

## General Comments on Matthew 23

Jesus' three year public ministry ends in this chapter with him condemning the Pharisees (v. 1-36), weeping over Jerusalem (v. 37-39), and telling them their rejection of him will result in the Temple being taken from them by demolition (v. 38).

Jesus publicly pronounces seven woes upon the Pharisees and scribes. Not only is it in public, it is in the Temple just prior to Passover, so there were many people present. Nowhere else does Jesus take the offensive in such a public manner. The typical confrontation had Jesus on the defensive, and while some of them were public and in the Temple, they were always instigated by someone else (the notable exceptions being when Jesus purged the Temple of the moneychangers). Here, Jesus faces down the Pharisees (cf. 22:15-22) and Sadducees (cf. 22:23-46) in the typical manner, but then goes on to publicly lambaste the Pharisees before a multitude within the Temple (v. 1). Why is this? Because their final murderous plot against him is set, and he is passing judgement on them for it in the seventh and final woe he pronounces on them, cf. v. 29-36. Jesus publicly denounces the Pharisees as murderers, and they then murder him a few days later, just as he predicts.

It is probable the events of ch. 23-25 are on the day following the events of 21:18-22:46. Given the lack of any explicit differentiation between these two day's events, a reasonable split would be between ch. 22 and 23. If this is the case, then Jesus' comments in this chapter are presented as all the more confrontational as he had effectively silenced them the day before. He then goes on the offensive to publicly condemn them, and does so unanswered.

Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (v. 1-12), and then casts seven woes upon them (v. 13-36). That there are seven woes suggest this is a heavenly Judgement against the Pharisees, seven being the divine number. His comments here are effectively a public trial of his murderers. He presents his evidence against them to make his case, they cannot respond because what he is saying is true, and so he pronounces judgement on them.

Jesus knows full well that he is about to be executed, so he ends his public ministry by telling everyone plainly what is about to happen, condemning his executors, and passing divine judgement on them.

Comments on Matthew 23

1 THEN spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, 2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: 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. 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. 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, 6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, 7 And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, [even] Christ; and all ye are brethren. 9 And call no [man] your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. 10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, [even] Christ. 11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

v1-12 Jesus attacks the scribes and Pharisees for exploiting the Law of Moses to promote themselves. They sit in Moses' seat as arbiters of Law (v. 2) and want to tell everyone what to do, but Jesus tells them they should not follow the Pharisees bad example (v. 3). The Pharisees overload other people when they wouldn't do the smallest amount of work themselves (v. 4). All they are interested in is appearances (v. 5), public recognition (v. 6), and adulation (v. 7).

What people should do is just the opposite. The only master and teacher should be the one anointed by God, and all should be brothers (v. 8, 10). The only spiritual father is our Father in heaven (v. 9). The greatest one is the one who serves the most (v. 11), and the humble one is the one who will be lifted up (v. 12).

v3 The KJV reading suggests Jesus is telling the Jews to observe the Law of Moses but not to follow the Pharisees' bad example. The IV reading states it is the Pharisees who want to tell the Jews what to do because they make themselves judges over the Jews.

v9-10 The obscure references to the Father and Christ are explained in the IV. See the parallel below.

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. 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.**

v13 Jesus casts misery upon the Pharisees and scribes because not only do they pervert the ways of heaven, they likewise undermine the spirituality of other people as well.

v14 This verse is probably an addition not present in the original. It is absent from the most ancient Greek manuscripts available. The inclusion appears to be an attempt to harmonize Mark's and Luke's account of the exchange. Mark's and Luke's accounts are simplified versions of Matthew's more lengthy and inclusive account, cf. Mark 12:38-40, Luke 20:45-47.

**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.**

v15 Grief upon them for exploiting and misleading students of religion. The context of this curse is that the Pharisees would commonly charge proselytes for their educations, so the proselytes became a source of income to them. Hence the Pharisaic willingness to "compass sea and land to make one proselyte". Their desire to have a student to exploit was great.

**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! 17 [Ye] fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? 18 And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. 19 [Ye] fools and blind: for whether [is] greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? 20 Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. 21 And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. 22 And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.**

v16-22 Anguish upon the Pharisees for loving only the physical aspects of the Temple and not spiritual aspects. The context of the passage is the abuse of the temple gift, or Corban. The Pharisees abused the physical aspects of the Temple for their personal goals, and ignored all of the spiritual covenants and commitments associated with the Temple.

**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. 24 [Ye] blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.**

v23-24 Sorrow upon them for meticulously paying tithes on even the increase of the tiniest of the herbs, and yet ignoring the real spiritual importance of the Law (v. 23). The Pharisees are spiritually blind, they pick at nits while entirely missing the purpose of the Law (v. 24).

Lev. 27:30 tells Israel to tithe on all seeds and fruit of the land. The Pharisees made a meticulous show of their piety by tithing even on the tiniest herbs that grew in their gardens. They paid a tenth of their mint, anise, and cummin, just so everyone could see them do it. All the while they are entirely lacking in justice, mercy, and faith.

v24 Both gnats and camels are unclean. The Pharisees would go to great lengths to filter out gnats so as to avoid accidentally being unclean by ingesting a gnat, and yet they wilfully violate the whole purpose of the Law.

The IV adds to the text of this verse to make explicit what would otherwise be implicit.

**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. 26 [Thou] blind Pharisee, cleanse first that [which is] within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.**

v25-26 Suffering on them for only being concerned about their outward appearances, while their hearts are filled with evil desires (v. 25). They must first cleanse themselves inside, and then they will be entirely clean (v. 26). The Pharisees are more interested in looking good than in being good.

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

v27-28 Afflictions upon them for appearing to be spiritually clean when they are ritually impure and rotten to the core.

This particular accusation goes well beyond that of v. 25-26. There the accusation is of hypocrisy, where here the accusation is of ritual impurity. They want to be the religious elite, when in fact they are profane and desecrated.

**29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, 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. 31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. 32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. 33 [Ye] serpents, [ye] generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? 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: 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. 36 Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

v29-36 Agony upon them for venerating the ancient prophets while actively persecuting and murdering the contemporary ones.

This final woe cast upon them is particularly stinging as it is one that all of the Jews already know they are guilty of, cf. John 7:25-26, John 8:33-59, John 10:31-39, John 11:47-53. They have been conspiring to kill him for years, and they are about to have their way and do it. Why is he allowing it? "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth...."

After the end of the KJV v. 36 the IV adds text indicating it is the contemporary group of Pharisees and scribes he is addressing, and they are even worse than their fathers because they are willful murders who are not acting in ignorance.

v31 Jesus is speaking figuratively of them being the contemporary spiritual children of the ancient murderers of prophets.

v35 "Abel unto the blood of Zacharias", Abel being the first murder and Zacharias being the last documented murder, cf. 2 Chron. 24:19-21. Although, it is possible the Zacharias Jesus is referring to is some undocumented and more recent murder.

**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! 38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. 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.**

v37-39 Jesus mourns over the condition of Jerusalem, but moreso their spiritual leaders in specific. The Lord would have gathered Israel but the spiritual leaders he sends are murdered and the spiritual leaders they choose refuse Him (v. 37). Because of this the House will be demolished (v. 38), and they will not see the Messiah again until all will confess He is the Son of David (v. 39).

The IV changes the text significantly and indicates the disciples understood that Jesus was speaking in v. 38 of his return in glory.

v37 Preceding the text of the verse the IV inserts:

Then Jesus began to weep over Jerusalem, saying,

This addition reveals the depth of Jesus' remorse over the rejection he faces by his people. He is not angered, he is moved to tears.

v38 "your house", referring to the Temple, the house which the Pharisees had usurped, and which the Lord would throw down by the hands of the Romans. This prediction of the demolition of the Temple is what prompts the question and answer in 24:1-2.

v39 The comment Jesus makes in v. 39 seems odd as this is what the multitudes said just a day or two earlier during the triumphal entry, cf. 21:9. However, Jesus' is addressing the leaders of Jerusalem at present who were "sore displeased" that the people were heralding Jesus as the Blessed One (cf. 21:15) a day or two earlier.

Given the context of the preceding v. 1-36, Jesus is lamenting the wickedness of the religious leaders of Jerusalem and the terrible influence they have (cp. Isa. 28), and in v. 39 is referring to a future time where all of Jerusalem, both the leaders and the people, will herald him as the Messiah. The IV indicates this time will be at the Day of the Lord.

Tangentially, Jesus said something similar some months earlier in a different context, cf. Luke 13:34-35.

v39 "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord", a quotation of Ps. 118:26.

## Matthew 23 Parallel of KJV & IV Translations

### KJV

1 THEN spake Jesus  
to the multitude, and  
to his disciples,  
2 Saying,  
The scribes and the Pharisees  
sit in Moses' seat:  
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.  
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.  
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,  
6 And love the uppermost  
rooms at feasts, and  
the chief seats  
in the synagogues,  
7 And greetings  
in the markets, and  
to be called of men,  
Rabbi, Rabbi.

8 But be not ye called Rabbi:  
for one is your Master,  
[even] Christ; and  
all ye are brethren.  
9 And call no [man]  
your father upon the earth:

### IV

1 Then spake Jesus  
to the multitude, and  
to his disciples,  
saying,  
The Scribes and the Pharisees  
sit in Moses' seat.

2 All, therefore, whatsoever  
they bid you observe,  
they will make you  
observe and do;  
for they are ministers  
of the law, and they  
make themselves your judges.

But do not ye  
after their works;  
for they say, and do not.  
3 For they bind heavy burdens  
and  
lay on men's shoulders, and  
they are grievous to be borne;  
but they

will not move them  
with one of their fingers.

4 And all their works  
they do to be seen of men.  
They make broad  
their phylacteries, and  
enlarge the borders  
of their garments,  
and love 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,  
(which is master.)

5 But be not ye called Rabbi;  
for one is your master,  
which is Christ; and  
all ye are brethren.

6 And call no one  
your creator upon the earth,  
or your heavenly Father;

for one is your  
Father,  
which is in heaven.  
10 Neither be ye  
called masters:  
for one is your Master,

[even] Christ.

11 But he that is  
greatest among you  
shall be your servant.  
12 And whosoever shall  
exalt himself  
shall be abased; and  
he that shall humble himself  
shall be exalted.  
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.  
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.  
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.

for one is your creator and  
heavenly Father,  
even he who is in heaven.

7 Neither be ye  
called masters;  
for one is your master,  
even he whom  
your heavenly Father sent,  
which is Christ;  
for he hath sent him  
among you that ye  
might have life.

8 But he that is  
greatest among you  
shall be your servant.  
9 And whosoever shall  
exalt himself  
shall be abused of him; and  
he that shall humble himself  
shall be exalted of him.

10 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.

11 Woe unto you,  
Scribes and Pharisees!  
for ye are hypocrites!  
Ye devour widows' houses,  
and for a pretence  
make long prayers;  
therefore ye shall receive  
the greater punishment.  
12 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 two-fold more  
the child of hell  
than he was before,  
like unto yourselves.



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!  
17 [Ye] fools and blind:  
for whether is greater,  
the gold, or the temple  
that sanctifieth the gold?  
18 And,  
Whosoever shall swear  
by the altar,  
it is nothing;  
but whosoever sweareth  
by the gift that is upon it,  
he is guilty.  
19 [Ye] fools and blind:  
for whether [is] greater,  
the gift, or the altar that  
sanctifieth the gift?  
20 Whoso therefore shall swear  
by the altar, sweareth by it,  
and by all things thereon.  
21 And whoso shall swear  
by the temple,  
sweareth by it, and  
by him that dwelleth therein.  
22 And he that shall swear  
by heaven,  
sweareth by the throne of God,  
and by him  
that sitteth thereon.  
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

13 Woe unto you,  
blind guides,  
who say,  
Whosoever shall swear  
by the temple,  
it is nothing;  
but whosoever shall swear  
by the gold of the temple,  
he committeth sin,  
and is a debtor.  
14 You are fools and blind;  
for which is the greater,  
the gold, or the temple  
that sanctifieth the gold?  
15 And ye say,  
Whosoever sweareth  
by the altar,  
it is nothing;  
but whosoever sweareth  
by the gift that is upon it,  
he is guilty.  
16 O fools, and blind!  
For which is the greater,  
the gift, or the altar that  
sanctifieth the gift?  
17 Verily I say unto you,  
Whoso, therefore, sweareth  
by it, sweareth by the altar,  
and by all things thereon.  
18 And whoso shall swear  
by the temple,  
sweareth by it, and  
by him who dwelleth therein.  
19 And he that shall swear  
by heaven,  
sweareth by the throne of God,  
and by him  
who sitteth thereon.  
20 Woe unto you,  
Scribes and Pharisees,  
hypocrites!  
For ye pay tithe of  
mint, and anise, and cummin;  
and have omitted the weightier  
things of the law;  
judgment, mercy, and faith;  
these ought ye to have done,  
and not to leave

the other undone.  
24 [Ye] blind guides,  
which strain at a gnat, and  
swallow a camel.

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.  
26 [Thou] blind Pharisee,  
cleanse first that [which is]  
within the cup and platter,  
that the outside of them  
may be clean also.  
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.  
28 Even so  
ye also outwardly appear  
righteous unto men, but  
within ye are full of  
hypocrisy and iniquity.  
29 Woe unto you,  
scribes and Pharisees,  
hypocrites!  
because ye build the  
tombs of the prophets,  
and garnish the  
sepulchres of the righteous,  
30 And say,  
If we had been  
in the days of our fathers,

the other undone.  
21 Ye blind guides,  
who strain at a gnat, and  
swallow a camel;  
who make yourselves  
appear unto men that  
ye would not commit  
the least sin, and  
yet ye yourselves,  
transgress the whole law.  
22 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.  
23 Ye blind Pharisees!  
Cleanse first  
the cup and platter within,  
that the outside of them  
may be clean also.  
24 Woe unto you,  
Scribes and Pharisees,  
hypocrites!  
For ye are like unto  
whited sepulchers,  
which indeed appear  
beautiful outwardly,  
but are within full of  
the bones of the dead, and  
of all uncleanness.  
25 Even so,  
ye also outwardly appear  
righteous unto men, but  
within ye are full of  
hypocrisy and iniquity.  
26 Woe unto you,  
Scribes and Pharisees,  
hypocrites!  
Because ye build the  
tombs of the prophets,  
and garnish the  
sepulchers of the righteous,  
27 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.  
31 Wherefore ye be witnesses  
unto yourselves, that

ye are the children of them  
which killed the prophets.

32 Fill ye up then  
the measure of your fathers.

33 [Ye] serpents,  
[ye] generation of vipers,  
how can ye escape the  
damnation of hell?  
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:

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.

36 Verily I say unto you,  
All these things  
shall come upon  
this generation.

we would not have been  
partakers with them  
in the blood of the prophets;  
28 Wherefore, ye are witnesses  
unto yourselves

of your own wickedness, and  
ye are the children of them  
who killed the prophets;

29 And will  
fill up the measure then of  
your fathers;

for ye, yourselves,  
kill the prophets  
like unto your fathers.

30 Ye serpents, and  
generation of vipers!  
How can ye escape the  
damnation of hell?

31 Wherefore, behold,  
I send unto you prophets, and  
wise men, and scribes;  
and of them

ye shall kill and crucify; and  
of them ye shall  
scourge in your synagogues,  
and persecute  
from city to city;

32 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.

33 Verily I say unto you,  
All these things  
shall come upon  
this generation.

34 Ye bear testimony  
against your fathers,  
when ye, yourselves,  
are partakers of  
the same wickedness.

35 Behold your fathers  
did it through ignorance,  
but ye do not; wherefore,

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!  
38 Behold, your house  
is left unto you desolate.  
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.

their sins shall be  
upon your heads.  
36 Then Jesus began to weep  
over Jerusalem, saying,  
37 O Jerusalem! Jerusalem!  
Ye who will kill  
the prophets, and  
will stone them  
who are sent unto you;  
how often  
would I have gathered  
your children together,  
even as a hen gathers  
her chickens  
under her wings, and  
ye would not.  
38 Behold, your house  
is left unto you desolate!  
39 For I say unto you,  
that ye shall not  
see me henceforth, and  
know that I am he  
of whom it is written  
by the prophets,  
until ye shall say,  
40 Blessed is he who cometh  
in the name of the Lord,  
in the clouds of heaven, and  
all the holy angels with him.  
41 Then understood  
his disciples that  
he should come again  
on the earth, after that  
he was glorified and crowned  
on the right hand of God.

Copyright © 2003 by S. Kurt Neumiller <kurtn@cybcon.com>. All rights reserved. No part of this text may be reproduced in any form or by any means for commercial gain without the express written consent of the author. Digital or printed copies may be freely made and distributed for personal and public non-commercial use.