

# Matthew 23

by John Nelson Darby

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*The sermon highlights the judgment of the nation for their hypocrisy and condemnation of their fathers, and the character of the apostles and Christian prophets as scribes, wise men, and prophets sent to the Jews.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:20, Matthew 7:15-20, Matthew 12:34-37, Matthew 21:33-46, Matthew 22:34-40, Matthew 23, Luke 13:34-35, John 1:11, Acts 7:51-53, Romans 11:25-26

**Topics:** "Hypocrisy", "Repentance"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on Matthew 23, emphasizing the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, who misled the people while still holding authority over them. He highlights the disciples' connection to the nation of Israel, urging them to judge the leaders' actions while remaining faithful to God's law. Darby points out the historical guilt of the nation for rejecting God's prophets, culminating in the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. He warns that Jerusalem's house will remain desolate until the people repent and recognize Jesus as their Savior. Ultimately, the sermon reflects on the need for spiritual awakening and the hope of restoration for Israel.

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## Transcript

Chapter 23 clearly shews how far the disciples are viewed in connection with the nation, inasmuch as they were Jews, although the Lord judges the leaders, who beguiled the people and dishonoured God by their hypocrisy. He speaks to the multitude and to His disciples, saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat." Being thus expositors of the law, they were to be obeyed in all that they said according to that law, although their own conduct was but hypocrisy. That which is important here is the position of the disciples; it is in fact the same as that of Jesus. They are in connection with all that is of God in the nation, that is to say, with the nation as the recognised people of God-consequently, with the law as possessing authority from God. At the same time the Lord judges, and the disciples also were practically to judge, the walk of the nation, as publicly represented by their leaders. While still forming part of the nation, they were carefully to avoid the walk of the scribes and Pharisees. After having reproached these pastors of the nation with their hypocrisy, the Lord points out the way in which they themselves condemned the deeds of their fathers-by building the sepulchres of the prophets whom they had slain. They were, then, the children of those who slew them, and God would put them to the test by sending them also prophets and wise men and scribes, and they would fill up the measure of their iniquity by putting these to death and persecuting them-condemned thus out of their own mouths-in order that all the righteous blood which had been shed, from Abel's to that of the prophet Zechariah, should come upon this generation. Frightful amount of guilt,

accumulated from the beginning of the enmity which sinful man, when placed under responsibility, has ever shewn to the testimony of God; and which increased daily, because the conscience became more hardened each time that it resisted this testimony! The truth was so much the more manifest from its witnesses having suffered. It was a rock, exposed to view, to be avoided in the people's path. But they persisted in their evil course, and every step in advance, every similar act, was the proof of a still increasing obduracy. The patience of God, while graciously dealing in testimony, had not been unobservant of their ways, and under this patience all had accumulated. All would be heaped upon the head of this reprobate generation.

Remark here the character given to the apostles and christian prophets. They are scribes, wise men, prophets, sent to the Jews-to the ever rebellious nation. This very clearly brings out the aspect in which this chapter regards them. Even the apostles are "wise men," "scribes," sent to the Jews as such.

But the nation-Jerusalem, God's beloved city-is guilty and is judged. Christ, as we have seen, since the cure of the blind man near Jericho, presents Himself as Jehovah the King of Israel. How often would He have gathered the children of Jerusalem, but they would not! And now their house should be desolate, until (their hearts being converted) they should use the language of Psalms 118, and, in desire, hail His arrival who came in the name of Jehovah, looking for deliverance at His hands, and praying to Him for it-in a word, until they should cry Hosanna to Him that should come. They would see Jesus no more until, humbled in heart, they should pronounce Him blessed whom they were expecting, and whom they now rejected-in short, until they were prepared in heart. Peace should follow, desire precede, His appearing.

The last three verses exhibit clearly enough the position of the Jews, or of Jerusalem, as the centre of the system before God. Long since, and many times, would Jesus, Jehovah the Saviour, have gathered the children of Jerusalem together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but they would not. Their house should remain forsaken and desolate, but not for ever. After having killed the prophets, and stoned the messengers sent unto them, they had crucified their Messiah, and rejected and slain those whom He had sent to proclaim grace unto them even after His rejection. Therefore should they see Him no more until they had repented, and the desire to see Him was produced in their hearts, so that they should be prepared to bless Him, and would bless Him in their hearts, and confess their readiness to do so. The Messiah, who was about to leave them, should be seen of them no more until repentance had turned their hearts unto Him whom they were now rejecting. Then they should see Him. The Messiah, coming in the name of Jehovah, shall be manifested to His people Israel. It is Jehovah their Saviour who should appear, and the Israel who had rejected Him should see Him as such. The people should thus return into the enjoyment of their relationship with God.

Such is the moral and prophetic picture of Israel. The disciples, as Jews, were viewed as part of the nation, though as a remnant spiritually detached from it, and witnessing in it.

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