

~Zechariah's murder--which Zechariah?~

Question: Does Matthew 23:34-36 disprove the preterist claim that "this generation" is limited to Christ's own generation of contemporaries?

Answer: According to some futurists, Matthew 23:34-36 disproves the preterist claim that the NT phrase "this generation" is limited to Christ's own generation of contemporaries. In the passage, Jesus blames his generation for slaying a certain Zechariah, son of Berechiah, who was murdered between the Temple and altar:

"...upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation." (**Matthew 23:35-36**).

Futurists assert that the Zechariah specified in this passage refers to the one of 2 Chronicles 24:20-21, whose murder took place hundreds of years before Christ. Futurists conclude, therefore, that Matthew's use of the term "this generation" in Matthew 23:34-36 must mean something different than a mere life span of the people who were living at that time, for Christ's contemporaries did not slay the Zechariah of 2 Chronicles 24:20-21. In their claim, however, futurists have erred. Jesus was not referring to the Zechariah of 2 Chronicles 24:20-21, but instead to Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, who was murdered by Christ's contemporaries. That the Zechariah of Matthew 23:34-36 is not the Zechariah of 2 Chronicles 24:20-21 is evident by examining the fathers of the two men; the **Zechariah of Matthew 23:34-36 is "son of Berechiah,"** while the **Zechariah of 2 Chronicles 24:20-21 is "son of Jehoiada"**--thus the two men are not the same. Furthermore, the Zechariah of 2 Chronicles 24:20-21 was murdered in the courtyard--not between the Temple and altar as Jesus describes in Matthew 23:34-36. So then, who is the Zechariah of Matthew 23:34-36? Early statements by the first Christians taught that the Zechariah slain at the altar of the Temple was, in fact, the father of John the Baptist who was murdered by Christ's contemporaries. The 2nd century work the **"Protoevangelium of James"** records his death:

"Now Herod sought for John, and sent officers to Zacharias, saying: Where hast thou hidden thy son? And he answered and said unto them: I am a minister of God and attend continually upon the temple of the Lord: I know not where my son is. 2 And the officers departed and told Herod all these things. And Herod was wroth and said: His son is to be king over Israel. And he sent unto him again, saying: Say the truth: where is thy son? for thou knowest that thy blood is under my hand. And the officers departed and told him all these things. 3 And Zacharias said: I am a martyr of God if thou shed my blood: for my spirit the Lord shall receive, because thou shed innocent blood in the fore-court of the temple of the Lord. And about the dawning of the day Zacharias was slain. And the children of Israel knew not that he was slain. XXIV. 1 But the priests entered in at the hour of the salutation, and the blessing of Zacharias met them not according to the manner. And the priests stood waiting for Zacharias, to salute him with the prayer, and to glorify the Most High. 2 But as he delayed to come, they were all afraid: and one of them took courage and entered in: and he saw beside the altar congealed blood: and a voice saying: Zacharias hath been slain, and his blood shall not be wiped out until his avenger come. And when he heard that word he was afraid, and went forth and told the priests. 3 And they took courage and went in and saw that which was done: and the panels of the temple did wail: and they rent their clothes from the top to the bottom.

And his body they found not, but his blood they found turned into stone. And they feared, and went forth and told all the people that Zacharias was slain. And all the tribes of the people heard it, and they mourned for him and lamented him three days and three nights. And after the three days the priests took counsel whom they should set in his stead: and the lot came up upon Symeon. Now he it was which was warned by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death until he should see the Christ in the flesh." --

Protoevangelium of James (2nd Century)

So we see, the Zechariah of Matthew 23:34-36 slain at the altar was most likely referring to Zechariah, father of John the Baptist. Jesus was indicting his own generation of men for that murder, and such would have been naturally understood by Christ's original hearers who were participants of--and eyewitnesses to--that unrighteous act. That the Zechariah of Matthew 23:34-36 is the father of John the Baptist is the most sensible fit for the following reasons: **(1)** He, Jesus, is clearly rebuking Israel for murdering all her prophets down through the ages, from the very first murder of Abel up until the present day, his present day. The very latest murder, before the beheading of John, was that of Zachariah described in **The Protoevangelium of James**. **(2)** Why would Jesus frame his rebuke from the first murder to some murder at least 500 years, possibly 800 years old by his time. That's like saying "from A to M" or "A to P" instead of the all encompassing "A to Z." Christ surely meant all of history up until his present time. **(3)** It was Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, who was murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. As the document says he was in the vestibule, between the sanctuary and the altar, and his clotted blood was observed beside the altar.