

Matthew 23:31

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.

Analysis

Ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets (μαρτυρεῖτε ἔαυτοῖς ὅτι νιοί ἔστε τῶν φονευσάντων τοὺς προφήτας)—Jesus turns their self-defense into self-incrimination. Martyreite (witness) is legal terminology; they've testified against themselves. Huioi (sons/children) means both physical descendants and spiritual heirs—they share their ancestors' nature.

By claiming "we wouldn't have done it," they unwittingly confess they are indeed sons of murderers—they have the same hardened hearts, the same resistance to God's messengers, the same religious pride. Their elaborate tomb-building unconsciously testifies: "Our fathers killed prophets, and we're their spiritual descendants." Jesus forces them to see what their actions prove: they're chips off the old murderous block.

Historical Context

Jewish understanding of corporate identity included both biological descent and spiritual succession. "Sons of Abraham" could mean either genetic lineage or faith-following (John 8:39-44). Jesus earlier told these same Pharisees, "You are of your father the devil" (John 8:44). Here He says they're sons of prophet-killers. The temple-building, tomb-garnishing, Torah-obsessed religious leaders were actually spiritual descendants of Israel's worst apostates—those who murdered God's messengers.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How do your defenses and justifications sometimes serve as unwitting confessions of the very sins you deny?
2. What does it mean to be a spiritual "child" of someone—how do we inherit the sins we condemn in previous generations?
3. In what ways does elaborate religious activity (like tomb-building) camouflage hard-hearted resistance to God's current word?

Interlinear Text

ὅστε	μαρτυρεῖτε	ἐαυτοῖς	ὅτι	υἱοί	ἐστε	τῶν
Wherefore	ye be witnesses	unto yourselves	that	the children	ye are	G3588
G5620	G3140	G1438	G3754	G5207	G2075	
φοινευσάντων	τοὺς	προφήτας				
of them which killed	G3588	the prophets				
G5407		G4396				

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org