

Matthew 27:1-9 The Potter's Field

Matthew 27:1-9 (CSB) 1 When daybreak came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. 2 After tying Him up, they led Him away and handed Him over to Pilate, the governor. 3 Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that Jesus had been condemned, was full of remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders. 4 "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood," he said. "What's that to us?" they said. "See to it yourself!" 5 So he threw the silver into the temple and departed. Then he went and hanged himself. 6 The chief priests took the silver and said, "It's not permitted to put it into the temple treasury, since it is blood money." 7 They conferred together and bought the potter's field with it as a burial place for foreigners. 8 Therefore that field has been called "Field of Blood" to this day. 9 Then what was spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him whose price was set by the Israelites, 10 and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me.

From Matthew 27:7-9 we read of the priests and elders conferring together to buy the Potter's field with the money Judas threw back into the temple after he regretted betraying Christ to them for the 30 pieces of silver. In purchasing the Potter's field to be used as a burial place for foreigners, they were buying land that would have been outside of Jerusalem. Matthew writes, that this was fulfilling the words spoken by the prophet Jeremiah. At the beginning of Matthew chapter 27, Matthew was describing the custodial transfer of Christ between the Jewish Sanhedrin and the Roman governor Pilate. At this point in his description of the final hours of Christ's life, here wasn't the place to elaborate on Jeremiah's words or add that Zachariah had made equally relevant prophecy regarding the same Potter's field. The fulfillment of what Jeremiah had spoken carried so much more weight than just the 30 pieces of silver, but Matthew had to trust that the Holy Spirit would guide us to the understanding He intended.

There are Old Testament references that Matthew was referencing by making his statement here in 27:9-10, so we need to look at these to gain the proper understanding that Matthew was leading us to. First, we have the Old Testament reference from Jeremiah that describes Jeremiah's purchase price for the land during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem while he was a captive. In Matthew 27:9, this was described as 30 pieces of silver. This price is 17 shekels in Jeremiah 32:9. These are identical measures, not just by Matthew's testimony, but by archaeological evidence of the weight of coinage and silver from that time. One silver piece weighed roughly 14 grams and contained approximately 93% silver. This was the equivalent of the .43 pounds of silver in the 17 shekels referenced in the Old Testament verses from Jeremiah. This at least confirms that Matthew was accurately connecting the price of land to the prophet Jeremiah.

There is much more to see here, and this isn't the only passage from Jeremiah that Matthew intended us to consider. Matthew would have had an intimate knowledge of Jeremiah's writings by the time he wrote the book of Matthew, so he wouldn't have missed any relevant connections. The Potter's field has more significance than simply satisfying the priest's need to dispense with these 30 pieces of blood money (Mt 27:6 τιμή time 5091, the expense, price, cost; αἷμα haima 129, blood -especially as shed) by means other than returning it to the temple coffers (Mk 7:11 κοβᾶν korban 2878, a temple fund, a gift, offering, anything consecrated to God).

This specific location was by no means random, nor was its purpose. The Potter's field is described in Matthew 27:8 as "called the Blood Field to this day." Most scholars agree that Matthew's gospel was written between 80-90 A.D. His reference to it still being called the Blood Field would have been significant even then because Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in 70 A.D., yet it was still known as the Blood Field after the Jews had been dispersed from Jerusalem. In fact, the field remains to be known by that name to this day as "the Fields of Blood" in Akeldama. The most recent use of this field as of Matthew's writing, according to church tradition, had been as a hiding place for Jesus' disciples after Christ was apprehended in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:56), and where Judas Iscariot had hanged himself (Matthew 27:5). But that had nothing to do with Jeremiah or Zechariah.

Speaking of Zechariah, Matthew didn't even mention him, but when we look at Zachariah 11:6-13, from one of the final prophecies of the Old Testament, we read that the Messiah will turn Jerusalem over to her enemies once again and they will devastate the land (Zech.11:6). We now know this happened when the Romans put down the Jewish rebellion of 70 A.D. and destroyed Jerusalem, the Temple, killed over a million Jews, and took nearly 100,000 captives. In Zechariah 11:7-11, Zachariah prophesied of the Messiah withdrawing His favor from His chosen people (v.10), discarding the Priests, Pharisees, and Elders (3 shepherds), (v.8) who had been misleading the people of Israel (the flock), and leaving them to go astray on their own without the shepherds who are intended for destruction (v.7; Matthew 21:44), who He will have become impatient with, but who will also detest him (v.8; Matthew 21:45-46, 22:15, 26:3-4, 65-68). And then provides the most obvious connection to Christ with these words of prophecy:

***Zechariah 11:12-13 (CSB)** 12 Then I said to them, "If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them." So they weighed my wages, thirty pieces of silver. 13 "Throw it to the potter," the Lord said to me—this magnificent price I was valued by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw it into the house of the Lord, to the potter.*

Zachariah prophesied of the value of the Messiah - a sarcastically "magnificent price" of 30 pieces of silver to be paid, thrown into the House of the Lord, to pay the Potter.

The significance of these references to a potter is all still pretty thin at this point other than the fact that the name of the field referred to in the New Testament was also stated in the Old Testament. Matthew has this same connection for us to make in Jeremiah. This field is more than just a place the priests decided would be good for burying foreigners (Matthew 27:7).

The words of Jeremiah that Matthew references in Matthew 27:9 come from a combination of Jeremiah's words from Jeremiah 7:31-32; Jeremiah 19:6, 11-14; and Jeremiah 32:6-12. Matthew's combination of references. But he is also including the obviously fulfilled prophecy from Zachariah with his statement about fulfilled prophesy. This writing style is not uncommon in the New Testament. Even though he includes the reference, Matthew mentions the major prophet (Jeremiah) without mentioning the minor prophet (Zachariah). Mark does the same thing in Mark 1:2,3 referring to Malachi then Isaiah, but ascribing both prophecies only to the major prophet Isaiah. Whether this was for literary efficiency, or to avoid confusing the reader, it is nonetheless not contradictory to scripture. It is not only common in the New Testament but this writing style is also seen in the Old Testament. One such example comes from 2 Chronicles 36:21, which is drawn from Leviticus 26:34, 35 and Jeremiah 25:12, but ascribed only to "Jeremiah" (An Exposition of Matthew [Baker, 1975], p. 948).

Continuing to look at the passage from Jeremiah, we see first from Jeremiah 32:7-8 that he acknowledges that this word was from the Lord when he heard - *“you own the right of redemption to buy it.” (v.7), “the Lord has said and urged... please buy my field and ask in the land of Benjamin, for you own the right of inheritance, and redemption. Buy it for yourself.” (v.8)*

Matthew establishes that the context of this purchase from Jeremiah’s words was **Jesus has all the rights of inheritance and redemption, and it is His life that is the purchase price** for this land.

Still, however, there is a significant missing piece. What is the big deal about “this land?”

There is considerable debate, which I’ve already alluded to in this writing, about why Matthew chose to reference Jeremiah instead of Zachariah, whose prophecy appears to make the most significant and obvious connection to the Potter’s field, and the purchase price. Some have gone so far as to argue that Matthew made a mistake, or that there were scribal errors in duplication of the Biblical text. Others reference the way that Old Testament scrolls were written and suggest that Matthew might have simply been reading from a larger scroll of the major prophet Jeremiah, which could have also included the writings of the minor prophets including Zachariah. This argument concludes that he might’ve simply alluded to the overall scroll of the prophecies of Jeremiah. However, all these conclusions imply some version of an unintended result. That is not acceptable. I conclude this: Matthew knew very well of Zachariah’s prophecies and knew also that they were easily connected to the events surrounding Judas’ betrayal, the priests, the price, and the Potter from Zachariah. HE very specifically intended to point us to the words of the prophet Jeremiah. This Potter’s field that the priests purchased, which Matthew references, didn’t just show up in scripture for the first time here in the book of Matthew. Matthew wants us to see what Jeremiah said about this exact spot - because in fact, Jeremiah talks about this exact spot.

The “Fields of Blood” in today’s Akeldama are the same Potter’s field that was purchased with the 30 pieces of silver from Judas’s betrayal of Christ. Before this, it was known as Tophet, in the valley of Hinnom. This was the area to the South and East of the old city of Jerusalem. This was where dead animals from temple sacrifices were thrown to rot and be eaten by worms and maggots. This was the valley where in the past, Israelites had worshipped Molech and Baal (Leviticus 20:2). The Greek translation of this Hinnom valley, “Gehenna,” became synonymous with hell, as this area was also where infants had been sacrificed, by burning them to the god Molech. King Solomon himself had set up a high place for Chemosh and other gods of his foreign wives, (1 Kings 11:8). In response, God took the Kingdom of Israel away from Solomon (1 Kings 11:11). This is what the prophet Jeremiah had to say in Jeremiah 7:31-32 about this Potter’s field, the Field of Blood, that was once known as Tophet.

***Jeremiah 7:31-32 (CSB)** They have built the high places of Topheth in Ben Hinnom Valley in order to burn their sons and daughters in the fire, a thing I did not command; I never entertained the thought. “Therefore, look, the days are coming”—the Lord’s declaration— “when this place will no longer be called Topheth and Ben Hinnom Valley, but Slaughter Valley. Topheth will become a cemetery, because there will be no other burial place.*

And in Jeremiah 19:5-6 he says this,

***Jeremiah 19:5-6 (CSB)** They have built high places to Baal on which to burn their children in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, something I have never commanded or mentioned; I never entertained the*

thought. “Therefore, look, the days are coming—this is the Lord’s declaration—when this place will no longer be called Topheth and Ben Hinnom Valley, but Slaughter Valley.

Matthew was pointing out that this same field, was the one that had been used as an affront to God, for evil purposes, compared to hell, and declared to one day be renamed the “Valley of Slaughter.” I don't need to attempt a technical connection of the Greek translations of “Field of Blood” to the Hebrew translation of “Valley of Slaughter,” because it is clear that this is the same place - it is the same Potter’s field, purchased with the price of Christ’s life.

But we aren't done with Jeremiah yet, because he also understood from God, (and Matthew wanted us to make the connection) who the “Potter” was that owned the field. Here are Jeremiah’s words from Jeremiah 18:2-8.

***Jeremiah 18:2-8 (CSB)** “Go down at once to the potter’s house; there I will reveal My words to you.” So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, working away at the wheel. But the jar that he was making from the clay became flawed in the potter’s hand, so he made it into another jar, as it seemed right for him to do. The word of the Lord came to me: “House of Israel, can I not treat you as this potter treats his clay?”—this is the Lord’s declaration. “Just like clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, house of Israel. At one moment I might announce concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will uproot, tear down, and destroy it. However, if that nation about which I have made the announcement turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the disaster I had planned to do to it.*

The Potter’s field had always been a place of sin, filth, offense to God, comparison to hell - just as the heart of man, just as the nation of Israel, always within God's grasp, yet always a place that needed to be renamed, purchased, and restored. Even before Jeremiah, the prophet Isaiah had spoken about this same place called Tophet, where fires burned, and people were tortured and sacrificed apart from God.

***Isaiah 30:33 (Amplified Bible)** For Topheth [in Hinnom] has long been ready; Indeed, it has been prepared for the [Assyrian] king. He has made it deep and wide, A pit of fire with plenty of wood; The breath of the Lord, like a river of brimstone (blazing sulfur), kindles and fans it.*

Even then, there was a vivid picture for us to see of a place set apart, recognizable to be compared to Gehenna - to the fires of hell. So, Matthew didn't make a mistake when he pointed to the prophet Jeremiah and said:

***Matthew 27:9-10 (CSB)** Then what was spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of Him whose price was set by the Israelites, and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord directed me.*

Christ’s death had purchased hell.

Matthew intended us to understand that Jeremiah’s words were fulfilled because the significance of this exact location was that it was a place that represented hell. Christ’s death bought the rights of inheritance, redemption, and life, from the Potter – God Himself, who had set hell as a place of eternal torment for Satan, his demons, and those who fail to accept the gift of Christ’s sacrifice. By purchasing the Potter’s field, or this symbolic hell, the picture was painted for us to see the same thing that was not figurative at all – Christ had been handed the keys to death and hell, by the price of His blood on the cross, the atonement for our sin.