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A Mournful Apostrophe

by Bill Lockwood

In Jesus' famous lament over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-39) at the conclusion of His earthly sojourn He remarks to the Jews, "Ye shall not see me henceforth, until ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (v. 39). Some refer to this as Christ's "Mournful Apostrophe."

Our Blessed Lord here signaled that God had finished with national Israel as His people. No longer was the Temple the *House of God*, but *your House* (Matthew 23:38; spoken to the Jews). This "house" was now left "empty" or desolate. The word "desolate" means "deserted." Just as Ezekiel had seen in a vision (Ezekiel 1-10) of the "deserted temple" of his day, Jesus shows that God had exited the physical structure.

But what of the statement, 'Ye shall not see me henceforth, until ye shall say ...?' Bible students have offered various thoughts pertaining to this text.

First, some suppose that Christ here refers to the conversion of the Jews. One commentator, for example, remarks: "the repentant people [Jews, bl] shall turn with true and loyal Hosannas ... to 'greet Him whom they pierced'" (Henry Alford, *The New Testament for English Reader's*, 161). However, the NT does not teach the national or general conversion of the Jewish nation. Besides, Paul is emphatic that God's promises encompass only *spiritual Israel* (Romans 9:6-29) – they only include *believers*.

Second, it is posited that Jesus refers ONLY to the remnant (believers among the Jews) who will say at the second coming, "Blessed is He that comes ..." This view is similar to that above. R.C.H. Lenski offers the fact that any positive expectation can only refer to the remnant (small number of believers from among the Jews). God would spare "the remnant" and it is *this remnant* that will so rejoice when the Lord returns.

Third, others suggest that the Jews will be forced to say, "Blessed is He that comes ..." at His Second Coming. Our Lord speaks to the Jews who will be *unwilling to confess* but nevertheless constrained to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. It is true that all will confess Him (Philippians 2:5-10) but it seems that there is another thought suggested here.

Fourth, still others believe that Jesus refers to the Destruction of Jerusalem. The sense would be this: 'You leaders who have now with so much indignation heard the children and the people saluting me thusly, 'Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord' (21:9)—after a while shall lie under so great calamities for the punishment of your infidelity, that ye *would be glad* of a deliverer whom you might hail with these same words!' (Doyle & Mant). Matthew Poole, an older commentator, also renders the passage this manner (Vol. III, p. 112). "Ye shall be glad to see one of these days!" In other words, the days are coming (Destruction of the Temple, see chapter 24) that 'You would be glad to see one of these days.'

After eliminating the first option, the last seems to fit more closely the context of the verse. Jesus not only depicts the overthrow of Judaism in the verses immediately following, but offers in His final lament over the wicked city what might be called, A Mournful Apostrophe.