

There is a song we sing in children's ministry that goes like this, "I don't want to be a hypocrite. I don't want to be a hypocrite. Cuz' they're not hip with it. I don't want to be a hypocrite." None of us want to be a hypocrite. The trouble is that we become one by default when our spiritual life is not right on the inside. Jesus doesn't want us to be hypocrites either. The woes of Matthew 23 call us out of hypocrisy. This message considers the final woe and denounces hypocritical tradition. Hypocritical tradition is ***honoring God's Spirit in the past while rejecting God's Spirit in the present***. God is at work right now and this is our time to be part of it.

Verse 29- *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous...*

Do you hear it? They were honoring the Spirit in the past. This is the first part, and it is the good part. Consider two different spiritual enrichment tours.

The first is a tour of the holy lands, where I found myself one July day, in a cave with a candle, posing for a picture in a 2500-year-old tomb. It is concerning to think of finding spiritual enrichment by going inside graves. But this wasn't some creepy new age thing. The tour bus brought us to an overlook on the west slope of the Mount of Olives. The temple mount is the centerpiece of the view, rising above the city and capped with the gilded Dome of the Rock. Between us and the Temple Mount was the Kidron Valley. The view from the Mount of Olives takes in the scenes of more Bible stories than any other viewpoint. Our guide helped us to grasp some of the significance of what we saw. Then he led us down a steep stone roadway just wide enough for two small cars to pass if they both had their mirrors folded back. He led us to a staircase that descended into a cave. We were introduced to the man who owns the land at the entrance of the cave. The stairs took us directly beneath his house. It is an ancient tourist site called the Cave of the Prophets. There are 50 burial spaces carved into the rock. I laid down in one. Three of these spaces are inscribed with the names of the last three Old Testament prophets, Haggai, Zachariah, and Malachi. The Hebrew people made a big deal of building tombs for their prophets, and they are still honored at these sites.

When our group was back above the ground, we spent the rest of the day descending the Mount of Olives into the Kidron Valley. The entire hillside is a massive ancient cemetery. The Jews were good at memorializing. After they passed through the Jordan River they placed memory stones (Joshua 4:8). They established holy sites in the places where God worked in mighty ways. They gather to this day at the Western Wall, the last exposed portion of the Second Temple. Jerusalem is layered with holy sites, monuments, and honored tombs.

When Jesus said, "You build tombs for the prophets..." he had a current example to point to in the Tomb of The Patriarchs. This is not the one that I was in on the Mount of Olives. This one is 20 miles south of Jerusalem in Hebron at the Cave of Machpelah. This is the site that Abraham purchased to bury Sarah. Later Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were also buried there with their wives (Genesis 23, 35, 49, 50). Herod the Great built an elaborate structure over the site less than 50 years before Jesus spoke these words. This was a bright and shiny decorated tomb of righteous people in the time of Christ.

The Jewish culture has a rich value for honor. It is a beautiful thing to honor what God has done in the past. Jesus didn't rebuke them for honoring the prophets but because the only prophets they honored were the dead ones. If you build tombs for the prophets, listen to the voice of the prophets. If you decorate their monuments, listen to their message.

Let me tell you about another spiritual heritage tour. This one I have not been on. But I found the following itinerary for a New England Adventist Heritage Tour in 2023¹.

DAY 1 Travel east to Rochester, NY

DAY 2

- Grave of J. N. Andrews
- Adventist historical sites in Rochester.

DAY 3

- Travel to New Hampshire.
- Sabbath History Trail.
- Childhood home of Uriah and Annie Smith.

DAY 4

- Travel to Maine
- Ellen White childhood and early adulthood sites.
- Stockbridge and Louisa Howland home in Topsham.

DAY 5

- Joseph Bates home, school and church in Fairhaven, MA.
- The bridge where Bates first shared the Sabbath message.

DAY 6

- Chapel and home of William Miller in Low Hampton, NY.
- Ascension Rock
- Miller's grave.

DAY 7

- Roosevelt, NY Adventist Church, where Ellen White had her second Civil War vision.
- Hiram Edson's barn, cornfield and grave.

DAY 8 Travel Home

Please understand, I am not criticizing this tour. I would love to go on it. But I also must pause and admit that my church culture also builds tombs for the prophets and decorates monuments for the righteous. We memorial our heritage with signs and tours and pilgrimages. It is all a thing of beauty until it becomes hypocrisy when we honor God's work in the past but reject his work in the present. This kind of a tour could help us pursue God's Spirit in the present or it could be an exercise in hypocritical tradition.

This final woe speaks with extra pointedness to Seventh-day Adventists because we have a heritage of prophecy. More than other Christians, Adventists honor a past of the Spirit of Prophecy. It is not limited to a history tour of New England. You can visit the Adventist Village in

Battle Creek Michigan and see the beginnings of the ministry of the church. You can join the 8,000 other people annually who visit Elmshaven, Ellen White's home for the last 15 years of her life, in Napa Valley California. We build tombs for the prophets and decorate monuments to righteous people by the sites we establish, the stories we tell, the ceremonies we hold, and the traditions we keep. All of which can be beautiful. But honoring God's work in the past becomes hypocritical the moment we start rejecting his work in the present. You can honor the heritage of prophecy by reading Ellen White's writings or you can reject his Spirit in the present by using those writings as a tool of judgment on others. We can honor God's Spirit in the past by keeping the tradition of a weekly prayer meeting. Or we can reject God's Spirit in the present by refusing to enter his presence at that prayer meeting. That meeting can be marked more by the spirit of gossip than the Spirit of God. We are more vulnerable to hypocritical tradition than most. Since we have such a strong heritage of honoring God's work in the past, we should have an intense focus on receiving and engaging in his work in the present.

Read some of our heritage. Our founders were radically given to the cause of following the voice of God. Our denominational origins are a movement of the Spirit. These were people who broke tradition in ways that got them kicked out of their churches and mocked by society. They were obsessed with what they called "present truth". They were not content to honor the past work of God only, they insisted on joining him in what he was doing in their time. We have a heritage that is far from hypocritical tradition. How wrong it would be to take that heritage and memorialize it as the great work of God in the past, and not also pursue his leading in the present. ***To continue as a prophetic movement, it is not enough to have the red books on our shelves. We need to have the Holy Spirit in our hearts.*** We don't automatically recognize God's work in our present situation by having the right denominational affiliation or the right set of beliefs. It is a mistake to think that a heritage of following the Spirit is the same as walking with the Spirit.

A preoccupation with the past will cause us to miss the opportunities in the present. When I was growing up, one of the big names in football was quarterback Drew Bledsoe. He was drafted #1 overall in 1993. He was the youngest player to play in a Pro Bowl game in 1995, the 1st of three Pro Bowl appearances. In 2001 he was the face of the New England Patriots. He had just signed a record breaking 10-year contract. In the second game of the season, he got hit late in the 4th quarter. His replacement was backup quarterback Tom Brady. It took Bledsoe a month to get healthy. Once he was, coach Belichick made the decision to keep starting Brady. Brady went on to win six Superbowl's with the Patriots and is widely regarded as the greatest of all time. What if the Patriots would have been too preoccupied with the superstar of the past to play Brady? What if they had felt bound by the 10-year contract? The greatness of coach Belichick was being aware of the opportunity that was in front of him.

The religious leaders that Jesus rebuked in Matthew 23 honored Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at their beautifully decorated tourist site while the Messiah stood right in front of them, and they rejected him. We honor Bates, Smith and White while the Holy Spirit is given without limit. They rejected God when he was right in front of them. We don't have to. Don't stop honoring God's work in the past. Do it in a way that awakens you to his activity right now. Don't keep it

because it is traditional but because God is in it. Old does not equal good. New does not equal bad. God is good. Rejecting him his bad.

Hypocritical tradition is ***honoring God's Spirit in the past while rejecting God's Spirit in the present.***

Verse 30 ...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."

It is easy to sit on your couch and see how the football coach called the wrong play. Or to read the history book and see how the army had a flawed battle plan. Or to see the failures of religious people of the past. It is easy to say, "If I would have been there, I would not have...". I wouldn't have worshipped the Baals. I wouldn't have crucified Christ. I wouldn't have gone on the crusades. I wouldn't have paid indulgences. I wouldn't have dislocated Native Americans. I wouldn't have owned slaves. I wouldn't have gone along with Nazi Holocaust crimes. I wouldn't have been as legalistic as the staff were at the academy I went to. I wouldn't have made that decision the elders made. They all got it wrong. You can see it. And you think you wouldn't do the same if you were there.

I would like to offer you ***the benefit of a healthy mistrust of self.*** Replace your confidence in how you would have behaved with an awareness of how you are behaving. The truth is that most of us would have placed Brady back on the bench. The right action is seen clearer in hindsight. Meaning is hard to perceive in real time. In 100 years, how will society assess our behavior? What will be the landmark successes and failures that define the 2020's? How will those who come after us be completing the sentence "If I were there I would have not..."? In high level sports when there is confusion about what happened on the court or the field, they check the replay. It was too much to process in the moment but in the replay, they know just where to look. They can slow down the footage. It is tempting to say, "If it happened today, I would not have...". But if you could test that hypothesis and be placed in that movement, would you see it? Would you do the right thing?

Behavioral anthropologists and social scientists may have a clearer pulse on society than most of us. But none of us can fully take in what is happening in the moment. How do we live spiritually aware in real time? ***Knowing what God is doing is not required. Knowing him is.*** There is only one who can do it and he must live inside of you. God knows the end from the beginning. He isn't bound by time. He doesn't only have access to instant replays, he has instant pre-play. He doesn't need slow motion. He is the only one who knows the right action in real time. We need to replace the words, "If I would have lived in the days of..." with, "If I am filled with the Spirit today...". The same spirit that would have put us in the right then will direct aright now.

Remember that Bible verse that says, "If we live by the Spirit, we will keep tradition". Oh wait, it doesn't say that. It says, "If we live by the Spirit let us keep in step with the Spirit." I don't know where all this is going. I just know I am walking with the Spirit.

Isaiah 30:21 And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.

When you aren't getting it and you don't understand God, talk to him about it honestly. Try praying something like this, "Lord, this road looks strange to me. But you look familiar. And I see you walking that way, so I am going too. This direction makes me nervous but going there with you gives me peace. This decision scares me, but I know you are in it. Lord, I'd rather let go of my tradition than let go of you. I will turn my back on my prejudices before I turn my back of you. I will give up my preferences before I give up my faith. It scares me to follow you there, but I'd be terrified if I stopped following. So, I am going where you go. Because if I had lived in the days of our fathers, I would have taken part in the shedding of righteous blood if I wasn't walking with the Spirit. I would have been just as blind if I clung to my preconceived ideas. I see their mistake and I don't feel superior I feel desperate to stay with the Spirit. So, Lord, I don't get it. But I'm with you." Pray like that.

We don't always know his plan, but we can get to know his character. Those who join God's work in the present won't understand it all at the time, they need only to be spiritually aware enough to know that Jesus is in front of them. We don't need to know where he is going, we need only to follow.

Hypocritical tradition is ***honoring God's Spirit in the past while rejecting God's Spirit in the present.***

Verses 31-32 *Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.*

Their honoring of the past had incriminated them as the sons of those who killed the prophets. They didn't just have a strong heritage of prophecy, but of consistently rejecting the prophets. They were the sons of King Zedekiah and his officials who threw the prophet Jeremiah into a muddy cistern because he warned that Jerusalem would fall to Babylon (Jeremiah 38). They were the sons of Queen Jezebel who chased the prophet Elijah to the point that he had a mental breakdown. He cried out, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." (1 Kings 19:10). They killed so many prophets that he thought he was the only one left. The religious leaders were sons of these people. We read that King Manasseh filled the streets of Jerusalem with innocent blood (2 Kings 24:4). Steven, in his martyrdom speech, asked, "Which of the prophets did you not kill? (Acts 7:52). Rejection of God's Spirit in the present was not just an occasional mistake for the Jewish people, it was the standard.

We are all sons of those who kill the prophets. Go back in your own family history. It doesn't take long to find someone who rejected God. As humans we share a heritage of all human evil. No, my hands didn't drop the bomb and my finger didn't pull the trigger, but my species did. We are not far removed from the most heinous acts of history. It is the history of our religion that carried out the crimes of the medieval church. We come from that. What is it that distinguishes us between being sons of the prophets and sons of those who killed the prophets? Listen to how Jesus explains this.

John 8:39-41 They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, ⁴⁰ but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. ⁴¹ You are doing the works your father did.”

We are their sons if we do what they did. When we reject God’s Spirit in our time, we are sons of those who rejected God’s Spirit in their time. Jesus, knowing that they were soon to kill him, the greatest rejection of God’s work, told them to fill up the wrath of all former rejections.

Hypocritical tradition is ***honoring God’s Spirit in the past while rejecting God’s Spirit in the present.***

Verse 33- *You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?*

Jesus was not attempting to compliment them when he called them serpents. This is how Jesus feels about hypocrisy. This is how he feels about those who keep traditions but don’t learn from those traditions to walk in the Spirit.

Jesus offered them a visual of their hypocrisy when he asked them how they would escape being sentenced to hell. Remember that valley that they looked over toward the temple from the Mount of Olives? It is the Kidron Valley. It is filled with decorated tombs of religious people. This is where they imagined themselves going upon death. They would be honored just as they honored the past prophets. In Matthew 24:1 we read of Jesus leaving the temple, telling us that Jesus spoke these woes from the Temple Mount. This is an elevated place where he would have been able to see the valleys below. They could see those tombs that Jesus spoke of. They could also see the valley to the south, the Valley of Hinnom. They could probably even smell it. The Valley of Hinnom is where the trash was thrown and where it continually smoldered. It was in this valley that their ancestors offered child sacrifices (Jeremiah 7:31) and the prophet Jeremiah cursed the valley for the idolatry of Israel (Jeremiah 19:2-6). The Greek name for this valley is Gehenna, the very word that Jesus used in verse 33 that is translated as “hell”. You can see how a continually burning fire called “hell” would have supported the false notion of an ever-burning hell if the focus was on the smoldering fire instead of how it brought a final end to the trash that was dumped there. The point here is that they had a physical place, just outside the temple, that they called “hell”. The fate of their trash is the fate they imagined for the wicked. Jesus confronted them with this visual. They thought they were going over there (to the Kidron Valley where the dead are honored) but Jesus was telling them they were going there (to the Valley of Gehenna where the dead are rejected). They had the choice of honoring or rejecting the work of God that was in front of them. Jesus was telling them that their choice would determine if they would be honored or rejected.

Luke includes a woe that Matthew doesn’t.

Luke 11:44 Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it.”

He is telling them that their graves will not be honored. We don't get spot in the Kidron Valley by honor the Spirit in the past but by receiving him in the present.

Matthew 10:32-33 So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Hypocritical tradition is ***honoring God's Spirit in the past while rejecting God's Spirit in the present.***

Verse 34 *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.*

The test of what we would do in the past is what we are doing in the present. The sincerity of our honor for God's past work is tested by our acceptance of his work now. Remember what they said in verse 30 (*If we would have been there...*)? Jesus gave them the opportunity to test this hypothesis by standing before them as more than a prophet and by sending others. They honored Moses, but they would have rejected a burning bush. They would have rejected his pagan upbringing. They honored Elijah but they did not accept when John came in the spirit of Elijah. They honored Noah but they wouldn't have gotten on the boat. They honored Isaiah but they would have rejected anyone in their day who claimed that their tongue had been touched by a coal from the alter. Who is God sending to you now? Jesus was speaking to scribes, and he said he would send them scribes, that is, experts in the law. He said he would send wise men. Is there a professor, counselor, pastor, teacher, grandparent, sister, neighbor, a person in your life who God is sending you to call you into the work of his Spirit? How are you receiving the one he is sending?

What is in front of you? We don't need to be a hero of the past we just need to be faithful in the moment. They honored the graves of the prophets who told of a coming Messiah. The Messiah stood before them. What is in front of you? The Holy Spirit is poured out among us. What we do with the Spirit now is what we would have done to Jesus then. We resist this idea, but it is a fact. They decorated the monuments of righteous men. The New Testament uses the word "monument" 40 times, 27 of these times it refers to the tomb of Christ. These monument decorators were about to kill the one most monumental righteous man. What is in front of you?

A modern paraphrase of verse 34 might read, "I will send you parents and preachers, authors and teachers. Some you will cancel. Some you will put on a no-fly list to keep their messages from influencing your community. Some you will fire. Some you will gossip about until the influence is irreparably invalidated. Others you will reject before hearing because they don't look right, talk right, or believe right." What is in front of you?

We reject the Spirit of God because it is old or it is new. It doesn't fit with our prejudice, bias, preference, or style. Some insist that it is not the Spirit of God because it is happening in an Adventist Church. We dismiss it as not from God because they are not Adventist. One generation stay that their music can't be from God because it has too much beat. The other

generation says their music can't be from God because it is too boring. It doesn't matter what angle it comes from or what it looks like. It matters if it is the Spirit or not.

Jesus says to the same religious leaders in Mark chapter 7, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!... Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." (Mark 7:9 and 13). We can miss it if we let tradition guide us more than we let the Spirit guide us.

Hypocritical tradition is ***honoring God's Spirit in the past while rejecting God's Spirit in the present.***

Verse 35 *So that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.*

"Righteous blood" is an intense term. It refers to all those people God was working through, but man rejected. Jesus extends their guilt for the righteous blood all the way back to Cain, the first murderer (Genesis 4:8). The other bookend of their guilt is less clear. There is only one Abel in the Bible. There are approximately 30 Biblical characters named Zechariah. Regardless of which Zechariah this is, the point is clear, their rejection of the work of God brings on them the cumulative guilt of previous rejections.

The identity of this Zechariah may be inconclusive, but the exploration of the possibilities is meaningful in illustrating the pattern of rejection. We are given some criteria to narrow our search. This Zechariah is a righteous person, the son of Berechiah, he is in some way the last martyr of an era, and he was martyred in the temple (in the inner court of the priests suggesting he was likely a priest- 2Ki.21:5, 2Ch.4:9). There are four Zechariah's that meet the criteria to various extents.

Zechariah Candidate #1: Zechariah the son of Baruch. We do not have a Biblical reference linked this Zechariah. We read about him in the writing of Josephus, "Zealots and Iduméans intended to have Zacharias the son of Baruch, one of the most eminent citizens, slain. Hatred of wickedness was in him. He was a rich man, who had great power to destroy them. He turned his speech to his accusers and went over all their transgressions and made heavy lamentation. Two of the boldest Zealots fell upon Zacharias in the middle of the temple and slew him."ⁱⁱ This shedding of righteous blood took place around 68 AD, so it would have not happened yet at the time that Jesus spoke these words. This would have been a prophetic word from Jesus if this is who he was referring to. This Zechariah would have been the last in the sense that he was the last before the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

Zechariah Candidate #2: The father of John the Baptist.

He was a priest (Luke 1:5) and he also prophesied (Luke 1:68-79). An extra Biblical source reports that he was killed in the temple, "Zacharias replied to them, 'I am a martyr for God, and if he [Herod] shed my blood, the Lord will receive my soul. Besides, know that you shed innocent blood.' Zacharias was murdered about daybreak in the entrance of the temple and altar."ⁱⁱⁱ Early church writings also tell us that his father's name was Berechiah.^{iv} The early theologian Origen (185–254 AD) understood this to be the Zechariah that Jesus was referring

to. This would have been within a few years of the time that Jesus spoke these woes. It was either fresh in their minds or soon to happen.

Zechariah Candidate #3: The Zechariah who wrote the Old Testament book with his name.

In Zechariah 1:1 we learn that he is a prophet and the son of Berechiah.

This Zechariah was a prophet to the returned exiles after the Babylonian Captivity in the 5th century BC. He is the last in the sense that he is the last Zechariah in the Greek Septuagint, which Matthew often quotes from and that his is the second to last book in the English Old Testament. The Bible does not tell how he died but again extra Biblical sources tell us of his martyrdom in the temple. There is a document called Targum Lamentations. It is a 1st or 2nd century Aramaic rendering of the Biblical book of Lamentations that adds Rabbinical notes. In Lamentations 2:20 it asks, "Should priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord?" In Targum Lamentations 2:20 it adds, "as when you killed Zechariah son of Iddo, the High Priest and faithful prophet in the Temple of the Lord on the Day of Atonement because he admonished you not to do evil before the Lord?" Another rejection of God through another Zechariah before another judgment in Israel.

What is with all these Berechiah's naming their sons Zechariah? How is it that they all happened to be good guys and got killed for it and that it took place in the temple? The multiple possibilities are not a lack of clarity on the part of Christ. He was an expert communicator. Jesus was aware of these multiple possibilities, even the future ones. In saying, "Zechariah son of Berechiah" he was giving an example that featured the Jewish leader's rejection of the Spirit in every age. If he wanted to highlight the most recent tragedy of righteous blood, he could have mentioned John the Baptist. But Jesus chose Zechariah. Even with this narrow criterion we see multiple examples of them rejecting the work of God. Jesus is pointing out that they have consistently rejected God.

Berechiah means "bless Yahweh" or "Yahweh blesses". Zechariah means "remember Yahweh" or "Yahweh remembers". There is a generational pattern of worshipping God then forgetting God, honoring him then rejecting him. It is significant that these Zechariah's come in a generation when the people are not remembering God. They reject him as evidenced by them killing the righteous Zechariah. And that martyrdom is a call to remember God. "Zechar" means remember. By using Zechariah, Jesus calls the religious leaders to remember and stop rejecting God.

We are not encountering a lack of clarity in the text. We are observing abundant clarity with repeated examples. They were the sons of those who killed the prophets.

Zechariah Candidate #4: The Zechariah son of Jehoiada

There is a fourth candidate that I will zoom in on. Not because he is more likely to be the one Jesus was referring to but because his story vividly illustrates this message. The first thing we notice is that his dad had the wrong name. Some suggest that he had a grandfather named Berechiah or that Jehoiada had a second name. Others suggest that the inclusion of this name in Matthew is an error or a later addition. We don't need to prove any of this to see that his story relates to the message of the final woe in Matthew 23. The martyrdom of Zechariah is

recorded in the book of 2nd Chronicles around 800 BC. The last book in the Tanakh. This is the Hebrew Old Testament. The books are arranged in a different order. Abel is killed in the first book, Zechariah in the last. One of the most prominent tombs in the Kidron Valley is the tomb of this Zechariah.

All arguments aside, listen to his story.

2 Chronicles 24:20-22

²⁰ Then the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people, and said to them, "Thus says God, 'Why do you break the commandments of the Lord, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, he has forsaken you.'" ²¹ But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the Lord. ²² Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness that Jehoiada, Zechariah's father, had shown him, but killed his son. And when he was dying, he said, "May the Lord see and avenge!"

His message was the message of the final woe. They held onto traditional forms of Judaism but they had forsaken God. They were rejecting his work in the present. When he gave the woe they did the same thing they were about to do to Jesus, kill him.

It was the king of Israel who led in the murder of Zechariah. And who was this king? Joash. Does that ring a bell? Joash, the boy king. He was the good guy. He was the son of the good guys. Read the backstory in 2 Chronicles 22-24. Evil Ahaziah was king in Israel. He was followed by his wicked mother Athaliah. She secured her rule by destroying all the royal family. Except she didn't kill one of her grandsons, Joash, the son of Ahaziah. His Aunt, Jehoshabeath abducted him and put him in hiding. His family was killed. He was orphaned. But his aunt and her husband, Jehoiada the priest became his new parents. They raised him in the Lord. He was literally the son of a prophet. At age 7 he was presented as king. Athaliah tore her clothes and cried, "treason". For the next 40 years, Joash reigned as a good king. He was part of what God was doing. In fact, he specialized in his own form of building tombs for the prophets and decorating monuments for righteous people. He repaired the temple wall. He stationed the gatekeepers at the gates of the house of the Lord so that no one should enter who was in any way unclean (23:20). He employed masons, carpenters, and iron workers to repair and beautify the temple and decorate the monument. He brought in utensils, dishes, and offering bowls to be used in temple services. We read in 2 Chronicles 24:2 that "Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest." He didn't do right all his days but all the days of the prophet who raised him. Then the good king turned into a bad king. He had been the central leader in God's work of reform but then he started rejecting God.

2 Chronicles 24:17-19

Now after the death of Jehoiada the princes of Judah came and paid homage to the king. Then the king listened to them. ¹⁸ And they abandoned the house of the Lord, the God of their fathers, and served the Asherim and the idols. And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this guilt of theirs. ¹⁹ Yet he sent prophets among them to bring them back to the Lord. These testified against them, but they would not pay attention.

They decorated holy monuments but rejected the prophets. Somehow, Joash thought he was in the right. He was the one who decorated the monuments. God was on his side. He has a heritage of courageously following the Spirit. But he stopped.

I can't rely on the spiritual connectedness of a past generation, or a prior time in my life, or last week or yesterday. What is God doing now? What is he doing at AGA? What is he doing through the staff we currently have? What is he doing through our current church leadership? What is he doing in this sermon series? What is he doing in these last few years that your kids are in the home? What is he doing in this stage in your career? What is he doing in your old age? What is he doing with your youth? Don't miss it! Don't reject it! Don't be blinded by your tradition!

As Zechariah died, he said, "May the Lord see and avenge!" The Lord did see and avenge. Josiah was assassinated because of what he did to Zechariah (24:25). God sees our rejection of him. May we never keep a tradition alive while killing the spirit that tradition was meant to memorialize.

Verse 37 *"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 were not willing!"*

The woes are over in verse 36. But you miss the tone of voice they were spoken in if you don't continue on to verse 37. The woes were spoken because Jesus longs to gather us. He points out our hypocrisy because he wants to redeem our spirituality. When he spoke this, they didn't have much time. Jesus would be hanging on a cross in two days. As we read this, we don't have much time. Our lives are short. The thing God is doing will move on without us if we refuse to see it. Soon, Jesus is coming to take us home. Now is the time to be in tune with the Spirit. Don't reject the Spirit. Reject hypocrisy.

ⁱ <https://www.centerforadventistresearch.org/netour/>

Photos at <https://www.facebook.com/NEtour/>

ⁱⁱ *Wars of the Jews* 4:5:4

ⁱⁱⁱ *Protevangélion of James* 16:14-25

^{iv} A. Mingana *Woodbrooke Studies: Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic, and Garshuni, vol 1, Cambridge 1927, pp. 138-287*. Woodbrooke dates Serapion's text to 385–395 AD, probably composed in Greek