

**Heard-hearted Leaders**  
**Matthew 23:29—39**

Jesus had just finished warning the people about their religious leaders. These leaders have been leading Israel away from God for hundreds of years. Going back to Ezekiel 34 and Jeremiah 23 we can see these evil shepherds making themselves fat at the expense of their sheep. Instead of taking care and nurturing the people of Israel they were taking advantage of them using their position to lord over them and get rich off of them. Worse than that they didn't train them in the ways of the Lord God of Israel. If Israel had wholeheartedly followed God they would have experienced many blessings including abundant crops, safety and security from enemies (Leviticus 26:1—13). However, since the leadership turned the people away from God and allowed, even encouraged the worship of other gods, Israel experienced sickness, failed crops, plagues, death, famine and captivity by other nations (Leviticus 26:14—39). Jeremiah 10:21 sums up the failure of these leaders:

**Jeremiah 10:21** For the pastors (leaders of Israel) are become brutish, and have not sought the Lord: therefore they (Israel) shall not prosper, and all their flocks (the people of Israel) shall be scattered.

**A generation of vipers** (verses 29—33)

When John saw the leaders of Israel coming out to where he was baptizing Israel into the Kingdom he called them a generation of vipers (Matthew 3:7). Jesus applied this same term to the Pharisees when they accused Him of working for Satan when casting out demons. They are from the generation of vipers who are unable to speak good because their hearts are so completely evil (Matthew 12:34). They will be judged for every idle (or lazy) word spoken (verse 36—every word spoken out of laziness in failing to search the Scriptures to see that Jesus was their Messiah). Vipers are only able to poison and destroy and in this case these leaders being evil could only cause people's destruction.

When the term generation is used we usually think in terms of a span of years between our grandparents and parents for instance. As each generation dies out a new generation takes over. However, a generation can also refer to a bloodline or seedline and can span hundreds of years. For instance, a generation of bluebloods would refer to a whole line of nobility. Scripture also uses the term generation in this way. Genesis 5:1 speaks of the generations of Adam (the Adamic generation) or of Noah (Genesis 6:9). The generation of vipers is not referring to those leaders who were alive at the time of Jesus but in context indicates that these vipers came from vipers whom also came out of vipers. In fact, as can be seen from the first paragraph above, these vipers were active at least 600 years previous to the vipers in Matthew. Even though they were bragging that they would never have allowed the prophets to be killed as their fathers had done (verse 30), Jesus knew their hearts were at least as evil as the leaders of Ezekiel's day, which is why Jesus says that they are the sons of those who murdered the prophets.

Jesus ends with the rhetorical question, "how will you escape the damnation of hell?" The answer to this question was right in front of them; believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah of Israel.

**God's mercy** (verses 34—36)

In spite of the many prophets that were killed and knowing that very soon even the Son of God would be put to death by these evil leaders, God will still be sending more men out to reach Israel with the Gospel of the Kingdom—the good news that the Kingdom is going to be set up for those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah. However, Jesus also knows that those who are sent will suffer the same fate as other men of God—death and persecution. These prophets, wise men (those who are spiritually wise) and scribes (teachers of the Law perhaps those who were saved as in Matthew 13:52) are those who will be spreading the Gospel of the Kingdom after Jesus' death, burial and resurrection.

These are the people who show up in early Acts. Jesus promised that these people would be sent to Israel and by implication they would be continuing their ministry to Israel as they were doing before Jesus was put to death. They are not sent to set up the Church, the Body of Christ, as many would interpret them to be doing. Instead Jesus says that Israel will be given another chance to accept Him. This second chance was given because they killed Jesus in ignorance and Jesus asked the Father to forgive them (Luke 23:34, also see Acts 3:17). Israel was also given an additional year to repent and acknowledge Jesus as Messiah (Luke 13:6—9).

### **Prophets, wise men and scribes** (verses 34—36)

Among those Jesus said He would send to Israel after His death were the Disciples who were imprisoned (Acts 5:18) and flogged (Acts 5:40). Both Stephen and James were put to death (Acts 7:58; 12:2). Saul (later the Apostle Paul) was sent out as a Pharisee to imprison and kill the followers of Jesus (8:1—3). The religious leader's hate for Jesus seemed to grow exponentially as they tried to contain this religious movement called "The Way" (Acts 9:2). The blood of righteous men murdered by their fathers is even placed upon their heads since they are all born out of the same lineage of vipers (verse 35).

### **Jesus leaves the temple** (verses 37—39)

Sometimes it's the little words that can make a big difference as Scripture is studied. In John 2:16 when Jesus drives out the moneychangers, He calls the temple "My Father's house." When He is driving out the moneychangers the second time in Matthew 21:13 He calls the Temple "My house." Now as Jesus finishes talking with the religious leaders in the temple with their hearts remaining as hard as ever, He calls the temple "your house." It is with this that the temple is left desolate because Jesus leaves with no intention to come back until He sits on His throne as King. This is reminiscent of the temple being left desolate in Ezekiel (10:2—4; 18—20; 11:22—23) when the presence of God left.

As a side note, why is it that John clearly states that the term "My Father's house" is the temple in John 2:16 and then in John 14:2 most people interpret "My Father's house" to mean heaven? To be consistent, this term should refer to the same place and since John 2:16 clearly means the temple then John 14:2 would also mean the temple. It is this temple that the Disciples are told has many rooms. When Christ comes again (at the Second Coming) He will bring the Disciples unto Himself to rule in this Millennial Kingdom temple. This verse in John 14:2 has absolutely nothing to do with the Church, the Body of Christ but has everything to do with Israel in the Millennial Kingdom. This Millennial Kingdom temple is described beginning in Ezekiel 40 and the Shekinah presence will once again dwell there (Ezekiel 43:1—7). This type of bad theology is the result of wrongly- or nonly-dividing the Word of Truth. It's important to read Scripture knowing to whom it is written. Only the writings of Paul are specifically written to us so that we can know our Doctrine, position, walk and destiny.

### **Lament over Jerusalem** (verses 37—39)

In spite of Jesus being rejected by the leaders of Israel, He still mourned over their spiritual condition and their lack of faith. Instead of Israel being safely gathered under God's protective wing, they will now be left desolate because they are rejecting His call to come to Him. It is at this point that Jesus tells them that they will not see Him again in the temple until they welcome Him at His Second Coming by saying, "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord." This quote is taken from Psalm 118: 26 which concerns Jesus Christ at His Second Coming when He comes in His glory. There are unfortunately some who understand verse 27 (Bind the festival sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar) to mean that Jesus was to be sacrificed by faithful Israel on the altar instead of the cross. This is not a possible interpretation because the context is the actual Second Coming, not a picture of His Coming by riding on a colt of a donkey into Jerusalem. Christ will not appear in the temple until Israel recognizes their Messiah.

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