

Matthew 27:6-10

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Matthew reports what the priest's did with the bribe money that Judas left in the temple. Because it was unlawful for the priests to put Judas's returned blood money into the Temple treasury, they used it to buy the Potter's Field, which becomes a burial place for strangers. Matthew explains how the priest's purchase of "the Potter's Field" with the returned blood money originally paid to Judas for betraying Jesus, the Messiah, fulfills four prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem.

In the previous section (Matthew 27:3-5), Matthew informed his readers what happened to Judas. After Judas saw that Jesus was condemned to die, he felt remorse for his sinful role in betraying his former Rabbi (Matthew 27:3). He tried to return the bribe money to *the priests* and elders, but they refused to listen to and harshly told him to leave them alone (Matthew 27:3-4). Judas then "threw the thirty silver pieces into the temple sanctuary" and ran away—where he hanged himself (Matthew 27:5).

Now Matthew jumps ahead of his main narrative about the crucifixion of Jesus, to finish the story about what eventually happened with the unclaimed blood money and how it fulfilled Jewish prophecy.

WHAT THE PRIESTS DID WITH THE BLOOD MONEY

The chief priests took the thirty pieces of silver left by Judas in the temple sanctuary (v 6a).

These *chief priests* were the leaders among the Sadducees, the party responsible for the temple and offering of sacrifices that took place there. Because the previous owner, Judas, was dead and he had left the money there for them, *they* had to decide what to do with *the pieces of silver*.

Typically, unclaimed money would be *put into the temple treasury*, but *they said*, "It is not lawful to put them into the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood" (v 6).

The chief priests' admission that *silver* was *not lawful to put in the temple funds* because it was *blood-money* was an unintended admission that their prosecution and condemnation of Jesus had been illegal because it was based on a bribe.

The Law of Moses stated:

"You shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just."
(Exodus 23:8)

Their oral law, called "the Mishnah" also prohibited a judge from receiving anything from the litigants in criminal or civil trials.

And yet, Jesus's trial was obviously the result of a bribe,

“Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?’ And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him. From then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus.”
(Matthew 26:14-16)

Without Judas, *they* would not have located Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Him. Without Jesus as their prisoner, *they* could not have accused or condemned Him. Judas performed this indispensable service for them for the price of thirty *pieces of silver*. The entire trial was illegally based on a bribe paid for the purpose of killing a man.

Now that Jesus had been killed, the abandoned *silver* was considered *blood-money*. And *blood-money* was considered defiled and unholy. This *price of blood* was not allowed to be mixed *into the holy temple treasury*, lest it defile the funds, and *the temple*, and the sacrifices offered there.

But it was not the illegal bribe money that made *the temple* unholy. It was *the chief priests* who conspired to murder the Messiah and Son of God that defiled *the temple*.

The chief priest's twisted rationale was a bloody instance of the kind of hypocritical legalism and self-righteousness that Jesus had famously preached against (Matthew 5:33-35, 23:16-22, 27-33).

They could not return *the pieces of silver* to Judas; he had hanged himself (Matthew 27:5).

So they conferred together and with the money bought the Potter's Field as a burial place for strangers (v 7).

Since *they* could *not* lawfully *put the silver into the temple treasury*, and were unable to claim it for themselves without becoming defiled, *they* decided to use it for the public good. *They* used it to purchase a place called *the Potter's Field*.

The Potter's Field was located outside the city of Jerusalem to its south, along one of the slopes of the Hinnom valley. It was called *the Potter's Field* because it was rich with the red clay which craftsman used to make fine pottery. *The field* would now be used *as a burial place for strangers* and foreigners who died in the city.

Matthew explains: *For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day* (v 8).

Apparently, either *the priests* renamed it *the Field of Blood* after *they* bought it, or it somehow became common knowledge that Judas betrayed Jesus for a *price* and the *blood-money* he returned was used to fund the purchase of *that field*. Matthew's phrase, *to this day*, indicates that he wrote his account some years after these events took place.

Luke confirms that this *field* purchased by Judas's wickedness “became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language [Aramaic] that field was called ‘Hakeldama’, that is, Field of Blood” (Acts 1:19).

THE PROPHETIC FULFILLMENTS

Matthew then connects their purchase of *the Potter's Field* to Jewish prophecy:

Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one whose price had been set by the sons of Israel; and they gave them for the Potter's Field, as the Lord directed me" (v 9-10).

This is the sixteenth time Matthew has explicitly pointed out how *Jesus* fulfilled Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. (The previous fifteen are found in Matthew 1:22-23, 2:5-6, 2:15, 2:16-18, 2:23, 3:1-3, 4:4-6, 4:13-16, 8:17, 10:35-36, 11:10, 12:17-21, 13:14-15, 13:35 and 21:2-5. This list does not include additional Messianic prophecies that *Jesus* alluded to in Matthew 11:5-6 and 26:31).

Matthew attributes this prophecy to *that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet*, but the wording seems to be taken from another Jewish *prophet*—Zechariah.

Matthew does not name Zechariah as *the prophet through whom these words were spoken*. Instead, Matthew names *Jeremiah*, who does not seem to write these exact words in either the Book of Jeremiah or Lamentations.

Why then does Matthew name *Jeremiah* rather than Zechariah when seemingly quoting *the prophet*?

This could simply be the result of a scribal error; a scribe may have accidentally copied the wrong prophet's name and mistakenly changed it from "Zechariah" to *Jeremiah*. But looking deeper, it appears that Matthew knew exactly what he was doing when he attributed these things to Jeremiah.

Matthew appears to be alluding to themes from three prophecies within *Jeremiah* while using the words of Zechariah. The wider context for all four prophecies (three from Jeremiah and one from Zechariah) all pertain to an impending destruction of Jerusalem. We will look at these prophecies more closely in a moment. For now, it is worth pointing out that Matthew seems to have had both *the prophet Jeremiah* and *the prophet Zechariah* in mind when discussing *the priests' purchase of the Potter's Field/the Field of Blood* with the returned *blood-money* by Judas.

There are at least three possible reasons why Matthew only mentioned *Jeremiah* but not Zechariah even though he likely had both prophets in mind.

The first possible reason is that Matthew cited the more prominent of the two prophets (*Jeremiah*), while leaving the minor one out (*Zechariah*). By Jewish reckoning, between the two, *Jeremiah* is the more significant prophet because he is before Zechariah and his writings are more voluminous. In this case Matthew's mentioning of *Jeremiah* but not Zechariah is comparable to when a person only mentions their visit to New York when they might well have flown in to Newark airport in New Jersey. (New York is the more prominent state which makes New Jersey less important to mention).

Another factor which makes *Jeremiah* more prominent than Zechariah is the fact that Matthew appears to draw upon three prophetic references from *Jeremiah*, but only one from Zechariah. Therefore, Matthew credits *the prophet* he referenced most.

The second possible reason Matthew only mentioned *Jeremiah* but not Zechariah is because he alluded to prophecies from *Jeremiah* which would be less noticeable without an explicit reference, while his quotation from Zechariah would have been obvious to his Jewish audience. Therefore, he felt it was necessary to mention *Jeremiah* but unnecessary to name Zechariah.

With these possibilities offered as to why Matthew mentioned Jeremiah when quoting Zechariah, we now turn to the four prophecies the Gospel writer references to see what points he was trying to make. We will begin with the obvious reference from Zechariah.

PROPHETIC REFERENCE 1: ZECHARIAH 11—THIRTY SILVER SHEKELS THROWN TO THE POTTER

Matthew appears to be directly quoting or paraphrasing a prophecy from Zechariah 11:12-13.

“So **they** weighed out thirty shekels of silver as **my wages**. Then **the LORD said to me**, ‘Throw it to the potter, that magnificent price at which I was valued by them.’ So I **took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them to the potter** in the house of the LORD.”
(Zechariah 11:12b-13)

Matthew seems to be interpreting Zechariah to *the priests’* purchase of this *Potter’s Field*.

- The “they” in Zechariah are *the sons of Israel—the chief priests* in Matthew.
- “Thirty pieces of silver” is *the price of the one whose price had been set by the sons of Israel*. This is *the exact price set by the priests* for Judas to betray Jesus (Matthew 26:15),
- This *silver* was thrown “in the house of the LORD” (Zechariah 11:13b). The house of the LORD is the descriptive name of the temple. The exact place Judas *threw the thirty pieces of silver* was the sanctuary of the temple (Matthew 27:5).
- *They gave the thirty pieces of silver* “to the potter” (Zechariah 11:13) “*for the Potter’s Field*.”
- And *they* did these things as “the LORD said to me” (the prophet Zechariah) and *directed me (the chief priests)* to do.

The context of Zechariah’s prophecy comes within a prophetic metaphor foretelling the destruction of Israel and warning its corrupt leaders (Zechariah 11:1-17).

In this scripture, God tells the prophet Zechariah to shepherd a “flock doomed to slaughter” (Zechariah 11:4). The flock likely represents the nation of Israel. Through the prophecy, the Lord mockingly laments the flock for two catastrophes. The first catastrophe is because “their own

shepherds [who symbolize Israel's *priests* and religious leaders] have no pity on them" (Zechariah 11:5). The second is because a brutal political takeover is about to occur: "each will fall into another's power and the power of his king; and they will strike the land, and I will not deliver them" (Zechariah 11:6). This is likely a prediction of Rome's demolition of Israel and the temple that took place in 70 A.D. In His Olivet Discourse, Jesus warned His disciples of this impending destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:2).

Next, Zechariah says that he shepherded the flock doomed to slaughter and took two staffs which he named "Favor" and "Union" (Zechariah 11:7). The staff named "Favor," Zechariah explains, represents God's covenant with all the peoples at Mt. Sinai, and he breaks it to symbolize how the children of Israel broke the covenant with God (Zechariah 11:10-11). Zechariah also breaks the staff named "Union." He explains that it represented the broken unity between the tribes of Judah and Israel when they became separate kingdoms (Zechariah 11:14).

Using these two staffs as illustrations, the prophet Zechariah was both summarizing Israel's past history, and prophesying what was to come. Throughout their history, Israel repeatedly disobeyed God's covenant, and the kingdom of Israel divided in ~975 B.C. Zechariah was describing these historical events centuries later in ~520 B.C. Prophetically, the splitting of the staff "Favor" also symbolizes Israel's rejection of Jesus as God and Messiah five hundred years later. The splitting of the staff "Union" also symbolizes Rome's bloody victory over the Jews in 70 A.D. and the Jewish diaspora that followed. This is consistent with the biblical pattern of prophecies having a double fulfillment.

There is also a Messianic prophetic fulfillment that can be applied concerning the splitting of the two staffs. The splitting of "Favor" could represent Israel rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. The splitting of "Union" could represent Rome's crucifixion of the Messiah. This Messianic interpretation goes along with the general principle that whatever happens to the Israelites also will happen to the Messiah and vice-versa.

In Zechariah 11:8, the Lord said that He "annihilated the three [bad] shepherds in one month, for my soul was impatient with them, and their soul was weary of me." These three shepherds possibly represent the three religious offices during Jesus's day who conspired to destroy Him: the elders (Pharisees), *chief priests* (Sadducees) and the scribes (religious lawyers) (Matthew 16:21, 21:45-46, 26:3-5). This might represent these three offices being destroyed during the Roman destruction of Jerusalem.

As Zechariah dramatically enacted the word of the Lord through his speech and actions in front of the people, he paused to ask them if the word seemed good to them, and asked for his wages if it did. Amused, the people watching "weighed out thirty shekels of silver as my wages" (Zechariah 11:12). They insultingly offered him *the price* of a slave.

Then *the Lord directed* Zechariah to, "Throw it to the potter" and sarcastically commented on the cheapness of "that magnificent price at which I was valued by them." Zechariah then did as *the Lord* commanded him, "So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the Lord" (Zechariah 11:14).

Matthew appears to be associating this prophecy from Zechariah with *the priests'* use of the *blood* money to purchase *the Potter's Field*, linking their corrupt bargain to kill the Messiah to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D.

During this terrible event in 70 A.D., the temple was destroyed. Gold melted and seeped into the stones so that they were pried apart by soldiers to recover the gold—the temple was completely dismantled just as Jesus predicted (Matthew 24:1-2). It is estimated that over a million Jews perished in that war. So many died that according to the ancient historian, Philostratus: “the country all round (Jerusalem) was filled with corpses” (Flavius Philostratus. “The Life of Apolonius,” 6.29). Many of these corpses were buried in the aptly named *Field of Blood* purchased by these priests.

This horrific slaughter likely occurred sometime after Matthew's Gospel was in circulation. If so, then Matthew himself is prophesying (through the Holy Spirit and use of Zechariah and *Jeremiah's* prophecies) about this impending doom. And Matthew is directly connecting this future catastrophe to Israel's rejection of Jesus as the Messiah and King. If Matthew wrote this after Jerusalem's fall, he is simply demonstrating that it was a consequence for rejecting Jesus as the King and Messiah and that this prophecy, once foretold as a warning, *was now fulfilled*.

PROPHETIC REFERENCE 2: JEREMIAH 18—THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

The first allusion from Jeremiah seems to come from *Jeremiah's* visit to *the potter's* house (Jeremiah 18:1-4) and the prophetic warning to Jerusalem that he draws from it (Jeremiah 18:5-12).

Jeremiah observes how *the potter* fashions and molds clay and is quick to refashion it into another vessel to suit his design if it spoils in his hand (Jeremiah 18:3-4). Then the LORD tells *Jeremiah* that He can and will act as *the potter* towards His handiwork (Israel) if it persists in doing evil (Jeremiah 18:5-10).

The Lord then directly speaks to “the men of Judah” (again this is Judas's Hebrew name—see the Bible Says commentary for [Matthew 27:3-5](#)) and “the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (Jeremiah 18:11),

“Behold, I am fashioning calamity against you and devising a plan against you. Oh turn back, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds.”
(Jeremiah 18:11b)

Despite His warning and invitation to repent the Lord predicts they will not turn from their wickedness,

“But they will say, ‘It's hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.’”
(Jeremiah 18:12)

Jeremiah's words are prophetic on multiple levels. They were initially true when Babylon destroyed the city of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. They also are prophetic of Rome's destruction of Jerusalem centuries later in 70 A.D. They are prophetic of Judas, who in guilt and remorse killed himself (Matthew 26:3-5) when he felt things were "hopeless" (Jeremiah 18:12). And they are prophetic of *the chief priests* and elders who followed their "own plans... according to the stubbornness of [their] evil heart" (Jeremiah 18:12) when they refused to believe in Jesus as the Messiah even after He was raised back to life.

PROPHETIC REFERENCE 3: JEREMIAH 19—THE SHATTERED POT AND THE VALLEY OF SLAUGHTER

The second prophecy from *Jeremiah* that Matthew seems to allude to in this passage is from Jeremiah 19.

In that chapter, the Lord tells *Jeremiah* to return to *the potter*, buy an earthen jar, and bring some of the elders and priests with him to the valley of Ben-hinnom (Gehenna) (Jeremiah 19:1-2). Once there, *Jeremiah* is to prophesy of Jerusalem's coming calamity that will tingle the ears of those who hear of it (Jeremiah 19:3). Among the things he predicts is that the Lord will "void the counsel of Judah [Judas's Hebrew name] and Jerusalem" in this *place* (Jeremiah 19:7). It will be renamed "the valley of Slaughter" (Jeremiah 19:6) because human carcasses will fill the valley (Jeremiah 19:7).

The Lord tells Jeremiah to then break the jar as a sign that He will break His unfaithful people (Jeremiah 19:10-11) before telling them they will bury people in Topheth (another name for Ben-hinnom/Gehenna) "because there is no other place for burial" (Jeremiah 19:11).

Matthew's allusion to this terrifying prophecy is an ear-tingling warning that the God will make "void the counsel of Judah [Judas] and [the priests of] Jerusalem" (Jeremiah 19:7) when He comes to claim the "Field of Blood" purchased with the thirty *pieces of silver* returned by Judas to *the chief priests*. Once again, when Rome destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. countless Jews were slaughtered and their corpses filled the Hinnom Valley and the field they purchased with the Messiah's *blood-money*.

Quoting the ancient historian Philostratus once more:

"After Titus [the commanding Roman General] had taken Jerusalem...he disclaimed any such honor to himself, saying that it was not himself that had accomplished this exploit, but that he had merely lent his arms to God, who had so manifested his wrath."
(Flavius Philostratus. "The Life of Apollonius," 6.29)

God's wrath was perhaps the most fitting way to describe Jerusalem's fall.

PROPHETIC REFERENCE 4: JEREMIAH 32—JEREMIAH'S PURCHASE OF THE FIELD

The third prophecy from *Jeremiah* that Matthew seems to be alluding to in this passage is from Jeremiah 32.

Matthew writes:

Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one whose price had been set by the sons of Israel; and they gave them for the Potter's Field, as the Lord directed me."

This seems to reference the prophecy where the Lord told *Jeremiah* while he was in prison to buy the *field* at Anathoth (Jeremiah 32:6-7). The imprisoned *prophet* enlists his uncle to help him, and he purchases it with "shekels of silver" (Jeremiah 18:8-9) and has a record of the deed sealed (Jeremiah 18:10-15). (Silver pieces was the currency used in Judas's betrayal of Jesus). *Jeremiah* then goes on to explain how this purchase is an act of faith, despite the fact that Judea will soon be demolished by Babylon. The buying of this *field* is still a good investment, because God will redeem the land and His people will flourish once again in Judea (Jeremiah 18:16-44).

Once again as he did with the prophecy from Jeremiah 18 and 19, Matthew is using *Jeremiah's* initial prophecy about Jerusalem's fall to Babylon to draw a prophetic link between Judas's betrayal, *the chief priests'* rejection of Jesus the Messiah, and their purchase of *the Field of Blood* to Jerusalem's later fall to Rome.

The common theme in all four of these prophetic references (three from Jeremiah and one from Zechariah) is connecting the purchase of *the Field of Blood* and Jerusalem's rejection of the Messiah with the city's destruction roughly forty years after these events.

The field purchased with the Messiah's blood money would soon become the location of an unspeakable slaughter and *a burial place* for the corpses that fell there when Rome will destroy the city in 70 A.D. This passage in Matthew demonstrates that when the priests bought the Potter's Field, they also brought the Lord's vengeful prophecies concerning that field upon themselves. The wages of sin was, and is, death.

As the American President Abraham Lincoln applied Psalm 19:9 to the bloodshed of the American Civil War as the penalty of American slavery, so may we reverently apply this verse to Judas's returned *blood-money* and the Messiah-murdering *priests* who used it to purchase *the Field of Blood*:

"The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether."
(Psalm 19:9)

Biblical Text

⁶The chief priests took the pieces of silver and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood."⁷ And they conferred together and with the money bought the Potter's Field as a burial place for strangers.⁸ For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.⁹ Then that which was spoken through

Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: “And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one whose price had been set by the sons of Israel; ¹⁰ and they gave them for the Potter’s Field, as the Lord directed me.”