

Matthew 23 Commentary

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MATTHEW CONTAINS 15 PARABLES 20 MIRACLES

KEY VERSES: 1:1 "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

2:2 "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

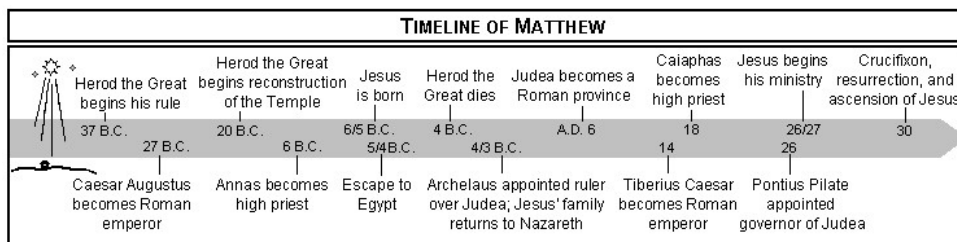


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Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission
Another Chart from Swindoll

THE LIFE OF JESUS AS COVERED BY MATTHEW (shaded area)



Click chart to enlarge



Source: Borrow [Ryrie Study Bible](#)

Matthew 23:1 Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples,

KJV Matthew 23:1 Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,

BGT Matthew 23:1 Τ ἔ ῃσο ς λ ῃσεν το ς χ λ ο ι ς κα το ς μαθητα ς α το

NET Matthew 23:1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples,
 CSB Matthew 23:1 Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples:
 ESV Matthew 23:1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples,
 NIV Matthew 23:1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples:
 NLT Matthew 23:1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples,
 YLT Matthew 23:1 Then Jesus spake to the multitudes, and to his disciples,
 MIT Matthew 23:1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples:
 NJB Matthew 23:1 Then addressing the crowds and his disciples Jesus said,
 NRS Matthew 23:1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples,

- Mt 15:10-20 Mk 7:14 Lu 12:1,57 20:45
- Parallel - Mark 12:38-40 Luke 20:45-47

Related Passages:

Mark 12:38-40+ In His teaching He was saying: "**Beware** of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places, 39 and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, 40 who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation."

Luke 20:45-47+ And while all the people were listening, He said to the disciples, 46 **Beware** of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, 47 who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."

JESUS' TEACHING FOCUSES ON DISCIPLES

Then ([tote](#)) - Time phrase. Marks progression in the narrative. This seems to follow on the heels of his teaching on Psalm 110:1 in Mt 22:41-46+.

Note that this is the last public sermon of Jesus, spoken in the Temple, just before He went to the cross. He would teach many other things to His disciples in private, but this is His last public message. One would have thought that the last public message would have been one of salvation and have an invitation. On the contrary, it was a message of condemnation and denunciation against the religious hierarchy of His day. It was a strong, brutal denunciation against the false religious system and its leaders.

Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples Mark tells us that Jesus was still "**teaching**." (Mark 12:38+) This is amazing to me. He must have been exhausted, but He knew He would have only a few hours left with His disciples before He was crucified. The crowd was still present and was listening. But this passage marks a transition, for from now on Jesus focuses on His true disciples.

MacArthur adds that "He said all there is to say, nothing more can be said. He's answered every question that could be raised. He will turn and give instruction to those who are still following, still showing interest, still wanting to learn from Him, still following Him. The attackers are gone and the crowd fades away. But there's one final message for everybody to hear, disciples and people."

C H Spurgeon ([Matthew Commentary](#)) - Then spake Jesus to the multitude: the King commenced his final address to the people. He was soon to withdraw himself from them; but first he would put them on their guard against their false teachers. They had heard what he had said to the scribes and Pharisees; now they would hear what he said of them.

Matthew Henry Concise - Mt 23:1-12. The scribes and Pharisees explained the law of Moses, and enforced obedience to it. They are charged with hypocrisy in religion. We can only judge according to outward appearance; but God searches the heart. They made phylacteries. These were scrolls of paper or parchment, wherein were written four paragraphs of the law, to be worn on their foreheads and left arms, Exodus 13:2-10, 11-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 13-21. They made these phylacteries broad, that they might be thought more zealous for the law than others. God appointed the Jews to make fringes upon their garments, Numbers 15:38, to remind them of their being a peculiar people; but the Pharisees made them larger than common, as if they were thereby more religious than others. Pride was the darling, reigning sin of the Pharisees, the sin that most easily beset them, and which our Lord

Jesus takes all occasions to speak against. For him that is taught in the word to give respect to him that teaches, is commendable; but for him that teaches, to demand it, to be puffed up with it, is sinful. How much is all this against the spirit of Christianity! The consistent disciple of Christ is pained by being put into chief places. But who that looks around on the visible church, would think this was the spirit required? It is plain that some measure of this antichristian spirit prevails in every religious society, and in every one of our hearts.

Disciples (3101)([mathetes](#) from [manthano](#) = to learn which Vine says is "from a root *math*, indicating thought accompanied by endeavor". Gives us our English = "*mathematics*" - see [matheteuo](#))) describes one who learns from another by instruction and includes the idea of intentionally learning by inquiry and observation (cf [inductive Bible study](#)). "As **followers** of Jesus we are to be, first of all, **learners**. We are to learn from Him by listening to Him, learn the truth that will set us free (John 8:32) and keep us from error. But we are also to learn from Him by looking at Him- learn how to live a life of beauty and blessing." (Ralph Earle)

A **mathetes** describes an adherent of a teacher. As discussed below **mathetes** itself has no spiritual connotation, and it is used of superficial followers of Jesus as well as of genuine believers. The Lord calls everyone to grow as a disciple (a learner of Christ; cf. also Mt 11:29,30+), one who lives in faith, who lives in and by His Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Note in the Great Commission that the implication is that the disciple is not just a hearer and a learner from another, but is a doer of what he learns for Mt 28:20+ says "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Matthew 23:2 saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses;

KJV Matthew 23:2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:

BGT Matthew 23:2 λ γων· π τ ς Μωϋσ ως καθ ὅρας κ θισαν ο γραμματε ς κα ο Φαρισα οι.

NET Matthew 23:2 "The experts in the law and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat.

CSB Matthew 23:2 "The scribes and the Pharisees are seated in the chair of Moses.

ESV Matthew 23:2 "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat,

NIV Matthew 23:2 "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.

NLT Matthew 23:2 "The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees are the official interpreters of the law of Moses.

YLT Matthew 23:2 saying, 'On the seat of Moses sat down the scribes and the Pharisees;

MIT Matthew 23:2 The scholars and Pharisees sit on Moses' bench.

NJB Matthew 23:2 'The scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses.

- Ne 8:4-8 Mal 2:7 Mk 12:38 Lu 20:46

Related Passages:

Mark 12:38+ In His teaching He was saying: "**Beware** of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places,

Luke 20:46+ "**Beware** of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets,

SELF-APPOINTED AUTHORITIES

saying: "The scribes ([grammateus](#)) and the Pharisees ([pharisaioi](#)) have seated ([kathizo](#)) themselves in the chair ([kathedra](#)) of Moses - Note that sitting was the posture of official teaching, so that rabbis, like Jesus, "sat to teach." The **Chair of Moses** refers to the symbolic seat of authority as a teacher and interpreter of the Law — like Moses, who received and taught the commandments. Figuratively the word **chair** ([kathedra](#)) pictured the scribes as occupying Moses' place as an expounder of the Law. In many synagogues, there was an actual "seat of Moses" where the teacher of the Law would sit while delivering instruction. The phrase

implies that the scribes and Pharisees claimed Mosaic authority, positioning themselves as successors to Moses in their role as interpreters of God's Law. They claim Moses' mantle, but do not reflect Moses' heart or humility. In short they claim Moses' seat, but not Moses' spirit.

*Kathedra is more than furniture for it represented
the weight of spiritual leadership, for better or worse.*

Jesus will go on to say that while they teach, they do not practice what they preach (Mt 23:3) and thus their leadership appears outwardly authoritative, but inwardly is corrupt. Thus Jesus warns the people to discern between the message and the messenger, affirming the Law but rebuking the hypocritical teachers.

C H Spurgeon ([Matthew Commentary](#)) - Then spake Jesus....to his disciples: according to Luke, Jesus spoke to his disciples "in the audience of all the people." His theme was one that concerned the whole population as well as his own disciples. He knew that he would shortly be taken away from them; therefore he warned them against those who would seek their ruin: "Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do." It was the duty of Moses to expound to the people the Law of God. The scribes and Pharisees occupied his place; but alas! the Spirit that guided him was not in them. They spoke as from the chair of Moses, ex cathedra, as we say; and as far as they really filled his seat, and followed his sayings, their words were to be obeyed. Our Savior could not have intended the people to heed their false comments and foolish glosses upon the Law of Moses; for he had already declared that by their traditions they had transgressed the commandment of God, and made it of none effect.

MacArthur notes that "Not all Pharisees were **scribes**, but the scribes were primarily Pharisees, who were interpreters and teachers of the law of Moses and the traditional rabbinic writings. Their teaching provided the theological framework for the Pharisees' legalistic system of works-righteousness. The **scribes** were the dominant force in Judaism, not only theologically, but socially. Their views affected every aspect of life, and they also handled all legal matters, including property, estates, and contracts. They were revered, and given the respectful title of Rabbi (Mt. 23:7). That title was sometimes given to Jesus because He was a teacher (cf. John 1:38, 49; 3:2, 26; 6:25). It was commonly believed that Moses received the law, then gave it to Joshua, who gave it to the elders, who gave it to the prophets, who gave it to the **scribes**. (See [Luke Commentary](#))

NET NOTE - Scribes - The traditional rendering of γραμματεὺς (grammateus) as "scribe" does not communicate much to the modern English reader, for whom the term might mean "professional copyist," if it means anything at all. The people referred to here were recognized experts in the law of Moses and in traditional laws and regulations. Thus "expert in the law" comes closer to the meaning for the modern reader. **Pharisees** were members of one of the most important and influential religious and political parties of Judaism in the time of Jesus. There were more Pharisees than Sadducees (according to Josephus, Ant. 17.2.4 [17.42] there were more than 6,000 Pharisees at about this time). Pharisees differed with Sadducees on certain doctrines and patterns of behavior. The Pharisees were strict and zealous adherents to the laws of the OT and to numerous additional traditions such as angels and bodily resurrection.

Scribes (1122) [grammateus](#) from [grapho](#) = to write) was one skilled in Jewish law and theology scribe, expert, scholar ([Mt 2.4](#)). **Grammateus** also referred to a chief executive officer of a governmental entity such as a town official secretary, town clerk (Acts 19.35). Jesus gives a long rebuke including **8 WOES** primarily to the Scribes and Pharisees which should be read to help understand how this group of Jewish religious men functioned (See Mt 23:1-39, 13, 14, 15, 16, etc). Most sources consider the **lawyers** (nomikos - meaning one skilled in the Mosaic law) to be scribes specialized in the jurisprudence of the Law of Moses. Finally the scribes in Lk 5:17 (nomdidaskalos) were teachers of the Jewish law who were equal to the lawyers and scribes. In the Septuagint [grammateus](#) frequently used for a political officer who assisted kings or magistrates by keeping written accounts of public acts and occurrences or royal revenues (2 Ki 12:10) (See [Brown-Driver-Briggs definition of saphar](#)).

Pharisees (5330) [pharisaios](#) is transliterated from the Hebrew **parash** (06567 - to separate) from Aramaic word **peras** (06537) ("Peres" in Da 5:28-note), signifying to separate, owing to a different manner of life from that of the general public. After the resettling of the Jewish people in Judea on their return from the Babylonian captivity, there were two religious groups among them. One party contented themselves with following only what was written in the Law of Moses. These were called **Zadikim**, the righteous. The other group added the constitutions and traditions of the elders, as well as other rigorous observances, to the Law and voluntarily complied with them. They were called **Chasidim** or the pious. From the Zadikim the sects of the Sadducees and Karaites were derived. From the Chasidim were derived the Pharisees and the Essenes. In I Mac2:42, among the persons who joined Mattathias against Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), about 167 b.c., are named the Asideans (Asidaioi), who are described as voluntarily devoted to the law. The Asideans are mentioned also in I Mac 7:13; II Mac14:6. In the time of our Lord, the Pharisees were the separatists of their day, as well as the principal sect among the Jews. The Pharisees considered themselves much holier than the common people (Lu 18:11, 12). They wore special garments to distinguish themselves from others. **PRINCIPLE TENETS OF PHARISEES:** In opposition to those of the Sadducees, and the former group maintained the existence of angels and

spirits and the doctrine of the resurrection (Acts 23:8), which the latter party denied (Mt 22:23; Mk 12:18; Lu 20:27). The Pharisees made everything dependent upon God and fate (Josephus, The Jewish Wars, ii.8.14). However, they did not deny the role of the human will in affecting events (Josephus, Antiquities, xviii.1.3). ZEAL FOR TRADITION: The Pharisees distinguished themselves with their zeal for the traditions of the elders, which they taught was derived from the same fountain as the written Word itself, claiming both to have been delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai (Mt 15:1-6; Mk 7:3-5). See also *parádosis* (3862), *tradition*, and *éntalma* (1778), a religious precept versus *entole* (1785), commandment. ([See more detailed notes from William Barclay](#))

Chair (2515)(**kathedra** from **kata**, "down," and **hedra**, "a seat," root of Eng cathedral) literally means a sitting down place, a seat and figuratively the seat of teaching authority or official teaching position. It was likely associated with an actual stone seat in synagogues where the Torah teacher would sit. **Thayer** = "of the exalted seat occupied by men of eminent rank or influence, as teachers and judges....sit on the seat which Moses formerly occupied, i. e. bear themselves as Moses' successors in explaining and defending his law." Only found 3x - Matt. 21:12; Matt. 23:2; Mk. 11:15.

Kathedra later influenced Christian terminology, so that **Cathedra** in Latin becomes the term for a bishop's seat, leading to the term **Cathedral** which was the church where a bishop's official seat resides.

Complete Biblical Library - Kathedra, constructed from *hedra* ("chair") and the intensive prepositional prefix *kata* (2567), is a concept which emphasized a formal seat or position of business or influence. The diminutive form *kathedrarion* means "stool" (Moulton-Milligan). The term is used 15 times in the Septuagint and 3 times in the New Testament (Matthew 21:12; 23:2; Mark 11:15). Matthew 21:12 and Mark 11:15 refer to chairs occupied by those selling in the temple. Matthew 23:2 refers to the position during the time of Christ which represented Moses' authority. In particular, there was an actual stone seat used during that time in front of the synagogue where a teacher carrying great authority would sit. (Notice that after Jesus had read from the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue located in Nazareth, Luke 4:20 says, "He closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.")

KATHEDRA - 17X/16V - 1 Sam. 20:18; 1 Sam. 20:25; 1 Ki. 10:5; 1 Ki. 10:19; 2 Ki. 16:18; 2 Ki. 17:25; 2 Ki. 19:27; 2 Chr. 9:4; 2 Chr. 9:18; Ps. 1:1; Ps. 107:32; Ps. 139:2; Lam. 3:63; Matt. 21:12; Matt. 23:2; Mk. 11:15

QUESTION - [What is Moses' seat? GOTQUESTIONS.ORG](#)

ANSWER - The term *Moses' seat* is found in Matthew 23, where Jesus pronounces woes against the Jewish religious leaders. In verses 1–3, He says to His disciples and the crowd around them, "The teachers of the law and the [Pharisees](#) sit in Moses' seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach."

The biblical background for Jesus' mention of Moses' seat is found in [Exodus 18:13](#): "The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening."

A "seat" in this context is a place of authority. It is similar to our modern metaphorical use of the word *bench*. A judge may be said to "occupy the bench," and the word *bench* may even be used as a substitute for the judge, as in "the ruling from the bench."

In Jesus' day, the teachers of the law and Pharisees continued in the footsteps of Moses in that they were the interpreters and enforcers of the law. In that way, they are said to "sit in Moses' seat." They may not have held the same official position or authority as Moses, but they still had a great deal of authority in Israel at the time. If someone wanted to know what Moses would say about something, he would consult an expert in the Law of Moses—a Pharisee or a teacher of the law. What Moses said was binding, so anyone who was in the position to tell people what Moses said was himself in a position of great authority.

In Matthew 23, Jesus points out that, even though what these leaders say may be correct, they do not practice what they preach. So Jesus tells the people to listen to what they say and respect their position, but not to follow their example. With this instruction, Jesus honors Moses, the law, and spiritual authority even as He confronts the hypocrisy of the teachers and interpreters of the law.

After saying what He said about those who sit in Moses' seat, Jesus pronounced [seven woes](#) against those religious leaders. He was arrested and crucified later the same week.

Matthew 23:3 therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.

KJV Matthew 23:3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

BGT Matthew 23:3 π ν τ α ο ν σα ν ε π ω σ ι ν μ ν π ο ι σ α τ ε κ α τ η ρ ε τ ε, κ α τ δ τ ρ γ α α τ ν μ π ο ι ε τ ε· λ γ ο υ σ ι ν γ ρ κ α ο π ο ι ο σ ι ν.

NET Matthew 23:3 Therefore pay attention to what they tell you and do it. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they teach.

CSB Matthew 23:3 Therefore do whatever they tell you, and observe it. But don't do what they do, because they don't practice what they teach.

ESV Matthew 23:3 so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice.

NIV Matthew 23:3 So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.

NLT Matthew 23:3 So practice and obey whatever they tell you, but don't follow their example. For they don't practice what they teach.

YLT Matthew 23:3 all, then, as much as they may say to you to observe, observe and do, but according to their works do not, for they say, and do not;

MIT Matthew 23:3 Do all they tell you to do and to keep, but do not do as they do. For they make pronouncements, but do not implement them.

NJB Matthew 23:3 You must therefore do and observe what they tell you; but do not be guided by what they do, since they do not practise what they preach.

NRS Matthew 23:3 therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.

- **All that they tell you:** Mt 15:2-9 Ex 18:19,20,23 De 4:5 5:27 17:9-12 2Ch 30:12 Ac 5:29, Ro 13:1
- **for:** Mt 21:30 Ps 50:16-20 Ro 2:19-24 2Ti 3:5 Titus 1:16

LISTEN TO THEIR TALK BUT DON'T IMITATE THEIR WALK

Therefore (3767) ουν) Term of conclusion.

All that they tell you, do (poieo) and observe (tereo) - Both verbs are [present imperative](#) which necessitates [depending on the Holy Spirit to obey](#). Jesus is calling for their obedience to be their lifestyle. He is not advocating perfection (He knows that is impossible for fallen flesh) but is advocating a general direction of their lives toward godliness and holiness.

But (VITAL term of contrast) **do not do (poieo) according to their deeds** - This third command **do (poieo)** -- [present imperative with a negative](#) means to stop imitating the deeds of the scribes or alternatively do not begin doing them.

For (term of explanation) **they say things and do not do (poieo) them** - In short, the scribes lips (what they say) and lives (how they live) do not line up. This is an excellent description of a hypocrites, who says one thing and does another. These men's lives are in effect "lies!"

C H Spurgeon (Matthew Commentary) - At this time, however, our Lord was speaking of another grievous fault in the scribes and Pharisees; namely, that they said one thing and did another: "But do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not." Sad indeed is the state of that religious teacher of whom the Searcher of hearts has to say, "Do as he says, and not as he does." Many such are with us still, preaching one thing, and practicing another. May the Lord preserve the people from following their evil example!

Matthew 23:4 "They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.

KJV Matthew 23:4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

BGT Matthew 23:4 δεσμεουσιν δ φορτ βαρ α [κα δυσβ στακτα] κα πιπιθ ασιν π το ς μους τ ν νθρ πων,

α το δ τ δακτ λ α τ ν ο θ λουσιν κιν σαι α τ .

NET Matthew 23:4 They tie up heavy loads, hard to carry, and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing even to lift a finger to move them.

CSB Matthew 23:4 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.

ESV Matthew 23:4 They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.

NIV Matthew 23:4 They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

NLT Matthew 23:4 They crush people with impossible religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden.

YLT Matthew 23:4 for they bind together burdens heavy and grievous to be borne, and lay upon the shoulders of men, but with their finger they will not move them.

MIT Matthew 23:4 For instance, they impose heavy, unwieldy burdens upon people's shoulders, but they opt not to move so much as their finger to bear those loads.

NJB Matthew 23:4 They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people's shoulders, but will they lift a finger to move them? Not they!

NRS Matthew 23:4 They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them.

- Mt 23:23 11:28-30 Lu 11:46 Ac 15:10,28 Ga 6:13 Rev 2:24

LEGALISTIC BURDENS ON MEN

They tie up ([desmeuo](#)) **heavy** ([barus](#)) **burdens** ([phortion](#)) **and lay them on** ([epitiithemi](#)) **men's shoulders** **Burdens** is a figurative description of the oppressive religious rules, legalistic demands, and oral traditions that the Scribes and Pharisees added to God's Law. The verb **tie up** evokes the image of binding up a heavy load on a pack animal to carry. These burdens were not from God, but man-made regulations meant to control people under the guise of piety. The Scribes and Pharisees imposed these burdens on others with no mercy or sensitivity, showing how they were as oppressors of the people, not their shepherds. These hypocrites weighed people down rather than lifting them up, seeking to control them rather than shepherd them (see Ezek 34).

Jesus rebukes the religious leaders for elevating rules over relationship and burdens over mercy.

C H Spurgeon ([Matthew Commentary](#)) - The contrast between the true Teacher and the false ones is clearly brought out by this verse: "They bind heavy burdens to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders. " Their regulations as to moral and ceremonial observances were like huge faggots or crushing burdens bound together, and made into a weight intolerable for any man to carry. Many of these rules by themselves were grievous enough; but all together they formed a yoke that neither the people nor their fathers could bear. The scribes and Pharisees piled the great load upon them; but neither helped them; to sustain it, nor offered to relieve them of any portion of it: "they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. " How different was Christ's teaching: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" Taking their burdens of sin and sorrow and care upon his own shoulders, he exchanges them for his easy yoke, which itself gives rest to all who wear it.

But - Term of contrast. What is being contrasted?

They themselves are unwilling ([ou](#) - absolutely not + [thelo](#) - present tense) **to move** ([kineo](#)) **them with so much as a finger** ([daktulos](#)) - Note the present tense indicating that they are continually as their habitual practice unwilling to lift a little finger! Here we have another excellent "descriptive definition" of hypocrisy. As we saw in Mt 23:3 the preach but do not practice what they preach! They place the burdens that they themselves refused to obey. They demand obedience from others, but offer no example, no help, and no humility.

Tie up (1195) [desmeuo](#) from **desmos** = bond, chain; **deo** = to bind) to tie or bind as with cords, to shackle, to enchain, put in fetters. There are only 3 uses - Mt 23:4, Lk 8:29, Acts 22:4. Jesus used it to describe men (the Pharisees) who "tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger." (Mt 23:4)

In Luke 8:29+ **desmeuo** describes the demon possessed man who was "**bound** with chains and shackles" (which he would break = superhuman strength!). In classical times **desmeuō** spoke of a ship loaded down with heavy contents.

Desmeuo is used figuratively of God's Spirit applying His supernatural balm to our souls and spirits in Psalm 147:3 "He heals the brokenhearted and **binds** (desmeuo in present tense) up their wounds."

Spurgeon on Ps 147:3 - This the Holy Spirit mentions as a part of the glory of God, and a reason for our declaring His praise: the Lord is not only a Builder, but a Healer; He restores broken hearts as well as broken walls. The kings of the earth think to be great through their loftiness; but Jehovah becomes really so by His condescension. Behold, the Most High has to do with the sick and the sorry, with the wretched and the wounded! He walks the hospitals as the good Physician! His deep sympathy with mourners is a special mark of his goodness. Few will associate with the despondent, but Jehovah chooses their company, and abides with them till He has healed them by His comforts. He deigns to handle and heal broken hearts: **He Himself lays on the ointment of grace, and the soft bandages of love, and thus binds up the bleeding wounds of those convinced of sin.** This is compassion like a God. Well may those praise Him to whom He has acted so gracious a part. The Lord is always healing and binding: this is no new work to Him, He has done it of old; and it is not a thing of the past of which He is now weary, for He is still healing and still binding, as the original hath it.

Come, broken hearts, come to the Physician who never fails to heal:
Uncover your wounds to Him Who so tenderly binds them up!

DESMEUO IN SEPTUAGINT - Ge 37:7 ("we were **binding** sheaves in the field") ; Gen. 49:11 ("**ties** his foal"); Jdg. 16:11 (of Samson - "'If they **bind** me tightly with new ropes"); 1 Sa 24:11; Job 26:8 ("He **wraps** up the waters in His cloud"); Ps. 147:3 ("binds up their wounds. "); Amos 2:8;

Matthew 23:5 "But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments."

KJV Matthew 23:5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

BGT Matthew 23:5 π ν τ α δ τ ρ γ α α τ ν ποιο σιν π ρ ς τ θεαθ ναι το ς ν θ ρ ποις· πλατ νουσιν γ ρ τ φυλακτ ρια α τ ν κα μεγαλ νουσιν τ κ ρ σπεδα,

NET Matthew 23:5 They do all their deeds to be seen by people, for they make their phylacteries wide and their tassels long.

CSB Matthew 23:5 They do everything to be observed by others: They enlarge their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels.

ESV Matthew 23:5 They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long,

NIV Matthew 23:5 "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long;

NLT Matthew 23:5 "Everything they do is for show. On their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes with Scripture verses inside, and they wear robes with extra long tassels.

YLT Matthew 23:5 'And all their works they do to be seen by men, and they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the fringes of their garments,

MIT Matthew 23:5 All their activities are performed to polish their image in the public perception. They increase the width of the pendant scroll cases they wear and lengthen the tassels on their clothing.

NJB Matthew 23:5 Everything they do is done to attract attention, like wearing broader headbands and longer tassels,

NRS Matthew 23:5 They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.

- **all:** Mt 6:1-16 2Ki 10:16 Lu 16:15 20:47 21:1 Jn 5:44 7:18 12:43 Php 1:15 2:3 2Th 2:4
- **they make:** De 6:8 Pr 3:3 6:21-23
- **the borders:** Mt 9:20 Nu 15:38,39 De 22:12

Related Passages:

Deuteronomy 6:6-8+ These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be **on your heart**. 7 “You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 8 “You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.

Proverbs 3:3+ Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart.

Numbers 15:38-39+ “Speak to the sons of Israel, and tell them that they shall **make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments** throughout their generations, and that they shall **put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue**. 39 “It shall be a **tassel** for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you played the harlot,

Deuteronomy 22:12+ “You shall make yourself **tassels on the four corners of your garment** with which you cover yourself.

LOOK AT HOW RELIGIOUS I AM!

But - Term of contrast. What is Jesus contrasting? First, note that this particular "but" sets the tone for the rest of Jesus' sharp rebuke of the religious leaders. There are actually several contrasts brought out by this "but" - They teach the Law from the seat of Moses **BUT** they use their teaching to gain attention, not honor. They say the right things (law-based teaching), **BUT** they do everything for human praise. They bind burdens on others without helping **BUT** even their outward religious symbols serve pride. They put on an appearance of orthodox authority **BUT** the reality is they manifest hypocrisy and relish self-glory.

They do ([poieo](#) - present tense) **all their deeds** ([ergon](#)) **to be noticed** ([theaomai](#)) **by men; for they broaden** ([platuno](#)) **their phylacteries** ([phulakterion](#)) **and lengthen** ([megaluno](#)) **the tassels** ([kraspedon](#)) *of their garments* - Jesus exposes their motive for of their grandiose religious acting. These men had jettisoned true devotion replacing it with pretentious ostentation. We have an idiom in English when someone becomes proud, saying they have a "**big head**." Look at the picture above of the big phylacteries on their foreheads, literally depicting men with a big heads! They liked to appear authoritative to men, but in effect they were acting for love of men (men's applause), and not for the love for God or love toward other men, thus breaking the two commandments Jesus had just described as great and foremost in Matthew 22:37-40+! Yes, these great pretenders sat in Moses' seat and preached God's Law, **BUT** Jesus says don't be fooled, for their deeds are driven by pride, not piety!

The **phylacteries** ([phulakterion](#)) are also known as [tefillin](#) in Hebrew and were small (NOT LARGE) leather boxes containing Scriptures (e.g., Dt 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Ex 13:1-16) and were worn by devout Jews on the forehead and left arm during morning prayers as a literal interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:8+. The Pharisees made extra-large phylacteries to appear especially pious and devout, in effect a visual display of their supposed spiritual superiority. These men twisted the Scriptures and in effect disobeyed Moses' command that these words (the Scriptures they put in the phylacteries) were first to be **on your heart** (Dt 6:6+), not just on your head!

Their **tassels** ([kraspedon](#), Hebrew = tzitzit - צִיצִית) were commanded in Numbers 15:38-39 and Deuteronomy 22:12. The purpose of the tassels was clearly stated by Moses writing "It shall be a **tassel** for you to look at and **remember** all the commandments of the LORD, so as to **do** them and **not follow after your own heart and your own eyes** after which you played the harlot." In short, the tassels were to motivate obedience to God, the irony being that the tassels of these men motivated disobedience to God as it fostered their pride! What does "lengthen" mean? They exaggerated the length of their tassels to visibly demonstrate their religious dedication. In other words the longer your tassels, the more "holy" you were in the eyes of the common folk! In short, their garments became billboards of self-righteousness!

Note the marked contrast Jesus had given one of His great commands in His Sermon on the Mount...

Beware ([prosecho](#) in the [present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 6:1+)

C H Spurgeon (Matthew Commentary) - This was the fatal flaw in their character: "But all their works they do for to be seen of men. " So long as they stood well in the sight of their fellow-creatures, they cared little or nothing how they appeared to the eye of God. They were very particular about the literal observance of certain Mosaic injunctions, although they completely missed the spiritual meaning of them: "They make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments. " Four passages from the Law, Exodus 3:3-10, 11-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21, were written on strips of parchment, and worn on the forehead and the hand or arm as amulets, or preservatives. These the scribes and Pharisees made especially prominent, yet all the while the Word of the Lord was not hidden in their hearts, nor obeyed in their lives. The Lord commanded the children of Israel to make fringes in the borders of their garments, and upon the fringe a ribband or thread of blue, that they might look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them (Numbers 15:38,39). These ritualists of our Savior's day were very scrupulous about having deep fringes or large tassels to their garments; but they remembered not the commandments of the Lord to do them. Many keep the laws of God to the eye, but violate them in the heart From such deceit may the Spirit of truth preserve us!

THOUGHT - Are you (am I) a hypocrite? You are if you do not practice what you preach (Mt 23:1-4). You are a hypocrite if you desire to be seen by men rather than to be pleasing to God (Mt 23:5-6). You are a hypocrite if you love being addressed by a special title (Mt 23:6-10). Jesus reminds us of the path to true greatness - "The way up is down!" (Mt 23:11-12)

NET NOTE - **Phylacteries** were small leather cases containing OT scripture verses, worn on the arm and forehead by Jews, especially when praying. The custom was derived from such OT passages as Exod 13:9; 16; Deut 6:8; 11:18. The term κράσπεδον (kraspedon) in some contexts could refer to the outer fringe of the garment (possibly in Mark 6:56). This edge could have been plain or decorated. L&N 6.180 states, "In Mt 23:5 κράσπεδον denotes the **tassels** worn at the four corners of the outer garment (see 6.194)." Tassels refer to the tassels that a male Israelite was obligated to wear on the four corners of his outer garment according to the Mosaic law (Nu 15:38; Deut 22:12).

External Act	Original Purpose	Misused for
Phylacteries	Reminder of God's law (Deut 6)	Religious pride and attention
Tassels	Call to obedience and holiness	Spiritual showmanship

Tassels(fringes)([2899](#))([kraspedon](#)) is the outer limit of something and thus means the edge, border, hem of a garment (Mt 9:20; 14:36; Mk 6:56; Lk 8:44, cf Lxx of Zech 8:23). **Kraspedon** also means tassel (Hebrew tsitsit) or fringe on the four corners of the outer garment ([see picture](#), [another picture](#)), worn as a reminder to observe the commandments (Mt 23:5, cf. Nu 15:38, 39; Dt 22:12).

Gilbrant - By the time of Jesus the original purpose of the **kraspedon** had been lost. Jesus wore the kraspedon on His garment, so one hung in the middle of His back (Matthew 9:20; 14:36; Mark 6:56; Luke 8:44), but He condemned the Pharisees for their departure from the original meaning (Matthew 23:5). Instead of allowing the tassels to remind them of God and His Word, they made them larger than necessary to remind God of their goodness! The woman with the issue of blood touched the hem or tassel of Jesus' garment (Mt 9:20; Lk 8:44). Why she touched the **kraspedon** rather than His shoulder, feet, or hair cannot be determined. But she was not concerned about the superstition of the Pharisees concerning the tassel. She was putting her faith in Jesus. The [tzitzit](#) refers to the fringes on the borders of the robes. They were meant to hang from the corners of the upper garment (Dt 22:12), which was worn on top of the clothing. The tassel was probably made by twisting the overhanging threads of the garment into a knot that would hang down. This was a reminder of the covenant. The tassels were retained down through history, and today more elaborate prayer shawls with tassels are worn during prayer. [Complete Biblical Library](#)

Phylacteries ([5440](#))(phylakterion from [phulasso](#) - keep, preserve) pouches or boxes containing scrolls of parchment on which the Jews wrote certain portions of the Law and bound them on their foreheads and their wrists.). They were originally called phylaktéria, places of preservation, because they reminded the Jews to keep the Law. However, the Jews in our Lord's day came to regard them as amulets or charms which would keep or preserve them from evil. By historical accounts when the Jews returned from 70 years of exile in Babylon, at some point they began to apply the Lord's instructions in Exodus 13:16, Deuteronomy 6:8, Deuteronomy

11:18 literally making these "memorials" into **external** trappings in the form of leather bands on their arms with a box of Scriptures and a similar box attached to a band around their forehead.

Gilbrant - phulakterion appears in the extant literature earliest in Herodotus. It is derived from phulakē "guard," and the place suffix -tērion. In its development phulakē came to have the sense of "a safeguard" as a means of protection. It also came to denote an amulet—a protective charm of some sort. This use is attested in the papyri and appears in Plutarch's Moralia (Second Century A.D.) in reference to an amulet of Isis worn around the neck (387b; cf. Liddell-Scott). In secular literature of Christ's day it apparently denoted an amulet or good luck charm. The term never appears in the Septuagint. In the New Testament Matthew used it once (23:5) to refer to the tēphillin—the prayer boxes Pharisees wore on their foreheads and wrists (tēphillin is the Aramaic plural of the Hebrew word tēphillah, "prayer"). These boxes contained Scripture verses inscribed with texts from Deuteronomy 5 and 6, 10 and 11, and Exodus 12 and 13 (Gundry, Matthew, p.456). The scriptural basis for wearing them came from Exodus 13:16 and Deuteronomy 6:8, and perhaps they were expected to have some protective value. (Tobit 6:6-8 and 8:3 shows that Jewish theology contained belief in certain types of magic charms and formulas.) The Mishnah—the rabbinic oral tradition put into written form about A.D. 200—required male Israelites over 13 to "lay the tephillin" at daily morning prayer (Shebuoth 111.8; cf. Davies, "Phylactery," Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 3:808). We call these prayer boxes phylacteries today—the Greek word phulaktērion having passed into the Vulgate and then into English Bibles via the Geneva Bible of 1557 (ibid.). Matthew did not purposely misrepresent the Jewish tephillin as "amulets," magic good luck charms; rather it appears from Justin (Dialogue with Trypho 46:5) and from Jerome's homily on Matthew 23:5 (PL 26:168) that these boxes really were called phulaktēria (see Tigay, "On the Term Phylacteries [Matthew 23:5]," p.46). The Aramaic equivalent for phulaktērion is qamīa'. Jesus probably originally used this word in this discourse (ibid., p.49), having substituted it for tephillin because of the superstitious veneration that some Jews were associating with them. Their prominent position on the body made them a wonderful proof of "righteousness" and "piety" along with the other outward expressions of godliness. Apparently these Pharisees were increasing the size of their phylacteries to inform everyone more clearly of their piety. Thus the phulaktēria "are a type of religious symbol which could be exploited hypocritically" (ibid., p.48); and it is this hypocrisy which Jesus denounced in this discourse against the Pharisees.

Matthew 23:6 "They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues,

KJV Matthew 23:6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,

BGT Matthew 23:6 φιλο σιν ὁ τ ν πρωτοκλισι αν ν το ς δε πνοις κα τ ς πρωτοκαθεδρ ας ν τα ς συναγωγα ς

NET Matthew 23:6 They love the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues

CSB Matthew 23:6 They love the place of honor at banquets, the front seats in the synagogues,

ESV Matthew 23:6 and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues

NIV Matthew 23:6 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues;

NLT Matthew 23:6 And they love to sit at the head table at banquets and in the seats of honor in the synagogues.

YLT Matthew 23:6 they love also the chief couches in the supper, and the chief seats in the synagogues,

MIT Matthew 23:6 They love seats at the head-table at banquets, the platform seats in the synagogues,

NJB Matthew 23:6 like wanting to take the place of honour at banquets and the front seats in the synagogues,

NRS Matthew 23:6 They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues,

- Mt 20:21 Pr 25:6,7 Mk 12:38,39 Lu 11:43-54 14:7-11 20:46,47 Ro 12:10 Jas 2:1-4 3Jn 1:9

Related Passages:

Matthew 20:21+ And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She *said ([historical present tense](#)) to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left."

Luke 14:7-11+ And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been

picking out the places of honor at the table, saying to them, 8 “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, 9 and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this man,’ and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. 10 “But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. 11 **“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

Luke 20:46+ **“Beware** of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and **chief seats in the synagogues** and places of **honor at banquets**,

THE BEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE AND SYNAGOGUE

They love ([phileo](#) - present tense - continually) **the place of honor** ([protoklisia](#)) **at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues** ([synagoge](#)) - They craved the prominent positions in order to be noticed and exalted by men! Their motivation was not to glorify God but to exalt themselves for their hearts were full of pride and self-promotion! They sought prominence before men over piety before God! This was the very antithesis of God's way, where humility is always the path to true exaltation (Mt 23:12+, Jas 4:10+, 1Pe 5:6+).

C H Spurgeon ([Matthew Commentary](#)) - Jesus next put together four things that the scribes and Pharisees loved: “the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. ” Whether they met with their fellow-men for feasting, for worship, for business, or for instruction, they loved to be first and foremost. This is a common sin, and one into which we may easily fall. Our Lord felt it necessary to warn even his disciples against that evil, for his next words were evidently spoken specially to them.

In first-century Jewish culture, **banquets** were social events where seating order reflected rank or prestige and the best seats in the house were near the host — often reclining closest to the head of the table (cf. Luke 14:7-11+). Their desire for these “front row” seats revealed their lust for status and public admiration, the antithesis of humble service.

*They did not want proximity to God
but visibility before men.*

The chief seats in the synagogues - In synagogues, there were special seats near the front (possibly facing the congregation) which were reserved for elders, scribes, or distinguished guests. Obviously these seats were highly visible, and thus symbolized honor and authority of those sitting there. What is so sad is that the Pharisees loved these front row seats not to be closer to God and to worship, but to be seen as spiritually superior. These fakers sought public honor over private holiness! While these men wanted the prestige and attention of the front seats, Jesus calls us to take the last seat! (Lk 14:10+)

THOUGHT - Is it wrong to have a high position, a position of leadership in the church? Clearly not! Jesus is not condemning positions but is exposing prideful ambition. The heart that longs for recognition by others rather than approval from God is far from the kingdom. Oh my! I need to go look in the mirror as I write these words! The verse that continually resonates in my mind is 1Co 4:5+ “Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and **disclose the motives of men’s hearts**; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.” I am also always reminded of the Puritans who believed the human heart is deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9), and that even our best actions can be tainted by pride, self-righteousness, or a desire for man’s approval! John Owen said it well writing in [The Mortification of Sin](#) that “The root of all indwelling sin is self. **Even in duties, self will be active.**” (Bolding added) The Puritans warned that even in prayer, one might be secretly admiring his or her own eloquence, similarly in preaching, seeking praise of the hearers and in fasting, desiring others to notice. The Puritans emphasized that God sees the heart, and that motive is what distinguishes true obedience from hypocrisy. It was **Thomas Watson** who wrote “It is not duty, but love to duty, God looks at.” ([The Godly Man’s Picture](#)) In other words, beloved, it is not just **WHAT** we do, but **WHY** we do it. Have you (I) had a “motive check” recently? **William Gurnall** quipped “We must take heed that we do not give the devil a back door into our heart, even when the front door seems to be shut fast with good intentions.” Woe! You can mark it down beloved that even in holy things, sin can hide! Here is the takeaway - We need to continually search our hearts (cf Ps 139:23,24+), asking **“Am I doing this for the glory of God, or the glory of self?”**

Spiritual Act	Puritan Concern	Godly Motive Sought
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Preaching	Pride, showmanship	Glory of Christ, humility
Prayer	Impressing others	Brokenness, communion with God
Giving	Recognition	Secret generosity, heavenly reward
Fasting	Religious show	Sorrow for sin, devotion to God
Church attendance	Duty or custom	Love for the Word and fellowship with the saints

Love (5368) **phileo** from **philos** = loved, dear, friend) means to be a friend to another, to be fond of (have a liking for) an individual or an object, to have or show affection for. In some contexts it means to kiss another as a mark of tenderness for that person. **Phileo** denotes personal attachment and is more a matter of sentiment or feeling. It is devotion based in the emotions distinguished from agapao which represents devotion based in the will. Stated another way **phileo** is chiefly of the heart whereas agape is chiefly of the head. **Phileo** is a love which is the response of the human spirit to what appeals to it as pleasurable. **Phileo** is a love which consists of the glow of the heart kindled by the perception of that in the object which affords us pleasure. **Phileo** love is basically emotional. [Click here for an in depth 4 PAGE discussion of PHILEO in the New International Dictionary of the New Testament](#)

Place of honor (4411) **protoklisia** from **protos** = first, chief + **klisia** = a place for reclining from **klino** = to cause to bend) was the seat or place of honor at a dinner or banquet, usually beside the host and thus the most important place, the place of honor, the best seat. The chief place at a banquet, usually the middle place on the middle triclinium where there is room for three (Mt. 23:6; Mk 12:39; Lk 14:7, 8; 20:46).

PROTOKLISIA - 4V - Matt. 23:6; Mk. 12:39; Lk. 14:7; Lk. 14:8; Lk. 20:46. NOT IN SEPTUAGINT

Synagogues (4864) **sunagoge** from **sunago** = lead together, assemble or bring together) refers to a group of people "going with one another" (sunago) literally describes a bringing together or congregating in one place. Eventually, sunagoge came to mean the place where they congregated together. The word was used to designate the buildings other than the central Jewish temple where the Jews congregated for worship. Historically, the Synagogues originated in the Babylonian captivity after the 586 BC destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar and served as places of worship and instruction. Sunagoge was the name of a group "Synagogue of the Freedmen" (Acts 6:9). Synagogues should have been (and frequently were) a place of teaching and proclamation of the Gospel (Mt 4:23, 9:35, 12:9, 13:54, Mk 6:2, Lk 4:15, 16, Lk 4:44, 6:6, 13:10, Jn 6:59, 18:20, Acts 9:20 = Paul immediately "began to proclaim Jesus," Acts 13:5 = Paul proclaimed "the word of God," Acts 14:1 = place Paul, et al, spoke and where "a large number of people believed," Acts 17:17, 18:4, 18:19, 19:8 = Paul, et al reasoned with various audiences in synagogues). In James 2:3 the synagogue seems to describe an assembly-place for Judeo-Christians. Sadly many synagogues became hotbeds of hypocrisy (Mt 6:2), assemblies for arrogant display (a form of hypocrisy) (Mt 6:5, Mk 12:39, Lk 11:43, 20:46).

Synagogue is used in the Septuagint of Ps 21:16 to describe a group of persons who banded together with hostile intent. Synagogues also were used as places where court was held and punishment inflicted = they became places of false accusation (Lk 12:11) and of scourging, flogging, etc of true disciples (Mt 10:17, Mk 13:9, Lk 21:12, Acts 22:19 = imprisoned, Acts 26:11 = Paul's punishment of believers,), and places of violent reaction to unpopular teaching (Lk 4:28).

Matthew 23:7 and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men.

KJV Matthew 23:7 And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

BGT Matthew 23:7 κα το ς σπασμο ς ν τα ς γορα ς κα καλε σθαι π τ ν νθρ πων αββ .

NET Matthew 23:7 and elaborate greetings in the marketplaces, and to have people call them 'Rabbi.'

CSB Matthew 23:7 greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called 'Rabbi' by people.

ESV Matthew 23:7 and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.

NIV Matthew 23:7 they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.'

NLT Matthew 23:7 They love to receive respectful greetings as they walk in the marketplaces, and to be called 'Rabbi.'

YLT Matthew 23:7 and the salutations in the market-places, and to be called by men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

MIT Matthew 23:7 the deferential greetings in the markets, and to be addressed by men as "rabbi."

NJB Matthew 23:7 being greeted respectfully in the market squares and having people call them Rabbi.

NRS Matthew 23:7 and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi.

- **Rabbi:** Jn 1:38,49 3:2,26 6:25 20:16

Related Passages:

John 12:42-43 Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; 43 for **they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.**

LOVING APPROVAL FROM MEN RATHER THAN FROM GOD!

And (kai) - This little "hinge word" (a word that connects two parts of a sentence and often marks a transition, escalation, contrast, or causality) marks Jesus' continuing His rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees by exposing their craving for public recognition and religious titles. In other words the **"AND"** in this context serves not just to connect, but to build on Jesus' indictment of the scribes and Pharisees.

Respectful greetings ([aspasmos](#)) in the market places ([agora](#)) - The market places ([agora](#)) were the public centers of town life where the people would gather to shop, talk, and (especially in the case of the religious leaders) be seen. Exalted greetings from others was a sign of honor and status. In short these men loved being seen and honored in public, not for the purpose of glorifying God, but to elevate themselves. They sought to be the spiritual elites in their society. What a contrast they were to Jesus' followers who were to seek humility, not public honor.

And being called Rabbi ([rhabbi](#)) by men - Rabbi (Hebrew: רַבִּי, meaning "my great one" or "my teacher") was a title of high respect and by Jesus' day, "Rabbi" had become a prestigious religious designation, often used for respected teachers of the Law. The scribes and Pharisees craved this title, not because they wanted to serve God or teach men, but because they loved status and admiration of men.

For the Jews greeting is an important ceremony. Theologians were held in such high regard that according to Talmudic tradition even King Jehoshaphat addressed them as "my father, my teacher, my lord." Since the scribes were generally addressed as rabbi in the presence of others, it gradually became a term used for those who had completed their studies and were ordained teachers of the Law. The scribes and Pharisees misused the designation Rabbi to prompt implicit obedience to their decisions and traditions and words rather than to those of the law and the prophets!

Note that although the title **Rabbi** was often given to the Lord Jesus, we do not find that He ever rebuked those who gave it to Him because He was in truth the Teacher sent from God, even that great Prophet who should come into the world, and of whom the Lord had said by Moses in Deut. 18:18, 19.

"There is later Jewish material in the Talmud that spells out such greetings in detail." ([NET NOTE](#))

Windisch on **respectful greetings** adds that "Like the seat of honour in the synagogue or at a feast, greeting in the market-place is one of the distinctions to which rabbis raise claim by reason of the dignity of their office. A greeting is given on the street when [שְׁלוֹמִים](#) [פְּלִי](#) is first addressed to the one who is to be honoured. In their desire for a greeting, the rabbis want to be greeted first and therefore publicly recognised as superiors (cf. Alexander and the high-priest in Jos. Ant., 11, 331, → 496, n. 4). Censuring the claim of the rabbis to [σπασμός](#), Jesus does not wish his disciples to be honoured by greetings but rather to greet others. It is known that this basic principle was taught and practised by many rabbis, especially Jochanan ben Zakkai - "To offer rabbis the [σπασμός](#) coveted by them was the impulse of all pious Jews." (TDNT, volume 1, page 498)

Respectful greetings (salutation) ([783](#)) [aspasmos](#) from [aspazomai](#) = welcome, greet, to salute) describes the use of set words or phrases to express a welcome or farewell -- salutation, greeting, either orally or by letter. Acknowledgement or expression of good will on meeting. Louw-Nida = "employ certain set phrases as a part of the process of greeting, whether communicated directly or indirectly." Liddell-Scott adds an embrace. [Aspasmos](#) the noun form is extremely rare in antiquity, both in literary documents and nonliterary papyri.

TDNT - To offer rabbis the σπασμός coveted by them was the impulse of all pious Jews. Only once (Mk. 9:15) do we read that the multitude respectfully greeted Jesus: δόντες α τ ν ξεθαμβήθησαν, κα προστρέχοντες σπάζοντο α τόν. But there is frequent mention of → προσκυνε v before Jesus, and this is a particularly respectful form of σπασμός. The caricature of such greeting is the mocking of Jesus as the King of the Jews in Mk. 15:18 f.: κα

ASPASMOS - 10V - Matt. 23:7; Mk. 12:38; Lk. 1:29; Lk. 1:41; Lk. 1:44; Lk. 11:43; Lk. 20:46; 1 Co. 16:21; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17

Rabbi (4461) [rhabbi](#) from Hebrew [rab 07227](#) = >400x in OT - great one, master, chief) means my master (most common rendering in KJV) or my teacher. It was an respectful title of honor by which one would address a teacher who was recognized for their expertise in the Mosaic Law or Scriptures. This term was introduced as a title into the Jewish schools under a three-fold form, Rab, as the lowest degree of honor; Rab with the first person suffix i, Rabbi, my master, with higher dignity; and Rabboni, meaning my great master, the most honorable of all. This was publicly given to only seven persons, all of the [school of Hillel](#) and of great eminence. Jesus' disciples repeatedly address Him as **Rabbi** (Jn. 4:31; Jn. 6:25; Jn. 9:2; Jn. 11:8) The suffix **-bi** signified "my master" "and was a title of respect by which teachers were addressed. The suffix soon lost its specific force, and in the NT the word is used as courteous title of address." (Vine) It is interesting that In Mt. 23:7-8 Jesus forbade His disciples to desire to use it ("do not be called **Rabbi**"). " ([Was Jesus a rabbi?](#))

RHABBI - 15v - Matt. 23:7; Matt. 23:8; Matt. 26:25; Matt. 26:49; Mk. 9:5; Mk. 11:21; Mk. 14:45; Jn. 1:38; Jn. 1:49; Jn. 3:2; Jn. 3:26; Jn. 4:31; Jn. 6:25; Jn. 9:2; Jn. 11:8

Matthew 23:8 "But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers.

KJV Matthew 23:8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.

BGT Matthew 23:8 με ς δ μ κληθ τε αββ · ε ς γ ρ σπιν μ ν διδ σκαλος, π ντες δ με ς δελφο στε.

NET Matthew 23:8 But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher and you are all brothers.

CSB Matthew 23:8 "But as for you, do not be called 'Rabbi,' because you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers.

ESV Matthew 23:8 But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers.

NIV Matthew 23:8 "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers.

NLT Matthew 23:8 "Don't let anyone call you 'Rabbi,' for you have only one teacher, and all of you are equal as brothers and sisters.

YLT Matthew 23:8 'And ye -- ye may not be called Rabbi, for one is your director -- the Christ, and all ye are brethren;

MIT Matthew 23:8 As for you, do not let yourself be called rabbi, for you have one master-teacher, and all of you are brothers.

NJB Matthew 23:8 'You, however, must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one Master, and you are all brothers.

NRS Matthew 23:8 But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students.

- **Do not be called** : Mt 23:10 2Co 1:24 4:5 Jas 3:1 1Pe 5:3
- **One**: Mt 10:25 Mt 17:5 Mt 26:49 Jn 13:13-14 Ro 14:9,10 1Co 1:12,13 3:3-5
- **All brothers**: Lu 22:32 Eph 3:15 Col 1:1,2 Rev 1:9 19:10 22:9

Related Passages:

Matthew 10:25+ "It is enough for the disciple that he become like his **teacher** ([didaskalos](#)), and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!

John 13:13-14+ "You call Me **Teacher** ([didaskalos](#)) and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. 14 "If I then, the Lord and the **Teacher** ([didaskalos](#)), washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

WARNINGS TO HIS DISCIPLES

But ("as for you") - Term of contrast. What is Jesus contrasting? The key is to discern to whom is He speaking these words? Imagine Him turning in gaze from the Scribes and Pharisees to His disciples. This is clearly addressed to His 12 disciples. They are to be different from the Scribes and Pharisees, the ones who loved being called **Rabbi**.

Do not be called ([kaleo](#)) **Rabbi** ([rhabbi](#)) (cf Mt 23:10+) - ESV, NET - "you are not to be called". While not strictly speaking a command in the Greek, clearly this exhortation functions much like a command. It might have been tempting to the disciples to imitate the Scribes and Pharisees, seeing how the people fawned over them and bowed to them. Flesh loves approval and honor, so Jesus tries to give them forewarning so that they can avoid such fleshly thinking. In short, it is not the title itself (Rabbi), but the pride and spiritual superiority behind the fleshly craving for this title which Jesus rebukes.

C H Spurgeon ([Matthew Commentary](#)) - In the Church of Christ, all titles and honors which exalt men and give occasion for pride are here forbidden. In the Christian commonwealth we should seek to realize a truer "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity," than that for which the world clamors in vain. He who is called "Rabbi " robs Christ of his honor as the only Master or Teacher of his disciples: "for one is your Master, even, Christ. " He also takes from his fellow-Christians the privilege that they share equally with him: "and all ye are brethren. " Those who use such titles as "Holy Father "and "Right Reverend Father in God "would have a difficulty in explaining any our Savior's words: "Call, no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. " In the tenth verse, our Lord's words might be rendered: "Neither be ye called leaders (guides, instructors): for one is your Leader (Guide, Instructor), even the Christ (the Messiah). " If we follow him, we cannot go wrong.

For ([gar](#) - term of explanation) **One is your Teacher** ([didaskalos](#)) - Jesus explains why they are not to be called **Rabbi**. **One** refers to himself as their **Teacher**. They would soon learn in the [Upper Room Discourse](#) this Teacher would be the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26+), the Spirit of Jesus, One Who would function as another ([allos](#) - another of same kind) Helper (see Jn 14:16+) like Jesus had been for the past 3+ years. He would be their teacher just as Jesus had been their Teacher.

And you are (present tense) **all brothers** ([adelphos](#)) - Imagine what went through Judas Iscariot's mind upon hearing this "family" word **brothers**. He would prove to be a betrayer and was never a spiritual brother of the other 11 disciples, for he was never born again. Brothers is a word that in effect "[levels the playing field](#)" the idea being that no individual of the 12 was greater than the others. Another practical implication of brothers is that it does away with spiritual hierarchy in the Kingdom of God (no "have's, have not's" like the elite Scribes and Pharisees) and calls believers to servant leadership, not superiority.

THOUGHT - Discipleship is not to be a competition for titles, rewards, etc, but a family of brothers and sisters under one Lord, on one team and with one goal, to glorify God and see His Kingdom expand from sea to sea. (see Eph 4:1-7+) Are you wrestling with envy, jealousy, etc, often comparing yourself with your brethren? Confess and repent so that you might not grieve the Spirit, Who will then supernaturally enable you to accomplish the **good works** (plural) which God prepared specifically for you in Christ Jesus even before the foundation of the world. (Eph 2:10+). In many races runners are disqualified if they get into another runner's lane. One takeaway then for **all brothers** (and sisters) is to stay in the lane God has assigned as your lane and run with endurance the race set before you, fixing your eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:1-2+).

Teacher (1320) [didaskalos](#) from [didasko](#) = teach to shape will of one being taught by content of what is taught <> cp [didaskalia](#)) is one who provides instruction or systematically imparts truth. The **teacher** teaches in such a way as to shape will of one being taught by content of what is taught. Someone has said that "The great teacher is the one who turns our ears into eyes so that we can see the truth." Henry Brooks added that "A (Bible) teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops."

DIDASKALOS - 59X/58V - Matt. 8:19; Matt. 9:11; Matt. 10:24; Matt. 10:25; Matt. 12:38; Matt. 17:24; Matt. 19:16; Matt. 22:16; Matt. 22:24; Matt. 22:36; Matt. 23:8; Matt. 26:18; Mk. 4:38; Mk. 5:35; Mk. 9:17; Mk. 9:38; Mk. 10:17; Mk. 10:20; Mk. 10:35; Mk. 12:14; Mk. 12:19; Mk. 12:32; Mk. 13:1; Mk. 14:14; Lk. 2:46; Lk. 3:12; Lk. 6:40; Lk. 7:40; Lk. 8:49; Lk. 9:38; Lk. 10:25; Lk. 11:45; Lk. 12:13; Lk. 18:18; Lk. 19:39; Lk. 20:21; Lk. 20:28; Lk. 20:39; Lk. 21:7; Lk. 22:11; Jn. 1:38; Jn. 3:2; Jn. 3:10; Jn. 8:4; Jn. 11:28; Jn. 13:13; Jn. 13:14; Jn. 20:16; Acts 13:1; Rom. 2:20; 1 Co. 12:28; 1 Co. 12:29; Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11; 2 Tim. 4:3; Heb. 5:12; Jas. 3:1

Matthew 23:9 "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.

KJV Matthew 23:9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.

BGT Matthew 23:9 καὶ πατρὸς μὴ καλέσητε μὴ πτερύχεις, ἐς γὰρ σὺν μὴ πατρὶ οὐρ νιός.

NET Matthew 23:9 And call no one your 'father' on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.

CSB Matthew 23:9 Do not call anyone on earth your father, because you have one Father, who is in heaven.

ESV Matthew 23:9 And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.

NIV Matthew 23:9 And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.

NLT Matthew 23:9 And don't address anyone here on earth as 'Father,' for only God in heaven is your spiritual Father.

YLT Matthew 23:9 and ye may not call any your father on the earth, for one is your Father, who is in the heavens,

MIT Matthew 23:9 Also you are not to be called "father" on the earth, for you have one heavenly father.

NJB Matthew 23:9 You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven.

- **call:** 2Ki 2:12 6:21 13:14 Job 32:21,22 Ac 22:1 1Co 4:15 1Ti 5:1,2 Heb 12:9
- **for:** Mt 6:8-9,32 Mal 1:6 Ro 8:14-17 2Co 6:18 1Jn 3:1

Related Passages:

Matthew 6:8-9+ "So do not be like them; for **your Father knows** what you need before you ask Him. 9 "Pray, then, in this way: '**Our Father** who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

Matthew 6:32+ "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for **your heavenly Father** knows that you need all these things.

Ephesians 3:14-15+ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name,

ANOTHER WARNING EXHORTATION FOR THE DISCIPLES

Do not call ([kaleo](#)) anyone on earth ([ge](#)) your father ([pater](#)) - Jesus is still addressing His disciples with a warning that in effect functions like a command. Obviously Jesus is speaking of spiritual fathers not biological fathers. He is saying that they are not to revere or honor another person by calling them "Father." They were not to elevate human leaders to the position of ultimate spiritual authority because that role belongs to God Alone.

In Jewish tradition, some rabbis or religious figures were called "father" as mentors, or guides in the faith (cf. 2 Kings 2:12; Judges 17:10). Jesus is correcting the misuse of that title as a status symbol or symbol of one having authority. Jesus is warning against giving human leaders the kind of spiritual authority, dependence, or reverence that belongs only to God. He is not banning a word, but confronting the prideful use of titles that elevate men above others in spiritual status.

[Henry Morris](#) - The point is that no man should be regarded or addressed as an authoritative spiritual master, playing a role equal to that of our heavenly Father or even as an intermediary between us and Him. "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5+). The same would apply to any other title or position (Rabbi, Master, Doctor, Reverend) which might imply spiritual authority or power above that of ordinary believers, all of whom have been made "kings and priests unto God and his Father" (Rev 1:6+, Rev 5:10+).

For ([gar](#) - term of explanation) One is your Father ([pater](#)), He who is in heaven ([ouranios](#)) - Jesus is explaining what He means that they are not to call anyone on earth their father. The disciples have only one true spiritual Father, God. Clearly Jesus is not forbidding using the word father for one's biological father. And He is not forbidding using "father" to describe a spiritual mentor. Paul used the term father in 1 Corinthians 4:15+ explaining to the Corinthians "if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your **father** through the gospel." Who is in heaven emphasizes the transcendence of God.

[Believer's Study Bible](#) notes that "The Aramaic [abba](#), "father," was not used by orthodox Jews to refer to God because the designation was too familiar and intimate. However, Jesus taught His disciples to use it as a form of addressing God. The caution is

to reserve it to address God and not just as an everyday title of courtesy.

Heaven (3770) (**ouranios** from **ouranos**) mean heavenly, coming from or living in heaven. Celestial. Belonging to heaven. **Ouranios** speaks of what dwells in heaven, comes from it, or appears in it. A **heavenly** host of angels (Luke 2:13); a **heavenly** vision (Acts 26:19). "**Heavenly** Father" occurs only in Matthew (Mt. 6:14, 26, 32; 15:13).

OURANIOS - 9V - heaven(1), heavenly(8). Matt. 5:48; Matt. 6:14; Matt. 6:26; Matt. 6:32; Matt. 15:13; Matt. 18:35; Matt. 23:9; Lk. 2:13; Acts 26:19

QUESTION - [Did Jesus mean that we should never refer to our earthly father as "father" \(Matthew 23:9\)?](#) GOTQUESTIONS.ORG

ANSWER - Religious hypocrites will do almost anything for attention. Like the [Pharisees](#) of Jesus' day, they love to be seated in high positions where they will be seen and honored above everyone else. In His final discourse, Jesus dealt with the vain hypocrisy of Israel's religious leaders and warned His followers not to be like them: "But as for you, do not be called 'Rabbi,' because you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father, because you have one Father, who is in heaven. And do not be called masters either, because you have one Master, the Messiah" (Matthew 23:8–10 HCSB).

These instructions came on the heels of Christ's scathing description of the Pharisees ([Matthew 23:1–12](#)), condemning their fixation with status, positions of importance, and titles of honor such as Father, Rabbi, Teacher, and Master (verses 5–7). Many of these Jewish leaders flaunted their high appointments. In essence, they made idols of themselves and insisted that others bow down and worship them.

Jesus commanded His disciples to be different. Instead of striving for personal glory and public recognition, followers of Jesus are to humble themselves before God and people (Luke 14:9–11; Colossians 3:12; James 4:10; 1 Peter 3:8; 5:6). Jesus taught that the greatest in His kingdom are meek and modest servants (Matthew 20:26; 23:11; Luke 9:48; 22:26–27). Genuine kingdom seekers don't demand recognition but instead desire God alone to be glorified (Matthew 5:16; Philippians 1:11; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 1 Peter 4:11).

Jesus said, "Do not call anyone father," not as a blanket injunction against the use of such titles but as an exhortation to humility. The Bible tells us to "honor your father and your mother," so it's certainly not wrong to call one's earthly father by that name (see Exodus 20:12; Hebrews 12:9). Likewise, the respectful and affectionate title "father" was often used in Bible times for elders and teachers (see 2 Kings 6:21; 13:14; Acts 7:2; 22:1).

The apostle Paul saw himself as a spiritual father figure to those he had led to Christ and nurtured in the faith (1 Corinthians 4:14–15; Philippians 2:22; 1 Timothy 1:2, 18; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4), but he never insisted that anyone call him by the title "father." Instead, Paul acknowledged his lowly place as "less than the least of all the Lord's people" (Ephesians 3:7–8; see also 1 Corinthians 15:9–10; 1 Timothy 1:12–16).

Jesus also wasn't teaching that there should never be positions of authority in the body of Christ. Rather, He emphasized that all [leadership roles](#) in the church should be seen as opportunities to serve the Lord and others. It is inappropriate and unbiblical to put human spiritual leaders onto pedestals. Scripture shows that all Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ (Matthew 23:8; Philemon 16; 1 Timothy 6:2). Ultimately, God in heaven is the only One who has the right to be called our Father (Matthew 6:9), and only He is holy and worthy of exaltation (1 Samuel 2:2; Isaiah 6:3; 43:15; Revelation 4:8; 15:4). Only Jesus is our Master (Luke 17:13; Colossians 4:1), and the Holy Spirit our Teacher (John 14:26).

Believers are told, "Do not call anyone father," because anyone who assumes the title in arrogance and self-promotion will have to contend with God the Father. True spiritual leaders are unpretentious enough to recognize that any wisdom or knowledge they possess is a gracious gift from God. Although the Pharisees exalted themselves, they would one day be humbled (Isaiah 2:11–12; 5:15; Ezekiel 21:26), and disciples of Jesus Christ, who humble themselves in [service](#), will be exalted in God's time (Matthew 23:12).

Matthew 23:10 "Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ."

KJV Matthew 23:10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.

BGT Matthew 23:10 μηδὲ κληθῆτε καθηγῆται, ὅτι ὁ καθηγὴς ὑμῶν ὁ Χριστός.

NET Matthew 23:10 Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one teacher, the Christ.

CSB Matthew 23:10 And do not be called masters either, because you have one Master, the Messiah.

ESV Matthew 23:10 Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ.

NIV Matthew 23:10 Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ.

NLT Matthew 23:10 And don't let anyone call you 'Teacher,' for you have only one teacher, the Messiah.

YLT Matthew 23:10 nor may ye be called directors, for one is your director -- the Christ.

MIT Matthew 23:10 Neither are you to be called an "expert" because you have one expert, the messiah.

NJB Matthew 23:10 Nor must you allow yourselves to be called teachers, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ.

NRS Matthew 23:10 Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah.

Related Passages:

Colossians 1:18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

A THIRD WARNING FOR THE DISCIPLES

Do not be called leaders (kathēgetes) - This is the third in a series of negative exhortations to the disciples, each functioning like a command. Jesus is not saying leadership is wrong — but that His disciples must not seek or exalt leadership titles that imply superiority, authority, or self-importance. This is a rebuke of spiritual elitism — where a person tries to stand above others in position or title.

for One is your Leader (kathēgetes), *that is, Christ* ([Christos](#)) Christ alone is the ultimate guide, teacher, and head of the church. All other leaders are merely under-shepherds or servants. The clear teaching is that the disciples (then and today) are to follow One Leader, Jesus Christ, submitting to Him. A corollary truth is that all human leadership must point to Christ, not to self.

These three exhortations in (Mt 23:8, 9, 10) protect church members from spiritual pride, clericalism, and idolizing leaders - we have One Teacher, One Father and One Leader! Clericalism is the overemphasis on the role of ordained clergy, where spiritual authority and decision-making are concentrated in the hands of a few, often leading to spiritual elitism, exclusion, or abuse of power.

NET NOTE - Christ - The term [Christos](#) was originally an adjective ("anointed"), developing in LXX into a substantive ("an anointed one"), then developing still further into a technical generic term ("the anointed one"). In the intertestamental period it developed further into a technical term referring to the hoped-for anointed one, that is, a specific individual. In the NT the development starts there (technical-specific), is so used in the gospels, and then develops in Paul to mean virtually Jesus' last name. It was a common belief in Judaism that Messiah would be the **son of David** in that he would come from the lineage of David. On this point the Pharisees agreed and were correct. But their understanding was nonetheless incomplete, for Messiah is also David's Lord. With this statement Jesus was affirming that, as the Messiah, he is both God and man.

Leaders (2519) kathēgetes (**agō** = "to lead," + intensive prefix kata). The emphasis is upon leadership and guidance. It denotes a guide, a teacher. However, the aspect highlighted in the use of kathēgētēs is guidance. The word is not used in the Septuagint and has only two in Matthew 23:10 refers to Christ as the only kathēgētēs the believer should follow.

Matthew 23:11 "But the greatest among you shall be your servant."

KJV Matthew 23:11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

BGT Matthew 23:11 ὁ μεζων μὲν σταί μὲν δι κonoς.

NET Matthew 23:11 The greatest among you will be your servant.

CSB Matthew 23:11 The greatest among you will be your servant.

ESV Matthew 23:11 The greatest among you shall be your servant.

NIV Matthew 23:11 The greatest among you will be your servant.

NLT Matthew 23:11 The greatest among you must be a servant.

YLT Matthew 23:11 And the greater of you shall be your ministrant,

MIT Matthew 23:11 The greatest among you will be the one who serves you all.

NJB Matthew 23:11 The greatest among you must be your servant.

NRS Matthew 23:11 The greatest among you will be your servant.

- Mt 20:26,27 Mk 10:43,44 Lu 22:26,27 Jn 13:14,15 1Co 9:19 2Co 4:5 2Co 11:23 Ga 5:13 Php 2:5-8

Related Passages:

Mark 10:43-45+ "But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; 44and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. 45"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

THE FORMULA FOR TRUE GREATNESS" IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

But (term of contrast) - Jesus is contrasting with spiritual elitism that is inherent in each of the previous 3 designations - rabbi, father, leader.

The greatest (megas) **among you shall be your servant** ([diakonos](#)) - Jesus had stated the same thing in Matthew 20:26+ (cf Mk 10:43+) "It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your **servant** ([diakonos](#)). This word for servant conveys the picture of "one who waits on tables!" Jesus does not condemn "greatest" but radically inverts the world's definition of "greatest!" In the context of Jesus' diatribe against the Scribes and Pharisees, who sought greatness through status, titles, and attention, Jesus points to humility and service as the true path. In God's kingdom, greatness is not about rising above others, but stooping to serve them.

C H Spurgeon ([Matthew Commentary](#)) - This is nearly the same lesson that is recorded in Mt 20:27. Our Lord had to repeat many times this law of his kingdom: "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant. " You are all equal; but if there is one amongst you who claims to be the greatest, he shall be the servant of all. Where our King rules, any one of his disciples who exalts himself shall be abased; while, on the other hand, the one who humbles himself shall be exalted. The way to rise is to sink self; the lower we fall in our own esteem, the higher shall we rise in our Master's estimation.

As an aside, Jesus is not eliminating leadership, simply redefining it. The greatest leaders are servant leaders, which was the pattern of Jesus!

*Those whom God will employ are first struck
with a sense of their unworthiness to be employed.*

Matthew Henry

Servant (minister, deacon) ([1249](#)) [diakonos](#) see related words [diakoneo](#), [diakonia](#) is of uncertain origin. Some say it is from **dia** (through) + **konis** (dust) which denotes one who hurries through the dust to carry out his service. (**Thayer** and others doubt this derivation for technical reasons). **Vine** says that **diakonos** is probably from **diako** which means to hasten after, to pursue and so to run on errands. "Then the root idea is one who reaches out with diligence and persistence to render a service on behalf of others. This would imply that the deacon reaches out to render love-prompted service to others energetically and persistently." (Hiebert) This word group ([diakonos](#), [diakoneo](#), [diakonia](#)) focuses on the rendering or assistance or help by performing certain duties, often of a humble or menial nature, and including such mundane activities as waiting on tables or caring for household needs, activities that to many would seem to be without dignity (not true of course in God's eyes, Pr 15:3, Rev 22:12+). In summary, the basic idea of this word group is that of humble, submissive, personal service, with less emphasis on a specific office or a particular function.

DIAKONOS - 27V - Matt. 20:26; Matt. 22:13; Matt. 23:11; Mk. 9:35; Mk. 10:43; Jn. 2:5; Jn. 2:9; Jn. 12:26; Rom. 13:4; Rom. 15:8; Rom. 16:1; 1 Co. 3:5; 2 Co. 3:6; 2 Co. 6:4; 2 Co. 11:15; 2 Co. 11:23; Gal. 2:17; Eph. 3:7; Eph. 6:21; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:7; Col. 1:23; Col. 1:25; Col. 4:7; 1 Tim. 3:8; 1 Tim. 3:12; 1 Tim. 4:6

Matthew 23:12 "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted."

KJV Matthew 23:12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

BGT Matthew 23:12 στις ὁ ψ σει αὐτ ν ταπεινωθ σεται κα στις ταπειν σει αὐτ ν ψωθ σεται.

NET Matthew 23:12 And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

CSB Matthew 23:12 Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

ESV Matthew 23:12 Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

NIV Matthew 23:12 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

NLT Matthew 23:12 But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

YLT Matthew 23:12 and whoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled, and whoever shall humble himself shall be exalted.

MIT Matthew 23:12 Whoever acclaims himself will be humiliated, but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

NJB Matthew 23:12 Anyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be raised up.

NRS Matthew 23:12 All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

- Mt 5:3 18:4 Job 22:29 Ps 138:6 Pr 15:33 16:18,19 29:23 Isa 57:15 Da 4:37 Lu 1:51,52 14:11 18:14 Jas 4:6 1Pe 5:5

Related Passages:

Proverbs 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling. 19 It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly Than to divide the spoil with the proud.

Matthew 5:3+ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 18:4+ "Whoever then **humbles** himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

James 4:6+ But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT **GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.**"

1 Peter 5:5+ You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, **BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.**

THE PARADOX OF TRUE GREATNESS

Whoever exalts ([hupsoo](#)) **himself shall be humbled** ([tapeinoo](#)) - **Exalts** is in the active voice indicating willful, volitional exaltation by the person, actively seeking recognition, honor, status, or superiority, as did the Scribes and Pharisees! In contrast **shall be humbled** is in the [passive voice](#) which indicates that this person's desire to be exalted is countered by being acted upon by an outside force -- God! The takeaway is look out if you are seeking to be exalted, for there will be payday someday! This recalls the picture of the Pharisee in Luke 18:11-14+ who was exalting self and left the temple unjustified (spiritually lost).

And whoever humbles ([tapeinoo](#)) **himself shall be exalted** ([hupsoo](#)) - **Humbles** ([tapeinoo](#)) is in the active voice indicating volitional choice, or a choice of their will be take the humble path. The verb [tapeinoo](#) comes is from [tapeinos](#) which is found in an early secular document where it speaks of the Nile River in its low stage in the words, "It runs low." The idea then is "not rising far from the ground." In essence this describes the person who follows in the humble and lowly steps of the Lord. **Exalted** ([hupsoo](#)) is in the [passive voice](#) which indicates that this person will be exalted by an outside force, specifically God! The tax collector in Luke 18:11-14+ humbled himself and left the temple justified! Of course the supreme example is the Lord Jesus Himself as described in Php 2:5-11+ Who God highly exalted because of His willingness to humble Himself and die on the Cross!

Archibald Alexander once said that "Humility is to the Christian what ballast is to the ship; it keeps him in his proper position and regulates all his thoughts and feelings."

Related Resource:

- [Spiritual Paradox in the Christian Life](#)

Humbled (5013) **tapeinoo** from **tapeinos** = low, not high, describes Jesus in Mt 11:29+, figuratively of one's attitude/social position) literally means to level, to cause something to be lower or to make low (eg, to level off a mountain in Lk 3:5 from Lxx of Is 40:4). To be brought low not high, particularly of attitude & social positions. HUMBLE is fr Latin HUMILIS low, humble in turn fr HUMUS earth! Greeks saw humility as shameful, NT sees humility as condition bringing man to right relation to God! **Tapeinoo** means to bow down, to make low, to humble. Most NT uses of **tapeinoo** are figurative and include the following meanings: To cause someone to lose prestige, to reduce to a meaner condition or lower rank, to abase. To be ranked below others. In secular Greek, the person who was **tapeinos** described the one who was base, ignoble or of low birth, servile, held in low esteem. Obviously in the Bible, the supreme example of humility and humbling one's self is the Lord Jesus Christ. The original sense of **low lying** soon gave rise to metaphorical uses, [NIDNTT \(online\)](#) listing several examples.

Wuest says that **tapeinoo** means "to make low, bring low, to bring into a humble condition, to abase, to assign a lower rank or place to, to humble or abase one's self, to be ranked below others who are honored or rewarded, to have a modest opinion of one's self, to behave in an unassuming manner." The word **tapeinos** is found in an early secular document where it speaks of the Nile River in its low stage in the words, "It runs low." The word means "not rising far from the ground." It describes the Christian who follows in the humble and lowly steps of his Lord.

TAPEINOO - 15X/11V - **brought low(1), get along(1), humble(2), humble means(1), humbled(4), humbles(4), humbling(1), humiliate(1)**. Matt. 18:4; Matt. 23:12; Lk. 3:5; Lk. 14:11; Lk. 18:14; 2 Co. 11:7; 2 Co. 12:21; Phil. 2:8; Phil. 4:12; Jas. 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:6

QUESTION - [What does it mean that those who humble themselves will be exalted \(Matthew 23:12\)? GOTQUESTIONS.ORG](#)

ANSWER - The Jewish teachers and religious leaders of Jesus' day—the [scribes](#) and [Pharisees](#)—exhibited many undesirable traits. Chief among them were pride and hypocrisy. In Matthew 23:1–12, Jesus warns His followers not to imitate their despicable behavior, concluding with these words: "The greatest among you must be a servant. But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Matthew 23:11–12, NLT).

According to the paradoxical principles of God's kingdom, the greatest person is the one willing to stoop to the lowest place and serve others (see Matthew 20:24–28). The Pharisees tried to prove their worth by lifting themselves above everyone else. But the Lord's faithful servants don't need to exalt themselves. They have nothing to prove. Instead, they humble themselves before God and are filled with His grace, trusting that God exalts the humble (James 4:6, 10).

God commands His people to "walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8; see also Exodus 10:3; Isaiah 57:15; Zephaniah 2:3; Luke 14:9–11; 1 Peter 3:8) and to "be completely humble" (Ephesians 4:2; see also Colossians 3:12; James 3:13). The Lord declares, "I will bless those who have humble and contrite hearts, who tremble at my word" (Isaiah 66:2, NLT). The Beatitudes echo with reminders that God exalts the humble (see Matthew 5:3–12).

Godly leadership is always marked by [humility](#). Peter taught, "Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you" (1 Peter 5:5–6, ESV). The Bible consistently characterizes people deserving of high positions as those with an attitude of unassuming servanthood (Proverbs 25:6–7; 2 Samuel 7:8; 1 Kings 14:7; Luke 1:52).

One day, the disciples asked Jesus, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Matthew 18:1). The Lord answered, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3–4; see also Matthew 19:14). Humility is linked with repentance and salvation (see 2 Kings 22:19; 2 Chronicles 7:14; 12:6–7; 12:30:11; 33:12,19; 34:27).

Jesus Christ gave us the supreme example of humble, obedient submission to the Father: "Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name

of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:6–11, NLT). God the Son humbled Himself and became a human. He selflessly served others, ultimately sacrificing His life to save us (Matthew 20:26–28). And God exalted Him to the highest place of honor.

Just as “[pride](#) goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18), “humility comes before honor” (Proverbs 15:33). The proud are brought low, but God exalts the humble.

True greatness in the eyes of God is letting ourselves “become less and less” and Him “become “greater and greater” (John 3:30, NLT). It means becoming like Jesus, who stooped down to wash the disciples’ feet (John 13:4–17). God will surely humble us if we try to exalt ourselves as the scribes and Pharisees did. But if we voluntarily humble ourselves by avoiding the limelight and serving others, God will exalt us in His time.

Matthew 23:13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

KJV Matthew 23:13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

BGT Matthew 23:13 Ο α δ μ ν, γραμματε ς κα Φαρισα οι ποκριτα , τι κλε ετε τ ν βασιλε αν τ ν ο ραν ν μπροσθεν τ ν νθρ πων· με ς γ ρ ο κ ε σ ρχεσθε ο δ το ς ε σερχομ νους φ ετε ε σελθε ν.

NET Matthew 23:13 "But woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You keep locking people out of the kingdom of heaven! For you neither enter nor permit those trying to enter to go in.

CSB Matthew 23:13 "But woe to you, scribes and 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.

ESV Matthew 23:13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.

NIV Matthew 23:13 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

NLT Matthew 23:13 "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you shut the door of the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces. You won't go in yourselves, and you don't let others enter either.

YLT Matthew 23:13 'Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye shut up the reign of the heavens before men, for ye do not go in, nor those going in do ye suffer to enter.

MIT Matthew 23:13 How horrible your destiny, scholars and Pharisees—hypocrites all—because you effect a lockout on the kingdom of heaven just as people get to the entrance. For you neither enter yourselves, nor do you permit those about to enter to get inside.

NJB Matthew 23:13 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut up the kingdom of Heaven in people's faces, neither going in yourselves nor allowing others to go who want to.

NRS Matthew 23:13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven. For you do not go in yourselves, and when others are going in, you stop them.

- **woe:** Mt 23:14,15,27,29 Isa 9:14,15 33:14 Zec 11:17 Lu 11:43,44
- **shut:** Mt 21:31-32 Lu 11:52 Jn 7:46-52 Jn 9:22,24,34 Ac 4:17,18 5:28,40 Ac 8:1 13:8 1Th 2:15,16 2Ti 3:8 4:15

Related Passages:

Matthew 11:19+ “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, **Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!**” Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

Matthew 12:23-24+ All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, “This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?” 24 But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, “**This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.**”

Matthew 21:15+ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and

the children who were shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," **they became indignant**

John 9:22+ His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.

JEWISH RELIGIOUS PRETENDERS SHUTTING HEAVEN'S DOOR

But - Term of contrast. Now Jesus turns again to address the Pharisees who undoubtedly had heard what He has just said to His disciples about the way to be great in the Kingdom of God.

Woe ([ouai](#)) **to you** - **Woe** is a word expressing extreme displeasure and is a prophetic denunciation, calling for retributive pain on these hypocrites. This word includes Jesus' lament for their spiritual failure while at the same time warning them of coming of divine judgment. In short woe was a reproof and a lament, wrath plus sorrow. This is the first of 8 woes in this chapter (or seven if Mt 23:14 is excluded for it is omitted in many manuscripts). Put yourself for a moment in the sandals of these religious leaders as they heard this verbal barrage of woes! Add to that 7 times they are called hypocrites (6 if we omit Mt 23:14), 5 times blind and once "a son of hell!" The word that comes to mind is [castigate](#) which means to reprimand severely, and no human beings have ever been reprimanded as severely as the Scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23!

R C H Lenski - "Every one of the seven 'woes' is an exclamation like the 'blessed' in the Beatitudes. It does not state a wish but a fact. It is not a curse that calls down calamity but a calm, true judgment and verdict rendered by the supreme Judge himself. Hence six of these judgments have the evidence attached by means of a causal *hoti* [**ED**: 'because' - TERM OF EXPLANATION] clause which furnishes the full reason for the verdict 'woe,' and in the remaining judgment (Mt 23:16) the varied form of expression does the same by means of an apposition." (Borrow [Interpretation of St Matthew's Gospel page 902](#))

J Vernon McGee - Here we see the gentle Jesus using the harshest language that is in the entire Word of God. No prophet of the Old Testament denounced sin as the Lord Jesus denounces it. (Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee)

C H Spurgeon ([Matthew Commentary](#)) - While our Savior was speaking to the people and his disciples, the scribes and Pharisees may have again drawn near. At any rate, his next words were addressed to them: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" This is the first of eight "woes", in which the Lord Jesus both foretells the doom of the hypocrites gathered before him, and reveals the depth of his pity even for them. In seven of the eight "woes" he calls them "hypocrites", in one he addresses them as "blind guides." This first "woe" was pronounced against them because, as far as they could, they "shut up the kingdom of heaven against men." This was a terrible charge to be brought against them by him who could read their hearts, and who could truthfully say to them, "for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in." They ought to have helped men into the kingdom; instead of doing so, they hindered those who were entering. Are there not false teachers, nowadays, who put stumbling-stones instead of stepping-stones in the way of those who are entering the kingdom of heaven?

D A Carson on **woe** - A "woe" can be a compassionate "alas!" (24:19), a strong condemnation (23:11-21) or a combination of the two (18:17; 26:24). In Matthew 23 condemnation predominates; but it is neither vindictive nor spiteful so much as judicial. Jesus the Messiah pronounces judgment. (See [Matthew](#))

MacArthur on **woe** - In the New Testament it is used to speak of sorrow and of judgment, carrying the mingled ideas of punishment and pity, cursing and compassion.

Barclay writes that the Greek word "is hard to translate for it includes not only wrath, but also sorrow. There is righteous anger here, but it is the anger of the heart of love, broken by the stubborn blindness of men. There is not only an air of savage denunciation; there is also an atmosphere of poignant tragedy."([Ref](#))

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

William MacDonald adds on the woes that "These are not 'curses,' but rather expressions of sorrow at their fate, not unlike the expression, 'Alas for you!'" (See [Believer's Bible Commentary - Page 1289](#))

[Pulpit Commentary](#) - These terrible "woes" are not only evoked by indignation, and pronounced as a solemn judgment, they are

also expressive of the profoundest pity, and are prophetic of the future. They have, indeed, a twofold reference — they refer first to temporal judgments and visitations, now ready to fall; and secondly to the retribution in the eternal world. That the meek and lowly Jesus should utter such awful denunciations shows how greatly he was moved how he left nothing untried to turn these hard hearts to introspection and repentance.

[A T Robertson](#) says on **woe** - 'This hardest word from the lips of Jesus falls on those who were the religious leaders of the Jews (Scribes and Pharisees), who had justified this thunderbolt of wrath by their conduct toward Jesus and their treatment of things high and holy.

ESV Study Bible ([borrow](#)) has an interesting note that "These seven woes stand in contrast to the first seven "blessings" that introduce the Sermon on the Mount and describe Jesus' true disciples (Mt 5:3-9). (For a similar list of woes, see Luke 11:37-54+.)

Scribes ([grammateus](#)) and **Pharisees** ([pharisaaios](#)), **hypocrites** ([hupokrites](#) - hupo = under + krites = judgment) - The men are like "stage actors" in a play, but this "play" was a divine redemptive drama. They were like actors who wore external masks, hiding their true internal corrupt character. And given the fact that the word hypokrites came from Greek theater would have been even more offensive to the Pharisees who hated all forms of Hellenization. They pretended to be spiritual guides to the people, but their actions betrayed their role. Jesus has called the religious leaders **hypocrites** earlier in Mt 15:7 and in Mt 22:18 and will proceed to call them **hypocrites** ([hupokrites](#)) seven times in Matthew 23. This reminds me of the men in Titus 1:16+ who "profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed."

[Pulpit Commentary](#) on **hypocrites** - It is applied to the Pharisees as deceiving themselves and others, under the mask of godliness hiding polluted hearts, persuading themselves that formal externalism was real piety and devotion, and practically teaching this fatal delusion.

[William Barclay](#) - Verses 13–26 of this chapter form the most terrible and the most sustained denunciation in the New Testament. Here we hear what [A T Robertson](#) called 'the rolling thunder of Christ's wrath'. As A. Plummer has written, these woes are 'like thunder in their unanswerable severity, and like lightning in their unsparing exposure ... They illuminate while they strike.' . . . To Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees were men who were acting a part. What he meant was this. Their whole idea of religion consisted in outward observances, the wearing of elaborate phylacteries and tassels, the meticulous observance of the rules and regulations of the law. But in their hearts there was bitterness and envy and pride and arrogance. To Jesus, these scribes and Pharisees were men who, under a mask of elaborate godliness, concealed hearts in which the most godless feelings and emotions held sway. And that accusation holds good in greater or lesser degree of anyone who lives life on the assumption that religion consists in external observances and external acts.

David Turner: Jesus's denunciation of the religious leaders must be viewed against the background of the biblical prophets, who frequently cried woe against Israel's sins. These oracles blend anger, grief, and alarm about the excruciating consequences that will come upon Israel due to its sin. The form of such oracles includes an initial pronouncement of woe followed by a description of the persons upon whom the woe will come. This description amounts to the reason the woe is merited. Thus a woe oracle states the conclusion and then the premises on which it is based. Woe oracles may have developed from covenant curses (Deut. 27:15) or even from funeral lamentations (Jer. 22:18). (See Clements, ABD 6:945–46; Westermann 1967: 192– 95.)[2] In oracles of woe, the prophet's attitude is anger tempered at times by grief and alarm at the horrible price Israel will pay for its sin. Prophets are angry because they are speaking for God against sin. But prophets are also stricken with grief because this anger is directed toward their own people. The palpable pathos of woe oracles is due to the prophet's dual solidarities. The prophets must speak for God, but in announcing oracles of judgment, the prophets know that they are announcing the doom of their own people. In light of this biblical background, Jesus's pronouncements of woe upon the religious leaders were not innovative. His severe language must have had a familiar ring in the leaders' ears. In light of the woe oracles in Second Temple literature, Jesus's woes would have sounded rather contemporary. His woe oracles were not merely an exercise of spite against his opponents; as is clear in Matt. 23:37, his words come at least as much from grief as from anger. (See [Matthew Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament](#))

Because (term of explanation) **you shut off** ([kleio](#)) **the kingdom** ([basileia](#)) **of heaven** ([ouranos](#)) **from people** - **NLT** - "For you shut the door of the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces." **NET** - "You keep locking people out of the kingdom of heaven!" He is explaining why these religious leaders are deserving of **Woe** ([ouai](#)). These men rather than helping the populace find the way of salvation in Jesus, actually became obstacles blocking the way of salvation. In short, they distorted the Word of God by adding legalistic burdens, and by rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, thereby closing the door to God's kingdom. We see them hindering others from accepting Jesus as the Messiah in Mt 11:19, Mt 12:23-24, Mt 21:15 ([see above](#)).

*The chief evil of every false religion
is that it shuts people out of God's kingdom.*
-- John MacArthur

Pulpit Commentary - They prevent men from accepting Christ, and so entering God's kingdom, by their false interpretation of Scripture, by not allowing that it testified of Christ, and by making the path impassable for the poor and ignorant. And this is done "in the face of men," when they are, as it were, thronging round and wishing to enter.

John MacArthur (NLT) - "*For you shut the door of the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces*") - The picture Jesus gives here suggests the idea of the scribes and Pharisees standing just outside the gates of the **kingdom** and slamming them shut in the faces of those who were about **to go in**. People who came to those religious leaders for direction and help in finding God were actually being **shut off** from Him even while they were on the verge of salvation. (See [Matthew Commentary](#))

A parallel passage is found in Luke 11:52+ in which Jesus declares "Woe to you lawyers! For **you have taken away the key of knowledge**; you yourselves did not enter, and you hindered those who were entering." **MacArthur** explains that "The false leaders **took away the key of knowledge** by misinterpreting the Word of God, by denying the Messiah, by denying the need for repentance, and by denying salvation by grace."

A T Robertson on **shut off** - In Luke 11:52 the lawyers are accused of keeping the door to the house of knowledge locked and with flinging away the keys so as to keep themselves and the people in ignorance. These custodians of the kingdom by their teaching obscured the way to life. It is a tragedy to think how preachers and teachers of the kingdom of God may block the door for those who try to enter in. **FROM** ([emprosthen](#)) **PEOPLE** (KJV - against men) Literally, before. These door-keepers of the kingdom **slam it shut in men's faces** and they themselves are on the outside where they will remain. They hide the key to keep others from going in. (Bolding added) (**ED**: NO WONDER JESUS SAYS "WOE!")

Grant Osborne adds that "[emprosthen](#) is strong here, meaning normally "in front of, before" and having the idea of slamming the door of heaven "right in the face of" their followers. The purpose of the Pharisees in "building a fence around the law" should have been to shepherd God's flock through the gate or door to the kingdom. Their teaching should have made the reign of God . . . more apparent and meaningful in the lives of the people. Instead, they have closed the door to God. Earlier Jesus had taught about the narrow and wide gates (Mt 7:13-14) and had given Peter (and the church) the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 16:19), meaning the authority to open the doors of heaven. The binding/loosing metaphor that followed referred to the authority to open the kingdom truths by properly interpreting God's Word. The Pharisees have rejected the final authority of Jesus as interpreter of Torah and so have fallen into false teaching. (See [The Matthew Commentary Collection: An All-In-One Commentary](#))

For (term of explanation) **you do not enter in** ([eiserchomai](#) - present tense = habitual practice) *yourselves* - Here Jesus explains how they shut themselves and the people that listened to them out of entrance into the kingdom, which ultimately was by their rejection of Jesus as the Door (Jn 10:9+) and the Way (Jn 14:6+). Not only did they not enter the door, but they in effect blocked entry through the "way," through the "door" for others! Woe!

MacArthur - In their hypocrisy the unbelieving scribes and Pharisees pretended to know God but did not, pretended to be His spokesmen but were not, pretended to be in His kingdom but were not. In their boundless pride they even believed they themselves were the doorkeepers of the kingdom. (See [Matthew Commentary - Page 376](#))

Nor do you allow ([aphiemi](#) - present tense = habitual practice) **those who are entering** ([eiserchomai](#) - present tense = habitual practice) **to go in** - They discouraged, confused, and even condemned those who tried to seek God. They were like lawyers who withhold the key of knowledge (cf. Luke 11:52), and they spiritual misled others stopping them from entering the door of salvation.

D A Carson - When the crowds begin to marvel at Jesus and suggest he may be the Messiah, the authorities do all they can to dissuade them (cf. Mt 9:33-34, 11:19; Mt 12:23-24; 21:15). The sheep of Israel are "lost" (Mt 10:6; 15:24) because the shepherds have led them astray. (See [Matthew](#))

William MacDonald - Strangely, religious leaders are often the most active opponents of the gospel of grace. They can be sweetly tolerant of everything but the good news of salvation. Natural man doesn't want to be the object of God's grace and doesn't want God to show grace to others. (See [Believer's Bible Commentary - Page 1289](#))

David Guzik - The religious leaders kept people from the kingdom of heaven by making human traditions and human religious rules more important than God's Word. This was clearly seen in the way that they opposed and rejected Jesus; if they had opened the kingdom of heaven to men, they would have welcomed and received Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God.

Matthew Poole - "It was written of old, that the priest's lips should preserve knowledge: God that committed the key of knowledge to the ministers and guides of his church, not that they should take it away, but that the people might seek the law of their mouths, because they are the messengers of the Lord of hosts, Malachi 2:7."

Warren Wiersbe - The poor in spirit enter the kingdom, but the proud in spirit keep themselves out and even keep others out. The Greek verb indicates people trying to get in who cannot. It is bad enough to keep yourself out of the kingdom, but worse when you

stand in the way of others. By teaching man-made traditions instead of God's truth, they "took away the key of knowledge" and closed the door to salvation (Luke 11:52). ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

Pulpit Commentary has a blistering note - The kingdom of heaven is here metaphorically regarded as a banqueting hall, where are celebrated the espousals of Christ and his Church. The Pharisees watched the access thereto. They stood at the door to bar all entrance. If any showed signs of yielding to honest conviction, they sternly forbade them to proceed; they repelled them with violence, as by excommunication (John 9:22, 34), or by calumniating the Teacher (Matthew 9:34, etc.). There was many a time when people were ready to acknowledge Christ and to follow him as Messiah. A word from their authorized leaders would have turned the scale in his favour; but that word was never spoken. The weight of authority was always placed on the opposite side, and naught but prejudice, animosity, and slander befell the cause of Jesus.

Related Resource:

- [What does the Bible say about hypocrisy?](#)
- [What does it mean to be pharisaical?](#)
- [What is the leaven of the Pharisees?](#)

NET NOTE - TECHNICAL NOTE - The most important MSS (ⲁ B D L Z Θ f1 33 892* pc and several versional witnesses) do not have 23:14 "Woe to you experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You devour widows' property, and as a show you pray long prayers! Therefore you will receive a more severe punishment." Part or all of the verse is contained (either after v. 12 or after v. 13) in W 0102 0107 f13 and several versions, but it is almost certainly not original. The present translation follows NA27 in omitting the verse number as well, a procedure also followed by a number of other modern translations. Note also that Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47 are very similar in wording and are not disputed textually.

Matthew Henry Concise - Mt 23:13-33. The scribes and Pharisees were enemies to the gospel of Christ, and therefore to the salvation of the souls of men. It is bad to keep away from Christ ourselves, but worse also to keep others from him. Yet it is no new thing for the show and form of godliness to be made a cloak to the greatest enormities. But dissembled piety will be reckoned double iniquity. They were very busy to turn souls to be of their party. Not for the glory of God and the good of souls, but that they might have the credit and advantage of making converts. Gain being their godliness, by a thousand devices they made religion give way to their worldly interests. They were very strict and precise in smaller matters of the law, but careless and loose in weightier matters. It is not the scrupling a little sin that Christ here reproves; if it be a sin, though but a gnat, it must be strained out; but the doing that, and then swallowing a camel, or, committing a greater sin. While they would seem to be godly, they were neither sober nor righteous. We are really, what we are inwardly. Outward motives may keep the outside clean, while the inside is filthy; but if the heart and spirit be made new, there will be newness of life; here we must begin with ourselves. The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was like the ornaments of a grave, or dressing up a dead body, only for show. The deceitfulness of sinners' hearts appears in that they go down the streams of the sins of their own day, while they fancy that they should have opposed the sins of former days. We sometimes think, if we had lived when Christ was upon earth, that we should not have despised and rejected him, as men then did; yet Christ in his Spirit, in his word, in his ministers, is still no better treated. And it is just with God to give those up to their hearts' lusts, who obstinately persist in gratifying them. Christ gives men their true characters.

Woe (alas; How dreadful!) ([3759](#)) [ouai](#) ([3759 - click and select "Phonetics" to hear "ouai" pronounced](#)) ([ouai](#) pronounced "oo-ah'ee," an eerie, ominous foreboding sound some say is like the cry of an eagle) is an onomatopoeic word (an imitation of the sound) which serves as an interjection or lamentation (e.g., at funerals 1Ki 13:30) expressing an outburst of emotion, a cry of intense distress, displeasure, pain, sorrow or horror. An exclamation denoting pain or displeasure. Sometime woe was used to attract attention (Isa. 55:1). Less frequently, it occurs as a noun denoting a disaster or calamity. The OT prophets would often open their prophetic utterances of coming divine judgment with the word "Woe!" (Isa. 5:8-10; Mic 2:1-5) An interjection expressing great distress or sorrow; or a noun signifying a condition of deep suffering due to a calamity that has befallen or will befall a person or community. It may convey a warning of impending disaster to the hearers. BDAG - ① interjection denoting pain or displeasure, woe, alas ② a state of intense hardship or distress, woe

[What is the meaning of woe in the Bible?](#) - Gotquestions.org

Most NT uses of **ouai** are in the context of warning about inevitable, impending judgment, often intermingled with a feeling of pity (Mt 11:21-22, Lk 22:22 = Judas' betrayal). Rev 8:13+ has woe in triplicate which seems to provide the greatest possible emphasis on God's coming judgment on the world, much as the cry of "holy" in triplicate emphasizes His holiness. Indeed, His perfect holiness demands His perfect judgment! In the Lxx a double woe is addressed to unfaithful Jerusalem because of her idolatry and immorality (Ezek 16:23). **Ouai** does **not** depict sorrow on the part of those who have sinned (as some have mistakenly taught).

Ouai is an interjection of grief, pain, lament, threat, doom or indignation. **Ouai** is an expression of pain and pity for the misfortune that awaits someone in a certain condition. **Ouai** is often an announcement of disaster to come. **Woe** warns of danger and the nearness of judgment. In a sense "to bless" or "blessing" stands in opposition to woe.

OUI - 47X/36V - Matt. 11:21; Matt. 18:7; Matt. 23:13; Matt. 23:14; Matt. 23:15; Matt. 23:16; Matt. 23:23; Matt. 23:25; Matt. 23:27; Matt. 23:29; Matt. 24:19; Matt. 26:24; Mk. 13:17; Mk. 14:21; Lk. 6:24; Lk. 6:25; Lk. 6:26; Lk. 10:13; Lk. 11:42; Lk. 11:43; Lk. 11:44; Lk. 11:46; Lk. 11:47; Lk. 11:52; Lk. 17:1; Lk. 21:23; Lk. 22:22; 1 Co. 9:16; Jude 1:11; Rev. 8:13; Rev. 9:12; Rev. 11:14; Rev. 12:12; Rev. 18:10; Rev. 18:16; Rev. 18:19

Hypocrites (5273) **hupokrites** from **hupó** = under, indicating secrecy + **krino** = to judge) describes one who acts pretentiously, a counterfeit, a man who assumes and speaks or acts under a feigned character. A hypocrite is someone who pretends to be something he or she is not. **W E Vine** adds "primarily denotes "one who answers;" then, "a stage-actor;" it was a custom for Greek and Roman actors to speak in large masks with mechanical devices for augmenting the force of the voice; hence the word became used metaphorically of "a dissembler, a hypocrite."

Originally the word **hupokrites** was used for an actor in the Greek theater. One actor might appear in the same production several times with his true identity disguised by various masks. To determine his/her true identity, one would have to "judge beneath the mask." Thus, the word has become synonymous with insincerity and mere pretense.

Hupokrites - 18x/18v - Matt. 6:2; Matt. 6:5; Matt. 6:16; Matt. 7:5; Matt. 15:7; Matt. 22:18; Matt. 23:13; Matt. 23:14; Matt. 23:15; Matt. 23:23; Matt. 23:25; Matt. 23:27; Matt. 23:29; Matt. 24:51; Mk. 7:6; Lk. 6:42; Lk. 12:56; Lk. 13:15

Gilbrant on hypocrites - Every New Testament instance of **hupokrites** occurs in the Synoptic Gospels and every one occurs in a saying of Jesus. Moreover, every instance but two (parallel texts) is in the plural form (cf. Matthew 7:5; Luke 6:42).

In classical Greek this noun (a compound form related to *krinō* [2892], "judge") denotes the individual who "answers" or "replies" on stage. At the same time, it can depict the "interpreter" or "expounder" who explained the drama to the audience. In 536 B.C. Thespis introduced an individual who replied to the chorus (a group of male dancers and singers) in the festival of Dionysius held every spring in Athens. This individual wore a mask (as did the chorus) and was called the *hupokritēs*, the one who "answers" or "interprets." The *hupokritēs* came to be the actor in Greek theater. *Hupokritēs* alone never had an unfavorable ethical meaning in classical Greek (Wilckens, "hupokrinomai," *Kittel*, 8:563). **Septuagint Usage** Negative meanings of *hupokritēs* developed in the Septuagint and in Hellenistic Jewish usage, where it occurs most regularly in later writings. Found only in Job 34:30 and 36:13, *hupokritēs* (Hebrew *chānēph*, "estranged from God, godless") contains clearly negative ethical implications. According to Wilckens, in Jewish thinking "the *hupokritēs* is the ungodly man, the ungodly man is the *hupokritēs*" (*ibid.*, 8:564). The negative sense attached to this word perhaps derived from Jewish dislike of the pagan Greek theater and *hupokritēs*' association with lying and deception (*ibid.*, 8:566). ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

William Barclay - Originally the Greek word **hupokrites** meant one who answers; it then came to be specially connected with the statement and answer, the dialogue, of the stage; and it is the regular Greek word for an actor. It then came to mean an actor in the worse sense of the term, a pretender, one who acts a part, one who wears a mask to cover his true feelings, one who puts on an external show while inwardly his thoughts and feelings are very different. To Jesus the Scribes and Pharisees were men who were acting a part. What he meant was this. Their whole idea of religion consisted in outward observances, the wearing of elaborate phylacteries and tassels, the meticulous observance of the rules and regulations of the Law. But in their hearts there was bitterness and envy and pride and arrogance. To Jesus these Scribes and Pharisees were men who, under a mask of elaborate godliness, concealed hearts in which the most godless feelings and emotions held sway. And that accusation holds good in greater or lesser degree of any man who lives life on the assumption that religion consists in external observances and external acts. There is an unwritten saying of Jesus which says, "The key of the Kingdom they hid." His condemnation of these Scribes and Pharisees is that they are not only failing to enter the Kingdom themselves, they shut the door on the faces of those who seek to enter. What did he mean by this accusation? We have already seen (Matthew 6:10) that the best way to think of the Kingdom is to think of it as a society on earth where God's will is as perfectly done as it is in heaven. To be a citizen of the Kingdom, and to do God's will, are one and the same thing. The Pharisees believed that to do God's will was to observe their thousands of petty rules and regulations; and nothing could be further from that Kingdom whose basic idea is love. When people tried to find entry into the Kingdom the

Pharisees presented them with these rules and regulations, which was as good as shutting the door in their faces. The Pharisees preferred their ideas of religion to God's idea of religion. They had forgotten the basic truth that, if a man would teach others, he must himself first listen to God. The gravest danger which any teacher or preacher encounters is that he should erect his own prejudices into universal principles and substitute his own ideas for the truth of God. When he does that he is not a guide, but a barrier, to the Kingdom, for, misled himself, he misleads others. ([Matthew 23 - William Barclay's Daily Study Bible](#))

ILLUSTRATION - Some years ago, a young man called and informed me that he was planning to leave our church and join Mormonism, two workers from which were going to visit him again shortly. I immediately drove to his house and confronted him with the extreme peril of what he was about to do. I told him that if he was not now a true Christian, they would damn his soul by leading him away from Christ and that if he were a Christian they would make a shambles of his spiritual life. When the workers arrived I refused to discuss doctrine with them but rather in the spirit of Matthew 23 presented the true gospel of Christ and denounced the unbiblical and damning errors that their sect taught. However, the young man fell into the cult and was not able to escape for a number of years. (SEE [The MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

QUESTION - [Why did Jesus rebuke the scribes and Pharisees so harshly in Matthew 23:13–36?](#) GOTQUESTIONS.ORG

ANSWER - In Matthew 23 Jesus pronounces “woes” on the [scribes](#) and [Pharisees](#), the religious elite of the day. The word *woe* is an exclamation of grief, denunciation, or distress. This was not the first time Jesus had some harsh words for the religious leaders of His day. Why did Jesus rebuke them so harshly here? Looking at each woe gives some insight.

Before pronouncing the woes, Jesus told His listeners to respect the scribes and Pharisees due to their position of authority but not to emulate them, “for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Everything they do is done for people to see” (Matthew 23:3–5). The scribes and Pharisees were supposed to know God and help others know Him and follow His ways. Instead, the religious leaders added to God’s Law, making it a cumbersome and onerous burden. And they did not follow God with a pure heart. Their religion was not true worship of God; rather, it was rooted in a prideful heart. Jesus’ [Sermon on the Mount](#) emphasizes the true intent of the Law over the letter of the Law. The scribes and Pharisees emphasized the letter, completely missing its spirit.

The first woe is, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to” (Matthew 23:13). Jesus cares for people. He desires for them to know Him and to enter into His kingdom (John 3:16–17; 10:10, 17; 2 Peter 3:9). After rebuking the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus lamented over rebellious Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37–39). Clearly, His heart is for people to find life in Him. It stands to reason, then, that He would have harsh words for those who prevented people from finding salvation. The teachers of the Law and Pharisees were not truly seeking after God, though they acted as if they were. Their religion was empty, and it was preventing others from following the Messiah.

In the second woe, Jesus condemns the scribes and Pharisees for making strenuous efforts to win converts and then leading those converts to be “twice as much” children of hell as the scribes and Pharisees were (Matthew 13:15). In other words, they were more intent on spreading their religion than on maintaining the truth.

The third woe Jesus pronounces against the scribes and Pharisees calls the religious leaders “blind guides” and “blind fools” (Matthew 23:16–17). Specifically, Jesus points out, they nit-picked about which oaths were binding and which were not, ignoring the sacred nature of all oaths and significance of the temple and God’s holiness (verses 15–22).

The fourth woe calls out the scribes and Pharisees for their practice of diligently paying the tithe while neglecting to actually care for people. While they were counting their mint leaves to make sure they gave one tenth to the temple, they “neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness” (Matthew 23:23). Once again, they focused on the letter of the Law and obeyed it with pride, but they missed the weightier things of God. Their religion was external; their hearts were not transformed.

Jesus elaborates on their hypocrisy in the fifth woe. He tells the religious leaders they appear clean on the outside, but they have neglected the inside. They perform religious acts but do not have God-honoring hearts. It does no good, Jesus says, to clean up the outside when the inside is “full of greed and self-indulgence” (Matthew 23:25). The Pharisees and scribes are blind and do not recognize that, when the inside is changed, the outside, too, will be transformed.

In the sixth woe, Jesus claims the scribes and Pharisees are “like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean” (Matthew 23:27). The deadness inside of tombs is likened to the “hypocrisy and wickedness” inside the religious leaders (verse 28). Once again, they appear to obey God, but their hearts are far from Him (see Matthew 15:7–9 and Isaiah 29:13).

Jesus concludes His seven-fold rebuke by telling the religious leaders that they are just like their fathers, who persecuted the prophets of old. In building monuments to the prophets, they testify against themselves, openly admitting that it was their ancestors who killed the prophets (Matthew 23:29–31). Although they arrogantly claim that they would not have done so, they are the ones who will soon plot the murder of the Son of God Himself (Matthew 26:4).

Jesus' words are harsh because there was so much at stake. Those who followed the Pharisees and scribes were being kept from following God. So much of the teaching in Jesus' day was in direct contradiction of God's Word (see Matthew 15:6). The religious leaders made a mockery out of following God. They did not truly understand God's ways, and they led others away from God. Jesus' desire was that people would come to know God and be reconciled with Him. In Matthew 11:28–30 Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Unlike the burdens the scribes and Pharisees laid on the people in a human effort to gain reconciliation with God, Jesus gives [true rest](#). The religious leaders spread lies covered in a veneer of godliness (John 8:44); Jesus spoke harshly against them because He came to bring life (John 10:10).

Also, the word *woe* carries with it a tinge of sorrow. There is an element of imprecation, to be sure, but with it an element of compassionate sadness. The [seven woes](#) that Jesus pronounces on the religious leaders are solemn declarations of future misery. The stubbornness of the sinners to whom He speaks is bringing a judgment to be feared. The scribes and Pharisees are calling down God's wrath upon themselves, and they are to be pitied.

Immediately after Jesus' rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees, we see Jesus' compassion. He asks, "How will you escape being condemned to hell?" (Matthew 23:33). Jesus then expresses His desire to gather the people of Israel to Himself for safety, if only they were willing (verse 37). God longs for His people to come to Him and find forgiveness. Jesus was not harsh to be mean. He was not having a temper tantrum. Rather, love guided His actions. Jesus spoke firmly against the deception of Satan out of a desire for people to know truth and find life in Him.

QUESTION - [What are the seven woes of Matthew 23?](#) GOTQUESTIONS.ORG

ANSWER - In Matthew 23, Jesus pronounces seven "woes" on the religious leaders of His day. A "woe" is an exclamation of grief, similar to what is expressed by the word *alas*. In pronouncing woes, Jesus was prophesying judgment on the religious elite who were guilty of [hypocrisy](#) and sundry other sins.

The King James Version and some other translations list eight woes in Matthew 23, but older manuscripts leave out verse 14, in which the [scribes and Pharisees](#) are condemned for taking advantage of widows and making lengthy prayers for show. Elsewhere, Jesus speaks against those very sins (Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47); most likely, however, Matthew did not include them among the other woes of chapter 23.

The seven woes are addressed to the teachers of the law and Pharisees; in one of the woes, He calls them "blind guides" (Matthew 23:16). At the end of His denunciations, He calls them "snakes" and "brood of vipers" (verse 33). Prior to Jesus' condemnation of the religious hypocrites, they had been following Him to test Him and try to trick Him with questions about divorce (Matthew 19:3), about His authority (Matthew 21:23), about paying taxes to Caesar (Matthew 22:17), about the resurrection (verse 23), and about the greatest commandment of the law (verse 36). Jesus prefaced His seven woes by explaining to the disciples that they should obey the teachings of the Jewish leaders—as they taught the law of God—but not to emulate their behavior because they did not practice what they preached (Matthew 23:3).

The first of Jesus' seven woes condemned the scribes and Pharisees for keeping people out of the kingdom of heaven: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to" (Matthew 23:13). Jesus is the only Savior and the only way to heaven. In their rejection of Jesus Christ, the Pharisees were effectively refusing to enter the kingdom of heaven. They also hindered the common people from believing in Him, thereby blocking the way to heaven for others. Repentance and faith in Christ is the door of admission into this kingdom, and nothing could be more disagreeable to the Pharisees, who saw no need for repentance in their own lives and attempted to justify themselves by strict adherence to the law.

In the second of the seven woes, Jesus condemned the leaders for teaching their converts the same hypocrisy that they themselves practiced. They led their converts into a religion of works, but not into true righteousness, making them "twice as much a child of hell" (Matthew 13:15).

The third woe Jesus pronounced referred to the religious elite as "blind guides" and "blind fools" (Matthew 23:16–17). The hypocrites fancied themselves guides of the blind (see Romans 2:19), but they themselves were blind and therefore unfit to guide others. Their spiritual blindness caused them to be ignorant of many things, including the identity of the Messiah and the way of salvation. They were blind to the true meaning of Scripture and to their own sin. They purported to guide the people into the truth, but they were

incapable of doing so because they had no personal knowledge of the truth. Instead of teaching spiritual truth, they preferred to quibble over irrelevant matters and find loopholes in the rules (Matthew 23:16–22).

The fourth of the seven woes called out the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy in the practice of tithing. They made a big deal of small things like tithing spices, while they ignored crucial matters. They diligently counted their mint leaves to give every tenth one to the temple, but they “neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness” (Matthew 23:23). Turning to hyperbole, Jesus said, “You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel” (verse 24). In other words, they were careful to avoid offense in minor things of little importance (straining gnats), while tolerating or committing great sins ([swallowing camels](#)).

In the fifth, sixth, and seventh woes, Jesus further illustrated the different aspects of hypocrisy that characterized the religious leaders. In the fifth woe, Jesus likened them to dishes that were scrupulously cleaned on the outside but left dirty inside. Their religious observances made them appear clean and virtuous, but inwardly their hearts were full of “greed and self-indulgence” (Matthew 23:25).

In the sixth woe, Jesus compared them to [“whitewashed tombs](#), which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean” (Matthew 23:27). The rotting corpse inside a tomb was like the hypocrisy and lawlessness in the hearts of the scribes and Pharisees. They appeared righteous on the outside, but they were just beautified tombs; inwardly, they were spiritually dead.

The hypocrisy Jesus addressed in the seventh woe was directed to those who erected monuments and decorated the tombs of the prophets of old. Jesus points out that those prophets had been slain by the Pharisees’ own ancestors. They imagined themselves much better than their fathers, saying, “If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets” (Matthew 23:30). But in that very statement they acknowledged their lineage: Jesus says they were truly their fathers’ sons; they had inherited their ancestors’ wickedness and were following in their steps. Jesus knew their evil hearts, which would soon plot to murder Him (Matthew 26:4) just as their ancestors had murdered the righteous men of old.

The seven woes of Matthew 23 were dire warnings to the religious leaders of Jesus’ day. But they also serve to warn us against religious hypocrisy today. We are called to true godliness, sincere love, and enduring faith. Pretension, affectation, and hypocrisy will only lead to woe.

Matthew 23:14 [“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.”]

KJV Matthew 23:14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

BGT Matthew 23:14

NET Matthew 23:13 "But woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You keep locking people out of the kingdom of heaven! For you neither enter nor permit those trying to enter to go in.

CSB Matthew 23:14 ["Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You devour widows' houses and make long prayers just for show. This is why you will receive a harsher punishment.]

ESV Matthew 23:13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.

NIV Matthew 23:13 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

NLT Matthew 23:13 "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you shut the door of the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces. You won't go in yourselves, and you don't let others enter either. 14

YLT Matthew 23:14 'Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye eat up the houses of the widows, and for a pretence make long prayers, because of this ye shall receive more abundant judgment.

- for ye: Josephus says that this sect pretended to a more exact knowledge of the law, on which account the women were subject to them, as pretending to be dear to God. Ex 22:22-24 Job 22:9 31:16-20 Mk 12:40 Lu 20:47 2Ti 3:6 Titus 1:10,11 2Pe 2:14,15
- long: That these were long we learn from Bab. Berachoth, where we are told that the very religious prayed nine hours a day.

- therefore: Mt 23:33-36 Mt 11:24 Lu 12:48 Jas 3:1 2Pe 2:3

[“Woe to you, scribes ([grammateus](#)) and Pharisees ([pharisaiois](#)), hypocrites, because you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.]

No comments on this verse.

See commentary on the following passages which do record this woe

Mark 12:40 - commentary "who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation."

Luke 20:47 - commentary "who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."

C H Spurgeon ([Matthew Commentary](#)) - The second “woe” was supported by two most serious accusations, which our Lord would not have uttered if they had not been true: “ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayer. ” Either of these sins by itself would have been very grievous; the two together were sufficient to sink those who were guilty of them to the lowest hell. The men who had defrauded widows would have to answer for their misdeeds to the widows’ “Judge “(Psalm 68:5). Those who had sought to cover their crimes with the cloak of superior sanctity deserved to be stripped before the people they had deceived, and to hear the King’s righteous sentence: “Therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. ” These words prove that there are degrees of punishment, as there are gradations in glory. All the ungodly will be judged and condemned by the Righteous Judge, but “the greater condemnation” will be reserved for the hypocrites who have “for a pretense” made “long prayers” while, behind the mask, they have been devouring the property of widows and the fatherless.

Matthew 23:15 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

KJV Matthew 23:15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.

BGT Matthew 23:15 Ο α μ ν, γραμματε ς κα Φαρισα οι ποκριτα , τι περι γετε τ ν θ λασσαν κα τ ν ξηρ ν ποι σαι να προσ λυτον, κα ταν γ νηται ποιε τε α τ ν υ ν γε ννης διπλ τερον μ ν.

NET Matthew 23:15 "Woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You cross land and sea to make one convert, and when you get one, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves!

CSB 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!

ESV Matthew 23:15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

NIV Matthew 23:15 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.

NLT Matthew 23:15 "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you cross land and sea to make one convert, and then you turn that person into twice the child of hell you yourselves are!

YLT Matthew 23:15 'Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye go round the sea and the dry land to make one proselyte, and whenever it may happen -- ye make him a son of gehenna twofold more than yourselves.

MIT Matthew 23:15 How horrible your destiny, scholars and Pharisees—pretenders all—because you travel over sea and land to make one proselyte, and once he is yours, you make him over into a decaying, smoldering, garbage dump of a person—your double.

NJB Matthew 23:15 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over sea and land to make a single proselyte, and anyone who becomes one you make twice as fit for hell as you are.

NRS Matthew 23:15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cross sea and land to make a

single convert, and you make the new convert twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

- **because you travel around:** Ga 4:17 6:12
- **proselyte:** Es 8:17 Ac 2:10 13:43
- **make:** Jn 8:44 Ac 13:10 14:2,19 17:5,6,13 Eph 2:3

Related Passages:

Romans 10:2 For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God (LIKE THE PHARISEES), but not in accordance with knowledge.

UNHOLY ZEAL TO MAKE PROSELYTES

Woe ([ouai](#)) to you, scribes ([grammateus](#)) and Pharisees ([pharisaiois](#)), hypocrites ([hupokrites](#) - masqueraders, imposters, charlatans, pretenders at piety) This is the second of seven woes (excludes Mt 23:14) and once again Jesus looks them in the eyes and calls them **hypocrites** ([hupokrites](#))! These men demonstrate outward shows piety but inward insincerity, focusing on rule keeping rather than obedience from a transformed heart.

Because (term of explanation) - What's Jesus explaining? In context clearly He is giving the reason for this **woe**, which as we discussed above is an interjection of both lament and reproach.

You travel around on sea ([thalassa](#)) **and land** ([xeros](#)) **to make one** ([heis](#)) **proselyte** ([proselutos](#)) - NET - "You cross land and sea" ESV note calls them "entrapped converts!" The geographic designations emphasize how zealous these hypocrites going to any length to indoctrinate more hypocrites who believe their lies and deception. They were in effect missionaries of evil! They are willing to go to great lengths for just **one** victim! Generally speaking, in Jewish usage of the time, a proselyte referred specifically to a Gentile who had converted to the Pharisaic brand of Judaism, likely submitting to circumcision, adherence to the Law of Moses, and the Pharisaic oral traditions (cf Mt 15:9+). Clearly Jesus is not condemning missions, but He is condemning the false religion of the Scribes and Pharisees being spread. Jesus' point is that these hypocrites were seeking to convert men to Pharisaism, not to true Judaism. (**Ryrie** is wrong saying "Convert from paganism to Judaism." It was their "brand" of Judaism, not Biblical Judaism!) It should be noted that the Pharisees had something on their side as they sought to make proselytes for monotheism (the concept of only one God) appealed to many people who lived in a world in which countless gods were worshiped.

As [A T Robertson](#) says "The Pharisees claimed to be in a special sense sons of the kingdom (Matthew 8:12). They were more partisan than pious."

John Walvoord - They are eager to make converts, but their converts simply mimic and accentuate their flaws. (One thinks by contrast of the stone-drunk man who told D. L. Moody, "I'm one of your converts," to which Moody reportedly replied, "I can certainly see you're not one of the *Lord's*.") (See [Matthew - Page 21](#))

Wycliffe Bible Commentary on Pharisaic proselytes - Not the God-fearing Gentile who stopped short of circumcision (i.e., proselyte of the gate), but the Gentile who had been persuaded to adopt Judaism *in toto*, including all the traditions taught by such Pharisees. **twice as much a son of hell** - Proselytes made by these unspiritual Pharisees (and doubtless added to their sect) would merely add rabbinic traditions to their pagan notions. (Online [The Wycliffe Bible Commentary](#))

William MacDonald - A modern analogy is the zeal of false cults. One group is willing to knock on 700 doors to reach one person for their cause; but the final result is evil. (Borrow [Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

[Pulpit Commentary](#) says **travel around on sea and land** "is a proverbial expression, denoting the employment of every means, the exercise of the utmost effort. One might have thought that, in its proud isolation and exclusiveness, Judaism would not have exposed itself to this reproach. But what says Josephus? In more than one passage of his histories he testifies to the zealous propagation of the Jewish religion, and in some cases the enforcement of circumcision on vanquished enemies (see 'Ant.,' 18:3. 5; 20:2. 4; 'Bell. Jud.,' 2:17. 10; 'Vita,' § 23)....In making converts, the Pharisees sought rather to secure outward conformity than inward piety, change of external religion than change of heart. There was no love of souls, no burning zeal for the honour of God, in their proselytism. They were prompted only by selfish and base motives — vain glory, party spirit, covetousness; and if they converted men to their own opinions, with their false tenets, gross externalism, and practical immorality, they had far better have left them in their irresponsible ignorance.

THOUGHT - How zealous are we who know and have been forever transformed by the truth of the Gospel to cross land and sea to win one convert to Jesus? How about just crossing over the fence to that lost neighbor

who lives behind us? I realize it is "scary" to share the Gospel, because we all like the approval of men and fear rejection. The truth is the only way we can really do this is supernaturally, filled with the Spirit, Who gives us the "fruit" of boldness (Acts 4:31+). It cannot be accomplished by our might or our power but by His Spirit (Acts 1:8+)! May God grant us boldness this week to share eternal life in Christ with one soul otherwise destined for eternal separation from God. For the glory and honor of God, by His Spirit and in the Name of His Son. Amen

J C Ryle - They labored incessantly to make men join their party and adopt their opinions. They did this from no desire to benefit men's souls in the least, or to bring them to God. They only did it to swell the ranks of their sect, and to increase the number of their adherents, and their own importance. Their religious zeal arose from sectarianism, and not from the love of God. This also was a great sin.

And when he becomes one, you make ([poieo](#) - present tense - continually) **him twice as much a son** ([huios](#)) **of hell** ("son of Gehenna" - [geenna](#)) **as yourselves** - Jesus pulls on punches stating that the proselyte offspring are destined to spend eternity in hell just like their "spiritual" fathers. So much for avoiding "hell and brimstone" messages. Some people need to hear these messages to have a clear warning of their future fate ([the Lake of Fire](#))! This idea of "son of..." in this context means fitted for, belonging to, worthy of, bound for or destined for, which can be said of very person converted to a cult! The concept of **son of...** is found many times in Scripture - 2Sa 12:5 = literally "a son of death;" Jdg 19:22; 1Sa 2:12; 1Ki. 21:10 = [sons of belial](#) (worthlessness); John 17:12 = "the son of perdition" 2Th 2:3 = son of destruction. **Twice as much a son** suggests this proselyte was twice as bad, surpassing his "teacher" in degree of hypocrisy and evil. As one has said, "The most converted often become the most perverted." **Twice** as bad would also warrant a greater degree of eternal punishment! (see Mt 11:21-24+) The old adage also applies "Like father, like son" for the father of the Pharisees was the devil (Jn 8:44+) (who inspired their false teaching) and Jesus is saying their offspring are doubly devilish!

Wiersbe agrees writing that "A "child of hell" is the equivalent of "child of the devil," which is what Jesus called the Pharisees (Matt. 12:34; 23:33; John 8:44). A "child of the devil" is a person who has rejected God's way of salvation (righteousness through faith in Christ). This person parades his own self-righteousness through whatever religious system he belongs to. The convert usually shows more zeal than his leader, and this "double devotion" only produces double condemnation. How tragic that people can think they are going to heaven, when actually they are going to hell!

*Instead of saving souls,
the Pharisees were condemning souls!*
-- Warren Wiersbe

As [William Barclay](#) said "A convert often becomes the most fanatical devotee of the new religion; and many of these proselytes were more fanatically devoted to the Jewish law than even the Jews themselves."

Gilbrant has an interesting note that the proselytes "were more evil, more bigoted, than their mentors. Later developments proved this to be true. The Book of Acts shows that in his travels the apostle Paul's worst opposition came from the Hellenistic Jews who were mostly proselytes." ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

Life Application Study Bible - The Pharisees' converts were attracted to religion, not to God. By getting caught up in the details of their additional laws and regulations, they completely missed God, to whom the laws pointed. A religion of works puts pressure on people to surpass others in what they know and do. Thus, a hypocritical teacher was likely to have students who were even more hypocritical. We must make sure we are not creating Pharisees by emphasizing outward obedience at the expense of inner renewal. (See [Life Application Study Bible - Page 357](#))

David Guzik - In this respect, the religious leaders were similar to Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses today. They were courageous and energetic messengers, but with a false message.

John Phillips - The Lord was not denouncing Israel's mission to mankind. It was Israel's destiny to witness to the world about the true and living God; and that will be Israel's mission in the millennium. Jesus was denouncing proselytizing people to Pharisaic, rabbinic Judaism.

Louis Barbieri - The problem with this was that by their actions they were condemning many individuals to eternal damnation. By imposing external restrictions of Rabbinic traditions on their converts, they were preventing these people from seeing the truth. (See [Bible Knowledge Commentary - Page 74](#))

C H Spurgeon ([Matthew Commentary](#)) - The "woe" related to the unholy zeal of the scribes and Pharisees in gaining adherents to Judaism and their own party, and by the process making them even worse than themselves. They freely gave time and trouble to the work with the prospect of a very slight return: "Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte. " They would, as it were, drag

the Great Sea with a seine net in the hope of entangling one proselyte in its meshes; or they would go over all the land in order to persuade one Gentile to be circumcised so as to become “a Jew outwardly.” The result to the proselyte was only evil: “When he is made, ye make him two fold: more the child of hell than yourselves. ” Perverts usually become bigots. The proselyte would naturally imitate the vices of his hypocritical teachers, without having that knowledge of the Scriptures which might to some extent exercise a wholesome restraint upon them. The circumcised heathen would be a Judas rather than a Jew, a veritable “son of perdition.”

NET NOTE - Grk “a son of Gehenna.” Expressions constructed with υἱός ([huios](#)) followed by a genitive of class or kind denote a person belonging to the class or kind specified by the following genitive (L&N 9.4). Thus the phrase here means “a person who belongs to hell.” The word translated hell is “Gehenna” (γέεννα, [geenna](#)), a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew words **ge hinnom** (“Valley of Hinnom”). This was the valley along the south side of Jerusalem. In OT times it was used for human sacrifices to the pagan god Molech (cf. Jer 7:31; 19:5–6; 32:35), and it came to be used as a place where human excrement and rubbish were disposed of and burned. In the intertestamental period, it came to be used symbolically as the place of divine punishment (cf. 1 En. 27:2, 90:26; 4 Ezra 7:36).

Proselyte (4339) [proselutos](#) from **proserchomai** to come near to join) describes *one who has approached or drawn near*—a stranger, foreigner, one who comes from his own people to another. A proselyte is a convert to a cause. “A newcomer,” “a convert,” or “one who has come over” (to a new faith or way of life) The word [proselutos](#) is used in the Septuagint to signify “a stranger” or “sojourner” (Exodus 12:48, 49, etc.), and at this time was applied to a convert to Judaism (Acts 2:10; 6:5), whether circumcised, “a proselyte of righteousness;” or uncircumcised, “a proselyte of the gate.” In the NT **proselutos** is a technical term for a Gentile who has come over into Judaism (circumcision, baptism, sacrifice) usually won over from paganism through Jewish missionary efforts and then by submitting to c circumcision (males), self-baptism before witnesses (The Talmud adds that Gentile conversion must be supervised by three Jews - *The Talmud of Babylonia*) and offering of a sacrifice.

The first use of [proselutos](#) is by Jesus describing Jewish “missionaries” who traveled far “to make one **proselyte** and when he becomes one, (he is made) twice as much a son of hell as” the Jewish missionary. (Mt 23:15). In their zeal to make converts one of the places the Jewish missionaries had visited was Rome. **Zodhiates** says that “such zeal being so remarkable at that time that it became proverbial among the Romans.”

Luke also describes Jewish proselytes from Antioch. Some of the proselytes in Palestine in the day of Christ were the centurion (Mt. 8:5-13; Lk 7:1-10), who was an officer in the army of Herod Antipas, the Greeks who were going up to worship at the Passover (Jn 12:20), and possibly (evidence only circumstantial) Pilate’s wife (Mt 27:19).

PROSELUTOS- 4x/4v - Mt. 23:15; Acts 2:10; Acts 6:5; Acts 13:43

PROSELUTOS IN THE SEPTUAGINT - Ex 12:48; Exod. 12:49; Exod. 20:10; Exod. 22:21; Exod. 23:9; Exod. 23:12; Lev. 16:29; Lev. 17:3; Lev. 17:8; Lev. 17:10; Lev. 17:12; Lev. 17:13; Lev. 17:15; Lev. 18:26; Lev. 19:10; Lev. 19:33; Lev. 19:34; Lev. 20:2; Lev. 22:18; Lev. 23:22; Lev. 24:16; Lev. 24:22; Lev. 25:23; Lev. 25:35; Lev. 25:47; Num. 9:14; Num. 15:14; Num. 15:15; Num. 15:16; Num. 15:26; Num. 15:29; Num. 15:30; Num. 19:10; Num. 35:15; Deut. 1:16; Deut. 5:14; Deut. 10:18; Deut. 10:19; Deut. 12:18; Deut. 14:29; Deut. 16:11; Deut. 16:14; Deut. 24:14; Deut. 24:17; Deut. 24:19; Deut. 24:20; Deut. 24:21; Deut. 26:11; Deut. 26:12; Deut. 26:13; Deut. 27:19; Deut. 28:43; Deut. 29:11; Deut. 31:12; Jos. 8:30; Jos. 20:9; 1 Chr. 22:2; 2 Chr. 2:17; 2 Chr. 15:9; 2 Chr. 30:25; Ps. 94:6; Ps. 146:9; Isa. 54:15; Jer. 7:6; Jer. 22:3; Ezek. 14:7; Ezek. 22:7; Ezek. 22:29; Ezek. 47:22; Ezek. 47:23; Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5;

QUESTION - [Why did Jesus refer to the Pharisees as a “child of hell” in Matthew 23:15? GOTQUESTIONS.ORG](#)

ANSWER - “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are” (Matthew 23:15). This is one of the “[seven woes](#)” pronounced by the Lord against the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law. To understand why Jesus would refer to a convert of the Pharisees as a “child of hell” (literally, “son of [Gehenna](#)”), we have to look at the context of Jesus’ words. Jesus is instructing His followers about the religious hypocrites who are themselves “children of hell.”

Jesus begins His condemnation of the religious leaders of the day in Matthew 22 with [aporable](#). The story of the [wedding feast](#) (Matthew 22:1–15) condemns the leaders’ self-righteousness and their refusal to accept God’s provision for their salvation. Because their hearts were still hard, they responded by trying to entrap Jesus with questions about taxes (verses 16–22), the resurrection (verses 23–33), and the Law (verses 34–40). Jesus avoided their traps and indicted them for knowing neither the Scriptures nor the power of God (verse 29). Then He turned the tables on them, asking them a question they couldn’t answer about

the Messiah (verses 41–46). Once He had silenced them, He used the occasion to teach His disciples the truth about the teachers of the Law in chapter 23.

To be a child of hell is to be deserving of hell, that is, to be awfully wicked. In Matthew 23, Jesus explains that the Pharisees and Sadducees displayed their wickedness in many ways. They did not practice what they preached (verse 3). They burdened the people with religious rituals and ceremonies of their own invention and made no effort to help them to bear them (verse 4). All their religious rituals were done in a public manner in order to receive the praise and glory from others (verses 5–7). For all these sins and more, Jesus pronounces “woes” upon them for their guilt and the punishment that would surely await them.

The Pharisees and their converts were children of hell primarily because they rejected God’s provision for their salvation, attempting to justify themselves through their own righteous deeds. In so doing, they “shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces” (Matthew 23:13). Jesus said that, when they made a Gentile convert, they made him double the child of hell that they were—the former pagan became twice the hypocrite that they were, twice as confirmed in wickedness. By opposing Jesus, the leaders tried to convince people that He was an impostor. Many were ready to embrace Him as the Messiah and were about to enter into the kingdom of heaven, but the hypocrites prevented it. Jesus says they had “taken away the key of knowledge” (Luke 11:52), meaning they had taken away the right interpretation of the ancient prophecies respecting the Messiah. In that way they prevented the people from receiving Jesus as their promised Redeemer.

Just as the [Pharisees and Sadducees](#) became children of hell by rejecting Jesus as their only Savior, so do millions today. All who remain in their sins are deserving of hell because God demands justice, and wickedness must be paid for (Romans 6:23). If we reject Christ’s payment for our sins, we must pay for them ourselves, thus rendering ourselves children of hell.

Matthew 23:16 “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.’

KJV Matthew 23:16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!

BGT Matthew 23:16 Ο α μ ν, δηγο τυφλο ο λ γοντες· ς ν μ σ ν τ ν α, ο δ ν σιν· ς δ ν μ σ ν τ χρυσ το ν α ο, φε λει.

NET Matthew 23:16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple is bound by nothing. But whoever swears by the gold of the temple is bound by the oath.'

CSB Matthew 23:16 "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.'

ESV Matthew 23:16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.'

NIV Matthew 23:16 "Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.'

NLT Matthew 23:16 "Blind guides! What sorrow awaits you! For you say that it means nothing to swear 'by God's Temple,' but that it is binding to swear 'by the gold in the Temple.'

YLT Matthew 23:16 'Woe to you, blind guides, who are saying, Whoever may swear by the sanctuary, it is nothing, but whoever may swear by the gold of the sanctuary -- is debtor!

MIT Matthew 23:16 How horrible your destiny, you blind counselors who say, "It means nothing to swear on the basis of the temple, but it is binding if one swears on the gold of the temple."

NJB Matthew 23:16 'Alas for you, blind guides! You say, "If anyone swears by the Temple, it has no force; but anyone who swears by the gold of the Temple is bound."

NRS Matthew 23:16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the sanctuary is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the sanctuary is bound by the oath.'

- **blind:** Mt 23:17,19,24,26 15:14 Isa 56:10,11 Jn 9:39-41
- **Whoever swears by the temple:** Mt 5:33-34 Jas 5:12
- **it is:** Mt 15:5,6 Mk 7:10-13
- **he is:** Ga 5:3

Related Passages:

Matthew 5:33-37+ "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.' 34 "But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God 35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. 36 "Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil.

(**NOTE:** In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus condemned all swearing of vows. A simple yes or no would be sufficient for one who is committed to always speak the truth! In other words, Jesus teaches that our words should be true without the need for oaths!)

Matthew 15:14+ "Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit."



Jesus Pronouncing Woes on Religious Leaders

AN EVASIVE DISTINCTION REGARDING OATHS

In Matthew 23:16-22 Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for creating a hierarchy of oaths where some were considered binding, and others were not, depending on *what* one swore by. In short, they had developed a system that allowed them to evade their commitments if they swore by something "less sacred."

ESV Study Note ([borrow](#)) - As in much of their belief system, they focus on misguided superficial distinctions and overlook the higher principles of the law.

Woe ([ouai](#)) **to you, blind** ([tuphlos](#) - again in Mt 23:19, 24) **guides** ([hodegos](#)) - This woe has to do with the way Pharisees perverted oaths and goes through Mt 23:22 (6 verses). Jesus substitutes "**blind guides**" for hypocrites speaking of their spiritual blindness making them dangerous guides who would only lead people to hell and never to heaven. These guides prided themselves on their presumed greater spiritual knowledge, but as Jesus said in Mt 15:14+ they were **blind guides** leading the spiritually blind and both groups were doomed to judgment if they never had their eyes opened spiritually.

Barbieri points out that "In the first two woes Jesus spoke of the leaders' effects on others; in the other five woes He spoke of the leaders' own characters and actions."

Who say, 'Whoever swears ([omnuo](#)) **by the Temple** ([naos](#) - sanctuary, not Temple complex = hieron), **that is nothing** ([oudeis](#)); **but** (term of contrast) **whoever swears** ([omnuo](#)) **by the gold of the Temple** ([naos](#)) **is obligated** ([opheilo](#) - present tense) (NET = "bound by that oath" YLT = "Is debtor") - The Pharisees perverted the truth about oath taking saying that there were distinctions in the binding force of oaths depending on what he swore by or upon. In short, Jesus says they had developed a double standard for swearing oaths. So if one swore by the Temple the person was not obligated to carry out his oath. They said if a man swore by the gold of the Temple, he was obligated (was a debtor) to fulfill the oath. In short, this was the perverted "logic" the Pharisees used regarding oaths, arbitrarily saying that swearing on the unholy gold was more binding than swearing on the holy temple or the holy altar!

Reformation Study Bible quips that "This way of taking oaths is like children making promises with their fingers crossed behind their backs. God desires truth in all our words (Mt 5:37)."

*A person could lie all he wanted, provided he
swore **by the temple** and not **by the gold of the temple***

John MacArthur explains the ruse of the Pharisees - The very fact that they had developed such a double standard for swearing gives evidence that their concern was not for truth but for the evasion of it when it did not suit their selfish interests. The underlying

purpose behind the first part of the standard was to provide sanctimonious justification for lying with impunity. A person could lie all he wanted, provided he swore **by the temple** and not **by the gold of the temple**. Since no society can survive without some provision for verifying and guaranteeing such things as promises and contracts, the second part of the standard was developed as a necessary expediency. If a person wanted to make absolutely certain that someone was telling the truth or would live up to an agreement, he would make him swear **by the gold of the temple**, which supposedly made his word binding. A person who broke his word after taking such an oath was subject to penalties under Jewish law. (See [Matthew Commentary](#))

Hypocritical human rules and tradition cannot justify or protect us from lying. If one made an oath and broke they could say it was okay to break because they swore on the **Temple**, not the **gold** or they swore on the **altar** and not the **offering**. In other words, while they appeared to be making a binding oath by swearing on the **Temple** or the **altar**, they inwardly had no intention of keeping it. In effect they were being dishonest and justifying their dishonesty with fabricated rules regarding making oaths.

[William Barclay](#) - "To the Jew an oath was absolutely binding, so long as it was a binding oath. Broadly speaking, a binding oath was an oath which definitely and without equivocation employed the name of God; such an oath must be kept, no matter what the cost. Any other oath might be legitimately broken."

Swears (makes an oath) [3660](#) **omnuo** derives from a basic meaning to grasp a sacred object (Friberg). The verb **omnuo** thus means to swear, confirm or affirm the truth of a statement by calling on a divine being (heaven, altar, temple, throne of God) to execute sanctions against a person if the statement in question is not true. The word meant to put one's self under oath. **BDAG** phrases it this way "to affirm the veracity of one's statement by invoking a transcendent entity, freq. w. implied invitation of punishment if one is untruthful."

Louw-Nida on **omnuo** - to affirm the truth of a statement by calling on a divine being to execute sanctions against a person if the statement in question is not true (in the case of a deity taking an oath, his divine being is regarded as validating the statement)

OMNUO - 21V - make an oath(1), make...oath(1), swear(6), swears(10), swore(6), sworn(2). Matt. 5:34; Matt. 5:36; Matt. 23:16; Matt. 23:18; Matt. 23:20; Matt. 23:21; Matt. 23:22; Matt. 26:74; Mk. 6:23; Mk. 14:71; Lk. 1:73; Acts 2:30; Acts 7:17; Heb. 3:11; Heb. 3:18; Heb. 4:3; Heb. 6:13; Heb. 6:16; Heb. 7:21; Jas. 5:12; Rev. 10:6

Temple (sanctuary) [3485](#) **naos** in the Greek culture denoted the "abode of the gods" and was used to refer to a literal structure or building associated with, dedicated to and set apart to be a dwelling place for a deity. either pagan gods (Acts 17:24) or the true God (Mt 23:16). **Naos** describes the place where a deity was worshipped (cp Zacharias ministering to God in Lk 1:9). **Naos** referred to the temple proper, including the inner sanctuary, composed of the outer room, the **Holy of Holies** and the innermost **Holy Place**. When our Lord taught in the temple, He taught in the **hieron**, in one of the temple porches. He expelled the money-changers from the **hieron**, the court of the Gentiles. When the veil of the temple was rent at the time of the death of our Lord (Mt 27:52), it was the veil of the **naos**, the curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. When Zacharias entered the temple to burn incense (Lk 1:9), he entered the **naos**, the Holy Place where the altar of incense stood while the multitude were in prayer outside he people were "without," in the **hieron** (Lk 1:10).

Jesus used **naos** in a figurative to refer to His body as a temple (Jn 2:19, 20, 21). Paul extends this meaning to the individual believer's body as the dwelling place or inner sanctuary of the Holy Spirit (1Co 6:19), the inner sanctuary of the Holy Spirit.

NAOS - 40V - Matt. 23:16; Matt. 23:17; Matt. 23:21; Matt. 23:35; Matt. 26:61; Matt. 27:5; Matt. 27:40; Matt. 27:51; Mk. 14:58; Mk. 15:29; Mk. 15:38; Lk. 1:9; Lk. 1:21; Lk. 1:22; Lk. 23:45; Jn. 2:19; Jn. 2:20; Jn. 2:21; Acts 7:48; Acts 17:24; Acts 19:24; 1 Co. 3:16; 1 Co. 3:17; 1 Co. 6:19; 2 Co. 6:16; Eph. 2:21; 2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 3:12; Rev. 7:15; Rev. 11:1; Rev. 11:2; Rev. 11:19; Rev. 14:15; Rev. 14:17; Rev. 15:5; Rev. 15:6; Rev. 15:8; Rev. 16:1; Rev. 16:17; Rev. 21:22

Matthew 23:17 "You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold?"

KJV Matthew 23:17 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?

BGT Matthew 23:17 μωρο κα τυφλο , τ ς γ ρ με ζων σ τ ν , χρυσ ς νας γι σας τ ν χρυσ ν ;

NET Matthew 23:17 Blind fools! Which is greater, the gold or the temple that makes the gold sacred?

CSB Matthew 23:17 Blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the sanctuary that sanctified the gold?

ESV Matthew 23:17 You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred?

NIV Matthew 23:17 You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?

NLT Matthew 23:17 Blind fools! Which is more important-- the gold or the Temple that makes the gold sacred?

YLT Matthew 23:17 Fools and blind! for which is greater, the gold, or the sanctuary that is sanctifying the gold?

MIT Matthew 23:17 Ignoramuses and unenlightened, which is greater, the gold, or the temple that consecrates the gold?"

NJB Matthew 23:17 Fools and blind! For which is of greater value, the gold or the Temple that makes the gold sacred?

NRS Matthew 23:17 You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the sanctuary that has made the gold sacred?

- **fools:** Ps 94:8
- **or:** Mt 23:19 Ex 30:26-29 Nu 16:38,39

Mammon Preferred Over God

WHEN GOLD MATTERS MORE THAN GOD!

Another title might be "Sanctified or Shiny."

You fools ([moros](#)) and blind ([tuphlos](#)) men! - As Jesus calls them these names, can you see their faces flush, their nostrils begin to flare and the hair bristle on the back of their neck? The Pharisees treasured what glittered, but not what was truly glorious.

You've heard of fool's gold. Fool's gold is a shiny mineral (pyrite) that looks like gold but has no real value. It deceives people who are looking for treasure into thinking they've found something valuable — when they haven't. The Pharisees were

Gilbrant on fools - The term meant more than lack of intelligence, though their logic left doubts about their mental abilities. It was often used to mean "sinner," one who was morally delinquent. ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

Pulpit Commentary - Jesus adds to "blind" the epithet "fools," which implies not only the irrationality and absurdity of their practice, but also its moral delinquency, the fool in [sapiential language](#) being the sinner.

Which is more important (megas - greater), **the gold or the Temple ([naos](#)) that sanctified ([hagiazō](#) - present tense) the gold?** This is a rhetorical question. Clearly the **Temple** is more important as it "makes the gold sacred" (NLT) The Pharisees had reversed the order of importance. Their logic is absurd for the gold was nothing without the Temple. The only reason the gold was holy or sacred was because it was in the place of God's presence.

John MacArthur explains "In other words, by what perverted logic had it been determined that making a vow on something lesser was more binding than one made on something greater? The only reason **the gold** could be thought of as sacred, and thereby make the vow supposedly more obligatory, was **the temple that sanctified the gold**. (See [Matthew Commentary](#))

THOUGHT - God or gold? There is only one letter difference but oh what a difference that one letter makes! One will make you materially rich, the other spiritually rich. One will make you rich in time, but only one will make you rich in eternity. Don't be foolish and blind! Make the right choice!

ILLUSTRATION - Fool's gold is a shiny mineral (pyrite) that looks like gold but has no real value. It deceives people who are looking for treasure into thinking they've found something valuable — when they haven't. Jesus is exposing the spiritual "fool's gold" of legalistic religion — it shines with tradition and ritual, but lacks the substance of God's presence and truth.

FOOL'S GOLD AND MATTHEW 23:17

Fool's Gold	Pharisaic Religion (Matthew 23:17)
Appears valuable but is worthless	They honored gold but ignored what made it holy
Deceives those who judge by appearance	The Pharisees were blind and foolish , prioritizing externals
Leads seekers away from true treasure	They missed the heart of worship — God's presence
Pursued by fools	Jesus calls them "fools and blind" for their misplaced values

Fools (3474) **moros** conveys the root meaning of one who is mentally dull, sluggish in understanding, foolish, morally worthless, useless, silly or stupid (English = “moron”). Absurd (ridiculously unreasonable, unsound, or incongruous) **Barclay** - **Moros** also means fool, but the man who is **moros** is the man who is a moral fool. He is the man who is playing the fool... To call a man **moros** was not to criticise his mental ability; it was to cast aspersions on his moral character; it was to take his name and reputation from him, and to brand him as a loose-living and immoral person. ([Matthew 5 - William Barclay's Daily Study Bible](#)) The word **moros** "expresses a more serious form of contempt than Raca. Raca expresses contempt for a man's head = you stupid! More expresses contempt for his heart and character = you scoundrel. The reckless use of such opprobrious epithets Jesus regarded as the supreme offence against the law of humanity. ([Matthew 5 - The Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

Friberg - **Moros** - foolish, stupid always a term of reproach; (1) of persons considered to be intellectually weak, irrational, or lacking in foresight (Mt 7.26), opposite sophros (wise) and phronimos (intelligent); substantively = foolish person (Mt 25.3); of one without respect for God (Mt 23.17); the meaning of the substantive more, in Mt 5.22 is uncertain; as an insult it could mean you fool! blockhead!; (2) of things foolish, useless (2Ti 2.23); neuter as a substantive ta. mora, what is thought of as foolish (1Cor 1.27)

MacArthur notes that **moros** "was sometimes used in secular Greek literature of an obstinate, godless person. It was also possibly related to the Hebrew **mārâ** which means “to rebel against.” To call someone **You fool** was to accuse them of being both stupid and godless. The three illustrations in this verse show increasing degrees of seriousness. To be angry is the basic evil behind murder; to slander a person with a term such as Raca is even more serious, because it gives expression to that anger; and to condemn a person's character by calling him a fool is more slanderous still... Jesus' prohibition is against slanderously calling a person a fool out of anger and hatred. Such an expression of malicious animosity is tantamount to murder and makes us guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. (MacArthur, J: [Matthew 1-7 Macarthur New Testament Commentary Chicago: Moody Press](#))

Matthew 23:18 “And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.’

KJV Matthew 23:18 And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.

BGT Matthew 23:18 κα · ς ν μ σ ν τ θυσιαστηρ , ο δ ν στιν· ς δ ν μ σ ν τ δ ρ τ π ν ω α τ ο , φ ε λ ει.

NET Matthew 23:18 And, 'Whoever swears by the altar is bound by nothing. But if anyone swears by the gift on it he is bound by the oath.'

CSB Matthew 23:18 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.'

ESV Matthew 23:18 And you say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.'

NIV Matthew 23:18 You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.'

NLT Matthew 23:18 And you say that to swear 'by the altar' is not binding, but to swear 'by the gifts on the

altar' is binding.

YLT Matthew 23:18 'And, whoever may swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever may swear by the gift that is upon it -- is debtor!

MIT Matthew 23:18 Also you say: "It means nothing to swear on the basis of the altar, but if one swears on the basis of the gift on the altar, it is binding."

NJB Matthew 23:18 Again, "If anyone swears by the altar it has no force; but anyone who swears by the offering on the altar, is bound."

NRS Matthew 23:18 And you say, 'Whoever swears by the altar is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gift that is on the altar is bound by the oath.'

- guilty: or, debtor, Mt 23:15

And - (kai) - Hinge word that connects the argument, giving another example of their foolish rules on oaths.

Whoever swears (omnuo) by the altar (thusiasterion), that is nothing (oudeis), but whoever swears (omnuo) by the offering (doron - gift) on it, he is obligated (opheilo - present tense) - Similar to the perversion in Mt 23:17 the Pharisees said that if one swore by the **altar**, the person was not obligated to carry out his oath. But if he swore by the **offering** (gift) on the altar, he was obligated (was a debtor) to fulfill the oath.

Gilbrant on the **altar** - The brazen altar is referred to here. It stood in the outer court, just outside the temple building. It was here that the gifts (the sacrifices) were offered. ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

Pulpit Commentary on the altar and the sacrifice on the altar - The great altar of burnt offerings, according to the Mosaic ritual, was consecrated and dedicated with most remarkable solemnities, as the centre of sacrificial worship (see Ex 29:36, etc.; Ex 30:28,29; Numbers 7:10, etc.). The **gift** that is upon it. The victim, which, as being offered by themselves, was counted (CONSIDERED BY THE PHARISEES AS) more worthy than the **altar** of God which sanctified the gift. This is, indeed, an instance of sight blinded by self-righteousness.

Matthew 23:19 "You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering?"

KJV Matthew 23:19 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?

BGT Matthew 23:19 τυφλο , τ γ ρ με ζον , τ δ ρον τ θυσιαστρον τ γι ζον τ δ ρον ;

NET Matthew 23:19 You are blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

CSB Matthew 23:19 Blind people! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?

ESV Matthew 23:19 You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

NIV Matthew 23:19 You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

NLT Matthew 23:19 How blind! For which is more important-- the gift on the altar or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

YLT Matthew 23:19 Fools and blind! for which is greater, the gift, or the altar that is sanctifying the gift?

MIT Matthew 23:19 Irrational men, which is greater, the gift, or the altar that consecrates the gift?

NJB Matthew 23:19 You blind men! For which is of greater worth, the offering or the altar that makes the offering sacred?

NRS Matthew 23:19 How blind you are! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

- or: Ex 29:37 30:29

You blind (tuphlos) men - This is the third time in this section on oaths in which Jesus describes them as **blind**, obviously speaking of their spiritual blindness.

Which is more important, the offering (doron), or the altar (thusiasterion) that sanctifies (hagiazō - present tense) the offering (doron - gift)? Jesus repeats His rhetorical question of Mt 23:17, pressing the Pharisees regarding their spurious assessment that

the **offering** was more important than the **altar**. Clearly the **altar** is the greater, for the **altar** sets apart or makes the gift or offering sacred. The gift was of value only because of the altar. If it should be offered elsewhere, it would have no value. As with the Temple and gold, the Pharisees had reversed the order saying the person was obligated (was a debtor) when he swore by the lesser thing, the offering or the gold.

Matthew 23:20 “Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it.

KJV Matthew 23:20 Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.

BGT Matthew 23:20 ο υ μ σ α ς ν τ θ υ σ ι α σ τ η ρ μ ν ε ι ν α τ κ α ν π σ ι τ ο ς π ν ω α τ ο .

NET Matthew 23:20 So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.

CSB Matthew 23:20 Therefore, the one who takes an oath by the altar takes an oath by it and by everything on it.

ESV Matthew 23:20 So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.

NIV Matthew 23:20 Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.

NLT Matthew 23:20 When you swear 'by the altar,' you are swearing by it and by everything on it.

YLT Matthew 23:20 'He therefore who did swear by the altar, doth swear by it, and by all things on it;

MIT Matthew 23:20 So one who swears on the basis of the altar swears by it and by all upon it.

NJB Matthew 23:20 Therefore, someone who swears by the altar is swearing by that and by everything on it.

NRS Matthew 23:20 So whoever swears by the altar, swears by it and by everything on it;

ONE CANNOT SEPARATE THE ALTAR FROM THE OFFERING

Therefore ([oun](#)) - Term of conclusion. What is Jesus concluding? He is in effect answering the question He had just posed.

Whoever swears ([omnuo](#)) **by the altar** ([thusiasterion](#)), **swears** ([omnuo](#)) **both by the altar** ([thusiasterion](#)) **and by everything on it** - Jesus counters their distinction between the importance of swearing on the altar and the offering on the altar.

Pulpit Commentary - The oath by the altar involves the notion of the victim as well as the altar; one cannot be separated from the other; and, of course, implies Him to Whom the offering is made.

Matthew 23:21 “And whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it.

KJV Matthew 23:21 And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.

BGT Matthew 23:21 κ α μ σ α ς ν τ ν α μ ν ε ι ν α τ κ α ν τ κ α τ ο ι κ ο ν τ ι α τ ν ,

NET Matthew 23:21 And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and the one who dwells in it.

CSB Matthew 23:21 The one who takes an oath by the sanctuary takes an oath by it and by Him who dwells in it.

ESV Matthew 23:21 And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it.

NIV Matthew 23:21 And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it.

NLT Matthew 23:21 And when you swear 'by the Temple,' you are swearing by it and by God, who lives in it.

YLT Matthew 23:21 and he who did swear by the sanctuary, doth swear by it, and by Him who is dwelling in it;

MIT Matthew 23:21 One who swears by the temple swears by it and the one who dwells in it.

NJB Matthew 23:21 And someone who swears by the Temple is swearing by that and by the One who dwells in it.

NRS Matthew 23:21 and whoever swears by the sanctuary, swears by it and by the one who dwells in it;

- and by: 1Ki 8:13,27 2Ch 6:2 7:2 Ps 26:8 132:13,14 Eph 2:22 Col 2:9

And whoever swears (omnuo) by the Temple (naos), swears (omnuo) both by the Temple (naos) and by Him Who dwells (katoikeo - present tense) within it - Jesus pointed any swearing **by the temple** (or things in the Temple) was binding because behind the Temple was God **Who dwelt in it**.

Pulpit Commentary - In fact, it comes to this: to swear by temple or altar is to swear by God — an oath most solemn, which may not be evaded....From such passages (**both by the Temple and by Him Who dwells within it**) we learn that God sanctifies things and places to be devoted to His service, and to be accounted by men holy and separated from all common uses.

Matthew 23:22 “And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.

KJV Matthew 23:22 And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

BGT Matthew 23:22 καὶ ὁ ὅστις ὀρκισθῇ ὑπὲρ τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ὑπὲρ τοῦ καθημένου ἐπ' αὐτοῦ.

NET Matthew 23:22 And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and the one who sits on it.

CSB Matthew 23:22 And the one who takes an oath by heaven takes an oath by God's throne and by Him who sits on it.

ESV Matthew 23:22 And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.

NIV Matthew 23:22 And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it.

NLT Matthew 23:22 And when you swear 'by heaven,' you are swearing by the throne of God and by God, who sits on the throne.

YLT Matthew 23:22 and he who did swear by the heaven, doth swear by the throne of God, and by Him who is sitting upon it.

MIT Matthew 23:22 One who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and the one who sits upon it.

NJB Matthew 23:22 And someone who swears by heaven is swearing by the throne of God and by the One who is seated there.

NRS Matthew 23:22 and whoever swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by the one who is seated upon it.

- by the: Mt 5:34 Ps 11:4 Isa 66:1 Ac 7:49 Rev 4:2,3

And whoever swears (omnuo) by heaven (ouranos), swears (omnuo) both by the throne (2362) thronos) of God and by Him Who sits (kathemai - present tense) upon it - To swear **by heaven** was to make a binding oath because of God Who sat upon the throne in heaven.

In short Jesus condemned the distinctions for making oaths that they Pharisees had devised because they were dishonest and deceptive. This brood of vipers either missed or simply ignored Jesus' clear teaching on oaths in Mt 5:33-37 where He taught "Swear not at all!"

John MacArthur explains "As Jesus went on to point out, to swear **by the altar** was to swear **by everything on it**; to swear **by the temple** was to swear **by Him who dwells within it**, namely, God Himself; and to swear **by heaven** was to swear **both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it**. In other words, everything involved with **the Temple** and everything involved with **heaven** involved God. In fact, since God is the creator of everything, to swear by anything at all involves God. (See [MacArthur Commentary](#))

Grant Osborne: Here the point made in Mt 23:16–22 comes full circle. Every oath, from the least to the greatest, involves God and his throne and so is binding. In this sense Jesus' point in Mt 5:34–37 is in full agreement. Since every oath by nature centers on God and is made in relation to God, there is no need to swear by anything, but instead a "yes" is a "yes" and a "no" is a "no" because all

promises are made before the throne of God and will be judged by God. (See [Matthew - Page 850](#))

*Our integrity must be based on our walk with God,
not formulas we utter over our promises.*

- Paul Apple

As an aside, the Talmudists (the Jewish rabbis and scholars who compiled the Talmud, a central collection of Jewish oral law and commentary) taught that not all oaths were equally binding. Specifically if someone swore by “heaven” or “earth”, it was considered a non-binding oath. Their logic was that heaven and earth are created things, not God Himself, and thus, the oath held less moral weight. This created loopholes in the moral system. A person could make a solemn-sounding promise, but claim it wasn't binding because it wasn't made “by God” or the temple's gold, etc.

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

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

BGT Matthew 23:23 Ο α μ ν, γραμματε ς κα Φαρισα οι ποκριτα , τι ποδεκατο τε τ δ οσμον κα τ νηθον κα τ κ μινον κα φ κατε τ βαρ τερα το ν μου, τ ν κρ σιν κα τ λεος κα τ ν π στιν· τα τα [δ] δει ποι σαι κ κε να μ φι ναι.

NET Matthew 23:23 "Woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You give a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin, yet you neglect what is more important in the law— justice, mercy, and faithfulness! You should have done these things without neglecting the others.

CSB 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.

ESV Matthew 23:23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.

NIV Matthew 23:23 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.

NLT Matthew 23:23 "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law-- justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things.

YLT Matthew 23:23 'Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye give tithe of the mint, and the dill, and the cummin, and did neglect the weightier things of the Law -- the judgment, and the kindness, and the faith; these it behoved you to do, and those not to neglect.

MIT Matthew 23:23 How horrible your destiny, scholars and Pharisees—hypocrites that you are—because you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, yet you neglect the important issues of the law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These are the priorities of the law you should practice, while not neglecting those other elements.

NJB Matthew 23:23 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You pay your tithe of mint and dill and cummin and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law-justice, mercy, good faith! These you should have practised, those not neglected.

NRS Matthew 23:23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others.

- **the weightier:** Mt 9:13 Mt 12:7 22:37-40 1Sa 15:22 Pr 21:3 Jer 22:15,16 Ho 6:6 Mic 6:8 Ga 5:22,23
- **these:** Mt 5:19-20

Related Passages:

Leviticus 27:30-33 'Thus **all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land** or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S; it is holy to the LORD. 31 'If, therefore, a man wishes to redeem part of his tithe, he shall add to it one-fifth of it. 32 'For every tenth part of herd or flock, whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the LORD. 33 'He is not to be concerned whether it is good or bad, nor shall he exchange it; or if he does exchange it, then both it and its substitute shall become holy. It shall not be redeemed.'"

Deuteronomy 14:22-23 "You shall surely tithe all the produce from what you sow, which comes out of the field every year. 23 You shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God, at the place where He chooses to establish His name, the tithe of your grain, your new wine, your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and your flock, so that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.

Luke 11:42+ "But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

Micah 6:8+ (**SUMMARY OF TRUE RELIGION**) He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?

Zechariah 7:8-10 Then the word of the LORD came to Zechariah saying, 9 "Thus has the LORD of hosts said, 'Dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother; 10 and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.'

1 Samuel 15:22+ Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? **Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.**

Hosea 6:6 For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Hosea 12:6 Therefore, return to your God, Observe kindness and justice, And wait for your God continually.

Matthew 9:13 "But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Matthew 12:7 "But if you had known what this means, 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,' you would not have condemned the innocent.

Hebrews 11:6+ And without **faith** it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

THE PHARISEES MAJORED ON THE MINORS!

Woe (ouai) to you, scribes (grammateus) and Pharisees (pharisaiois), hypocrites (hupokrites)! NLT paraphrases "Woe" by the phrase "What sorrow awaits you!" The heart of the Pharisees was an evil heart, a spiritually darkened, spiritually bankrupt heart. They were [going through the motions](#) so to speak. They invented external things they could observe to hide the truth that they had no power to keep the precepts that God desired men to obey (by the power of the Spirit). They had symbol but no substance. They were sham [shysters](#).

THOUGHT- Do we ever do that in Christianity? Certainly a number of denominations have routines that are part of their worship service. While in many cases there is substance behind the ritual (e.g., reciting the Lord's Prayer as a congregation), what was meant to be substance can too often become only empty ritual. This principle is true in our individual lives. We have our morning devotional, but there are many days when it seems more like an empty ritual than a meeting with the King. Father, by Thy Holy Spirit and Thy Holy Word, and for the sake of Thy dear Son, Jesus, deliver us from falling into the subtle trap of a ritualistic relationship with Thee. Amen

For (term of explanation) - Once again Jesus explains why He interjects this "Woe."

HERBS WITHOUT HOLINESS

You tithe ([apodekatoo](#) - give 10% of) mint ([heduosmon](#)) and dill ([anethon](#) - KJV = "anise") and cummin ([kuminon](#)) - NLT = "For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens." The Pharisees' practice of these tiny tithes gave the undiscerning observer the impression these men were very righteous and deserving of respect.

The Pharisees meticulously followed Leviticus 27:30 'Thus all the tithe of the land, **of the seed of the land** or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S; it is holy to the LORD.' The Pharisees missed the spirit of the last phrase that it "is the LORD'S; it is holy to the LORD!"

Cornerstone Biblical Commentary - For the Pharisees, only food that had been tithed was ritually pure and lawful to eat. Cf. *m. Avot* 1:16; *Demai* 2:1. (See [The Gospel of Matthew - The Gospel of Mark - Page 297](#))

John MacArthur explains "The instructions for tithing produce (**ED: [SEE PASSAGES ABOVE](#)**) related to marketable farm crops such as grains, olive oil, wine, fruits, and vegetables. But the legalistic scribes and Pharisees extended the provision to include the smallest potted plant grown in a kitchen window. As today herbs then were grown mostly for their leaves and seeds, and when the scribes and Pharisees picked leaves from a **mint** plant or gathered seeds from the **dill and cummin** plants, they would carefully count out the leaves and seeds, separating out one for God from each ten counted. They gloried in the self-righteousness of subscribing to such minutiae. (See [Matthew Commentary](#))

Pulpit Commentary adds that "Practically, the law of tithe was enforced only in the case of the produce mentioned in Deuteronomy 14:23 — corn, wine, and oil — but the Pharisees, in their overstrained scrupulosity, applied the law of Leviticus 27:30 ("all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's") to the smallest pot herbs, even to their leaves and stalks

David Guzik has a pithy comment - Their tithing was meticulous and noteworthy; but hypocritical because it served to sooth the guilt of their neglect of the weightier matters of the law. It is both possible and common to be distracted with relatively trivial matters while a lost world perishes.

And have neglected ([aphiemi](#)) the weightier provisions ([barus](#) - the more central, more decisive) of the law: justice ([krisis](#) - right treatment of others) and mercy ([eleos](#) - compassion toward the needy) and faithfulness ([pistis](#) - loyalty to God and His truth) - Jesus gives a short list of the **he weightier provisions of the law**. The Pharisees were disregarding the spirit of the Law obsessing over counting leaves, but failing to obey the other aspects of the law. They were counting leaves and ignoring lives! But the truth is that they had no power to do otherwise because they were so corrupt inside. Their outward religion belied their inward rot! The attitudes and actions of justice, mercy and faithfulness emanate from within, from a heart that is clean.

THOUGHT - Are you like the Pharisees, majoring on the minors? You have rules for every minute area of your life, but you put aside the thing God says are more important (justice, mercy, faithfulness). The nature of legalism is to be a stickler for the details, but to be blind to the weightier principles that please God.

It's not that tithing is wrong —

it's that empty ritual without justice and mercy is worthless.

MacArthur makes an excellent point that "Jesus borrowed the word **weightier** from the rabbinical tradition, which had divided the law into light and heavy categories. In their inverted priorities the scribes and Pharisees had reduced such matters as **justice and mercy and faithfulness** to the light category and elevated the tithing of garden herbs to the **weightier** category....The scribes and Pharisees were inequitable, unfair, unjust, unmerciful, brutal, unforgiving, unkind, greedy and abusive of others. They were everything that is contrary to **the weightier provisions of the law**. Worst of all, they walked by sight rather than faith, trusting in their own works rather than God's grace. (See [Matthew Commentary](#))

They majored in minors

while failing in the majors of God's law

Warren Wiersbe illustrates the hypocrisy of the Pharisees in regard to justice and mercy - This crowd thought nothing of condemning an innocent man, yet they were afraid to enter Pilate's judgment hall lest they be defiled (John 18:28+)....Justice, mercy, and faithfulness are the important qualities God is seeking. Obeying the rules is no substitute. While it is good to pay attention to details, we must never lose our sense of priorities in spiritual matters. Jesus did not condemn the practice of tithing. But He did condemn those who allowed their legalistic scruples to keep them from developing true Christian character. ([Bible Exposition](#))

[Commentary](#))

Gilbrant - According to Leviticus 27:30, 32 and Deuteronomy 14:22, 23 tithes were to be paid on the produce of the land (wheat, oil, new wine, and fruit) and on livestock. In their zeal the Pharisees extended the commandment to include the smallest of herbs, such as mint, dill, anise, and cumin. During Old Testament times tithes were paid to support the priests, the Levites, and the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28ff.; 26:12ff.). Jesus was not criticizing the payment of tithes as such ("without neglecting the others," *New English Bible*), but the excessive concern over minutiae, such as tithing garden herbs of little value. It was much easier to tithe a few tiny cumin seeds than it was to be really concerned over and carry out the more serious matters of doing the Law—righteousness, mercy (or compassion), and faith (or faithfulness) to God's will....The Greek word *krisin* ([krisis](#)) does not mean "judgment" here, but like compassion ([eleos](#)) and faithfulness ([pistis](#)) it indicates an attitude toward one's neighbor and means a righteousness that in mercy sees that wrongs are made right, and justice is received. ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

But (term of contrast) **these are the things you should have done without neglecting** ([aphiemi](#)) **the others** - NIV = "You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former." Note that Jesus was not saying they were wrong in tithing. What He is saying is that they should also have practiced the far more important matters of justice, mercy and faithfulness. Tithing of tiny herbs could be done, but not in lieu of justice, mercy and faithfulness.

Pulpit Commentary - Christ does not censure this attention to minutiae. He would teach conformity to regulations made by competent authority, or conscientiously felt to be binding, even though not distinctly enjoined in Scripture (see vers. 2, 3); his blame is reserved for that expenditure of zeal on trifles which stood in the place of, or left no strength for, higher duties. It was a very elastic conscience which tithed a pot herb and neglected judgment.

Stu Weber says that "their tithing served only as a smoke screen, distracting people from noticing that they had neglected the more important matters of the law— justice, mercy and faithfulness (cf. Deut. 10:12-13; Mic. 6:8). They made it appear that they were paying "full rent," when in reality they were only keeping up the "newspaper subscription." The implication is that they were guilty of committing injustice and acting unmercifully at the expense of others and for their own profit." (See [Holman New Testament Commentary - Matthew](#))

Steven Cole - Modern day legalists also major on the minors and minor on the majors. Some churches and Christian parents put major attention on rules about petty issues, such as dress codes or certain activities, but they tolerate serious sins, such as gossip, greed, and pride. If we shun people because of how they look, or over certain behaviors that, according to the Bible, are not major, we are guilty of the sin of the Pharisees. For example, you may be surprised to know what Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, G. Campbell Morgan, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and C. S. Lewis all had in common. Yes, they were all godly Christian leaders who were greatly used by God. All except Lewis were gifted Bible expositors and pastors. But also, at least some of the time they were in the ministry, they all smoked! Many Christians question your salvation if you smoke! I think that if you smoke, you should quit as soon as possible, because it is not good stewardship of your body. The men I just mentioned all lived before that medical evidence was known. But my point is that there are many Christians who are more concerned with getting people to stop smoking than with getting them to walk in the Spirit and stop doing the deeds of the flesh. ([Why Jesus Hates Legalism](#))

Tithe (586) ([apodekatoo](#) from **apo** - from + **dekatoō** = to collect tithes) means to pay or collect a tenth. **Friberg** - 1) pay tithes, give one-tenth or one part out of every ten of something (Mt 23:23); (2) collect a tithe from someone (Heb 7:5) (Borrow [Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament](#))

Apodekatoo -4x in NT - Matt. 23:23; Lk. 11:42; Lk 18:12 Heb. 7:5 - Use in Septuagint - Gen. 28:22; Deut. 14:22; Deut. 26:12; 1 Sam. 8:15; 1 Sam. 8:16; 1 Sam. 8:17;

Mishnah on tithing

9:1

A Rue, goosefoot, wild coriander, water parsley, and eruca of the field are exempt from [separation of] tithes and may be bought from anyone during the Sabbatical year,

B because produce of their type is not cultivated [but grows wild].

C R. Judah says, "Aftergrowths of mustard are permitted [may be bought during the Sabbatical year],

D "because transgressors are not suspect concerning them [they are not suspected of cultivating mustard and then claiming that it is an aftergrowth]."

E R. Simeon says, "All aftergrowths are permitted, except aftergrowths of cabbage,

F "because produce of this type does not [grow uncultivated] among wild vegetables."

G And sages say, "All aftergrowths are forbidden."

Cummin (Heb. kammon; i.e., a "condiment"; Greek kuminon), the fruit or seed of an umbelliferous plant, the *Cuminum sativum*, still

extensively cultivated in the East. It has carminative properties and is used for flavoring various dishes, especially during fasts. In flavor and appearance it resembles caraway, though it is less agreeable to western palates. As an illustration of Yahweh's wisdom it is said (Isa 28:25,27) that cummin is scattered in sowing and beaten out with a rod in threshing. These facts are true in Palestine today. In the New Testament it is mentioned in Matt. 23:23, where our Lord pronounces a "woe" on the scribes and Pharisees, who were zealous in paying tithes of "mint and anise and cummin," while they omitted the weightier matters of the law." "It is used as a spice, both bruised, to mix with bread, and also boiled, in the various messes and stews which compose an Oriental banquet." See online [Tristram, Natural History, page 442](#).

Mint [EBD] (Gr. heduosmon, i.e., "having a sweet smell"), one of the garden herbs of which the Pharisees paid tithes (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42). It belongs to the labiate family of plants. "Mint" (ἡ δύσμον). Of this well known plant several species grow in Palestine; it was one of the ingredients of the sauce of bitter herbs eaten at the Paschal feast (Exodus 12:8), and was hung up in the synagogue for its fragrance. The species most common in Syria is the *Mentha sylvestris*, the wild mint, which grows much larger than the garden mint (*M. sativa*). It was much used in domestic economy as a condiment, and also as a medicine. The paying of tithes of mint was in accordance with the Mosaic law (Deut. 14:22), but the error of the Pharisees lay in their being more careful about this little matter of the mint than about weightier matters. (See [Tristram's note on mint](#))

*The tithe of these plants would be very small;
but to exact it would indicate scrupulous conscientiousness.*

Dill - ANISE [SMITH] This word occurs only in (Matthew 23:23) It is by no means a matter of certainty whether the anise (*Pimpinella anisum*, Lin.) or the dill ([Anethum graveolens](#)) is here intended though the probability is more in favor of the latter plant. "Anise is an annual plant growing to the height of one foot, carries a white flower, and blooms from June till August. The seeds are imported and used in large quantities on account of their aromatic and carminative properties. It grows wild in Egypt, in Syria, Palestine and all parts of the Levant. Among the ancients anise seems to have been a common pot-herb in every garden. Although it is less used in medicine by the moderns than by the ancients, it still retains its former reputation as an excellent stomachic, particularly for delicate women and young children. The Romans chewed it in order to keep up an agreeable moisture in the mouth and to sweeten the breath, while some Orientals still do the same." Dill, a somewhat similar plant, is an annual, bearing small aromatic seeds, used also for cookery and medicine. (See [Tristram's note on dill](#))

Justice (2920) **krisis** from **krino** = to judge, decide) means a decision or judgment, verdict, justice, court (tribunal). In the present passage **krisis** means what is right in the sense of justice, righteousness Mt 12:18, 20; 23:23; Lk 11:42. In other words **krisis** in Mt 23:23 does not mean "judgment", but like mercy and faithfulness it indicates an attitude toward one's neighbor and means a righteousness that in mercy sees that wrongs are made right, and justice is received. The idea is acting equitably to one's neighbour, hurting nobody by word or deed (cf Jer 5:1).

The first use is by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount declaring "'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the **court**.'" ("in danger of judgment") (Mt 5:21, cp also Mt 5:22) Mt 10:15, 11:22, 24 all describe Jesus' sobering warning to the Jews of a specific future and frightening "day of **judgment**." (cp "**sentence** of hell" Mt 23:33, see also 2 Peter 2:9, 11, 3:7, 1 John 4:17) In Jn 5:24 Jesus gives sinners the way of escape, the way to miss the horrible day of **judgment** (Heb 10:27)! In Mt 12:18 God's **judgment** is equated with **justice**, for He is the righteous and just Judge (cp Mt 12:20, 23:23, Rev 16:7). Note the striking contrast in Jn 5:29 "those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of **judgment**." There is no such thing as reincarnation but only one life, one death, one **judgment** (Heb 9:27)

Mercy (1656) **eleos** is the outward manifestation of pity and assumes **need** on the part of those who are recipients of the mercy and sufficient **resources** to meet the need on the part of those who show it. The idea of **mercy** is to show kindness or concern for someone in serious need or to give help to the wretched, to relieve the miserable. Here the essential thought is that mercy gives attention to those in misery. Mercy, loving kindness in conduct is frequently taught in the Pentateuch, as in the case of the widow, the stranger, and the debtor, and very different from the feeling of those who "devour widows' houses." (Lk 20:47).

Mercy for past sins; **grace** for future work, trial, and resistance to temptation. In Classical Greek "**eleos** was used as a technical term for the end of the speech for the defence, in which the accused tried to awaken the compassion of the judges." It has well been said that **faith** is not believing in spite of evidence—that's superstition—but obeying in spite of circumstances and consequences. As **pistis** relates to God, it is the conviction that God exists and is the Creator and Ruler of all things well as the Provider and Bestower of eternal salvation through Christ. As faith relates to Christ it represents a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through Whom we obtain eternal salvation and entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. Stated another way, eternal salvation comes **only** through belief in Jesus Christ and no other way.

Wuest writes that **eleos** is "God's "kindness and goodwill toward the miserable and afflicted, joined with a

desire to relieve them" (Vincent). Grace meets man's need in respect to his guilt and lost condition; mercy, with reference to his suffering as a result of that sin. ([Word Studies](#))

Larry Richards - Originally (eleos) expressed only the emotion that was aroused by contact with a person who was suffering. By NT times, however, the concept incorporated compassionate response. A person who felt for and with a sufferer would be moved to help. This concept of mercy--as a concern for the afflicted that prompts giving help--is prominent in both the Gospels and the Epistles. ([Richards, L O: Expository Dictionary of Bible Words: Regency](#))

A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing;
Nor fear, with thy righteousness on,
My person and offering to bring;

The terrors of law and of God
With me can have nothing to do;
My Saviour's obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view.

Augustus M. Toplady
([Click to play his hymn](#))

Faithfulness (4102) [pistis](#) is synonymous with trust or belief and is the conviction of the truth of anything, but in Scripture usually speaks of belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and joined with it. "This word denotes confidence in the reliability of a person or thing and can describe one's trust in a person's word, a compact or treaty, or a deity (or deities). The term implies both knowledge and action. One may receive knowledge of a certain truth and may even offer verbal agreement, but "trust" or "confidence" is not said to be present until one's behavior reflects that truth." (Swindoll)

Maclaren - Faith is the hand that grasps. It is the means of communication, it is the channel through which the grace which is the life, or, rather, I should say, the life which is the grace, comes to us. It is the open door by which the angel of God comes in with his gifts. It is like the petals of the flowers, opening when the sunshine kisses them, and, by opening, laying bare the depths of their calyxes to be illuminated and coloured, and made to grow by the sunshine which itself has opened them, and without the presence of which, within the cup, there would have been neither life nor beauty. So faith is the basis of everything; the first shoot from which all the others ascend...**Faith works**. It is the foundation of all true work; even in the lowest sense of the word we might almost say that. But in the Christian scheme it is eminently the underlying requisite for all work which God does not consider as busy idleness...

"Faith is the foot of the soul; so it comes to Christ.
Faith is the hand of the soul; so it receives Christ.
Faith is the arm of the soul; so it embraces Christ.
Faith is the eye of the soul; so it looks upon Christ.
Faith is the mouth of the soul; so it feeds on Christ.
Faith is the lips of the soul; so it kisses Christ."

--Unknown writer

Matthew 23:24 "You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!"

KJV Matthew 23:24 Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

BGT Matthew 23:24 ὁ γὰρ τυφλὸς, ὁ διὕλ ζωντὲς τὴν κνῶπα, τὸ δὲ κμῆλον καταπινοντὲς.

NET Matthew 23:24 Blind guides! You strain out a gnat yet swallow a camel!

CSB Matthew 23:24 Blind guides! You strain out a gnat, yet gulp down a camel!

ESV Matthew 23:24 You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

NIV Matthew 23:24 You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

NLT Matthew 23:24 Blind guides! You strain your water so you won't accidentally swallow a gnat, but you

swallow a camel!

YLT Matthew 23:24 'Blind guides! who are straining out the gnat, and the camel are swallowing.

MIT Matthew 23:24 Blind counselors that you are, you strain out the gnat (that gets in the milk) but drink down the camel.

NJB Matthew 23:24 You blind guides, straining out gnats and swallowing camels!

NRS Matthew 23:24 You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!

- Mt 7:4 Mt 15:2-6 Mt 19:24 Mt 27:6-8 Lu 6:7-10 Jn 18:28,40

Related Passages:

Matthew 7:4 "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye?"

Leviticus 11:4, 23, 41 'Nevertheless, you are not to eat of these, among those which chew the cud, or among those which divide the hoof: the **camel**, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you. 23 'But all other winged insects which are four-footed are **detestable** to you. 41 'Now every swarming thing that swarms on the earth is **detestable**, not to be eaten.

HYPERBOLE REGARDING THE ABSURDITY OF HYPOCRITICAL RELIGION

Hyperbole is an intended overstatement to make a point and surely He struck a chord with this sarcastic statement!

You blind (tuphlos) guides (hodegos) - These hypocrites prided themselves as spiritual instructors, interpreters of the Law, and moral examples but in truth were spiritually **blind** to truth, **blind** to their own sin, and **blind** to God's priorities. They loved minutiae and saw every tiny speck of ritual impurity — but were **blind** to their own hypocrisy and injustice. Sadly, **blind guides** don't just get lost themselves, but they mislead others too, so that "both will fall into a pit." (Mt 15:14+).

Stu Weber on **blind guides** - Their self-deception about the various Old Testament laws also deceived the people who followed them, so no one knew how to go about pleasing God. (See [Holman New Testament Commentary - Matthew](#))

Who strain out a gnat and swallow (katapino - gulp down, devour) **a camel** - **NLT** - **Strain** is diulizo (dia = thoroughly + hulizo - to strain) used only here in the NT and in the present tense indicating this was their continual practice. "You strain your water so you won't accidentally swallow a gnat, but you swallow a camel!" Both gnats and camels were considered unclean animals (gnat the smallest, camel the largest) under the Law (cf. Leviticus 11). Pharisees were known for straining wine or water through cloth to remove even tiny insects (gnats), so they would remain kosher and wouldn't become ceremonially unclean. The tragic irony was their cups were clean but their souls were corrupt. And they would "swallow" camels — a grotesque exaggeration meaning they were blind to massive spiritual faults while obsessing over tiny details. In short, Jesus was telling these men they were meticulous about minutiae but they trivialized truth.

[William Barclay](#) - "This is a humorous picture which must have raised a laugh, of a man carefully straining his wine through gauze to avoid swallowing a microscopic insect and yet cheerfully swallowing a camel. It is the picture of a man who has completely lost his sense of proportion."

Gilbrant - in saying they "swallow a camel," Jesus pointed out the absurdity of their inconsistency. The most minute item was given full attention, while they disregarded the most serious matters of keeping the Law (Mt 23:23). ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

R. T. France: The grotesque imagery of straining out the gnat (from wine or water before drinking) and swallowing the camel belongs to the same class of burlesque as the splinter and the plank in Mt 7:3–5 or the camel going through the eye of a needle in Mt 19:24. It depends on the relative size of the smallest and largest creatures in Palestine. The gnat, as an insect, was unclean (Lev 11:20–23; cf. also the "swarming creatures" of Lev 11:41–44) and therefore must not be ingested; but then the camel was no less unclean (Lev 11:4), and a lot bigger! The joke may have been helped by an Aramaic word-play between qalmâ (**gnat**) and gamlâ (**camel**). (See [The Gospel of Matthew - Page 10](#))

Believer's Study Bible - Jesus displays a classic use of irony in this saying, which summarizes the gullibility of the Pharisees. The picture of a Pharisee straining and coughing as he inadvertently swallows a gnat, while another gulps down an enormous camel

without difficulty is intentionally ludicrous. The words reveal a sense of humor in Jesus, even when He was discussing serious matters.

*Pharisees would drink their wine through clenched teeth
in order to filter out any small insects that might have gotten into the wine.*

John MacArthur - Pharisees would drink their wine through clenched teeth in order to filter out any small insects that might have gotten into the wine. In their typical reversal of values, those Jewish religious leaders were more concerned about being contaminated by a tiny **gnat** than by a huge **camel**. They were painstaking about formal, ceremonial trivialities but were unconcerned about their hypocrisy dishonesty cruelty greed, self-worship, and a host of other serious sins. They substituted outward acts of religion for the essential virtues of the heart. (See [Matthew Commentary - Page 385](#))

Pulpit Commentary - Our Lord uses a proverbial expression to denote the inconsistency which would avoid the smallest ceremonial defilement, but would take no account of the gravest moral pollution.

I like country and western songs and thought a good title fitting Jesus' description would be [atwangy version](#) of "The Gnat in My Cup, the Camel in My Heart." Here's the first line I take great pride, I'm pleased to say/In straining gnats from cabernet/My filter's fine, my standards pure—/

No insect sin shall pass, that's for sure!

*They strained at the gnat of ceremony,
but they ignored the camel of sin in their hearts.*

Gotquestions - The [Pharisees](#) were scrupulous in counting out their mint leaves and tithing their "dill and cumin" (Mt 23:23), but their hearts were full of envy, pride, greed, and malice. They strained at the gnat of ceremony, but they ignored the camel of sin in their hearts.

Marvin Vincent - Insects were ceremonially unclean (Leviticus 11:20, 23, 41, 42), so that the Jews strained their wine in order not to swallow any unclean animal. Moreover, there were certain insects which bred in wine. Aristotle uses the word gnat (κ νωπτα) of a worm or larva found in the sediment of sour wine. "In a ride from Tangier to Tetuan I observed that a Moorish soldier who accompanied me, when he drank, always unfolded the end of his turban and placed it over the mouth of his bota, drinking through the muslin to strain out the gnats, whose larvae swarm in the water of that country" (cited by Trench, "On the Authorized Version").

QUESTION - [What does it mean to strain at a gnat but swallow a camel? GOTQUESTIONS.ORG](#)

ANSWER - This proverb is spoken by Jesus in Matthew 23:24. On His last trip to Jerusalem, Jesus spoke at length about life under the oppressive reign of the Pharisees. The religious leaders tested Him continually "and plotted how to entangle him in his words" (Matthew 22:15). In Matthew 23, Jesus pronounced [seven woes](#) against the [scribes and Pharisees](#), accusing them of hypocrisy, laying heavy burdens on the people, exalting themselves, and preventing people from entering God's kingdom. He was especially harsh in His assessment of their strict adherence to the laws of tithing while they "neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness" ([Matthew 23:23](#)). He concludes by saying, "You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel" (verse 24).

The KJV translates the first part of the proverb as "strain *at* a gnat." That wording gives the impression of choking while trying to swallow the gnat while easily gulping down the camel. But the better translation is "strain *out* a gnat." The Greek word refers to straining water through a cloth or sieve to remove impurities. The GNT translates it this way: "You strain a fly out of your drink, but swallow a camel!"

The Jews had a law that forbade eating any flying insects that did not have jointed legs for hopping (Leviticus 11:20–23), and in this they were strictly observant. Because water could have insects and insect larvae in it, pious Jews were careful to strain the water through a cloth before drinking it. They did not want to accidentally ingest an [unclean insect](#) and thus violate the law. Jesus mentions this practice in His proverb and then contrasts it with a hyperbolic picture of gulping down a camel. In this way, Jesus accused them of taking great pains (straining out gnats) to avoid offence in minor things of little importance, while tolerating or committing great sins (swallowing camels) such as deceit, oppression, and lust.

Christ's fifth woe relates to the same type of hypocrisy (Matthew 23:25–26). All Jewish sects agreed on the need to wash their dishes in order to maintain their ceremonial cleanness, but Jesus pointed out that it is senseless to clean the outside of a cup and leave the inside filthy. But this is exactly what the actions of the Jewish leaders achieved. They focused on outward behavior but neglected the [most important commands](#)—loving God and one another. They strained at a gnat, mistakenly believing that external conformity to the law was enough, while not seeing that the evil in their hearts was a camel-sized problem. The [Pharisees](#) were scrupulous in counting out their mint leaves and tithing their "dill and cumin" (verse 23), but their hearts were full of envy, pride,

greed, and malice. They strained at the gnat of ceremony, but they ignored the camel of sin in their hearts.

Related Resources:

- [What made some animals clean and others unclean \(Genesis 7\)?](#)

Matthew 23:25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence."

KJV Matthew 23:25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

BGT Matthew 23:25 Ο α μ ν, γραμματε ς κα Φαρισα οι ποκριτα , τι καθα ρ ζετε τ ξωθεν το ποτη ρου κα τ ς παροψ δο ς, σωθεν δ γ μουσιν ξ ρπα γ ς κα κρασ α ς.

NET Matthew 23:25 "Woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

CSB Matthew 23:25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence!

ESV Matthew 23:25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

NIV Matthew 23:25 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

NLT Matthew 23:25 "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy-- full of greed and self-indulgence!

YLT Matthew 23:25 'Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye make clean the outside of the cup and the plate, and within they are full of rapine and incontinence.

MIT Matthew 23:25 How horrible your destiny, scholars and Pharisees, charlatans all, because you wash the outside of your cup and dish, but the interior remains untouched—full of plunder and greed.

NJB Matthew 23:25 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of cup and dish and leave the inside full of extortion and intemperance.

NRS Matthew 23:25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

- **for:** Mt 15:19,20 Mk 7:4-13 Lu 11:39,40
- **full:** Isa 28:7,8

ANOTHER ILLUSTRATION OF THEIR GROSS HYPOCRISY

Woe ([ouai](#)) **to you, scribes** ([grammateus](#)) **and Pharisees** ([pharisaiois](#)), **hypocrites** ([hupokrites](#)) - This is the 5th out of 7 times Jesus has called them hypocrites in Matthew 23, and here illustrates how their outward behavior (ceremonially immaculate) did not line up with their inward disposition (spiritually squalid and repulsive)!

For (term of explanation) - Jesus explains the "Woe!"

You clean ([katharizo](#) - present tense) **the outside of the cup** ([poterion](#)) **and of the dish** (side-dish, with the accompanying sense of something dainty), **but** (term of contrast) **inside they are full** ([gemo](#)) **of robbery** ([harpagē](#) - greed, extortion, plunder) **and self-indulgence** ([akrasia](#)) - The word for **robbery** ([harpagē](#)) describes plundering, pillaging, and extortion. The word **self-indulgence** ([akrasia](#)) implies a lack of self-control and unrestrained self-gratification. And why did they clean the outside? They did it to be seen by and honored by men!

Grant Osborne: The next four verses are dominated by the “outside-inside” (ξωθεν-σωθεν) distinction, forming the perfect definition of hypocrisy as stemming from the dichotomy between “outward” appearance and “inward” reality. Jesus uses as his example the care with which the scribes wash the outside surface of cups and plates. (See [Matthew - Page 852](#))

John MacArthur helps us understand this illustration - The Greek phrase behind **dish** (paropsis) was often used of a platter on which exquisite delicacies were served. The idea is of a person who offers a guest a seemingly lovely meal served with the best wine. But it turns out that, although the utensils are beautiful and ceremonially purified, the food served on them was putrid....The unscrupulous religious leaders robbed the people they were supposed to serve in order to satisfy their own greed. They plundered both the souls and the wallets of the people and used the ill-gotten gains to serve themselves. (See [Matthew Commentary - Page 385](#))

Clean (2511) **katharizo** from **katharos** = pure, clean, without stain or spot; English words - catharsis = emotional or physical purging, cathartic = substance used to induce a purging, Cathar = member of a medieval sect which sought the purging of evil from its members) means to make clean by taking away an undesirable part. To cleanse from filth or impurity. [Click here \(and here\)](#) for more background on the important Biblical concept of **clean** and **cleansing**. Figuratively **katharizo** referred to cleansing from ritual contamination or impurity as in (Acts 10:15). In a similar sense **katharizo** is used of cleansing lepers from ceremonial uncleanness (Mt 8:2-3, et al) This word group conveys the idea of physical, religious, and moral cleanness or purity in such senses as clean, free from stains or shame, and free from adulteration. In secular Greek **katharizo** occurs in inscriptions for ceremonial cleansing.

Robbery (seizure)(724) **harpazo** from **harpazo** = to seize and carry off with force, of the "Rapture" [1 Thes 4:17](#)! from the root **harp---**, seen in Eng., "rapacious;" an associated noun, with the same spelling, denoted a rake, or hook for drawing up a bucket) means robbery, pillage, plunder, extortion, that which has been stolen such as loot or prey. In the New Testament **harpagē** is that which was gained unlawfully by the Pharisees and which was gained by extortion. (See Matthew 23:25.) In Hebrews 10:34 it is used of that which was taken from the Christians illegally and for which they were compensated by a better possession. Note that in Luke 11:39 it can refer to the desire in the heart of a man to indulge in gain that comes from greediness. **Friberg** on **harpazo** - (1) as an action of carrying off someone's belongings by force robbery, plundering (Heb 10:34); (2) concretely what has been seized, plunder, booty (probably Mt 23:25); (3) as an attitude greediness, covetousness (Lk 11:39). [Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament](#)

Self-indulgence (192)(**akrasia** from **akrates** = incontinent from **a** = without + **kratos** = strength, prevail) means properly, conduct which shows a want of power over one's self' incontinence or intemperance, lack of dominion (not prevailing), i.e. inability to maintain control; figuratively, want of self-restraint, without self-control, and therefore mastered by personal appetites (urges). Only 2 uses in NT - Mt 23:25 1 Cor 7:5

Matthew 23:26 “You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.

KJV Matthew 23:26 Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

BGT Matthew 23:26 Φαρισαε τυφλ , καθ ρισον πρ τον τ ντ ς το ποτηρ ου , να γ νηται κα τ κτ ς α το καθαρ ν.

NET Matthew 23:26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside may become clean too!

CSB Matthew 23:26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so the outside of it may also become clean.

ESV Matthew 23:26 You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

NIV Matthew 23:26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

NLT Matthew 23:26 You blind Pharisee! First wash the inside of the cup and the dish, and then the outside will become clean, too.

YLT Matthew 23:26 'Blind Pharisee! cleanse first the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside of them also may become clean.

MIT Matthew 23:26 Blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of your cup, so its interior may be clean as well as the outside.

NJB Matthew 23:26 Blind Pharisee! Clean the inside of cup and dish first so that it and the outside are both clean.

NRS Matthew 23:26 You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may become clean.

- cleanse: Mt 12:33 Isa 55:7 Jer 4:14 13:27 Eze 18:31 Lu 6:45 2Co 7:1 Heb 10:22 Jas 4:8

CLEAN THE CUP OF YOUR HEART

You blind ([tuphlos](#)) **Pharisee** ([pharisaïos](#)), **first clean** ([katharizo](#) - [aorist imperative](#) - only possible by [depending on the Holy Spirit](#)) **the inside of the cup and of the dish** - They were **blind** to their spiritual condition of internal corruption! It is notable that Jesus shifted from addressing them in the plural to speaking in the second person singular (**Pharisee**), thus giving His command a personal ring. The verb **clean** ([katharizo](#) - [aorist imperative](#)) was calling for them to do this immediately and ultimately commanding an action only possible by [depending on the Holy Spirit](#). In a sense, He was telling them (at least indirectly) of their need to be born again, to get a new heart, a circumcised heart. (See Circumcision of the Heart).

So that - Term of purpose. What's the purpose?

The outside of it may become clean also - Jesus is saying that if they wanted "kosher" food, they needed to cleanse the inside of the cup or dish even more than the outside. The external purity would proceed from the internal purity. Of course, Jesus is now addressing the heart of their problem which was their unclean hearts, with belied their external cleanliness.

David Guzik - Jesus did not call them to choose between outer righteousness and inner righteousness. He called them to be concerned with both, but to first address the inside. True outward righteousness starts on the inside.

Gilbrant - In contrast to the Pharisees' focus on external appearances, Jesus taught that the heart must first be cleansed, then good fruits will be the normal result, just as a good tree produces good fruit (7:16-20; 15:18-20). The Bible shows again and again that true righteousness comes by the cleansing power of the Word and the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. When it begins with spiritual life in the heart it can then be demonstrated in daily living. Notice that Jesus did not say that the cleansing of the outside was not important. It is just a fact that a person who was self-centered or self-indulgent, and comes to Jesus and is changed and filled with love for others, will also clean up on the outside as well. ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

QUESTION - [Why did Jesus say to cleanse the inside of the cup \(Matthew 23:26\)? GOTQUESTIONS.ORG](#)

ANSWER - Jesus came to the nation of Israel proclaiming the good news that the kingdom of the heavens was at hand (Matthew 4:17), because the King (Jesus) had come. He came teaching them about the eternal kingdom of God that was in the heavens and that would one day change addresses, moving to earth in fulfilment of God's promises. Jesus used many examples and illustrations, and in one instance He challenged His listeners that it was important to "first clean the inside of the cup and dish" (Matthew 23:26).

As Jesus proclaimed the coming kingdom, He urged the people to repent, or to change their mind about how they could enter that kingdom. In part because of the teachings of the [Pharisees](#) and [scribes](#), many of the people thought that they could enter the kingdom of God based on their lineage or based on their external obedience to the Law of Moses. Jesus strongly contradicted that thought, challenging them especially in His [Sermon on the Mount](#) (Matthew 5—7) that external obedience to the law did not constitute righteousness. They needed internal righteousness, and they did not have that internal righteousness. Their righteousness had to be greater than what the Pharisees and scribes were prescribing, or else they could never enter the kingdom (Matthew 5:20). Instead of pursuing their current course of simply trying to look like they had righteousness, Jesus wanted them to look to Him to provide them with the true righteousness that they needed. It was important to cleanse the inside of the cup (Matthew 23:26), Jesus would later explain. First cleaning the inside of the cup was so important, in fact, that Jesus compared those who thought they would enter the kingdom through external obedience to a man who built a house on the sand. Those who looked to Jesus and discovered true righteousness were like a man who built a house on the rock. When the inevitable storm came, the house built on the sand fell, but the house built on the rock stood fast (Matthew 7:24–27).

The Pharisees and scribes thought they were righteous, but Jesus called them hypocrites who did not have righteousness and who

were misleading others down a path of false righteousness (Matthew 23:13). He exposed their hypocrisy, saying that they were stealing the houses of widows while offering long public prayers to make themselves look holy (Matthew 23:14). He pronounced woe on them for making disciples of themselves and their error, instead of following Jesus as they ought to have done (Matthew 23:15). They were claiming to be guides, but they themselves were blind. They were misrepresenting God and His path to righteousness (Matthew 23:16–22). They were tithing, bringing glory to themselves, but were neglecting justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Matthew 23:23).

Jesus illustrates the spiritual bankruptcy of the religious leaders by saying that they focused on cleaning the outside of the cup and dish but were full of robbery and pursuit of self-interest (Matthew 23:25). Jesus says they should first focus on cleansing the inside of the cup and dish (Matthew 23:26). If they do that, the outside would be clean as well. Jesus further illustrates the problem of hypocrisy by calling them whitewashed tombs—they were pretty on the outside, but they were full of death and decay on the inside (Matthew 23:27–28).

Jesus' message is consistent. To make a cup truly clean, it is important to cleanse the inside of the cup (Matthew 23:26). That is, it is necessary to have authentic, inner righteousness that only Christ can provide. The Pharisees and scribes were pursuing righteousness by their own efforts, but they failed to recognize that even our most righteous deeds are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). We have nothing to offer God that would make us righteous. The only way we can be righteous is faith in Him. This has always been the recipe, as evidenced by the early example of [Abraham](#), who was declared righteous when he believed in God who was speaking to Him (Genesis 15:6). In the same way, we are justified (declared righteous by God) through faith in Him and now have peace with God (Romans 5:1). Because of this we are citizens of His kingdom (Colossians 1:13) and will one day see Him in all the glory of that kingdom (Revelation 19–20). It was true when Jesus first said it—it is important to cleanse the inside of the cup—and it is still true today. Righteousness is *on the inside* by faith in Jesus.

Matthew 23:27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness."

KJV Matthew 23:27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

BGT Matthew 23:27 Ο α μ ν, γραμματε ς κα Φαρισα οι ποκριτα , τι παρομοι ζετε τ φοις κεκοιανμ νοις, ο τινες ξωθεν μ ν φα νονται ρα οι, σωθεν δ γ μουσιν στ ων νεκρ ν κα π σης καθαρο ας.

NET Matthew 23:27 "Woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs that look beautiful on the outside but inside are full of the bones of the dead and of everything unclean.

CSB Matthew 23:27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every impurity.

ESV Matthew 23:27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness.

NIV Matthew 23:27 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean.

NLT Matthew 23:27 "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs-- beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity.

YLT Matthew 23:27 'Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye are like to whitewashed sepulchres, which outwardly indeed do appear beautiful, and within are full of bones of dead men, and of all uncleanness;

MIT Matthew 23:27 How horrible your destiny, scholars and Pharisees, imposters all. You are comparable to whitewashed tomb vaults, which externally appear to be attractive, but inside they are full of the bones of dead people and all kinds of uncleanness.

NJB Matthew 23:27 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs that look handsome on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of corruption.

NRS Matthew 23:27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs,

which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth.

- **like** ([term of comparison](#)) - Isa 58:1,2 Lu 11:44 Ac 23:3
- tombs: Nu 19:16

Related Passages:

Luke 11:44+ (USE OF TOMBS IN SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT ILLUSTRATION) "Woe to you! For **you are like concealed tombs**, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it."

Acts 23:3+ Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, **you whitewashed wall!** Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?"

Numbers 19:16-18+ Also, anyone who in the open field touches one who has been slain with a sword or who has died naturally, or a human bone or a grave, shall be unclean for seven days. 17 'Then for the unclean person they shall take some of the ashes of the burnt purification from sin and flowing water shall be added to them in a vessel. 18 'A clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it on the tent and on all the furnishings and on the persons who were there, and on the one who touched the bone or the one slain or the one dying naturally or the grave.

Psalms 51:6 Behold, You desire truth in the **innermost being**, And in the **hidden part** You will make me know wisdom.

Whitewashed Tomb with Bones Inside

THE CURSE OF WHITEWASHED RELIGION

Woe ([ouai](#)) to you, scribes ([grammateus](#)) and Pharisees ([pharisaiois](#)), hypocrites ([hupokrites](#))! - This is the 6th of 7 times Jesus calls them hypocrites. Imagine their blood pressure rising each time they hear this deprecatory designation!

For (term of explanation) - Jesus explains the "**Woe!**"

[Pulpit Commentary](#) gives the background - Once a year, about the fifteenth of the month Adar (**ED**: MONTH BEFORE PASSOVER AND AFTER THE RAINY SEASON), the Jews used to whitewash the tombs and the places where corpses were buried, partly out of respect for the dead, but chiefly in order to make them conspicuous (**ED**: FOR PASSOVER WOULD BRING MANY PILGRIMS), and thus to obviate the risk of persons incautiously contracting ceremonial defilement by touching or walking over them (Numbers 19:16,18).

[William Barclay](#): Here again is a picture which any Jew would understand. One of the most common places for tombs was by the wayside. We have already seen that anyone who touched a dead body became unclean (Numbers 19:16). Therefore, anyone who came into contact with a tomb automatically became unclean. At one time in particular, the roads of Palestine were crowded with pilgrims – at the time of the Passover Feast. To become unclean on the way to the Passover Feast would be a disaster, for that meant that such a person would be debarred from sharing in it. It was then Jewish practice in the month of Adar to whitewash all wayside tombs, so that no pilgrims might accidentally come into contact with one of them and be rendered unclean. So, as people journeyed the roads of Palestine on a spring day, these tombs would glint white, and almost lovely, in the sunshine; but within they were full of bones and bodies whose touch would defile. That, said Jesus, was a precise picture of what the Pharisees were. Their outward actions were the actions of intensely religious men; their inward hearts were foul and putrid with sin.

Stu Weber adds that "According to Old Testament law (Num. 19:11), anyone who came in contact with a dead body was ritually unclean for a week. That person had to perform the appropriate sacrifices to complete restoration. Contact with a dead body was among the most abhorrent of experiences to the religious Jew. (See [Holman New Testament Commentary - Matthew](#))

You are like whitewashed tombs ([taphos](#)) which on the outside appear beautiful ([horaiois](#)), but inside they are full ([gemo](#)) of dead ([nekros](#)) men's bones and all uncleanness ([akatharsia](#)) - Even today we use the term [whitewashed](#) meaning to make something look better than it really is or to conceal something bad. The tombs were whitewashed with powdered lime dust every spring after the rains to make sure no one touched the tombs and was defiled. How ironic was this? The "touch" of these Pharisees whether by word or deed was defiling and even worse because it caused spiritual death to those whom they contacted! They were beautiful on outside, full of death and decay on the inside! The picture above says it all! They were "holy" (or at least thought they were) on the outside, but were hollow on the inside. They had scrubbed walls externally, but dead hearts internally. They had **reputation**, which is what others think about you, but they needed **character**, what God knew was true about them!

In an infinitely worse way than the tombs ceremonially defiled those who touched them, the scribes and Pharisees spiritually defiled those whom they touched.

-- John MacArthur

NET NOTE - whitewashed tombs - This was an idiom for hypocrisy—just as the wall was painted on the outside but something different on the inside, so this person was not what he appeared or pretended to be (for discussion of a similar metaphor, see L&N 88.234; BDAG 1010 s.v. to ἥχος). See Deut 28:22; Ezek 13:10–16; Acts 23:3.

Marvin Vincent on whitewashed tombs - Not the rock-tombs, belonging mostly to the rich, but the graves covered with plastered structures. In general, cemeteries were outside of cities; but any dead body found in the field was to be buried on the spot where it had been discovered. A pilgrim to the Passover, for instance, might easily come upon such a grave in his journey, and contract uncleanness by the contact (Numbers 19:16). It was therefore ordered that all sepulchres should be whitewashed a month before Passover, in order to make them conspicuous, so that travellers might avoid ceremonial defilement. The fact that this general whitewashing was going on at the time when Jesus administered this rebuke to the Pharisees gave point to the comparison. Word Studies in the New Testament.

Uncleanness (167) **akatharsia** (from **a** = without + **kathairo** = cleanse) is a broad term referring to moral uncleanness in thought, word, and deed. It describes a state of moral impurity, especially sexual sin. The term **akatharsia** refers to filth or refuse. Paul's point here is that sin defiles us, producing corruption and degradation of the sinner. The sinner is never a winner! The word **akatharsia** means everything which would hinder a man to enter into God's presence. It describes the life muddled with wallowing in the world's ways. It is the opposite of purity and considered one of the deeds of the flesh (Galatians 5:19). It relates to the idea that aberrant sex defiles the purity of marriage.

AKATHARSIA - Matt. 23:27; Rom. 1:24; Rom. 6:19; 2 Co. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 4:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 2:3; 1 Thess. 4:7

QUESTION - Why did Jesus call the Pharisees whitewashed tombs in Matthew 23:27? GOTQUESTIONS.ORG

ANSWER - The condemnation *you are like whitewashed tombs* was part of Jesus' indictment of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23. It is one of [seven woes](#) Jesus pronounced on the religious leaders as He confronted them about their hypocrisy.

Whitewashed tombs means exactly what it sounds like: tombs or mausoleums that have been covered with white paint, so they "look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean" (Matthew 23:27). This speaks to the spiritual condition of the [scribes](#) and [Pharisees](#). Outwardly, they were holy and clean, but inside they were spiritually dead.

The comparison to whitewashed tombs would have been quite offensive because the Mosaic Law states, "Whoever touches the dead body of any person shall be unclean seven days" (Numbers 19:11, ESV). For a group of people who prided themselves on ceremonial cleanliness and following the law, the accusation that they were full of dead bodies would be insufferable. That was precisely Jesus' point, though. They may have been ceremonially clean, but, inside, they were the highest level of unclean—full of the death and decay they tried so hard to avoid.

Such a harsh statement from Jesus reveals His anger at the hypocrisy in the religious leaders, who only cared about appearances. They took care of what *people* could see—and took pride in it—but they neglected what *God* could see. They "painted the outside," leaving the inside full of greed and self-indulgence (Matthew 23:25). In their eyes, if they followed the law to the letter, they were holy, and the condition of their hearts wouldn't matter. Jesus needed to confront the superficiality of these dangerous leaders who did not practice what they preached. The whitewashed tombs were leading themselves and others to death and separation from God (Matthew 23:15).

In the [Sermon on the Mount](#), Jesus explained that the law was less about what to do and not do and more about changing the heart. One analogy is that the law is like a mirror, revealing the flaws in man and how much they need God, like a mirror showing the food stuck between one's teeth. The law can reveal uncleanness, but it cannot be used to make a person righteous; only God can do that. The Pharisees were taking the mirror off the wall and trying to use it to pick their teeth. It simply does not work.

Whitewashed tombs work as a good contrast to Jesus Himself, the Son of Man, who came to bring life (John 10:10). He offered rest and grace instead of the impossible burden and condemnation of the Pharisees (Matthew 11:28–30). The superficial cleanness of whitewashed tombs cannot compare to the deep-cleaning blood of Christ (1 John 1:7). "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace" (Ephesians 1:7).

KJV Matthew 23:28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

BGT Matthew 23:28 ο τω ς κα με ς ξωθεν μ ν φα νεσθε το ς νθρ ποι ς δ και οι, σωθεν δ στε με στο πο κρ σεω ς κα νο μ α ς.

NET Matthew 23:28 In the same way, on the outside you look righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

CSB Matthew 23:28 In the same way, on the outside you seem righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

ESV Matthew 23:28 So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

NIV Matthew 23:28 In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

NLT Matthew 23:28 Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.

YLT Matthew 23:28 so also ye outwardly indeed do appear to men righteous, and within ye are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

MIT Matthew 23:28 In the same manner you put on a sanctimonious façade to the public, but internally you are full of hypocrisy and noncompliance to the law.

NJB Matthew 23:28 In just the same way, from the outside you look upright, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

NRS Matthew 23:28 So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

- **So you too:** Mt 23:5 1Sa 16:7 Ps 51:6 Jer 17:9,10 Lu 16:15 Heb 4:12,13
- **but:** Mt 12:34,35 15:19,20 Mk 7:21-23

Related Passage:

1 Samuel 16:7b+ But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

POLISHED ON THE OUTSIDE POISONED ON THE INSIDE

So you, too, outwardly appear righteous ([dikaios](#)) to men - MIT - "In the same manner you put on a sanctimonious façade to the public" Like the beautiful whitewashed tombs appeared "clean" on the outside. These vipers appeared upright to men externally. They looked holy, pious, and law-abiding in public. They wore religious garments, prayed publicly, and strictly observed rituals.

but (term of contrast - outer vs inner) **inwardly you are full of ([mestos](#)) hypocrisy ([hupokrisis](#)) and lawlessness ([anomia](#))** - The internal was the antithesis of what they wanted to appear to the populace. Jesus is God and God sees the heart (1Sa 16:7b+) and the heart of these men was filled with **hypocrisy and lawlessness**. They were the great pretenders in ancient Israel. Jesus in effect took off their mask of morality and "play acting" and exposed their rebellion against God's law, even while claiming to uphold it. In a word, Jesus exposes them as men who had clean robes but dirty hearts. This passages drives home the point that external appearance does not equate with spiritual health. God's concern is always the heart and without inner transformation of the heart, religious display is worse than empty, but is even deceptive.

Jesus' description of these men reminds me of Isaiah 29:13

Then the Lord said, “Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But

they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote.

Matthew 23:29 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,

KJV Matthew 23:29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,

BGT Matthew 23:29 Ο α μ ν, γραμματε ς κα Φαρισα οι ποκριτα , τι ο κοδομε τε το ς τ φους τ ν προφητ ν κα κοσμε τε τ μνημε α τ ν δικα ων,

NET Matthew 23:29 "Woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous.

CSB Matthew 23:29 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous,

ESV Matthew 23:29 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous,

NIV Matthew 23:29 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous.

NLT Matthew 23:29 "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you build tombs for the prophets your ancestors killed, and you decorate the monuments of the godly people your ancestors destroyed.

YLT Matthew 23:29 'Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and adorn the tombs of the righteous,

MIT Matthew 23:29 How horrible your destiny, scholars and Pharisees—phonies all—because you construct the tombs of the prophets and beautify the monuments of the righteous.

NJB Matthew 23:29 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build the sepulchres of the prophets and decorate the tombs of the upright,

NRS Matthew 23:29 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous,

- **build:** Lu 11:47-48 Ac 2:29

Related Passages:

Luke 11:47-48+ "Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them. 48"So you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build their tombs.

MONUMENTS HONORING THE PROPHETS

Woe ([ouai](#)) **to you, scribes** ([grammateus](#)) **and Pharisees** ([pharisaios](#)), **hypocrites** ([hupokrites](#)) - This is the seventh and last woe. They would exhaled an audible "[Whew!](#)" had they known it was the last woe.

John Phillips adds "They are stunned, shocked, and stabbed to the heart, for they have been thoroughly exposed by the preacher from Nazareth. Will they *repent*? No. *Revenge* is their word. They will have this man who claims to be their King dead and in His tomb before the week is out.

For (term of explanation) **you build** ([oikodomeo](#) - present tense) **the tombs** ([taphos](#)) **of the prophets and adorn** ([2885](#)) ([kosmeo](#)) **the monuments** ([mnemeion](#)) **of the righteous** ([dikaio](#)) - Memorials were commonly erected in Palestine. Jesus builds His case here that they may have been builders of tombs and memorials, He will go on to say they built them with blood on their hands. Jesus goes on to expose this as a kind of historical virtue-signaling: honoring the dead while rejecting the truth they stood for. It was easy for them to build tombs and monuments for these prophets could no longer prophesy of the sins of these

religious hypocrites.

ESV Study Bible ([borrow](#)) - Funerary art became rich and varied around this time, with widespread ornamentation of tomb facades, ossuaries, and stone coffins, as well as wall paintings and graffiti.

Plummer - "These men who professed to be so distressed at the murdering of the Prophets, were themselves compassing the death of Him who was far greater than any Prophet"

A T Robertson - There are four monuments called **Tombs of the Prophets** (Zechariah, Absalom, Jehoshaphat, St. James) at the base of the Mount of Olives. Some of these may have been going up at the very time that Jesus spoke. In this seventh and last woe Jesus addresses the Jewish nation and not merely the Pharisees.

Pulpit Commentary - The sumptuous mausoleums and tombs found *e.g.* round Jerusalem, and bearing the names of celebrated men (such as Zechariah, Absalom, Jehoshaphat), sufficiently attest the practice of the Jews in this matter. But the Pharisees' motives in acting thus were not pure; they were not influenced by respect for the prophets or repentance for national sins, but by pride, hypocrisy, and self-sufficiency.

Matthew 23:30 and say, 'If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'

KJV Matthew 23:30 And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

BGT Matthew 23:30 καὶ λέγετε· ἐμεῶν τὰς μὲν πατρῶν μὴ, οὐκ ἐμεῶν κοινῶν ὡς ἡμεῖς τὴν προφητῶν.

NET Matthew 23:30 And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have participated with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'

CSB Matthew 23:30 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.'

ESV Matthew 23:30 saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'

NIV Matthew 23:30 And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'

NLT Matthew 23:30 Then you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would never have joined them in killing the prophets.'

YLT Matthew 23:30 and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

MIT Matthew 23:30 You also say: "Had we lived in the times of our ancestors, we would not have participated with them in causing the prophets to bleed.

NJB Matthew 23:30 saying, "We would never have joined in shedding the blood of the prophets, had we lived in our ancestors' day."

NRS Matthew 23:30 and you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'

- **the blood:** Mt 23:34,35 21:35,36 2Ch 36:15 Jer 2:30

Related Passages:

2 Chronicles 36:15-16+ The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; 16 but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy.

Jeremiah 26:20-23 Indeed, there was also a man who prophesied in the name of the LORD, Uriah the son of

Shemaiah from Kiriath-jearim; and he prophesied against this city and against this land words similar to all those of Jeremiah. 21 When King Jehoiakim and all his mighty men and all the officials heard his words, then the king sought to put him to death; but Uriah heard it, and he was afraid and fled and went to Egypt. 22 Then King Jehoiakim sent men to Egypt: Elnathan the son of Achbor and certain men with him went into Egypt. 23 And they brought Uriah from Egypt and led him to King Jehoiakim, who slew him with a sword and cast his dead body into the burial place of the common people.

HYPOCRITICAL BOASTING

And say - Jesus is quoting the testimony of the scribes and Pharisees and will turn it against them in the following verse.

'If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners(participated with, taken part) **with them in shedding the blood (haima) of the prophets (prophetes).**' - There is a saying my wife often used with our 4 children when they lied declaring "**Liar, liar, pants on fire.**" They are in effect claiming that they disapproved of their ancestors' treatment of the prophets, implying they would have honored them. They have short memories, for they rejected the message of John the Baptist who was murdered on their watch!

Gilbrant - This kind of unconscious hypocrisy appears in every generation in one form or another. People often mistakenly judge the past as if they were immune from repeating the sins of their forebears. These people were truly play actors. They claimed that they honored the dead prophets but they would denounce and crucify the Son of God to whom both Abraham and Moses bore witness. ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

Pulpit Commentary - They boasted that they were better than their fathers; they disavowed their crimes, and endeavoured, by honouring the prophets' graves, to deliver themselves from the guilt of those who persecuted them. Fair show, with no reality! They professed to venerate the dead, but would not receive the living; they revered Abraham and Moses, but were about to murder the Christ to whom patriarch and prophet bore witness.

John Phillips adds that "Such was their foolish mistake! The scribes and Pharisees were soon to dye their hands crimson in richer blood drawn from nobler veins. Their fathers had martyred God's saints; they would murder God's Son." (See [Exploring the Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary - Page 439](#))

Matthew 23:31 "So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.

KJV Matthew 23:31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.

BGT Matthew 23:31 στε μαρτυρε τε αυτο ς τι υ ο στε τ ν φονευσ ντων το ς προφ τας.

NET Matthew 23:31 By saying this you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets.

CSB Matthew 23:31 You, therefore, testify against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.

ESV Matthew 23:31 Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.

NIV Matthew 23:31 So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets.

NLT Matthew 23:31 "But in saying that, you testify against yourselves that you are indeed the descendants of those who murdered the prophets.

YLT Matthew 23:31 So that ye testify to yourselves, that ye are sons of them who did murder the prophets;

MIT Matthew 23:31 Right there you testify against yourselves. For you have conceded you are the offspring of those who murdered the prophets,

NJB Matthew 23:31 So! Your own evidence tells against you! You are the children of those who murdered the prophets!

NRS Matthew 23:31 Thus you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets.

- **testify** : Jos 24:22 Job 15:5,6 Ps 64:8 Lu 19:22
- **that**: Ac 7:51-52 1Th 2:15,16

Related Passages:

Acts 7:51-52+ "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. 52 "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become;

LIKE FATHER LIKE SON

So you testify ([martureo](#) - present tense - continually) **against yourselves, that you are** (present tense - continually) **sons** ([huios](#)) **of those who murdered** ([phroneuo](#)) **the prophets** ([prophetes](#)) On one hand they venerated the prophets posthumously while opposing and persecuting God's messengers in the present including Jesus Himself, at that very moment preparing to kill the greatest Prophet of all and thus testifying against themselves! Jesus uses **sons** ([huios](#)) to show their relationship to their murderous ancestors.

Pulpit Commentary - By busying yourselves about adorning the tombs of the prophets slain by your ancestors, you show your descent and the spirit which animates you. They were true sons of their fathers, inheriting their murderous instincts, following their steps. Like father, like son. They inherited and put in practice the same false principles which led their ancestors astray.

William MacDonald on you testify - But how did they witness this? It almost seems from the preceding verse that they dissociated themselves from their fathers who killed the prophets. First, they admitted that their fathers, of whom they were physical sons, shed the blood of the prophets. But Jesus used the word **sons** in the sense of meaning people with the same characteristics. He knew that even as they were decorating the prophets' graves, they were plotting His death. Second, in showing such respect for the dead prophets, they were saying, "The only prophets we like are dead ones." In this sense also they were sons of their fathers. (Borrow [Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

Gilbrant - by their (the scribes and Pharisees) own words ("our fathers," Mt 23:30), they testified to their relationship to those who killed the prophets. They would act no more responsibly than their forefathers (cf. Matthew 23:34; Acts 7:52). ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

Matthew 23:32 "Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers.

KJV Matthew 23:32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.

BGT Matthew 23:32 κα με ς πληρ σατε τ μτρον τ ν πατ ρων μ ν.

NET Matthew 23:32 Fill up then the measure of your ancestors!

CSB Matthew 23:32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' sins!

ESV Matthew 23:32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.

NIV Matthew 23:32 Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!

NLT Matthew 23:32 Go ahead and finish what your ancestors started.

YLT Matthew 23:32 and ye -- ye fill up the measure of your fathers.

MIT Matthew 23:32 and you fit the profile of your fathers.

NJB Matthew 23:32 Very well then, finish off the work that your ancestors began.

NRS Matthew 23:32 Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors.

- **the measure**: Ge 15:16 Nu 32:14 Zec 5:6-11

Related Passages:

Genesis 15:16+ "Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete."

Fill 'er Up!

REPEATING HISTORY KILLING THE PROPHET

Fill up ([pleroo](#) - [aorist imperative](#)), then, the measure ([metron](#)) of the guilt of your fathers ([pater](#)) - The idea of **fill up** in this context is keep on sinning which would prove the Scribes and Pharisees to be as evil as were their fathers. In short, what their fathers began would be completed by them, their sons. And they would soon obey Jesus' command (**fill up**) and murder the Prophet Jesus, thus following in the footsteps of their forefathers.

William MacDonald on **fill up** - The fathers had filled the cup of murder part way by killing the prophets. The scribes and Pharisees would soon fill it to the brim by killing the Lord Jesus and His followers, thus bringing to a terrible climax what their fathers had begun. (Borrow [Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

Pulpit Commentary on **fill up** - An imperative, expressive of Divine irony, containing virtually a prophecy. Complete your evil work, finish that which your fathers began (comp. John 13:27). The measure. There is a certain limit to iniquity; when this is reached, punishment falls. The metaphor is derived from a full cup, which a single drop more will make overflow. This added drop would be the death of Christ and the persecution of his followers. Then vengeance must follow (comp. Genesis 15:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:16).

Bruce - "Fill up the measure of your fathers; crown their misdeeds by killing the prophet God has sent to you. Do at last what has long been in your hearts. The hour is come"

Stu Weber notes that "This was not only a prophecy, but a pronouncement of judgment. Sometimes the way God judged the evil was by allowing them to continue on deeper into their sin, thus condemning themselves (cf. Rom. 1:18-32; also Isa. 6:9; Jer. 44:25; Amos 4:4-5). (See [Holman New Testament Commentary - Matthew](#))

Spurgeon wrote that "This is one of the most terrible sentences that ever fell from Christ's lips. It is like his message to Judas, 'That thou doest, do quickly'...This crowning sin would fill up the measure of their fathers' guilt and bring down upon them the righteous judgment of God."

David Guzik - Jesus prophesied about how these leaders would complete the rejection of the prophets their fathers began by persecuting His disciples, whom He would send to them.

G Campbell Morgan - No amount of argument can rob these words of their terrible import. They stand upon the page for evermore speaking to us of 'the wrath of the Lamb.'"

Gilbrant points out that God sets limits to sin (cf. Genesis 15:16); when its measure is full, judgment will begin (Matthew 23:34-36; cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:15, 16). ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

Matthew 23:33 "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?"

KJV Matthew 23:33 Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

BGT Matthew 23:33 φεις, γενν ματα χιδν ν, π ς φ γητε π τ ς κρ σεως τ ς γε ννης;

NET Matthew 23:33 You snakes, you offspring of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?

CSB Matthew 23:33 "Snakes! Brood of vipers! How can you escape being condemned to hell?

ESV Matthew 23:33 You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?

NIV Matthew 23:33 "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?

NLT Matthew 23:33 Snakes! Sons of vipers! How will you escape the judgment of hell?

YLT Matthew 23:33 'Serpents! brood of vipers! how may ye escape from the judgment of the gehenna?

MIT Matthew 23:33 Snakes! Brood of poisonous vipers! How will you escape getting what you deserve in hell?

NJB Matthew 23:33 'You serpents, brood of vipers, how can you escape being condemned to hell?

NRS Matthew 23:33 You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to hell?

- **serpents:** Mt 3:7 Mt 12:34 Mt 21:34,35 Ge 3:15 Ps 58:3-5 Isa 57:3,4 Lu 3:7 Jn 8:44 2Co 11:3 Rev 12:9
- **how:** Mt 23:14 Heb 2:3 Heb 10:29 Heb 12:25

Related Passages:

Matthew 3:7+ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You **brood of vipers**, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

Matthew 12:34+ "You **brood of vipers**, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.

Genesis 3:15+ And I will put enmity Between you (THE SERPENT SATAN) and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."

Hebrews 2:3+ how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,

Hebrews 10:29+ How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

Hebrews 12:25+ **See** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.

VIPERS THEMSELVES ARE "STUNG!"

You serpents ([ophis](#)), **you brood** ([gennema](#)) **of vipers** ([echidna](#)) - Using this [epithet](#) would have stung these arrogant serpentine ecclesiastics! It would have been [excoriating](#) a word used to express strong disapproval of and derives from the idea of to "flay, strip off the hide!" **Vipers** was an apt comparison of the religious leaders to the poisonous snakes common in Palestine which were both deceptive and deadly, because the teaching (works righteousness, legalism, etc) of these men would poison men's hearts and minds and damn both themselves and their hearers to an eternal hell. In a bit of bitter irony, the vipers themselves were stung! Jesus saw through these hypocrites to the sinister, "[serpentine](#)" character of their hearts. This reminds me of Paul's warning to Timothy that (in the last days - 2 Ti 3:1+) " evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." (2Ti 3:13+) The Pharisees were deceivers and were themselves deceived!

Evans - Scripture makes figurative use of poisonous snakes and vipers (Dt. 32:33; Isa 59:5; Ps. 140:3) with reference to the wicked. Truth be told, all of us in our natural ([unregenerate](#)) state have "the poison of [asps](#) ([picture](#)) under (our) lips." (Ro 3:13b+, cf Ps 58:3,4) It is also interesting that various politicians and other groups were called "vipers" or "brood of vipers" in Greco-Roman sources (e.g., Aeschylus, Choephoroi 994; Euripides, Ion 1262).

Zodhiates - The products of sin and hypocrisy are equivalent to the poisons of venomous snakes that prey on the unsuspecting. (Exegetical Commentary on Matthew)

William MacDonald - Can Incarnate Love speak such scathing words? Yes, because true love must also be righteous and holy. The popular conception of Jesus as an innocuous reformer, capable of no emotion but love, is unbiblical. Love can be firm, and must always be just. It is solemn to remember that these words of condemnation were hurled at religious leaders, not at drunkards and reprobates. In an ecumenical age when some evangelical Christians are joining forces with avowed enemies of the cross of Christ, it is good to ponder the example of Jesus, and to remember the words of Jehu to Jehoshaphat, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord?" (2 Chron. 19:2). (Borrow [Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

A T Robertson - These blistering words come as a climax and remind one of the Baptist (Matthew 3:17) and of the time when the Pharisees accused Jesus of being in league with Beelzebub (Matthew 12:34). They cut to the bone like whip-cords.

Charles Swindoll - They were poisonous and dangerous, like vipers ready to strike their unsuspecting prey. (See [Insights on Matthew 16-28 - Page 197](#))

Holman Apologetics Commentary on the Bible - **Vipers** are known for their subtle approach and attack, as was the original serpent ([Genesis 3](#)). In a similar fashion, the Pharisees attempted to hide their own blasphemy by calling Jesus a blasphemer. But Jesus revealed the crux of the problem of the Pharisees—they blasphemed the Spirit because their hearts were evil. The words of accusation with which they slandered Jesus revealed their evil heart. (Holman Apologetics Commentary on the Bible see [The Gospels and Acts](#))

How will you escape the sentence of hell ([geenna](#)) - This was a rhetorical question indicating they could not possibly escape hell. What a picture Jesus gives with this warning -- what happens when there is a fire in the desert? The vipers flee from the heat of the fire to take cover in their holes. God's coming **wrath** would be far worse, beginning with first being cast into [Hades](#) (a "place of torment" Lk 16:28+), and ending with Hades being thrown into the [Lake of fire and brimstone](#) (Rev 20:15+), where "they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." (Rev 20:10+), Whether this is literal or figurative fire, the effect is to produce eternal torment. Jesus emphasizes this coming **wrath** of God, a truth which should stir a fear in every human heart and in turn motivate a desire for genuine repentance.

THOUGHT - The indescribable horror of God's righteous **wrath** ([one of His divine attributes](#)) which is coming upon all men and women who stubbornly resist His gracious call to "be saved" (Mt 19:25,26+) and remain dead in their trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1+) should motivate us who are saved from that wrath to boldly (cf Acts 4:31b+), continually throw out the Gospel life line to those who are perishing (Play and watch Fanny Crosby powerful classic [Rescue the Perishing](#) and then do it!). And we can certainly pray for their salvation! I routinely pray for a hidden people group using the [Joshua Project's daily reminder](#) and find myself literally overwhelmed by the statistics on many days where the people group is described as having several million eternal souls and **NOT A SINGLE BELIEVER** is known in all of those millions. This should break our hearts and stimulate us to plead with God for these otherwise eternally doomed souls! If you need some additional motivation, take some time to study the horrors of [Eternal Punishment](#).

John MacArthur adds an interesting note - Jesus' relating **vipers** to **the sentence of hell** suggests the common practice of a farmer's burning the dried stubble in his field to prepare the land for the next planting. As the flames approached their dens, **vipers** would try to scurry away but were usually unsuccessful and consumed by the fire. Jesus said, in effect, "You wicked, deceitful men, do you really think you can outrun God's fire of judgment?" (See [Matthew Commentary - Page 388](#))

Serpents (3789) [ophis](#) means snakes or serpents generally feared by Near Eastern peoples for their cunning and deadliness. These small poisonous snakes lived primarily in the desert regions of Palestine and other parts of the eastern Mediterranean. Evil individuals were often compared to **serpents** because of their malicious natures (cf. Ps 58:4; 140:3; Mt 23:33). Some ancient religions regarded the serpent as a symbol of chaos. They were also described as deities in the underworld—demonic beings—as well as creatures that brought life into existence. In the Septuagint [ophis](#) most often transliterates the Hebrew [nāchāsh](#), "snake," though it describes no specific species. It also refers to the serpent as an image of the creature which does man the most ultimate evil: Satan. In Genesis 3 Satan used the serpent in tempting Eve to rebel against God which brought about the fall of man. Satan, the archenemy of both God and man, is represented by the serpent or dragon (Isaiah 27:1). New Testament writers maintained this symbolic link between the evil serpent and the devil. The apostle Paul linked the serpent in Eden with the devil who continues to hate mankind and lead him astray (Romans 16:20; 2 Corinthians 11:3). John wrote pictorially of the fifth and sixth plagues describing destructive serpents which God will send to earth (Revelation 9:19). Finally, the serpent or Satan himself will be overcome by God's power (Revelation 20).

Brood (KJV - "generation") (1081) ([gennema](#) from [gennáo](#) = to give birth to, beget, involving generation from [gínomai](#) = to become) is the product of the activity expressed by [gennao](#) and thus means that which is born or produced. **You brood** occurs 4 times - Matt. 3:7; Matt. 12:34; Matt. 23:33; Lk. 3:7.

Vipers (2191) ([echidna](#)) was an adder or other poisonous snake. **Echidna** is used four times as a figurative description of people - Pharisees and Sadducees (Mt. 3:7; Mt 12:34; Mt 23:33) and the Jewish **crowd** (Lk 3:7). In pagan culture, the [echidna](#) were associated with evil. In their mythology the name was given to a monster deity that was half snake and half woman and that gave birth to other monsters, including the murderous sphinx of Thebes. By the time of Christ, [echidna](#) was universally associated with extreme wickedness and danger. Therefore when Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees a **brood of vipers**, He was declaring them to be both evil and deadly. **Broadus** adds **vipers** is "a phrase of reproach, describing them as noxious and odious, and perhaps also as insidious." **Echidna** is used once of a literal viper (Acts 28:3+). **Echidna** referred to small poisonous snakes that lived primarily in the desert regions of Palestine and other parts of the eastern Mediterranean. Because they looked like a dried twig when they were still, a person collecting wood for a fire would often pick one up inadvertently and be bitten, as was Paul on the island of Malta (Acts 28:3+). That particular viper was deadly, and when Paul suffered no harm from the bite, the superstitious islanders thought he was a god (Acts 28:3, 6+). Vipers therefore had the understandable reputation for being both **deadly** and **deceitful**.

"Vipers (e.g., the Nicander's viper) were commonly believed to eat their way out of their mother's womb; thus John's calling the crowd "viper's offspring" was even nastier than calling them "[vipers](#)." Serpents would flee a burning field." (Craig Keener) **ESV** note adds that **viper** was "A general term for any of a number of poisonous snakes in Israel, showing that the people had become the seed of the Serpent (Ge 3:15⁺)."

Hell (**Gehenna**) ([1067](#)) [geenna](#) from Hebrew **gay** = valley + **Hinnom**) is literally the **valley of Hinnom**, the ravine or valley south of Jerusalem where the refuse and filth, bodies of dead animals, and bodies of criminals were cast and burned. These fires were continually kept burning, all a fit symbol of the future home of all unrepentant, unregenerate wicked men and women. It was a foul, forbidding place where the fire, smoke, and stench never ceased. It is thus fitting that geenna is where sin and unrepentant sinners will one day find it's "resting place".

See on site [Study of Eternal Punishment](#)

Gilbrant - Originally geenna, or gehenna, was the name of a valley south of Jerusalem. Gê Hinnôm (Hebrew) equals Hinnom Valley (cf. Joshua 15:8; 18:16). Thus the Greek word has its origin in this Hebrew expression (cf. Aramaic gê Hinnâm). The valley itself was the site of child sacrifice during the time of King Ahab and Manasseh. There children were sacrificed to Molech. King Josiah declared the place unclean, and later it was referred to as the place of the dead. The form Gaienna is found in the Septuagint of Joshua 18:16, but it is not found in secular Greek writings. In the Old Testament the Valley of Hinnom was, to some extent, viewed as a symbol of Israel's apostasy from or rejection of God. As stated above, it was a site where offerings and sacrifices were made to Molech (2 Chr 33:6; Jer 32:35). As a result of this association with apostasy both the place and the word became associated with God's punishment and judgment (Jeremiah 7:32; 19:6). Later Judaism associated God's judgment of His people with the Valley of Hinnom. Several times the Old Testament explicitly associates the valley with God's judgment. Isaiah especially reflects such an understanding. In a picture of final things Isaiah envisioned salvation (a new heaven and a new earth, Isa 66:22,23ff.; cf. Revelation 21:1ff.) as well as judgment (the worm does not die and the fire will not be quenched, Isaiah 66:24; cf. Mark 9:48). In these cases gehenna is not a literal reference to a valley south of Jerusalem; instead it symbolizes the future judgment and punishment. (Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary)

Geenna is essentially synonymous with the **lake of fire**, a God's "cosmic garbage dump," mentioned in the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation 20:14-15-[see note](#). Into this place both **death** and [Hades](#) are cast. It is the place that was prepared for "the devil and his angels" (Mt 25:41), but which will also become the final abode of the unrighteous. Jesus Himself declared "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." (Mt 25:46, see context Mt 25:31-46).

Related Resources:

- [Gehenna - Holman Bible Dictionary](#)
- [What was Jesus' teaching on hell?](#)
- [Hell - Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#)
- [Hades \(Sheol\) - to be differentiated from Gehenna](#) (See also [Sheol](#))
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Gehenna](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Gehenna](#)
- The Jewish Encyclopedia [Gehenna](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Gehenna](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Gehenna Gehenna \(2\)](#)

QUESTION - [Why did John the Baptist refer to the Pharisees as a brood of vipers?](#) [GOTQUESTIONS.ORG](#)

ANSWER - [John the Baptist](#) condemned the Pharisees and Sadducees as a "brood of vipers" in Matthew 3:7. A "brood of vipers" is a "family of snakes." Because vipers are venomous, John was essentially calling the religious leaders "deadly sons of serpents." It's quite a bold denunciation—and one Jesus repeated to the Pharisees in Matthew 12:34.

The [Pharisees and Sadducees](#) were the religious leaders in Israel during the time of John the Baptist and Jesus. The Pharisees were the Law-keepers and promoters of tradition, and the Sadducees comprised the wealthier ruling class. Over the centuries, these well-meaning groups had become corrupt, legalistic, and hypocritical and would eventually be responsible for crucifying the Son of God. They earned their label "brood of vipers," a sobriquet with deeper meaning than is obvious at first glance.

The viper was seen to be an evil creature. Its venom was deadly, and it was also devious—the viper that bit Paul was hiding in the firewood (Acts 28:3). The Hebrew Scriptures, which the Pharisees knew well, associate the serpent with Satan in Genesis 3. For

John to call the Pharisees a “brood of vipers” implies that they bore satanic qualities. This idea is clearly stated by Jesus in John 8:44, where He says the unbelieving Jews “belong to [their] father, the devil.” When John and Jesus called the Pharisees a “brood of vipers,” they were pointing out that these men were deceitful, dangerous, and wicked—deceitful in that they were hypocrites (Matthew 23:15); dangerous in that they were blind leaders of the blind (Matthew 15:14); and wicked in that their hearts were full of murder (John 8:37).

Another fascinating detail is found in Jesus’ use of the epithet “brood of vipers” to describe the Pharisees. In Matthew 23:33, He says, “You brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?” Farmers, then as now, often burned the stubble of their fields to get the land ready for the next planting season. As the fires neared the vipers’ dens, the snakes would slither away from the flames, but they often did not escape being consumed. Snakes fleeing the fire was a common sight, and Jesus’ words to the Pharisees would likely have called it to their minds. How could they think they would escape the fire of God’s judgment by relying on their own works, which were not at all honest or good? John’s and Jesus’ calling them a brood of vipers was meant to make them aware of their own wickedness and call them to repent.

Matthew 23:34 “Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city,

KJV Matthew 23:34 Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city:

BGT Matthew 23:34 Δι το το δο γ ποστ λλω πρ ς μ ς προφ τας κα σοφο ς κα γραμματε ς· ξ α τ ν ποκτενε τε κα σταυρ σετε κα ξ α τ ν μασιγ σετε ν τα ς συναγωγα ς μ ν κα δι ξετε π π λεω ς ε ς π λι ν·

NET Matthew 23:34 "For this reason I am sending you prophets and wise men and experts in the law, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town,

CSB 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.

ESV Matthew 23:34 Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town,

NIV Matthew 23:34 Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town.

NLT Matthew 23:34 "Therefore, I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers of religious law. But you will kill some by crucifixion, and you will flog others with whips in your synagogues, chasing them from city to city.

YLT Matthew 23:34 'Because of this, lo, I send to you prophets, and wise men, and scribes, and of them ye will kill and crucify, and of them ye will scourge in your synagogues, and will pursue from city to city;

MIT Matthew 23:34 For this reason—scan the history—I am sending to you prophets, wise men, and scholars. Some of them you will murder, even crucify; some you will whip in your synagogues and chase out of town on to the next town.

NJB Matthew 23:34 This is why -- look -- I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some you will slaughter and crucify, some you will scourge in your synagogues and hunt from town to town;

NRS Matthew 23:34 Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town,

- **I am sending you:** Mt 10:16 28:19,20 Lu 11:49 24:47 Jn 20:21 Ac 1:8 1Co 12:3-11 Eph 4:8-12
- **prophets:** Ac 11:27 13:1 15:32 Rev 11:10
- **and wise:** Pr 11:30 1Co 2:6 3:10 Col 1:28
- **scribes:** Mt 13:52
- **you:** Mt 10:16,17 Jn 16:2 Ac 5:40 Acts 7:51,52,58,59 Acts 9:1,2 Acts 12:2 Acts 14:19 Ac 22:19,20 2Co 11:24,25 1Th 2:16 Heb 11:37

Related Passages:

Matthew 10:16-17+ "**Behold**, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. 17 "But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues;

Luke 11:49+ "For this reason also the wisdom of God said, '**I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute,**

John 16:2+ "They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God.

Acts 5:40+ They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them.

Acts 7:51-52, 58-59+ (STEPHEN STONED TO DEATH BY HOSTILE JEWS) "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. 52 "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; 7:58 When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"

Acts 9:1-2+ Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, 2 and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Acts 12:2+ And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.

Acts 14:19+ But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.

Acts 22:19-20+ "And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. 20 'And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.'

MESSENGERS REJECTED TRUTH RESISTED!

Therefore Because ye are resolved on imitating your forefathers' iniquities, you will also reject the messengers that are sent to you, and shall suffer righteous condemnation. ([Pulpit Commentary](#))

behold ([idou](#) - to grab their attention), **I am sending** ([apostello](#) - present tense - sending had already begun) **you prophets** ([prophetes](#)) **and wise men** ([sophos](#)) **and scribes** ([grammateus](#)) - Who is sending? Jesus says He is claiming divine authority for Himself. One is surprised these vipers did not jump on that revelation! **Scribes** ([grammateus](#)) of course is not in the Jewish sense, but men who would instruct in the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6+).

Some of them you will kill ([apokteino](#)) **and crucify** ([stauroo](#)), **and some of them you will scourge** ([mastigoo](#)) **in your synagogues** ([synagoge](#)), **and persecute** ([dioko](#)) **from city to city** - Jesus prophesies persecution and death for those He sends. This verse anticipates the persecution of the early church ([see passages above](#)), and lays the foundation for Jesus' coming judgment on Jerusalem (see Mt 23:36-38). Imagine what His disciples must have been thinking! The treatment described in this verse echoes God's pattern throughout history as He would send prophets, only to have them rejected, abused, or murdered (cf "again and again" in 2Ch 36:15). The rejection of the prophets (the "mouthpieces" of God) was tantamount to rejection of God! And don't miss the fact that God keeps sending prophets reflects His great mercy.

[Pulpit Commentary](#) - **Kill**; as Stephen (Acts 7:59), James (Acts 12:2). **Crucify**; as Peter (John 21:18, 19; 2 Peter 1:14); Simeon (Eusebius, 'Hist. Eccl.' 3:32); and probably Andrew. **Scourge** (see Acts 5:40; 22:19 26:11; 2 Corinthians 11:24, 25). **Persecuted** (see Acts 13:50; 14:5, 6, 19, 20; 26:11; and compare Christ's prediction, Matthew 10:17, 18).

John MacArthur notes that "All of the apostles experienced abuses for their faith, as did most other believers. "Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes," Paul recounted. "Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned" (2 Cor. 11:24-25). Before his conversion, Paul had himself been in the vanguard of those who persecuted Christians **from city to city** (Acts 8:1-4; 9:1-2), and after his conversion he was the recipient of such persecution. He was opposed in and frequently driven out of many cities, including Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:45, 50), Iconium (Acts 14:1-2), Lystra (Acts 14:19-20), Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-10), Berea (Acts 17:13-14),

Corinth (Acts 18:12-18), Jerusalem (Acts 21:27; 23:12), and Caesarea (Acts 24:1-9). Believers in the early church were continually hounded by the false spiritual leaders of Israel, who sought to stamp out the gospel of Christ. (See [Matthew Commentary](#))

NET NOTE - mastigoo - "of flogging as a punishment decreed by the synagogue (Dt 25:2f; s. the Mishna Tractate Sanhedrin-Makkoth, edited w. notes by SKrauss '33) w. acc. of pers. Mt 10:17; 23:34."

Matthew Henry Concise - Mt 23:34-39. Our Lord declares the miseries the inhabitants of Jerusalem were about to bring upon themselves, but he does not notice the sufferings he was to undergo. A hen gathering her chickens under her wings, is an apt emblem of the Saviour's tender love to those who trust in him, and his faithful care of them. He calls sinners to take refuge under his tender protection, keeps them safe, and nourishes them to eternal life. The present dispersion and unbelief of the Jews, and their future conversion to Christ, were here foretold. Jerusalem and her children had a large share of guilt, and their punishment has been signal. But ere long, deserved vengeance will fall on every church which is Christian in name only. In the mean time the Saviour stands ready to receive all who come to him. There is nothing between sinners and eternal happiness, but their proud and unbelieving unwillingness.

Behold (2400) **idou** is the second person singular aorist middle imperative of eidon which means to see, perceive, look at. In the NT **idou** is used as a demonstrative particle that draws attention to what follows. **Idou** in the **middle voice** means "you yourself look, see, perceive!" The **aorist imperative** is a command emphasizing "Do it now! Don't delay!" In 2Cor 5:17 Paul uses **idou**, to get his reader's attention as he introduces the truth that the one who in now **in Christ** is a qualitatively new person. (see also notes above on "behold")

Spurgeon reminds us that "**Behold** is a word of wonder; it is intended to excite admiration. Wherever you see it hung out in Scripture, it is like an ancient sign-board, signifying that there are rich wares within, or like the hands which solid readers have observed in the margin of the older Puritanic books, drawing attention to something particularly worthy of observation." I would add, **behold** is like a divine highlighter, a divine underlining of an especially striking or important text. It says in effect "Listen up, all ye who would be wise in the ways of Jehovah!"

Matthew 23:35 so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

KJV Matthew 23:35 That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

BGT Matthew 23:35 πως λθ φ μς π ν α μα δ καιον κχυνν μενον π τ ς γ ς π το α ματος βελ το δικα ου ως το α ματος Ζαχαρ ου υ ο Βαραχ ου, ν φονε σατε μεταξ το ναο κα το θυσιαστηρ ου.

NET Matthew 23:35 so that on you will come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

CSB 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.

ESV Matthew 23:35 so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.

NIV Matthew 23:35 And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

NLT Matthew 23:35 As a result, you will be held responsible for the murder of all godly people of all time--from the murder of righteous Abel to the murder of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you killed in the Temple between the sanctuary and the altar.

YLT Matthew 23:35 that on you may come all the righteous blood being poured out on the earth from the blood of Abel the righteous, unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the sanctuary and the altar:

MIT Matthew 23:35 Consequently, you are liable for all the blood of the righteous soaking the ground from the blood of that righteous man, Abel, to the blood of Zechariah, son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the sacrificial altar.

NJB Matthew 23:35 and so you will draw down on yourselves the blood of every upright person that has been shed on earth, from the blood of Abel the holy to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.

NRS Matthew 23:35 so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.

- **upon:** Ge 9:5,6 Nu 35:33 De 21:7,8 2Ki 21:16 24:4 Isa 26:21 Jer 2:30,34 26:15,23 La 4:13,14 Rev 18:24
- **of righteous:** Ge 4:8 Heb 11:4 12:24 1Jn 3:11,12
- **to:** 2Ch 24:20-22 Zec 1:1 Lu 11:51

Related Passages:

Genesis 4:8-11+ Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. 9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" 10 He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. 11 "Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

Luke 11:51+ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.'

Zechariah 1:1 In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to **Zechariah the prophet, the son of Berechiah**, the son of Iddo saying,

2 Chr 24:20-22+ Then the Spirit of God came on **Zechariah the son of Jehoiada** the priest; and he stood above the people and said to them, "Thus God has said, 'Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD and do not prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, He has also forsaken you.'" 21 So they conspired against him and at the command of the king they **stoned him to death in the court of the house of the LORD**. 22 Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness which his father Jehoiada had shown him, but he murdered his son. And as he died he said, "May the LORD see and avenge!"

VENGEANCE FOR ALL KILLED FROM A TO Z

So that (term of purpose/result) - The result of sending men who the Jews rejected and even killed.

Upon you may fall ([erchomai](#)) *the guilt of* **all the righteous** ([dikaioi](#)) **blood** ([haima](#)) **shed** ([ekcheo](#)) **on earth** ([ge](#)), **from the blood** ([haima](#)) **of righteous** ([dikaioi](#)) **Abel to the blood** ([haima](#)) **of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered** ([phroneuo](#)) **between the temple** ([naos](#) - sanctuary) **and the altar** ([thusiasterion](#)) - This is quite a verdict against the religious leaders of Jesus' day. He is saying that the generation of religious leaders in His day would bear the accumulated responsibility for the rejection and murder of God's righteous messengers throughout history! God is not being unfair -- they inherited guilt not by bloodline, but because they were walking in the same murderous footsteps as their fathers.

John MacArthur explains why they would be held culpable - The scribes and Pharisees had all the accumulated revelation of the Old Testament, and for three years they had even received the perfect revelation of God's own Son. And the more they accumulated God's revelation without believing and following it, the more they accumulated God's wrath and judgment in direct proportion. They and their generation could be held guilty for **all the righteous blood shed on earth**, because no generation in history has had or will ever have more of God's light. They had God incarnate in their midst, who was Himself all truth and all light, yet they would not have Him....It is significant that Jesus said, **whom you murdered**, speaking directly to the scribes and Pharisees but including all unbelieving Israel (v. 36). Although the murder of the prophet had been over 500 years earlier, the wicked leaders the Lord now addressed had participated in it. By their murdering Jesus, the incarnation of righteousness, they proved their complicity in and solidarity with the persecution and murder of every righteous person who has ever suffered at the hands of evil men. (See [The MacArthur Commentary](#))

Steven Cole - Jesus is saying that the blood of all the righteous men who were martyred in the Old Testament would be charged

against this current wicked generation, because they rejected God's revealed wisdom about their sin. This may point to the awful judgment on **Jerusalem in A.D. 70** or it **may also include the final judgment**. The point is, legalists don't apply God's holiness to their hearts; they just put on an outward show of honoring it. ([Luke 11:37-54: Why Jesus Hates Legalism](#))

From the blood ([haima](#)) of righteous ([dikaiois](#)) Abel - This of course refers to **Abel** (Genesis 4:8+) is the first righteous person in Scripture to be murdered, and he was murdered by his own brother Cain, because his offering pleased God. Abel's blood marked the beginning of the biblical witness to righteous suffering. Jesus words parallel those of the writer of Hebrews 11:4 which says "By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, **though he is dead, he still speaks**." And here he was "speaking" through the words of Jesus.

To the blood ([haima](#)) of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah Many commentators feel this murder may be the one described in Second Chronicles and since 2 Chronicles was the last book in the Hebrew Bible, that would make it the last murder in the Bible of Jesus' day but John MacArthur disagrees.

John MacArthur has a different interpretation of the identity of **Zechariah** - No speculation is needed because Jesus made clear which of the more than two dozen Zechariah's mentioned in the Old Testament He was referring to. In Matthew 23:35 He called him "**Zechariah, the son of Berechiah.**" This was the prophet Zechariah, the author of the book of Zechariah (Zech. 1:1) whose martyrdom, though not recorded in Scripture, took place near the close of the Old Testament. Evidently **Zechariah the son of Berechiah** was also killed between the altar and the house of God (cf. Joab, who was executed at the altar itself [1 Kings 2:28-34]). The collective guilt for the deaths of all those righteous martyrs would be charged against that wicked generation that had filled up God's wrath to the top. (See [Luke Commentary](#))

Zechariah was **murdered ([phroneuo](#)) between the temple ([naos](#) - sanctuary) and the altar ([thusiasterion](#))** - In other words he was slain in the Temple courtyard which included the Brazen Altar. So in a bit of irony we see that Abel was killed after a sacrifice and Zechariah was killed at the place of sacrifice!

Hendriksen - Between Abel and Zechariah ever so many other righteous men had been murdered in cold blood. And even while Jesus was saying this, Israel, by and large, had not repented. In fact, as is clear from Luke 11:53, 54, while Jesus was saying these things the hearts of the scribes and the Pharisees were filled with wrath, vengeance, murder, the murder of the very One who was addressing them! Looking again at this entire passage (Lk 11:49-51), one can hardly fail to be impressed by the marvelous manner in which the divine decree and human responsibility are intertwined here, each receiving its due. Cf. Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23. (Borrow [Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke](#))

Matthew 23:36 "Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

KJV Matthew 23:36 Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

BGT Matthew 23:36 μ ν λ γω μ ν, ξει τα τα π ντα π τ ν γενε ν τα την.

NET Matthew 23:36 I tell you the truth, this generation will be held responsible for all these things!

CSB Matthew 23:36 I assure you: All these things will come on this generation!

ESV Matthew 23:36 Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

NIV Matthew 23:36 I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation.

NLT Matthew 23:36 I tell you the truth, this judgment will fall on this very generation.

YLT Matthew 23:36 verily I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation.

MIT Matthew 23:36 I assure you that responsibility for all these actions will devolve to this generation.

NJB Matthew 23:36 In truth I tell you, it will all recoil on this generation.

NRS Matthew 23:36 Truly I tell you, all this will come upon this generation.

- Mt 24:34 Eze 12:21-28 Mk 13:30,31 Lu 21:32,33

THIS GENERATION'S RECKONING

Truly ([amen](#)) I say to you - This is in a sense Jesus' divine signature "Amen, I say to you..." signifying not speculation, but prophetic

finality. You can "[take it to the bank!](#)" Jesus gives a solemn, authoritative introduction Jesus uses to emphasize the certainty of what He's about to say.

Truly I say to you - 76 VERSES - ALL FROM JESUS - Matt. 5:18; Matt. 5:26; Matt. 6:2; Matt. 6:5; Matt. 6:16; Matt. 8:10; Matt. 10:15; Matt. 10:23; Matt. 10:42; Matt. 11:11; Matt. 13:17; Matt. 16:28; Matt. 17:20; Matt. 18:3; Matt. 18:13; Matt. 18:18; Matt. 19:23; Matt. 19:28; Matt. 21:21; Matt. 21:31; Matt. 23:36; Matt. 24:2; Matt. 24:34; Matt. 24:47; Matt. 25:12; Matt. 25:40; Matt. 25:45; Matt. 26:13; Matt. 26:21; Matt. 26:34; Mk. 3:28; Mk. 8:12; Mk. 9:1; Mk. 9:41; Mk. 10:15; Mk. 10:29; Mk. 11:23; Mk. 12:43; Mk. 13:30; Mk. 14:9; Mk. 14:18; Mk. 14:25; Mk. 14:30; Lk. 4:24; Lk. 12:37; Lk. 12:44; Lk. 18:17; Lk. 18:29; Lk. 21:3; Lk. 21:32; Lk. 23:43; Jn. 1:51; Jn. 3:3; Jn. 3:5; Jn. 3:11; Jn. 5:19; Jn. 5:24; Jn. 5:25; Jn. 6:26; Jn. 6:32; Jn. 6:47; Jn. 6:53; Jn. 8:34; Jn. 8:51; Jn. 8:58; Jn. 10:1; Jn. 10:7; Jn. 12:24; Jn. 13:16; Jn. 13:20; Jn. 13:21; Jn. 13:38; Jn. 14:12; Jn. 16:20; Jn. 16:23; Jn. 21:18

All these things will come upon this generation ([genea](#)) - This should prompt a question "all what things?" He is speaking of judgment and notice the immediate context when He laments for Jerusalem. Within one generation the Temple will be destroyed, Jerusalem sacked and 100's of thousands of Jews (see Josephus below) would perish at the hands of the Romans led by General Titus in 70 AD.

*Jesus had just pronounced a finality
to His dealing with Israel.*

Stu Weber: Jesus finished the seventh and most sobering woe with his pronouncement of judgment. I tell you the truth assured the listeners of the validity of his prediction. All this included the persecutions and the judgment for them. **This generation** (cf. Matt. 11:16; 13:39,45; 16:4) should be taken quite literally in this case, since judgment on Israel did come in the form of the A.D. 70 devastation. Israel had broken covenant with Yahweh as completely in the first century as in any previous century, by murdering the greatest prophet, the Messiah, God's Son. As in centuries before, punishment would certainly come. This generation of false religionists living in the time of Christ would inherit all the guilt of their forefathers (cf. Jer. 16:10-13). Jesus had just pronounced a finality to His dealing with Israel. He had determined that judgment for all the unfaithfulness of the nation through the centuries (Abel to Zechariah) would fall upon "**this generation.**" He was about to announce that your house is left to you desolate—a statement that shocked the disciples. Jesus would deal with their questions and this impending future judgment in Matthew 24-25. (See [Holman New Testament Commentary - Matthew](#))

Josephus wrote that "The number of those that perished during the siege was 1,100,000, the greater part of whom were indeed of the same nation [Jews], but not belonging to the city itself." (The Jewish War 6.9.3) Many of the dead were pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover and became trapped inside the city when the Roman siege began. In addition to the 1.1 million killed, Josephus states that: 97,000 were taken captive. Thousands were sold into slavery, forced into gladiatorial combat, or dispersed. Some think that Josephus' figures are likely exaggerated, and modern estimates typically range from 300,000 to 600,000 deaths, but still reflect the catastrophic scale of the devastation.

If you would like more discussion of the things that have come upon the Jews since Jesus' day, John MacArthur has an interesting sermon that goes into considerable detail - [Matthew 23:37-39 Jesus' Last Words to Israel](#)

Matthew 23:37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.

KJV Matthew 23:37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

BGT Matthew 23:37 ερουσαλ μ ερουσαλ μ, ποκτη νουσα το ς προφ τα ς κα λιθοβολο σα το ς πεσταλμ νου ς πρ ς α τ ν, πο σ κ ι ς θ λ η σα πι σ υ ν α γ α γ ε ν τ τ κ ν α σου, ν τ ρ π ο ν ρ ν ι ς πι σ υ ν γ ει τ νο σ σ α α τ ς π τ ς π τ ρ υ γ α ς, κα ο κ θελ σα τε.

NET Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would have none of it!

CSB 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!

ESV Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

NIV Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

NLT Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God's messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn't let me.

YLT Matthew 23:37 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that art killing the prophets, and stoning those sent unto thee, how often did I will to gather thy children together, as a hen doth gather her own chickens under the wings, and ye did not will.

MIT Matthew 23:37 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, assassinator of the prophets and pelter of those sent there! How often I wanted to gather your children as a hen does her chicks under her wings, but you did not want that.

NJB Matthew 23:37 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you refused!

NRS Matthew 23:37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

- **Jerusalem:** Jer 4:14 6:8 Lu 13:34 Rev 11:8
- **who:** Mt 23:30 5:12 21:35,36 22:6 2Ch 24:21,22 Ne 9:26 Jer 2:30 26:23 Mk 12:3-6 Lu 20:11-14 Ac 7:51,52 1Th 2:15 Rev 11:7 17:6
- **how:** 2Ch 36:15,16 Ps 81:8-11 Jer 6:16,17 11:7,8 25:3-7 35:15 Jer 42:9-13 44:4 Zec 1:4
- **even:** De 32:11,12 Ru 2:12 Ps 17:8 36:7 57:1 63:7 91:4
- **and you:** Mt 22:3 Pr 1:24-31 Isa 50:2 Ho 11:2,7 Lu 14:17-20 15:28 19:14-44

Related Passage:

Luke 13:34-35+ "**O Jerusalem, Jerusalem**, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it! 35 "**Behold**, your house is left to you desolate; and I say to you, you will not see Me until the time comes when you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"

UNDER HIS WINGS... IF ONLY...

Jerusalem, Jerusalem (means "City of Peace") - Note that the double naming is deeply emotional — a pattern used in Scripture when expressing deep grief (cf David over Absalom's death 2Sa 18:33+), affection, or urgency. (cf "Martha, Martha" = Lk 10:41+, "Saul, Saul" = Acts 9:4+, "Simon, Simon" = Lk 22:31+). Jerusalem is personified as a "murderer"! And just because Christ's emotions are grieved by what could have been, His emotions will not prevent His declaration of future judgment for His beloved city.

Who kills ([apokteino](#) - present tense = a process still continuing) **the prophets** ([prophetes](#)) **and stones** ([lithoboleo](#) - present tense = a process still continuing) **those who are sent to** ([apostello](#)) **her!** - Jesus is apparently still addressing the same crowd including disciples and religious leaders as in the Seven Woe section, but now His tone softens to one of sorrow and compassion. Clearly Jesus' heart is that even now, at the "midnight hour" of His earthly life, some of the audience might still repent and believe in Him. This is an apt illustration of Jesus' command in Mt 5:44+ to "love your enemies." But even with the softening of tone, Jesus has clearly [drawn a line in the sand](#) for accepting Him as Messiah, while rejection means inevitable judgment (cf. Mt 10:32–33, 40+; Mt 12:41+).

William MacDonald - It is highly significant that the chapter which, more than almost any other, contains the woes of the Lord Jesus,

closes with His tears! After His bitter denunciation of the Pharisees, He utters a poignant lament over the city of lost opportunity. The repetition of the name—"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem"—is charged with unutterable emotion. (Borrow [Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

Craig Blomberg feels that "**Jerusalem**" is a metonymy (the use of one name or object to refer to a closely related item) for the corrupt leadership of the people. Jesus' words betray great tenderness and employ maternal imagery. . . Here Jesus wishes he could gather all the recalcitrant "children" of Israel, to love, protect, and nurture them like a mother hen does with her baby chickens. Similar imagery recurs frequently in Jewish literature (e.g., Deut 32:4; Ps 36:7; Ruth 2:12; Isa 31:5)" (See [Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition](#))

How often I wanted ([thelo](#)) to gather your children ([teknon](#)) together ([episunago](#)), the way a hen gathers ([episunago](#)) her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling ([ouk](#) - absolute negation + [thelo](#)) - As John 1:11+ said "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him." Note Jesus wanted to **gather**, not to condemn and disperse, but justice dictates He must condemn all who reject Him. God's arms are open. The tragedy isn't His unwillingness to save — it's our unwillingness to come. The Jews for the most part failed to act like frail, innocent, dependent chicks and instead of coming to Jesus for protection from the wrath to come, they ran from Him and rejected Him. This is truly such a sad, tragic picture to ponder. Notice the sad irony of the two uses of the verb [thelo](#) - "**I wanted ([thelo](#))...you were unwilling ([ouk](#) + [thelo](#))!**"

[Pulpit Commentary](#) on **gathers her chicks under her wings** - A tender similitude, which is found in the Old Testament and in classic authors. It implies love, care, and protection. Thus the psalmist prays, "Hide me under the shadow of thy wings;" "In the shadow of thy wings will I take refuge, until these calamities be overpast" (Psalm 17:8; 57:1); comp. Deuteronomy 32:11; Isaiah 31:5, etc.

Although it is a bit technical, there is an interesting change in the verbs from the singular (**Jerusalem...kills...stones...**) to the plural in the verb **unwilling**. You say so what? **Kills** and **stones** refer to the city (singular), but now switching to the plural, Jesus brings the rejection down to a personal level describing the people's rejection (not just the rejection by an abstract "Jerusalem"). Does that make sense?

*God's arms are ever open, so the tragedy is not His unwillingness to save
but the unwillingness of men to humble themselves and come to Him.*

A C Gaebelien: What a loving, sublime lamentation this is! The King is a King of Love and His heart yearns over His city Jerusalem. How He did long for them! The illustration He uses is one they fully understood, not alone by its simplicity, a hen gathering her chickens, but also because their elders had mentioned this very fact. The Rabbis spoke of Messiah under the name of the Shekinah and declared that Israel would be gathered under the wings of the Shekinah, where they would find rest and blessing. And now the Shekinah was with them. The promised One has come and they would not have Him. They turned away from Jehovah, their King. Their house -- no longer "the Father's house" -- is to be left desolate. They would see Him in no wise henceforth. That this has a national significance, the rejection of them is evident. And no sooner were the words spoken than He left the temple and went away. ([Matthew 23 Commentary](#))

Grant Osborne: The lament flows right out of the preceding context. Jesus had to indict first the leaders for their hypocrisy and sin, and then in the previous verse had to extend that judgment to the whole nation. This caused Jesus deep sorrow, and he wants them to know the deep love of both God and himself for them. By using the metaphor of a hen and her chicks, Jesus reveals his tender concern to see the people of Jerusalem get right with God. At the same time, they have already rejected his offer, and so their future is "desolate." (Mt 23:38) Yet one thing is certain: he will return as the royal Messiah. (Mt 23:39) (See [Matthew - Page 860](#))

[Pulpit Commentary](#) on **unwilling** - Unmoved by warning and chastisement, impenetrable to long suffering love, ungrateful for mercies, the Jews repulsed all efforts for their amendment, and blindly pursued the course of ruin. It was always in their power to turn if they willed (**ED**: YES BUT ONLY AS ENABLED BY THE SPIRIT), but they wilfully resisted grace, and must suffer accordingly (comp. Isaiah 30:15).

NET NOTE - The double use of the city's name betrays intense emotion. Although the opening address ("Jerusalem, Jerusalem") is direct (second person), the remainder of this sentence in the Greek text is third person ("who kills the prophets and stones those sent to her"). The following sentences then revert to second person ("your ... you"), so to keep all this consistent in English, the third person pronouns in the present verse were translated as second person ("you who kill ... sent to you"). **How often I have longed to gather your children.** Jesus, like a lamenting prophet, speaks for God here, who longed to care tenderly for Israel and protect her.

QUESTION - [Why did Jesus say He wanted to gather Jerusalem's children as a hen gathers her chicks \(Matthew 23:37\)?](#)
[GOTQUESTIONS.ORG](#)

ANSWER - As Jesus came into Jerusalem during the [Passion Week](#), He mourned over Israel's history of rejecting God's prophets

and His people's refusal to believe and repent. In [Matthew 23](#), Jesus pronounces judgment on the Jewish religious leaders and their dead religion (Matthew 23:1–39). He grieves over the misguided and spiritually lost children of Jerusalem, saying, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God’s messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn’t let me” (Matthew 23:37, NLT).

Despite Israel’s waywardness and the disobedience of its leaders, the relentlessly loving heart of Jesus aches to gather Jerusalem’s children as a hen gathers her chicks. The poignant imagery evokes a mother hen desiring to enfold her vulnerable hatchlings into the protective shelter of her wings to nurture, guide, and defend.

For the past three years, Jesus had been pleading with the people of Jerusalem to repent and be saved. Rather than heed the voice of their Messiah, the city is on the brink of crucifying its long-awaited Savior. The Lord knows that history is about to repeat itself—the people of God had a track record of killing God’s prophets. Jesus wants to protect and shield His people, but they won’t let Him.

God’s [love](#) and compassion—as revealed in His Son, Jesus—are permanent and unchanging because they are part of His nature. “If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny who he is” (2 Timothy 2:13, NLT; see also 1 John 4:8, 16). No matter how deeply we wade into sin and disobedience, the Lord will always want us back. He is perfectly loyal and consistent: “The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning” (Lamentations 3:22–23, NLT; see also Romans 3:3–4).

Jesus’ desire to gather Jerusalem’s children as a hen gathers her chicks resonates in God’s message through the prophet Isaiah: “The Lord of Heaven’s Armies will hover over Jerusalem and protect it like a bird protecting its nest. He will defend and save the city; he will pass over it and rescue it” (Isaiah 31:5, NLT). It echoes in this ancient Song of Moses: “Like an eagle that rouses her chicks and hovers over her young, so he spread his wings to take them up and carried them safely on his pinions” (Deuteronomy 32:11, NLT). And it ripples throughout the psalms: “He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings. His faithful promises are your armor and protection” (Psalm 91:4, NLT; see also Psalm 17:8; 36:7).

God loves all people but is especially committed to loyal relationships with His own children (Jeremiah 31:3; Psalm 103:17; Isaiah 54:10; Hosea 11:1–4). God’s love for His own is unparalleled. He is more ferociously protective than a mama bear with her cubs and more sacrificial than a nursing mom with her newborn baby: “Jerusalem says, ‘The Lord has deserted us; the Lord has forgotten us.’ Never! Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for the child she has borne? But even if that were possible, I would not forget you! See, I have written your name on the palms of my hands. Always in my mind is a picture of Jerusalem’s walls in ruins” (Isaiah 49:14–16, NLT).

The apostle Paul prays for believers to “have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully” (Ephesians 3:18–19). God’s love is perfect and eternal; He never stops reaching out to us with His love, and nothing we do can separate us from it (Romans 8:38). As unfathomable as it may seem, our loving Father always longs to gather us to Himself as a hen gathers her chicks safely under her wings.

Matthew 23:38 “Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!”

KJV Matthew 23:38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

BGT Matthew 23:38 δο φ εται μ ν ο κος μ ν ρημος.

NET Matthew 23:38 Look, your house is left to you desolate!

CSB Matthew 23:38 See, your house is left to you desolate.

ESV Matthew 23:38 See, your house is left to you desolate.

NIV Matthew 23:38 Look, your house is left to you desolate.

NLT Matthew 23:38 And now, look, your house is abandoned and desolate.

YLT Matthew 23:38 Lo, left desolate to you is your house;

MIT Matthew 23:38 Pay attention! Your house is abandoned to you as an empty shell.

NJB Matthew 23:38 Look! Your house will be deserted,

NRS Matthew 23:38 See, your house is left to you, desolate.

- Mt 24:2 2Ch 7:20,21 Ps 69:24 Isa 64:10-12 Jer 7:9-14 Da 9:26 Zec 11:1,2,6 14:1,2 Mk 13:14 Lu 13:35 19:43,44 21:6,20,24 Ac 6:13,14

THEIR HOUSE LEFT EMPTY GOING FROM GLORY TO DESOLATION

Behold ([idou](#)) - Jesus uses this interjection to gain their full attention. "Listen up!" is the idea. "Don't miss what I am about to tell you."

Your house ([oikos](#)) - **The question is to what does your house refer?** The answer ranges from the Temple, the city of Jerusalem or even Israel as a whole. Writers like Carson and Hagner see a reference to all three entities. If He is addressing the Temple, it is interesting He calls it "your house," implying it is no longer the habitation of God. He is God. He is in the Temple complex as He speaks. But He would soon depart from the Temple and be crucified.

Is being left ([aphiemi](#) - abandoned) **to you desolate** ([eremos](#)) - Jesus is giving a prophecy that God's presence is departing much like the Shekinah glory departed the temple in Ezekiel 10+. **Desolate** is a vivid word that means **abandoned, uninhabited, barren, or laid waste**.

Henry Morris writes "This prophecy was fulfilled in grim detail when the Romans destroyed the temple in A.D. 70 and Jerusalem in A.D. 135, sending the Jewish survivors into worldwide exile for almost two thousand years.

John MacArthur rightly points out that "In the end times (**ED**: The last 7 years of this present evil age, [Daniel's Seventieth Week](#)) the persecution of Jews will escalate into a holocaust like no other they have experienced. That suffering will occur in a period called the time of Jacob's distress (Jer. 30:7+) and the Great Tribulation, a time "such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now nor ever shall" (Matt. 24:21+). (See [The MacArthur Commentary](#))

Desolate (secluded, desert) ([2048](#)) [eremos](#) means lonesome, solitary, wilderness = uninhabited, lonely, uncultivated region translated "wilderness" 32x in the KJV.

BDAG - pert. to being in a state of isolation, isolated, desolate, deserted. of an area isolated, unfrequented, abandoned, empty, desolate; an uninhabited region or locality, desert, grassland, wilderness

Friberg - (1) of an empty or uninhabited place abandoned, lonely, desolate (Lk 4.42); (2) of persons abandoned, forsaken, desolate (Gal 4.27); (3) an uncultivated or uninhabited place desert, wilderness (Lk 15.4)

MacArthur adds that "**the wilderness** of Judea, where Jesus was most likely **tempted**, was the most barren, desolate region in all of Israel. Scarred by precipitous cliffs, deep ravines, and tumbled boulders, it was a region so barren that animals could not be pastured in it. In this remote, largely uninhabited area, Jesus might be more alone than anywhere else in Israel." (Ibid)

EREMOS - 48V - Matt. 3:1; Matt. 3:3; Matt. 4:1; Matt. 11:7; Matt. 14:13; Matt. 14:15; Matt. 23:38; Matt. 24:26; Mk. 1:3; Mk. 1:4; Mk. 1:12; Mk. 1:13; Mk. 1:35; Mk. 1:45; Mk. 6:31; Mk. 6:32; Mk. 6:35; Lk. 1:80; Lk. 3:2; Lk. 3:4; Lk. 4:1; Lk. 4:42; Lk. 5:16; Lk. 7:24; Lk. 8:29; Lk. 9:12; Lk. 15:4; Jn. 1:23; Jn. 3:14; Jn. 6:31; Jn. 6:49; Jn. 11:54; Acts 1:20; Acts 7:30; Acts 7:36; Acts 7:38; Acts 7:42; Acts 7:44; Acts 8:26; Acts 13:18; Acts 21:38; 1 Co. 10:5; Gal. 4:27; Heb. 3:8; Heb. 3:17; Rev. 12:6; Rev. 12:14; Rev. 17:3

QUESTION - [What does it mean that "your house is left to you desolate" \(Matthew 23:38\)? GOTQUESTIONS.ORG](#)

ANSWER - At the end of Matthew 23, as Jesus excoriates the scribes and Pharisees for their behavior, He says, "Look, your house is left to you desolate" (verse 38). Jesus spoke this prophecy regarding the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.

There is a twofold meaning of the temple being left desolate or abandoned. First, Jesus—who is God in human form—was departing from the temple for the last time, leaving it deserted of the divine Presence. God was forsaking their beautiful house of worship, leaving it spiritually empty and ripe for destruction. In Matthew 23:39, Jesus promises the Jews that they will see Him no more "until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" At that time, Israel will be saved, and the Jews will be converted to faith in their true Messiah (see Romans 11:25–27).

The second meaning of "your house is left to you desolate" refers to the physical destruction of the temple, which would be desolated in just forty years when the Romans invaded Jerusalem in AD 70. Shortly after Jesus' pronouncement that "your house is left to you desolate," His disciples pointed to the buildings of the temple, noting how wonderful the architecture and adornments

were. They must have been shocked to hear Jesus describe the future state of the temple: “These things which you see—the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down” (Luke 21:6). Such was the sad desolation in store for Jerusalem, the temple, and the people who rejected their Messiah.

About a week prior to Jesus’ statement that “your house is left to you desolate,” He had [cleansed the temple](#). At that time, Jesus had said, “It is written, ‘My house is a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves’” (Luke 19:46). The difference between *My house* and *your house* is striking. The temple belonged to God, but evil men had profaned it, requiring Jesus’ cleansing. Then, as Jesus exited for the last time, He called it “your house”—that is, it was no longer God’s, but theirs. They had wrested control of God’s house and objected to the Lord’s right to oversee it. In return, God forsook it, leaving it open to devastation.

Jesus got no satisfaction out of this sad prediction regarding the great temple. In fact, He lamented its destruction and especially the fate of the people: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing” (Matthew 23:37). Luke describes how Jesus wept over the terrible fate that awaited the city and its inhabitants (Luke 19:41).

Historical records, including those of [Josephus](#), describe in detail the Roman invasion, affirming that Jesus’ prophecy, “your house is left to you desolate,” came true.

Matthew 23:39 “For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!’”

KJV Matthew 23:39 For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

BGT Matthew 23:39 λ γω γ ρ μ ν, ο μ με δ ητ ε π ρτ ι ως ν ε π ητ ε· ε λο γ η μ νος ρ χ με νος ν ν μα τι κυ ρ ου.

NET Matthew 23:39 For I tell you, you will not see me from now until you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

CSB Matthew 23:39 For I tell you, you will never see Me again until you say, 'He who comes in the name of the Lord is the blessed One!'"

ESV Matthew 23:39 For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

NIV Matthew 23:39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' "

NLT Matthew 23:39 For I tell you this, you will never see me again until you say, 'Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!' "

YLT Matthew 23:39 for I say to you, ye may not see me henceforth, till ye may say, Blessed is he who is coming in the name of the Lord.'

MIT Matthew 23:39 For I declare to you: You will never again see me until the time you say: Blessed is he who comes in Yahveh's name.

NJB Matthew 23:39 for, I promise, you shall not see me any more until you are saying: Blessed is he who is coming in the name of the Lord!'

NRS Matthew 23:39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

- **you will not see Me** Ho 3:4 Lu 2:26-30 10:22,23 17:22 Jn 8:21,24,56 14:9,19
- **Blessed:** Mt 21:9 Ps 118:26 Isa 40:9-11 Zec 12:10 Ro 11:25-26 2Co 3:14-18

Related Passages:

Matthew 21:9+ (**JUST A FEW DAYS EARLIER AT HIS "TRIUMPHAL ENTRY" THE CROWDS QUOTED Ps 118:26**) The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David; **BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD**; Hosanna in the highest!”

Psalms 118:26 Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD; We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.

Romans 11:25-26+ For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and **so all Israel will be saved**; (COMPARE THIS WITH Zechariah 13:8-9 [BELOW](#)) just as it is written, “THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.”

2 Corinthians 3:14-18+ But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. 15 But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; 16 but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

THEY WILL SEE THE KING RETURN BUT NOT "UNTIL"...

For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me- He is speaking to the crowd that day and to the generations of Jews that would follow over the next 2000 years. He will no longer appear to the religious leaders or the nation publicly until a future time. These would be Jesus' final words to Israel as He will turn and walk out of the Temple for the last time, in effect ending His public ministry to the nation. We should point out that following the Resurrection, Jesus did make appearances but they were only to chosen witnesses who were believers (Acts 10:40-41+, 1Co 15:5-8+).

Until ([heos](#)) - Notice Jesus does not say **"NEVER"** but **"UNTIL!"** This word is an [expression of time](#) and means something will continue to happen up to a point and then it will not happen. In other words, Israel will continue NOT to say "blessed..." up to a time in the future, when they will declare "blessed..." And that is when they see Him and acknowledge Him as their Messiah. This is clearly a reference to the Second Coming of Christ. The upshot is that God is **NOT** finished with the nation of Israel as is sadly taught in [replacement theology](#) even in evangelical circles where it is said that the church is the true Israel!

Here is an example of the genre of comment you will find in resources written by those who favor [replacement theology](#) - The **Reformation Study Bible** has some excellent notes but sadly has a generous sprinkling of "replacement" type comments such as their comment on **until** in Mt 23:39 - "Some interpret this verse as a promise of an end-time conversion of the Jews (Rom. 11:25-32 and note), though the context seems to point more to the judgment of national Israel and the extension of **the promises to spiritual Israel**, made up of Gentiles as well as Jews (v. 38; cf. 21:43)." (see [Matt 23:39](#)) Bolding added. Think about their comment for a moment. What is the context (always keep context king to avoid inaccurate interpretation)? What specific city has Jesus just mentioned twice? Obviously Jerusalem. To whom is Jesus addressing this prophetic promise, to the church or to the people of Israel? Clearly to the Jews, who have also just been warned their house would be left desolate. He did not say the church would be left desolate! Where is He giving this promise? In the Jewish Temple! Do you see how [replacement theology](#) causes one to misinterpret the identity of the nation of Israel? And keep in mind, the objective fact that the name **"Israel"** is used 77x in 75v in the NT and every instance refers to the literal nation of Israel. [Replacement theologians](#) would argue there is one exception in Galatians 6:16 but that can be refuted - See discussion of [The Israel of God](#). This genre of [replacement theology](#) permeates commentaries on Isaiah where "Israel" is repeatedly replaced by the church under the guise of "spiritual Israel." Could I be wrong? Absolutely. Therefore I advise the one who wants to accurately divide the Word of Truth (2Ti 2:15+) to examine the truth for themselves without any bias (from me or anyone else). This calls for an Acts 17:11+ approach - "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."

John MacArthur has a discussion on the time phrase **UNTIL** - Were it not for Jesus' qualifying word **until**, that would have been their final moment in history and the theology of the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments, would be radically altered. In addition to that, men would have had good reason never to trust God's word again, because He repeatedly promised that His chosen people would ultimately be saved, restored, and blessed (see, e.g., Jer. 23:5-6; Isa. 66:10-22; Zech. 14:1-11). Jesus did not say "unless," making Israel's restoration only a possibility but **until**, making it a certainty. Even in the context of His most severe curses upon unbelieving Israel and her false leaders, that word offered hope. One day Israel will finally say in faith, **"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,"** and in that day she will be forever redeemed, restored, and blessed. (See [The MacArthur Commentary](#))

You say BLESSED ([eulogeo](#)) IS HE WHO COMES ([erchomai](#)) IN THE NAME OF THE LORD ([kurios](#)) - It is fascinating that the same words were cried out by the crowd who thought He was the Son of David, their long awaited Messiah. Unfortunately, He was not the kind of Messiah they were hoping for, One Who would defeat Rome and set up His Kingdom. They failed to understand that first the Messiah must suffer the cross before He gained the crown. This was shouted by the crowds during the Triumphal Entry (Matthew 21:9), but in ignorance or shallow enthusiasm. In the future, it will be said in truth, with faith and understanding by the believing [Remnant of Israel](#).

Stu Weber - Jesus turned and walked away from the temple, but his shocking words rang in the ears of the disciples. They were moved to ask, "When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming?" (Mt 24:3+). Jesus answered their questions in the fifth and final discourse (Matt. 24-25), the Olivet Discourse, from the Mount of Olives just outside Jerusalem. This great discourse prophesied the coming kingdom and the time of reward for Christ's followers.

[Pulpit Commentary](#) makes a good point - Thus this terrible chapter, so dark and menacing, closes with a glow of hope and a promise, indefinite (ED: REGARDING THE EXACT TIMING OF THE SECOND COMING) but certain, of final restoration.

In quoting this passage Himself, Jesus now clearly identifying Himself with God, Israel's Savior, the Coming One Who would return. When He returns Zechariah prophesied

Zechariah 12:10+ "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.

COMMENT - In Jewish reckoning there is no mourning as bitter as that for an only son.

Zechariah 13:1-2+ "In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity. 2 "It will come about in that day," declares the LORD of hosts, "that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will no longer be remembered; and I will also remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land.

Zechariah 13:8-9+ "It will come about in all the land," Declares the LORD, "That two parts in it will be cut off and perish; But the third will be left in it. 9 "And I will bring the third part through the fire, Refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' And they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'"

Zechariah 14:3, 8-9+ Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle.....8 And in that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter. 9 And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one.

David Thompson comments - Zechariah predicts the day they will see Him will be a time of great mourning, and that is so true. They will be in the Tribulation and the antichrist will be trying to exterminate every Jew and were it not for the grace of God, he would succeed. But in the darkest hour of Israel's night, Jesus will come and she will say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." Now it is important to see that not every Jew will be thrilled when Christ returns, but a remnant will. The Pharisees and scribes won't cry blessed is He who come; they will be burning in hell (Matt. 23:33).