

Judas Hangs Himself

Let's walk through **Matthew 27:3–10** (Judas Hangs Himself).



MT 27:3–10 – Judas Hangs Himself



The Passage

- After seeing Jesus condemned, Judas is seized with remorse.
- He returns the **thirty pieces of silver** to the chief priests and elders, saying: *"I have sinned, for I have betrayed innocent blood."*
- The priests dismiss him: *"What is that to us? See to it yourself."*
- Judas throws the silver into the temple, departs, and hangs himself.
- The priests, considering the money "blood money," buy the potter's field for burying foreigners.
- Matthew links this to prophecy (Jeremiah/Zechariah).



Narrative Context

- This occurs **immediately after Jesus is handed over to Pilate** (Matt 27:1–2).
- Judas witnesses that Jesus is officially condemned, which shatters whatever expectation he had about the outcome.
- Unlike Peter's denial (who later weeps and is restored), Judas' remorse leads to despair rather than repentance.



Historical and Cultural Background

1. **Thirty Pieces of Silver**
 - Equal to the value of a slave (Exod 21:32).
 - In Zechariah 11:12–13, the prophet sarcastically receives thirty pieces of silver as "his wages," then throws it into the house of the Lord for the potter.
2. **The Temple and Blood Money**
 - Jewish law (Deut 23:18) prohibited putting "tainted" money into the temple treasury.
 - The priests use the money to buy land, avoiding "defilement" but ironically revealing their hypocrisy—they reject Judas' conscience yet worry about ceremonial purity.
3. **The Potter's Field**
 - A cheap piece of land (likely with clay pits used by potters) outside Jerusalem.
 - Becomes a burial place for strangers (foreigners, poor, unclean).



Prophetic Connection

- Matthew attributes the prophecy to **Jeremiah**, though it closely parallels **Zechariah 11:12–13**.
- Likely Matthew sees a **blended prophecy**:
 - *Jeremiah 19* → buying a potter's field, shedding innocent blood.
 - *Zechariah 11* → thirty pieces of silver thrown into the temple.
- Thus, Judas' act fulfills both prophetic strands.

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Theological Insights

- **Remorse vs. Repentance**
 - Judas *feels remorse* (μεταμεληθείς, *metamelētheis* = regret, sorrow) but does not *repent* (μετανοέω, *metanoeō* = change of heart, turn toward God).
 - This distinction explains why Peter's denial led to restoration, while Judas' despair led to destruction.
- **Innocent Blood**
 - Judas himself declares Jesus' innocence. Even the betrayer testifies to Christ's righteousness.
- **The Priests' Indifference**
 - They dismiss Judas with chilling words: "*What is that to us? See to it yourself.*"
 - It echoes Cain (Gen 4:9: "*Am I my brother's keeper?*"), showing hardness of heart.



Judas' Death

- **Matthew:** Judas hangs himself.
- **Acts 1:18:** He falls headlong, his body bursts open.
 - Possible harmonization: Judas hanged himself near a cliff/tree; his body later fell and burst when the rope/tree broke.
- Both accounts agree his death was violent, shameful, and tied to the "Field of Blood."



Symbolic Irony

- Judas sells Jesus for the price of a slave, then dies in slavery to sin.
- He casts silver into the temple, but it funds a cemetery—death money, not life.
- The field of clay (potter's field) recalls God as the potter (Jeremiah 18), but Judas, rather than being remade, is shattered.



Reflection

- Judas shows the danger of unresolved guilt: he acknowledges sin but turns to death instead of grace.
- The priests show legalistic blindness: worried about blood money, but complicit in shedding the blood of the true Lamb.
- Matthew contrasts Judas' failure with Peter's restoration and Jesus' faithfulness, highlighting the choice every disciple faces—despair or redemption.

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One of the most puzzling little “textual knots” in the Gospels: **Matthew 27:9–10**, where he attributes a prophecy to *Jeremiah*, but the wording comes much closer to **Zechariah 11:12–13**. Let’s untangle this carefully.

The Passage in Question

Matthew 27:9–10

“Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, ‘And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord directed me.’”

Zechariah 11:12–13

“So they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. Then the LORD said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter’—the handsome price at which they valued me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter.”

Clearly, Matthew’s main source is Zechariah.

Why Does Matthew Say Jeremiah?

Here are the main scholarly and traditional explanations:

1. **Jeremiah as “Head of the Prophets”**

- As we discussed earlier, in some Jewish traditions Jeremiah headed the list of prophetic scrolls.
- Just like “the Psalms” could stand for the whole Writings (Luke 24:44), **“Jeremiah” might stand for “the Prophets.”**
- In this case, Matthew may be citing “the prophets” as a whole, but using *Jeremiah* as the representative name.

2. **Jeremiah’s Themes Are Present Too**

- While the exact wording is Zechariah, the **themes of a potter, a field, and judgment** strongly echo Jeremiah:
 - **Jeremiah 18:1–6** → the potter and the clay.
 - **Jeremiah 19:1–13** → Jeremiah is told to buy a potter’s earthenware jar and break it in the Valley of Hinnom as a sign of coming judgment.
 - **Jeremiah 32:6–15** → Jeremiah purchases a field as a prophetic sign.
- Matthew may be **weaving Zechariah’s words with Jeremiah’s imagery**, attributing the whole to Jeremiah since his themes dominate.

3. **Combination Citation**

- Matthew may be giving a **“composite quotation”** (not unusual in Jewish citation practice).
- Rabbinic writings sometimes combine texts from multiple prophets under the name of the more prominent one.
- Thus, Matthew fuses Zechariah’s wording with Jeremiah’s imagery.

4. **Scribal or Transmission Issue?**

- Some suggest an early scribe mistakenly wrote “Jeremiah” where “Zechariah” stood, and the reading stuck.
- However, all our earliest manuscripts say “Jeremiah,” and the Church Fathers were already aware of the difficulty. That makes it unlikely this was just a copyist’s slip—it’s more likely Matthew’s deliberate choice.

Conclusion

Matthew 27:9–10 quotes **Zechariah’s text** but gives credit to **Jeremiah** because:

1. Jeremiah was sometimes shorthand for “the Prophets.”
2. Jeremiah’s prophecies about a **potter and a field** provided the thematic backdrop.
3. Jewish citation practices allowed combining texts under one prophet’s name.

So Matthew isn’t “mistaken” in a sloppy way—he’s doing a **Jewish-style midrash**, weaving together prophetic voices into a single fulfilled word, with Jeremiah as the “covering authority.”