

Biblical Notes – Matthew 23:37

Let's look at the verses in question:

Matthew 23:37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

Luke 13:34 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!

First, we must ask what is meant by "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem." Without taking into account the rest of the context of Matthew 23 or Luke 13, it looks as though Christ is addressing every person in Jerusalem. However, the context does not bear witness to this. Note that Jerusalem here is said to "kill the prophets and stone those who are sent." Who are these that have done these atrocious crime(s)?

As suggested by The Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible, this is akin to the parable of Christ in Matthew 21:33-46 which is based on Isaiah 5:1-7 and probably reflects Psalm 80:8-18. Here there is a landowner who is God (Matt 23:33). The vineyard is the Kingdom of God (Matt 23:43). The servants are the prophets which were beaten, stoned, and killed (Matt 23:35-36) by the tenants. The son of course is Jesus (Matt 23:37-39). The tenants are the Jews opposed to the prophets and Jesus (Matt 23:34-40). They murder the son just as they mistreated the prophets of the past. The tenants have done these atrocious crime(s).

The context of our text parallels this. In Matthew 23:2 Jesus begins with his own explanation: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees (tenants) sit in Moses' seat." Then in Matthew 23:13 and following, Christ begins with the "woes" of the leaders of Jerusalem and ends in Matthew 23:23 with, "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?" Thus, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem" refers to the leaders of Jerusalem (again, referring to the tenants of Matt. 21).

Also, note in our two texts above that Jesus states he desires to have gathered the "children," not all "Jerusalem." It is not God's elect resisting, rather it is the seed of the serpent (the leaders of Jerusalem, the tenants) waging war with God's servants (Gen. 3; Rev. 12), whom Christ is gathering. This "Jerusalem" was temporarily preventing the children from being gathered. It is these unregenerate ones that are resisting the proclamation of the Gospel because it is in their nature to do so (John 12:40; Romans 9:18; 11:7; Acts 7:51). How were they preventing this? By killing the prophets and stoning them, etc. They even crucify the very Son of God!

In this passage, Jesus is wrapping up his final rebuke of judgment against the leaders (seed of the serpent) who opposed him (the seed of the woman). They were trying to keep the children of Jerusalem (chicks) from coming to salvation; but, as Matthew 23:38 states, their house will be left desolate to them. In other words, as much as the leaders of Jerusalem desire to prevent the elect of Israel from being gathered to Christ, he will gather them despite their resistance.

These verses, then, show God's irresistible grace and his sovereignty rather than in any way challenging it.

Website Reference:

<http://thirdmill.org/answers/answer.asp/file/40223>