

# Matthew 23:29

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,

## Analysis

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**Ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous** (οἰκοδομεῖτε τοὺς τάφους τῶν προφητῶν καὶ κοσμεῖτε τὰ μνημεῖα τῶν δικαίων)—kosmeite means "to adorn, decorate, beautify." The Pharisees constructed elaborate monuments honoring martyred prophets—likely including Isaiah (tradition says sawn in two, Hebrews 11:37), Jeremiah (stoned in Egypt, tradition), Zechariah (2 Chronicles 24:20-22). This appeared pious: honoring God's messengers their ancestors killed.

But Jesus exposes the irony: they honor dead prophets while preparing to kill the Prophet standing before them. They've turned martyrdom memorials into monuments to their own imagined righteousness—"We would never do what our ancestors did." This self-congratulation while plotting Jesus's murder reveals that honoring past prophets can camouflage rejection of present ones.

## Historical Context

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Second Temple period Jews built elaborate tomb monuments, especially for prophets and righteous figures. Absalom's Pillar and the Tomb of Zechariah in Kidron Valley date to this era. These monuments demonstrated supposed reverence for God's messengers. But Jesus spoke this days before the Sanhedrin (composed largely of Pharisees and Sadducees) would illegally try Him, suborn

false witnesses, and demand Roman crucifixion—exactly what their ancestors did to the prophets.

## Related Passages

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**Romans 10:9** — Confession and belief for salvation

**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

**Colossians 1:16** — All things created through Christ

**Genesis 1:1** — Creation of heavens and earth

## Study Questions

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1. How do we honor past spiritual heroes while rejecting current prophetic voices that challenge our comfort and compromise?
2. What monuments, institutions, or traditions have you built to commemorate past faithfulness while ignoring present calls to repentance?
3. In what ways does celebrating historical Christian courage serve as substitute for present obedience to costly discipleship?

## Interlinear Text

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Οὐαὶ	ὑμῖν	γραμματεῖς	καὶ	Φαρισαῖοι	ὑποκριταί	ὅτι
<b>Woe</b>	<b>unto you</b>	<b>scribes</b>	<b>and</b>	<b>Pharisees</b>	<b>hypocrites</b>	<b>! because</b>
G3759	G5213	G1122	G2532	G5330	G5273	G3754
οἰκοδομεῖτε	τοὺς	τάφους	τῶν	προφητῶν	καὶ	κοσμεῖτε
<b>ye build</b>		<b>the tombs</b>		<b>of the prophets</b>	<b>and</b>	<b>garnish</b>
G3618	G3588	G5028	G3588	G4396	G2532	G2885
τὰ	μνημεῖα	τῶν	δικαίων			
<b>the sepulchres</b>			<b>of the righteous</b>			
G3588	G3419	G3588	G1342			

