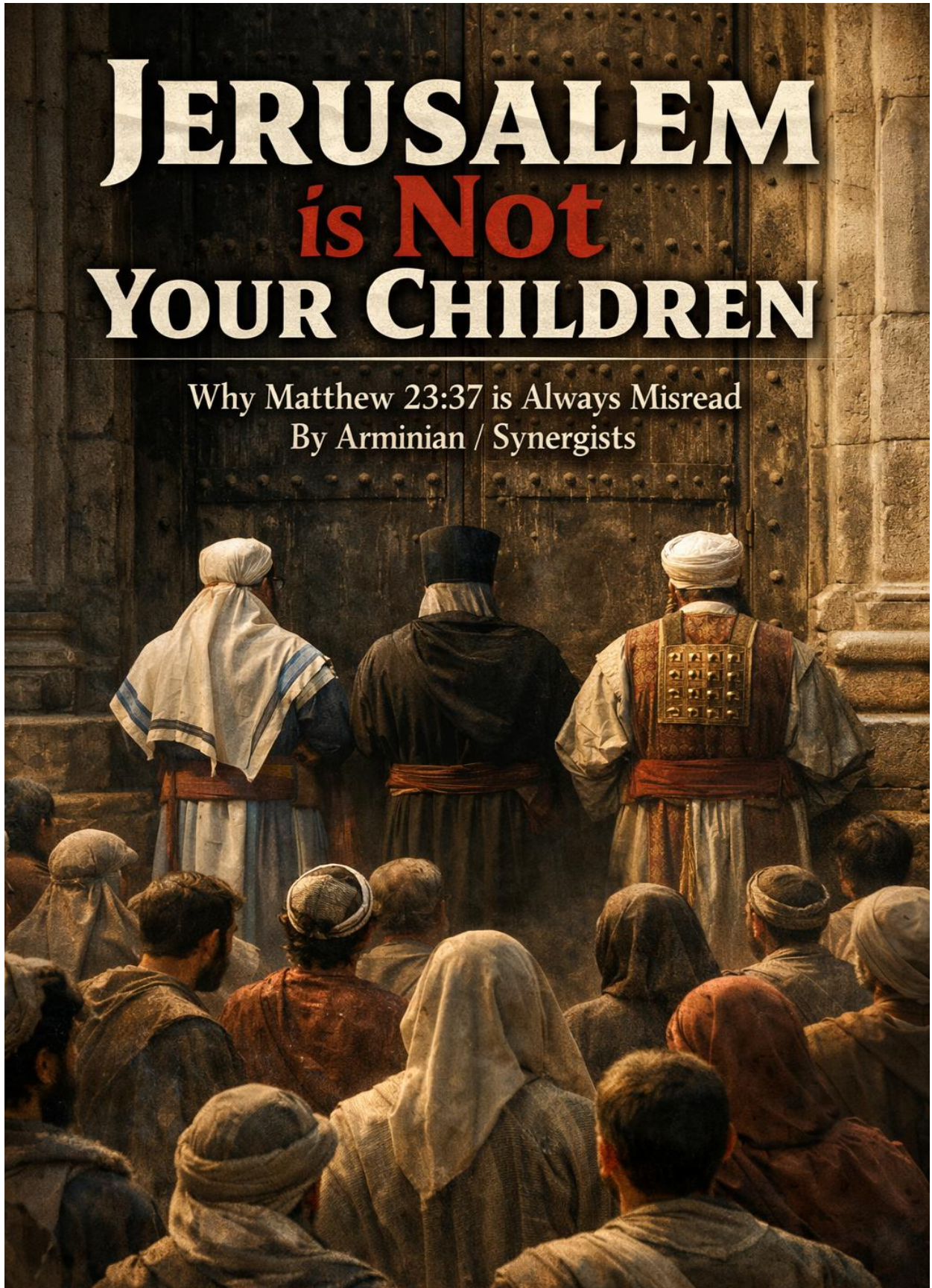


JERUSALEM *is Not* YOUR CHILDREN

Why Matthew 23:37 is Always Misread
By Arminian / Synergists



“Jerusalem” is Not “Your Children”

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The text

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing.”

Few verses are as frequently referenced and pulled out as a “proof text” into synergistic theology as **Matthew 23:37**. And few are *so consistently misread*.

The standard claim is familiar: Jesus desired to gather *all* the people of Jerusalem, but they resisted His grace – “You were not willing.” Therefore, grace can be sincerely offered, genuinely desired by God, and finally thwarted by human will. Classic synergistic logic.

That reading fails — not philosophically, but **textually**. It collapses because it either genuinely misses or flat out ignores an obvious distinction in the text itself – by intention – from the Lord. Once that distinction is honored, the synergistic appeal to this as a “proof text” evaporates as easily as the morning mist in the warmth of the sun. Here’s why.

I. The Grammar That Breaks the Argument

Jesus does **not** say:

“How often I would have gathered *you*, but *you* were not willing.”

He says something far more precise — and far more devastating to synergism:

“How often I would have gathered **your children**... and **you** were not willing.”

- ✚ If Jesus was speaking to parents and referenced “you” and “your children” – no one would assume He was referring to the parents by the term “your children.” It is *obvious* “your children” are not “you” – the parent. Yet this is precisely the obvious categorical error all synergists make when they appeal to this text which they assume “proves” God’s saving-desire can be thwarted by free will.

- **“Jerusalem”** — in context of the chapter as a whole, clearly **refers to its leadership**: scribes, Pharisees, elders, rulers. This is not conjecture; *the entire chapter is a sustained indictment of Israel’s religious authorities* (Matt 23:1–36).
- **“Your children”** are those under their charge — the people, the flock, the ones affected by the leaders’ actions.

Jesus is not lamenting the failure of His grace to overcome the will of the people. He is indicting the leaders for *their* efforts to frustrate, hinder Him from gathering the people.

- This is not subtle. It is *explicit* in the chapter as a whole. And verse 37 cannot be ripped from its entire surrounding context as if not related to or relevant to it,

II. The Unwillingness Is Clearly Assigned

Notice carefully **where** Jesus places the unwillingness:

“...and **you** were not willing.”

Not *they*.

Not *the children*.

You — Jerusalem — the leaders.

This perfectly aligns with Jesus’ accusation against the Pharisees earlier in the same chapter:

“You shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For **you** neither enter yourselves **nor allow** those who would enter to go in.” (Matt 23:13)

- ***That is the controlling context. They are the one who are not willing that Jesus should “gather” the people. Synergism – as it so often does – must ignore context and grammar in its haste to employ vs. 37 as a “proof texts.”***

The leaders resist.

The leaders obstruct.

The leaders refuse to come — and per Jesus’ rebuke here - *refuse to let others come*.

This is not a picture of grace helplessly knocking on autonomous hearts.
It is an indictment of their *authority abused*, truth *suppressed*, and access *obstructed*.

A hen does not ask her chicks whether they would like protection.
She **gathers** them.

What prevents the gathering here is not the chicks' refusal — it is the **leaders' resistance to the One who “gathers.”**

The gospels record that *multitudes* flocked to Jesus, that the “And the large crowd enjoyed listening to Him.” (Mark 12:37). In the next verse, Jesus warns the people — “the children” about the danger and evil posed *by the Pharisees* (Mark 12:38-40), thus showing again a clear contextual distinction between the common people and the religious leaders.

➤ **That distinction matters. And Jesus does not blur it.**

Matthew 23 is not a meditation on frustrated grace.
It is a **verdict** of holy indictment against the spiritual leaders who openly sought to frustrate His mission and acceptance by the people.

It was the Pharisees

- who conspired against Jesus.
- who tried Him
- who brought Him to Pilate
- who demanded His death
- who manipulated the crowd with their own plans yelling “crucify Him!”
- whom Jesus openly, scathingly denounced, rebuked and consigned to hell itself in Matthew 23:13-33.
- who were “not willing” that He should gather “your children.”

✚ **The context is clear and unmistakable – “Jerusalem” is distinct from “your children” and therefore every attempt by every Arminian / Synergist who uses this as a “proof text” fails for this reason.**