

WHY FOUR GOSPELS? THE FOUR-FOLD PORTRAIT OF CHRIST

in
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

by

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE OFFICIAL REJECTION OF THE KING BY THE NATION OF ISRAEL

Matthew 21:1-23:39

The King's Public Entry into Jerusalem, and His Rejection by the Rulers of the Jews
21:1-17

The many Old Testament prophecies of the first coming of Christ into the world were written, in order that we might know Him as the Lord and Saviour and King who came to fulfill these inspired predictions. Accordingly, when He rode into Jerusalem; the city of the King, in exact fulfillment of the detailed prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, all Israel should have received Him as their Messiah. It was Christ's official presentation of Himself to His nation; and it resulted in Israel's official rejection of Him as her Messiah and King.

Even when the multitudes quoted Psalm 118:26 concerning Him, they were fulfilling another prophecy concerning this very occasion,

“Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest” (Matthew 21:9).

Again asserting His right to cleanse the temple of ungodly practices, the Lord quoted still another prophecy from Isaiah 56:7, saying,

“My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves”
(Matthew 21:13).

And yet again, when the chief priests and scribes objected to the praises the children were ascribing to the Lord, He quoted another Old Testament prophecy from Psalm 8:2 concerning His coming into the world,

“Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise” (Matthew 21:16).

The second chapter of Hebrews proves that the eighth Psalm is Messianic; and our Lord’s testimony here but adds to the awful responsibility of the Jews who rejected His interpretation of that inspired Psalm. They knew their Old Testament; they were without excuse; their knowledge was of the head, but not of the heart. How significantly this scene closes!

Israel had officially rejected her King; therefore, He **“left them,”** and went out of the city of Jerusalem to Bethany, and **“lodged there.”** Bethany was the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus; they loved and worshipped the Lord; He was welcome there — but not in the hearts of the rulers of the nation!

Having been rejected by them as their King, He was soon to die for the sins of the world — for all who would believe.

2. The Barren Fig Tree Cursed — Symbolic of Barrenness in Israel during the Absence of the King

21:18-22; cf. Matthew 24:32, 33

Sometimes, in both the Old and New Testaments, Israel is likened unto a vineyard, from which her Lord expects fruit. Here and in Matthew 24:32, 33 the fig tree is a symbol of the nation of Israel. The Lord looked for fruit, but found nothing other than leaves; therefore, He pronounced the curse upon it, and **“it withered away.”**

Later, in His Olivet discourse, He compared the tokens of the restoration of Israel to the budding of the fig tree. The typical lesson is plain: during this church age, while Israel’s King is away, the nation is in spiritual blindness. She rejected her King; now she is suffering from the curse of her own barrenness and unbelief. But one day the fig tree will begin to bud, as it were; and Israel’s coming restoration and glory will be at hand. May God hasten the day!

Then His suffering people will receive Him who died for her as her only righteous Messiah and King!

3. The King’s Authority Questioned

21:23-27

Returning to the temple, the Lord met the subtlety of the rulers of the Jews by propounding to them a questioning which they dared not answer. Thus He illustrated yet again His knowledge of the very hearts of men, manifesting His all-wise, divine Being. They dared not say that John the Baptist was not **“from heaven”** for fear of the people; yet they dared not say he was **“from heaven,”** lest their own confession condemn them for not having received him and his message.

They evaded the issue; and once more the Lord began to teach in parables — three parables which plainly foretold His rejection by the nation of Israel and His calling out **“a people for his name”** from among the Gentiles — whosoever would heed His invitation to be saved.

4. The King's Rejection and His Turning to the Gentiles Told in Three Parables
21:28-22:14

These three parables are those of the two sons, of the householder demanding fruit from his vineyard, and of the king who made a marriage for his son. They all tell the same story — that, having been rejected by Israel; the King would turn to the Gentiles, offering salvation to every individual who would receive Him. The following quotations give us the key to these parables:

To the unbelieving Jews who had questioned His authority, the Lord said,

“Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you . . .” (Matthew 21:31).

To those same unbelieving Jews He quoted another Messianic prophecy, applying it to Himself, and saying,

“Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matthew 21:42, 43; cf. Psalm 118:22, 23).

Christ Himself, the Rock of Ages, is the Stone rejected by Israel. He has become the **“chief corner-stone”** of the church. And one day He will come as the **“smiting stone”** upon the godless nations, even as Daniel foretold in the second chapter of his inspired prophecy.

The king, whose invited guests would not go to the wedding, sent out into the highways to bid all who would to attend the wedding feast; **“and the wedding was furnished with guests.”** The man who went without **“a wedding garment”** is a picture of the sinner who would seek to enter the presence of God without the robe of righteousness provided by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, through faith in His shed blood. The Pharisees were like unto that man; they sought to establish their own righteousness, rejecting the only One who could make them fit for heaven and the presence of God.

5. The King's Answer to the Three Leading Groups of the Day
22:15-46

By His divine wisdom our Lord silenced all His critics; all who sought to ensnare Him in His teaching. To the Herodians, who questioned Him concerning paying tribute to Caesar; to the Sadducees, who did not even believe in the resurrection from the dead; and to the Pharisees, who questioned Him concerning the Law of Moses — to all He uttered such words of wisdom that **“no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions”** (22:46). Not only so; but He also questioned the Pharisees concerning Psalm 110:1, which proves beyond controversy that **“David's Son is David's Lord,”** even Jesus. That was the very truth which the hypocritical Pharisees vehemently denied — the Lordship of Christ.

All of this teaching doubtless made a marked impression upon the Jews, to whom Matthew addressed his Gospel in particular. If they truly sought the light concerning the Person of the Lord Jesus, they were convinced of His right to the Messianic claim, of His right to David's throne. But the nation of Israel was not seeking the truth; and because they rejected their King, He had to pronounce woe upon them, eternal condemnation and separation from God.

6. The King's Warning of "Woe" to Come upon the Hypocritical Pharisees
23:1-36

All of chapter twenty-three is the record of our Lord's condemnation of the rulers of the Jews — hypocrites; spiritually proud, self-righteous seekers after vainglory. With the voice of authority that was ever His by right, He uttered grave and terrible warnings of judgment to come upon those whom He called "**hypocrites . . . blind guides . . . fools and blind . . . serpents . . . generation of vipers.**"

Because Matthew was writing particularly for Jews, he did not need to explain the reference in 23:35 to "**all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias . . .**" And Matthew is the only one who mentions these Old Testament characters. The Jews were familiar with their own Old Testament.

7. The Rejected King's Lament over Jerusalem
23:37-39

If our Lord's denunciation of the hypocritical Pharisees was justly bitter — for He is the holy God, and cannot tolerate sin unconfessed and unforgiven; yet His lament over His beloved Jerusalem was filled with tenderness and yearning and sorrow.

It was the city of David's choice for his throne; it was the city outside of whose walls the King of the Jews was soon to be crucified; it is the city over which He will one day rule in power and great glory. It will be the metropolis of the world in that coming day. The Lord loved Jerusalem and His ancient people identified with that royal city. As He thought of all the prophets Jerusalem had stoned; as He thought of His own rejection by those He came to redeem, He mourned for His beloved city. And then He uttered a solemn and significant statement:

"Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (23:38, 39).

8. The House of Israel to Be "Desolate" during the Absence of the King
23:38, 39

How desolate has the house of Israel been for nearly two thousand years! How persecuted, betrayed, down-trodden, massacred, tortured! Little wonder the Lord who loved Israel yearned over His rebellious city! He could look down the centuries and see the tears, the agony, the sorrow of His "**people of the wandering feet**"! But they made their own choice; they would not have their King to rule over them.

And because He was eternal God, and knew all that the future held for them, He foretold the desolation of their house — until they should fulfill Psalm 118:26, saying,

“Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

The Jews, far better than Gentiles of their day, should have known the significance of this, another application of the Messianic prophecies to Himself! And again, Matthew was faithful to his God-given task, as he let the Holy Spirit guide him to pen these lines.

Psalm 118:26 will be literally fulfilled in that yet future day when Israel’s King shall stand once more upon the Mount of Olives; when His people, Israel, will worship Him and honor Him as their Messiah and Lord.

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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