

91 THE 30 PIECES OF SILVER DEBATE

Introduction: There is controversy around Matthew's "thirty pieces of silver" prophecy because Matthew stated that it comes from Jeremiah, but it clearly pertains to a passage in Zechariah. Some believe Matthew was mistaken in attributing the prophecy to Jeremiah and others maintain it shows the Bible isn't inerrant. There are other explanations that seek to reconcile the apparent mismatch. We will seek to show that Matthew's statement of fulfillment incorporates both Zechariah and Jeremiah references and by emphasizing Jeremiah in his attribution, Matthew revealed to his Jewish audience, the dreadful big-picture consequences of Jesus' betrayal.

1. "Thirty pieces of silver" scripture: *"Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet [Jeremiah 19 & Zechariah 11] was fulfilled, saying, 'They [chief priests and elders] took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him [Jesus] upon whom a price had been set, whom some of the children of Israel [chief priests] priced, and they [chief priests and elders] gave them [the pieces of silver] for the potter's field [a cemetery to bury foreigners], as the Lord commanded me [fore-ordained by God].'" Mt 27:9-10*

2. Summary of the "thirty pieces of silver" fulfillment: Scripture was fulfilled when temple officials took the 30 pieces of silver, the cheap price the chief priests set for Jesus, and used it to buy a potter's field, as directed by God.

3. Summary of Zechariah 11:9-14

Zechariah was told to act out a scene to illustrate the people's contempt for God's leading. Zechariah was to play the role of a shepherd trying to care for condemned sheep who, in truth, despised him. Because they had broken trust with him, he would let them go their own way, killing and consuming each other. He asked for the pay he had earned in his attempt to care for the rebellious sheep. When Zechariah, representing Yahweh, was given an insultingly insignificant sum of money (sarcastically called "a handsome price"), Yahweh told Zechariah to throw the money to the potter who was in the temple. All covenantal ties were severed.

4. Summary of Jeremiah 19:1-13

Jeremiah was told to buy a jar from a potter and escort the temple rulers to the valley of Hinnom near the Potsherd Gate. There Jeremiah announced that unimaginable disaster was coming to the city for their wickedness. They had worshipped Baal and sacrificed, killing their innocent sons. The place they were standing, the valley of Hinnom, would be called "the Valley of Slaughter" where the slain from the war would be cast. The starving people in Jerusalem would eat their own sons and daughters. Jerusalem would become a horror. Jeremiah then broke the pottery jar, illustrating the irreversible destruction of Jerusalem.

5. Connection of Matthew and Zechariah

The connection of the Matthew prophecy fulfillment with Zechariah is obvious. In Zechariah, Yahweh's shepherding was despised and given a paltry value of 30 pieces of silver. Yahweh told Zechariah to throw the coins to the potter who was in the temple. In Matthew, Jesus was also despised and ascribed the same meager value—30 pieces of silver. Judas threw the coins into the temple, but Matthew emphasized the money was in the hands of the temple officials.

6. Connection of Matthew and Jeremiah

Matthew explained that, with the thirty pieces of silver, the temple leaders bought a potter's field in the Hinnom Valley. This was not mentioned in the Zechariah passage and gives us the Jeremiah connection. When Jeremiah took the temple leaders out into the Hinnom Valley, he told the men it would become a cemetery for the people of Jerusalem. Their wickedness included worshipping false gods and shedding the blood of their innocent sons. Similarly, and with an ironic twist, first century temple leaders bought a cemetery in the Hinnom Valley where, in a repetition with the Babylonian war, the people of Jerusalem would be cast for despising their Messiah and killing Yahweh's innocent son. The "cemetery for strangers" would be for those who were strangers to Yahweh and His Son.

7. Jesus referenced the Valley of Hinnom many times during his ministry. Whenever he used the word "Gehenna" (some Bibles wrongly translate Gehenna as "hell"), it is a reference to the Valley of Hinnom and the carnage of the Babylonian conquest around 600 BC. The Hebrew word "Hinnom" means "Gehenna" in the Greek and was similar to the meaning of "Waterloo" to us today. It was emblematic of complete and utter defeat. Jesus was telling his audience that another Hinnom Valley destruction was in their future and they needed to repent and turn to Yahweh. Without repentance, Jesus' audience was destined to be caught up in the war with Rome that would occur in their generation. It would be a repetition of the Babylonian War when the Hinnom Valley was filled with the Jewish dead. Without turning to their Messiah and thereby entering the spiritual Kingdom of God, they would be swept up in the War with Rome.

8. Roman General Titus viewed the valleys during the siege of Jerusalem in AD 70.

"When Titus, in going his rounds along those valleys, saw them full of dead [Jewish] bodies, and the thick putrefaction running about them, he gave a groan; and, spreading out his hands to heaven, called God to witness that this was not his doing; and such was the sad case of the city [Jerusalem] itself." Josephus, "Wars" 5.12.4.

9. Seven Gehenna/Hinnom passages in Matthew. "Fire" meant judgment and was also the primary weapon of war.

Mt 5:22 "...everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause will be in danger of the judgment. Whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' will be in danger of the council. Whoever says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of **Gehenna**."

Mt 5:29 "If your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish than for your whole body to be cast into **Gehenna**."

Mt 5:30 "If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off, and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into **Gehenna**."

Mt 10:28 "Don't be afraid of those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. Rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in **Gehenna**."

Mt 18:9 "If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the **Gehenna** of fire."

Mt 23:15 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel around by sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of **Gehenna** as yourselves."

Mt 23:31-33 "Therefore you testify to yourselves that you are children of those who killed the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you offspring of vipers, how will you escape the judgment of **Gehenna**?"

10. The Valley of Hinnom is referenced several ways in the Bible. These names are all indicators of roughly the same geographical area—the valley just southwest of Jerusalem: Hinnom, Topheth, Gihinnom, valley of the son of Hinnom, Gehenna, Valley of Slaughter, the potter's field, field of blood, Akeldama.

Note: "The site referred to in these verses [Mt 27:7-8] is traditionally known as Akeldama, in the valley of Hinnom, which was a source of potters' clay." Wikipedia, "Potter's Field"

11. A little history: The valley of Hinnom had a sordid history from early on. It was associated with child sacrifices to the gods Molech and Baal way back in Joshua 15:8 and these practices continued. The conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 or 586 BC was commemorated every year with mourning and fasting. So when Jesus spoke of the Hinnom Valley, there would have been immediate recognition of the devastation to which He was referring. Coincidentally, the final day of the war in AD 70 occurred on the same day and in the same month as the destruction of the first temple—the 9th day of the month of Av (Tisha B'Av).

12. Who purchased the potter's field, Judas or temple leaders?

Matthew reported that the chief priests purchased the potter's field, but in Acts, Judas is said to have "acquired" the field. Given the temple leaders' efforts to distance themselves from the "blood money", they likely bought the property in Judas' family name. They were apparently oblivious to the fact that they had hired the "hit" and were fully "bloodied" and responsible for the death of Yahweh's innocent Son—as we all are.

Closing thoughts: When we find problems in the Biblical text, it causes us to look deeper and not assume the Bible is in error. Blending scriptures was a common practice for Jesus and the inspired New Testament writers. In Preterist Paper #75, we documented how Jesus, in Matthew 21, conflated the foundation stone passage of Psalm 118 with the crushing stone of Daniel 2. In the first chapter of Mark, the author blended Malachi 3:1 with Isaiah 40:3, but only mentioned the prophet Isaiah. Both Zechariah 11 and Jeremiah 19 were documenting the people's hardness of heart toward Yahweh. By emphasizing Jeremiah, Matthew underlined the vivid Hinnom Valley picture painted by Jeremiah, revealing the larger consequence of killing Yahweh's innocent Son. The consequence was national judgment.