by singing the second clause of each verse. When Psalm 29 was reached, they would sing this together. Often then, Psalm 130:17 was added in conclusion.⁴⁸

As to the Messianic significance of this psalm and verse, many believe this verse itself became for the Jewish community an expression of hope in the coming Messiah and his kingdom. Johnson states that rabbinic citations support the view that this psalm is indirectly Messianic and “*o’ercomenoi*” was a well-known Messianic title.⁴⁹ This quote is also identical to that in the passages describing the words of the multitude as Jesus was entering Jerusalem on Passover (Matt. 21:9; Mark 11:9-10, Luke 19:38, John 12:13). This is also the psalm from which Jesus quotes verses 22-23 in reference to his rejection by the Jews, “The stone which the builders rejected has become the corner stone. This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes” (Matt. 21:42, Mark 12:10,11, Luke 20:17). The apostles also quote this in reference to Jesus in Acts 4:11, Eph. 2:20 and 1 Peter 2:6-7. The New Testament writers certainly see a Messianic significance in this psalm.

How much of the psalm’s context Jesus intended is uncertain. Clearly, it seems that there is a Messianic significance in this statement by Christ. Thus, when the Jewish nation accepts him as their Messiah, they would “see” him. However, the context of the psalm may also shed light on what Jesus intended by ending his proclamation of judgment on Israel with this quotation.

That this is a psalm of celebration is important in understanding Jesus’ use of it here. Although the verse in which it is placed resounds with emphatic judgment, *ouvnh, ne ihhte*, “you shall *certainly not* see me,” its significance in Jewish worship was overwhelmingly one of joy. The psalm is a celebration of praise to God for his lovingkindness (*dsx*). Willis Beecher makes a convincing argument for this term not meaning simply “mercy” or “compassion” but being inseparably connected to God’s covenant faithfulness to the eternal promises which he gave to Abraham, Israel,

⁴³ Charles Lee Feinberg, “The Uses of the Psalter,” *BSac* 105, no. 420 (1948): 463-477

⁴⁴ Leslie C. Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary, Psalms 101-150* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1983), 124-5.

⁴⁵ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 224, 231.

⁴⁶ Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalms*, 231 and France, 58.

⁴⁷ Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalms*, 231.

⁴⁸ Edersheim, 728.

⁴⁹ S. Lewis Johnson, “The Triumphal Entry of Christ,” *BSac* 124, no. 495 (1967): 218-229.

and the line of David.⁵⁰ The psalm begins with four lines with the second stanza of each line, "His lovingkindness is everlasting!" and the psalm ends with the same line, "For His lovingkindness is everlasting." The entire psalm is indeed a celebration of this faithfulness. In fact, the use of the psalm in Jewish liturgy was one of thankfulness and praise to God for his covenant faithfulness to Israel.

Furthermore, Jeremiah 33:11 shows that the line above was a common expression of thankfulness to God when he restores both nations after judgment.⁵¹ He emphasizes the fact that the "voice of joy" and the "voice of gladness" would be heard in Jerusalem. Then he states the "voice of those who say, 'Give thanks to the LORD of hosts, for the LORD is good, for His lovingkindness is everlasting.'" The context of the chapter is clearly eschatological and this exclamation of praise comes as a result of God restoring "the fortunes of the land as they were at first." Clearly, this portion of the psalm was reflective of joy and celebration of Yahweh's covenant faithfulness in restoring Jerusalem after judgment.

In relation to its use in Matthew 23, it may also help to note the immediate context of verse 18: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD; we have blessed you from *the house of the LORD*."⁵² Here is a mention to people blessing God from the house of the LORD (the temple). This, along with the fact that the temple seems to be a significant theme in this psalm may give credence to the fact that the *oikoj*, "house" referred to in verse 38 is in fact the temple. Furthermore, if this was a common expression for those who were coming to the temple, it also may add credence to this being a reference to a day when a temple would again stand in Jerusalem and the nation of Israel would welcome Jesus as Messiah into it.

Thus, Jesus concludes his judgment on Israel with a phrase from one of their most celebratory songs! If Jesus was intending to communicate to the Jewish nation that their end as his people had come and the promises of the restoration of their nation were never to be fulfilled, why would he have quoted from one of their primary songs of praise and thanksgiving for Yahweh's covenant faithfulness? Even if Jesus did not intend to draw on the context of the psalm in his use here, it is unlikely that he would have even quoted from one of Israel's psalms of thanksgiving that would have certainly communicated such. It seems then that Jesus intended to conclude his judgment this way because he intended to give hope to the nation Israel of a coming restoration. Here, he continues to follow the model of the Old Testament prophets in ending their judgment with a promise of restoration. Furthermore, this mention of Israel's restoration fulfills many of their yet unfulfilled predictions for Jerusalem and the nation (cf. Isa. 62-65; Eze. 36; Amos 9:14-15; Zech. 10; 14:9-11), Yes, Israel would certainly be judged, but one day they would see him again and celebrate his covenant faithfulness.

Conclusion

As any study of the Old Testament in the New will do, the meaning of this text has come alive as the result of a careful and thorough analysis of possible Old Testament connections. After tracing the themes of Jesus' judgments through the Old Testament, the following can be asserted in reference to this passage.

⁵⁰ Willis J. Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963), 313-343.

⁵¹ Charles Lee Feinberg, "The Uses of the Psalter," *BSac* 105, no. 418 (1948): 154-477.

⁵² The second "you" here is a second person masculine plural suffix, thus it is unlikely that this refers to the LORD. It is probably best explained by the theory that the priests would sing this to the worshippers.

First, here Jesus is acting as a prophet of God in carrying out his covenant lawsuit which he initially set forth in the Song of Moses. His statements closely parallel the structure of prophetic declarations from the Old Testament which discuss judgments on wicked men, the city of Jerusalem, and the nation Israel. Similar to many other prophetic announcements, Jesus' also ends with the hope of future restoration.

Second, as in most of the other prophetic declarations, there are separate judgments involved: judgment on the *individual* evildoers and judgment on the *corporate* nation and the city of Jerusalem. The first is a judgment against the unfaithful Jewish individuals due to their rebellion against God. Here, the leaders of Israel, the scribes and Pharisees, represent this "generation." God's judgment on them includes their incurring of guilt for all the innocent blood that has been shed since the beginning of time, including the persecution and murder of the prophets. Their future "shedding of blood" of those God is sending, especially Christ, is the final action that will complete their guilt for which they deserve judgment. Thus, they will be given the sentence of hell. Their acts as Israel's representatives will also cause innocent blood to be shed on the city of Jerusalem and in the midst of the nation of Israel, which is one factor which leads to the second *corporate* judgment which will fall upon the city and the nation. The other factor which leads to this judgment is the unwillingness of Israel to trust God. This judgment will consist of the desolation of the temple and God's withdrawal of his presence, protection, and blessings for a time.

Third, Jesus' use of passages primarily from Deuteronomy 31 and 32 and the prophets point to his intention of making clear the cause of each of these judgments and showing that the warnings have been in existence since the time of Moses. Thus, they are without excuse as God has warned both groups in the past of impending judgment for their rejection of God. Furthermore, now they are rejecting the only atonement provided for them by rejecting the Messiah. These connections back to the Mosaic Law also show God's plan throughout time for the coming of the Messiah that would bring eternal restoration and the corresponding judgment God would issue on those who rebelled against him.

Finally, also in correlation with prophetic declarations, the corporate judgment is followed by a future blessing of restoration. Jesus' quotation of Psalm 118:26 shows his twofold intention of communicating a future hope to the nation as well as the need for them to accept Jesus the Messiah as part of that future hope. This is in complete unity with the prophetic declarations of judgment on the nation which were accompanied by promises of future blessing. Although judgment has come, God will show his covenant faithfulness by once again restoring Israel and fulfilling her still unmet promises after her sins have been atoned for through the blood of Christ.

Certainly, we can see that Jesus had many Old Testament themes in mind as he issued this judgment on the Jewish leaders, Jerusalem, and the nation Israel. The continuity between this passage and the prophetic judgments of the Old Testament are clearly not accidental. Not only do these correspondences support a clear typology of events within the scriptures, but they also should alert us to the consistency of God's dealings with mankind and specifically Israel. Certainly, the advent of the Messiah issued in a new dispensation in relation to some aspects of the way He deals with mankind. However, this crucial event should not and does not abrogate his everlasting faithfulness and promises to Israel. Perhaps in some sense a greater theological continuity between the testaments should be asserted, but let this also include a continuity between God's dealings with Israel in the Old Testament and his dealings with the nation in the New. Let it also affirm a correspondence between the prophetic announcements in the New and those in the Old, including the promise of future restoration. Most importantly, let it affirm continuity in *both* aspects of God's character displayed most commonly in prophetic announcements: his justice *and* his covenant

faithfulness. While his justice certainly warrants that judgment needs to come, his faithfulness just as assuredly warrants a future restoration. As promised, God will show forth his justice as he avenges the blood of his servants and renders vengeance on his adversaries. However, he will also just as certainly display his eternal faithfulness in atoning for his land and his people through the shed blood of "the one who comes in the name of the Lord."

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