

## Matthew's Use of the OT in 27:6–10 and Why It Matters

Zechariah 11:13 (NASB) — “Then the LORD said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter, *that* magnificent price at which I was valued by them.’ So I took the thirty *shekels* of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the LORD.”

Jeremiah 19:5, 11 (NASB) — “...‘because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent’ ... Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Just so will I break this people and this city, even as one breaks a potter’s vessel, which cannot again be repaired.’”

### **This use of the OT in 27:6–10 raises two questions:**

- (1) Why does Matthew say that this “**fulfilled**” what was said by “**Jeremiah the prophet**” (27:9) when his words appear to come from Zechariah 11?
- (2) What is the connection between Judas’ betrayal of Jesus and Zechariah 11?

### **Let’s try to address the second question first:**

In Zechariah 11, the prophet, living 500 years before the coming of Jesus, is told to act out a sign which explains why the people of Israel are receiving judgment (depicted in vv. 1–3 and likely fulfilled in AD 70). Zechariah plays the role of a shepherd (vv. 7–8) but grows weary from the task and quits (v. 9a). Therefore, because Israel has not listened to the prophet, verses 9b–11 describe God’s decision to allow a Gentile power to destroy her. Zechariah acts this out by breaking a staff called “Favor,” symbolizing God’s temporary termination of the relationship described in Exodus 19:5–6 (“my treasured possession”), which kept Israel from being destroyed by her neighbors (cf. Ezek 34:20–31). This predicted judgment was fulfilled by the Romans following Christ’s rejection (Lk 19:41–44; 21:20–24) and continues today!

Zechariah is so frustrated by how the people have treated him during his “shepherding” that he tells them he does not care if he receives wages. However, they decide to give him thirty pieces of silver (v. 12; cf. Mt 26:15). God mocks the small amount of money and tells Zechariah to throw the coins to the potter who works in the temple. The value placed on the prophet spoke of the low value the people placed on God! The prophet obeys and throws the money (v. 13). Various factors in the passage indicate that Zechariah is acting out a prophecy of future realities, specifically how the Messiah will be treated when he comes as a prophet to shepherd his people.<sup>1</sup> Finally, Zechariah breaks a second staff called “Union,” which pictures the union of the twelve tribes of Israel (v. 14), and then proceeds to act out the role of a coming “foolish shepherd,” which John will one day call the antichrist (vv. 15–17). *Therefore, Judas’ betrayal is part of the rejection of Jesus by his own people, which directly fulfills Zechariah’s prophetic sign-act.* Of course, now it is not merely a prophet who is valued lowly, but Immanuel (“God with us”) himself who is being sold for thirty pieces of silver!

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<sup>1</sup> One of the arguments in favor of this Messianic reading is Zech 11’s dependence on Ezekiel 34, a passage that Matthew has likely already alluded to in 26:31 with his addition of “of the flock.” Both Ezek 34 and Zech 11 describe the Good Shepherd Jesus, the latter focusing on his rejection in the first century and the former on his future regathering of the lost sheep of Israel at his Second Coming.

## Ok, but why then refer to Jeremiah instead of Matthew?

Many have recognized that the connection between Zechariah 11 and Jeremiah is likely found in Jeremiah 18–19, one of a few OT passages that refer to “**the potter.**” Jeremiah 19:4 also mentions (1) “**the blood of the innocent,**” and the rest of the passage (2) focuses on the nation’s leaders and (3) the temple, as does Matthew 27. What is Jer 18–19 about? In this prophecy, given 600 years before the coming of Jesus, God predicts that judgment is coming on the nation for various sins, including shedding innocent blood. In Matthew, Judas admits that he is responsible for the shedding of innocent blood, and, by implication, the chief priests are as well. Therefore, the speech in Jeremiah provides the backdrop in front of which Jesus’ rejection should be viewed, and because of the importance of this backdrop, Matthew explicitly names Jeremiah. Matthew wants you to think of both the prophecy of Jeremiah and that of Zechariah, so he cites the one that is less obvious but more important for his point.

In Jeremiah, the potter serves as a sign of God’s sovereignty and the judgment coming upon the nation (cf. Ps 2:9). As one writer puts it, the potter in Jeremiah is like our symbol of the grim reaper, which points to coming judgment. Matthew sees God’s providence and great irony in the self-righteous opponents of Jesus buying a *potter’s* field with this blood money.

However, the similarities don’t stop there; it is also likely significant that Jeremiah 19’s prophecy follows a description of the religious leadership’s plot to get rid of Jeremiah and appears to respond to Jeremiah’s lament to God (18:18–23). This leads to the acted-out sign of smashing a clay pot in front of the leaders (19:1ff). Therefore, not only is Jesus’ rejection a direct fulfillment of Zechariah’s sign-act, but *it also continues the rebellion described by Jeremiah, which led to the destruction of the First Temple and the first exile and will now lead to the destruction of the Second Temple and a much greater and longer exile.* Just as in Jeremiah’s days, the religious leaders were putting great confidence in their possession of the temple (they were worried about defiling it with the blood money!), but they missed that because they had rejected the One greater than the temple that judgment was coming.

### What does this passage teach us? Why does Matthew’s use of the OT matter?

1. It is a great illustration of God’s providence over history. We have seen two prophecies today, which pointed, either directly (Zechariah) or indirectly (Jeremiah), to Jesus’ betrayal hundreds of years before he was born.
2. It is a good reminder that the NT authors expect us to be reading the OT and that they consider the entire Bible to be one unified story about the King and his kingdom.
3. The passages point to the hypocrisy of trusting in religious rituals while not having a heart that loves God.
4. Judas was right—he had committed a crime, and Jesus was really innocent. **But** Judas was wrong to think that he should pay for his own crime. Instead, he should have looked to Jesus’ death in his place. Judas, along with most of his countrymen, had a stain that could not be removed, but Jesus could have removed it for him (Is 1:18).
5. Rather than seeing Jesus’ death as a mere tragedy or, like Judas, merely being emotionally moved by it and our own guilt, we should embrace the cross as a great victory! Jesus was innocent, but he voluntarily gave his life for those who were guilty.