

## **Beware of Scribes and Pharisees**

Matthew 23, Pt. 1

Opening Text: **Matthew 23:1-12**

I've recently taken a break from the book of Luke, and I think I'm going to continue that break for a while longer, because my mind is gravitating to some things in the book of Matthew.

I love the gospels. I love the whole Bible, but I really enjoy reading and studying the words of Yeshua. He is the Word of Yahweh made into a human being. He's the Word of Yahweh come to life. I find so much depth in Yeshua's teachings, and I guess that shouldn't surprise me, because after all, he is Yahweh's Son.

So today, we are going to begin Matthew 23. I'm not completely sure where I'm going to end up in all of this, but I do know that I'm going to teach through Matthew 23 for the next little while.

What we are going to see in this chapter is a very harsh Yeshua. As we have been going through Luke's Gospel, we have seen that our Master is very compassionate, merciful, a friend of sinners who admit their sin, confess their sin, realize that they will never be good enough, and know they need his righteousness in order to be justified before Yahweh.

This all remains true, but the opposite is true as well. Yeshua is very harsh on religious people. People who think they have no sin. Men who think they are head and shoulders above everyone else. Men who looked very pious and holy on the outside, yet were filthy on the inside, these were the people whom Yeshua was harsh with.

True devotion towards Yahweh is never marked by outward show.

While it is true that an inward change will produce fruit, it is also true that someone can change outwardly, to where it looks like they have changed, it looks like some fruit is produced, but they have no inward change. Someone can look like they follow Yahweh on the outside, and go through many of the motions, but not really have a new heart. We can make "holy" our outward appearance in order to puff ourselves up, and make *men think* that we are the most righteous in the community, but it doesn't make it so. We may look like we have real fruit, but the reality is, sometimes it's just a bowl of wax fruit.

Yeshua speaks of these type of men in Matthew 23, and elsewhere. He tells us to beware of the scribes and the Pharisees.

I believe we still need to beware of people like the scribes and Pharisees today, and we also need to beware that *we* are not acting like the scribes and Pharisees in *our* own lives today. Yeshua's words still rebuke scribes and Pharisees today.

So we'll begin in Matthew 23:1-2.

Mt23:1 Then Yeshua spoke to the crowds and to His disciples:

Mt23:2 The scribes and the Pharisees are seated in the chair of Moses.

Yeshua is speaking to a large audience here, some of which were the scribes and Pharisees themselves. When you read Matthew 21-22 you see that much of what Yeshua said was spoken directly to scribes, Pharisees, and even Sadducees... leaders inside of the Judahite community. I believe some of them are included in the "crowds" of Matthew 23:1. Yeshua also spoke to his disciples, which probably means not just his 12 personal, closest disciples, but his students in general (there were more than 12; see Luke 10:1).

This is important because as we go through this chapter, realize that Yeshua is speaking harshly of the scribes and Pharisees RIGHT IN FRONT OF THEM. He wasn't bashful. He directly rebuked the men who seemed to be most religious in the community at that time. The men who looked most dedicated got the sternest rebuke.

So who were the Scribes and Pharisees?

The word scribes here comes from the Greek word *grammateus* (from which we get our English word "grammar.") It is primarily defined as a "writer, secretary, clerk, recorder." Henry Joseph Thayer gives the following in his #2 definition of the word: "a man learned in the Mosaic law and in the sacred writings, an interpreter, teacher." W.E. Vine gives us this definition of the word:

"...denotes a scribe, a man of letters, a teacher of the law; the scribes are mentioned frequently in the Synoptists, especially in connection with the Pharisees, with whom they virtually formed one party (see Luke 5:21), sometimes with the chief priests, e.g. Matt. 2:4; Mark 8:31; 10:33; 11:18, 27; Luke 9:22..."

If we look up every use of the word scribes in the gospels, we see that they are frequently associated with the Pharisees and the chief priests, all leaders in the Judahite community.

Then we have the Pharisees, who called themselves such because they believed they were the strictest group within Israel. These groups (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, etc.) all formed after the Babylonian captivity during the second temple period, the time between the prophet Malachi and the prophet John the Baptizer. This is why we don't read about these groups in the Old Testament, and then we get into reading the Gospels and these groups seem to be suddenly on the scene in the land of Israel. Well... they formed after the return to Israel (in Ezra and Nehemiah), by the house of Judah, from the Babylonian captivity. They didn't just happen over night. They all formed inside of a 400 year period.

The word Pharisee stems from the Hebrew word *parash* meaning "to separate or divide." The plural of that word is *parashim*, which later turns into Pharisees, literally meaning "separatists." They believed they were the pious, the holiest, the most set apart followers of the Almighty. Because of this they often separated themselves from others in Judah and Israel who they considered to be low class.

I'm of the belief that the Pharisees are the originators of Judaism. Sometimes we hear people speak of the faith of the Old Covenant Israelite saints as Judaism, but that is not correct. Many Old Covenant saints were from the *tribe* or *house* of Judah, and were followers of Yahweh, but that is not Judaism. Judaism is a religion that began to develop after the Babylonian captivity (at the same time as the different groups were forming), and it was a mixture of some semblance of Yahweh's law, and an acceptance of the traditions of man that often overturned the law of Yahweh - bringing it to nothing in order to hold fast to man-made tradition. Saul of Tarsus was actually an adherent to the *religion* of Judaism prior to being converted to the Messiah (as recorded in Galatians 1:13-14). Saul of Tarsus (also called Paul) was a member of the Pharisees group prior to his faith in Yeshua as the promised Messiah of the Hebrew Scriptures.

W.E. Vine says this about the scribes and Pharisees in his dictionary of Biblical words:

"In their regime piety was reduced to external formalism. Only that was of value which was governed by external precept. Life under them became a burden..."

The scribes and Pharisees were *very* knowledgeable men, but they were only focused on outward particulars (that which men could see and praise). They were only concerned with APPEARING to be holy, rather than really being holy. They focused little to none on inward repentance from sin and genuine purity of heart. They did not pray like David, "Create in me a clean heart," because they thought they were already clean, and to them, their outward show proved it.

Now... what's this about the chair of Moses in verse 2? Let's read verse 2 again.

Mt23:2 The scribes and the Pharisees are seated in the chair of Moses.

Whenever I read this, my mind automatically goes to Exodus 18, specifically verses 13-16. Let's read it.

Ex18:13 The next day Moses **sat down** to judge the people, and they stood around Moses from morning until evening.

Ex18:14 When Moses' father-in-law saw everything he was doing for them he asked, "What is this thing you're doing for the people? Why are you alone sitting as judge, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?"

Ex18:15 Moses replied to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of the Mighty One.

Ex18:16 Whenever they have a dispute, it comes to me, and **I make a decision between one man and another. I teach [them] the Mighty One's statutes and laws.**"

In this text we have Moses, notice he *sits down* to judge, and he is teaching Yahweh's law to the people of Israel.<sup>1</sup> Matthew 23:2 says that the scribes and Pharisees are *seated* in the

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that at this time the codification of the 10 words (commandments) had not taken place. Here were the Israelites (in Ex18) at the mountain learning the laws of Yahweh from Moses prior to

*chair* of Moses. This means they are basically imitating - in the first century A.D. - what Moses did many years prior, back in Exodus 18.

Customarily (at that time), when the law was read, a man *stood up*, and when the law was explained, a man often *sat down* and explained it. Thus the phrase "seated in the chair" in Matthew 23:2.

Let me mention that there have been some old synagogues found from the early centuries A.D. where on the inside was found a stone chair in the front of the gathering hall. This may have been termed "the chair of Moses" in which the scribes and Pharisees sat and taught the law to the people on Sabbath.

The fact that it was *the scribes and Pharisees* who were seated in the chair of Moses in Yeshua's day does show their status as leaders among the people. Now leaders can become corrupt in their deeds, we see that all through the nation of Israel in the books of Kings and Chronicles. We see corrupt king after corrupt king (doing what was evil in the sight of Yahweh), especially from the house of Israel. Nonetheless, these men (the scribes and Pharisees) were considered the law teachers in Judah during the first century A.D.

Let's go back to Matthew 23 and look at the next verse, verse 3.

Mt23:3 Therefore do whatever they tell you and observe it. But don't do what they do because they don't practice what they teach.

Do whatever they tell you Yeshua says. I'd like to focus some on this word "whatever."

Some have seen this word *whatever* and have been taken back a little, because the scribes and Pharisees would tell people a lot of things that were traditions of men not found in the law of Yahweh. I am one of these people. At times, I've been perplexed at this word "whatever" or "whatsoever" in Matthew 23:3.

Let me give you my understanding of this verse. The verse begins with "*Therefore*," meaning, "On the basis of what I've just said." Remember, Yeshua has just mentioned that the scribes and Pharisees are the ones "seated in the chair of Moses - so *on that basis* - do whatever they tell you." The understanding is that you are to follow what they tell you *from prophet Moses*. So long as they are in line with the teachings of Moses, so long as they do not contradict what Moses says (which is Yahweh's law through Moses' mouth), you are to listen to them and obey what they tell you.

If we do not take this understanding of Matthew 23:3 then we have a conflict between what Yeshua says here, and what he has already said earlier, in Matthew 15, in this same gospel. Matthew 15 is the chapter where the scribes and Pharisees question Yeshua, as to why his disciples transgress the tradition of the elders, not performing the ritual hand-washing before they eat. Yeshua goes on in that chapter to rebuke them for transgressing

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them being given, beginning in Exodus 20 and following. The law must have been in existence prior to codification. This passage in Exodus, as well as many in Genesis, proves that to be the case.

the commandment of Yahweh for the sake of keeping their tradition. He also goes on to tell them that not ritually washing their hands before eating is not what defiles a man.

So Yeshua, in Matthew 15, is defending his disciples for NOT doing something the scribes and Pharisees taught. This means in Matthew 23, Yeshua must be talking about doing whatever they tell you, *so long as it's in line with the teachings of Moses in the law*. It's interesting that this view was the view of the writers of the Geneva Bible translation, the translation of the Bible in the 1500's (before the KJV), used by the pilgrims in early America. The Geneva Bible footnote on Matthew 23:3 reads:

"Provided always that they deliver the doctrine of Moses which they profess, which thing the metaphor of the seat shows, which they occupied as teachers of Moses' teaching."<sup>2</sup>

Now notice the last part of Matthew 23:3. Don't do what they do. Yeshua begins by saying observe what they say (from the law), but not what they do. Why? Because they don't practice what they teach. They read you the truth from the law of Moses, but they don't obey it themselves.

What is interesting here is that many people in Christianity today, and even in the Messianic movement today believe that the Pharisees were strict law keepers. They looked like law keepers. They appeared to be holy, and yes, they did observe the outward laws (and letter of the law) found in the books of Moses. If you saw a Pharisee he would have on a long robe, he would have a beard, long tassels, large phylacteries, and he would be well versed in the law and have a great part of it - if not all of it - memorized.

Yet, Yeshua tells everyone to do what they say but don't do what they do, because they don't practice what they teach. Yeshua shows us here that the law is much more than externals.

I'm afraid that the same Pharisee mentality plagues the pro-law movement today. Many feel that just wearing tassels makes them Torah obedient, or just not shaving their beard makes them Torah obedient.

Now, it is true that wearing tassels and not shaving your beard (men) is in the law. After all, Yeshua wore tassels and did not shave his beard. Yeshua is not abolishing these outward matters of the law. Yeshua is just saying these things aren't where righteousness begins and ends. There are more important matters within the law that were often neglected by the Pharisees then, and are often neglected by us today.

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<sup>2</sup> Many of the older commentators agree. I'll give two here, the first being Albert Barnes (a Presbyterian theologian from the 1800's): "Verse 3. *All therefore whatsoever*, etc, That is, all that they teach consistent with the law of Moses; all the commands of Moses which they read to you and properly explain. The word *all* could not be taken without such a restriction, for Christ himself accuses them of teaching many things contrary to that law, and of making it void by traditions, Mt 15:1-6." Secondly, here is John Gill (a English Baptist pastor of the 1700's): "All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe - this must be restrained to things that were agreeable to the chair of Moses, in which they sat, to the law of Moses, which they read and explained, to other parts of Scripture and truth in general; for otherwise many of their glosses and traditions were repugnant to the law, and ought not to be observed, as appears from Mt 15:1."

What good is the wearing of tassels, *if* we are going to go around slandering our neighbor or mistreating widows?

What good is the not shaving of the beard, *if* we have a hateful, bitter attitude in our hearts or always complain about everything?

What good is a phylactery (or writing the law on your doorpost), *if* we aren't showing mercy to the repentant man, or the needy, the poor, the least of these our brethren?

The answer is: they are *no good* in these cases. Outward morality is meant to be a manifestation of what is on the inside, not a show of pride, piety, or a better than thou attitude. The symbol or outward aspect of the law becomes meaningless if done for the wrong reason. The symbol or outward aspect of the law can be accomplished without the inward change of heart. That is possible, and that is what was happening with the majority of the scribes and Pharisees in Yeshua's day. They had the outward symbols, but they meant nothing without the inward reality.

So Yeshua considers the Pharisees and scribes to be law-breakers, that's why he says "don't do as they do." Don't follow their example. They are *hypocrites*.

Now, Yeshua hasn't called them hypocrites yet, but he will many times in this chapter, the first of which is found in Matthew 23:13 where he says, "But woe to you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites!"

The Greek word *hupokritace* (hypocrite) originally denoted a stage-actor in a Greco-Roman play. Greek and Roman actors and actresses would often be on stage with masks and speak in a way that disguised their natural voice. The word meant a "play-actor" or "pretender" originally. The word later came to be used of someone who claimed to be one thing in their life, but were only pretending.<sup>3</sup>

Let's look at the next verse, Matthew 23:4.

**Mt23:4** They tie up heavy loads that are hard to carry and put them on people's shoulders, but they themselves aren't willing to lift a finger to move them.

At one time in my life of studying, I believed that this was referring to the man-made traditions of the scribes and Pharisees that they attempted to put on people. These traditions were a heavy load, hard to carry.

While the traditions of the elders were indeed numerous, heavy, and hard to carry, I now *do not* believe that is what Yeshua is speaking of here.

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<sup>3</sup> One extra-biblical use of the word *hupokritace* can be found in 2 Maccabees 6:21 and 24 where Eleazar (a righteous scribe) refused to pretend he was eating swine's flesh.

I want you to think about this with me in context. Yeshua has already said that the scribes and Pharisees are "seated in the chair of Moses." He has told us "**do** what they SAY, but not what they DO (...*they tie up heavy loads...*)." Yeshua is talking here about Yahweh's law. He is telling the people to follow what they are saying from the law, but don't follow their lifestyle because they are pretenders; they don't practice what they are teaching.

Think about this as well. Whatever heavy load they are putting upon people, Yeshua says that *they themselves don't lift this load with even a little finger*. Is this their traditions? No, they were meticulous in their traditions. It is rather the law of Yahweh that they aren't willing to lift a finger to move.

So then, the written law, the law of Yahweh, is the heavy load that they put on someone's shoulders.

Here, Yeshua is teaching us that there is a *wrong* way to teach the law. Yeshua was a teacher of law. When he taught obedience, he taught the law as a guide, a way of life, accompanied with grace and mercy for the broken-hearted, repentant man. (see Luke 18:9-14; tax collector)

The Pharisees and scribes taught the law as a check-list which justified a person, an impossible check-list. They used the law only as a hammer to pound everyone, without including mercy and longsuffering into the equation.

If I showed up here every week and taught the law in all its perfection, and just hammered and hammered it over and over, without ever telling you about the Old Testament verses about Yahweh's mercy, His forgiveness, His compassion on the broken, and how He doesn't turn away those with a contrite spirit and shattered heart - if I never told you about all those verses, the law of Yahweh would become a heavy load upon your shoulders that would be impossible to carry.

You would realize that you couldn't do it. You would realize that you are a sinner, and you don't measure up. You're not perfect like Yahweh is perfect. You're not sinless. You would realize these things, and if I just kept on hammering you, I would be the one, as a teacher, that was unwilling to even use a small finger to move your burden.

This is a metaphor. The law is pictured here as a heavy load laid on someone's shoulders. And the Pharisees are said to be unwilling to use even one of their fingers to lighten the people's load. This is law without gospel. It's like me tying a 300 pound back-pack on your shoulders and demanding you carry it around from now on without giving out.

See, the law actually *is* designed to crush you. The first use of the law is a mirror; you look at yourself in the mirror and you see blemishes. It shows you that you are a sinner. The law condemns your sin. It condemns your natural heart. What does Yeshua say, actually defiles a man? It's definitely not eating without ritually washing your hands - that doesn't defile a man. What defiles a man comes from THE INSIDE of YOU not OUTSIDE of you. In Matthew 15:18-20 Yeshua says (talking to his disciples), "But what

comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and this defiles a man. For from the HEART come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies. These are the things that defile a man, but eating with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

We sin because our fleshly nature wants to sin. Don't pass that buck to the devil or to someone else, whoever they may be, in your life. Don't place the blame on your neighbor next to you or say that it's all Satan's fault. You sin, because it's what *you* want to do in that moment. Your heart desires to commit an evil act, and that's because your natural heart, the heart you are born with, is evil. As a matter of fact you and I are much worse than we think we are, and it's only the restraining grace of Yahweh that keeps us in check.

So the law is there, first, to condemn us. And if I stopped right there in this sermon, and then preached the same thing next week, and the week after, and on and on, it would be like I'm throwing a heavy load on your shoulders and I'm doing nothing to help you lift it.

But, by Yahweh's grace, He has revealed to me the need for preaching the sweetness of the gospel (which is also found in the law, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; see Romans 3:21-22). The message of His mercy. All true teachers follow Yeshua's example of teaching BOTH law and gospel. Not just law. Not just gospel. But BOTH law and gospel.

The law condemns you. It reveals your sin. It shows you that you are condemned. The gospel, the message about the Messiah, frees you from condemnation. (see Romans 8:1)

The law says do, perform, measure up. The gospel says, Yeshua did it, Yeshua performed, Yeshua measured up, for you.

The gospel is the good news that your sin, your evil heart, all those things that come from inside of you (in your heart) - all those things IN you, that defile you - all that can be washed away and be made clean by the work Yahweh has done through His Son Yeshua. Though your sins be as scarlet, He comes and washes them as white as snow. Though your evil is red like crimson, He makes you white like wool (Isaiah 1:18). We can't scrub our natural heart clean. We can't create a clean heart. That's the work of the Spirit through the gospel. This is the mercy that must accompany the teaching of the law. Yes the law must be taught in all its perfection, and it must hammer you. It must kill you. But if you're laying there on the ground hammered, beat, bruised, and torn - and someone just keeps on hammering and beating and bruising and tearing - that's a load too heavy for you to carry. It's at this point that you no longer need the tearing, you need the mending. You no longer need the bruising, you need the ointment. Hosea 6:1 - "Come, let us return to Yahweh. For He has torn us, and He will heal us; He has wounded us, and He will bind up our wounds."

That's why we are here. We aren't here to hurt one another. We aren't here because we are all perfect. There's no such thing as a perfect church. There's no such thing as a perfect

pastor. I'm just one beggar trying to tell other beggars where to find bread. We are here because we all need help, love, and mercy. Coming to a New Covenant assembly isn't saying that you have it all figured out. It's admitting that you don't have it all figured out - that you are a sinner, in need of the Savior.

The Pharisees and scribes loved to bruise people. They loved to hammer people, and beat them to a pulp with the law. They taught the law as a checklist to see if you were justified. They taught the law as what justified you, and they completely left out mercy. Matthew 23:23 (which we will get to in a later lesson) says that they left out mercy, and Yeshua calls mercy a "weightier (more important) matter of the law."

The scribes and Pharisees did not care about even using a small finger to help ease the burden of the people. They taught the law in its full force, and when they saw people break, tear, and hurt they *could have* said, "Take heart dear child. It's okay. There is forgiveness. A broken heart and contrite spirit He will in no wise turn away. There is mercy with Yahweh. Take heart. Be encouraged. He forgives and forgets."

They could have said these things and lifted these burdens off of the broken person's shoulders -- but they did not. Instead they just kept on loading the people's shoulders down with more law, more law in justification form, and they weren't even keeping the law themselves. What a joke. Yeshua condemned them for this. This mentality will either (1) make a liar out of you (fooling yourself into thinking you're perfect in the law), or (2) break you down and burn you out because you realize you can't do it. If you're #1, may Yahweh have mercy upon your soul you lying hypocrite. Woe unto you. If you're the #2, broke down, burned out, and realizing that you fail every day, I have good news for you.

Yeshua is not a Pharisee. He does teach the law, but he also teaches the gospel. He teaches both law and gospel correctly, and if you come to him today in faith - in broken humility and confession of your sinfulness before Yahweh, you will go home today, and tomorrow, and the next day, and the day after that, and all the days - justified by faith.

There's a lot more to get into, and I thought we'd make it through verse 12, but I'm going to stop here for now. We'll pick it back up in verse 5 in the next lesson.

## **I Hope Someone Sees Me**

Matthew 23, Pt. 2

Opening Text: **Matthew 23:1-12**

Okay, we made it through the first 4 verses of Matthew 23 in the last lesson, so we are just going to pick this right back up in verse 5 for this lesson.

For a brief review, remember, we are looking at Yeshua's condemnation of the scribes and the Pharisees here in Matthew 23. They are leaders in the community. They are seated in the chair of Moses, but... that doesn't give them a free pass. They don't have a license to do whatever they want just because they have a high position. Leaders are in their positions, not to domineer or lord over others, but to be an example to the people.

To show people the proper path, and to help people answer their questions. That means it is destructive to society to have corrupt leaders, because that spiritual sickness rubs off on the community.

Yeshua is condemning the leaders in Israel at that time. I do believe the scribes and Pharisees here are Israelites. Their seat in the chair of Moses, and Yeshua's declaration to do what they say (23:2-3) shows this, and I'll continue to show that they are Israelites from the rest of the chapter as we make progress. For now, let us realize that the men that most people would consider to be the holiest men in the nation were being condemned by Yeshua.

Let's pick it up at verse 5.

**Mt23:5 They do everything to be observed by others: They enlarge their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels.**

Yeshua begins by saying that everything they do is done so that other people can see it. They want other people to see them and think: "That's the most righteous man in town." In other words, they do something and think, "Boy I sure hope somebody sees me doing this."

If you could think of one word to describe this attitude what would it be? My mind thinks of PRIDE. A haughty attitude. "Look at me. I'm holy. I'm righteous. Let me make sure that I do my works in front of a crowd so they can look at me and think highly of me."

We get caught up in this today. Maybe we do a good deed and no one notices and we think, "Nobody appreciates what I'm doing. If only they could have seen me do it. I think I'll tell them about what I did so they'll know." What is that? That's our pride kicking in. That's us doing something *just* to be observed by other people.

If we know the Scriptures, we know that the eyes of Yahweh go to and fro throughout the earth, beholding the evil and the good. (Proverbs 15:3) When we do a good work we should be satisfied that Yahweh sees; that should be enough. The problem is - that wasn't what mattered to the Pharisees, and that's not what matters to us. It's not enough that Yahweh sees, we want some praise from someone else.

Is praise from others wrong? No, not at all. As a matter of fact it is inevitable that some of the good works of the saints will be seen by others. There will be times when you do something good, someone sees it, and someone gives you praise. Proverbs 27:2 says, "Let another praise you, and not your own mouth - a stranger and not your own lips." That verse implies that it's okay to praise *someone else* for a good deed.

The key is that this should not be our motivation. Our desire should not be to make our name great, our desire should be to make our Father's name great. As a matter of fact, look at this verse earlier in Matthew's gospel, from Yeshua, in Matthew 5:16.

Mt5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Now, here in Matthew 5 Yeshua speaks of people seeing the good works of his followers. He says "let your light shine," which means "do your good deeds in public (like a city on a hilltop that is easily seen)." It almost seems contradictory to Matthew 23:5, but the key is that here in Matthew 5:16, the reason given for letting your light shine is so that others may *give glory to the Father in heaven*. When we do our good deeds, and when people give us praise, we should make sure to direct them to the Father. He's the reason we are able to do anything good in the first place. He makes it all possible. We'd never do a single good work if not for His grace upon our life.

The Pharisees weren't concerned with glorifying the Father in heaven. They wanted the glory for themselves. Genuine good works are done by saints whether they are ever seen by someone else or not. In the times when they are seen, we should direct the glory to the Father. In the times when they are not seen, the Father is still glorified and we shouldn't care that no one upon the earth knows.

Matthew 23:5 tells us some of the ways the Pharisees wanted themselves to be seen for their own glory. They enlarged their phylacteries and lengthened their tassels.

A phylactery literally means a "guard-case" which held little slips of Scripture texts.<sup>4</sup> Texts like Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (the shema) and also Deuteronomy 11:13-21 (among other texts in Exodus). In the mid 1900's, some phylacteries were unearthed in the same area as the Dead Sea Scrolls that contained the entire 10 commandments on the slips inside.

Some Israelites throughout history would read Deuteronomy 6:8-9, which says: "Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates," and they interpreted this verse (and others) not only metaphorically, but literally. They would write out texts of Scripture on slips of parchment and place them inside a leather pouch which was then attached to a strap. They would wear one around their head and one around their wrist or arm. They would also write out these same texts of Scripture on their gates and the doorpost of their house. I actually agree that there is both a metaphorical application and literal application of these verses.

What was happening here is that the scribes and Pharisees, in order to make sure people saw them, would *enlarge* or *make broad* their phylacteries.

Some of the men in Judaism *today* do this exact thing (make broad their phylacteries), and remember what I mentioned in the last lesson: the *Pharisees* are likely the originators of the religion of Judaism. I've seen men in Judaism with a phylactery on their forehead that looked like a camera from the 1980's. I mean it is impossible to miss. I guess the

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<sup>4</sup> Strong's Concordance: "φυλακτηριον phylakterion *foo-lak-tay'-ree-on* neuter of a derivative of 5442; a guard-case, i.e. "phylactery" for wearing slips of Scripture texts:— phylactery. See Greek [5442](#)"

larger the phylactery, the more holy the man. Why in the world would you want to walk around with a 1980's camera sized box strapped to your forehead? Well it's not because it's comfortable, I'll tell you that. The sole reason is to make sure everybody sees you and then thinks that you are so righteous because your phylactery is the size of Texas. I've also seen these same men in Judaism have tassels that just about dragged the ground. That brings us to the next point.

The scribes and Pharisees are also said to have lengthened their tassels. Tassels stem from two texts in the law, Numbers 15:37-41 and Deuteronomy 22:12. The Israelites were commanded to make tassels on the four corners or borders of their garment, and put inside the tassel a thread of blue to remind them to obey the commandments. I believe the color blue was used because the 10 commandments were actually written on sapphire stone, or blue stone. When the Israelites looked at the blue thread, it reminded them of the blue stone.

Yeshua wore tassels. We know this for a few reasons: (1) because he was obedient to all aspects of the Torah, and (2) because there are places in the gospels where we read of a woman who touched the hem of his garment in faith that she would be healed of her sickness.<sup>5</sup> The word hem in these verses is the Greek word *kraspedon*, meaning "a fringe or tassel." *Kraspedon* is the word used in the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament) in Numbers 15:37-41 for tassel. What the sick woman actually touched was the tassel hanging off the corner of Yeshua's tunic or robe.

Now, what's interesting is that this shows that Yeshua is not condemning the *wearing* of the tassels, because he's wearing tassels when he says this about the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:5. He is condemning <the *lengthening* of the tassels so that they are seen by others because of the Pharisees pride of wanting to *look* righteous.>

The same holds true for the phylacteries. Yeshua wore the tassels, and in the same breath he mentions the phylacteries. It's likely that he was wearing phylacteries too, but either way, he is not condemning the wearing of a phylactery, but only <*enlarging* the phylacteries because of the Pharisees pride of wanting to *look* righteous.>

Remember, all the Israelites of that day wore tassels, and many of them wore phylacteries. This wasn't like today where if you wear tassels and you're walking through Publix, you're the only one in the store wearing tassels. No, if we had been standing there listening to Yeshua that day, we would have seen more tassels on people than we'd ever seen in our life. Everybody wore them, but the Pharisees and scribes made theirs extra-long, because after all, that made them more holy. (sarcasm)

Christians still do this today, and I'm not just talking about with tassels and phylacteries. Women today can think that the longer their hair is the more holier they are. Men today can think that the more Scripture they can quote the more righteous it makes them, or if they have a good full or long beard it makes them holier, or the longer the tunic the holier

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 9:20; 14:36; Mark 6:56; Luke 8:44. The same word (*kraspedon*) used in each of these verses is the word used in Matthew 23:5, translated "tassels" (HCSB) or "borders" (KJV).

the man. There is nothing wrong with long hair on women, long beards on men, quoting Scripture, or wearing a tunic.

All of those are well and good when kept in their proper perspective. When they are taken out of perspective and turn into matters of pride and a better-than-thou attitude, they fall under the same category as these large phylacteries and long tassels that the scribes and Pharisees wore. Christians today can act just like these men. We can even get to a place where, just like the Pharisees, we shun people who don't belong to our group. We consider them lower class Christians or maybe not even Christians at all, just because they don't do everything exactly like we have outlined on the outside.

There are many things we can *overdo* or even just *do* in an attitude of wanting to be seen to puff up ourselves. We can do things just to make sure another person sees what we're doing, which only proves we aren't really interested in righteousness, only the appearance of righteousness. In that case we are only desiring the praises of man.

Let's look at the next few verses and I'll make some application as we go along.

**Mt23:6 They love the place of honor at banquets, the front seats in the synagogues,**  
**Mt23:7 greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called Rabbi by people.**

Those two little words right at the beginning of verse 6 are the key. **THEY LOVE**. These words apply to each of the statements in verses 6-7. *They love* the places of honor, *they love* the front seats, *they love* the public greetings, *they love* to be called Rabbi.

The places of honor at banquets. These places existed, and they were used for seating high ranking people at a banquet. There was nothing wrong with having designated seating in order to honor someone at a banquet, but the problem was that the scribes and Pharisees **LOVED** these seats because it caused them to be seen to puff up their ego and they loved to be noticed. They would sit at the head of the table, where everyone could see them and they would feel prominent. Head and shoulders above everyone else. The same thing goes for the front seats in the synagogues. They *loved* these front seats because it made them feel superior, and they wanted everyone to look at them as pious, and holy, to the utmost degree.

I have heard of churches that have assigned seating based upon the tithing record of its congregants. In other words, the more tithes you pay, the better seat you get. Is that the heart of Yahweh?

Look again at verse 7. They love prestigious greetings. They love to be called Rabbi (which literally means "my master or teacher"). As they walk through the market they want people to call out to them in a way that exalts them and lifts them up. All this they are doing for the gratification of their flesh. They want to be the rulers. They want to be noticed as the people who are above everyone else.

I have actually witnessed pastors of churches who have gotten upset if someone didn't address them as pastor, bishop, reverend, apostle, etc. They would fall under this category. I've seen and talked to pastors that wouldn't give you the time of day unless you were wealthy, well known, a big tithing payer, or could better their position in some way. All of this is foolishness and is here condemned by our Lord, so he goes on to say:

Mt23:8 But as for you, do not be called Rabbi, because you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers.

Mt23:9 Do not call anyone on earth your father, because you have one Father, who is in heaven.

Mt23:10 And do not be called masters either, because you have one Master, the Messiah.

What does Yeshua mean here? Well it should be obvious. This entire context is condemning self-glorification. We should not seek, desire, or be ambitious to have these titles upon ourselves. The greatest leaders are servants. The greatest men and women are the ones who serve people, not the ones who love prestige and want everyone to look at them.

It could be argued that pride is one of the greatest sins because it leads to so many other sins. Knock out pride and everything hanging under it is destroyed. Accept pride, and let it stand tall and straight, and watch how many other sins follow.

Verse 8 here literally reads in such a way that it's saying "Don't take that title upon yourself. Don't *seek* for that title. Don't be ambitious to have people call you Rabbi."

Some manuscripts of Matthew read at the end of verse 8, "for you have one Teacher, **even Messiah.**" Yeshua is saying that *he* is our Teacher. So we shouldn't be in competition with one another, trying to seek prestigious titles. That's why he says right after this, "for we are all brothers." We are level. We are equal. We are laborers together. We are many members that belong to ONE body, and each member is important.

Now, I need to cover this next point: is it wrong to refer to someone ELSE with a title like Rabbi, Teacher, or Master?<sup>6</sup> Well, let me ask it in this way. Is it wrong to call someone father? Look back to verse 9 again.

Mt23:9 Do not call anyone on earth your father, because you have one Father, who is in heaven.

When Yeshua says not to call anyone on earth father, is it meant to be taken in such a way that forbids me from calling my earthly dad, "father"?

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<sup>6</sup> The word Rabbi is used of John the Baptizer in John 3:25-27. Other men called John Rabbi, but John never sought after or desired the title to be used of himself. This is an excellent example of John following Yeshua's teachings on humility, but at the same time it shows that it is not erroneous if someone calls us by that title or if we call someone else by a title such as Rabbi, Teacher, Master, or even Father.

Doesn't James call Abraham our father in James 2? "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar?" (James 2:21)  
 I think it's safe to say that Yeshua isn't speaking against calling someone dad, daddy, or father. He is teaching against people who *seek* or are *ambitious about* or *love* prestigious titles for themselves to puff themselves up in pride above others.

Yahweh in heaven is our one Father. We don't need another Father Yahweh. We don't need any man on earth trying to act like Father Yahweh.

We don't need any Rabbi's or Teachers who usurp Yeshua's position and try to place themselves in prestigious positions to rule over people with a big stick. Yahweh isn't looking for leaders like that. I'm not interested in making a bunch of rules for you to follow. Yahweh has already set the rules. I'm here to try and be an example to the flock. And when I fail, please give me grace. I'll give it to you too.

The same thing goes for the title Master in verse 10. Here in the south we tend to call people Mr. as in Mr. Janzen, Mr. Smith, Mr. Welting. Mister stems from the word Master referring to the head of a home. Is that wrong for us to do? I don't think so, but it is wrong for men to seek or be ambitious about the title Master out of a desire to be "one-up" upon everyone else. That's a pride thing.

Yeshua makes this clear in the next 2 verses.

Mt23:11 The greatest among you will be your servant.

Mt23:12 Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

If we didn't get the meaning from the previous verses this should clear it up. The great ones among you (the people whom Yeshua is talking to, and us that follow Yeshua today) will be the ones who serve. Someone who serves someone else. The greatest people are the ones who use their lives to be servants to others.

In a world that's all about me, myself, and I. "I need my space, I need my time, I need to be appreciated, *they* don't appreciate *me* enough, I need more recognition."

I, I, I, me, me, me, me...

Yeshua says, "It's not to be this way among you. The greatest is the one who uses his life not for himself, but to serve other people. The greatest is the person who considers everyone else better than themselves."

Husbands, you are to use your office as a husband to serve your wife.

Wives, you are to use your office as a wife to serve your husband.

Brothers and sisters, we are to seek to serve our neighbor. There are no big I's here and little u's. There is no rank here. We are all brothers and sisters in the Messiah. No one in here is too good to vacuum the floor or clean the toilet. No one in here is too good to mow the grass or pick up trash off of the church grounds. We are all laborers together, and if we have the mind of Messiah we will seek *these things* out - the lowly things. We won't seek out prestige, honor, to be uplifted, to be placed on a pedestal. We will seek out ways to serve each other, not caring if anyone ever recognizes us, because Father Yahweh sees in heaven, and that which He sees in secret He rewards openly.

And then Yeshua says something that he says often in his earthly ministry. If we exalt ourselves we will be brought down low, but if we bring ourselves down low, we will be exalted.

He says it often because it's so important. We live in a world that tells us that we need to lift ourselves up more and more, make ourselves known, and the more we hear it from the world (and the louder they say it) the more we start believing the lie the world is telling us. This all just flies in face of Yeshua's teaching. According to him we should be looking for ways to bring ourselves down low. We should NEVER exalt ourselves. Exaltation will come for those who are humble, but it always comes from *outside* of ourselves, never in ourselves. Let another man praise you and not your own mouth.

Why not try it? If you haven't been doing this why not start listening to Yeshua today? Start looking for ways to bring yourself lower and lower as a servant to your neighbor. Look for ways to make others feel better, to make others feel important. Find something in your neighbor to praise. Speak highly of your brother or sister in the faith. Make other people feel good by complimenting their strengths and doing things for them.

When you do this, Yahweh will exalt you. But if you do not. If you always go around looking for notoriety, praise, honor, prestige... Yahweh will bring you down low.

Yeshua's followers are to be a humble people. His followers are to see themselves as all level on the playing field. His followers are to serve each other. His followers are to follow *his* example. His was the best example.

If there was ever a man who deserved to seek praise and prestige. If there was ever a man who deserved to exalt himself, it was Yeshua of Nazareth. Yet he didn't do that. He humbled himself. He was in the form of Yahweh more than any other man. He was the only begotten Son of the heavenly Father, one of a kind, no other like him. Yet he did not consider equality with Yahweh as something to be seized. He instead emptied himself, even to the point of death. Beaten, bruised, bloody, naked, and hanging on a Roman cross, dying the death of a criminal.

He was like the Son of a Great King that jumped over the wall of the kingdom and disguised himself and lived as a pauper or a beggar among the commoners.

Yeshua was royalty, yet he had no place to lay his head. Yeshua deserved to be served, yet he served others. He bent down and washed his disciples feet the night he was betrayed. He bent down and washed Judas Iscariot's feet before he sent him out and said, "What you are about to do, do it quickly." He considered others as better than himself. And after all of this, Yahweh resurrected him from the dead and exalted him to the highest position a man could ever have - the right hand of the Father. That's where he is today, ruling and reigning at the Father's right hand. But the key is, Yahweh gave him that position, Yahweh gave him that name, *because he humbled himself*.

If Yeshua humbled himself, why in the world do we not humble ourselves? Who are we? We are nothing but dust, here today, gone tomorrow. If we want to truly seek real greatness, greatness in the Kingdom, we will bring ourselves down low.

Let's stand and pray, we'll pick this back up at verse 13 tomorrow.

### **The Woes Begin**

Matthew 23, Pt. 3

Opening Text: **Matthew 23:13-22**

In the last two lessons we've covered Matthew 23:1-12 concerning the scribes and Pharisees in the days that Yeshua walked the earth. They were "seated in the chair of Moses." They were the ones who led the community. They were the leaders in Judah. They were the readers of the law. They were the men you would go to in order to have the law explained to you, or expounded upon.

Yeshua instructs others to do what they are telling you from the law of Moses, but don't do as they do, because they don't practice what they are teaching. Yeshua says that they love to heap law upon law on everyone else as a burden, as a checklist for justification, but they aren't interested in lifting such a burden with even one of their fingers, by teaching the mercy and forgiveness found within the law. The few works that they do perform are all outward show, done for the purpose of praise, prestige, and the honor that comes from *men*.

Yeshua has spoken harshly about the scribes and Pharisees. The men who most would have considered to be the righteous, Yeshua comes down on them hard. Yeshua, while compassionate and merciful towards repentant sinners, was always harsh with religious people who didn't see their sin and thought they had nothing to repent of. This is why we see him speak negatively of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:1-12. But he doesn't stop in verse 12.

If we thought he was a rough on the scribes and Pharisees up to this point, then we are going to think he is downright mean towards them in the next verses we are going to cover, because he doesn't ease up at all; he gets *more harsh*. Let's begin look at this in verse 13.

Mt23:13 But woe to you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! You lock up the kingdom of heaven from people. For you don't go in, and you don't allow those entering to go in.

Yeshua begins a series of woe's here. "Woe to you!" he says. Woe is a term that the Old Testament prophets used to express condemnation upon the people of Israel for their sins. It's like a shout of disgust to a sinful people. Here are some examples in the Old Testament prophet Isaiah; he gives several woes to the people of the house of Judah in Jerusalem in Isaiah 5.

Isa5:11 Woe to those who rise early in the morning in pursuit of beer, who linger into the evening inflamed by wine.

Isa5:18 Woe to those who drag wickedness with cords of deceit and pull sin along with cart ropes.

Isa5:20 Woe to those who call evil good and good evil who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.

Isa5:21 Woe to those who are wise in their own opinion and clever in their own sight.

We can see here that the woe's are not good. If a prophet is giving you a woe, you are in a place of rebellious un-repentance. We see other prophets pronounce woes upon the people of Israel in the Old Testament. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and others. They all come to the nation of Israel with the word of Yahweh that says to them "Woe unto you!" because either the nation as a whole is in rebellion against Yahweh's law, or individual Israelites within the nation are in rebellion against Yahweh's law.

What Yeshua is doing in Matthew 23:13 (as he begins his series of woe's against the scribes and Pharisees) is speaking with the authority of a prophet from Yahweh. Yeshua is one of Yahweh's prophets. He's the greatest of all of the prophets. As a matter of fact, in Acts 3 Peter quotes Yahweh in Deuteronomy 18, and teaches that if we do not listen to Yeshua, the prophet Yahweh sent, we will be completely cut off from Yahweh. When the scribes, Pharisees, and everyone else heard Yeshua say "Woe unto you!" they would have automatically connected it with the many Old Testament prophets who came to Israel and Judah to pronounce woe's upon them for their sin. They may not have liked it, but they would have recognized the language of the prophet.

That's what Yeshua is doing to the scribes and Pharisees. They are Israelites, in rebellion against Yahweh and His law, and Yeshua is condemning them here. They were given the law, they had the law, they were even seated in the chair of Moses, yet they had abandoned the law, and turned from Yahweh. They had left Yahweh. They had deceived their own selves.

Matthew 23:13 again.

Mt23:13 But woe to you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! You lock up the kingdom of heaven from people. For you don't go in, and you don't allow those entering to go in.

This is the first place Yeshua calls them hypocrites. I touched on this in the first lesson through this chapter. Hypocrite is pretty much a transliteration of the Greek word *hupokritace*, which originally meant "play actor or stage player." The reason that was the word for Greco-Roman actors is because the base word *hupokrisis* means "to explain, reply, or answer." It had to do with you replying in a stage-play with your part. Whatever part you played on stage, you made your replies or answers. You recited your lines.

A stage-actor was acting out a part that was not his or her self. Just like we see today in the movies. The word later came to be used in a derogatory sense of someone who pretended to be something they were not in real life. Thus, we see it used here of the scribes and Pharisees. Yeshua is rebuking them for pretending to be holy men when in reality they are living in rebellion and lawlessness.

In each of these woes, he mentions what he is saying woe to. In verse 13 he says woe to them because they lock up the kingdom of heaven from people. What does that mean?

I think he starts here because it is an summary explanation of everything he has said up to this point. As leaders in Israel, the ones seated in the chair of Moses, their job was the job of Moses, to teach the people Yahweh's ways: his commandments, statutes, and judgments. Their job was to explain the Scriptures properly. Their job was to rightly understand and explain the Scriptures about the coming Messiah, but of course they didn't believe that Yeshua was the Messiah.

Instead of doing their job properly, they distorted the Scriptures. Yes, they would read Moses (from the chair) and the prophets, but they didn't follow the law themselves. They didn't practice what they read. They distorted the meaning of the Scriptures, and since everyone was coming to them for guidance, they were in essence taking the key they possessed and locking the door to the kingdom of heaven. They were locking the entrance to understanding the law and the prophets. Thus *they* would not enter the kingdom, and in holding that leadership position, having people come to them for guidance, they were keeping *the people* from entering as well.

They were blind guides, and those who followed them in everything they did were blind followers.

I have to make an application here that is not popular, but I believe it is true. I think the same thing can be said for the pastors of many Christian churches today. Men who are supposed to be shepherds, supposed to be skilled in the Scriptures, and able to expound and explain texts to help people understand are instead locking up the kingdom of heaven from the people in the pews.

I can't help but think of Acts 8 where the eunuch from Ethiopia was riding in his chariot reading a scroll copy of the prophet Isaiah, and Phillip (a follower of the Messiah) heard him reading and ran up to the chariot and asked him "Do you understand what you are reading?" The eunuch responded, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" Then Phillip began guiding him through that Scripture passage of Isaiah 52 through 53 about Yeshua.

That's the job of pastors and shepherds in congregations. That's what I'm here for. If you have a question about a Scripture, you can come and ask me. I'm not saying I know everything (for I certainly don't), but I do spend a lot of time studying the Bible so that I can help explain it to people, specifically those who attend this congregation. I'm here to help guide you through the Bible. If I don't know something, we can study it together.

What I'm seeing is that many pastors of many churches have left this. You just don't hear much chapter-by-chapter, verse-by-verse, expository preaching these days. Instead you hear about a series that ties in with the latest movie coming out in the theatre. A series called "The Avengers: Saving God's World." That's silly. That stuff ought not be mixed with teaching the Bible. I just saw the other day by happenstance, a man share a video inside of a church where they performed Michael Jackson's song "Thriller" in front of the congregation to start off the sermon. Um, yea... It seems like a lot of churches these days will do just about anything except for what's written in the Bible.

People who lead, but don't know the Scriptures, and don't teach the Scriptures (properly), are in a manner of speaking, locking up the door to the kingdom of heaven. This was exactly what the scribes and Pharisees were doing. People would come to them for proper guidance, and they would lead them down a path that led to destruction and a man-made religion rather than to the kingdom.

Look at the next verse, verse 14.

**Mt23:14** Woe to you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! You devour widows houses and make long prayers for show. This is why you will receive a harsher punishment.

Let me begin in this verse, by saying that some manuscripts of Matthew do not contain this verse. If you are reading the HCSB, this verse will be in brackets with a footnote that tells you this. So, it may not have originally been at this place in Matthew's gospel.

However, the exact same thing is recorded in both Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47, neither of which is questionable. What probably happened is a scribe copying Matthew at a later century placed it here in Matthew 23 in order to agree with or flow better with Mark and Luke's parallel writings.

However it eventually got into Matthew's gospel, the truth of the verse is substantiated by Mark and Luke so let's look at it here.

Yeshua says that the scribes and Pharisees devour widow's houses and make long prayers for show. These two are placed together, and done so for a reason. What seems to be taking place here was the scribes and Pharisees were talking the widows into giving them large amounts of money or giving them their possessions and in exchange they would pray an extra long prayer over the widow for her blessing.

Women who had lost their husbands were being exploited by the scribes and Pharisees. They would DEVOUR the widow's house, meaning - they would take everything she had, but they would do it craftily. They wouldn't show up in the middle of the night, hold her at gun point, and rob her of her possessions. No, that would be too obvious. They would piously talk her into giving them everything she had, and promise her a blessing. They would promise to pray a long prayer over her. Theft by deception is what is taking place here.

I don't have to go to all of the Scriptures where Yahweh speaks about acting justly towards the widows. There all over the place in Scripture. I'll mention one: Psalm 68:5 says that Yahweh is a father to the fatherless and a champion of widows. Yahweh wants us to look out for a woman who has lost their husband, especially elder widows. They aren't to be exploited, they are rather to be cared for and even supported by members in their family, and in some cases, by the congregation (see 1 Timothy 5).

Yeshua then says that because of this they will receive a harsher punishment. This must mean that treating widows properly is an important commandment, because neglecting widows, and exploiting widows craftily, receives a greater punishment than other sins. It's interesting that in the Shem Tov and Munster Version of the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, the text reads that they will receive a "long damnation," likely playing off of the "long prayers" that they are praying. In other words, "You scribes and Pharisees think these long prayers mean something. You think these long prayers make what you are doing okay. These long, showy prayers will only mean a long punishment for you."

Next verse, Matthew 23:15

**Mt23:15 Woe to you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to make one proselyte, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as fit for hell as you are!**

So here we have our third WOE upon the scribes and Pharisees. And this one has to do with them making proselytes.

First we have Yeshua saying that they will travel over land and sea to do this. This could be taken literally, meaning that they actually would travel anywhere, but it is probably more likely a figure of speech meaning that they would do *anything* to make one proselyte. They go to great lengths, they go to great pains just to make one convert.

And convert or adherent is what is meant by proselyte. Proselyte is a transliteration of the Greek word *prosaylootos*, defined by various Greek lexicons as "an arriver from a foreign region, a newcomer, a stranger."

In this context, the Pharisees were going to any measure it took to gain converts into *their* particular sect. They considered those outside their group as the lesser class, with a lesser degree of knowledge than they. So they would constantly try to talk people into converting to their sect.

Now, what's the problem with that? Well, Yeshua is here calling them hypocrites and saying they don't practice what they teach, yet they are trying to convert people over to their group. That's the problem. Therefore, when the convert is made, when someone is persuaded to join the party of the Pharisees, they are twice as fit for hell as the original Pharisee himself! The convert not only has his own baggage, he now has all the baggage of a Pharisee too!

Literally this reads "twice the son of hell." In other words, Yeshua is calling the scribes and Pharisees "sons of hell" and saying that the converts they make to their twisted, distorted group are "twice the sons of hell."

The name "a son of hell" is a metaphor that means a person who is fit or headed for the flames of Gehenna. Gehenna is the Greek word behind hell here and signifies the Valley of Hinnom, which in those days (of Yeshua) was used as the garbage dump for the land of Judah where all the refuse of the land was dumped, burned, and smoke continuously rose from the Valley.

"A son of hell" in Matthew 23:15 is a man that is going to be punished harshly in hell (Gehenna) for his sin. The Pharisees were sons of hell (headed to Gehenna), and their converts were even worse than they were (TWICE the son of hell) because the converts were learning from lawless teachers - the scribes and the Pharisees.

The *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary* says of this son of hell (this convert), that he is "condemned, for the hypocrisy he would learn to practice, both by the religion he left and that he embraced."

Woe unto you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! Yeshua has now pronounced 3 woe's upon them. They are under judgment for their transgressions. They were to be the holders of the Torah; the men who should have been the righteous in Israel. But they had abandoned their post. They were locking up the kingdom of heaven from others, devouring widows houses, and making converts to their false group.

Let's cover one more in verses 16-22. These are all connected so I can deal with them at one time.

Mt23:16 Woe to you blind guides, who say "Whoever takes an oath by the sanctuary, it means nothing. But whoever takes an oath by the gold of the sanctuary is bound by his oath.

Mt23:17 Blind fools! For which is greater? The gold or the sanctuary that sanctified the gold?

Mt23:18 Also, "Whoever takes an oath by the altar, it means nothing. But whoever takes an oath by the gift that is on it is bound by his oath."

Mt23:19 Blind people! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?

Mt23:20 Therefore the one who takes an oath by the altar, takes an oath by it, and by everything on it.

Mt23:21 The one who takes an oath by the sanctuary takes an oath by it, and by Him who dwells in it.

Mt23:22 And the one who takes an oath by heaven takes an oath by the Mighty One's throne, and by him who sits on it.

Now, here we have our 4th WOE pronounced against the scribes and Pharisees, and Yeshua gets even stronger or harsher here. He's already called them hypocrites and sons of hell, but now he calls them blind guides and fools. He's laying it all out there in the open.

What is the issue in these verses? It can all be summed up by saying that the scribes and the Pharisees are trying to find loopholes to relieve them of their oaths.

They had come up with an elaborate system of oath-taking that did not hold them accountable for what they would swear so long as they didn't take an oath by certain things. They were saying, "You can swear by the sanctuary, and it doesn't really mean anything. But if you swear by the gold in the sanctuary you better keep your word!" Really? Says who? Where in the world is that in Yahweh's law?

Yeshua points out that the sanctuary that sanctifies the gold inside of it is greater than the gold in the first place! So the methods of the scribes and Pharisees were wrong, foolish, in error. This is why in verses 20-22 Yeshua tells them that any oaths they take are to be kept, because whether you take an oath by the altar, by the sanctuary, or by heaven, you are still taking an oath in the presence of Yahweh. There is no such thing as making loopholes around oath-taking. An oath is an oath. If you don't swear an oath, that's fine, but if you swear an oath, don't try to get yourself out of it by swearing to something you feel to be less in importance, and then breaking your oath later on. It doesn't work that way.

This is just another of many transgressions being committed by the scribes and Pharisees, but it doesn't stop here. We've covered 4 WOE'S against them so far, but there is 4 more. I hope to cover 3 of the 4 left in the next lesson. You can be reading and studying Matthew 23:23-28 to get a head start. Let's stand and close in prayer.

## **I Don't Eat Gnats, but I Do Eat Camels**

Matthew 23, Pt. 4

Opening Text: **Matthew 23:23-28**

We continue in our study through Matthew 23 today by looking at three more woes upon the scribes and Pharisees. In the last lesson we covered the first four woes and saw that Yeshua gets more harsh with these men as he continues his rebuke. Yeshua's harshest recorded rebuke is likely here in this section, Matthew 23, and it is directed not to atheists, not to pagans, not to non-Israelites, but to Israelites; rebellious yet outwardly religious Israelites. Israelites who had gotten so far off track that they had really started their own religion. Israelites who were puffed up in themselves and considered themselves more righteous than everyone else in the community because of their outward piety.

That the scribes and Pharisees were physical Israelites will become more apparent and easier to prove the further we get to the end of the chapter, but it should already be seen at this point. Here are two points on this thus far.

1. They are seated in the chair of Moses, and Yeshua tells the people to do what they say. After this Yeshua goes on to expose their corrupt deeds or actions, but he begins by recognizing the authority they have in the chair or seat of the prophet Moses. This shows they are Israelites.

2. A second proof is the harsh judgment pronounced upon these men. Yahweh only gave his law to one people, the nation of Israel. Psalm 147:19-20 says, "He declares His word to Jacob, His statutes and judgments to Israel. He has not done this for any nation; they do not know His judgments. Hallelujah!" Romans 9:4-5 says that it's to Israelites that the giving of the law belongs. The nation of Israel has always been the chosen, physical people whom Yahweh gave His law too. If then Israel refuses or rebels against the law they've been given, it is a most serious offense. Yahweh reprimands them accordingly, just like we saw last week in Isaiah 5 with the house of Judah. Remember, Isaiah 5 says the following things (vss. 7, 13, 24-25).

### **Isaiah 5:7**

For the vineyard of Yahweh of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah, the plant He delighted in. He looked for justice but saw injustice, for righteousness, but heard cries of wretchedness.

### **Isaiah 5:13**

Therefore My people will go into exile because they lack knowledge; her dignitaries are starving, and her masses are parched with thirst.

### **Isaiah 5:24-25**

Therefore, as a tongue of fire consumes straw and as dry grass shrivels in the flame, so their roots will become like something rotten and their blossoms will blow away like dust, for they have rejected the instruction of Yahweh of Hosts,

and they have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore Yahweh's anger burns against His people. He raised His hand against them and struck them; the mountains quaked, and their corpses were like garbage in the streets. In all this, His anger is not removed, and His hand is still raised to strike.

The more I read and study Isaiah 5, the more I see parallels to what we are studying in Matthew 23. In Isaiah 5 Israel and Judah are said to be Yahweh's vineyard. Read the entire chapter in your study time at home. Yahweh says, "Why, when I expected a yield of good grapes, did it yield worthless grapes?" He then says that He will remove the hedge and wall around the vineyard so that it can be trampled and consumed. The rebellious inside of the nation of Israel will be destroyed.

When Yahweh gives His law to His chosen, physical people, and those people neglect the observance of that law, the harsh judgment of Yahweh comes upon His people, because that is the people He has dealings with. This is a reason you can know that the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23 are physical Israelites. More of these proofs will come in the remainder of the chapter.

So let's get back into Matthew 23. We will cover three more woes tonight.

### **Matthew 23:23**

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You pay a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin, yet you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy, and faith. These things should have been done without neglecting the others.

Here again Yeshua calls them pretenders or hypocrites. They pretend to be righteous, but they really aren't. They look righteous outwardly, but inside their is no heart change. They still have that stony heart that all adam-kind is born with. They don't have the new heart.

Yeshua pronounces another woe upon them here for majoring on the minors WHILE they minor on the majors. This is a subtle but vital point, because some people believe Yeshua was against paying attention to the minor points of law, and they leave it at that. But such is not the case. Let me explain.

Yeshua points out that the scribes and Pharisees are meticulous in tithing the herbs from their vegetable garden. They make sure to - pay a tenth - (literally TITHE), on their mint, dill, and cumin. Tiny herbs in their garden.

Can you imagine tithing on these things? Taking every tenth leaf or tenth sprig and making sure that you set it aside to take to the annual feast for the Levite priest to partake of? That's being careful. That's being meticulous. Some would say that's being legalistic. But Yeshua does not rebuke them for their tithing here. Tithing was part of Yahweh's law. It is how (1) the Levites were taken care of, (2) the poor in the land were provided for, and (3) the food at the feast was made plentiful. All of this was possible because of

the tithe. The Israelites would always set aside a tenth of their increase in both produce and livestock.

The scribes and Pharisees were so careful in this that they took it down to the smallest herbs like mint and dill.

The problem was that while they were so careful to tithe correctly, they were at the same time neglecting the more important matters in the law. Literally this reads "the weighty" or "heavy" points in the law. What were these points? Yeshua gives us three of them: justice, mercy, and faith.

The scribes and Pharisees neglected justice (proper, righteous judgment), mercy (kindness and gentleness to the undeserving), and faith (trust, belief, possibly faithfulness in walking with Yahweh in their life). These are KEY elements of THE LAW, Yeshua says. The Pharisees had set these aside, but yet they weren't forgetting their mint and dill tithe.

Many people don't think of matters like mercy and faith to be matters of the law at all, much less WEIGHTY matters of the law, but according to Yeshua, they are.

Being merciful. Showing compassion upon the undeserving. Showing kindness upon sinners in general, and especially sinners who repent. This is a weighty matter of the law. If you want to keep a heavy commandment, show mercy to people.

Having faith. Simply trusting in Yahweh. Trusting in His word. Believing what he says. Having confidence in Him rather than what we want or think. That's faith. If you want to keep a heavy commandment, have faith.

And justice. Properly making judgments. Seeking to genuinely administer punishment to the guilty and let the innocent go free. Not pouncing upon people for our hidden agenda's or personal gain from bribery. If you want to keep a heavy commandment, practice justice.

The Pharisees neglected these heavy matters while focusing meticulously on their herb tithing.

You know, we've got to be careful not to fall into this trap. We understand here that the law is for us today, but we can get lopsided on the law and focus on minors while we neglect the majors.

We may have the Leviticus 19:27 law down to a tee. We may be very careful not to mar the borders of our beard men, but if at the same time we don't have any mercy upon people. If we aren't kind and gentle and forgiving, we are committing the same error as the Pharisees.

The same could go for the tassels. We may be meticulous in our tassel making and wearing, but if we are faithless. If we aren't trusting in Yahweh and instead worrying and murmuring and complaining about so much all the time, we are acting just like a Pharisee in the first century.

Notice what Yeshua tells them at the end of verse 23. He doesn't tell them to stop tithing, he just tells them the tithing should be done without neglecting the others. Or he could be saying "Do these three weighty matters, without neglecting the tithing." Either way you read that he is saying to do them all. Don't neglect the majors or the minors, but don't focus on the light matters while neglecting the heavy matters.

This is another proof that the Pharisees are Israelites. Remember at the beginning of the sermon, I pointed out how Yahweh chose only the nation of Israel to specifically give His law to. Well look at the end of verse 23. He tells the Pharisees, "these things should have been done without neglecting the others." Yeshua is telling them that their tithing is good, but just don't neglect the heavier things. When he acknowledges their obedience to tithing he is praising that one aspect of their obedience. He is acknowledging that they are keeping on of the laws given to them as Israelites.

Look now at verse 24.

#### **Matthew 23:24**

Blind guides! You strain out a gnat, yet gulp down a camel!

Here he calls them blind guides (as in verse 16), and he explains what is going on in verse 23. Their focus on small things and neglect of big things is like straining out a gnat while swallowing a camel.

Gnats and camels are both unclean animals, but obviously a camel is a big animal, and in comparison to a gnat the contrast is greater. Yeshua is saying that what they are doing is like sitting down for dinner and being careful to strain the gnat out of their wine, making certain no little bitty gnats are eaten by them, but at the same time you have a huge camel sitting right on your main dish plate and you are about to dig in and eat a camel steak!

Once again, focusing on the small things while neglecting the big things. We've got to be careful about this. I think Christians get caught up in following the Pharisees here more than we think. Focusing on the outside. Cleaning up our outside, and wanting others to clean up their outside, instead of desiring for and praying for a heart change. The next two verses tie into this well.

#### **Matthew 23:25-26**

25 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed (NASB "robbery") and self-indulgence!

26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so the outside of it may also become clean.

Another woe, another derogatory reference to them being pretenders, and here it's because they focus on the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence (lack of self-restraint). This inside defilement goes back to Matthew 15:18-20 where Yeshua teaches that what defiles you and I is our heart. Yeshua says evil things like blasphemy, murder, and adultery comes from inside of us and defiles us. That's why we need new hearts. Our natural heart by birth is wicked.

But, the Pharisees looked the part. Remember, they had the broadest Phylacteries, longest tassels, nicest beards, most beautiful robes, eloquent speech, Scripture memorization, yet they were full of greed on the inside. It's possible to make yourself look holy on the outside without ever having a new heart. It's called a facade. Presenting your outward appearance as something you really aren't. It's like pulling up to a building that says "hospital" only to find it's just a wall in a movie set that looks like a hospital.

This is why I'm so against pressured confessions or conversions, praying a sinners prayer or thinking that just because someone gets baptized they are automatically saved. Salvation happens from the inside-out. I believe in confession and baptism, but not everyone who prays "come into my heart" and gets baptized has salvation.

This happens far too often with youth in church today. They attend a youth conference where emotions run high, and they are pressured to come to an altar, say a prayer, get baptized, and then it's like they've gotten their hand stamped or their ticket punched. By Yahweh's grace, some of them are saved, but because of bad doctrine and theology, people end up thinking someone is saved when they really aren't.

As a parent, it is better for you to bring your children every week to Sabbath service to hear the teaching of the word. Not to just hear a "salvation message," not to hear me coerce them into getting baptized, not for me to stir up their emotions like a con-artist, but just to hear the word preached. Faith comes by hearing the Bible taught. Whatever the sermon is - whether it's Leviticus 1:1 or John 3:16 - if it's from the Bible, it can produce faith in a person.

If we had more faith in that, if we really trusted Yahweh's word, we would believe this and let Yahweh deal with our children and our neighbors. Sure, we are supposed to teach or children diligently, and we are supposed to witness to lost sheep in the world, but we aren't supposed to coerce people into a ritual whereby they think that something they did or performed saved them. Salvation is of Yahweh. Yeshua's name means "He (referring back to Yahweh) WILL save," (not he might save). Let Yahweh deal with your child, and... let Yahweh deal with your neighbor. You can't pressure someone into being saved.

When we coerce people into a false salvation, we've only made a false convert that still doesn't love Yahweh. Even if they clean up a little bit or a lot bit. Even if they begin performing some outward laws, it doesn't mean that their heart has been changed. They can still be full of greed and self-indulgence just like a Pharisee.

Remember, we know the Pharisees were greedy because of what they were doing to the widows. They were stealing widows possessions by deceit according to verse 14. They

had no self-restraint. They were prideful, boastful, loving the praises of man while loving to hammer everyone else who wasn't part of their group.

This is why in verse 26, Yeshua calls them blind again. He says to first clean the inside of the cup, so the outside of it may also become clean. They are the cup here. They need to be cleansed inwardly, and if this happens the outside will automatically become clean. If someone gets born from above, born of the spirit, a new heart, a new birth, born of Yahweh, they will gradually manifest obedience outwardly, but it takes time, just like a seed planted in the garden. You can't holler at the seed and help it grow. You just nourish it, water it, and make sure it gets sunshine.

This seed in good ground won't be a quick growth. It won't be like the seed that landed on the rocky soil. That seed grew up quick and looked pretty for a while, but withered away because it had no root.

A saved person, a person who has been given a new heart, a person that is good soil, now desires to follow Yahweh. Sure, they still battle with their flesh, and they still sin, but the key is that they battle. They don't win every time, but they battle because they are now born - not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but born of Yahweh. (John 1:13).

People sometimes tell me, "Brother Matthew, I've been struggling with this sin and I need help." I always tell them "Be thankful you're struggling. Be thankful you haven't given up and given in. Be encouraged that you are battling. Yahweh's Spirit is in your heart. If He wasn't, you wouldn't be struggling with sin, you'd be practicing it, living a lifestyle of sin."

The inner man is the key. He is the focus. I'm not here to teach you to start by cleaning up your outer man. I'm not here to make you do something on the outside, or force you to talk a certain way, say a certain prayer, dress a certain way, or look a certain way. I'm not here to hand out tassels and Phylacteries at the door of the church. I'm not interested in a facade. I believe Yahweh. I believe that faith comes by hearing the word preached. Every part of it. Leviticus, Numbers, Ezekiel, Matthew 23, the book of Revelation, it all produces faith. When Yahweh saves you it is always genuine. Matthew Janzen can force a false salvation on you in an attempt to make you feel better, or to grow a bigger church, or whatever, but none of that comes from Yahweh. My prayer is that Yahweh creates clean hearts in you. My prayer is that Yahweh creates a clean heart in me. That's my prayer every day.

When you have a clean inside it will always, always, always, gradually produce a clean outside. It's just that the Pharisees got it backwards. They cleaned up the outside, but had dirty insides. They washed the car, but didn't clean out the trash and vacuum the carpet. They brushed their hair, but didn't brush their teeth. You get the picture.

When you see lost sheep, unsaved people, pray that Yahweh changes their heart. Witness to them, but don't force the Bible on them, let Yahweh deal with them. That's genuine conversion. We can't deliver anyone. That's Yahweh's job.

Let's look at the last woe, it's similar to what we just covered.

**Matthew 23:27-28**

27 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead mens bones and every impurity.

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

Here Yeshua says they are like whitewashed tombs. Touching a dead body rendered a person unclean, so Israelites would often cover tombs with lime-plaster, making them white and thus easier to see. This helped them steer clear of tombs that otherwise might be bumped into unknowingly or accidentally.

Yeshua is making his point then by telling the scribes and Pharisees that they are like these whited-tombs, having a clean appearance on the outside, marked white with lime on the outside, but inside they are full of the bones of dead men, an unclean corpse.

In the same way as these tombs, the Pharisees seemed like they were clean to people, but inside they were filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness. They were transgressors of law not keepers of law. This hearkens back to verse 3 where Yeshua says that they don't practice what they teach so therefore he tells the people not to follow their example.

So on the outside they are like a whited-tomb, marked clearly for all to see, but inside they are dead. Dead is often a figure of speech in scripture for the natural, unsaved man. The man without a new heart. Like when Paul writes to the saints in Ephesians 2 that prior to their conversion they were "dead in their trespasses and sins." Or when Yeshua told one of his disciples in Matthew 8:22 "let the dead bury their own dead." That first dead has to mean spiritually dead, and that's the same meaning here in Matthew 23:27. The scribes and Pharisees are full of dead men's bones on the inside. They are spiritually dead. They need spiritual life, just like I once was and just like you once were before you were given spiritual life.

The problem was that the Pharisees didn't see themselves as dead. They didn't think they were sick. They didn't think they were the problem, and many people today are the same way. When you don't see any of this you don't run to the solution, you think YOU are the solution. You look at yourself as good rather than evil. But Yeshua told his disciples in Matthew 7:11, "If you then who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children." We are evil by birth. We are not born with a new heart, we have to be given a new heart. "Given" means we haven't always had it.

Someone who doesn't think they are sick will never go to the doctor. Someone who doesn't realize they have cancer will never make any changes, and someone who already thinks they are righteous, holy, and look the part, will not run to Yeshua of Nazareth. The Pharisees had the remedy to their wickedness right there in front of them. But you don't see the remedy if you don't think you need any healing.

Brothers and sisters, run, RUN to Yeshua everyday. Yahweh gave him to us to run to. He is Yahweh's salvation, and righteousness, and deliverance. We are all sick. We all need to be healed spiritually. We all need to die daily to the desires of our flesh. Run to the Master. Don't be a whitewashed tomb. Realize that your outward show doesn't relieve you from your thoughts and feelings. Recognize that you are hopeless apart from Yahweh sending you His Son.

Run to Yeshua. Run to him. His arms are wide open to those who admit that they are sick. He is ready and more than willing to forgive you and heal you, but you must run to him and admit, "Have mercy upon me, a sinner."

### **Murdering the Prophets**

Matthew 23, Pt. 5

Opening Text: **Matthew 23:29-33**

Today we come to the final woe Yeshua pronounces upon the scribes and Pharisees. There's 8 in all. I'd like to recap them briefly now, and then jump right into our text tonight.

1. Woe to them for they lock up the kingdom from people. They should be teaching truth and enlightening people from their position in the chair, but they aren't.
2. Woe to them for stealing from widows by deceit and praying a long prayer blessing over them for show.
3. Woe to them for making hellish converts to their twisted religion of Judaism.
4. Woe to them for trying to circumvent the law with their made up oath taking system.
5. Woe to them for neglecting the weighty matters of the law, while focusing on the small matters.
6. Woe to them for cleaning the outside of the cup but not the inside.
7. Woe to them for they are full of deadness even though they appear like a lime plastered tomb of white on the outside.

And now tonight (the 8th woe), **WOE TO THEM** for lying and false piety concerning their relationship to the prophets that Yahweh sends.

What do I mean? We read it specifically in verses 29-30 moments ago. Let's look at it again.

**Matthew 23:29**

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous.

So, first we read here that they are building and decorating tombs and monuments of the prophets. I think that: (1) build the tombs of the prophets (2) decorate the monuments of the righteous, are equivalent statements. I think it's parallelism here. One point, said two different ways by Yeshua. Build and decorate is synonymous, and prophets and righteous are synonymous. Prophets of Yahweh were always righteous men, meaning they lived righteous lives, thus sometimes they are referred to by Yeshua as the righteous rather than the prophets (see also Matthew 10:41; 13:17 where prophets and righteous are used synonymously).

But what does it mean to build and decorate a monument or tomb of a prophet? We find in Scripture, as well as history, that tombs of holy men were often venerated. Their grave was a monument that memorialized the greatness and devotion the holy man had towards the Most High.

Men like Abraham, Israel, and Joseph (Genesis 25; 50) all had their place of burial marked clearly, because they were great saints in Israel; pillars of faith in Yahweh.

This is probably what the Apostle Peter is speaking of in Acts 2:29 when he brings up the patriarch David and says, "he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day." Peter is pointing out not only that David is dead, but that everyone there knows where David's tomb is. The Israelite historian Flavius Josephus talks about there being an expensive white marble monument that was placed at the entrance of David's tomb in the first century (Antiquities 16.182). He also speaks of how he had visited the tombs of the patriarchs in the land of Hebron, and they were of excellent marble and built in the most elegant manner (Wars 4.532). There's also some mention of this practice in the book of 1 Maccabees 13:27-30.

In Matthew 23:29 Yeshua says that the scribes and Pharisees build or decorate the tombs of the dead prophets. Yeshua doesn't so much rebuke this practice as he rebukes their hypocrisy attached to the practice. Here again, the scribes and Pharisees are doing one thing, but acting contrary to what they are doing. Very similar to cleaning the outside of the cup, but not the inside.

Verse 30 adds how they were contrary or hypocritical. Let's read verses 29 and 30 together now:

**Matthew 23:29-30**

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

30 and you say, If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we wouldn't have taken part with them in shedding the prophets blood.

So they are decorating these tombs of the prophets, and then piously proclaiming, "If we lived in the past, in the days of our fathers (meaning their ancestors), we would have never killed the holy prophets like they did."

Here they are recognizing that prophets of Yahweh have been killed in the past, and this killing was done by their fathers, their physical ancestors, but their claim is that they are different. They say that they are not like their fathers. They claim to love the prophets, because after all, they are building these great tomb monuments for the prophets.

Now, I want you to remember to the last message where I said that as we get further to the end of Matthew 23 it will become very easy to prove that the scribes and Pharisees are physical Israelites. I point this out because there are some who teach that the scribes and Pharisees were not physical Israelites, but were instead descendants of Esau (Edomites), or descendants of Cain (Cainites). I disagree with both views. I believe the scribes and Pharisees here that Yeshua addresses are all physical Israelites, and I believe Matthew 23:30 proves this beyond a shadow of a doubt. Let me now explain this further and in more detail.

In verse 30 Yeshua says that they say, "Had we lived in the days of OUR FATHERS, we wouldn't have taken part WITH THEM in shedding the prophets blood."

This shows that the ancestors of the Pharisees were the ones who killed the prophets back in times past. Killed what prophets? Well obviously, they killed the righteous, Israelite prophets of Yahweh.

If we go back to the Hebrew Scriptures and see who is responsible for killing the prophets, then we will know who the Pharisees fathers (or ancestors) are.

So, who was responsible for killing the prophets in the Old Testament? I can say to you with absolute certainty today that it was physical Israelites. Physically chosen men, inside the nation of Israel, who rebelled against Yahweh. They were responsible for killing the prophets, and it was from this unrighteous Israelite lineage that the Pharisees descended. The sins of the fathers continued to be passed down from generation to generation.

Now, I want to show this to you from the Scriptures. It's one thing to make a claim, but it's an entirely different thing to prove that claim. Let's turn first to 1 Kings 19, beginning at verse 1.

### **1 Kings 19:1-18**

1 Ahab told Jezebel everything that Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. (In 1 Kings 18 we have the "contest" on Mount Carmel between Elijah [the prophet of Yahweh], and the 450 prophets of Baal, as well as 400 prophets of Asherah. Elijah won by the power of Yahweh, and then Elijah killed all the

prophets of Baal with the sword. We aren't specifically told if Elijah slaughtered Asherah's prophets, but I presume he did [1 Kings 18:19].)

*Side Note on Vs. 1* - Ahab was an Israelite King, of the house of northern Kingdom, Israel (1 Kings 16:29). Ahab's wife Jezebel however, was not an Israelite. She was from a forbidden lineage, a Sidonian (1 Kings 16:31), who enticed Ahab her husband to worship Baal. The Sidonians were descendants of Canaan's firstborn son Sidon (Genesis 10:15), and were included in the nations Yahweh had told the Israelites not to intermarry with (1 Kings 11:1-2; Deuteronomy 7:1-6), for these women would turn you away from Yahweh to follow after their mighty ones, which is exactly what Jezebel did to King Ahab.

2 So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, May the gods punish me and do so severely if I don't make your life like the life of one of them (dead prophets of Baal) by this time tomorrow! (Jezebel's reference to "the gods" stems from her idolatrous upbringing as a Sidonian. She sought to kill Elijah, because he is the one Yahweh sent to pronounce no rain on the land back in 1 Kings 17, and then he slaughtered 450 prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18, verse 40.)

3 Then Elijah became afraid and immediately ran for his life. When he came to Beer-sheba that belonged to Judah, he left his servant there,

4 but he went on a day's journey into the wilderness. He sat down under a broom tree and prayed that he might die. He said, I have had enough! Yahweh, take my life, for I'm no better than my fathers.

5 Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree. Suddenly, an angel touched him. The angel told him, Get up and eat.

6 Then he looked, and there at his head was a loaf of bread baked over hot stones, and a jug of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again.

7 Then the angel of Yahweh returned for a second time and touched him. He said, Get up and eat, or the journey will be too much for you.

8 So he got up, ate, and drank. Then on the strength from that food, he walked 40 days and 40 nights to Horeb, the mountain of (the) Mighty One.

9 He entered a cave there and spent the night. Then the word of Yahweh came to him, and He said to him, What are you doing here, Elijah?

10 He replied, I have been very zealous for Yahweh (the) Mighty One of Hosts, but the Israelites have abandoned Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are looking for me to take my life. (Notice that Elijah is afraid of rebellious Israelites; Israelites, who like King Ahab, did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh. Notice also that it is possible for Israelites to abandon Yahweh's covenant according to verse 10. This is a key verse to understand who it was throughout the Old Testament that killed the prophets of Yahweh. The fathers or ancestors of the Pharisees were rebellious Israelites.)

11 Then He said, Go out and stand on the mountain in Yahweh's presence. At that moment, Yahweh passed by. A great and mighty wind was tearing at the mountains and was shattering cliffs before Yahweh, but Yahweh was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but Yahweh was not in the earthquake.

12 After the earthquake there was a fire, but Yahweh was not in the fire. And after the fire there was a voice, a soft whisper.

13 When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Suddenly, a voice came to him and said, What are you doing here, Elijah?

14 I have been very zealous for Yahweh (the) Mighty One of Hosts, he replied, but the Israelites have abandoned Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they're looking for me to take my life. (Again, Elijah repeats what he stated in verse 10. The Israelites had abandoned Yahweh's covenant, and killed Yahweh's prophets with the sword, and Elijah was the only prophet left at that time [at least the only acting prophet, executing the office of a prophet; see 1 Kings 18:3-4, 13], and they were out to get him. Some of this did come about because of Jezebel's idolatrous influence on Ahab, but Yahweh wasn't blaming Jezebel, Yahweh was blaming the Israelites [see also 1 Kings 21:17-26]. It was the Israelites fault for bringing Jezebel into the camp. They were the ones rebelling against Yahweh by following her orders.)

15 Then Yahweh said to him, Go and return by the way you came to the Wilderness of Damascus. When you arrive, you are to anoint Hazael as king over Aram.

16 You are to anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel and Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel-meholah as prophet in your place.

17 Then Jehu will put to death whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death whoever escapes the sword of Jehu.

18 But I will leave 7,000 in Israel — every knee that has not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him. (Whew! Yahweh preserved 7,000 Israelites who had not been involved in killing the prophets. This was the righteous remnant, but they were few in comparison to the many wicked Israelites who had abandoned the covenant. This story is a picture of so many New Testament references to "the many and the few" or to "the sheep and the goats." All of these phrases are dealing with Israelites. You can be one of the many in Israel, who abandon the covenant, or one of the few in Israel, who hold fast to the covenant. You can be one of the goats in Israel, who rebel against Yahweh, or you can be one of the sheep in Israel, who follows the shepherd. See Romans 11:1-6 for a NT reference to this very story, and the application to the remnant of Israel, by grace.)

The key in this entire passage we are looking at is that it was Israelites who were guilty of killing their own prophets. Remember again that in Matthew 23:30, Yeshua says to the Pharisees, "And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we wouldn't have taken part with them in shedding the prophets blood.'" The Pharisees were making a reference to their Israelite forefathers back at the time of Elijah. Their rebellious Israelite forefathers who abandoned Yahweh's covenant and killed Yahweh's prophets, the prophets who preached to expose their evil deeds.

Let's look at another passage in the Old Testament that corroborates this. Nehemiah 9, beginning at verse 1.

**Nehemiah 9:1-26**

1 On the twenty-fourth day of this month the Israelites assembled; they were fasting, wearing sackcloth, and had put dust on their heads.

2 Those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners, (This has to be the forbidden lineages. Some foreigners [like the Midianites; see Exodus 2:15-21; 18:1-12; Genesis 25:1-2] were allowed to join themselves to Israel, so long as they worshipped Yahweh, following in His law.) and they stood and confessed their sins and the guilt of their fathers.

3 While they stood in their places, they read from the book of the law of Yahweh their Mighty One for a fourth of the day and spent another fourth of the day in confession and worship of Yahweh their Mighty One.

4 Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani stood on the raised platform built for the Levites and cried out loudly to Yahweh their Mighty One.

5 Then the Levites — Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah — said, Stand up. Praise Yahweh your Mighty One from everlasting to everlasting. Praise Your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise.

6 You alone are Yahweh. You created the heavens, the highest heavens with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to all of them, and the heavenly host worships You.

7 You are Yahweh, the Mighty One who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans, and changed his name to Abraham.

8 You found his heart faithful in Your sight, and made a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites, and Girgashites —

to give it to his descendants. You have kept Your promise, for You are righteous.

9 You saw the oppression of our ancestors in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea.

10 You performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, all his officials, and all the people of his land, for You knew how arrogantly they treated our ancestors. You made a name for Yourself that endures to this day.

11 You divided the sea before them, and they crossed through it on dry ground. You hurled their pursuers into the depths like a stone into churning waters.

12 You led them with a pillar of cloud by day, and with a pillar of fire by night, to illuminate the way they should go.

13 You came down on Mount Sinai, and spoke to them from heaven.

You gave them impartial ordinances, reliable instructions, and good statutes and commands.

14 You revealed Your holy Sabbath to them, and gave them commands, statutes, and instruction through Your servant Moses.

15 You provided bread from heaven for their hunger; You brought them water from the rock for their thirst. You told them to go in and possess the land You had sworn to give them.

16 But our ancestors acted arrogantly; they became stiff-necked and did not listen to Your commands.

17 They refused to listen and did not remember Your wonders You performed among them. They became stiff-necked and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But You are a forgiving Mighty One, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in faithful love, and You did not abandon them.

18 Even after they had cast an image of a calf for themselves and said, This is your Mighty One who brought you out of Egypt, and they had committed terrible blasphemies,

19 You did not abandon them in the wilderness because of Your great compassion. During the day the pillar of cloud never turned away from them, guiding them on their journey. And during the night the pillar of fire illuminated the way they should go.

20 You sent Your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold Your manna from their mouths, and You gave them water for their thirst.

21 You provided for them in the wilderness 40 years and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out, and their feet did not swell.

22 You gave them kingdoms and peoples and assigned them to be a boundary. They took possession of the land of Sihon king of Heshbon and of the land of Og king of Bashan.

23 You multiplied their descendants like the stars of heaven and brought them to the land You told their ancestors to go in and take possession of it.

24 So their descendants went in and possessed the land: You subdued the Canaanites who inhabited the land before them and handed their kings and the surrounding peoples over to them, to do as they pleased with them.

25 They captured fortified cities and fertile land and took possession of well-supplied houses, cisterns cut out of rock, vineyards, olive groves, and fruit trees in abundance. They ate, were filled, became prosperous, and delighted in Your great goodness.

**26 But they were disobedient and rebelled against You. They flung Your law behind their backs and killed Your prophets who warned them in order to turn them back to You. They committed terrible blasphemies.**

Verse 26 is KEY. In this entire section, it is blatantly obvious, that Yahweh's people are the Israelite people. Physical ancestors, physical descendants, all coming from Abraham, through Isaac, through Jacob-Israel. Yahweh was so compassionate upon them, even when they rebelled. He continued to be slow to anger, rich in faithful love, and merciful and forgiving. He kept taking them back, but verse 26 says that after all his goodness, the Israelites still flung Yahweh's law behind their backs, and... killed Yahweh's prophets with the sword. Why did they kill Yahweh's prophets? Yahweh's prophets were righteous, and were trying to warn the rebellious Israelites to turn back to Yahweh. They didn't want to, they didn't care about Yahweh, so they slaughtered the prophets of

Yahweh. Rebellious Israelites slaughtered holy men, holy prophets, committing what the verse calls terrible blasphemies. Nehemiah 9 is so wonderful, so let's read the rest of it, picking it back up at verse 27, to the end.

27 So You handed them over to their enemies, who oppressed them. In their time of distress, they cried out to You, and You heard from heaven. In Your abundant compassion You gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the power of their enemies.

28 But as soon as they had relief, they again did what was evil in Your sight. So You abandoned them to the power of their enemies, who dominated them. When they cried out to You again, You heard from heaven and rescued them many times in Your compassion.

29 You warned them to turn back to Your law, but they acted arrogantly and would not obey Your commands. They sinned against Your ordinances, which a person will live by if he does them. They stubbornly resisted, stiffened their necks, and would not obey.

30 You were patient with them for many years, and Your Spirit warned them through Your prophets, but they would not listen. Therefore, You handed them over to the surrounding peoples.

31 However, in Your abundant compassion, You did not destroy them or abandon them, for You are a gracious and compassionate Mighty One.

32 So now, our Mighty One — the great, mighty, and awe-inspiring Mighty One who keeps His gracious covenant — do not view lightly all the hardships that have afflicted us, our kings and leaders, our priests and prophets, our ancestors and all Your people, from the days of the Assyrian kings until today.

33 You are righteous concerning all that has come on us, because You have acted faithfully, while we have acted wickedly.

34 Our kings, leaders, priests, and ancestors did not obey Your law or listen to Your commands and warnings You gave them.

35 When they were in their kingdom, with Your abundant goodness that You gave them, and in the spacious and fertile land You set before them, they would not serve You or turn from their wicked ways.

36 Here we are today, slaves in the land You gave our ancestors so that they could enjoy its fruit and its goodness. Here we are — slaves in it!

37 Its abundant harvest goes to the kings You have set over us, because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and our livestock as they please. We are in great distress.

What a text. I know I say this a lot, but that's gotta make it into my favorite text group. Wow, wow, wow... As I was studying this past week, reading through this text in Nehemiah, I wept sitting at my kitchen table. I wept because of the mercies of Yahweh. I wept because I felt the text as I read it. Yahweh kept taking the Israelites back, and as soon as they would get relief and prosper, they would fall back into sin, and they even went so far as to kill their own prophets; Yahweh's prophets.

I wept because I saw myself. I wept because I have been a rebellious Israelite. I wept because I can feel Yahweh's mercy. I can actually feel it. It overwhelms me.

Yahweh's mercy is always there, IF we confess and repent. It never runs out. It's a never ending supply, but you can't remain hard-hearted, stubborn, and stiff-necked. You can't continue in wickedness. You can't practice it and expect the mercies of Yahweh. Yahweh is the forgiver, but He is also the destroyer. Turn to Him today and be forgiven.

I'm not even through with this section of Matthew 23, but I think I'm going to stop here for now. Meditate on these texts we've covered. Go back and read them. Compare Matthew 23:29-30 with 1 Kings 19 and Nehemiah 9. I believe it is undeniable that the fathers the Pharisees spoke about, their fathers who shed the blood of the prophets, were their Israelite fathers. The Pharisees were descendants of these rebellious Israelites, and if they didn't repent, what happened to rebellious Israel of old would happen to rebellious Israel of their time. They would receive judgment.

We will pick this back up next week, same text, Matthew 23:29-33, but we will get into even more confirming Scripture.

### **The Sons of Murderers**

Matthew 23, Pt. 6

Opening Text: **Matthew 23:29-33**

In the last lesson we began to study the verses we just read, along with Old Testament texts that helped explained this section in Matthew 23.

The scribes and Pharisees were big on building and decorating tombs for the prophets. They would have this outward show of honoring the dead prophets, and then they would go around proclaiming, "If we lived in the days of our fathers, we wouldn't have taken part with them in shedding the prophets blood."

We looked at two Old Testament texts, 1 Kings 19 and Nehemiah 9. Both of those texts showed who the fathers of the Pharisees were that murdered the prophets: rebellious Israelites. Israelites who abandoned the covenant of Yahweh. Israelites who stiffened their neck because of their hard hearts of stone. The prophets would come to them, telling them to repent and Yahweh would forgive them, but many in Israel would not repent. There was always a remnant that would, but the remnant was small in comparison to the many.

Being a physical Israelite meant you were physically chosen, but it did not mean you were automatically spiritually chosen. There has always been a spiritual remnant inside of physical Israel; those who did the will of the Father. The Pharisees claimed to be part of that spiritual remnant, but they were not. They were only physical Israelites, and physical alone does not cut it with Yahweh.

Before we go into Matthew 23:31-33, I'd like to mention three more Old Testament texts that continue to prove it was rebellious Israelites who killed their own prophets. They are Jeremiah 2:29-32, Jeremiah 26:20-23, and 2 Chronicles 24:15-22.

### **2 Chronicles 24:15-22**

15 Jehoiada died when he was old and full of days; he was 130 years old at his death.

16 He was buried in the city of David with the kings because he had done what was good in Israel with respect to the Mighty One and His temple. (It's important to understand these verses in light of 24:1-2. King Joash of Judah did what was right in Yahweh's eyes as long as Jehoiada the priest was alive. But look at the next verse.)

17 However, after Jehoiada died, the rulers of Judah came and paid homage to the king. Then the king listened to them,

18 and they abandoned the temple of Yahweh, the Mighty One of their ancestors and served the Asherah poles and the idols. So there was wrath against Judah and Jerusalem for this guilt of theirs.

19 Nevertheless, He sent them prophets to bring them back to Yahweh; they admonished them, but the people would not listen.

20 The Spirit of the Mighty One took control of Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest. (Zechariah is about to prophesy.) He stood above the people and said to them, This is what the Mighty One says, Why are you transgressing the Yahweh's commands and you do not prosper? Because you have abandoned Yahweh, He has abandoned you.

21 But they conspired against him and stoned him at the king's command in the courtyard of the Yahweh's temple.

22 King Joash didn't remember the kindness that Zechariah's father Jehoiada had extended to him, but killed his son. While he was dying, he said, May Yahweh see and demand an account. (Almost unbelievable as I read this account. Joash had been led by Jehoiada the priest for many years [see 2 Chronicles 23]. Yet after the death of Jehoiada, Joash did not even respect Jehoiada's son Zechariah. What a tragedy.)

So who was it who shed the prophets' blood? In the last 2 lessons we've looked at 3 witnesses, Elijah, Nehemiah, and 2 Chronicles - that all say it was Israelites, rebellious Israelites, who loved the way of lawlessness rather than the way of Yahweh.

So, back to Matthew 23. The Pharisees claimed that if they lived back in the days of their fathers, their physical Israelite fathers, they wouldn't have shed the prophets' blood like their fathers did. But, you can pay lip service to anything. Saying they wouldn't have killed the prophets if they lived back then didn't prove anything. Actions always speak louder than words. Look at what Yeshua says in response to their claims?

### **Matthew 23:31**

You, therefore, testify against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.

They were witnesses against their own selves. How?

By all of their wicked deeds that Yeshua has been condemning in the entire chapter. Their wicked deeds proved that their words were empty and meaningless.

Their saying one thing and doing another, their pride and love of flattering titles, their stealing from widows, their oath breaking, their neglect of justice, mercy, and faith, all these things were a testimony against their own words.

They said they wouldn't have been in on killing the prophets back in the olden days, but their actions testified that they would have been right there with the other rebellious Israelites. Yeshua then says this:

**Matthew 23:32**

Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers sins!

Yeshua gives them a sarcastic command. He knows their heart. He knows they are rebellious. He knows they have abandoned Yahweh's covenant, just like Israel of old, and so he tells them to fill up the measure of their father's sins.

Notice their fathers sins. Sin is the transgression of the law. The law was given specifically to Israel. The Pharisees fathers sinned against Yahweh by killing the prophets. They broke the law that was given to them, and Yeshua tells the Pharisees to fill up that sin like it's a measuring cup. The Pharisees were going to complete the sin cup to the top. They were going to sin against the law given to them as well. This all continues to prove that the Pharisees were rebellious Israelites, descendants of their forefathers.

How would they fill up this cup of sin? Picture a cup in your mind, and little by little it is being filled up with sin. The Israelites of old kept filling it up each time they would kill a prophet, or each time they would rebel against Yahweh, abandoning His covenant.

I will tell you how they would fill up the cup. By rejecting and killing Yeshua, the ultimate prophet of all prophets. The Israelite Pharisees would call for the murder of Yeshua, just like the rebellious Israelites at the time of King Ahab called for the murder of Elijah. It's bad to desire to murder Elijah. He was a holy prophet of Yahweh. But it is multiplied bad to call for and murder Yeshua, because not only is he a prophet of Yahweh, He is Yahweh's Son. Now, we are going to go from here to Matthew 21, and I think you'll see how this ties in with a parable Yeshua told.

But before we go there, look at Matthew 24:1.

**Matthew 24:1**

As Yeshua left and was going out of the temple complex, His disciples came up and called His attention to the temple buildings.

The part I want you to focus on here is that Yeshua left the temple complex in Matthew 24:1. Now turn with me to Matthew 21:23.

### **Matthew 21:23**

When He entered the temple complex, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to Him as He was teaching and said, By what authority are You doing these things? Who gave You this authority?

Yeshua entered the temple complex in Matthew 21:23 (he actually went in in 23:12) and he did not exit it until Matthew 24:1, and there's a reason for his exit, and boy do I want to get into that right now, but I'd be putting the cart before the horse. We will eventually get to it. For now, realize that everything from Matthew 21:12 to Matthew 24:1 is tied together. The chapter divisions are placed in here by man. This is one cohesive section, all related together.

Notice Matthew 21:23 again; it is the chief priests and elders that come to him with questions. Now look at Matthew 21:45.

### **Matthew 21:45**

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they knew He was speaking about them.

Here they are called the chief priests and Pharisees. Chief priests are the same in both verses and elders and Pharisees are synonymous. The elders of Matthew 21:23 are the Pharisees of Matthew 21:45

Now, in this section we have two parables, and I'd like to cover them both briefly. We have the parable of the two sons and the parable of the vineyard. I will take more time on the parable of the vineyard, but we will cover them both.

### **Matthew 21:28-32**

28 But what do you think? (Remember, Yeshua is directly addressing the chief priests and the Pharisee elders. We read verses like this and see the word "you" and sometimes [even subconsciously] think that he is talking directly to us. We can always learn something in principle, but Yeshua had a direct audience in front of him that day, and that's who he was speaking to when he said "But what do YOU think?") A man had two sons. He went to the first and said, My son, go, work in the vineyard today.

29 He answered, I don't want to! Yet later he changed his mind and went.

30 Then the man went to the other and said the same thing. I will, sir, he answered. But he didn't go.

31 Which of the two did his fathers will?

The first, they said (The chief priests and Pharisees are answering here). Yeshua said to them, I assure you: Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of (the) Mighty One before you!

32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you didn't believe him. Tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him, but you, when you saw it, didn't

even change your minds then and believe him.

The chief priests and Pharisees (elders) are the son that spoke pleasing words with his mouth, but did not back up those words with their life. They said, "Yes, I will go work in the vineyard." They claimed to be the righteous, but their actions testified against them.

The tax collectors and prostitutes on the other hand were open, practicing sinners. Sinners who everyone could see. The Pharisees were sinners too, but you just couldn't tell it from the outside. The Pharisees would have looked down upon the tax collectors and prostitutes. They would have considered them the scum of the earth, so when Yeshua said that the tax collectors and prostitutes enter the Kingdom before them, it was like slapping them in the face.

Tax collectors and prostitutes heard John the Baptizer preach and they believed him, repented, and received his baptism. The Pharisees rejected Yahweh's council through John. They didn't believe him, thus they didn't repent of their sin.

Let's look now at the next parable.

### **Matthew 21:33-41**

**33 Listen to another parable:** (Yeshua is telling the men he just spoke the first parable to, to listen to this next parable; it is specifically addressed to them; the chief priests and Pharisee elders.) There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, and built a watchtower. He leased it to tenant farmers and went away. (Now, let's think about this. Yeshua is giving them this parable, and each player in the parable represents someone. I will show that the landowner represents Father Yahweh [this will be totally apparent in verse 37], and the tenant farmers represent the rebellious Israelites throughout the centuries, including the chief priests and Pharisee elders. It is best to view the tenant farmers as rebellious Judahite Israelites; Israelites from the house of Judah who Yahweh continued to have a relationship with on through to the time of Yeshua's birth. He had divorced the house of Israel back at the time of the prophet Hosea, but He continued to work with the house of Judah, because that was the house that His Son Yeshua would come through. Once His Son was born, he could then judge the house of Judah, and divorce them, like he did the house of Israel. I believe that is what is being spoken of in this parable. The divorce of the house of Judah. I'll explain more in later lessons.)

**34 When the grape harvest drew near, he sent his slaves to the farmers to collect his fruit.** (Who do you suppose the slaves represent? Look at the next verse.)

**35 But the farmers took his slaves, beat one, killed another, and stoned a third.** (The tenant farmers had the slaves sent to them, but they beat, killed, and stoned the slaves. The slaves represent the prophets [Jeremiah 7:25-27; 25:4 refers to Yahweh's prophets as his servants/slaves; Hebrew = ebed - "servant, bondman, slave"]. The prophets were sent to the tenant farmers which were the chief priests, Pharisees, and their Israelite ancestors. This ties in with Matthew 23:29-32. The fathers of the Pharisees killed the prophets, and the Pharisees followed suit. They thought they didn't need a prophet sent to them. They thought they were already righteous. Notice also that the slaves were

sent to the farmers. They were sent to the farmers, because the farmers were Israelites. Prophets were sent to the rebellious in Israel, preaching a message of repentance, but most in Israel would not listen.)

**36** Again, he sent other slaves, more than the first group, and they did the same to them. (More prophets; remember, in Jeremiah 7:25 and 25:4, Yahweh says he sent His servants the prophets time and time again. Literally, this reads "daily, rising up early and sending them.")

**37** Finally, he sent his son to them. They will respect my son, he said. (This proves that the landowner is Yahweh, because after sending his servants [the prophets], he sends his son, which represents Yeshua. All the prophets are sons or children of Yahweh too, in one sense, but in a more restrained sense, Yahweh has only one Son, Yeshua, only begotten. The sending of the prophets to Israel culminated in the sending of the greatest prophet, Yeshua the Son of Yahweh.)

**38** But when the tenant farmers saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance! (It's ironic, all they needed to do was receive and respect the landowners son that was sent to them, and they could have shared in the inheritance, being connected to the Son. Instead they hated the Son, just like the rebellious Israelites of old hated the prophets sent to them.)

**39** So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. (Now we see how this ties into Matthew 23:32 where Yeshua tells the Pharisees to: "Fill up the measure of your fathers sins." The way that measure would be filled up would be by their rejection and murder of Yeshua the Son. It was wicked that their Israelite fathers had murdered the prophets, but it was even worse to murder the Son of the landowner. Yeshua knew they were going to kill him. It would be the paramount sin. The sin of all sins. This would be the sin that filled up the measure of the cup mentioned in Matthew 23:32.)

**40** Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers?

**41** He will completely destroy those terrible men they told Him, and lease his vineyard to other farmers who will give him his produce at the harvest. (The vineyard will be taken away from the chief priests and Pharisees and given to other farmers who will give the landowner His portion from His vineyard.)

Now, I will bring this parable up again in a later sermon, but for now we can see how it ties into Matthew 23. Remember, Yeshua is saying all of this while standing inside the temple complex. This parable of the vineyard explains how the chief priests and Pharisees will fill up the measure of their fathers sins. They will do it by killing the Son of the landowner. That sin will do them in. It will fill up the cup, and judgment will have to come down upon them for such a heinous crime.

So, let's go back to Matthew 23:33 to finish this lesson, and read what Yeshua says right after this.

### **Matthew 23:33**

Snakes! Brood of vipers! How can you escape being condemned to hell?

Yeshua just keeps getting harsher on the scribes and Pharisees. Here he calls them snakes and the offspring of vipers. This is a metaphor or figure of speech. They are called this because of their sins against Yahweh, because they are descendants or offspring of lawless, rebellious Israelites.

It shouldn't surprise us that Yeshua uses a metaphor here, because he just used a metaphor a few verses before this when he talked about straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel. That's figurative. There were no literal gnats or camels that Yeshua was talking about, he just used gnats and camels to get his point across about the Pharisees focusing on small things and ignoring big things.

Likewise here, he uses a metaphor of snakes and vipers to get across the level of sin that the scribes and Pharisees were at. They were about to commit the worst of all sins. The murder of the very Son of the Almighty.

I've shown by numerous proofs that the scribes and Pharisees in this chapter are Israelites, so this reference to them being snakes and the offspring of vipers has to be metaphorical, describing their craftiness and trickery, like a snake.

Also consider this, Yahweh has used metaphorical language similar to this in the Old Testament for rebellious Israel. In the book of Jeremiah, Yahweh calls Judahites another unclean animal because of their sin. Look at this.

### **Jeremiah 5:7-8**

7 Why should I forgive you? Your children have abandoned Me and sworn by those who are not mighty ones. I satisfied their needs, yet they committed adultery; they gashed themselves at the prostitutes house.

8 They are well-fed, eager stallions, each neighing after someone else's wife. (If you read on down to Jeremiah 5:11 - "They, the house of Israel and the house of Judah, have dealt very treacherously with Me. This is Yahweh's declaration.")

Here Yahweh refers to rebellious Judahites as stallions, an unclean animal, and he says that they are neighing after their neighbor's wife. That's a derogatory, metaphorical way to say they are committing adultery. Yahweh is so upset with them, that he calls them an unclean animal. (Also see Isaiah 56:10-11.)

It is the same in Matthew 23:33. The Pharisees are snakes. They trick widows out of their money, and deceive people into thinking it's okay to break oaths. They are the offspring of vipers because they are the sons of those rebellious Israelites who murdered the prophets. Like father like son. They are continuing the rebellion.

The condemnation and judgment is getting heavy for the scribes and Pharisees. They are about to face the ultimate judgment for the ultimate sin, the rejection of their own Messiah, plus the murder of their own Messiah.

## Persecution Predicted

Matthew 23, Pt. 7

Opening text: **Matthew 23:29-36**

In the last lesson we looked at a few more Old Testament texts that proved it was rebellious Israelites who killed their own prophets.

Yahweh's servants, the prophets, were sent to Israel, yet the majority in Israel would not listen. Time and time again this occurred. Yahweh sent prophets to turn them back, but they would not take heed. Each time they rebelled, they were metaphorically filling up a cup with sin.

The scribes and Pharisees would fill up the complete measure in that cup, as Yeshua says in Matthew 23:32. The way they would do that is by rejecting and murdering the greatest prophet, the Son of Yahweh.

Remember back to the parable of the vineyard in Matthew 21. After sending his servants (the prophets) over and over, the landowner (Yahweh) would finally say, "I'll send my son (Yeshua). They'll respect my son," but the tenant farmers (chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees) will reject and murder the son, just like their ancestors (and they) who murdered the servants.

Because of their actions, their sins; because they followed in the footsteps of their rebellious ancestors, Yeshua calls the scribes and Pharisees the offspring of snakes, and today we pick this up where we left off in verse 34 where Yeshua continues by saying this:

### Matthew 23:34

This is why I am sending you prophets, sages, and scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will flog in your synagogues and hound from town to town.

Yeshua knows what they are going to do before they do it, so Yeshua says "I am sending (present tense) prophets to you. I am sending sages (wise men; holy men) to you. I am sending scribes (righteous scribes in contrast with those wicked scribes) to you."

I want you to notice the pronouns here. Yeshua says, "I am sending (again, present tense) these holy men to YOU, and some of them YOU will kill and crucify, some of them YOU will flog in your synagogues, and hound (persecute, pursue) from town to town."

Remember, they are Yeshua's direct audience. He is speaking directly to and about those scribes and Pharisees living in his day. The same men that the parable of the vineyard was about are the men to whom prophets, sages, and scribes are sent.

Except there is one difference: Yeshua would send the holy men, but the scribes and Pharisees would reject the holy men that were sent to them.

Now normally (like in the parable of the vineyard), it is Yahweh that sends prophets and wise men to the people of Israel. But here, Yeshua says, "I will." Yeshua is the one sending these prophets. How are we to understand this?

Ultimately, it is always Yahweh that sends any prophet or teacher, so we could still say that Yahweh is sending out these prophets through the agency of Yeshua. He is using Yeshua to do it. We find this principle of agency all through Scripture.

I believe Matthew 10:1-25 helps us to see what Yeshua is talking about more directly. It's a section where Yeshua actually sends out men to do missionary work, and it's very much the same in scope as Matthew 23:34. Let's look at it.

### **Matthew 10:1-25**

1 Summoning His 12 disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to drive them out and to heal every disease and sickness. (Here, Yeshua is giving his students authority, in a similar manner to how Yahweh had given him authority. When a leader hands a measure of authority over to you, you act in his stead [see Matthew 10:40]. Here, they are given authority to drive out unclean spirits [demons], and to heal sickness and disease. Let me also point out that while we may derive, from this text, principles for application today, the text was originally spoken to the 12 personal students [disciples] of Yeshua. Here is one of those texts that was spoken for us to learn from, but it wasn't spoken to us, directly. We may glean principle from this chapter to apply at certain times in our life, principally, but not directly. The direct application is for those 12, personal pupils of Yeshua who were standing there receiving these instructions from him, face-to-face.)

2 These are the names of the 12 apostles: First, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother;

3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus;

4 Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. (Someone may ask about Judas being sent out and not being a holy man. Judas did betray Yeshua, and Yeshua actually knew this would happen. Nonetheless, the scripture had to be fulfilled, so Judas walked with Yeshua for a time, and according to this text, he was given the same authority as the other 11 disciples, at least for a time period.)

5 Yeshua sent out these 12 after giving them instructions: (notice who is doing the sending here. It is Yeshua, just like he says in Matthew 23:34 "I am sending [present tense]." At that time, Yeshua was sending out prophets and wise men, giving them authority.) Don't take the road leading to other nations, and don't enter any Samaritan town.

6 Instead, go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (Here we see who Yeshua is sending his disciples to. The lost sheep of the house of Israel. This doesn't just apply to the northern house of Israel in distinction from the southern house of Judah. This applies to any lost sheep [lost Israelites] among all 12 tribes of Israel. Now link this verse with Matthew 23:34 where Yeshua tells the scribes and Pharisees "I am sending you prophets." Yeshua sends prophets to the scribes and Pharisees because they are lost sheep in Israel. When Yeshua tells the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:34 "I am sending

you prophets," he's sending prophets to lost sheep of Israel. I've read and heard some people say that the Pharisees in Matthew 23 were either Edomites, Cainites, or Canaanites, but they are not. Yeshua is sending holy men to them, so they have to be Israelites.)

7 As you go, announce this: The kingdom of heaven has come near.

8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with skin diseases, drive out demons. You have received free of charge; give free of charge.

9 Don't take along gold, silver, or copper for your money-belts.

10 Don't take a traveling bag for the road, or an extra shirt, sandals, or a walking stick, for the worker is worthy of his food.

11 When you enter any town or village, find out who is worthy, and stay there until you leave.

12 Greet a household when you enter it,

13 and if the household is worthy, let your peace be on it. But if it is unworthy, let your peace return to you.

14 If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that house or town.

15 I assure you: It will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town. (These are actual towns back in their day that they would physically journey to. We see here that the judgment would be great upon those Israelites who wouldn't receive these meant sent out by Yeshua. As the Master later implies in the chapter, if anyone rejects these sent ones, they reject him; and anyone who rejects him, rejects the Heavenly Father [vs. 40].)

16 Look, I'm sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as serpents and as harmless as doves. (Here again, Yeshua is sending them, just like he said he was doing in Matthew 23:34, but notice the metaphor of sheep among wolves. Wolves attack sheep, and this is Yeshua's figurative way of warning them of the coming persecution. Even though they are going out to witness to lost sheep of Israel [vs. 6], some of those lost sheep are here called wolves because they've gotten so off the track of Yahweh's law. Just keep in mind all of the Old Testament verses we've went over about brothers killing brothers in Israel. The scribes and Pharisees are the rebellious in Israel, who just like their rebellious Israelite fathers, hate the prophets, and seek to kill the prophets, because the projects expose their sin.)

17 Because people will hand you over to Sanhedrins and flog you in their synagogues, beware of them. (When Yeshua says people will hand YOU over to Sanhedrins, he's talking about the rebellious Israelites will hand THOSE DISCIPLES over to the Sanhedrin, and THOSE DISCIPLES would be flogged in the Israelite synagogues back then. Notice the persecutions predicted here. Yeshua is sending out the 12, and he tells them they are like sheep among wolves, and they will be persecuted. That sounds very familiar to Matthew 23:34 where Yeshua says that he is sending holy men to the scribes and Pharisees, and the scribes and Pharisees will kill and crucify some, and flog others in their synagogues. The reason these verses sound familiar to each other is because they are; they are talking about the same thing. What Yeshua said would happen [Matthew 10:17 and 23:34] actually did happen in places like Acts 5:12-42. Some of the disciples were flogged by the Sanhedrin. Others were stoned, liked Stephen in Acts 7:51-60.)

18 You (still talking to his disciples) will even be brought before governors and kings because of Me, to bear witness to them and to the nations.

19 But when they hand you over, don't worry about how or what you should speak. For you will be given what to say at that hour,

20 because you (those disciples) are not speaking, but the Spirit of your Father is speaking through you.

21 Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will even rise up against their parents and have them put to death. (This is talking about warfare inside of Israel. They will be at battle because only some will have faith in Yeshua while others reject Yeshua. A man's enemies will be they of his own household, [see Matthew 10:34-36].)

22 You (those disciples) will be hated by everyone because of My name. (The meaning here is that they will be hated for believing in Yeshua as Yahweh's Messiah. The chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees didn't believe Yeshua of Nazareth was the promised Messiah. They therefore hated all those who held this belief.) But the one who endures to the end will be delivered. (Enduring till the end isn't talking about the end of time as we know it, but either (1) enduring in their faith until the end of their life, even in the face of martyrdom [I think this is the contextual meaning here], or (2) [and we'll get to this more in Matthew 24] enduring through the great tribulation and being physically saved from destructive judgment.)

23 When they persecute you in one town, escape to another. For I assure you: You will not have covered the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. (Now this is an interesting verse that you don't here the prophecy prognosticators of our current day comment much on. This entire chapter is about Yeshua sending out his 12 disciples to the lost sheep of Israel. And here towards the end of his instructions to them, he says they will not finish going through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. In other words, the Son of Man will come before they finish going to all the towns of Israel. That must mean there was a "coming of the Son of Man" back then. If that doesn't fit into our eschatological view, we may need to get a new eschatological view. We may need to see what the Bible means in certain places where it talks about the coming of the Son of Man. I'll speak more about this in the near future lessons. Hopefully that whets your appetite.)

24 A disciple is not above his teacher, or a slave above his master.

25 It is enough for a disciple to become like his teacher and a slave like his master. If they called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household! (Yeshua's point here is that he himself has been and will be persecuted. His disciples are his students, so when he sends them out, they will be treated in the same manner as their teacher.)

This entire section of Matthew 10:1-25 is a commentary on what Yeshua means in Matthew 23:34 where he says, "I am sending you (scribes and Pharisees; lost sheep of Israel) prophets and wise men." They will murder the holy men sent to them just like Israel of old, and they will murder the son of the landowner as well.

While studying through these parallel texts, I found a New Testament epistle text that goes along with this train of thought, about the rebellious, unbelieving Israelites filling up

the cup of sin (remember Matthew 23:32). I'd like to look at it here in 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16.

I read the entire book of 1 Thessalonians the other morning to get the context, and a theme in the letter is remaining steadfast in the midst of persecution. If you look at chapter 1 verses 5-6 you already see where Paul praised this assembly for imitating he and the Master. They received the message of Yeshua with great joy even though there was severe persecution of believers in their area. In 3:1-5 Paul again encourages them not to be shaken by the persecutions. 2:13-16 is sandwiched right in here.

### **1 Thessalonians 2:13-16**

13 This is why we constantly thank the Almighty, because when you received the message about the Almighty that you heard from us, you welcomed it not as a human message, but as it truly is, the message of the Almighty, which also works effectively in you believers.

This verse is connected to the next statement of Paul by the word "for." We are going to see that Paul was praising them for their stance in the midst of persecution. They stood strong in the faith of Yeshua. They received Paul's message as a message from Yahweh. The message came from human lips but it was not a human message.

14 For you, brothers, (the saints of the assembly at Thessalonica) became imitators of the Almighty's churches in the Messiah Yeshua that are in Judea, (the area of Judah, and thus Judahites) since you have also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judahites.

The point here is that just like the churches in Judea suffered under the hands of people of their own country - unbelieving Judahites - the churches in Thessalonica were suffering under the hands of people in their own area as well. In Judea, Judahite scribes and Pharisees were persecuting their own people for believing in Yeshua of Nazareth as the promised Messiah.

Let me point out here that the word countrymen is the Greek word *sumpheletes*, and carries the literal meaning of "one of the same tribe." Albert Barnes mentions this in his notes on the NT, as does also Vincent's word studies in the NT.

The word *sumpheletes* carries the word *phele* inside of it. *Phele* is a Greek word meaning "offshoot, race, clan, kindred, tribe," and is most often translated as tribe in the NT. Paul (the author of Thessalonians) uses the word *phele* in both Romans 11:1 and Philippians 3:5 to speak of his being from the Israelite tribe of Benjamin.

This shows that Paul's point in 1 Thessalonians 2:14 is that the Thessalonians are being persecuted by people of their own tribe or race, in the same manner as the churches in Judea are being persecuted by unbelieving Judahites. Likely some of the same unbelieving Judahites that Yeshua rebuked in Matthew 23. Now notice the next verses.

15 who killed both the Master Yeshua and the prophets and persecuted us; (Who killed Yeshua, and the prophets, and persecuted the saints? It was the scribes and Pharisees, just as Yeshua said in Matthew 23:34. He would send holy men to them, and they would kill some and flog others. Also see Acts 2:5, 22-24, 36-38; Acts 3:11-20, 25-26.) they displease the Mighty One (Matthew 23 shows all the ways that these rebellious Judahites displease Yahweh.) and are hostile to everyone, 16 hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles (The nations here are likely the scattered sheep of Israel, sifted throughout the nations, the divorced 10 tribes of northern Israel that the Judahites considered to be accursed and unable to come to salvation. Nations could also include certain adamic, non-Israelites that were native to those areas like Thessalonica, and other parts of the then Roman Empire.) so that they may be saved. As a result, they are always adding to the number of their sins, and wrath has overtaken them at last.

My bound HCSB translates this as "wrath has overtaken them completely." Key word, sins; they are always adding to their transgressions of the law. The YLT and KJV translate this phrase as "fill up their sins always." This is exactly what Yeshua said in Matthew 23:32 where he told them to "Fill up then the measure of your father's sins." They are persecuting and even murdering the holy men sent to them in order to warn them to turn back. This is how they were adding to the number of their sins, or filling up the cup of sin with the blood of the righteous, especially the blood of Yeshua.

Let's go back now to Matthew 23, and look at verses 31 through 35 together.

### **Matthew 23:31-35**

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

32 Fill up, then, the measure of **your** fathers sins!

33 Snakes! Brood of vipers! How can **you** escape being condemned to hell?

34 This is why I am sending **you** prophets, sages, and scribes. Some of them **you** will kill and crucify, and some of them **you** will flog in your synagogues and hound from town to town.

35 So all the righteous blood shed on the earth will be charged to **you**, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom **you** murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.

Hopefully you're seeing how all of this fits. Now, in verse 35 we read that all the righteous blood shed upon the earth would be charged to them. Realize this verse must be read in connection with verse 34 and the previous verses 29-33.

I've shown from Scripture that it was rebellious Israelites who killed their own prophets, and this would culminate in Yeshua sending his disciples to the lost sheep of Israel, and most of the lost sheep would not receive him (or his agents; Matthew 10:40). As we read in a somewhat familiar verse to many Christians.

**John 1:11-13**

11 He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.

Who is his own? It is specifically the Judahite Israelites. Yeshua, as we should know, was from the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14). He came to his own people, but they didn't receive him, at least for the most part, because the next verse tells us:

12 But to all who did receive Him, He gave them the right to be children of the Almighty, to those who believe in His name.

According to this verse, it is only those Israelites who receive Yeshua that have the right to be called children of Yahweh. If you reject the one whom Yahweh sent to save you, you are rejecting Yahweh, and therefore cannot be called his child.

13 who were born, not of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of the Almighty.

There are three negatives here; the Israelites who received Yeshua were born - but not from (1) blood, (2) will of the flesh or (3) will of man. This proves that the Israelites that received Yeshua had a special birth that the unbelieving Israelites did not have. This is the new birth. This is being born from above. Not all Israelites are born from above, or else this verse makes no sense. The Israelites who received Yeshua had been born, not of the will of the flesh, or will of man, or of blood (the first birth), but of the will of Yahweh (the second, spiritual birth).

So in conclusion, Yeshua sends these holy men to the scribes and Pharisees, and the scribes and Pharisees will continue to kill these holy men, following you in the footsteps of their rebellious Israelite forefathers - SO THAT - (vs.35) all the righteous blood (the blood of righteous men, in good standing with Yahweh) will come upon them.

When Yeshua says to the scribes and Pharisees "So that all the righteous blood will be charged to you," he is speaking of them acting in the way their forefathers did and filling up the cup of their forefathers sins of killing the prophets.

It's the same cup. Each time a holy man was murdered, the innocent blood was poured into this metaphorical cup. Seeing that the scribes and Pharisees hated Yeshua and would murder him (and those Yeshua sent to them personally), they would fill the cup to the brim, and thus be responsible for all the righteous blood shed upon the earth. Yeshua was the righteous blood, and those ancestors of his (or contemporaries of his) who by faith served Yahweh in spirit and truth were connected to his righteous blood.

## **Judgment Upon This Generation**

Matthew 23, Pt. 8

Opening Text: **Matthew 23:34-36**

In this lesson, we come to a critical statement by Yeshua, directed to the scribes and Pharisees.

This entire section has been directed to them. Look at all the times Yeshua has singled them out. Just take two verses for instance, verses 15 and 34.

### **Matthew 23:15**

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to make one proselyte, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as fit for hell as you are!

### **Matthew 23:34**

This is why I am sending you prophets, sages, and scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will flog in your synagogues and hound from town to town.

Here he uses the personal pronoun YOU eight times, and that's because he is directly addressing the scribes and Pharisees in front of him, in that day and time.

As we've been going through Matthew 23, I've tried to pull out principles for us to learn from. I've tried to show how that we can get caught in the trap of following the example of the scribes and Pharisees, acting like one of them.

But... this passage wasn't spoken to us or about us. It was spoken by Yeshua to the scribes and Pharisees of his day

It's like we discussed in the last message in Matthew 10. I know people would like to make Matthew 10 apply to them. There's probably been people in every century for the last 1900 years who think Matthew 10 is about them, living in the last days of persecution, but they are wrong. Matthew 10 is Yeshua talking directly to his 12, personal disciples. We can pull principles out of Matthew 10 for us today, but that doesn't change the fact that Yeshua had an immediate audience.

If I'm talking to you, and I tell you "I want you to ride in the car with me to Snellville," and that gets written down and read by someone 100 years from now, it will still mean the same thing it meant when I said it. I'm talking directly to you and about you. I'm not talking to Joe Brown in the year 2097.

I bring this up because we are going to see that Yeshua speaks judgment upon the people alive in his generation in our text. It's pertinent that you understand what the phrase "this generation" means. We will get to that momentarily.

We opened up with verses 34-36, but we've already covered 34 in the last lesson. Let's begin this one with verse 35.

**Matthew 23:35**

So all the righteous blood shed on the earth will be charged to you, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.

Okay, we saw in verse 34 that Yeshua was sending holy men to the scribes and Pharisees, the leaders in Israel. But the scribes and Pharisees would persecute and even murder these holy men, just like their rebellious Israelite fathers did.

Verse 35, falling on the heels of that, has Yeshua saying that all the righteous blood shed upon the earth will be charged to YOU. Who is the you? The scribes and Pharisees he's been addressing this whole time.

What does he mean by righteous blood? He's talking about shedding the blood of a servant of Yahweh, connected by faith, to the blood of Yeshua. The blood of Yeshua is the only perfectly righteous blood in existence, but when men serve Yahweh, having faith in His sent one, Yeshua the Messiah, they are counted as righteous.

As verse 34 showed us, when prophets were sent to the scribes and Pharisees by Yeshua, the scribes and Pharisees would kill and crucify some of them. They would flog others. They would shed the blood of those sent to them.

These actions of theirs testified that they were the sons of those who murdered the prophets in the Old Testament. They were the descendants of the rebellious Israelites of old.

What made it even more potent is that they were the generation to whom Yeshua came in the flesh. Yeshua stood before them, directly. They saw him, heard him, could even shake hands with him (so to speak), yet they rejected him. Just think about the parable of the vineyard.

So because of their actions, all the righteous blood shed upon the earth was charged to them. It culminated in their generation. They filled up the measure.

Then, Yeshua goes on to mention the blood shed of two righteous men. He says, "from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berechiah."

From the blood of Abel takes us back to Genesis 4 where Cain murdered Abel. We read nothing there about Abel deserving to be killed. As a matter of fact we read that Abel was bringing the correct offering to Yahweh, the appropriate first or chief offering. And Yahweh had regard for Abel's offering.

Yeshua calls Abel "righteous Abel" here in Matthew 23, and the author of Hebrews refers to Abel as a righteous man (Hebrews 11:3). The book of 1 John 3:12 also says that Abel's works were righteous.

Why is Yeshua charging the scribes and Pharisees with Abel's murder? Well, he isn't; he never charges them with Abel's murder directly. They weren't alive back then. This is about how they are following in the footsteps of their rebellious Israelite forefathers. They are filling up the cup of sin with the blood of the righteous men they are murdering at their time. That cup of sin began to be poured into from the first murder of a righteous man.

This entire text up to this point, since verse 29 has been about Israelites killing Israelites. Enemies from their own household, just like Yeshua spoke of in Matthew 10. I took the time to go back to the Old Testament and show how that the prophets were murdered by their own Israelite kinsmen. Brothers killing their physical brothers. That's what this is about.

Someone might be quick to point out that Cain wasn't an Israelite, but I would just remind you that neither was Abel. The Israelites had not yet come into existence. Cain and Abel lived early on in the patriarchal period, long before Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob-Israel. Yahweh's covenant was then made with Adam, and with Adam's descendants that would be faithful to Yahweh, long before there was ever an Israelite on the scene. Faithful, non-Israelite Adamites can still be part of the covenant today.

So how does the murder of Abel, by Cain, fit into Yeshua's argument? How does the murder of Abel - by Cain - fit with rebellious Israelites killing faithful Israelites? Here's how.

Cain and Abel were brothers. As Yahweh asked Cain back in Genesis 4:9 "Cain, where is your brother, Abel?" Cain responds, "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?" Yahweh responds to Cain, "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground!"

I believe this is why Yeshua brings up the blood of righteous Abel. Up to this point he's been condemning brothers killing their physical brothers in Israel, so he goes back to the first murder of a righteous man, in Adam's lineage, and it too is an example of a man killing his brother. An enemy in your own house. When Yeshua says all the righteous blood shed upon the earth will be charged to you (scribes and Pharisees), he isn't saying that they are the ones who killed Abel. He is saying that they are killing their own Israelite brothers sent to them by Yeshua, just like Cain killed his own brother. That's the point.

Then Yeshua mentions "Zechariah son of Berachiah, whom YOU murdered between the temple and the altar." I want you to notice that this rebuke is different, because Yeshua specifically pins the murder of Zechariah on the scribes and Pharisees. He never says "YOU murdered Abel," because they didn't, Cain did, but Yeshua does say "YOU murdered Zechariah."

This is somewhat of a quandary for theologians. Most scholars believe the Zechariah here is the one we read about a few lessons ago in:

**2 Chronicles 24:20-22**

20 The Spirit of the Almighty took control of Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest. He stood above the people and said to them, This is what the Almighty says, Why are you transgressing Yahweh's commands and you do not prosper? Because you have abandoned Yahweh, He has abandoned you.

21 But they conspired against him and stoned him at the kings command in the courtyard of Yahweh's temple.

22 King Joash didn't remember the kindness that Zechariah's father Jehoiada had extended to him, but killed his son. While he was dying, he said, May Yahweh see and demand an account.

Zechariah was rebuking King Joash of Judah, and Joash murdered him right there in the courtyard of the temple.

Seems like a good fit, until we realize that the Zechariah in 2 Chronicles had a father whose name was Jehoiada, NOT Berachiah. We read that plainly in 2 Chronicles. Twice Jehoiada is mentioned as Zechariah's father. That text speaks of Zechariah son of Jehoiada.

But Yeshua speaks of Zechariah *son of Berechiah* in Matthew 23:35.

Scholars come up with all sorts of possibilities here. They say that it could be that Yeshua is speaking of Zechariah's grandfather. That's possible. Father doesn't always mean immediate father in the Bible. Yeshua could be meaning Zechariah descendant (son) of his ancestor (father) Berechiah, but we have no record of that in 2 Chronicles.

Others say that Jehoiada may have had a second name, Berechiah. That's possible too. Sometimes men had two names, like Simon Peter in the Gospels for example. But again, there's no evidence for that, it's just a possibility.

The fact remains that the evidence calls the Zechariah in 2 Chronicles the son of Jehoiada, not Berechiah.

Other theologians say that Yeshua is talking about the prophet Zechariah who wrote the prophetic book in our Scriptures. According to Zechariah 1:1 he is called the son of Berachiah, so that seems to fit, until we realize that there's no record of that prophet Zechariah being murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.

As a matter of fact, there is a book that was written around the time of the second temple period called "Lives of Prophets." The book lists the death of many of Yahweh's prophets. It records (in chapter 15:1-6) the prophet Zechariah as dying peacefully at an old age. So it's not likely that Yeshua spoke of that Zechariah either.

These are some interpretive options, but I'm going to share with you what I consider to be the most likely, yet least accepted option. Remember that whereas Yeshua does not directly say that the scribes and Pharisees murdered Abel, he does directly say that they murdered this Zechariah. He says, "to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom YOU murdered between the sanctuary and the altar."

As we've been studying this chapter we see over and over again Yeshua using the pronoun YOU, directing it to the scribes and Pharisees. Woe to YOU, scribes and Pharisees. I am sending YOU prophets. Some of them YOU will kill and crucify. It makes sense then that if Yeshua tells them, "YOU murdered Zechariah son of Berechiah," that there was a Zechariah son of Berechiah living in their day that they had murdered, and Yeshua knew about it, thus he says what he says here in verse 35.

There are many Zechariah's in Scripture. It's a common name. Same with Berechiah. The scribes and Pharisees had murdered this Zechariah right there in the first century. In THEIR generation.

The use of the pronoun YOU, and the fact that the record of the murder of a Zechariah in 2 Chronicles lists his father as Jehoiada, makes me go with this understanding of Matthew 23:35.

The first case of a brother murdering his own brother is Cain murdering Abel. The last case was the most recent murder of Zechariah son of Berechiah, one of their own brethren. Yeshua is moving from the first brother on brother murder to the most recent brother on brother murder.

And seeing how that Yeshua, the Son of the landowner was right there with them (remember the parable of the vineyard in Matthew 21), everything would come to a head in their generation. The cup of sin would be filled up with all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, which would soon include the blood of Yeshua the Messiah, the Son of Yahweh.

Look at the next verse in our text today.

### **Matthew 23:36**

I assure you: All these things will come on this generation!

On what generation? Who is Yeshua talking to? The people living in his day, and particularly the scribes and Pharisees, the leaders in Israel. All these things, all the judgment would come upon them, in their generation.

What does generation mean? Let's again let the Bible interpret the Bible.

Using the book of Matthew, the book we are in, we find help right in Matthew chapter 1 where there is a genealogy. A list of names in a family. From father to son, on down the line. In Matthew 1:17 we read this:

**Matthew 1:17**

So all the generations from Abraham to David were 14 generations; and from David until the exile to Babylon, 14 generations; and from the exile to Babylon until the Messiah, 14 generations.

We have here a mention of generations, and the meaning is obviously each current lifetime of each individual. From Abraham to David were 14 generations Matthew writes. That begins with the generation of Abraham on down to the generation of David.

The Greek word behind the English is the word *genea*, meaning "age or period of time." We see this meaning right at the beginning of Matthew.

We see the same thing in Luke 1:48 and 50 where Miriam is giving praise to Yahweh because of what He has done for her in allowing her to be the mother of the promised Messiah. She says:

**Luke 1:48, 50**

He has looked with favor on the humble condition of His slave. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed... His mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear Him.

All generations (*genea*) means all generations or ages of her people coming after her will call her blessed. From generation to generation means from one man's lifetime, to his son's lifetime, to his grandson's lifetime, and so on.

Let's narrow it down from here. Yeshua says in Matthew 23:36 "All these things will come upon a this generation. The phrase "this generation" applies to the generation, age, or time period of Yeshua's day. That's how it has been used all through Matthew up to this point.

In Matthew 11:16 Yeshua says, "To what should I compare this generation?" He goes on to speak of them acting like bratty children who can't be pleased. He says that John came to them not eating and not drinking and they said John has a demon. The Son of Man came to them eating and drinking and they said he was a glutton and a drunkard. Notice that Yeshua speaks of both John the Baptizer and himself preaching to this generation. These are things that the generation of Yeshua's day said. When he spoke of them as "this generation" he meant the people alive then, in his time.

In Matthew 12 the scribes and Pharisees came to Yeshua seeking a sign. He told them that they were a wicked and adulterous generation (living at that time) that sought after signs, but no sign would be given to them except the sign of Jonah. Yeshua went on to say that the men of Ninevah and the queen of the south would rise up at the judgment and condemn this generation. What generation? The one listening to Yeshua speak. The contemporaries of Yeshua. That's what the phrase "this generation" means in the book of Matthew, including Matthew 23:36.

Yeshua says "All these things will come upon THIS GENERATION," speaking of the generation then living at the time of Yeshua, specifically the leaders or elders - the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees, who were guilty of all the sins listed in Matthew 23, and who would be ultimately guilty of murdering the Son of the landowner. They were the generation that filled up the measure of the cup of sin (23:32). Wrath had overtaken them completely (1 Thess 2:16).

It is very important that we understand the phrase "this generation" here in Matthew 23:36. It will help us greatly in understanding the same phrase later in Matthew 24:34, but I don't want to get ahead of myself.

For now, let me end with pointing out that the focus of Yeshua, the focus of all this judgment, is upon the men living during the time of Yeshua. The rebellious Israelite leaders who Yeshua sent prophets and wise men to, but they refused to repent just like their fathers. They would not listen to those Yeshua sent to them (Matthew 23:34), and they would not listen to Yeshua, the very Son of Yahweh. The very hope of Israel was right there in front of them, yet they rejected Him. He came unto His own, and his own received him not (John 1:11).

Yah willing, we will pick this back up in the next lesson and finish out Matthew chapter 23, looking at verses 37-39. Once we do that, it will help catapult us into Matthew 24, and a thrilling study of the biblical last days. Notice that I said the biblical last days. I'm not talking about the phrase "last days" as it is defined by modern day prophetic prognosticators. I'm speaking of the last days, the abomination of desolation, and the great tribulation, as defined by the bible.

You cannot understand Matthew 24 rightly, without first understanding Matthew 23. Matthew 24 is the climax to Matthew 23. If you get Matthew 23 right, you will likely get Matthew 24 right. Chew on that, till next time.

### **Jerusalem is Left Desolate**

Matthew 23. Pt. 9

Opening Text: **Matthew 23:37-39**

We've been studying Matthew 23 for about 9 weeks now. I like to read and study chapters in the bible over and over until I understand them thoroughly. I'm not big on speed reading through the Bible or making sure I read my quota in a yearly bible reading plan. Maybe some people like it better that way, but I can't comprehend much at one time. I have to slow down and dissect the text.

That's what I've been doing in my own studies in Matthew 23, and I hope that my teaching through this chapter has given you a better understanding on at least some things. If it's been too much to swallow, and you want to rehearse some of the points in your mind, that's totally understandable, and no worries. You can re-listen to all the sermons online, as well as read my study notes if you'd like. I've made all of that available to anyone who wants it.

Lately we've been centered in on verses 34-36 where Yeshua tells the scribes and Pharisees that he is sending holy men to them, but they will flog some and murder others.

Yeshua explains that they will fill up the measure of their fathers sins, like filling up a cup, and judgment would come upon their generation.

It's the finale of a scathing rebuke against the leaders of Judah. Their fathers killed the prophets sent to them, and they - the descendants - did the same. They would even murder the very Son of the Landowner, sent to them. They would murder Yeshua.

We come now to verse 37 where Yeshua continues by saying:

**Matthew 23:37**

Jerusalem, Jerusalem! She who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, yet you were not willing!

This is an echo of verse 34. Jerusalem here represents the leaders of Judah, the scribes and the Pharisees. Yeshua uses the double Jerusalem to stress his shouting plea to the leaders that continue to rebel. She kills the prophets and stones those who are SENT to her.

Remember, in verse 34 Yeshua says "I am sending holy men to you (scribes and Pharisees), and you will murder them"? Well, verse 37 says Jerusalem murders the holy men sent to her.

Jerusalem is another way of speaking of Judah's leaders, Jerusalem being the capital city of Judah.

Here again is yet another proof that the scribes and Pharisees Yeshua addresses in this chapter are Israelites, because he addresses them as Jerusalem. Not Edom (Esau's dwelling place). Not Nod (Cain's dwelling place). But Jerusalem, Judah's dwelling place.

This is further seen in the statement that Jerusalem murders the holy men that are SENT to her. Who does Yeshua send his emissaries to? The lost sheep of the house of Israel, Matthew 10:6. The scribes and Pharisees that Yeshua has been rebuking this entire chapter, are Israelites.

Now, a blunder is often made when people quote this verse. Most of the time you hear someone quote this verse, they'll say something like this:

"Christ told Jerusalem, 'How often I wanted to gather you together, but you were not willing!'"

But take careful note, that is not what Yeshua says. He says "how often I wanted to gather... your children together." Whose children? Jerusalem's children. The people of Judah as differentiated from the leaders of Judah. The leaders of Judah are Jerusalem in this verse. The children are the people that come to the leaders for direction. Just as Yeshua said in verse 13. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees for you lock up the kingdom of heaven from people. The leaders were the ones who were NOT willing to allow Yeshua to gather Jerusalem's children.

The context is corrupt leadership in Judah. This isn't to say that there weren't any people of Jerusalem gathered to Yeshua; there were! But Yeshua's point is that as he went out to gather them to himself, to be their Savior, their deliverer, the promised Messiah that he was, the one sent by the Father, the leaders of Judah were not willing to let him do so.

Before we move from verse 37, I want you to notice Yeshua's tenderness here. He's been scathing the religious leaders this whole chapter, and as I mentioned in the first lesson on this chapter, that is who received the harshest rebukes from Yeshua - those who considered themselves to be righteous. Yeshua was always merciful on the humble and repentant in Israel, but he was unmerciful on those in Israel who felt they needed no repentance.

His tender mercy, just like his Father Yahweh, is seen here in verse 37 when he says that he wanted to gather the children of Jerusalem together, like a hen gathers her chicks under her wing. I like Lutheran minister, Paul Kretzmann's comments here, in his commentary from 1921.

"Now behold how the hen acts; there is hardly an animal that takes such an interest in its young ones; she changes her natural voice and assumes a sorrowful and lamenting call; she seeks, she scratches in the ground, she coaxes the chicks; whenever she finds anything, she does not eat it, but leaves it for the chicks; with all seriousness she fights and calls against the hawk, and extends her wings so willingly, and permits the chicks to crawl under her and upon her; it is a fine, pleasing picture. Thus also Christ assumed a sorrowful voice, has lamented for us and preached repentance, has shown to every one [of us our] sin and woe with all His heart. He opens up the beauties of Scripture, coaxes us in and permits us to eat, and spreads His wings with all His righteousness, merit, and mercy over us, and takes us under Him in such a friendly manner, warms us with His heat, that is, with the Holy [Spirit] who comes only through Him, and fights for us against the devil in the air."

So beautifully put by Kretzmann. Yeshua is a merciful and loving savior, to those who realize they need to be saved from their sins.

Next verse, verse 38.

### **Matthew 23:38**

See, your house is left to you desolate.

This falls on the heels of the condemnation of the leaders of Judah in Jerusalem in verse 37. They weren't willing to allow the anointed one, Yeshua, to gather, and they murdered the holy men sent to them, so he tells them, "Your house is left to you desolate!"

The word desolate carries the meaning of lonesome, waste, solitary, a wilderness. He pictures a house that was once dwelt in, but is now empty. I think the meaning is two-fold.

First, remember that Yeshua is in the temple. He entered the temple back in Matthew 21:12-13; look at it.

### **Matthew 21:12-13**

Yeshua went into the temple complex and drove out all those buying and selling in the temple. He overturned the money changers tables and the chairs of those selling doves. And He said to them, It is written, My house will be called a house of prayer. But you are making it a den of thieves!

Here Yeshua is angry with the merchandising of the HOUSE of Yahweh. He even quotes Yahweh in the OT from the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. Yahweh says his house is to be a house of prayer, but notice that THEY had turned it into a den of thieves.

Why den of thieves? This could be because of their actions outside of the temple. We know from Matthew 23 that the scribes and Pharisees were thieves, stealing from widows. Yeshua may have said den of thieves alluding to them being thieves and using the temple as their hideout. In other words, "We can do what we want, and then come to the temple and everything will be okay."

He could have also been alluding to their false weights and measures in selling sacrificial animals. During this time the leaders in Judah promoted their animals - the ones they had for sale at the temple - as the only ones that were pure. So the people were led to believe that these were the only animals that would be accepted as a sacrifice to Yahweh. The leaders would then sell these animals at an inflated price, thus thieving from the people.

Either way (and it may be both) they had turned Yahweh's house of prayer into a den of thieves.

What was supposed to be the house of Yahweh, the house that Yeshua called "my Father's house" (in Luke 2:49), he now calls "your house" in Matthew 23:38. YOUR house is left to you desolate.

Yeshua is talking about the temple here. He's inside the temple complex when he says this. He's been in it ever since he drove out all the money changers.

But now notice what he does right after he says this. In Matthew 24:1 we read that Yeshua left the temple. I think he was performing a symbolic act here. He now called it their house instead of his Father's, and he turned his back on it and walked out of it.

This fits the judgment theme that we've seen from Matthew 21 all the way through Matthew 23.

Now, think about the parable of the vineyard again, I want to speak of the second-fold use of house in Matthew 23:38. Remember, "YOUR house is left to you desolate, empty."

When I talked about the parable of the vineyard a few lessons ago, I mentioned that it described Yahweh's divorce of the house of Judah. I'd like to explain that in more detail in this lesson.

Look at the end of the parable again, beginning in Matthew 21:33.

**Matthew 21:33-41**

33 Listen to another parable: There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, and built a watchtower. He leased it to tenant farmers and went away.

34 When the grape harvest drew near, he sent his slaves to the farmers to collect his fruit.

35 But the farmers took his slaves, beat one, killed another, and stoned a third.

36 Again, he sent other slaves, more than the first group, and they did the same to them.

37 Finally, he sent his son to them. "They will respect my son," he said.

38 But when the tenant farmers saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance!

39 So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

40 Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers?

41 "He will completely destroy those terrible men," they told Him, "and lease his vineyard to other farmers who will give him his produce at the harvest."

The chief priests and Pharisee elders recognize and give an answer to what should be done to the tenant farmers, but they are the tenant farmers. They are the ones who the Son was sent to, but they rejected the Son of the Landowner.

Now look at the next verses that we didn't cover last time. Here is Yeshua's reply to the chief priests and Pharisee elders.

**Matthew 21:42**

Yeshua said to them, Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This came from Yahweh and is wonderful in our eyes?"

That's a direct quote from Psalm 118:22-23. (Remember Psalm 118. We'll be coming back to it.) Yeshua is the stone that came from Yahweh - he was sent by Yahweh - and the chief priests and Pharisees are the builders who rejected the stone, the cornerstone, which is the most important stone in a building.

The cornerstone was a stone at the base corner of a building. It connected two walls, holding them securely together. Everything was pulled square from that cornerstone, and everything was dependent upon that cornerstone. Yeshua, the Son of the Landowner (Yahweh), was that cornerstone, but the builders - the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisee elders in Judah - rejected that cornerstone.

Notice Matthew 21:42 says "this came from Yahweh." That's where the stone came from. Almighty Yahweh. Yahweh is the Landowner, and Yahweh is the one who laid that stone, meaning Yahweh is the one who sent Yeshua.

As Peter preached to the men of Israel on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 by saying "Listen to these words: This Yeshua of Nazareth was a man pointed out to you by Yahweh with miracles, wonders, and signs that Yahweh did, among you, through him."

Yahweh pointed out Yeshua because Yahweh had sent Yeshua. Yahweh did those miracles through Yeshua because Yahweh had sent Yeshua. Yeshua was the stone that came from Yahweh.

And more so than all of Yahweh's servants the prophets. Yahweh sent them too, and yes they are part of the foundation as even the apostles are (Ephesians 2:20), but Yeshua is the chief stone of the corner, coming directly from Yahweh. He is the stone that Daniel 2 prophesies of, that comes off of the mountain without the hand of a man. Yeshua comes directly from Yahweh. Yeshua is Yahweh's Son. Yahweh really does have a Son, and that Son is sent directly from the Yahweh, and is the chief stone of the corner in this glorious building that we are part of, IF we believe upon the chief cornerstone, Yeshua of Nazareth.

We can accept the stone, or we can reject the stone, like these builders did here in Matthew 21. He came to his own, but his own received him not. Yeshua told them, "Haven't you ever read this part in the Scriptures?" They were the builders, Yeshua was the stone, and they set him to the side, rejecting him in their building. So what happens to the leaders of Judah when they reject Yeshua? Look at the next verse:

### **Matthew 21:43**

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of the Almighty will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing its fruit.

Therefore, on the basis of your rejection of the stone, the kingdom of Yahweh will be taken away from you. Taken. If something is taken away from you, it means you had it at one time, right? Of course it does. And the kingdom being taken away speaks of the divorce of the house of Judah.

If we know our biblical history, we know that Yahweh described his relationship with the nation of Israel, all 12 sons/tribes, in marriage language. Yahweh is typified as the husband, and Israel is typified as Yahweh's bride. Hosea 1-2 is one of the clearest texts in the prophets on this. It shows that Yahweh speaks symbolically of the marriage he had with Israel, that ended up in the divorce he pronounced upon Israel.

### **Hosea 2:2**

Rebuke your mother; rebuke her for she is not my wife and I am not her husband. Let her remove the promiscuous look from her face and her adultery from between her breasts.

What happened here is that the Israelites were to be the people of Yahweh. They were to serve him and be devoted to him alone. That's what the famous passage in Deuteronomy 6:4 actually means. "Listen and obey this Israel. Yahweh is your Mighty One. Yahweh alone." This is a statement about Israel's sole devotion to Yahweh. Their heart and mind were to belong only to Yahweh, just like the heart and mind of my wife is to be solely devoted to me, her husband.

Well what happened? Israel violated the SHEMA. She went after other mighty ones, and served them. She was then described as playing the harlot on her husband. That's why we read in Hosea 1-2 about the divorce of the house of Israel, by Yahweh. He had put up with it long enough.

Look at Exodus 19. I'm trying to put some of these texts together to help you better understand. Exodus 19 shows a type of marriage covenant between Yahweh and the people of Israel. We'll read verses 3-8.

### **Exodus 19:3-8**

3 Moses went up the mountain to the Mighty One, and Yahweh called to him from the mountain: This is what you must say to the house of Jacob, and explain to the Israelites:

4 You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles wings and brought you to Me.

5 Now if you will listen to Me and carefully keep My covenant, you will be My own possession out of all the peoples, although all the earth is Mine,

6 and you will be My kingdom of priests and My holy nation. These are the words that you are to say to the Israelites.

7 After Moses came back, he summoned the elders of the people and set before them all these words that Yahweh had commanded him.

8 Then all the people responded together, We will do all that Yahweh has spoken. So Moses brought the people's words back to Yahweh.

That's beautiful isn't it. That's the marriage contract. Yahweh wiped out the Egyptians, and carried the people of Jacob-Israel unto himself as it were on eagles wings. And then he gives them a covenant, an agreement, a contract.

If you'll listen to me, and keep my words, you'll be my special treasure above all other

peoples. You'll be a KINGDOM of priests, and a holy nation. Take note of that word kingdom (in verse 6). Don't forget it. We're going back to Matthew 21 shortly.

The people respond, "All that Yahweh has said, we will do!" But there's a problem here. And the problem is that the nation of Israel didn't do all that Yahweh said. They soon bickered among themselves so badly that they split into two groups, north and south, Israel and Judah, and they constantly, over and over again, abandoned Yahweh's covenant. That was a problem because the covenant was conditional.

Exodus 19:5 - IF you listen to me and keep my covenant, then you'll be my special treasure.

They didn't, and Yahweh divorced the northern house of Israel according to the book of the prophet Hosea, because of their many transgressions.

Now if the giving of the Kingdom equals the marriage of Yahweh to Israel, what does the taking away of the Kingdom equal? The divorce, correct.

But see, Yahweh only divorced the house of Israel at the time of Hosea. If you read Hosea 1, you'll see that Yahweh says he will continue to have compassion upon the southern house of Judah (Hosea 1:7). I believe His reason for this compassion is because his Son Yeshua would be sent through the tribe of Judah. Yeshua was a Judahite, a Yehudim. Yahweh couldn't send the cornerstone through a tribe that had been divorced. Yahweh was still "wedded" to Judah when Yeshua was born in Bethlehem. Yahweh retained his marital status with Judah so that he could send his Son through a house or tribe that was still, in some way, in a relationship with him.

However, after Yeshua was born, Yahweh's judgment came down upon the house of Judah, just like He had formerly come down upon the house of Israel. Yeshua came to his own, the Yehudites or Judahites, but his own received him not. Thus we have the rebuke recorded in Matthew 23, or really Matthew 21-24. Yahweh wasn't going to let Judah off the hook. She had been just as promiscuous as her sister in northern Israel.

Now, read Matthew 21:43 again, which I have shown is a judgment reference to the leaders in Judah, the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisee elders.

### **Matthew 21:43**

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of the Almighty will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing its fruit.

The kingdom will be TAKEN away from you. Judah had it still, but the kingdom would be TAKEN away from them. Why? The parable of the vineyard. They rejected the Son of the landowner. They were the builders who rejected the chief stone of the corner.

In Exodus 19, the kingdom being given to all 12 tribes of Israel equals Yahweh's marriage covenant with Israel. In Hosea 1-2, Yahweh takes the Kingdom away from northern Israel (which equals the divorce of Israel). And in Matthew 21:43 Yeshua speaks of the kingdom being taken away from southern Judah (which equals the divorce of Judah).

When you study and learn Scripture as a whole, things come together. All of this makes verse 39 come to light, it's the last verse in Matthew 23. Let's read Matthew 23:37-39 together one more time.

**Matthew 23:37-39**

37 Jerusalem, Jerusalem! She who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, yet you were not willing!

38 See, your house is left to you desolate.

39 For I tell you, you will never see Me again until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of Yahweh!

That last verse, verse 39, ties into the parable of the vineyard, because in the parable of the vineyard, Yeshua quotes from Psalm 118 about the cornerstone coming from Yahweh. He is the stone that the builders rejected. And here Yeshua quotes again from Psalm 118 about him coming in the name of Yahweh.

Both times he is quoting from Psalm 118, and both times he is talking about the same thing. Yeshua came from Yahweh, meaning Yahweh sent him. That's what coming in the name of Yahweh means. Yahweh sent you, you have Yahweh's backing. You didn't come on your own accord, you came based upon the power of Yahweh. When a man actually comes in the name of Yahweh, and you accept that man, you are accepting Yahweh. When you reject that man, you are rejecting Yahweh.

The best and most well-known example of this that I can think of is when David battles Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. Goliath thinks he is about to kill David by sword, spear, or javelin. But there was no way possible that this would happen. Why? Because David came to Goliath in the name of Yahweh (17:45). David had the backing of Yahweh. Yahweh was fighting for David. Goliath was actually fighting Yahweh when he fought with David. Thus David says, "I come to you in the name of Yahweh."

The same thing applies to Yeshua. He came to the people in the name of Yahweh, just like David did when facing the giant. Yeshua is the cornerstone that came from Yahweh. Read Psalm 118:22-26. Yahweh sent the stone. This is Yahweh's doing, but the chief priests and Pharisees didn't believe Yeshua was sent by Yahweh. They rejected him. And by rejecting him, they rejected Yahweh, because Yahweh backed Yeshua.

Yeshua gives the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23 an offer of repentance. After all these scathing remarks against them, he still says that there is a way they can see him, meaning understand and believe upon him, but it is conditional. The condition is (vs. 39)

that they must look at him and say, "blessed is he (that's Yeshua) who comes in the name of Yahweh." Until they recognize Yeshua as the stone that came from Yahweh, they would be in a state of condemnation. Only through Yeshua the cornerstone could they receive salvation.

And that's the end of Matthew 23, at least if we are going by the chapter division placed in our English bibles. But remember, chapter divisions aren't inspired. The account continues right on into Matthew 24:1 where Yeshua exits the temple. The only way you will rightly understand Matthew 24, is if you've got a good grasp on Matthew 23. We will begin Matthew 24 next time.