

Preface

Matthew 23:32 is an unsettling text that portrays a moment of profound anger, extreme sadness, and palpable irony. When Jesus' wish for Jerusalem to repent becomes impossible, he tells its leaders to get on with their plan to do away with him. "Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors!"

This text is like an intersection where four motifs meet head-on. From the Hebrew Bible comes Deuteronomism, which views Israel's historical destiny as determined by its obedience to the Torah of Moses. Disobedience inevitably leads to judgment. A second, related biblical motif is Israel's all-too-common rejection of its prophets, God's messengers who reminded the nation of its covenantal obligations and the consequences of disobedience. The final biblical motif is the notion of sin coming to a head, to a state where God, in order to be God, must act in judgment. To this perfect storm of three biblical motifs Matthew adds a fourth, his own christological hermeneutic: Jesus fulfills the law and the prophets. Just as their ancestors had rejected earlier prophets, so the Jerusalem leaders have rejected Jesus, Israel's ultimate prophet. Their looming judgment is portrayed as the culmination of a historical pattern or typology of Israel rejecting its own prophets. Yet, just as in the former days when

sin led to judgment, repentance can yet again lead to the restoration of God's favor.

The argument of this study moves centripetally to the central text, Matt. 23:32. I introduce and explain the rejected prophet motif in the context of biblical Deuteronomism. I then survey examples of the motif in Second Temple literature, in the New Testament generally, and in Matthew more specifically. Next comes an exegesis of Matthew 23, which as a whole epitomizes the motif. Finally, I argue that Matt. 23:32 joins the motif to Matthew's distinctive approach to Jesus and biblical fulfillment.

This study is a revision of my 2009 PhD dissertation at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, under the direction of Rabbi Michael J. Cook and Rabbi Richard S. Sarason. I would like to thank the trustees, administration, faculty, and staff of HUC-JIR for the opportunity afforded me to participate in this unique learning community through the Interfaith Fellowship Program.

Although many of the Cincinnati faculty contributed to my studies, I owe a special debt of gratitude to several individuals, including Dr. Alan Cooper, former professor of Bible and director of the graduate school, and Dr. Adam Kamesar, who led me through numerous primary texts and taught me much about the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible during the Greco-Roman period. Dr. Richard Sarason introduced me to the Mishnah and various midrashim. As second adviser for the dissertation, his meticulous reading and cogent comments were extremely valuable.

Most of all, Dr. Michael J. Cook opened my eyes to Jewish perspectives on the New Testament. His courses exemplified clear organization of and rigorous critical engagement with the material. His contribution to my studies was extraordinary. Without his insight and counsel as first reader, the dissertation could not have

been completed. Rabbi Cook always required me to make the best arguments for my own views, and he never required me to agree with his.

Fortress Press has skillfully and efficiently facilitated the process of bringing this book to publication. I especially appreciate the work of Neil Elliott, Lisa Gruenisen, Carolyn Halvorson, Marissa Wold, and Mark Jensen. I am deeply grateful for the ongoing support and encouragement of Dean John VerBerkmoes and my colleagues at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary. As always in everything I do, my wife Beverly is a source of help and strength, even as she deals with the pressures of her own demanding career.