“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matthew 23:39)

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Matthew 23:39:
“For I tell you that you will not see Me again until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Matthew 23 records seven “woes” that Jesus pronounced on the scribes and Pharisees while he taught in the temple courts on the Tuesday of Passion Week. He arraigned these religious leaders for both their hypocrisy and their history of persecution. Verse 39 concludes his lengthy indictment.
But what precisely does Jesus mean here?
When would they see and meet him again, and why would they then cry out “Blessed is He …”?

Significantly, the crowds just a couple of days beforehand had welcomed the Lord with these very words as he entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey.
They had exclaimed:

> *“Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”*
> *“Hosanna in the highest!”* (Matthew 21:9)

Mark and John record that identical cry in their own Palm Sunday accounts (Mk 11:9; Jn 12:13).[1]
The words derive from Psalm 118:26 — a psalm that was likely sung at one of the great Jewish festivals.
“Blessed is he …” would seemingly be a shout of messianic salutation and welcome on the part of the Jews.
One that necessarily involves the recognition of him as the promised Messiah.
That the words did imply messianic recognition seems probable from their further exclamations:
“Hosanna to the Son of David!” (Mt 21:9);
“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” (Mk 11:10);
“Blessed is the King of Israel!” (Jn 12:13).

Most commentators assume that Matthew 23:39 envisages the national conversion of the Jews — the time when they finally come to recognize Jesus as their true Messiah.
The Jews will (supposedly) turn to Jesus at, or just prior to, his Second Coming.
This national turning is also inferred from Zechariah 12:10 and Romans 11:26-27.

[1] Luke has arranged his material more thematically: “Blessed is He …” is found only in the context of Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem (Lk 13:35) — not in the account of the seven woes (in Luke 11:37ff.) or that of the Triumphal Entry (in Luke 19:28ff.).

A cry of repentance, or of despair?

The greeting "Blessed is He …" clearly involves messianic recognition, but does it necessarily imply a happy or friendly encounter?

Consider the context:

The focus throughout Matthew 23 – 25 is on judgment.[2]

The "for" (Greek: *gar*) introducing 23:39 suggests a continuation or development of what has just been said.

In other words, the Lord is not changing tact here, suddenly offering the Jews hope instead of judgment.

Nor is he speaking about some distant generation who might repent.

No, the very people to whom he now spoke would see and encounter him again:

"… YOU will not see Me again until YOU say, 'Blessed is He …'"

Jesus and the people of Jerusalem would meet again:

Judgment was coming on that generation (23:36).

Jerusalem and its temple would fall (23:37-38; 24:2).

Jesus here is clearly pointing to the Jewish War and the events of AD 70.

How would the Jews "see" and recognize Jesus?

Answer:

They would see him not with the eyes of the flesh, but in the sense of *perceiving*.

This is wholly consistent with what is meant by "seeing" in Matthew 16:27-28; 24:30; 26:64; and Revelation 1:7.

Jesus would come on the clouds, and people would see and recognize him as they experienced his wrath.

Not a happy meeting at all.

In conclusion, the Jews failed to recognize their time of divine visitation — Christ's coming to them as Savior.

Their next "visitation" (meeting) would involve divine vengeance (Lk 19:41-44; 21:22).[3]

In support of this interpretation, see the following online articles:

1. Daniel Rogers: *A Closer Look at Matthew 23:39*.
   Via: https://danielr.net/a-closer-look-at-matthew-2339/.
2. Don K. Preston: Matthew 23:39: *The Song of Ascent*.
   Via: https://fullpreterism.com/matthew-2339-the-song-of-ascent/.

In the Appendix to this article, we present further support from John Calvin and James Stuart Russell.

[2] This is true of some of the preceding parables as well — see Matthew 21:33-46; 22:1-14.

[3] The Expanded Bible's (EXB) rendition of Luke 19:44 is helpful here:
"They will ·destroy you [level you; smash you to the ground] and all your ·people [[L] children within your walls], and not one stone will be left on another. All this will happen because you did not recognize the time ·when God came to save you [[L] of your visitation; [C] the failure to recognize God's "visit" in Jesus (see 1:68, 78) will result in a divine "visit" in judgment]."

Appendix: Further support for the given interpretation

The following is from John Calvin's Commentary, notes for Matthew 23:39.

> **39**. *For I tell you*. He confirms what he had said about the approaching vengeance of God, by saying that the only method of avoiding destruction will be taken from them. For that was the accepted time, the day of salvation (Isaiah 49:8; 2 Corinthians 6:2), so long as that very person who had come to be their Redeemer, attested and proclaimed the redemption which he had brought. But at his departure, as at the setting of the sun, the light of life vanished; and therefore this dreadful calamity, which he threatens, must of necessity fall upon them.
>
> *Until you say*. We come now to inquire what period is denoted by this phrase. Some restrict it to the last day of judgment. Others think that it is a prediction, which was soon afterwards fulfilled, when some of the Jews humbly adored Christ. But I do not approve of either of these interpretations. And I am certainly astonished that learned men should have stumbled at so small an obstacle, by taking great pains to inquire how unbelievers can say concerning Christ, Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord; for he does not declare what they will be, but what he himself will do. . . .
>
> So then the true meaning of the present passage, in my opinion, is this: "Hitherto I have lived among you in humility and kindness, and have discharged the office of a teacher; and now having finished the course of my calling, I shall depart, and it will not be possible for you any longer to enjoy my presence, **but him whom you now despise as a Redeemer and a minister of salvation, you will find to be your Judge**." In this manner the passage agrees with the words of Zechariah, *They shall look on him whom they pierced* (Zechariah 12:10; John 19:37). But Christ appears also to make an indirect allusion to their vain hypocrisy, because, as if they ardently longed for the promised salvation, they sung daily the words of the psalm, *Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord* (Psalm 118:26), while they treated with scorn the Redeemer that was offered to them. In short, he declares that **he will not come to them until, trembling at the sight of his dreadful majesty, they shall exclaim — when it is too late — that truly he is the Son of God**. And this threatening is addressed to all despisers of the Gospel, more especially to those who falsely profess his name, while they reject his doctrine; for they will one day acknowledge that they cannot escape the hands of him whom they now mock by their hypocritical pretensions. . . .[4]

[Emphasis added. End of quote.]

[4] From Calvin's Commentaries, comments for Matthew 23. Via the Bible Hub website: https://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/matthew/23.htm.

The following is from *The Parousia*.
Author: James Stuart Russell (1816-1895). Originally published in 1878; second edition, 1887.[5]
From the Section: Prophetic Intimations of the Approaching Consummation of the Kingdom of God;
Subsection VI: The (second) Lamentation of Jesus over Jerusalem.

> But how are we to understand the closing words, 'Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord'? **This phrase**, 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord,' **is the recognised formula which was employed by the Jews in speaking of the coming of Messiah** — the Messianic greeting: equivalent to 'Hail to the anointed one of God.' It is generally supposed to have been adopted from Psalm 118:26. There was a time coming, therefore, when such a salutation would be appropriate. The Lord who was leaving the temple would once more return to His temple. More than this, that same generation would witness that return. This is plainly implied in the form of our Saviour's language, 'Ye shall not see me again till ye shall say,' etc. — words which would be deprived of half their significance if the persons referred to in the first part of the sentence were not the same as those referred to in the second. **Nothing can be more distinct and explicit than the reference throughout to the people of Jerusalem, the contemporaries of Christ. They and He were to meet again**; and the Messiah, the Lord whom they professed to seek so eagerly, would suddenly come to his temple,' according to the saying of Malachi the prophet. They expected that coming as an event to be welcomed with gladness; but it was to be far otherwise. 'Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?' That day was to bring the desolation of the house of God, the destruction of their national existence, the outburst of the pent-up wrath of God upon Israel. This was the return, the meeting together again, to which our Saviour here alludes. And is not this the very thing that He had again and again declared? Had He not a little before said, that 'upon *this generation*' should come the sevenfold woes which He had just pronounced? (Verse 36.) Had He not solemnly affirmed, that some then living should see the Son of man coming in glory, with His angels, 'to reward every man according to his works' — that is, coming to judgment? Is it possible to adopt the strange hypothesis of some commentators of note, that in these words our Lord means that He would never be seen again by those to whom He spoke, until a converted and Christian Israel, in some far distant era of time, was prepared to welcome Him as King of Israel? This would indeed be to take unwarrantable liberties with the words of Scripture. Our Lord does not say, Ye shall not see me until *they* shall say, or, until *another generation* shall say; but, 'until *ye* shall say,' etc. It by no means follows, that because the Messianic salutation is here quoted, the people who are supposed to use it were qualified to enter into its true significance. Those very words had been shouted by multitudes in the streets of Jerusalem only a day or two before, and yet they were changed into 'Crucify him! crucify him!' in a very brief space. They simply denote the fact of His coming. The unhappy men to whom our Saviour spoke could not adopt the Messianic greeting in its true and highest sense; *they* would never say, 'Blessed is he,' etc., but they would witness His coming — the coming with which that formula was indissolubly associated, viz., the Parousia.

[5] Russell's work is available online here: http://preteristcentral.com/pdf/pdf%20books/1878_russel_parousia.pdf.
And also here: https://www.truthaccordingtoscripture.com/documents/parousia/Parousia_Russell.pdf.

> We contend, then, that we are not only warranted, but compelled, to conclude, that our Lord here refers to His coming to destroy Jerusalem and to close the Jewish age, according to His express declarations, within the period of the then existing generation. History verifies the prophecy. In less than forty years from the time when these words were uttered, Jerusalem and her temple, Judea and her people, were overwhelmed by the deluge of wrath predicted by the Lord. Their land was laid waste; their house was left desolate; Jerusalem, and her children within her, were engulfed in one common ruin.

[Emphasis added. End of quote.]