

Fulfilled Prophecies

[Home](#)

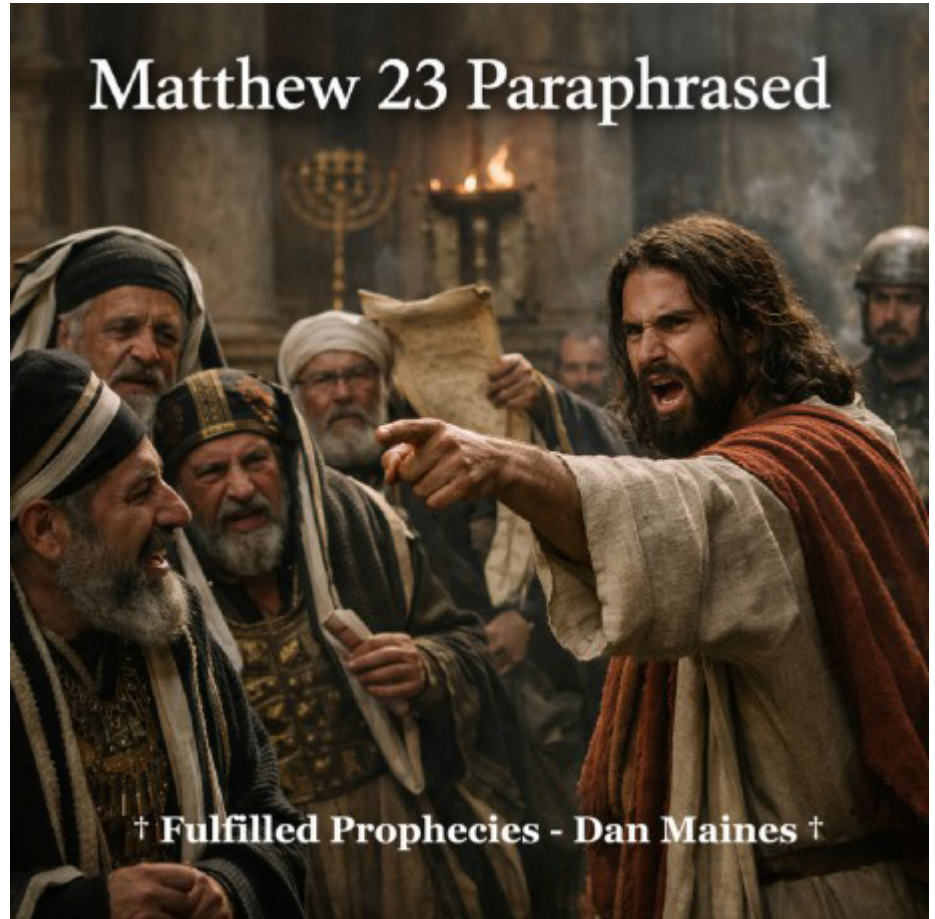
>

[Other](#)

>

[Share on Facebook](#)[FACEBOOK LINK](#)

Matthew 23 Paraphrased



By Dan Maines

Matthew 23 Paraphrased

Introduction

† Matthew 23 is one of the most direct and serious warnings Jesus ever spoke. He publicly confronted the religious leaders of Israel and exposed the hypocrisy that had taken hold of the temple leadership (Matthew 23:1).

† This chapter explains why judgment was about to fall on Jerusalem. The leaders who claimed to represent God had rejected the Messiah and were leading the nation in the same rebellion their fathers had shown against the prophets (Matthew

23:29-36).

† Jesus was not attacking the Law of Moses. He was exposing leaders who taught the Law but refused to live according to it (Matthew 23:3).

Matthew 23:1

Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples.

† Jesus made this statement publicly so both the people and His disciples could hear it. The corruption of the leadership needed to be openly exposed (Luke 12:1).

† The warnings in this chapter were not private criticism but a public declaration about the condition of Israel's religious leadership.

† The crowds were present because the leadership's hypocrisy affected the entire nation.

Matthew 23:2

The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses.

† The chair of Moses represented the position of teaching the Law in the synagogue system (Deuteronomy 17:8-11).

† These men had authority to read and explain the Law, but their authority did not guarantee that their lives reflected the truth they taught.

† God always held teachers to a higher level of accountability (James 3:1).

Matthew 23:3

Therefore whatever they tell you, do and follow it, but do not do according to their deeds, for they say things and do not do them.

† Jesus acknowledged that the Law itself was still valid, but the behavior of these leaders was corrupt (Romans 2:21-23).

† Their lives contradicted their teaching. This hypocrisy was the

central issue Jesus exposed throughout this chapter.

† Religious authority without obedience produces corruption.

Matthew 23:4

They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.

† The leaders added endless traditions and interpretations that made religious life unbearable for ordinary people (Mark 7:8).

† Instead of helping people understand God's commands, they created systems that trapped people in legalism.

† Jesus exposed the cruelty of leaders who demanded obedience from others but refused to help.

Matthew 23:5

But they do all their deeds to be noticed by other people, for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments.

† Phylacteries were small boxes containing scripture that were worn as reminders of the Law (Deuteronomy 6:8).

† The Pharisees exaggerated these symbols so people would view them as especially holy.

† Jesus showed that their goal was public recognition rather than true devotion.

Matthew 23:6

They love the place of honor at banquets and the seats of honor in the synagogues.

† Religious prestige had become their primary goal.

† Instead of serving the people, they pursued positions of influence and respect (Matthew 20:25-27).

† The kingdom of God operates by humility, not status.

Matthew 23:7

And personal greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called

Rabbi by people.

† Titles like Rabbi were used to elevate teachers above others.

† Jesus warned against religious systems that build authority on pride.

† Recognition from men had become more important to them than obedience to God.

Matthew 23:8

But as for you, do not be called Rabbi, for only One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers.

† Jesus reminded His followers that authority ultimately belongs to God.

† The community of believers was meant to function as a family rather than a hierarchy built on pride.

† Christ alone holds the ultimate position of teacher.

Matthew 23:9

And do not call anyone on earth your father, for only One is your Father, He who is in heaven.

† This warning addressed religious titles used to elevate men above their proper place.

† Spiritual authority must never replace God's authority.

† All believers ultimately answer to the Father in heaven.

Matthew 23:10

Do not be called leaders, for only One is your Leader, that is, Christ.

† Christ alone directs His people.

† Leadership in the church is meant to guide people to Christ, not replace Him.

† Any system that places men above Christ distorts the gospel.

Matthew 23:11

But the greatest of you shall be your servant.

† True greatness in God's kingdom is defined by service.

† Jesus Himself demonstrated this principle by serving others (John 13:14-15).

† Leadership that does not serve others contradicts the example of Christ.

Matthew 23:12

And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

† Pride always leads to downfall.

† God exalts the humble and resists the proud (James 4:6).

† The Pharisees were exalting themselves and were therefore heading toward judgment.

Matthew 23:13

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people.

† The leadership rejected Jesus as the Messiah and discouraged others from believing in Him (John 5:40).

† Their influence prevented many people from entering the kingdom.

† This is why Jesus pronounced woe, meaning divine judgment.

Matthew 23:14

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses.

† The leaders exploited vulnerable people while pretending to be righteous.

† Religious corruption often hides behind public prayers and outward piety.

† God has always defended widows and the oppressed (Isaiah 10:1-2).

Matthew 23:15

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte.

† They were zealous in spreading their religious system.
† But their converts were trained in the same hypocrisy and corruption.

† False teaching multiplies when corrupt leaders make disciples.

Matthew 23:16

Woe to you, blind guides.

† Jesus described them as blind because they claimed to guide others but lacked spiritual understanding.

† Leaders without spiritual insight mislead those who follow them.

† This blindness ultimately led the nation toward judgment.

Matthew 23:17

You fools and blind men.

† Their obsession with religious technicalities revealed their misunderstanding of God's priorities.

† They had lost sight of the purpose behind the Law.

† Jesus exposed the foolishness of religious pride.

Matthew 23:18

And whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing.

† The Pharisees created complicated rules about oaths.

† These rules allowed people to manipulate truth while appearing religious.

† Jesus rejected these dishonest systems.

Matthew 23:19

You blind men.

† Jesus continued exposing the spiritual blindness of the leaders.

† Their focus on objects rather than holiness revealed their distorted understanding of worship.

† God desires truth in the heart rather than technical religious

formulas.

Matthew 23:20

Therefore whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it.

† Jesus corrected their false teaching about oaths.

† All vows ultimately invoke God's authority.

† Manipulating religious language cannot escape God's judgment.

Matthew 23:21

And whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it.

† The temple represented God's dwelling among Israel.

† Using the temple as part of dishonest oaths was a form of disrespect toward God.

† Jesus exposed how religious systems often misuse sacred things.

Matthew 23:22

And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.

† Heaven is God's throne.

† No oath can remove accountability before God.

† Every word spoken is ultimately before Him.

Matthew 23:23

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.

† They carefully tithed small herbs while ignoring the heart of the Law.

† Justice, mercy, and faithfulness were the true weightier matters (Micah 6:8).

† Jesus exposed their obsession with minor details while neglecting righteousness.

Matthew 23:24

You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.

† This was a powerful illustration of their hypocrisy.

† They focused on tiny ceremonial details while ignoring serious injustice.

† Religious legalism often loses sight of God's priorities.

Matthew 23:25

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you clean the outside of the cup.

† Their righteousness was external.

† They appeared pure outwardly while their hearts were corrupt.

† True righteousness begins internally.

Matthew 23:26

You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup.

† Jesus called for inner transformation rather than outward appearance.

† The heart must change before outward behavior truly reflects righteousness.

† This principle remains central to the gospel.

Matthew 23:27

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are like whitewashed tombs.

† Whitewashed tombs looked clean but contained death.

† This image perfectly described outward religion hiding inner corruption.

† Jesus exposed the difference between appearance and reality.

Matthew 23:28

In the same way, you also outwardly appear righteous to people.

† Their public image was carefully maintained.

† But inwardly they were filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.

† God judges the heart, not appearances.

Matthew 23:29

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you build the tombs of the prophets.

† They honored dead prophets while rejecting the living Messiah.

† This exposed their false claims of loyalty to God.

† The same pattern had existed throughout Israel's history.

Matthew 23:30

And say, If we had been living in the days of our fathers.

† They believed they would have acted differently than previous generations.

† Yet they were preparing to reject Christ Himself.

† History often repeats when hearts remain unchanged.

Matthew 23:31

So you testify against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.

† Their rejection of Jesus proved they were continuing the same rebellion.

† Their actions confirmed their spiritual lineage.

† This rejection would soon bring judgment.

Matthew 23:32

Fill up then the measure of the guilt of your fathers.

† Jesus declared that the accumulated rebellion of generations was reaching its climax.

† Their rejection of the Messiah completed that measure.

† Judgment was therefore approaching.

Matthew 23:33

You snakes, you offspring of vipers.

† Jesus used language similar to John the Baptist (Matthew 3:7).

† Their deception and hypocrisy made them spiritually dangerous.

† The leaders were leading the nation toward destruction.

Matthew 23:34

Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes.

† The apostles and early Christian teachers would be sent to Israel.

† Many of them would be persecuted and killed.

† This pattern is recorded throughout the book of Acts.

Matthew 23:35

So that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth.

† Jesus traced the history of persecution from Abel onward.

† The rejection of God's messengers had been a long pattern.

† That generation would face the consequences.

Matthew 23:36

Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

† Jesus clearly placed the coming judgment within the lifetime of that generation.

† This statement connects directly to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

† This time statement removes the possibility of pushing the prophecy thousands of years into the future. Jesus placed the fulfillment within the lifetime of those hearing Him (Matthew 24:34).

Matthew 23:37

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets.

† Jesus expressed sorrow over the city's history of rejecting God's messengers.

† Despite repeated warnings, the leadership remained unwilling to repent.

† God's patience had been extended for generations.

Matthew 23:38

Behold, your house is being left to you desolate.

† Your house refers to the temple system centered in Jerusalem.

† The temple would soon be abandoned and destroyed.

† This prophecy was fulfilled in AD 70.

Matthew 23:39

For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.

† The nation would not see Christ again until they acknowledged Him as the Messiah.

† This statement leads directly into the events described in the next chapter when Jesus leaves the temple and predicts its destruction (Matthew 24:1-2).

† The warnings in Matthew 23 explain why the judgment described in Matthew 24 was about to come upon that generation.

Historical References

† Josephus records that the religious leadership of Jerusalem had become corrupt and oppressive before the Roman war (Josephus, Wars of the Jews 4.3).

† Eusebius records that Christians fled Jerusalem before its destruction because they remembered the warnings of Jesus (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.5).

† Tacitus confirmed the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (Tacitus, Histories 5.13).

† Clement of Alexandria wrote that Jerusalem's destruction fulfilled the warnings given by Christ to that generation (Clement

of Alexandria, Stromata 6.15).

How It Applies To Us Today

† Matthew 23 reminds us that religious appearance without true obedience is dangerous.

† God is not impressed by titles, positions, or public reputation.

† True faith begins with humility and a heart that seeks to follow Christ.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Who was Jesus condemning in Matthew 23?

A: The corrupt religious leadership of Israel who rejected Him while claiming to represent God. See Matthew 23:13; John 5:39-40.

Q: When did the judgment Jesus warned about occur?

A: Jesus said it would come upon that generation. This was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. See Matthew 23:36; Luke 21:20-22.

Q: What was the main sin of the Pharisees?

A: Hypocrisy. They taught the Law but did not live according to it. See Matthew 23:3.

Q: Why does Jesus call them hypocrites so many times in this chapter?

A: Because their outward religion hid inward corruption. Jesus repeatedly exposed this contrast between appearance and reality. See Matthew 23:27-28; Isaiah 29:13.

Q: Did Jesus condemn the Law of Moses in this chapter?

A: No. Jesus actually told the people to follow what was taught from Moses' seat but not to imitate the hypocrisy of the leaders. See Matthew 23:2-3.

Q: Why did Jesus speak so harshly to the Pharisees?

A: Because they were leading the nation away from the truth while claiming to represent God. Their hypocrisy harmed the

people spiritually. See Matthew 23:4; Matthew 23:13; Matthew 23:27.

Q: Were all Pharisees evil?

A: No. Some Pharisees later believed in Christ, such as Nicodemus and the apostle Paul. The condemnation in Matthew 23 was directed at the corrupt leadership. See John 3:1-2; Acts 23:6.

Q: What does Jesus mean when He calls them blind guides?

A: He means they claimed to lead others spiritually but lacked true understanding of God's will. A blind guide leads people into the same darkness. See Matthew 15:14; Matthew 23:16.

Q: Why did Jesus compare them to whitewashed tombs?

A: Because they appeared righteous on the outside while inwardly they were full of corruption and hypocrisy. The image shows the difference between appearance and reality. See Matthew 23:27-28.

Q: What does Jesus mean by straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel?

A: He exposed how the leaders focused on tiny ceremonial details while ignoring major issues like justice, mercy, and faithfulness. See Matthew 23:23-24.

Q: Why does Jesus mention Abel and Zechariah in Matthew 23:35?

A: Abel represents the first righteous person murdered in Scripture and Zechariah represents one of the last prophets killed in the Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus was referring to the entire history of persecuting God's messengers. See Genesis 4:8; 2 Chronicles 24:20-21.

Q: What does Jesus mean when He says fill up the measure of your fathers?

A: He was saying that their generation would complete the

pattern of rejecting and killing God's messengers, which would bring the final judgment upon that covenant system. See Matthew 23:32; Matthew 23:36.

Q: What does your house is left to you desolate mean?

A: The house refers to the temple and the religious system centered in Jerusalem. Jesus was predicting its abandonment and destruction. See Matthew 23:38; Matthew 24:1-2.

Q: Why does Matthew 23 lead directly into Matthew 24?

A: Because Jesus leaves the temple immediately after this speech, and the disciples ask about the destruction He just predicted. The Olivet discourse begins as a continuation of the same warning. See Matthew 23:38; Matthew 24:1-3.

Q: What generation was Jesus talking about in Matthew 23:36?

A: The generation living at that time who rejected Him. Jesus consistently used the phrase this generation to refer to His contemporaries. See Matthew 23:36; Matthew 24:34; Luke 11:50-51.

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

© Fulfilled Prophecies - Dan Maines.

Source Index

† Matthew 23; Matthew 24:1-2, 34; Luke 21:20-22; John 5:39-40; Micah 6:8; Isaiah 29:13

† Josephus, Wars of the Jews 4.3; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 3.5; Tacitus, Histories 5.13; Clement of Alexandria, Stromata 6.15

[Share on Facebook](#)

Links

Facebook Link <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1349070089314462/posts/>

Fulfilled Prophecies <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1349070089314462/>

Dan Maines

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1349070089314462/user/100001027365819/>

You may share this article freely without permission as long as you include credit to Dan Maines and/or a link to the Fulfilled Prophecies Group.