

## Episode #9-09 Matthew 23 Part 4-Final Condemnation of the Scribes and Pharisees

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. The Lord was having a final, conclusive confrontation with the corrupt, religious leaders of Israel in Jerusalem. He is in the process of pronouncing eight woes against the terrible hypocrisy of the liars and deceivers, the scribes and Pharisees. These woes contrast with the eight beatitudes of Matthew 5. He is in the midst of the seventh woe, condemning them as being like whitewashed tombs.

III. The Woes on the Scribes and Pharisees. Matthew 23:13-32.

- A. Verse 27. (Bullinger in *The Companion Bible* says that sepulchers were whitened a month before the Passover, to warn off persons from contracting uncleanness.) “Appear” is the Greek *phaino*, meaning to “shine forth as.”
- B. Verse 28. Again the idea of “appear” is of shining forth or manifesting.
  1. “Men” is *anthropos*, meaning people, not just men.
  2. Contrast this with the seventh beatitude: Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God (Matthew 5:9). To make peace is to lead others into a true unity with another. Those who lead men into a real unity with God are therefore peacemakers. Yet these hypocritical scribes and Pharisees were unclean within, and so they could only lead others into uncleanness and out of harmonious relationship with God!
- C. Verse 29. “Build” is *oikodomeo*, meaning to build as a home. In this case, they were erecting monuments over their tombs. The monuments they adorned were those already existing. If they did not exist, they built them for them.
- D. Verse 30. “Partakers” is the Greek *koinonoi*, meaning we would not have been in fellowship with our fathers. The problem was, by saying this, they were confirming that they were the descendants of their fathers. They were standing in the same place, as those who would persecute the righteous.
- E. Verse 31. “Witnesses” is *martureo*, they testified to this important fact against themselves. “Sons” is the Greek *huioi*, meaning they represented them and were in their same character. It was one thing to decorate and honor the righteous when they were dead and could not do anything. Yet when a righteous man was still alive, they wanted nothing to do with him and his God-given message, and in fact were just as likely to persecute him and shed his blood as their fathers had been.
- F. Verse 32. “Fill up” is *pleroo*, to fill full or complete. This is sarcasm.
  1. The measure of their fathers is that they were murderers and rejectors of the agents of God.
  2. Compare this with the eighth beatitude: blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:10). Yet these wicked religious leaders were the persecutors and builders of tombs for the righteous, and so were cursed and not blessed.

IV. Final Condemnation of the Scribes and Pharisees. Matthew 23:33-36.

- A. Verse 33. Having finished his eight woes, the Lord now sums up and completes His three-chapter-long confrontation with the wicked religious leaders by this scathing condemnation of these religious hypocrites.

1. Satan himself is called “that old serpent” in Revelation 12:9. These were like Satan in that they shared his character.
  2. This is the third time they were called “vipers” in Matthew. The first time was by John in Matthew 3:7. Second by the Lord in Matthew 12:34. Then here.
  3. “The condemnation of hell” is the judgment of Gehenna. This was a condemnation of the most egregious of criminals, that they were thrown into this trash dump and either were eaten by worms or burned by the fires that were often kindled there to consume the trash. For an executed criminal to be thrown there was a sign of the deepest contempt for him and what he had done. These men would never have thought of themselves that way. They, for all their wickedness, never realized that this was the type of people they were, until the Lord came and accused them of it.
- B. Verse 34. “Send” is the Greek word *apostello*, meaning He sends them with His authority or He commissions them. This commissioning of apostles would take place in the Acts period. Of course, the scribes would be the Lord’s own, and not the wicked scribes of the Pharisees whom He was condemning. The Lord had scribes, and they are the ones who penned Scripture, like Timothy who often wrote books down at Paul’s dictation. We have no record in Scripture of any of the apostles being crucified, but some suggest that the prophecies of Peter’s death indicate crucifixion, and tradition says he was crucified, though it was done upside-down. The only actual example we have of persecution from city to city from the Acts period is when the persecutors from Thessalonica followed Paul to Berea, Acts 17:13. Yet we do not doubt that this happened other times as well, and to some of the other apostles than Paul.
- C. Verse 35. “On the earth” could also be on the land. They could hardly be accused of the blood of the righteous of other lands with which they had nothing to do. Yet again, was Abel killed on Israelite soil?
1. After the eight beatitudes, He then spoke to His disciples and said, “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.” Now, He speaks to these wicked men and says in essence, “Cursed are you,” and accuses them of being the persecutors!
  2. Abel was the righteous younger son of Adam. See Genesis 4:4, and his inclusion in the hall of fame of faith in Hebrews 11:4.
  3. Zacharias in Hebrew would be Zachariah, but Greeks cannot end a word with an “h.” This name means “Remembered of Jehovah.” The Hebrew Barachiah means “Jehovah Blesses” or speaks well of. Who is this?

V. Conclusion: The scribes and Pharisees were like whitewashed tombs, that looked good on the outside, but inside were full of bones and uncleanness. They built tombs for the prophets and decorated those already existing, yet proved themselves true sons of their fathers who had killed these prophets. They were a brood of vipers, and it is hard to imagine they would find a way to escape the condemnation of Gehenna. He sides them prophets and wise men and scribes, but they will only persecute and kill them. The blood of all the righteous from Abel to Zechariah will come on these wicked men for this. Let us take great care not to be like them!