

# OpenTheo

## October 3rd: Zechariah 13 & Matthew 23:13-39

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Strike the shepherd! Woes on the scribes and Pharisees.

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## Transcript

Zechariah chapter 13. On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness. And on that day, declares the Lord of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that they shall be remembered no more.

And also I will remove from the land the prophets and the spirit of uncleanness. And if anyone again prophesies, his father and mother who bore him will say to him, You shall not live, for you speak lies in the name of the Lord. And his father and mother who bore him shall pierce him through when he prophesies.

On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies. He will not put on a hairy cloak in order to deceive. But he will say, I am no prophet, I am a worker of the soil, for a man sold me in my youth.

And if one asks him, What are these wounds on your back? He will say, The wounds I received in the house of my friends. Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me, declares the Lord of hosts. Strike the shepherd, and the

sheep will be scattered.

I will turn my hand against the little ones, in the whole land, declares the Lord. Two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive. And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refined silver, and test them as gold is tested.

They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, They are my people, and they will say, The Lord is my God. Zechariah chapter 13 continues the oracle that began in chapter 12.

The preceding chapter ended with the Spirit of Grace being poured out upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Israel, leading to a great mourning of the households over the pierced one, like a firstborn. The mourning there was akin to the general mourning of Egypt at the time of the tenth plague associated with the Passover. This is described in Exodus chapter 12 verses 29-30.

At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne, to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. And Pharaoh rose in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead.

Every Egyptian household lost a firstborn, and so each household primarily mourned for their own loss. However, in Zechariah chapter 12 all of the households of the nations are mourning for one firstborn, the pierced one, the shepherd, the branch, or the servant of the Lord. If chapter 12 involved a sort of Passover, chapter 13 opens with a Pentecost.

The opening up of the fountain for sin and uncleanness connects with the pouring out of the spirit of grace at the end of chapter 12. We've already come across imagery that might relate to the opening of such a fountain earlier in the book of Zechariah. In the night visions, the stone of the high priest had seven eyes, and the seven lamps of the lampstand in chapter 4 were also described as having seven eyes.

Considering that the word translated eyes can also be translated as springs, and that the vision of the lampstand and the olive trees in particular explores the theme of the flowing out of power, we might understand the eyes to be springs, from which fuel for the burning lamps proceeds. Here in chapter 13 however, the fountain is principally one for cleansing from impurity, like the water prepared in Numbers chapter 19. We might recall the water that flowed out from Ezekiel's visionary temple in chapter 47 of his prophecy.

In Jeremiah chapter 2 verse 13, the Lord describes himself as the fountain of living waters. Joel chapter 3 verse 18, while using a different term, declares, The fountain that is opened up in Zechariah chapter 13 is presumably one that comes from the house of

the Lord, and is ultimately a fountain of the life of the spirit. Perhaps we might connect this with the blood and water that proceeds from the pierced side of Jesus in John chapter 19 verse 34.

Especially in light of the allusion to Zechariah chapter 12 verse 10 in the context, and also to the living water that Jesus says will come from him in John's gospel. We might also, in light of all of the Exodus themes in the surrounding chapters, relate this to the water that comes from the rock. Passages like Ezekiel chapter 36 verses 25 to 27 might also be in the background here.

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh.

And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules. The fountain cleanses the land from its wickedness, idolatry and uncleanness. Prophecy, presumably false prophecy, is driven out.

A flip side of making the people holy is the expulsion of that which is wicked from their midst. The more pronounced the setting apart of the people, the more pronounced is the removal of the wicked. This pattern was already evident in the vision of the flying scroll in chapter 5. The cutting off of a name is elsewhere used to refer to the destruction or removal of a person's posterity.

Here, used with regard to the idols, it likely refers to the cessation of their worship. As no one calls upon the names of the idols any longer, their names are extinguished. Prophecy is especially singled out here.

While some commentators argue that the text envisages a cessation of all prophecy, as we attend to the descriptions of the prophecy that is cut off, it should be apparent that it is false prophecy that is in view. The prophet in view here speaks lies in the name of the Lord, puts on a hairy cloak in order to deceive, and seems to be inflicting wounds upon himself as a sort of pagan prophetic practice. False prophecy had been a pervasive problem in the history of the people, especially prior to the exile.

Even though there was nothing like the same problem with false prophecy after the return, it still persisted in some forms. In Nehemiah chapter 6 verses 10-14 for instance, we see that Tobiah and Sambalat used mercenary prophets to deliver false prophecies to scare and discourage Nehemiah and the rebuilders of the wall. False prophets could face the death penalty, as we see in Deuteronomy chapter 18 verses 20-22.

How may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken? When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the

Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.

False prophets perverted the word of the Lord, sowing distrust of the word of the Lord among the people. They also pretended to buy an authority for their own false words in order to serve their personal ends. Deuteronomy cautions about the danger of pity and emotional bonds in such situations.

In chapter 13 verses 6-8. Here in Zechariah's oracle, even the father and mother of the false prophet will rise up against their son and put him to death. Whereas formerly false prophets had enjoyed prominence and security, greatly outnumbering true prophets and doing their work in the open, as we see in the days of Ahab for instance, now the false prophet will have to act as secretly as possible, hiding himself, not dressing as a prophet, and trying to explain away the wounds that he had presumably sustained as part of his false prophetic rituals.

To understand the wounds of the prophet described here, we should probably think of the prophets of Baal who cut themselves as they called upon Baal in their conflict with Elijah on Mount Carmel. The short chapter ends with a further part of the oracle containing words that Jesus refers to himself in Matthew 26 verse 31. In the oracles from chapters 9-14, shepherd and flock imagery is common, especially in chapter 11, where Zechariah performed a prophetic sign act, representing the Lord as the good shepherd of his people, rejected for the foolish shepherds.

The oracle here seems to look back prior to the events described in the verses that precede it, referring to the death of Christ, the shepherd of the Lord, which precedes the mourning of the people and the opening of the fountain in Pentecost and the time that follows. The shepherd is described by the Lord as the man who stands next to me, as one intimately associated with him. This is the Davidic branch and specifically Jesus Christ.

When the shepherd was struck, the flock would be scattered. In 1 Kings chapter 22 verse 17, Micaiah the prophet foretold that as King Ahab was struck, all Israel would be scattered on the mountains as sheep that have no shepherd. When the people lost their leader, they would lose their unity and all flee in different directions.

Without a shepherd to go before them, they would be thrown into great disarray. The sword that strikes the shepherd here is mysteriously commanded by the Lord himself, striking the very man who is at his right hand, the man so closely associated with him. At this point we discover the key event that will later lead to the mourning of the people over the one that they pierced.

They are the ones who are like the sword that strikes the shepherd, unwittingly enacting the Lord's purpose, being the means by which the blow is delivered, even while in

rebellion against him. We might recall the words of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 verses 22 to 23. The Lord would then purify his people, cutting off the wicked and refining the righteous.

The division of the people into thirds should draw our minds back to Ezekiel chapter 5 verses 1 to 4. And a third part you shall scatter to the wind, and I will unsheathe the sword after them. And you shall take from these a small number and bind them in the skirts of your robe. And of these again you shall take some and cast them into the midst of the fire and burn them in the fire.

From there a fire will come out into all the house of Israel. Ezekiel's signet depicted the preservation and refining of a remnant of one of the thirds. In Zachariah's prophecy we see something similar, although it is a whole third and not just a remnant of a third that is preserved and refined.

It shouldn't be difficult to find reminders of Isaiah chapter 53 in the description of the Lord and his shepherd in this chapter. Anthony Pettison writes, Isaiah chapter 42 verse 1, 4 and 6 and 49 verse 6. They release captives from the pit or dungeon. Zachariah chapter 9 verses 11 to 12.

Isaiah chapter 42 verse 7 and 61 verse 1. They gather those who have been scattered from Israel. Zachariah chapter 9 verse 12. Isaiah chapter 49 verses 5 to 6. Significantly they are struck.

Zachariah chapter 13 verse 7. Isaiah chapter 53 verse 4 and pierced. Zachariah chapter 12 verse 10. Isaiah chapter 53 verse 5. They are associated with shepherd imagery.

Zachariah chapter 13 verses 7 to 9. Isaiah chapter 53 verses 6 to 7. Though the servant is likened to a sheep rather than a shepherd. The figures in Zachariah and Isaiah are rejected by the people. Zachariah chapter 12 verse 10.

13 verse 7. Isaiah chapter 53 verse 3. They are connected with the pouring out of a spirit upon people. Zachariah chapter 12 verse 10. Isaiah chapter 44 verses 3 to 5. Contrary to Peterson's assessment they are said to suffer by Yahweh's intent.

Zachariah chapter 13 verse 7. Isaiah chapter 53 verses 6 and 10. And their deaths result in forgiveness for the sins of the people. Zachariah chapter 13 verse 1. Isaiah chapter 53 verses 5 to 6. In addition the people later mourn over them.

Though the mourning in Isaiah is implicit. Zachariah chapter 12 verse 10. Isaiah chapter 53 verses 4 to 12.

There is also an echo of Isaiah chapter 53 verse 12. In Zachariah chapter 14 verse 14. With the spoil that is divided as a result of the servant's death.

These similarities seem too numerous to be coincidental. A question to consider. How might we start to piece together an account of the atonement.

From Zachariah's oracles of the Lord, the people and of the Lord's shepherd. Matthew chapter 23 verses 13 to 36. 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. You blind fools for which is greater the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred. 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. You blind men for which is greater the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred. So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.

And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it. And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it. 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.

You blind guides straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel. 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. You blind Pharisee first clean the inside of the cup and the plate. That the outside also may be clean.

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.

So you also outwardly appear righteous to others. But within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites.

For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous 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. Thus you witness against yourselves that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up then the measure of your fathers.

You serpents, you brood of vipers. How are you to escape being sentenced to hell? 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. So that on

you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth. From the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zachariah the son of Barakiah.

Whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly I say to you all these things will come upon this generation. 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 are not willing. See your house is left to you desolate.

For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Jesus' public ministry began with blessings and the beatitudes. And in chapter 23 of Matthew it ends with woes.

These blessings and these woes can also be mapped onto each other as we'll see shortly. Peter Lighthouse observes that they can be divided into woes upon the Pharisees for their effect upon others. Woes upon them for the handling of God's truth and the law.

Woes upon them for their neglect of purity of heart for the purity of the flesh. And then finally woe upon them for the treatment of the prophets. First of all their effect upon others.

They shut up the kingdom of God against others. Secondly, they prey upon widows. Third, they trap Gentiles as proselytes.

And then the handling of the law. First, they purposefully distort the law and use legalistic circumventions to neglect the intent of the law. Second, they show an utter failure for the deeper purpose of the law and reduce it to detached and nitpicking commandments.

They will tithe the smallest spices but they forget justice, mercy and faithfulness. Third, they neglect purity of heart. And under this Jesus accuses them first of their assumption that mere external cleansing suffices for purity without dealing with the deep issues of the heart.

Second, they are like whitewashed tombs. They look pleasant but they contain and they convey impurity to others. And the final charge is that their fathers killed the prophets and that they are continuing in the murderous ways of their fathers.

And then we should note that these woes can be matched onto the beatitudes as their counterparts. First, blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And that corresponds with the woe upon the Pharisees who shut up the kingdom of heaven in people's faces.

Here on the one hand you have those who are poor in spirit who are receiving the

kingdom of heaven and the Pharisees who close the kingdom of heaven to other people. Second, blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted. And the contrast is with the Pharisees who devour widows' houses.

They destroy the mourners. They pray upon the mourners. Whereas those who mourn in the kingdom of God will be comforted.

Third, blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth. And then they travel on sea and land to make converts and make them children of hell. They will inherit hell.

And so they're trying to inherit the earth. They're trying to bring in the Gentiles. But they're making them inheritors of hell.

Not those who will inherit the earth. Fourth, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied. And the Pharisees are marked rather by the perversion of all righteousness.

The way that they hunger and thirst to find some way out of righteousness. Hungering for any way they can circumvent God's purpose. Fifth, blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy.

The Pharisees tithe mint and anise and cumin and forget the weightier matters of the law. Justice, mercy and faithfulness. The weightier matters of the law.

Those who show mercy shall receive mercy. Those who understand and practice the law in that merciful way will receive the mercy of God. Sixth, blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.

And this contrasts with the Pharisees who cleanse the outside only and don't deal with the heart. They're not pure in heart. They're just cleansing the surface.

Seventh, blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God. The Pharisees on the other hand appear beautiful on the outside but full of dead men's bones and uncleanness. The sons of God will be raised up on the last day.

They will be those who are marked out as the children of the living God. But yet the Pharisees are characterised by deadness even when they're still living. Eighth and finally, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

However, the Pharisees are the sons of those who persecuted the prophets. Jesus talks about the way that those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, those who are persecuted for his name's sake, are those who are continuing the ministry of the prophets. And just as they were persecuted by the fathers of the scribes and the Pharisees, so the disciples of Christ will be persecuted by their children.



Various books of the Bible are introduced, concluded or otherwise framed by contrast between blessings and woes. We might think of Psalm chapter 1, blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners etc. Or perhaps we think of Proverbs chapter 9 with the contrast between the appeal of Lady Wisdom and the woman folly.

Or in Leviticus chapter 26, the blessings and the curses. Or Deuteronomy chapter 27 to 28. Matthew is framed in a similar way.

Jesus' ministry begins with blessings and ends with woes. And that bookends the entire teaching between. And that teaching of the body of the book of Matthew is repeatedly recognisable beneath the surface of this section.

Jesus isn't just making some new points here. Behind every one of his statements, we can recognise a specific conversation, teaching or action that Matthew has recorded. He is summing up his entire public ministry to this point and declaring condemnation.

The next few chapters will lay out the sentence. To whom are these woes directed? They're directed to a specific group of people, to the religious leaders. The blessings of the Beatitudes on the other hand are directed to the faithful disciples of Christ.

These blessings and woes then are not just general blessings and woes, but distinguishing markers placed upon two different groups. Looking through them, we'll see the way that they refer back to the earlier teaching of Christ. First of all, the effect of the scribes and the Pharisees upon others.

They shut up the kingdom of God. They don't open the kingdom of God to others. They close people off from it.

They enslave them with heavy burdens. The second challenge is that they prey upon widows. In the other synoptic gospels, in Mark and Luke, this is connected with the widow's mite.

And that story often taken as an example of sacrificial giving to follow, rather it's a story of judgment. It's a story of how people who give everything that they have are being destroyed by this. The false shepherds are fleecing the flock, causing them to invest in something that is going to be torn down as a result of their sin.

They trap Gentiles as proselytes. You can think about Jesus' ministry and the way that he has set forth Gentiles as examples of faith. The Canaanite woman, the centurion.

And rather than ministering to Gentiles, as we've seen Jesus do, the scribes and the Pharisees are making them children of hell. Then in the challenges to their use of the law, first of all, their use of casuistry and legalistic circumventions to neglect the intent of the law. We can think back to Jesus' conversation concerning the negation of the fifth

commandment, the way that they will purposefully circumvent the law through legalistic gerrymandering.

In challenging next, their utter failure to regard the deep purpose of the law and reducing it to detached and nitpicking commandments. We can think about the conversation concerning the greatest commandment. The small stuff matters.

Tithing those small spices is not something to be neglected, but it only makes sense in the light of the most important things. All of those details must point back to the core reality, the reality of love for God and neighbour. And where those things are forgotten, the little things just become burdens and things that distract and detract from the purpose of the law.

Next, concerning their approaches to purity. First, their assumption that mere external cleansing suffices for purity without dealing with the issues of the heart reminds us of the conversation about hand washing and the way that Jesus challenged them specifically at that point concerning the nature of true purity and also true pollution. What truly makes a man's heart unclean? It's not external things, it's what comes forth from the heart.

That's what really makes people unclean. And then second, they are like whitewashed tombs. They look pleasant, but they contain and they convey impurity to others.

And there we can see Jesus teaching in the background, avoid the leaven of the Pharisees, the hypocrisy that characterises their teaching. And that leaven is that hidden thing at the heart. It's that thing that's introduced to the new batch that causes it to rise.

It's that thing that's passed on from generation to generation, a poisonous tradition, a tradition that destroys people, that has that internal impurity as a transmission from one generation to another. And they must avoid the leaven of the Pharisees. They must recognise the death that exists at the heart of that religious system that they represent, that legalistic approach that they are taking.

And finally, their fathers killed the prophets and the way that they are continuing in their ways, all while covering this up by decorating the prophets' tombs. Jesus then goes on to develop this point further, as he does in the Sermon on the Mount, where he directly connects his disciples with the prophets as those persecuted for righteousness' sake. He's taught concerning this in the story of the wicked vine dressers, the wicked tenants.

All these servants that are sent, that are killed, can think also of the way that the servants are treated in the story of the wedding feast. Again, these are the prophets that are sent, and now the Son has come and he is going to be killed too. The Pharisees will prove themselves to be the sons of the murderers of the prophets by continuing in their actions as they murder the emissaries of Christ.

They will murder the disciples, they will crucify the disciples, they will cast them out of synagogues. And the entire blood of the martyrs, the whole history of the martyrs, from Abel's blood that called out from the ground at the beginning of Genesis to the blood of Zechariah in 2 Chronicles 24, is going to come on that generation. In Genesis chapter 15, God declared that the sin of the Amorites was not yet complete, with the assumption that when it was complete, Israel would enter into the land.

God gave Canaan into the hands of the Israelites when the sin of the Amorites was filled up, and now the leaders of the Jews are filling up the measure of their wrath, and their city is about to be destroyed. The kingdom is about to be given into the hands of other parties, of tenants who will give the fruits of the land to the Lord, to the disciples who will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus here is a new Jeremiah.

He declares judgment upon the house. He declares that there is no peace when others are saying peace, peace. And finally he laments over Jerusalem.

And in that lamentation we can hear the voice of Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, the one who stands over Jerusalem and sees it in its destruction. Jesus anticipates the destruction of Jerusalem and weeps over it just as Jeremiah does. Peter Lighthouse has observed the way that the story of Matthew follows a pattern.

It begins with themes of Genesis, the genealogy, the Genesis of Jesus Christ, and then giving his connection with Abraham, a Joseph who's the son of Jacob who leads his people into Egypt after having dreams, and then people being led out of Egypt. The themes of the Exodus coming at various points in those earlier chapters, particularly in Jesus' baptism and his time in the wilderness for 40 days. And then in chapters 5 to 7, all these themes on the Sermon on the Mount that point to the law being given connect us with the story of Sinai in the Revelation there, a new law being given, a new understanding of the law.

And then the disciples are sent out. There's the mission of the twelve, a preparation for conquest, a spying out of the land, an entrance into the land as they are sent to the cities, and the cities will be judged according to the way that they respond. And then there's the parables of the kingdom, the wisdom of Solomon in chapter 13.

And then as we move through, we've seen all these different themes tracing through Israel's history until we arrive at this point. And there's the expectation of the end of Judah and Babylonian exile. There's the statements of Jeremiah.

There's Ezekiel coming to the foreground at various points as well. There's Babylonian exile. And then as we end the book, it will end on the theme that is the theme of the final verse of the Old Testament in the Hebrew ordering.

It will end with 2 Chronicles chapter 36 and the decree of Cyrus re-entering the land,

building the temple, and God's presence being with his people. Now what's the point of all of this? Christ is playing out the history of Israel. Christ is the son of Abraham.

Abraham played out the history of Israel in advance. Christ is playing out the history of Israel as its Messiah, the one who sums it up in himself. He is the one who brings it to its destiny.

And as we follow the story even further, we'll see what shape this takes. A question to consider. One of the problems for many people's understanding of Christ, as they see him in the Gospels and in his teaching and in his practice, is that the Jesus they believe in is not crucifiable.

Yet the Jesus that we see in these chapters would seem to be crucifiable. Looking at the conflict between Jesus and the religious and political leaders in the last few chapters, summed up in this final chapter of condemnation, how can we better understand the motivations that people might have for crucifying this man?