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## The Death of Judas in Matthew: Matthew 27:9 Reconsidered

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The account of Judas's death in Matthew's Gospel yields opposite readings. In the traditional reading, Judas's death is damning: his suicide enacts his self-exclusion from the salvation promised in Jesus. More recently, scholars have sought to rehabilitate Judas. Far from cementing his condemnation, Judas's death is a sign of his repentance, even heroism, and points toward redemption. Matthew's use of Scripture is, I propose, illuminating for the debate. Matthew 27:9 applies to the episode a quotation from Zechariah attributed (famously) to Jeremiah. Scholarly attention has focused on the problem of (mis)attribution. I argue, rather, that the "mistake" is useful: in calling up both Zech 11 and Jeremiah, Matthew sets the death of Judas within a particular scriptural history. A close reading of Jer 19 together with Zech 11 reveals a dense interweaving of vocabulary and themes, an intertextuality that informs Matt 27. Themes of innocent blood and defilement emerge in all three, and Judas's problematic "repentance" finds in LXX Zechariah's use of μεταμέλομαι a precursor that opens up the debate. Against this scriptural background, Judas's death unfolds as a story not of one man only but of a people and a land, a story set within Israel's larger story in which both devastation and hope—indeed restoration—may, in the blood of Jesus, be true.

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How is the death of Judas in Matthew's Gospel to be understood? Matthew 27:3–10 has given rise to diametrically opposed readings. By the traditional reading, Judas's death is damning; his suicide enacts his self-exclusion from the salvation promised in Jesus. Judas is a man, Calvin says, "entirely shut out from the grace of God."<sup>1</sup> Many contemporary commentators agree. Robert H. Gundry entitles this

I would like to thank my daughter, Dr. Caitlin Anne Timmerman, for her generous help and excellent editorial eye. I am grateful also to the *JBL* reviewers for their helpful responses.

<sup>1</sup>John Calvin, *In harmoniam euang.*, Matt 27:3: ut ... exemplum esset hominis a Dei gratia prorsus abdicati. In *Commentarii in quatuor euangelistas Matthaem, Marcum, Lucam, et Joannem* (Amsterdam: J. J. Schipper, 1671), 308. Translation from Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, trans. and collated by William Pringle, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 3:269. The standard descriptor for Judas in ancient commentary is

section of his commentary “The Dreadful End of Judas”; Judas the traitor gets his just deserts. In N. T. Wright’s words, “the tragedy of Judas is real, horrible and lasting.”<sup>2</sup> Others, however, have sought to rehabilitate Judas. Far from cementing his condemnation, Judas’s death is a sign of his repentance, even heroism, and points toward redemption. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison are representative. Judas is not “an everlasting failure doomed to destruction.” He confesses his sin and seeks to make atonement by his suicide.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, William Klassen says that Judas is Jesus’s true friend.<sup>4</sup>

How are we to adjudicate these competing claims? Is Judas betrayer or friend? Is he lost or is he saved—even, perhaps, saving? Matthew’s use of Scripture is, I propose, illuminating for the debate. Matthew 27:9 applies to the episode a quotation from Zechariah attributed (famously) to Jeremiah. Scholarly attention has focused on the problem of (mis)attribution.<sup>5</sup>

In this article, I take up Davies and Allison’s suggestion that the reference to Jeremiah “prod[s] us to read Zech 11.13 in the light of” Jeremiah,<sup>6</sup> and argue

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“traitor.” See, e.g., Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.20.2: *proditor; Judas traditor* (PG 7:777); Tertullian, *Marc.* 4.40.2: *opera traditoris* (CCSL 1:655–56); Augustine, *Cons.* 3.7.31 (CSEL 43:308); Chrysostom, *Hom. Jo.* 70.1 (PG 59:381).

<sup>2</sup>Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 552; N. T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone*, 2 vols. (London: SPCK, 2002), 2:175. Cf. Pierre Bonnard, *L’Évangile selon saint Matthieu*, CNT 1 (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1982), 393; Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox, 1993), 314; Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, SP 1 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 386–87; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 658–60; Donald P. Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew: A Redactional Study*, BETL 39 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1975), 347–52, 384. Donald A. Hagner writes, “We can pity Judas, but we cannot make a hero out of him, nor alas even a believer” (*Matthew* 14–28, WBC 33B [Dallas: Word, 1995], 815).

<sup>3</sup>W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols., ICC (London: T&T Clark, 1988–1997), 3:561–65; quotation from 561.

<sup>4</sup>William Klassen, *Judas: Betrayer or Friend of Jesus?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996). See also John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1153; Judas is the true disciple, “the first disciple to ‘lose his life for [Jesus]’ sake” (16:25).” See also David Daube, “Judas,” *California Law Review* 82 (1994): 95–108; and Daube, “Judas,” *Journal for the History of Law* 13 (1994): 305–30; Hyam Maccoby, *Judas Iscariot and the Myth of Jewish Evil* (New York: Free Press, 1992); Kim Paffenroth, *Judas: Images of the Lost Disciple* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 115; Caroline F. Whelan, “Suicide in the Ancient World: A Re-examination of Matthew 27:3–10,” *LTP* 49 (1993): 505–22.

<sup>5</sup>See the reviews of the debate in Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:568–69; and Michael Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew’s Gospel: The Rejected Prophet Motif in Matthean Redaction*, JSNTSup 68 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 60–67.

<sup>6</sup>Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:569. They follow Raymond E. Brown: Matt 27:9 is a conflated citation containing words from both Zechariah and Jeremiah, identified by one name rather than both (*The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*;

beyond Davies and Allison that the “mistake” is deliberate and useful. In naming Jeremiah and echoing Zechariah, Matthew gains a rich referential background for the narrative of Judas’s death. Sjeff van Tilborg suggested some time ago that Matt 27:9 works deliberately to create meaning: the quotation from Zechariah, “hidden” by the attribution to Jeremiah, allows the reader who “hears and understands” (cf. Matt 13:14–15, 18–23) to read Matt 27:3–10 against the background of co-texts from Jeremiah and Zechariah that illuminate Matthew’s narrative.<sup>7</sup> I wish to carry van Tilborg’s important observation further. It is not just that Matthew’s story of Judas recalls, as commentators have shown, both Jeremiah (in particular, I will argue, Jer 19) and Zech 11, nor even (as van Tilborg notes) that the echoes of each text illuminate Matthew. It is also that Matthew finds in Jeremiah and Zechariah together a shared logic and a particular history, a logic that informs the story of Judas and a history within which Judas’s story unfolds. The logic, I will argue, is that of innocent blood and the problem of pollution. The history is that of a city and people in which the blood of the innocent and the threat of defilement loom large. To trace Matthew’s use of Jeremiah and Zechariah is to see that Matthew sets the story of Judas within this scriptural history. Against the background of Zechariah and Jeremiah together, Judas and his blood money raise the urgent question: what now of Israel’s fate and future?

My argument proceeds in two stages. Assuming with Ulrich Luz that “inter-texts ... are part of the rhetorical strategy of a text,” I seek to read with the grain of the text.<sup>8</sup> In the first place, I trace the referential background in order to establish its logic: what are the interrelationships between Jeremiah and Matt 27:3–10; between Jeremiah and Zechariah; between Zechariah and Matthew? What is the history of people and land that begins to emerge in the weave of intertexts?<sup>9</sup> Second,

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*A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, 2 vols., ABRL [New York: Doubleday, 1994], 1:651). See the similar suggestions of Gundry (*Matthew*, 557) and Knowles (*Jeremiah in Matthew’s Gospel*, 67–69).

<sup>7</sup>Sjeff van Tilborg, “Matthew 27.3–10: An Intertextual Reading,” in *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings: Essays in Honour of Bas van Iersel*, ed. Sipke Draisma (Kampen: Kok, 1989), 159–74, here 164–65. Van Tilborg (cf. Robert H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew’s Gospel: With Special Reference to the Messianic Hope*, NovTSup 18 [Leiden: Brill, 1975], 122–27) reads with great sensitivity to Matthean echoes of Zech 11 and Jer 32 and 19. He does not draw the Old Testament texts together, however, or find in them a common theme.

<sup>8</sup>Ulrich Luz, “Intertexts in the Gospel of Matthew,” *HTR* 97 (2004): 119–37, here 122 (cf. 121, 125).

<sup>9</sup>On method, see esp. Dale C. Allison Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 19–23. Cf. Luz, “Intertexts,” 130–31. The interrelationships between texts become apparent (as Allison notes, 21–23) through a conjunction of elements: shared vocabulary and shared themes, or verbal echoes and a similar narrative structure, or quotation and shared content. The possibilities are manifold and the presence of intertextuality must be determined afresh for each passage. In the case of Matthew and Jeremiah or Zechariah, we are working with demonstrated relationships between texts (see below and esp. Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*, 122–27; and van Tilborg, “Matthew 27.3–10”). In the case of Jeremiah and Zechariah, the relationship I seek

I ask about the import of this referential background. What is the meaning of Judas's death in the context of Jeremiah's and Zechariah's shared concern with innocent blood and defilement? To read Matthew against this background is, I propose, to discover a reading of Judas that goes beyond his individual fate to encompass the fates of both Jesus and the people. I hope to demonstrate that Matthew's use of Scripture is not atomistic but foundational and rich. Far from inserting isolated prooftexts into a gospel to which they are essentially extraneous, Matthew finds in his scriptural interlocutors a history encompassing large questions of purity and pollution, a people and a land, against and within which the history of Jesus and Judas unfolds.<sup>10</sup>

### I. JEREMIAH AND MATTHEW

Although he quotes Zechariah, Matthew sets the story of Judas under the sign of Jeremiah: "Then was fulfilled the word spoken through the prophet Jeremiah" (27:9).<sup>11</sup> Several elements of the scene find echoes in Jeremiah.<sup>12</sup> Gundry notes

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to demonstrate is one of resonance: shared images and a shared logic, rather than textual borrowing. As Luz demonstrates ("Intertexts," 122–25), the term *intertextuality* includes both specific textual borrowing and looser concinnities or relationships of various kinds. The work of Michael Fishbane (esp. *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1985]) and James L. Kugel (*In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990]; and *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998]) demonstrates the fundamentally interpretive and therefore allusive character of the biblical texts and texts based on them. Scriptural authors (or editors) habitually work against a background, steeped in the traditions of Scripture, speaking to it, with it, against it (allowing Scripture its broad sense, that is, the texts and traditions that a community considered sacred and authoritative). Matthew stands (as his story of Judas will, I hope, demonstrate) in this kind of Scripture-soaked and referential tradition.

<sup>10</sup>I would disagree with Luz's conclusion, namely, that the "innumerable biblical background-texts" in Matthew's gospel serve to illuminate and give legitimacy to "the new Matthean foundational story" ("Intertexts," 137); to this new story of Jesus "the foundational history of Israel" is subordinated. Matthew's use of Scripture—and in particular the fulfillment quotations—evidences for Luz "the painful experience of the parting of the ways" with Judaism (*ibid.*, 136). On the contrary, I suggest that Israel's history and its future in the land are the matrix within which Matthew's new story of Jesus unfolds and are, in a primary sense, its goal.

<sup>11</sup>Translations of biblical passages are taken from the NRSV. Where they differ from the NRSV they are my own.

<sup>12</sup>See the helpful summary of possible references in Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:568–69; cf. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 1:650–52; and van Tilborg, "Matthew 27.3–10," 169–73. There are resonances with Jer 18 (18:2–6, 18–23: the potter and the plot against Jeremiah) and 32 (the purchase of a field), as well as significant parallels, both verbal and thematic, with Jer 19.

parallels with Jer 19:1–13 in particular.<sup>13</sup> The parallels are verbal as well as thematic, and many of them have been noted before. In tracing them here I seek to show that these parallels describe a particular logic, the logic of innocent blood.<sup>14</sup> It is a logic that, for Matthew—as, indeed, for Jeremiah and Zechariah—underlies and illuminates Judas’s story. Jeremiah 19 begins with a declaration of sin, with an emphasis on *innocent blood*.<sup>15</sup> “Hear the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem . . . : the people have forsaken me, and have profaned this place [with idol worship] . . . and . . . have filled this place with the blood of the innocent” (םד םינקי; αἱμάτων ἀθώων, 19:3–4).<sup>16</sup> Jeremiah is commanded to make this declaration

<sup>13</sup>Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*, 125: blood of the innocents (Jer 19:4)/innocent blood (Matt 27:4); potter (Jer 19:1, 11; Matt 27:7, 10); elders and (chief) priests (Jer 19: 1; Matt 27:1, 3); the similarity between the names “Valley of Slaughter” (Jer 19:6) and “Field of Blood” (Matt 27:8) and the similar phrases that introduce each: “Wherefore this place shall be called” (Jer 19:6); “wherefore that field was called” (Matt 27:8). Gundry suggests a parallel also “between the burial of the Judaeans in the Valley of Hinnom and the burial of Judas in the potter’s field,” but Matthew does not mention Judas’s burial (as Senior also notes, *Passion Narrative*, 360 n. 46). See also Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 359–61; Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew’s Gospel*, 69–70; and Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:569. In addition to these specific parallels, Matthew’s account (I argue) follows a logic like that of Jer 19. In focusing on the parallels with Jer 19 I do not intend to exclude resonances with Jer 18 and 32. Jeremiah 19, however, yields a concentration of verbal echoes and thematic parallels with Matt 27:3–10 and resonances with Zech 11 that suggest it is central to Matthew’s purpose.

<sup>14</sup>For this argument see also, more briefly, Catherine Sider Hamilton, *The Death of Jesus in Matthew: Innocent Blood and the End of Exile*, SNTSMS 167 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), esp. 188–89. A number of commentators note the shared reference to innocent blood (Jer 19:4; Matt 27:4, e.g., Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*, 125; Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 360; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:569; van Tilborg, “Matthew 27.3–10,” 169). Van Tilborg goes on to note the importance of innocent blood in Matt 27:3–10 and its connection to the destruction of Jerusalem: “The readiness to shed Jesus’ innocent blood is the real cause of the disaster” (“Matthew 27.3–10,” 174). The question, however, is why—and whether the story ends here. This is a question, I submit, to which Matt 27:9, with its curious commingling of Zechariah and Jeremiah, provides an answer that challenges van Tilborg’s reading, which holds that the problem described under the term “innocent blood” is the rejection of the prophet, and the destruction that follows is the “final conclusion” of the story of Israel, a conclusion foreshadowed in the death of Judas. On the contrary, I propose that tracing the intertextual echoes reveals a scriptural vision that finds in innocent blood a different problem, the specter of defilement. Such a scriptural vision finds in innocent blood not only an explanation for the tragedy that has come upon the people but also the possibility of hope, precisely for “the holy city” (Matt 27:53).

<sup>15</sup>Verbal parallels are indicated with italics; thematic parallels by underlining. Note that in both Jeremiah and Matthew, innocent blood is introduced in the context of a declaration of sin.

<sup>16</sup>Gundry has argued persuasively that Matthew knows the biblical texts in Hebrew and in Greek versions (*Use of the Old Testament*, esp. 172–78). In discussions of Matt 27:3–10, most commentators assume the evangelist’s knowledge of the MT and LXX. For a contrary view, see Maarten J. J. Menken, who argues that Matthew’s Bible was a revised LXX (*Matthew’s Bible: The Old Testament Text of the Evangelist*, BETL 173 [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004], esp. 3–10, 179–99, 280). Luz (*Matthew: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, 3 vols., Hermeneia

in the presence of *the elders of the people and the senior priests* (מזקני העם ומזקני הכהנים; LXX οἱ πρεσβύτεροι τοῦ λαοῦ; οἱ πρεσβύτεροι τῶν ἱερέων, Jer 19:1). So, too, in Matt 27. Judas says to *the elders of the people and the chief priests* (οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς; οἱ πρεσβύτεροι, 27:3; cf. 27:1 οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι τοῦ λαοῦ): “I have sinned; I have delivered up *innocent blood*” (27:4).

In Matthew, the chief priests refuse to listen to Judas. Because they do not listen, Judas hangs himself. In Jeremiah, the priest Pashhur strikes Jeremiah for his prophecy of disaster (20:2); because the priest and his friends will not listen, Jeremiah says, “they shall fall by the sword” (20:4). In both cases, an accusation about sin and innocent blood is made and the priests reject it. In both cases destruction follows: in Matthew immediately, for Judas; in Jeremiah in the future, for Pashhur and the whole people.<sup>17</sup>

The parallel logic continues. In Matthew, Judas throws the *blood money* (τιμὴ αἵματος, 27:6)—the price of Jesus’s *innocent blood* (αἷμα ἀθῶον, 27:4)—into the temple. In Jeremiah, *innocent blood* (αἷμα ἀθῶον, 19:4) is shed in “this place”: Jerusalem, with its temple in it (Jer 19:4). Indeed, Jeremiah depicts the city as a temple. Her sins are all those that involve temple worship: the people “have profaned this place by making offerings in it to other gods”; they have built high places of Baal and burned their children as sacrifices; they have thereby “shed innocent blood in this place” (Jer 19:4). The term “this place” encompasses city and temple both. In Jeremiah as in Matthew the blood of the innocent lands at the center of the worship of God.<sup>18</sup> Therefore Jeremiah prophesies slaughter: the city will become a burial

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[Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005], 467), who follows Menken, nevertheless notes that in Matt 27:9 “there are many agreements with the MT, few with the LXX.” He concludes that the quotation is pre-Matthean. The more obvious conclusion, especially given the evidence of Matthean editing in 27:9, is that Matthew knows not only the LXX but also the Hebrew text.

<sup>17</sup>Van Tilborg notes a “parallel narrative structure”: the leaders throughout the book of Jeremiah do not listen to the prophet, as in Matthew they do not listen to Jesus; the persecution of the prophet puts at risk the future of the city and the land (“Matthew 27:3–10,” 170). (Oddly, van Tilborg does not note in relation to Jer 19 the priest’s rejection of Jeremiah’s message.) This is not quite the parallel that Matthew draws in 27:3–10, however. In Matt 27:3–10, it is *Judas* to whom the leaders do not listen: they fail to heed his warning about innocent blood. Similarly, it is Jeremiah’s prophecy of destruction following upon idolatry and innocent blood that Pashhur the priest refuses to hear. The center of gravity in both Matt 27:3–10 and Jer 19 lies not in the “rejected prophet” theme but in the problem of innocent blood (and, in Jeremiah, idolatry) and the fate of the people in its wake.

<sup>18</sup>See Charlene McAfee Moss, *The Zechariah Tradition and the Gospel of Matthew*, BZNW 156 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 182: in Jeremiah as in Matthew, the “trail of blood” leads to the temple because it is in the temple that Jeremiah prophesies destruction against the leaders of the people. In fact, the “trail of blood” is more concrete than McAfee Moss imagines. Jeremiah 19:4, like Matt 27:4–6, locates actual bloodshed—in 19:4, from child sacrifice—at the heart of temple worship. The problem here is not simply (as McAfee Moss and others suggest) the persecution of the prophet. The problem is the pollution of the holy place. On innocent blood and pollution, see further below.

ground (Jer 19:11–12 MT). In Matthew, the priests take the blood money and buy with it a burial ground outside the city. “Wherefore,” Matthew says, “that field was called ‘Field of Blood’” (27:8). Therefore, Jeremiah says, “this place shall no more be called Topheth ... but the Valley of Slaughter” (Jer 19:6). Gundry points out the similarity. The reference to Jeremiah follows in Matthew immediately.<sup>19</sup>

By means of these resonances, Matthew assimilates the story of Judas’s death and Jesus’s innocent blood to the history of idolatry, innocent blood, and destruction told by the prophet Jeremiah. In Jer 19, it is the history of a city and a people: “Hear the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem” (19:3). The people forsake God; they worship idols; they shed the blood of the innocent, and the priests are complicit in it. In the same way, Judas in Matthew does not stand alone. The blood money comes from and returns to the priests; the chief priests and the elders of the people have sentenced Jesus to death (27:1). In 27:25, in a passage linked by innocent blood to 27:3–10, the people themselves will concur (and the whole people said, “His blood be upon us and upon our children”).<sup>20</sup> Matthew, like Jer 19, tells a story of a city and a people.

## II. INNOCENT BLOOD AND THE PROBLEM OF POLLUTION

The story told in Matt 27 is a story framed in terms of defilement and its consequences. In Jeremiah, the city is profaned by idols and filled with innocent blood. Innocent blood is in fact the crowning image of the people’s sin, the horror of child sacrifice serving to sum up the people’s abandonment of God. “I have sinned,” Judas says. “I have delivered up innocent blood.” Judas’s words place the death of Jesus within a complex of ideas deeply rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures, having to do with bloodguilt and purgation, purity and pollution, the defilement of the land.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*, 125.

<sup>20</sup>For the several links between 27:4–5 and 27:24–25, see Timothy B. Cargal, “His Blood Be upon Us and upon Our Children: A Matthean Double Entendre?,” *NTS* 37 (1991): 101–12, esp. 106–8; Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 1:833–36; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:590–91; Gundry, *Matthew*, 564–65. For πᾶς ὁ λαός as a phrase indicating the whole people, Israel, see my detailed argument in *Death of Jesus in Matthew*, esp. 10–11, 43–44, 185–87. See also, e.g., Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 1:836–37; Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 258–61; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “Anti-Semitism and the Cry of ‘All the People,’” *TS* 26 (1965): 667–71, esp. 669. Compare, e.g., Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:592, following Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew’s Christian-Jewish Community*, CSHJ (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 32–33. That the phrase by my reading refers to Israel as a people does not, however, condone its use against Israel for anti-Jewish purposes, nor does the phrase imply that the gospel is anti-Jewish. Rather, as we will see, Matthew places this moment and the larger gospel narrative in conversation with the whole history of Israel. In this gospel and in its good news “the whole people” is intimately involved.

<sup>21</sup>This section is based in part on material published earlier in my article “His Blood Be

The problem with the blood of the innocent, according to Numbers, is that “blood pollutes the land”: “you shall not pollute the land in which you live; for blood pollutes the land, and no expiation can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it. You shall not defile the land in which you live; in which I also dwell” (Num 35:33–34). Blood unjustly shed, by murder, child sacrifice, or judicial execution, is a danger to the land. Indeed, as Jacob Milgrom notes, in the land defiled by blood neither God nor Israel can dwell; the land itself will eventually vomit out its inhabitants.<sup>22</sup>

This is the logic of Jer 19, which draws a straight line from innocent blood to disaster precisely for the land. The consequence of idol worship and the blood of the innocent, Jeremiah says, is slaughter, the siege of Jerusalem (19:6–9). It is a slaughter to “make void the plans of Judah and Jerusalem” (19:7). The city’s abandonment of God, evidenced by its idol worship and the shedding of innocent blood, leads to exile. All Judah will be carried captive to Babylon (20:4). Indeed, in the slaughter that follows upon idol worship and innocent blood, the city’s defilement is enacted. “I will make this city a horror: . . . I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters” (19:8–9). They shall eat unclean food; even the land will become unclean: the city, Jeremiah says, will become a burial ground (19:11 MT).<sup>23</sup> “And the houses of Jerusalem,” the prophet concludes, “and the

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upon Us’: Innocent Blood and the Death of Jesus in Matthew,” *CBQ* 70 (2008): 82–100, esp. 91–93. See also now my discussion of bloodguilt and pollution in *Death of Jesus in Matthew*, 59–62. On bloodguilt and pollution in the Hebrew Scriptures, see further Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and M. O’Connor, ASOR Special Volume Series 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 398–414; Hieronymus Christ, *Blutvergiessen im Alten Testament: Der gewaltsame Tod des Menschen untersucht am hebräischen Wort dām*, Theologische Dissertationen 12 (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1977). See also Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy דברים: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996); and Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers במדבר: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990). On purity, see Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Carl S. Ehrlich, Anders Runesson, and Eileen Schuller, eds., *Purity, Holiness, and Identity in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Memory of Susan Haber*, WUNT 305 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), and n. 24 below.

<sup>22</sup>See Milgrom, *Numbers*, 295. Cf. Lev 18:25–28.

<sup>23</sup>Unclean food and tombs, on the one hand, and innocent blood (murder), on the other, represent two different kinds of pollution in the Hebrew Scriptures: ritual and moral. As Jonathan Klawans observes, ritual impurity with which there is no wrongdoing associated is to be distinguished in the priestly purity paradigm from moral impurity, or sin (*Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], 22–31). Yet the distinction permits an interrelation. Ritual impurity comes to serve in the Hebrew Scriptures as an image of moral corruption (see, e.g., Lam 4:13–15 with Lev 13:45–46). Adele Berlin comments: In its allusion to the leper, Lam 4:15 “metaphorically represents moral impurity as ritual impurity” (*Lamentations*:

houses of the kings of Judah shall be defiled like the place of Topheth.... And I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon" (19:13; 20:4). The history that begins in idolatry and innocent blood ends in a burial ground and exile.

Read in light of Jeremiah, Judas's story begins to look rather different. Now the center of gravity lies not in Judas's hanging but in the inexorable progression from sin and innocent blood to a burial ground. Matthew's narrative tracks Jeremiah, beginning in innocent blood and describing a history of defilement. Judas first confesses that he has delivered up innocent blood ("for blood pollutes the land," Num 35:33); next he throws blood money into the temple ("you shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I also dwell," Num 35:34), and then he hangs himself. Judas's hanging is itself an act of defilement. "Anyone hanged on a tree is under God's curse," Deut 21:23 asserts (cf. Gal 3:13). The hanged man defiles the land (Deut 21:23). The priests too are complicit in defilement. It is their money that is the "price of blood"—money, they themselves grant, that cannot stay in the temple. With it they buy a burial ground for foreigners.<sup>24</sup> Like Jer 19, the story of Judas moves from innocent blood to land that has become a burial ground. Judas's death is in a primary sense not just about Judas but about a defilement in which Judas and the priests alike are caught up, a defilement that haunts the land. When Judas seeks to return the blood money to the priests, Deut 27:25 sounds: "Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood."<sup>25</sup> This is the last in the series of blessings and curses that speak to the future of the Israelites in the promised land. In both Deut 27–28 and Jeremiah, innocent blood leads to exile, the loss of the land.<sup>26</sup>

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*A Commentary*, OTL [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002], 110). In the Holiness source ritual and moral impurity are already intertwined. According to Martha Himmelfarb, whereas the legacy of P (Priestly source) is a "radical separation between the realms of purity and morality," for H (Holiness source) "moral sins have ritual consequences: they render the sinner impure and the land as well" ("Impurity and Sin in 4QD, 1QS, and 4Q512," *DSD* 8 [2001]: 9–37, here 13). Milgrom goes further: even in the Priestly source "the ethical is bound up with and inseparable from the ritual, and the Pentateuchal codes make no distinction between them" in terms of training a people toward holiness (*Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 3 [New York: Doubleday, 1991], 731; on purity in the ritual and ethical realms and their interrelation, see esp. 723–36, 1002–7). See also Hamilton, *Death of Jesus in Matthew*, 34–35 n. 6. For Jeremiah, as for Matthew, the burial ground in which both passages culminate witnesses to the corruption that now marks the land. This corruption, arising from idolatry, child sacrifice, and the blood of the innocent is moral, not merely ritual. Indeed, in Jeremiah (as in Zech 11:9; see below), ritual and moral defilement merge in the image of eating flesh—food that is ritually unclean and the hint of murder come together in a powerful image of pollution.

<sup>24</sup>On the (ritual) uncleanness of the dead (and so of the burial ground), see, e.g., Num 19:16; cf. Num 9:6; 19:11, 18; Lev 21:1, 11; Matt 23:27; Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 1:276; Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 56–58.

<sup>25</sup>NA<sup>28</sup> (on Matt 27:4) notes the allusion.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Deut 28:36–37 with Deut 27:15–26 and Jer 19:9, 20:4. For the prophets, innocent blood

### III. JEREMIAH AND ZECHARIAH

Matthew names Jeremiah but quotes Zechariah. Like Jer 19, Zech 11 is the story of a people and their leaders—the shepherds and the flock—and the land.<sup>27</sup> It too raises the specter of defilement and the land's destruction, using words and images that appear also in Jer 19.<sup>28</sup> Zechariah 11 begins with an image of bloodshed. "Be a shepherd," God says to the prophet in verse 4, "of the flock doomed to slaughter" (ההרגה; LXX τὰ πρόβατα τῆς σφαγῆς). The word σφαγή is found elsewhere in the LXX only in Jeremiah: "The days are surely coming," says the Lord, "when this place shall ... be called ... the Valley of Slaughter" (ההרגה; LXX τῆς σφαγῆς, Jer 19:6; cf. 7:32).<sup>29</sup>

In Zechariah as in Jeremiah, the slaughter that is to come follows upon the slaughter that Judah itself practices. "Those who buy them [the flock] kill them," Zechariah says; and "their own shepherds have no pity on them" (11:5). The term "innocent blood" is not used, but the image is the same: the innocent—children, sheep—die at the hands of those who ought to be their shepherds. With regard to Zechariah, Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers comment, "This bespeaks a kind of internal corruption akin to what Ezekiel condemns in pre-exilic Jerusalem: Jerusalem is to be 'held guilty' for the blood it has shed (22:4)."<sup>30</sup>

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is one of three grave sins, along with idolatry and unchastity, that defile and bring devastation upon the land. See, e.g., Isa 1:15; 59:7; Jer 2:30, 34–36; 7:4–15; 22:17, 26; Ezek 8:17–18; 22:13–15; 24:6–9; Hos 6:8–10, 12:15 MT (Eng. 12:14: "his crimes" translates דמיו, "bloodguilt"). See further Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification," esp. 404, 409–12; and Hamilton, "Innocent Blood," 93–95.

<sup>27</sup> "For I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of the land [יְשֵׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ], says the Lord" (Zech 11:6). On אָרֶץ as "land" here (contrast NRSV: "earth"), see Paul L. Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 124: "NRSV translates the word *ʿereṣ* by the word 'earth,' but there is no reason to assume a broad meaning for the word here. The land in question was Palestine or just Judah." So also Kenneth L. Barker, "Zechariah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed., 13 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005–2012), 8:723–833, here 809. Cf. Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 25C (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 258–59: the phrase "inhabitants of the land" is "very common" (258); for its own sins, "Israel will lose the right to dwell in its land" (259).

<sup>28</sup> For the argument that Zech 11 is influenced by Jeremiah, see, e.g., Raymond F. Person, *Second Zechariah and the Deuteronomistic School*, JSOTSup 167 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), esp. 125. In describing the parallels between Zech 11 and Jer 19 I am not claiming textual dependency; rather, I am pointing to a shared world of thought expressed in a common logic (from greed or idolatry and innocent blood to defilement and devastation) and even in specific images.

<sup>29</sup> Person, *Second Zechariah*, 125.

<sup>30</sup> Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14*, 254. The Meyerses, however, immediately render this bloodshed metaphorical: "the blood it has shed" means "the abuse of office by 'the princes of Israel in you [Jerusalem]' ... (22:6, NRSV)" at the expense of the poor and powerless.

The result is devastation. “I will cause them, every one,” says the Lord in Zechariah, “to fall each into the hand of a neighbor, and each into the hand of the king; and they shall devastate the land” (11:6). So too in Jeremiah, as we have seen. I will make them fall, the Lord says, “by the sword before their enemies, and by the hand of those who seek their life.... And I will make this city a horror” (19:7–8). From the blood of the innocent to the city’s destruction: Zechariah and Jeremiah share a logic. The devastation in Zechariah is total. It falls upon “the inhabitants of the land” (יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ; οἱ κατοικοῦντες τῆν γῆν, 11:6). The Meyerses note the parallel with Jeremiah’s theme of the desolation of יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ, the inhabitants of the land.<sup>31</sup>

Further, in both Jeremiah and Zechariah it is a desolation that not only derives from defilement but is described in terms of defilement. “What is to be destroyed, let it be destroyed; and let those that are left devour the flesh of one another!” (Zech 11:9; cf. 11:16)—a “vivid and horrible metaphor ... of internal corruption and consequent doom.”<sup>32</sup> It is, as we have seen, Jeremiah’s image too. “And I will make them eat the flesh of their sons ... and all shall eat the flesh of their neighbors in the siege,” Jeremiah says (19:9).<sup>33</sup> With that, Zechariah breaks the staff Favor and the staff Unity (Zech 11:10; 11:14), and Jeremiah breaks the potter’s jar (Jer 19:10).

#### IV. ZECHARIAH AND MATTHEW

The connection Matthew finds between Zechariah and Jeremiah thus need not hang on the word “potter” alone, as the Meyerses’ reading of Zechariah at several points demonstrates.<sup>34</sup>

Zechariah paints a picture consonant with Jeremiah’s of corrupt leaders and a city corrupted, of a progression from greed and bloodshed (or, in Jeremiah, idol worship and bloodshed) to devastation. It is not surprising that Matthew locates Zech 11:13 within the prophecy of Jeremiah. In the evangelist’s view, both prophets tell the history of Israel, its leaders, its people, and its corruption, summed up in slaughter and innocent blood defiling the land and leading to its devastation. It is

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 259; see Jer 1:14, 6:12, 10:18, 13:13; cf. 25:29 (references theirs). The Meyerses do not, however, connect the theme to the problem of innocent blood and defilement.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 267–68. They note the parallel with Jer 19:9 (cf. Person, *Second Zechariah*, 126).

<sup>33</sup>Meyers and Meyers (*Zechariah 9–14*, 40) note in Jeremiah one similar instance of “devouring flesh (in curses)” (Zech 11:9, 16), though they do not identify it.

<sup>34</sup>This is, nevertheless, still the primary explanation for the connection Matthew finds between Jeremiah and Zech 11. See, e.g., Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 356–57, 360; van Tilborg, “Matthew 27.3–10,” 163; Audrey Conrad, “The Fate of Judas: Matthew 27:3–10,” *TJT* 7 (1991): 158–68, esp. 162; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:558–59, 569 n. 49; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1042; Luz, *Matthew 12–28*, 468. McAfee Moss notes that the texts are linked also by “house of the Lord” (Zech 11:13, Jer 19:14–15) (*Zechariah Traditions*, 182–83).

a story that comes to a boil for Matthew in Judas and the chief priests and Jesus's innocent blood.

Zechariah 11, however, offers Matthew something that Jer 19 does not: a link to the particular story of Judas. "Then the Lord said to me, 'Throw it into the treasury [or: to the potter]'—this lordly price at which I was valued by them. So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them into the treasury [or: to the potter] in the house of the Lord" (Zech 11:13).<sup>35</sup> Recent commentary suggests that the traditionally negative reading of this act is a misreading influenced by Judas's act in Matthew.<sup>36</sup> Matthew, however, would seem to have read Zechariah correctly. For the money is payment, in Zech 11, from the sheep merchants who buy and kill the sheep (Zech 11:5, 7, 11–13).<sup>37</sup> This is tainted money, the price of innocent blood. When Judas throws the thirty silver pieces, the price of Jesus's blood, into the temple and when the priests buy with the blood money the potter's field, Zechariah's prophecy sounds. The chief priests buy Jesus's blood and Judas sells and grows rich.<sup>38</sup> The corruption of the leaders of Israel lived out on the backs of their people and at the price of their blood, a corruption described by Zechariah long ago, reaches now (as then) even into the holy place, and the temple is defiled. Matthew's quotation of Zechariah hammers home the gospel's indictment of the chief priests: these are the sheep merchants who deal in blood and bring destruction upon the land, even as they grant the truth of the verdict against them.<sup>39</sup>

Thus far, Matthew writes in concert with Jer 19 and Zech 11. The leaders deal in the blood of the innocent; the people and the land are corrupted. Judas's death and the Field of Blood are the signs and inevitable outworking of a defilement that

<sup>35</sup> For the textual problem, see the discussion of this verse in Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14*, 276–77. The MT reads "to the potter" (אֶל-הַיּוֹצֵר). The Syriac and Targum and Kennicott MS 530, however, emend "potter" to "treasury" (אֹצֵר). Meyers and Meyers conclude: "Because four of the five letters of 'potter' and 'treasury' are the same"—and because the confusion of the initial *yod* of potter with the initial *aleph* of treasury is possible by scribal error—"the reading of the more appropriate 'treasury' is compelling" (277). In either case, the link with Matt 27:5 is clear: Judas *throws* the *thirty silver* pieces (price at which Jesus was valued by the leaders) into the *house of the Lord*. In fact, as commentators note, Matthew seems to be aware of both readings: when Judas throws the silver into the temple the priests say, "it is not lawful to 'cast' [βάλλω—cf. ἐμβάλλω Zech 11:13 LXX] this into the *treasury* since it is the price of blood"; hence they buy with it a *potter's* field.

<sup>36</sup> See the discussion in Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14*, 278.

<sup>37</sup> See *ibid.*, 262 (cf. 271): in Zech 11:7 and 11 the term *merchants* "represents the 'buyers' and 'sellers,' who are probably any Israelite leaders in positions of power or control over others."

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Zech 11:4: "Those who buy [the flock] kill them and go unpunished; and those who sell them say, 'Blessed be the Lord, for I have become rich.'"

<sup>39</sup> According to Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14*, 273, the sheep merchants in Zechariah pay the shepherd who has uttered an oracle of condemnation against the city for its corruption. The payment recognizes the authority of the prophecy. In the same way, the chief priests in Matthew grant the truth of Judas's words even as they reject his appeal. The money is, they say, "the price of blood"; it cannot stay in the temple.

haunts the land. Against the background of Zechariah and Jeremiah, the problem of innocent blood and Judas's part in it comes into focus. Judas is no hero. Like the priests, he plays a role in the shedding of innocent blood and the destruction that comes upon the land. His hanging, indeed, far from being expiatory, intimates that destruction.<sup>40</sup> Like "innocent blood," the hanged man defiles the land. The blood money tracks its ominous way through the narrative after the death of Judas as before it. Donald Senior notes the omnipresence of the betrayal money: reference to the silver occurs in 27:3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10; the blood money helps to unify the narrative.<sup>41</sup> The problem that the blood money presents, this defilement of the land, is not resolved with the death of Judas. Quite the contrary, corruption is all around, and both Judas's death and the blood money are the signs of it.

At the same time, however, Judas does not stand alone. The narrative of defilement traced by the blood money comes to a conclusion not in Judas's death but in the purchase of a field called, Matthew concludes, "'Field of Blood,' to this day" (27:8). If Judas is not a hero in his dying (still less friend to Jesus), neither is Judas the villain of the piece. The priests take up the blood money where Judas throws it down, and the narrative of defilement continues. Judas is caught up in a history of innocent blood in which he himself and the priests and the people all play a part. The consequences of that history, adumbrated in Judas's suicide, embrace finally the whole land.<sup>42</sup>

## V. *Μεταμέλεται*: MATTHEW AND THE DESTABILIZATION OF THE PROPHETIC NARRATIVE

If the narrative describes a spiral of defilement in which all the players are involved, it describes also, however, a difference between Judas and the chief priests. Judas "repents," *μεταμέλεται* (Matt 27:3). Scholarly judgments about Judas depend in part on the semantics of this word. Does it indicate "true repentance" or simply (and inadequately) regret? What is the nature of the regret here indicated? According to Davies and Allison, the word in the New Testament "is often distinguished

<sup>40</sup>See van Tilborg, "Matthew 27.3–10," 174: "Judas draws the final conclusion from his action. He hangs himself: a lugubrious example of what is waiting for the city and the land." This is correct, as far as it goes. In the paradigm of innocent blood, however, there is more to be said. Judas's death, like the destruction of Jerusalem, is not the final word.

<sup>41</sup>Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 378 and n. 110.

<sup>42</sup>For a positive reading of Judas's suicide and of suicide in the Greco-Roman and early Jewish contexts, see esp. Whelan, "Suicide in the Ancient World," 505–22. See also the discussion in Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:561–62 and the works listed in n. 5 above. The positive reading founders, in my view, on the problem of defilement, which is central to the passage as a whole and is associated in the Hebrew Scriptures with hanging.

from μετανοέω,” the latter indicating “true repentance.”<sup>43</sup> In Matthew, however, the word is used in a context that indicates repentance (21:29–32). In the LXX, Luz notes, both words are used to translate the *niphāl* of Hebrew נִפְחַל; both words, he concludes, mean “to repent.”<sup>44</sup> The debate is inconclusive; the word’s semantic field, including as it does both senses, does not in itself decide the issue.<sup>45</sup> Precisely here, Matthew’s use of Scripture is illuminating. It is, in fact, against the background of Zech 11 that the word μεταμέλομαι in Matt 27 comes into focus.

Μεταμέλομαι occurs also in Zech 11:5.<sup>46</sup> Blithely buying and killing their own people, the shepherds are not held guilty (מִשְׁנֵי אֵלֶּיךָ: NRSV “they go unpunished,” Zech 11:5). Milgrom argues that the verb מִשְׁנֵי here is an example of the “consequential *ʿāšām*,” indicating retribution for wrong done.<sup>47</sup> In its consequential use, Milgrom goes on to say, the verb has an extended sense. It may indicate not only external punishment but the internal consequence of wrongdoing—feelings of guilt; the pangs of conscience: “*ʿāšām* without an object ... denotes the suffering brought on by guilt, expressed now by words such as qualms, pangs, remorse, and contrition.”<sup>48</sup> Though Milgrom does not note it, in Zech 11:5 מִשְׁנֵי has no object. Οὐ μετεμέλοντο, the LXX renders the phrase: the sheep merchants have no regret, no pangs of conscience. They do not see their offense. The LXX, that is, reads the verb as Milgrom’s “consequential *ʿāšām*” in the extended sense. For the LXX, Zech 11:5 depicts not just a failure of justice (the shepherds go unpunished) but a failure of conscience. The shepherds fail to hold themselves guilty for the slaughter of their people. In this they are like the chief priests in Matthew, who say to Judas’s confession of guilt for delivering up innocent blood, “What is that to us?” (Matt 27:4).

In Matthew, however, the chief priests’ refusal of repentance is not the whole story. Matthew, reading Zech 11, introduces (in contrast to Zechariah) the conscience of Judas: the recognition of sin in the face of innocent blood. “I have sinned in delivering up innocent blood,” Judas says when he sees that Jesus is condemned to death. Against the background of Zech 11:5, Judas’s statement can be understood

<sup>43</sup> Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:561. See, e.g., 2 Cor 7:8–9.

<sup>44</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 470 n. 30. In Zech 11:5, of course, the MT has מִשְׁנֵי.

<sup>45</sup> So, for instance, Hagner (*Matthew 14–28*, 812) and Davies and Allison (*Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:561), both of whom note a distinction between μεταμέλομαι and μετανοέω, come to different conclusions about the meaning of μεταμέλομαι in Matt 27:3. Hagner finds in the word an indication of remorse but “not technically repentance.” Davies and Allison argue that its occurrence in Matt 21:29 and 32 allows it to indicate repentance here. In fact, the focus on the question of repentance alone misses the point, as we shall see.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. van Tilborg, “Matthew 27.3–10,” 166: “Judas’ ‘repentance’ is the new allusion to Zech 11.” Judas’s “repentance” is, of course, the very point that needs to be established.

<sup>47</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 339–40. The verb, like other biblical terms for good and bad behavior, connotes both the wrong done and its retribution; either sense may be emphasized. I am grateful to Leslie Chisholm Demson for drawing my attention to Milgrom’s discussion of this word.

<sup>48</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 343.

as a rendering of the consequential  $\delta\psi\alpha$ : “consequential guilt,” a man suffering the pangs of conscience. If, in keeping with Zechariah, there is no regret among the priests, nevertheless Judas μεταμεληθείς ἔστρεψεν τὰ τριάκοντα ἀργύρια, “he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver” (NRSV). Judas knows remorse, and returns the money, and confesses his offense. These three things—“feeling guilt” ( $\delta\psi\alpha$ ), confessing the wrong, and making reparation—constitute in Numbers (5:6b–7) the required reparation for wrongdoing.<sup>49</sup>

The word μεταμέλομαι is thus significant in Matthew not in isolation, with respect only to the breadth of its semantic field, but against the background of Zech 11. Judas feels the pangs of conscience and tries to make reparation. This says something about Judas. In Matthew’s telling (and according to Numbers), he is a repentant sinner, but his repentance does not stop the chain of destruction he has set in motion. His confession falls on deaf ears; the blood money—and the plot—continues on its inexorable way toward a burial ground. Judas is not able to redeem the time. Indeed, his actions lead in Matt 27:3–10 only further into death and defilement. Yet Judas’s remorse is critical—for, against the background of Zechariah, Matthew’s use of μεταμέλομαι raises a question mark over the narrative. Is this, after all, quite the same story as that told by the prophet Zechariah? There is no exception, no softening, in the corruption and its consequences that assail Jerusalem in Zechariah’s vision. No one repents, and the disaster is complete. “I took my staff Favor and broke it, annulling the covenant that I had made with all the peoples” (Zech 11:10). But Matthew, quoting Zechariah, nevertheless departs from Zechariah. Τότε Ἰούδας μεταμεληθείς: Judas’s crisis of conscience opens a chink in the grim armor of Zechariah’s prophecy. Οὐ μεταμέλομαι has become, in the case of one man, μεταμέλομαι. Judas’s recognition of sin, contrasting with Zech 11 in a narrative that deliberately recalls Zech 11, destabilizes and opens up the prophetic narrative. Zechariah’s prophecy of the corruption of the land and God’s rejection of the covenant people sounds again in Judas and the chief priests and the blood money that lands in the temple. But Matthew signals precisely in the echo of Zechariah a difference.

Another verbal echo adds to this destabilization. Immediately after he “repents” (Matt 27:3), Judas returns the blood money to the priests, saying “I have sinned in delivering up innocent blood” (Matt 27:4). The word παραδίδωμι (“to deliver up”) occurs also in Zech 11:6, immediately after the sheep merchants do *not* repent: ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ παραδίδωμι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. In Zechariah it describes God’s delivering up of the people to destruction. As the Meyerses note, Zechariah’s use of  $\mu\omicron\mu\eta\kappa\alpha$ /παραδίδωμι is ironic, for in the Hebrew Scriptures “a significant portion of this form

<sup>49</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 345. The precise reparation required in Num 5:6–8 is full restitution + one-fifth and, when the money is given to the priest, a ram of atonement. Judas returns only the thirty silver pieces—thus preserving the parallel with Zech 11.

is used to indicate God's deliverance of Israel from bondage."<sup>50</sup> In Zechariah it describes exactly the opposite; the deliverance once promised is reversed.

In Matthew, it is Jesus who is handed over. Jesus faces at the hands of Judas and the chief priests precisely the fate of Jerusalem in Zechariah. He is delivered up to destruction. Thus far, Matthew's narrative recalls Zechariah, but, unlike Jerusalem in Zechariah, Jesus is innocent. He resembles the sheep who are slaughtered rather than the sheep merchants. Here again, Matthew is different. In Matthew's presentation, two opposite parts come together. Jesus is the innocent lamb, his blood bought and sold, portending as in Zechariah the city's destruction. Yet at the same time he is the one who is delivered up like the people in Zechariah, suffering ahead of time the destruction decreed in Zechariah against the corrupted city. The anomaly, like Judas's repentance, places a question mark against the narrative. What happens when the one delivered up to the destruction God has decreed is God's innocent one? It is a question Matthew answers in his account of Jesus's death.

## VI. AND THE GRAVES WERE OPENED: INNOCENT BLOOD AND THE DEATH OF JESUS

Matthew turns for an answer to the problem of innocent blood beyond the story of Judas, to the death of Jesus. The gospel draws a straight line from Judas's blood money to Jesus's crucifixion. "What is that to us?" the priests retort, when Judas confesses to delivering up Jesus's innocent blood. "See to it yourself" (Matt 27:4). "I am innocent of this man's blood," Pilate declares when he sentences Jesus to death. "See to it yourselves" (27:24). Commentators note the verbal echo.<sup>51</sup> In both cases, the leaders—Pilate and the priests—refuse responsibility for Jesus's blood; in both cases, the text declares it to be innocent blood, the wrongful condemnation of an innocent man.<sup>52</sup> And in both cases, they seek to place the consequences of innocent blood on the shoulders of others. Pilate washes his hands—ὕμεις ὀψέσθε—and the people say, "His blood be upon us" (Matt 27:25). Judas says, "I have sinned in delivering up innocent blood," and the priests say, "That is your

<sup>50</sup> Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14*, 259.

<sup>51</sup> See, e.g., Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:590–91; Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 1:634, 835–36; Gundry, *Matthew*, 554; Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, rev. and exp. ed., 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 2:721–22; John T. Carroll and Joel B. Green, *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 47; David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel*, *Reading the New Testament* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 257. See also Hamilton, "Innocent Blood," 85, and in more detail Hamilton, *Death of Jesus in Matthew*, 33–35.

<sup>52</sup> Though it is his own innocence Pilate declares, this is to indicate also the innocence of Jesus. Pilate seeks to avoid responsibility for unjust execution—judicial murder, or "innocent blood."

problem” (σὺ ὄψῃ). In the first place, innocent blood spells doom, in Matthew as in Zechariah, for both Judas and the city. Judas hangs himself; the whole people say, ominously, “His blood be upon us” (27:25). But for Matthew this is not the whole story.

Matthew has added Judas’s regret to Zechariah’s account of corruption; in Jesus handed over to death, the evangelist has conflated the fate of the sheep merchants and that of the innocent sheep. At the moment of Jesus’s death, Matthew, alone among the evangelists, adds to the Markan account this striking scene: “and the earth was shaken and the rocks were split, and the tombs were opened and many bodies of the holy ones who had fallen asleep were raised, and they came out of the tombs after his resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many” (Matt 27:51–53). There is a great deal that can be said about the effect of these verses at this crucial point in Matthew’s Gospel, not least with regard to their rich echoes of the prophets.<sup>53</sup> In the context of innocent blood, however, one thing in particular stands out.

At the moment of Jesus’s death, the tombs are opened and the dead bodies are raised.<sup>54</sup> This is the moment of God’s action, as the string of passive verbs and theophanic images indicate.<sup>55</sup> Ezekiel sounds in the background.<sup>56</sup> “Behold, I am going to *open your graves*, and *bring you up from your graves*, O my people; and *I will bring you back to the land of Israel*” (Ezek 37:12). Ezekiel’s three-part action finds a counterpart in Matt 27:52–53: *And the graves were opened*, and the *bodies were raised*, and *they came out . . . and went into the holy city*. Here, Matthew declares,

<sup>53</sup> Ezekiel 37, Zech 14:4–5, Dan 12:2, and, to a lesser degree, Isa 26:19 all have resonance in varying degrees in the passage. See the discussion in Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*, Bible and Liberation (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 536; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:628–29 (they find Zech 14:5 to be the primary reference); Dale C. Allison, “The Scriptural Background of a Matthean Legend: Ezekiel 37, Zechariah 14, and Matthew 27,” in *Life beyond Death in Matthew’s Gospel: Religious Metaphor or Bodily Reality?*, ed. Wim Weren, Huub van de Sandt and Joseph Verheyden, BTS 13 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 153–88.

<sup>54</sup> For this analysis and a more detailed discussion of Ezekiel 37 in relation to Matt 27:50–53, see Hamilton, *Death of Jesus in Matthew*, 208–12; cf. Hamilton, “Innocent Blood,” 99.

<sup>55</sup> For rocks splitting and earth shaking when God goes out (especially in judgment), see, e.g., Judg 5:4, 5; 1 Kgs 19:11–12; Pss 18:7–9; 77:18; Isa 24:18–23; 29:6; Ezek 38:19–20; Joel 2:10–11; Nah 1:5–6. See also later parallels in 1 En. 1:6–7; 102:2; 4 Ezra 5:8; 2 Bar. 27:7; LAB 3:9; etc. For parallels, see Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:340–41 and n. 86, 632; cf. Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 313.

<sup>56</sup> For Ezekiel as the primary influence on 27:52–53, see, e.g., Gundry, *Matthew*, 576; Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 320 (possibly also Daniel); France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1081–82 (with Dan 12:2 and Isa 26:19); Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 849; Harrington, *Gospel of Matthew*, 403. I take these verses to contain a primary reference to Ezek 37; however, this is not to deny the relevance of Zech 14:5, Dan 12:2, and Isa 26:19 but to suggest that Ezekiel’s theme of exile and the restoration of the defiled land is particularly pertinent to Matthew’s treatment of Jesus’s death in terms of innocent blood and its consequences.

is the ancient promise to Israel of Israel's restoration, realized now in the death of Jesus. This is, surely, a striking conclusion to the history of innocent blood that the gospel has been at pains to trace in the death of Jesus. Innocent blood pollutes the land, and pollution drives God out of God's house.<sup>57</sup> Matthew has seen in the aftermath of innocent blood a land defiled—a Field of Blood—and the armies at the gate. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her, how often have I desired to gather your children . . . and you would not. See, your house is left to you, desolate" (Matt 23:37–38; cf. 23:35–36). In the story of Judas, Matthew has described the death of Jesus deliberately as a matter of innocent blood. Yet at the moment of Jesus's death, it is Ezekiel's vision of hope that sounds: "I am going to open your graves, and I will bring you up from your graves, O my people, and I will bring you back to the land of Israel."

This is a picture of defilement overturned. The graves are opened. The burial ground yields now life and not death, at the death of Jesus. From the defiled land against all expectation the holy ones rise. "Son of Man, can these bones live?" YHWH asks the prophet in the time of Israel's exile (Ezek 37:3). Now at the death of Jesus, Matthew announces new life, precisely in the place of bones.

## VII. CONCLUSION

If Matthew draws a straight line from Judas's blood money to the death of Jesus, if the story of betrayal and innocent blood leads to a burial ground for Judas and for Jesus, the story nevertheless does not end there. The Field of Blood points forward to the blood of Jesus, and another burial ground, and there it finds its answer. The graves were opened at the death of Jesus, and the holy ones were raised, and they went into the holy city. It is the life of the city that is announced, at the end of the story. As in Jeremiah and Zechariah, Matthew's saga of innocent blood is, in the end as in the beginning, the history of a city and a people.

To ask, as the debate about Judas does, is Judas villain or hero? is therefore to frame the problem in a way that runs against the grain of the text. What, now, of Jerusalem, in the wake of Judas's suicide and the Field of Blood? What of the land and the people? This is the question that emerges from Judas's story read through the lens of Jeremiah and Zechariah together. It is the question that drives the action. What of Judas *and* Jerusalem in the wake of Jesus's innocent blood? In Zech 11, the people are doomed to slaughter, and in Jer 19 the city becomes a burial ground. In Matthew, too, Judas's words—I have sinned; I have handed over innocent blood—lead to a burial ground. But in Matthew the action does not stop here. For this burial ground, this innocent blood, points forward, beyond Judas's repentance and his

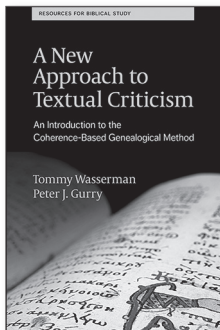
<sup>57</sup> Cf. Hannah K. Harrington, *The Impurity Systems of Qumran and the Rabbis: Biblical Foundations*, SBLDS 143 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), esp. 36.

death, beyond the field of blood, toward another burial ground where, in the death of Jesus, death yields unexpectedly to life. In this history, Judas is intimately involved. His own death is intertwined with Jerusalem's defeat. His repentance signals at the same time a disturbance in the narrative of doom. Insofar as Judas's story points deliberately forward, linked in the image of innocent blood to the death of Jesus and the opening of the graves, it speaks not only doom but also hope.

Matthew gives us, in the episode of Judas, Jeremiah's story and Zechariah's, a history of corruption and bloodshed and a city's doom. But it is Zechariah "tweaked"—for Judas repents and *Jesus* is delivered up, and in this Matthew sees a mystery. Judas's death is not the end of the story, any more than the Field of Blood is the end of the story of Jerusalem. Death and life stand back to back, in the story of Judas and the blood of Jesus, as in the prophet Jeremiah. Both are true. A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, the exile of the people (Jer 31:15; cf. Matt 2:18). Thus says the Lord. And thus, also, in Jesus's death: "Keep your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears.... There is hope for your future, says the Lord" (Jer 31:16–17).



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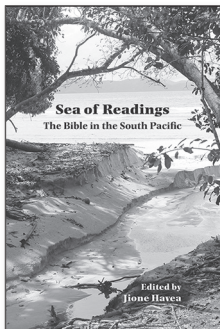


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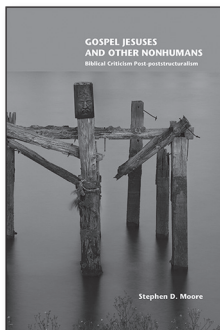
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