

## The Blood from Abel to Zechariah in the History of Interpretation\*

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The saying in the Gospels about the blood ‘from Abel to Zechariah’ has generated a number of theories regarding the identity of Zechariah and why Jesus specifically mentions these two victims. While a prominent interpretation today regards the names as pointing to the bookends of the Hebrew Bible, the Greek and Latin Fathers had their own peculiar ways of solving the exegetical puzzles connected to the saying. It seems that the invention of the printing press, and the stable sequence of books it created, exerted an influence on the development of the popular modern view.

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Near the end of the series of woes upon the Pharisees found in Matt 23 (// Luke 11.37–52), Jesus declared that his generation would pay the penalty for all the righteous blood shed on earth, ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵματος Ἀβελ τοῦ δικαίου ἕως τοῦ αἵματος Ζαχαρίου υἱοῦ Βαραχίου, ὃν ἐφρονέυσατε μεταξὺ τοῦ ναοῦ καὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου (v. 35). The identity and significance of ‘Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the Temple and the altar’ has troubled exegetes from ancient times.<sup>1</sup> A common interpretation today

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<sup>1</sup> The parallel version in Luke 11.49–51 lacks the patronym for Zechariah and contains further differences in wording. On the variations, see W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. 3 (ICC; New York: Continuum, 1997) 316–18. Davies and Allison consider the patronym a Matthean addition. For the view that the patronym is original to Q, see U. Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005) 150–1. The Lucan version of this statement has featured much less prominently in its reception, both because it does not present the problems associated with the Matthean version and because the Gospel of Matthew was by far the most popular of the Synoptic Gospels in antiquity, on which see the brief comments in L. W.

relates Abel and Zechariah to the first and last books of the Hebrew Bible so that Jesus' statement refers to the contours of the canon. This 'canonical' interpretation so dominates the discussion of this passage that a decade ago H. G. L. Peels asserted that '[v]irtually all exegetes believe that Mt 23,35 and Lk 11,51 mirror the structure and scope of the Old Testament canon of that time'.<sup>2</sup> During the decade since the publication of Peels' article, while a number of scholars demur, the 'canonical' interpretation has continued to claim a large number of adherents.<sup>3</sup> But this interpretation has not always dominated the exegesis of Matt 23.35. In fact, the Church Fathers never considered it, nor did anyone else, apparently, until the rise of modern biblical

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Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006) 30.

- 2 H. G. L. Peels, 'The Blood "from Abel to Zechariah" (Matthew 23,35; Luke 11,50f.) and the Canon of the Old Testament', *ZAW* 113 (2001) 583–601, at 586. Peels then produced a list of twentieth-century commentators that took this view, including eighteen commentators on Matthew and thirteen more on Luke, with only five commentators dissenting (586 n. 8).
- 3 More recent commentators accepting the 'canonical' interpretation of our passage include J. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005) 946–7; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007) 880; D. L. Turner, *Matthew* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2008) 558; M. J. Wilkins, *Matthew* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004) 756–7; D. E. Garland, *Luke* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011) 497. B. Witherington III, *Matthew* (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2006) 433, seems to leave the matter open as to whether our passage refers to 2 Chronicles as the last book of the Hebrew canon or as the conclusion of the historical books (assuming a LXX arrangement). For others who continue to advance this 'canonical' interpretation, see A. Hahn, *Canon Hebraeorum – Canon Ecclesiae: Zur deuterokanonischen Frage im Rahmen der Begründung alttestamentlicher Schriftkanonizität in neuerer römisch-katholischer Dogmatik* (Berlin: Lit, 2009) 197; I. Kalimi, *The Retelling of Chronicles in Jewish Tradition and Literature: A Historical Journey* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009) 44–54. Those who have dissented include O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 567–8; D. M. Carr, 'Canonization in the Context of Community: An Outline of the Formation of the Tanakh and the Christian Bible', in *A Gift of God in Due Season* (ed. R. D. Weis and D. M. Carr; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996) 22–64, esp. 44–5; A. E. Steinmann, *The Oracles of God: The Old Testament Canon* (St Louis: Concordia Academic, 1999) 98–101; L. M. McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007) 96–100; J. C. Trebelle Barrera, 'Origins of a Tripartite Old Testament Canon', in *The Canon Debate* (ed. L. M. McDonald and J. A. Sanders; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002) 128–45, at 131; C. A. Evans, 'The Scriptures of Jesus and His Earliest Followers', in McDonald and Sanders, *Canon Debate*, 185–95, at 189–90; Ph. Guillaume, 'New Light on the Nebiim from Alexandria: A Chronography to Replace the Deuteronomistic History', *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 5.9 (2004) 1–51, esp. 12–13, available online at: [www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/Articles/article\\_39.pdf](http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/Articles/article_39.pdf); T. H. Lim, *The Formation of the Jewish Canon* (Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013) 157–62.

criticism. This paper will examine the patristic interpretation of our verse, give brief consideration to some Early Modern interpretations (e.g. John Lightfoot, Calvin), and finally offer a suggestion for the origins of the ‘canonical’ interpretation.

Proponents of the ‘canonical’ interpretation make two assumptions about the exegesis of Matt 23.35 that were not always shared by earlier interpreters. First, they identify the Zechariah mentioned by Jesus with the Zechariah murdered by King Joash of Judah within the precincts of the Temple, as narrated in 2 Chron 24.20–2. Although this latter Zechariah has a different patronym (Jehoiada) from the one the Matthean Jesus specifies (Barachiah), few scholars in the modern period have considered this a serious deterrent to identifying the two.<sup>4</sup> We will see that in the patristic period this identification was much less obvious, especially to the Greek Fathers. The second assumption made by proponents of the ‘canonical’ interpretation is that the Hebrew Bible – or, at least, a very prominent form of it – already in the days of Jesus had a sequence concluding with Chronicles, just as is typical today. The Fathers were unaware of a sequence of Old Testament books with Chronicles at the end. If they did not relate Jesus’ mention of ‘Abel to Zechariah’ to the borders of the canon, what significance did these two names carry for the Fathers? We will first consider the identity of Zechariah in the history of interpretation before turning to the explanations offered for why Jesus named these two characters.

### 1. Greek Fathers on the Identity of Zechariah

In spite of the obvious similarities between the death of Zechariah as described by Jesus and the death of Zechariah son of Jehoiada in 2 Chronicles, two features of the Chronicles passage deterred the Fathers from always interpreting Jesus’ statement as a reference to it. First, of course, the problem of the variant patronym – Jehoiada versus Barachiah – could not be avoided and demanded explanation. Second, the Fathers did not always find in their Greek texts of 2 Chron 24 a character named Zechariah. The Old Greek translation of Chronicles gave this person the name Azarias son of Iodae.<sup>5</sup>

4 For an extended discussion of the variant patronym, see R. T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and its Background in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985) 211–22. See also R. H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994) 471–2.

5 As it is spelled in NETS. Leonard C. Allen lists our item as an inner-Greek corruption assimilated to the name Azaria in 2 Chron 26 (*The Greek Chronicles: The Relation of the Septuagint of 1 and 2 Chronicles to the Massoretic Text* (2 vols.; VTSup 25, 27; Leiden: Brill, 1974) 1.31).

The Greek translation of Chronicles is usually dated to the mid second century BCE.<sup>6</sup> The well-documented tendency of the Greek translations to undergo revision towards the Hebrew text finds an example in the name of the prophet in 2 Chron 24.<sup>7</sup> While the Old Greek reads Azarias, several manuscripts, especially those identified as Lucianic or Antiochene, attest the reading Zechariah, thus adapted towards the Hebrew textual tradition.<sup>8</sup> This might explain how both John Chrysostom and Theodoret of Cyrus know the prophet of 2 Chron 24 by the name Zechariah.<sup>9</sup> Already in the first century, Josephus calls this prophet Zechariah (*AJ* 9.168–71).<sup>10</sup> The preserved manuscript of the Vetus Latina for 2 Chronicles also attests the form *Zaccaria*.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, even the great Origen is unaware of the reading Zechariah in 2 Chron 24; he only knows this prophet by the name Azarias. One would have thought that Origen would show familiarity with the name Zechariah based on his close study of the Greek Minor Versions, which surely contained this reading in harmony with the Hebrew text. Unfortunately, Field's *Hexapla* cites no information from Aquila, Symmachus or Theodotion for our name.<sup>12</sup>

As a result of Origen's ignorance of the name Zechariah in 2 Chron 24, he never interprets Jesus' statement in Matt 23.35 as a reference to this passage. It

- 6 See Allen, *Greek Chronicles*, 6–17; G. N. Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 2003) 59–62; I. Kalimi, *The Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History in Chronicles* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005) 13 n. 46. The date of LXX Chronicles is established by the quotations of it found in the work of Eupolemus.
- 7 On Hebraising revisions of the LXX, see N. Fernández Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Versions of the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) 109–87.
- 8 A. E. Brooke, N. McLean and H. St. John Thackeray, eds., *The Old Testament in Greek: According to the Text of Codex Vaticanus*, 2.3: *I and II Chronicles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932) 524. The manuscripts attesting the reading ζαχαριαν are a b' b'(mg) fmc<sub>2</sub>e<sub>2</sub> (along with Josephus and Theodoret).
- 9 Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 74.2 (see below); Theodoret, *Comm. Hebrews* 11.37, PG 82.769a; *Quaestiones in 2 Paralipomenon*, for which see the edition of Natalio Fernandez Marcos and José Ramón Busto Saiz, *Theodoretii Cyrensis quaestiones in reges et paralipomena: editio critica* (Madrid: Instituto 'Arias Montano', CSIC, 1984) 283 line 5; 286 lines 11–12. Cf. also Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 9.17, PG 67.1629b.
- 10 B. Niese, ed., *Flavii Iosephi opera*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1885) 302–3. No significant variants are listed for this name. In general, see C. T. Begg, 'Joash of Judah according to Josephus', in *The Chronicler as Historian* (ed. M. P. Graham, K. G. Hoglund and S. L. McKenzie; JSOT Suppl. 238; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997) 301–20.
- 11 R. Weber, *Les anciennes versions latines du deuxième livre des Paralipomènes* (Rome: Abbe de St Jerome, 1945) 51. In general, see N. Fernández Marcos, 'The Old Latin of Chronicles between the Greek and the Hebrew', in *IX Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Cambridge, 1995* (ed. B. A. Taylor; SCS 45; Atlanta: Scholars, 1997) 123–36; M. Kraus, 'Hebraisms in the Old Latin Version of the Bible', *VT* 53 (2003) 487–513.
- 12 F. Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1875).

appears that Origen mentioned the prophet of 2 Chron 24 only twice in his extant works, both times in his *Commentary on Matthew*, once in the portion preserved in Greek, the second time in the Latin section. The comment preserved in Greek comes in his interpretation of the Parable of the Tenants (*Comm. in Matt.* 17.9). When Jesus says that ‘the tenants seized [the landowner’s] slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another’ (Matt 21.35), Origen explains these crimes with references to specific actions recorded in scripture:

‘ὄν δὲ ἀπέκτειναν’, ὡς Ζαχαρίαν μετὰ τοῦ ναοῦ καὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου, ὄν δὲ ἐλιθοβόλησαν’, ὡς τὸν Ἀζαρίαν υἱὸν τοῦ Ἰωδαῆ τὸν ἱερέα, καθάπερ γέγραπται ἐν τῇ δευτέρᾳ τῶν Παραλειπομένων· ἦνίκα γὰρ πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐνέδυσσε τὸν Ἀζαρίαν τὸν τοῦ Ἰωδαῆ τὸν ἱερέα ...

They killed one, such as Zechariah between the Temple and the altar. They stoned another, such as Azarias the priest, son of Iodae, just as it is written in the second [book] of *Paralipomena*, for when the Spirit of God imbued Azarias the priest, the son of Iodae ...

Origen continues by citing the rest of the passage from Chronicles (2 Chron 24.20–2). Note especially that, for Origen, Zechariah, murdered between the Temple and the altar (Matt 23.35), is a different individual from Azarias son of Iodae killed by Joash ‘in the court of the house of the Lord’ (ἐν ἀλλῇ οἴκου κυρίου, 2 Chron. 24.21, quoted by Origen). The first serves as an example of those servants of the Lord who were ‘killed’, the second as an example of those who were ‘stoned’.

Origen mentions Azarias later in his *Commentary on Matthew* to illustrate the infrequency of references to the murder of God’s servants in the Old Testament despite the repeated New Testament assertions that Israelite prophets routinely met a violent end.<sup>13</sup> Origen simply says *unum autem legimus lapidatum Azariam filium Ioidae sacerdotis, populum arguentem* (‘but we read of one stoned, Azarias son of Ioida the priest, while he was accusing the people’).<sup>14</sup> Again, these are the only two references to the prophet of 2 Chron 24 that I have been able to find in Origen.

On the other hand, Origen does mention Zechariah son of Barachiah, ‘whom you murdered between the Temple and the altar’, a number of times. The first

13 On the development of the tradition of the ‘murder of the prophets’, see D. Satran, *Biblical Prophets in Byzantine Palestine: Reassessing the Lives of the Prophets* (Leiden: Brill, 1995) 25–8. For further references in Origen, see N. de Lange, *La lettre à Africanus sur l’histoire de Suzanne*, in M. Harl, ed., *Origène: Philocalie, 1–20. Sur les Écritures* (SC 302; Paris: Cerf, 1983) 497.

14 *Comm. ser. Matt.* 28 (ed. E. Klostermann, *Origenes Werke* 11/2: *Origenes Matthäuserklärung* (GCS 38; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1933) 50.3). Klostermann gives the reading *Zachariam* in the apparatus. It is this latter reading that is printed by Migne (*PG* 13.1636c).

time this Zechariah appears in his *Commentary on Matthew* (10.18), he says that Jesus drew on apocryphal documents:

καὶ Ἡσαΐας δὲ πεπρίσθαι ὑπὸ τοῦ λαοῦ ἰστόρηται. εἰ δέ τις οὐ προσίεται τὴν ἱστορίαν, διὰ τὸ ἐν τῷ ἀποκρύφῳ Ἡσαΐα αὐτὴν φέρεσθαι, πιστευσάτω τοῖς ἐν τῇ πρὸς Ἑβραίους οὕτω γεγραμμένοις· ἐλιθάσθησαν, ἐπίσθησαν, ἐπειράσθησαν.<sup>15</sup> τὸ γὰρ ἐπίσθησαν ἐπὶ τὸν Ἡσαΐαν ἀναφέρεται, ὡσπερ τὸ ἐν φόνῳ μαχαίρας ἀπέθανον ἐπὶ τὸν Ζαχαρίαν φονευθέντα ἔμεταξὺ τοῦ ναοῦ καὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου, ὡς ὁ σωτὴρ ἐδίδασκε μαρτυρῶν, ὡς οἶμαι, γραφῆ οὐ φερομένη μὲν ἐν τοῖς κοινοῖς καὶ δεδημευμένοις βιβλίοις, εἰκὸς δ' ὅτι ἐν ἀποκρύφοις φερομένη.

And Isaiah is reported to have been sawn in two by the people. But if anyone does not accept the account because it is contained in an Isaiah apocryphon, let him give credence to the things written in the Epistle to the Hebrews, thus: 'they were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted' [Heb 11.37]. For the reference to those who were sawn in two relates to Isaiah, just as the phrase 'they died the death of the sword' relates to Zechariah murdered 'between the Temple and the altar', as the Saviour was teaching, testifying, as I think, to a writing not circulating in common and public books, but likely to be circulating in apocryphal books.

Here and elsewhere (cf. *Ep. Afr.* 14), Origen does not make absolutely clear which Zechariah he thinks Jesus had in mind. Of course, it cannot be the prophet of 2 Chron 24, whom Origen knows as Azarias, because Origen understands that Azarias was stoned whereas this Zechariah, he says, was killed by the sword. Even the patronym Barachiah used by Jesus in Matt 23.35 (but not by Origen in the quoted passage) does not point exclusively to a single scriptural Zechariah, since the Greek Bible knows two such characters: Zechariah the Minor Prophet (Zech 1.1) and a character mentioned in Isa 8.2 known in the Hebrew text as Zechariah son of Jeberechiah.<sup>16</sup> Origen actually connects the Zechariah mentioned by Jesus with neither of these Old Testament characters. In one place, Origen says that 'it is not possible that he should be understood to be the Zechariah who is one of the Twelve' in view of the second person plural verb used by Jesus: ἐφονεύσατε.<sup>17</sup>

15 Modern editions of the Greek New Testament omit ἐπειράσθησαν. See B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2nd edn; Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1994) 603–4. Metzger cites Origen as a partial witness to the omission of ἐπειράσθησαν.

16 The Vulgate, like the LXX, also gives the patronym *Barachia* in Isa 8.2. Strange to say, I cannot find any one before the eighth century who takes the view that Jesus' Zechariah was the Minor Prophet (see n. 40 below). According to *Lives of the Prophets* 15.6, the latter died peacefully. However, this identification has recently been defended by C. L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (2nd edn; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2007) 246–8.

17 *Comm. ser. Matt.* 25 (ed. Klostermann, GCS 38, 42.10–19). He says the same thing later (43.27–9). Origen puts too much weight on ἐφονεύσατε; see J. Chapman, 'Zacharias, Slain between

This indicates that the Zechariah referenced must be a contemporary of those first-century scribes and Pharisees condemned by Jesus in Matt 23. Origen does not in this passage reveal his choice for this Zechariah, but he does indicate that Jesus did not refer to any story in the scriptural canon but rather relied on apocryphal writings.<sup>18</sup>

More clarity comes later in the *Commentary on Matthew* (ser. 25) when Origen arrives at the passage under discussion (Matt 23.35). Here, emphasising the second person plural of ἐφρονεῦσατε in Matt 23.35, Origen looks for a first-century Zechariah. The decisive clue to his identification comes from a tradition – Origen attributes it to Josephus – that the father of John the Baptist, whom Luke names Zechariah (Luke 1.5), was himself the son of a Barachiah. Origen continues by relating another tradition:

ἀλλ' ἦλθεν εἰς ἡμᾶς τοιαύτη τις παράδοσις, ὡς ἄρα ὄντος τινὸς περὶ τὸν ναὸν τόπου, ἔνθα ἔξῃν τὰς μὲν παρθένους εἰσιέναι καὶ προσκυνεῖν τῷ θεῷ, τὰς δὲ ἤδη πεπειραμένας κοίτην ἀνδρὸς οὐκ ἐπέτρεπον ἐν ἐκείνῳ. ἢ οὖν Μαρία μετὰ τὸ γεννηῆσαι τὸν σωτῆρα [ἡμῶν] ἐλθοῦσα προσκυνῆσαι ἔστη ἐν τῷ τόπῳ τῶν παρθένων. καὶ καλύοντων τῶν εἰδότην αὐτὴν γεννήσασαν ὁ Ζαχαρίας ἔλεγε τοῖς καλύουσιν ἄξιαν αὐτὴν εἶναι τοῦ τόπου τῶν παρθένων ἔτι παρθένον οὖσαν. ὡς οὖν σαφῶς παρανομοῦντα καὶ εἰς τὸν τόπον τῶν παρθένων ἐπιτρέποντα γυναικὰ γίνεσθαι ἀπέκτειναν ἕνεκα τοῦ ναοῦ καὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου' οἱ τῆς γενεᾶς ἐκείνης.<sup>19</sup>

But a certain tradition has come to us such that there was a certain place at the Temple where it was permitted for virgins to enter and worship God, but they did not allow in that place those who had experienced the bed of a man. So Mary, after having given birth to [our] Saviour, having entered to worship, stood in the place of virgins. And while those who knew she had given birth were hindering her, Zechariah was saying to those hindering her that she was deserving of the place of virgins since she was still a virgin. So, on the assumption that he was clearly transgressing the law and allowing a married

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the Temple and the Altar', *JTS* 13 (1912) 398–410, esp. 406–7. But Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 318) do note that the 'you' in Matt 23.35 is 'odd'. On Jesus' Zechariah son of Barachiah not being the Minor Prophet, cf. also *Ep. Afr.* 14, where Origen seems to differentiate Zechariah son of Barachiah from the members of the Twelve. I have used the paragraph divisions of the edition by de Lange, *Lettre*.

18 On *Comm. Matt.* 10.18, see also R. P. C. Hanson, *Origen's Doctrine of Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1954) 42 and n. 2. See also the note in de Lange, *Lettre*, 546–7. Both Hanson and de Lange, and also others, think that Origen does sometimes indicate that the referent of Jesus' statement is Zechariah the Minor Prophet. See also Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 318 n. 46; G. Bardy, 'Saint Jérôme et ses maîtres hébreux', *RBén* 46 (1934) 145–64, esp. 161 n. 1. However, it seems possible to reconcile the seemingly divergent interpretations.

19 *Comm. ser. Matt.* 25 (ed. Klostermann, GCS 38, 42.23–43.18).



woman into the place of virgins, the men of that generation killed him 'between the Temple and the altar'.

This story has some resemblance to the conclusion of the *Protevangelium of James* (chs. 23–4), in that both Origen's tradition and the *Protevangelium* have Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, murdered in the Temple precincts. But there are also substantial differences, including both the party responsible for the murder and its motivation.<sup>20</sup> Origen credits his information to a tradition (*Comm. ser. Matt.* 25) derived, he assumes, from certain apocryphal books (*Comm. in Matt.* 10.18). Possibly there is also some connection with Josephus' account of the killing within the Temple of a certain Zechariah son of Bareis during the First Jewish Revolt (*BJ* 4.334–4).<sup>21</sup>

From whatever source Origen derived this tradition, his version of the story became influential among some later Greek Fathers. The same basic approach to the interpretation of Matt 23.35, linking Zechariah son of Barachiah to the father of John the Baptist, appears in Basil of Caesarea, his brother Gregory of Nyssa, and Cyril of Alexandria.<sup>22</sup> Some Greek Fathers do know about an interpretation linking Jesus' statement with 2 Chron 24,<sup>23</sup> but no Greek Father known to me firmly advocates such an approach to Matt 23.35. For even when the prophet's name in 2 Chron 24 was known to be Zechariah, still the problem of the divergent patronyms would hinder any clear-cut identification of this Zechariah with the one mentioned by Jesus.<sup>24</sup> Rather, the idea that Jesus referred to the father of John the Baptist seems to be the most popular view among the Greek Fathers. Its appearance already in Origen as a tradition preceding him demonstrates how early the identity of Zechariah in Matt 23.35 was felt to be problematic. As

20 Origen is emphatic that Zechariah was killed by the scribes and Pharisees (according to the saying of Jesus) and not by Herod (as in the *Protevangelium*), though he does not mention the *Protevangelium* in this context; *Comm. ser. Matt.* 26 (ed. Klostermann, GCS 38, 44.13–26).

21 De Lange, *Lettre*, 546–7 n. 1, suggests that Origen, or his source, may have misunderstood the information provided by Josephus regarding the death of Zechariah son of Bareis.

22 Basil of Caesarea, *Hom. in sanctam Christi generationem* 5, PG 31.1468c–1469a; Gregory of Nyssa, *In diem natalem Salvatoris* (ed. F. Mann, *Gregorii Nysseni opera* 10.2; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 248–50; Cyril of Alexandria, *Comm. in Lucam* 11:47, PG 72.720b–721a. On Basil's dependence on Origen in this regard, see M. DelCogliano, 'Tradition and Polemic in Basil of Caesarea's Homily on the Theophany', *VC* 66 (2012) 30–55, esp. 46–7. For additional references, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 318 n. 46. The view that Jesus referred to the father of John the Baptist was still being defended by M. Stuart, *Critical History and Defence of the Old Testament Canon* (Andover: Allen, Morrill and Wardwell, 1845) 279–83.

23 See the discussion on John Chrysostom below.

24 Of course, some Greek Fathers cite Matt 23.35 without discussing the identity of Zechariah; cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Dem. ev.* 8.2; 9.11; 9.13; Theodoret of Cyrus, *Comm. Psal.* 107.14, PG 80.1760.18. Probably, the patronym prevented Theodoret from seeing any relation between the two Zechariahs. He knows that the Zechariah of 2 Chron 24 is Zechariah son of Iodae (*Quaest. Par.*, cited above, n. 9). Eusebius never mentions the prophet of 2 Chron 24.



John Chapman pointed out a century ago, ‘the identity of Zacharias was a question older than the story, which was invented to answer it’, and so his identity seems to have caused problems at least by the mid second century.<sup>25</sup>

## 2. Latin Fathers on the Identity of Zechariah

Latin writers do tend to prefer the Zechariah of 2 Chron 24 as the one intended by Jesus in Matt 23.35. Two main points explain this. First, as mentioned earlier, the Latin translations of Chronicles, whether the *Vetus Latina* or the Vulgate, gave the reading *Zaccaria* as the prophet’s name, rather than the LXX’s Azarias.<sup>26</sup> Second, a suitable explanation for the divergent patronyms was provided by Jerome, the first author we see who argued strongly in favour of this identification. Most of the Latin exegesis favouring the interpretation depends for the argumentation on Jerome’s views.<sup>27</sup>

Jerome’s most extended discussion of Jesus’ statement naturally appears in his *Commentary on Matthew* 23.35. He first reviews the possibilities:<sup>28</sup>

quaerimus quis sit iste Zacharias filius Barachiae quia multos legimus Zacharias. et ne libera nobis tribuatur erroris facultas additum est: quem occidistis inter templum et altare. in diversis diversa legi et debeo singulorum opiniones ponere.

But we need to ask who this Zechariah son of Barachiah is. For we read about many Zechariahs. He even removes the possibility of error for us by adding: ‘whom you killed between the sanctuary and the altar’.<sup>29</sup> I have read diverse things in diverse sources, and I ought to record the opinions of each of these.

Jerome begins by mentioning the most obvious candidate based on the patronym:

alii Zachariam filium Barachiae dicunt qui in Duodecim Prophetis undecimus est patrisque in eo nomen consentiat, sed ubi occisus sit inter templum et altare scriptura non loquitur, maxime cum temporibus eius vix ruinae templi fuerint.

25 Chapman, ‘Zacharias’, 398–9.

26 It is possible that our extant sources for the VL have been influenced by the Vulgate in this regard, though the argument of Fernández Marcos, ‘Old Latin of Chronicles’, suggests that the reading *Zaccaria* could well be original to the VL (but he does not discuss this reading specifically).

27 Did Tertullian offer an identification for Zechariah of Matt 23.35? This is not found in his extant works, but Lawrence of Brindisi (*fl.* 1600) attributes to Tertullian the view that the intended Zechariah was the father of John the Baptist, and he cites Tertullian’s *Scorpiace* in this regard; *Nativitas et Epiphania, in die S. Stephani protomartyris, Hom.* 1.6.

28 The translation used here is slightly adapted from St Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* (trans. T. P. Scheck; FOC 117; Washington: Catholic University of America, 2008) 266–7.

29 As will become clear, this quotation from Matt 23.35 functions as a decisive proof in Jerome’s argument in a different way from what we saw in Origen. The latter highlighted the verb ‘you killed’, which, to his mind, indicted the first-century Jews. Jerome does not take notice of the verb in his analysis but rather stresses the location of the death.

Some say that Zechariah son of Barachiah is the eleventh of the Twelve Prophets. The name of his father is in agreement with this, but Scripture does not say when he was killed between the sanctuary and the altar, chiefly since in his time there were scarcely even ruins of the Temple.

This argument appears somewhat disingenuous. Jerome must have known from the Book of Ezra that the Second Temple had progressed sufficiently 'through the prophesying of the prophet Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo' (Ezra 6.14) for the exiles who had returned to be able to dedicate it in about 516 BCE, during Zechariah's lifetime.<sup>30</sup> Jerome exploits the situation early in Zechariah's ministry, when the Temple did stand in ruins, in order to eliminate this prophet as a possibility for the interpretation of Matt 23.35.

Next, he discusses a second unacceptable option:

alii Zachariam patrem Iohannis intellegi volunt ex quibusdam apocryphorum somniis adprobantes quod propterea occisus sit quia salvatoris praedicarit adventum. hoc quia de scripturis non habet auctoritatem eadem facilitate contemnitur qua probatur.

Others want this Zechariah to be understood as the father of John. Based on certain daydreams in apocryphal writings, they affirm that he was killed because he had predicted the Saviour's advent. Since this view does not have the authority of the Scriptures, it is rejected with the same facility with which it is approved.

This second option is, of course, the one favoured by Origen, which Jerome surely must have known. However, the reason for Zechariah's death, predicting 'the Saviour's advent', differs from the tradition reported by Origen regarding Mary's entering the court of virgins in the Temple.<sup>31</sup> Nor does Jerome's statement match exactly what we find in *Prot. Jas.* 23, where Herod kills Zechariah for not revealing the whereabouts of his son John. Perhaps Jerome relies here on his memory for the specific circumstances associated with this second possibility. The end of the fourth century witnessed growing tension about the suitability of reading and learning from apocrypha, particularly in the wake of Priscillian of Avila's promotion of this literature and his execution in 385.<sup>32</sup> As Priscillian cited Matt 23.35 as part of his justification for reading apocrypha,<sup>33</sup> Jerome may have felt extra motivation to reject this interpretation and find an alternative.

30 Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 318) curiously follow Jerome in asserting that the temple stood in ruins during the days of Zechariah the Minor Prophet.

31 Bardy, 'Saint Jérôme et ses maîtres hébreux', 160–1.

32 A. S. Jacobs, 'The Disorder of Books: Priscillian's Canonical Defense of Apocrypha', *HTR* 93 (2000) 135–59.

33 *Tract.* III; see *Priscillian of Avila: The Complete Works* (ed. and trans. M. Conti; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 86–7.

Finally, Jerome discusses his third and preferred option:

alii istum volunt esse Zachariam qui occisus est a Ioas rege Iudeae inter templum et altare sicut regnorum narrat historia. sed observandum quod ille Zacharias non sit filius Barachiae sed filius Ioiadae sacerdotis ... cum ergo et Zachariam teneamus et occisionis consentiat locus, quaerimus quare Barachiae dicatur filius et non Ioiadae. Barachia in lingua nostra benedictus Domini dicitur, et sacerdotis Ioiadae iustitia Hebraeo nomine demonstratur. In evangelio quo utuntur Nazareni pro filio Barachiae filium Ioiadae scriptum reperimus.

Others want this Zechariah to be the one who was killed between the sanctuary and the altar by Joash king of Judea, as the history of Reigns narrates. But one should observe that that Zechariah was not the son of Barachiah, but the son of Jehoiada the priest ... Since, then, not only do we have Zechariah but also the place of the killing is in agreement, we need to ask why he is called the son of Barachiah, and not of Jehoiada. Barachiah means 'blessed of the Lord' in our language, and the Hebrew name of the priest Jehoiada signifies 'righteousness'.<sup>34</sup> In the gospel that the Nazarenes use, in place of 'son of Barachiah' we have found it written: 'son of Jehoiada'.<sup>35</sup>

There seem to be four reasons why Jerome favours this Zechariah. First, the location of the death offers strong support. Second, the name Zechariah provides a match. Third, Jerome successfully devises an explanation for the variant patronyms: they present no real difficulty because Jehoiada and Barachiah mean similar things in Hebrew. Fourth, Jerome again employs his knowledge of Hebrew to inform his readers that the Gospel of the Nazarenes, written in Hebrew, contains the correct patronym for Zechariah.<sup>36</sup> He implies that this version of the Gospel may contain the original reading. Thus, Jerome favours this view not only because it makes sense and absolves him of relying on traditions preserved only in apocrypha, as Origen and Priscillian had before him, but also because it provides the opportunity, in multiple ways, of displaying his expertise in Hebrew and its usefulness for exegesis.

Jerome's contemporary John Chrysostom, almost uniquely among Greek Fathers, it would seem, evinces some familiarity with this interpretation relating the Zechariah mentioned by Jesus to the story in 2 Chron 24, but his description suffers from some confusion. While commenting on Jesus' statement in Matt 23.35, he asks:

34 My translation follows that of Émile Bonnard, *Saint Jérôme: Commentaire sur Saint Matthieu*, vol. 2 (SC 259; Paris: Cerf, 1979) 181.

35 On this last point, see Th. Zahn, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons* (2 vols.; Leipzig: Deichert, 1888–92) 2.695.

36 For Jerome's comments on this Gospel, see O. Skarsaune, 'Evidence for Jewish Believers in Greek and Latin Patristic Literature', in *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (ed. O. Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007) 505–67, esp. 541–9.

ἀλλὰ τίς ἐστὶν ὁ Ζαχαρίας οὗτος? οἱ μὲν τὸν Ἰωάννου πατέρα φασίν· οἱ δὲ τὸν προφήτην· οἱ δὲ ἕτερόν τινα διώνυμον ἱερέα, ὃν καὶ Ἰωδάε φησὶν ἡ Γραφή.<sup>37</sup>

But who is this Zechariah? Some say the father of John, others the [Minor] Prophet, and others a certain double-named priest, whom Scripture also calls Iodae.

Chrysostom does not seem to know much about this interpretation or to put much confidence in it. He may have seen some Antiochian manuscripts revised towards the Hebrew text containing the name Zechariah in 2 Chron 24 (as mentioned earlier), but it is not clear that he knows which Old Testament passage relates the story about this ‘double-named priest’. Possibly, he was just familiar with an interpretation like Jerome’s, though he botches some of the details. It is not Zechariah that is double-named, but rather his father (according to the interpretation); Iodae is not the alternative name of Zechariah but one of his father’s names, the other being Barachiah. Nevertheless, Chrysostom represents a rare case of a Greek Father that connected, however tenuously, Matt 23.35 with 2 Chron 24.<sup>38</sup>

The influence of Jerome ensured that this would become the standard interpretation among Latin writers.<sup>39</sup> Though Jerome attributes this view to his predecessors, who these predecessors might have been is not apparent from an examination of the extant exegesis of this verse. While Jerome’s position is not universally accepted, later Latin authors, including Bede, Thomas Aquinas and

37 *Hom. in Matt.* 74.2, PG 56.681. The NPNF translator incorrectly asserts that the indeclinable Ἰωδάε could be read as a genitive, so that the translation would be ‘whom scripture also calls the son of Iodae’ (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 10.446 n. 8). While this improves the accuracy of Chrysostom’s statement, it fails to consider that Chrysostom himself would have been concerned to make the genitive explicit by the insertion of a definite article in the genitive before Ἰωδάε. Rather, Ἰωδάε clearly represents the alternative name for Zechariah (and not his father’s name), because it complements the earlier adjective ‘double-named’.

38 Several Byzantine authors also knew the prophet of 2 Chronicles 24 by the name Zachariah, but they do not connect him with Matt 23.35; see *Chronicon Paschale* (7th c.; ed. L. Dindorf; 2 vols.; CSHB; Bonn: Weber, 1832) 1.302; George Syncellus (8th–9th c.), *Ecloga chronographica* (ed. A. A. Mosshammer; Leipzig: Teubner, 1984) 220–1; George Monachus (9th c.), *Chronicon* 4.11 (ed. C. de Boor; 2 vols.; Leipzig: Teubner, 1904) 1.216; George Cedrenus (9th c.), *Compendium historiarum* (ed. I. Bekker; CSHB; Bonn: Weber, 1838) 189; John Zonaras (12th c.), *Epitome historiarum* 2.19 (ed. L. Dindorf; 6 vols.; Leipzig: Teubner, 1868–75) 1.157; Michael Glycas (12th c.), *Annales* (ed. I. Bekker; CSHB; Bonn: Weber, 1836) 357–8. However, this character is still known as Azarias in John Damascene, *Sacra Parallela*, PG 95.1229d.

39 Jerome’s contemporary Augustine cites Matt 23.35 several times (*Leg.* 2; *Faust.* 22.76; *C. litt. Petil.* 2.14.31; *De excidio urbis* 2; *Enarrat. Ps.* 61.4; 108.18; *Epist.* 140.44.10; *Quaest. Hept.* 7.49.3; *Spec.* 25), but unfortunately he never deems it necessary to identify the particular Zechariah intended.

several others, tend to agree with it, sometimes quoting him verbatim, with or without attribution.<sup>40</sup>

### 3. Why Did Jesus Mention Zechariah?

The Fathers did not discuss why Jesus named these two particular victims in his condemnation of his generation. Given his identification of Zechariah, Origen probably favoured a chronological explanation: the blood from Abel to Zechariah (= the father of John the Baptist, according to Origen) would encompass all bloodshed from the foundation of the world to the very (early) lifetime of Jesus. It is perhaps less apparent what may have been Jerome's explanation in this regard, though it seems reasonable to guess that Jerome recognised that these two deaths served as particularly heinous examples of the category 'murder of the prophets'.<sup>41</sup> The Old Testament contains very few accounts of the murder of prophets, and we have already noticed that Origen perceived this to be a problem in light of the New Testament's repeated assertions that the Israelites/Jews routinely killed God's messengers.<sup>42</sup> Jerome, then, probably also understood that the Old Testament presented few examples of murdered prophets, and so Jesus chose to mention these two not only because their deaths were especially scandalous but because there were not many other examples from which to choose.

What is clear is that Jerome did not relate 'the blood from Abel to Zechariah' to the first and last books of the Hebrew Bible. He does not link these names to the contours of the Hebrew Bible because he does not know that the Bible ends with Chronicles. Indeed, no Christian list of canonical books locates Chronicles at the end of the Old Testament, nor does any pre-twelfth-century testimony,

40 Cf. Bede (8th c.), *Homiliae evangelii* 1.3; Christian of Stavelot (9th c.), *Expositio super Librum generationis*; Heiric of Auxerre (9th c.), *Homiliae per circulum anni 12 (sine dubio)*; Rabanus Maurus (9th c.), *Expositio in Matthaum* 7; Rupert of Deutz (12th c.), *Commentarium in Apocalypsim* 4.6; Paschasius Radbertus (9th c.), *Expositio in Matheo* 10; Thomas Aquinas (13th c.), *Super Evangelium Matthaei reportatio* 23.3.1894 (citing Jerome explicitly), *Catena aurea in Lucam* 11.12 (citing Gregory of Nyssa); Anthony of Padua (13th c.), *Sermones festivi, sermo in festo S. Stephani protomartyris* 1.4. Those who take a different view include the *Liber de ortu et obitu patriarcharum* 32.4 (8th c.; Zechariah the Minor Prophet); and Lawrence of Brindisi (16th–17th c.), *Nativitas et Epiphania, in die S. Stephani protomartyris, Hom.* 1.6, who names Jerome as having erred on this question, and takes instead Origen's view that Jesus referred to the father of John the Baptist, whose grandfather was named Barachiah and Jehoiada, as attested by Epiphanius (he says), thus harmonising Origen's interpretation with Jerome's information that the Gospel of the Nazarenes reads 'son of Jehoiada' at Matt 23.35.

41 This is similar to the position taken recently by Peels, 'Blood', 594–9, and also the position taken by Calvin, on whom see below.

42 E.g. Matt 23.29–36; 1 Thess 2.14–15. On the theme, see Satran, *Biblical Prophets*, 25–9.

Jewish or Christian, save only the Talmudic list preserved in *b. B. Bathra* 14b.<sup>43</sup> Jerome, alone among the Fathers of the first four or five centuries of the church, reflects an awareness that the contemporary Jewish Bible has three divisions: Law, Prophets and Writings. But even he does not place Chronicles at the end when reporting how the Jews organise their biblical canon, though he apparently concerns himself with getting the correct order. In his *Preface to Samuel and Kings*, he reports on the Jewish ‘order’ (*ordo*) of the Hagiographa, for which he lists the last three books as Chronicles, Ezra[-Nehemiah] and Esther, in that order.<sup>44</sup> Despite his intensive studies in Hebrew and Jewish traditions, and his obvious desire to report accurately on the number and order of the Jewish biblical canon,<sup>45</sup> Jerome fails to locate Chronicles at the end. This might suggest that the position of Chronicles as the conclusion of the Hebrew Bible was not so firmly established in ancient and Late Antique Judaism as scholars sometimes assume. Moreover, the medieval Masoretic manuscripts also contain no single order. While Chronicles concludes the *Ketuvim* in a great many manuscripts, it heads the *Ketuvim* in many others, including the earliest and most important, the Aleppo and Leningrad Codices.<sup>46</sup> It is for this reason that *Biblia Hebraica quinta*, now being published in fascicles, will begin the *Ketuvim* with Chronicles in conformity with its base text, the Leningrad Codex. Jerome did not interpret ‘the blood of Zechariah’ as a reference to the last book of the Hebrew Bible because it was not the last book of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament as he knew it.

We find the same to be generally true much later for writers from the Reformation period onward. In 1555, John Calvin interpreted the Gospel statement as a reference to Zechariah son of Jehoiada, but he mentions nothing

43 For all these lists, see most conveniently H. B. Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (rev. R. R. Otley; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914) 198–214. For analysis, see E. L. Gallagher, *Hebrew Scripture in Patristic Biblical Theory: Canon, Language, Text* (Vigiliae Christianae Supplements 114; Leiden: Brill, 2012) 21–30. Some of the Christian lists likely genuinely reflect Jewish sources; see G. Dorival, ‘L’apport des Pères de l’Église à la question de la clôture du canon de l’Ancien Testament’, in *The Biblical Canons* (ed. J.-M. Auwers and H. J. de Jonge; BETL 163; Leuven: Leuven University, 2003) 81–110.

44 Jerome’s term *ordo* seems to be related to the Hebrew term *sefer* found in, e.g., *b. B. Bathra* 14b; see Dorival, ‘Apport de Pères’, 92–3. For a recent study of Jerome’s canon list, see E. L. Gallagher, ‘Jerome’s *Prologus Galeatus* and the OT Canon of North Africa’, in *Studia Patristica* 69 (ed. M. Vinzent; Leuven: Peeters, 2013) 99–106.

45 Or, as Beckwith puts it, ‘Jerome was a Hebrew scholar, and had Jewish teachers; consequently, when he speaks of the opinions of the Jews, he is speaking from knowledge’ (*Old Testament Canon*, 119). For a recent examination of Jerome’s interactions with Jews, see M. Hale Williams, ‘Lessons from Jerome’s Jewish Teachers: Exegesis and Cultural Interaction in Late Antique Palestine’, in *Jewish Biblical Interpretation and Cultural Exchange: Comparative Exegesis in Context* (ed. N. B. Dohrmann and D. Stern; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008) 66–86.

46 See Beckwith, *Old Testament Canon*, 452–64.

about the canon. Rather, the reason Christ spoke of this Zechariah was because his murder was ‘the commencement and source of base licentiousness, and afterwards led them [i.e. the Jews] to break out into unbounded cruelty’.<sup>47</sup> John Lightfoot, in his *Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*, first published in 1658, also regarded Zechariah as the prophet from 2 Chron 24.<sup>48</sup> He agreed with Jerome that the priest Jehoiada had two names, and thought that Zechariah son of Jeberechiah (Isa 8.2) was the same as the son of Jehoiada (2 Chron 24).<sup>49</sup> According to Lightfoot, Christ chose to speak of Zechariah in Matt 23 because his death ‘was more horrible, as he was more high in dignity; and as the place wherein he was killed was more holy’.<sup>50</sup> This same period saw the emergence of the view identifying Jesus’ Zechariah with the Zechariah son of Bareis killed, according to Josephus (*BJ* 4.334–44), in the Temple during the First Jewish Revolt.<sup>51</sup> Here again, as for Origen earlier, the reason for the explicit mention of Zechariah would be chronological.

- 47 J. Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (3 vols.; Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845–6) 3.90–1, translation of *Harmonia ex tribus evangelistis composita, Matthaeo, Marco & Luca adjuncto seorsum Johanne, quod pauca cum aliis communia habeat cum Joh. Calvini commentariis* (Geneva: Stephanus, 1555).
- 48 J. Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica* (4 vols.; repr. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1989) 2.302–8. This is a reprint of *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae: Hebrew and Talmudical Exercitations* (ed. R. Gandell; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859). The following note appears in the online catalogues of some libraries (e.g. Harvard, Duke) regarding the Oxford edition of 1859: ‘Originally written in Latin and published at intervals between 1658 and 1674. It is not known by whom the translation was made.’ The original Latin publication went under the title of *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae: Imprensae* i. *In chorographiam aliquam terrae israeliticae*. ii. *In Evangelium s. Matthaei* (Cambridge, 1658).
- 49 Another version of this interpretation considers Jehoiada the priest to be the grandfather of Zechariah, Barachiah the father; see J. Morison, *Commentary on the Gospel according to Matthew* (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1870) 488; L. Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (PNTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992) 589 n. 45. Chapman, ‘Zacharias’, 407–8, thinks the patronym in Matthew is due to scribal error.
- 50 Lightfoot, *Commentary*, 2.307. Lightfoot (2.308) gives four further reasons for Christ’s choosing this Zechariah, mostly having to do with the especially heinous nature of his murder. In this way, he was ‘a more proper and apparent type of Christ’.
- 51 See Luz, *Matthew*, 155. This view was accepted by e.g. J. Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Matthaei: Übersetzt und erklärt* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1904) 119–21, on whom see Kalimi, *Retelling of Chronicles*, 46; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 318 n. 47. In fact, the tradition cited by Origen (*Comm. ser. Matt.* 25) relating the name of John the Baptist’s father as Barachiah is attributed, in a Greek fragment, to Josephus, and it may be that Origen was thinking of this passage about Zechariah son of Bareis (see de Lange, *Lettre*, 546–7 n. 1). Chapman, ‘Zacharias’, dedicates a good portion of his article to refuting the ‘son of Bareis’ interpretation, which he says (p. 399 n. 1) is assumed ‘as certain’ by many German writers.



#### 4. The Origins of the 'Canonical' Interpretation

It was, apparently, not until the rise of modern biblical criticism that someone thought of relating the mention of Zechariah to the concluding position of Chronicles within the Bible. In 1780, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn published the first volume of his *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, wherein we find this statement:

... und wenn er [d.h. Christus] das erste und letzte [*sic*] Beispiel vom unschuldigen Blutvergiesen [*sic*] aus der Geschichte des V. T. anführen will, so wählt er das Beispiel Abels aus der Genesis, als dem ersten Buch des V. T., und aus den Büchern der Chronik, als dem letzten [*sic*] unter allen, das Beispiel Zacharias (Matth. xxiii. 35).<sup>52</sup>

Eichhorn cites no previous authority for this interpretation; he apparently devised it himself.

How did Eichhorn explain the patronym given in Matthew's Gospel? The comments quoted above comprise all that he says in his Old Testament introduction, but he enters more fully into the matter later in his New Testament introduction, in his discussion of the original Hebrew form of the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>53</sup> Eichhorn accepts Jerome's testimony that the Gospel of the Nazarenes contained the patronym Jehoiada, and he assumes that this was the original reading of the Hebrew version of Matthew. Earlier, Johann David Michaelis had held a similar position. Michaelis, however, did not connect this Zechariah to the last book of the Hebrew Bible; rather, the reason Jesus referred to Zechariah son of Jehoiada was that 'the murder of this person was not only particularly known, but was supposed to call aloud for vengeance'.<sup>54</sup> But how did the patronym Barachiah come to be found in our text of Matthew? Michaelis does not address this question (at least, in this context), but Eichhorn suggests that the translator of Matthew into Greek, or perhaps an editor of the Hebrew version, changed the patronym from Jehoiada to Barachiah in order to update Jesus' statement by having it now point to the Zechariah killed during the First Jewish Revolt, as reported by Josephus. Thus, instead of the statement encompassing all

52 J. G. Eichhorn, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Bey Weidmanns erben und Reich, 1780) 18.

53 J. G. Eichhorn, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Bey Weidmanns erben und Reich, 1804) 510-13.

54 J. D. Michaelis, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3 in 2 parts (trans. Herbert Marsh from the 4th German edn; 2nd English edn; London: Rivington, 1802) 1.172-4; quotation from p. 174. Alternatively, Michaelis suggests (p. 173 n.) that perhaps the account in 2 Chron 24.20-2 has the incorrect patronym, and that the story actually refers to Zechariah the Minor Prophet and has been inserted into Chronicles in the wrong location. Thus, Jesus may have been correcting the story as found in Chronicles with its inaccurate patronym! Michaelis' translator also supplies an interesting note (2.131-2 n. 14), in which he affirms that Jesus intended Zechariah the Minor Prophet, and that for chronological reasons.

righteous blood shed within the limits of the Hebrew Bible, it now encompasses all righteous blood shed up to the time of the final redaction of the Gospel. The original statement, as uttered by Jesus, however, relied on the familiar sequence of books in the Bible, with Chronicles at the end.

It did not take long for Eichhorn's new 'canonical' interpretation of Matt 23.35 to catch on. In his 1836 commentary on Matthew, Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette advocates this interpretation of the passage.<sup>55</sup> In the English translation of de Wette's introduction to the Old Testament, within his discussion of the canon, the translator appended a note citing Eichhorn and paraphrasing his opinion on the order of the books, including the interpretation of Matt 23.35.<sup>56</sup> By 1845, Moses Stuart in America could say, 'It has become general to speak of Chronicles, as the *last* book in the Hebrew Canon ...', and he makes reference not only to Eichhorn and de Wette, but also to 'many others' as appealing 'to Matt. 23:35 as certain evidence, that the book of Chronicles was the *last* in the Old Testament in our Saviour's day'.<sup>57</sup> Though it was not without its challengers, including Stuart himself, within a century of its being suggested by Eichhorn, this interpretation had gained so many adherents that it was now spoken of as the traditional view and the consensus of interpreters.<sup>58</sup>

We might ask why this interpretation found expression and met with such popularity at this particular time, at the end of the eighteenth century, whereas no one seems to have thought of it earlier. Surely the stability of the sequence of books in printed Hebrew Bibles made a contribution. As noted earlier, of the many patristic lists of Old Testament books, none transmits a sequence with Chronicles at the end. In fact, no certain evidence before the twelfth century locates Chronicles at the end of the canon except for the list preserved in *b. B. Bathra* 14b. Even the Masoretic manuscripts, which often conclude with

55 W. M. L. de Wette, *Kurze Erklärung des Evangeliums Matthäi* (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1836) 194; he does not cite Eichhorn here.

56 W. M. L. de Wette, *A Critical and Historical Introduction to the Canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament* (2 vols.; trans. Theodore Parker; Boston: Little and Brown, 1843) 1.17. Parker, the translator who provides the note, was a transcendentalist preacher in Boston.

57 Stuart, *Critical History*, 279.

58 For early English-speaking commentators who adopt this interpretation, see Morison, *Commentary on the Gospel according to Matthew*, 488; J. A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886) 476-7; J. Wolfendale, *A Homiletical Commentary on the Books of Chronicles* (London: Richard D. Dickinson, 1890) 261. The two great works on the OT canon at the end of the nineteenth century took opposite positions: the interpretation was accepted by H. E. Ryle, *The Canon of the Old Testament: An Essay on the Gradual Growth and Formation of the Hebrew Canon of Scripture* (London: MacMillan, 1892) 141; it was rejected by F. Buhl, *Canon and Text of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1892) 17. See also the doubts expressed by W. H. Green, *General Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon* (New York: Scribner's, 1898) 201-2.

Chronicles, do not maintain this sequence universally. However, when the first Hebrew Bibles came off the press in the fifteenth century, they featured Chronicles at the end, and this has been true for every major printed Hebrew Bible up to the present day, although, as already mentioned, *BHQ* will overturn this tradition. By the time Eichhorn published his *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, the printing press had for three centuries established Chronicles as the definite conclusion to the Hebrew Bible.<sup>59</sup>

### 5. Conclusion

To which Zechariah did Jesus refer in his remarks about the righteous blood ‘from Abel to Zechariah’? Why did he single out these particular individuals, Abel and Zechariah? Exegetes through the centuries have struggled with these two questions as they encountered Matt 23.35. The Greek Fathers often identified Zechariah with the father of John the Baptist and apparently understood the reference chronologically – all the righteous blood from the beginning of the world up to Jesus’ own time. The Latin Fathers, on the other hand, often identified Zechariah with the murdered prophet of 2 Chron 24.20–2 and seem to have thought that the heinous nature of the deaths of both Abel and Zechariah prompted Jesus to mention them. The most popular interpretation today, relating Zechariah to the story in 2 Chron 24 as the final murder mentioned in the Bible viewed canonically, arose in a situation when the printed Hebrew Bible had firmly established Chronicles as the final book of the Bible. We have seen that exegetes throughout the centuries have usually not even considered such an explanation as they were completely unfamiliar with an order of books for the Old Testament concluding with Chronicles. The ‘canonical’ interpretation of Matt 23.35 proves convincing only in an era which allows little deviation in the sequence of scriptural books. Though we have lived in such an era for a number of centuries now, neither Jesus nor anyone else could assert the same until the late fifteenth century. It is doubtful whether the ‘canonical’ interpretation can do justice to the blood of Zechariah.

59 Cf. C. D. Ginsburg, *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible* (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 1897; repr. New York: Ktav, 1966) 779–976. Ginsburg gives a detailed survey of Hebrew Bible editions up to the Second Rabbinic Bible (1524–5) and a little after. He describes the *editio princeps* of the Hagiographa (Naples, 1486–87) on pp. 807–14. For a recent analysis of the rise of biblical criticism and Eichhorn’s role in its formation, see Pierre Gibert, *L’invention critique de la Bible: xv<sup>e</sup>–xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010). On Eichhorn, see pp. 322–50.