

XVII. The Triumphal Entry

March 29, 2020 Zechariah 9:9-17

Theme: Jesus, our triumphant Messiah, is righteous in His person and comprehensive in His salvation.

Aim: To rejoice in the salvation—justification, sanctification, and glorification—that we have through our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Key Verses: ⁹Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey (Zechariah 9:9).

Review

Last week, we looked at Zechariah 9:1-8, which is the first passage in the third and final section of the book, chapters 9-14. Despite differences in structure, tone, content, purpose, and time of writing, there is no doubt that the prophet Zechariah is the author of the entire book that bears his name.

Our study of Zechariah 9:1-8 was a walk through ancient history, a unique look at Alexander the Great's military campaign in the Levant from God's point of view. This is not man-centered history, written after the fact to exalt a human king. This is God-inspired prophecy, foretold more than 150 years before the events occurred, to glorify God and His wonderful providence. Alexander the Great was a remarkable military genius, whose conquests literally changed the course of human history. But nonetheless, he was but a pawn in God's hands, accomplishing only what God permitted. When it served His purposes, the LORD allowed Alexander to win great victories and conquer great cities and nations, but Alexander was powerless to inflict the slightest harm upon the people whom God protected. In the destruction of Tyre and Gaza by the Greek army, in the sparing of a remnant of the Philistines for later incorporation into the people of God, and in the miraculous protection of Jerusalem from the wrath of Alexander, God's sovereignty was on display for all the world to see. Zechariah rightly draws our eyes not to Alexander, but to the LORD, as He accomplishes His purposes in redemptive history. Let the watching eye of man learn from this passage that *God defends His people from all harm and defeats all His enemies, either by righteous condemnation or gracious conversion.*

Introduction

Antiochus IV Epiphanes is one of the most reviled figures in the history of Israel. He was a king of the Seleucid dynasty, one of the four kingdoms carved out of Alexander the Great's empire in the aftermath of the conqueror's unexpected death in 323 BC. The Seleucids often came into conflict with the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt, founded by another one of Alexander's generals. Due to its location, the land of Judea was often involved in the conflicts between these two Greek kingdoms. Indeed, Daniel chapter 11 is a lengthy and detailed account of the ongoing wars between the kings of the north, who ruled the Seleucid kingdom of Syria and Mesopotamia, and the kings of the south, the Ptolemies of Egypt, and how they impacted the people of God.

The level of persecution and suffering experienced by the Jews reached its pinnacle during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-163 BC). His own chosen epithet, *Epiphanes*, signifying

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“God Manifest,” gives an indication of his hubris and the disdain he would have held for the monotheistic residents of Judea. His often eccentric behavior and capricious actions led some of his contemporaries to call him *Epimanes* (“The Mad One”). He sought to complete the Hellenization of the Jews by destroying their religion and removing their cultural distinctives. “He suspended the daily sacrifices, abolished the Sabbath, destroyed copies of the Scriptures, forbade circumcision, and erected pagan altars. To crown it all, in December, 167 BC, he introduced the cult of the Olympian Zeus into the temple by setting up a pagan altar and offering swine’s flesh on it” (Boice, pp. 195-196). This act of profaning the Jewish religion is described by the prophet Daniel as the “abomination that makes desolate”:

³¹Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate (Daniel 11:31).

Resistance against the tyranny of Antiochus was great, and many thousands were martyred for their faith. Deliverance came in the form of priest named Mattathias and his five sons (John Simon, Judas, Eleazar, and Jonathan), from a small town in the hill country of Judea, who began a guerrilla campaign against their Syrian oppressors. Although Mattathias died soon after the rebellion started, his son Judas picked up the mantle of leadership. In a series of stunning victories against superior forces, Judas earned the nickname of “Maccabeus” or “hammer.” Judas Maccabeus was eventually able to recapture Jerusalem and purify the temple, restoring the true religion of the Jews and inaugurating a century of relative political independence from foreign powers, until their annexation by the Roman general Pompey the Great in 63 BC. This religious war of independence against the persecution of Antiochus IV Epiphanes is recorded in the apocryphal books of 1 & II Maccabees.

The period of the Maccabees forms the backdrop for our passage today, particularly in 9:11-17. But before we get to those verses, we first have a well-known and beautiful Messianic prophecy about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in 9:9-10. After having described the earthly conquests of Alexander the Great (9:1-8), Zechariah goes on to describe the coming, character, conveyance, and conduct of our heavenly king, the Messiah. What a great contrast between the pagan king of Greece and the glorious ruler from heaven!

After encouraging his readers that their true king is coming, Zechariah then prepares them for the future trials they will experience under Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He describes their current situation, their equipping for battle and victory, and then the peace and prosperity that will result. Although Messiah comes chronologically after the period of the Maccabees, certain knowledge of His advent is meant to encourage the faithful during times of adversity. Indeed, from a Christian perspective, verses 11-17, which describe the Maccabean struggle, also paint a spiritual portrait of the work of Messiah. In the God-given deliverance from Antiochus IV Epiphanes, we have a beautiful picture of the complete salvation we have in Jesus Christ—justification, sanctification, and glorification. Taken together as a whole, then, Zechariah 9:9-17 teaches us that *Jesus, our triumphant Messiah, is righteous in His person and comprehensive in His salvation.*

A. The Messiah's Person (Zechariah 9:9-10)

1. The King's Coming (9:9a)

⁹Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you;

Verse 1-8 of chapter 9 describe the coming of Alexander the Great, a king and conqueror, into the Levant. His coming was not accompanied by expectation and excitement, but rather by fear and dread: "Ashkelon shall see it, and be afraid; Gaza too, and shall writhe in anguish; Ekron also, because its hopes are confounded" (Zech. 9:5). God encamped around His city, Jerusalem, to keep this "oppressor" from marching against them (9:8).

Now, Zechariah describes the advent of another king, a very different king, who is to receive a very different sort of welcome. The gates of Jerusalem are to be thrown open, and the inhabitants, called here the *daughter of Zion* and the *daughter of Jerusalem*, are to wait in anticipation. This king is to be greeted by the people of God with shouts of joy and acclamation. His reception is to be an occasion of rejoicing and celebration. Who is this king, and why should they rejoice at his coming?

Notice that, unlike Alexander, who was a foreigner, a Gentile, and an invader, this king belongs to the people of God: He is *your king* and He *is coming to you*. That in and of itself is cause for great rejoicing. The last king of Israel was removed from his office in 587 BC by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. When this prophecy was written by Zechariah, Israel had been without a king for almost 100 years. The return of the king was a promise of peace, prosperity, and reversal of misfortune. It was a restoration of blessing, of safety, and of security. It represented everything that the post-exilic Jews currently lacked.

Although the nation of Israel never had a Jewish king over them again after 587 BC, the Old Testament is full of prophecies of a coming king, a glorious king, a better king, an eternal king who will sit on and rule from David's throne. The Messiah, which means "the Anointed One," was the promised King to whom Israel was looking forward and to whom Zechariah is referring.

But the Old Testament also makes clear that this coming King, the one who is to be received with rejoicing, is none less than God Himself:

⁷Lift up your heads, O gates!
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

⁸Who is this King of glory?
The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, mighty in battle!

⁹Lift up your heads, O gates!
And lift them up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

¹⁰Who is this King of glory?
The LORD of hosts,
he is the King of glory! (Psalm 24:7-11).

Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold, I come and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD (Zechariah 2:10)

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¹⁴Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion;
shout, O Israel!

Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!

¹⁵The LORD has taken away the judgments against you;
he has cleared away your enemies.

The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;
you shall never again fear evil (Zephaniah 3:14-15).

Who is this King of glory? His name is Jesus Christ, the Son of Man and Son of God, King of kings, and Lord of lords. His first advent was still in the future for the prophet Zechariah and the post-exilic generation. But like Zechariah, we in the church of the 21st century also live in anticipation of the coming King, for Christ's second advent yet awaits.

2. The King's Character (9:9b)

...righteous and having salvation is he, humble...

Zechariah goes on to depict three aspects of the coming King's character. First, He is *righteous* or "just." In calling Messiah "righteous," our text is describing not only His inward character, but also His outward rule. This is brought out more fully by the prophet Jeremiah:

⁵Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness" (Jeremiah 23:5-6; cp. 33:15; Psalm 45:6-7; Isaiah 9:7; 11:3-5; 32:1; 42:1; 45:23).

He is righteous in all that He says and does, because it is the essence of who He is: "The LORD is our righteousness." How different is Messiah than earthly kings, whose reigns are full of inequity and injustice, whose rule is often centered on consolidating their own power and ensuring their own advancement rather than on the welfare of their people. "Kings were often arbitrary and unfair in their actions—not least Alexander whose vanity often caused him to act inequitably. But the rule of the Messiah will be fair and just, because He Himself desires to do God's will and has His law within His heart (Ps. 40:8)" (Mackay, p. 185). Phillips describes this attribute displayed during the first advent of the Messiah:

The One who establishes righteousness is the One who is pleasing in God's sight, the One who is Himself righteous in all His ways. Jesus accomplished righteousness as the personal qualification for serving as God's righteous king. This refers to what theologians call the *active obedience of Christ*. Jesus was born under the law, lived under the law all His life, and perfectly fulfilled the law—God's moral and spiritual requirements for man—to the smallest letter (Mt. 5:17) (Phillips, p. 209).

Secondly, our Messiah-King comes to us *having salvation*. The translation of the Hebrew here literally means that the King is "saved" or "protected." When considering the first advent of Christ, it certainly can be stated that in His resurrection, He was saved or delivered from death to life (cp. Rom. 10:9; Eph. 1:20). However, this *passive obedience* of Christ is almost certainly not the primary intended meaning of this attribute. As our King, He is the representative head of all His people. What He has and receives, He holds and administers on behalf of His people. Therefore, almost all commentators understand this phrase to mean not only that He has

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salvation, but also that He grants or endows salvation to His people. “His deliverance, or salvation, is a sure sign of the deliverance of His people, which is to be accomplished by His means” (Baron, p. 308). Moore elaborates:

The meaning then would be that God was with Him, in spite of all His lowliness, sustaining Him in the mighty work He had undertaken, and that this protection was bestowed upon Him not as an individual but as a king, a representative of His people, so that He would not only enjoy it Himself, but possess the power of bestowing it upon others. Hence, while His inflexible justice might make us tremble in our sin, the fact that He was also endowed with a free salvation, and a salvation which He could bestow as a kingly right, would remove these fears and enable us to rejoice in this coming king (Moore, p. 228).

In the third place, Jesus Christ our eternal King comes to us in a *humble* or “gentle” manner. “The Hebrew term covers a variety of ideas and may also be rendered ‘poor’ in an economic sense (as in 7:10), ‘oppressed’ (11:7), ‘afflicted’ by evildoers (11:11), ‘lowly,’ or ‘humble.’ It describes one who knows suffering and misery, and who lives in outwardly insignificant circumstances” (Mackay, p. 186). This perfectly reflects the first advent of our Messiah. Born to a poor family in a humble manger, He lived a life of outward poverty and obscurity, not even owning a home in which to live (Mt. 8:20; Lk. 9:58). Christ did not come “to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:28). Again, we have a great contrast between our Messiah and the kings of this world. Alexander wanted the whole world to serve Him. Those who refused, like the citizens of Tyre and Gaza, he destroyed or sold into slavery. On the other hand, our Messiah-King left the splendor of glory in heaven and came to us on earth in poverty, sacrificing Himself so that we might become rich (cp. 2 Cor. 8:9).

Why are we called to rejoice at the coming of such a humble king? We expect kings to be rich and powerful, to be high and mighty, not poor and lowly, not “stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted” (Is. 53:4). Moore explains:

If the usual sense of the word be given, the Church would be summoned to rejoice because of the humiliation of her king. And however incongruous such a ground of rejoicing may seem to be to men generally, the heart that is crushed with penitence or grief will comprehend the reason of this summons. Had this august king been as sorrowless as He was sinless, had He been a robed seraph or a crowned monarch, the poor and suffering could never have approached him with confidence, for He could not have sympathized with them in their sorrows. But when He comes to us as one who can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, we welcome Him with joy, and understand why we are called to rejoice, because He comes to us as the lowly king (Moore, p. 229).

3. The King’s Conveyance (9:9c)

...and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

The manner in which the Messiah comes to His people reinforces this image of humility, gentleness, and peace. He is *mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*. In Israel’s ancient past, the use of a donkey as a mount for leaders, such as judges and kings, was common (cp. Jdg. 5:10; 10:4; 12:14 ; 2 Sam. 16:2; 18:9; 1 Kgs. 1:38). However, the arrival of the horse changed all that. Horses, and especially chariots pulled by horses, were powerful weapons and symbols of kingship and military might (Jer. 17:25; cp. 2 Ki. 6:15-17; 18:23; Ez. 26:7-11).

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During Solomon's reign and beyond, the kings of Israel multiplied horses (1 Kgs. 4:26; 20:1; cp. Is. 2:7). However, the law of God expressly forbade the kings of Israel from acquiring many horses (Dt. 17:16), knowing that it would lead to a reliance upon earthly strength of arms rather than a dependence on their heavenly Protector (cp. Dt. 20:1-4).

The warhorse was thus seen as the proper and appropriate steed for a powerful and mighty king in the ancient world. Alexander the Great had a magnificent black stallion with a white star on his head named Bucephalus, which means "ox-head." Bucephalus was one of the most famous horses in all of antiquity. This horse, which Alexander would have ridden during his visit to Jerusalem in 332 BC, accompanied Alexander in many battles. When Bucephalus died in battle in 326 BC in Pakistan, Alexander buried him and founded a city there named Bucephalia in his horse's honor!

How different is the conveyance of the King of kings and Lord of lords! He does not come to His people on a proud warhorse, but gentle and lowly on a donkey's colt, a modest animal that had never before been ridden. His is not the horse of war, but a mere beast of burden, a pack animal used in times of peace for humble work. This picture is reminiscent of a much earlier prophecy about the Messiah:

¹⁰The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until tribute comes to him;
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

¹¹Binding his foal to the vine
and his donkey's colt to the choice vine (Genesis 49:10-11a).

The gospels record the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy:

¹Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." ⁴This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

⁵"Say to the daughter of Zion,
'Behold, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. ⁸Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" ¹⁰And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" ¹¹And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee" (Matthew 21:1-11; cp. Jn. 12:12-15).

This prophecy was literally fulfilled in what is known as "the Triumphal Entry" of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The crowds rejoiced at the coming of their King, seated on the foal of a donkey. And yet, five days later, on Good Friday, the Jewish people conspired with the

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Roman authorities to condemn and crucify our Lord and Savior to death. Fortunately, that was not the end of the story, as the resurrection on Easter Sunday vindicated Messiah and guaranteed salvation for all those who put their trust in Him.

Interestingly, multiple commentators point out that even though a literal fulfillment of this prophecy is recorded in the gospels, the Triumphal Entry would not have been necessary for the essence of the prophecy—the righteous, salvific, and humble nature of our Savior—to have been true. For example:

Though this scripture then received a literal accomplishment, that triumphal procession was not, in the main, the fact which the prophecy was designed to depict. The prophecy would have been as truly and really fulfilled if the triumphal procession had never taken place. That single incident in the life of our Lord is not the point which the prophet had in view. It was rather the whole of the Savior's life, the entire series of events connected with Christ's first advent, which was present in one striking picture. The actual entrance of Christ into Jerusalem in the manner described in the Old Testament prophecy was an express declaration that this passage was indeed Messianic in the fullest sense, and was fulfilled in His Person and work (Baron, p. 312).

The humility described in verse 9 is the essence of Messiah's first advent. He comes as a King, but not as most of the Jews of Christ's day anticipated. They were looking for a conquering general, a leader to throw off Roman shackles and establish an earthly kingdom through military might. Instead, He came as a righteous and humble Savior, offering peace and salvation to those who would come to Him in faith.

Although the Lord Jesus Christ in His first advent came to His people gentle and lowly, riding on a donkey, His second coming will be very different. Next time, He does not come in humiliation, but in exaltation. At the last trump, Christ will return, not as the suffering Savior, but as the conquering King. It is fitting that in His second advent, He will no longer be riding on a donkey but on a warhorse, since He comes in righteousness to judge the nations:

¹¹Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹²His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:11-16).

4. The King's Conduct (9:10)

¹⁰I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

In verse 9, the character of the coming King is described: He is a righteous, humble Savior who brings salvation. The prophecy of the coming Messiah continues in verse 10, where the conduct of the King's reign is portrayed.

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The first aspect of the Messiah's reign is *protection of His people*. In the first three lines of verse 10, God announces that He will *cut off* or "remove" chariots, warhorses, and mounted archers from His people. This is not the first time such a disarmament has been prophesied:

And in that day, declares the LORD,
I will cut off your horses from among you
and will destroy your chariots (Micah 5:10).

The prophets are not saying that the nation of Israel will be literally disarmed and hence defenseless against their physical enemies. Rather, this prophecy is pointing to a change in attitude, whereby God's people rely on Him as their "help and their shield" (Ps. 115:9), as their "refuge and strength" (Ps. 46:1), and as their "strong tower" (Prov. 18:10), instead of in their own military might. They need to adopt the attitude of the Psalmist:

Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the LORD our God (Psalm 20:7).

"The presence of the Messiah in their midst means that no one would be able to assail them and so they could live at peace, without recourse to armaments. He who came as the king on a donkey did not establish His kingdom by worldly power, and will not have it maintained that way either" (Mackay, p. 187). His is a spiritual kingdom, and His protection is spiritual in nature. This is consistent with the promise of God made through the prophet Hosea:

But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God.
I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen (Hosea 1:7).

In using the terms "Ephraim" and "Jerusalem" to represent the old northern kingdom of Israel and southern kingdom of Judah, Zechariah paints an inclusive portrait of all of God's people. Thus, it is not only ancient Israel that must rely on the LORD for strength and protection, but the modern church as well. Phillips summarizes well the application here:

The point of verse 10, therefore, is that the Lord will *take away worldly sources of strength from His people and lead them to trust Him*. Just as the messianic king comes not in worldly might, so also His reign is not to be established according to worldly principles. This is a reminder to anyone in the church who would foolishly seek worldly power to achieve spiritual ends (Phillips, p. 212).

Secondly, Messiah comes to *proclaim peace to the nations*. Notice that the prophet says, *He shall speak peace to the nations*, not that "He shall *bring* peace to the nations." It is manifestly clear that the nations have never been at peace, either with God, between themselves, or even within themselves. "Israel's Redeemer-King comes to *publish* peace to the nations—not only peace from outward strife and conflict with one another, but that deeper inner peace, and the removal of hostility *between man and God*, which has been the cause of all outward restlessness and strife" (Baron, p. 314). This proclamation of peace to the nations is accomplished through the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1; Eph. 2:14-17; cp. Is. 52:7; Acts 10:36).

Finally, the *universal extent of Messiah's reign* is emphasized by quoting from the Psalms:

⁷In his days may the righteous flourish,
and peace abound, till the moon be no more!
⁸May he have dominion from sea to sea,

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and from the River to the ends of the earth! (Psalm 72:7-8).

“The quotation in the last two lines of the poem from Psalm 72:8 is reminiscent of the territory ideally allotted to Israel (but rarely in her possession), from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, and from the wilderness of Sinai to the Euphrates (Ex. 23:31; 1 Kgs. 4:21)” (Baldwin, pp. 166-167). Taken altogether, this is a poetic description of the worldwide dominion of the Messiah. The promised Savior was never intended to be merely a “Jewish King” – He is King of Kings and Lord of lords, the monarch of all creation.

Thus, in verse 10 we have a summary of Messiah’s work in the church age. First, Jesus came to *protect His people*. Our battles are no longer physical, but spiritual. We have no need of horses, chariots, archers, or swordsmen. Rather, we depend on the LORD for spiritual protection (cp. Zech. 2:5) as we fight against not flesh and blood, but spiritual powers (cp. Eph. 6:12). We must trust in Jesus and rely on Him for spiritual strength. Secondly, Jesus came to *proclaim peace to the nations*. The objective, internal peace that we have with God is the heart of the good news of Jesus Christ. We were once alienated from God, enemies at enmity with Him, but we have now been reconciled by the blood of Christ and are at peace with Him (cp. Col. 1:21-22). This is the message of the gospel that the world desperately needs to hear, and which we are called to proclaim; it is a ministry of reconciliation (cp. 2 Cor. 5:18). Finally, Jesus came to *extend His kingdom throughout the whole world*. The gospel enterprise is a global enterprise. People from every nation, tribe, and tongue are gathered into the universal church of Jesus Christ as His rule reaches every corner of the earth.

B. The Messiah’s People (Zechariah (9:11-17))

Having finished his discussion on the person and work of the Messiah, the prophet shifts his attention in verse 11 to the Messiah’s people, indicated by the phrase, *As for you also*. At first glance, verses 11-17 may be difficult to interpret due to uncertainty regarding their context.

However, the key to understanding this paragraph lies in the martial language of verse 13, where God has armed Israel against Greece, literally “the sons of Javan.” The only period in history where the Jews engaged in open warfare with Greeks was in the Maccabean era, fighting against the excesses of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who was the “son” or “heir” of the Seleucid kingdom that came from the empire of Alexander the Great. Thus, the immediate context of 9:11-17 speaks about the success that Israel will have facing their Greek overlords.

However, like most Old Testament prophecy, there is more here than meets the eye. The prophecy makes general promises that can be fulfilled in multiple ways, not just in the rebellion of the Maccabees. Further, elements contained in this passage do not necessarily fit that context, or seem grander or greater than the literal historical view. As previously described (in lesson XIV), there are multiple approaches to understanding the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy: the *historical*, *spiritual*, and *eschatological* views. We will need to employ all three interpretive lenses to make sense of this passage.

1. Justified (9:11-12)

a) *Delivered by God (9:11)*

¹¹*As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.*

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The LORD's relationship to His people is emphasized here in the phrase, *the blood of my covenant with you*. The primary reference here is to the ratification of the Mosaic Covenant at Mt. Sinai:

And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Exodus 24:8).

Through the shedding of blood, God sealed His covenant promises and committed Himself to His people in a binding relationship. The daily shedding of blood through the Old Testament sacrificial system was a continual reminder of that relationship between a holy God and a sinful people. It was also a foreshadowing of the New Covenant to come in Christ, when He inaugurated the covenant through the pouring out of His own blood on Calvary's cross:

²⁷And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:27-28).

It is because of this covenant relationship that God promises to deliver His people: *I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit*. Israel is pictured here as being trapped in a dry cistern. These "pits" were commonly carved out as reservoirs to hold water, particularly for use in the dry season. However, they could also be used as prisons, as the experience of both Joseph (cp. Gen. 37:24) and Jeremiah attest (Jer. 38:6). To be trapped in such a place with no avenue of escape and no drinking water was a death sentence. Metaphorically, the "pit" represented a situation of hopelessness or despair, from which rescue was required:

He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure (Psalm 40:2).

Thus, this promise is one of deliverance from affliction. The covenant-keeping God looks down upon His people in their distress, and He promises to rescue them from the pit of destruction.

b) *Restored in Hope (9:12)*

¹²Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.

Having delivered His people out of certain death, He restores their hope and returns them to the stronghold of His presence. In the words of Martin Luther's most famous hymn: *A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing. Our helper He, amid the flood, of mortal ills prevailing*. The phrase, *O prisoners of hope* is literally, "O prisons of the hope." This is a hope or assurance that is not merely wishful thinking; rather, it is a firm conviction founded on the One who is the basis of all hope. Our hope in deliverance is assured, because it depends on our covenant-making and covenant-keeping God.

This promise of restoration is not merely a deliverance from one bad situation to another; it is not "out of the frying pan and into the fire." Instead, there is a promise attached of a "double" restoration. This type of language is based on the Old Testament principle that the heir received a double portion of the father's inheritance (Dt. 21:17). God had declared Israel to be His firstborn son (Ex. 4:22), and hence worthy of a double portion of the inheritance. "There will be

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a double share of His blessings to compensate them for past sorrow (Is. 40:2; 61:7)” (Mackay, p. 191).

From a *historical* point of view verses 11-12 were meant to encourage the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea during the centuries while they awaited the advent of the Messiah depicted in verses 9-10. They were a small and insignificant nation, caught between stronger neighbors, the Ptolemies of Egypt to the south and the Seleucids of Syria to the north. They had no king, and they were often oppressed and afflicted by those foreign powers. But the LORD tells them not to lose hope. He has not forgotten His covenant with Israel, nor the promises He has made (cp. Zech. 8:1-8). He pledges to deliver them from their affliction and restore them in hope and blessing. What an encouragement for beleaguered believers!

Spiritually, these promises picture for us God’s mighty act of *justification*, which WCF Shorter Catechism Q&A 33 defines as “an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.” All men need to be delivered from their slavery to sin and restored to true righteousness and holiness. “Salvation begins in our lives when we are turned from the ways of the world to trust in the Lord. Because of the blood of His covenant, Christ sets the prisoners free: free from the pit of guilt, corruption, and separation from God into which we had been cast by our sin. We call this phase of salvation our *justification*, when we are forgiven and declared righteous in God’s sight because of Jesus Christ, and subsequently are adopted as God’s own into His family” (Phillips, p. 216), whereby we are allotted a double portion of His blessing, having become heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ (cp. Rom. 8:17).

2. Sanctified (9:13-15)

a) Prepared for War (9:13)

¹³*For I have bent Judah as my bow; I have made Ephraim its arrow. I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior's sword.*

In the original context, verse 13 describes God preparing the Jews for war against Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The Jews will need to raise up arms against this vile defiler of true religion. Thus, the Heavenly Warrior is described as kitting Himself up, with the bow of Judah, the arrow of Ephraim, and the sword of Zion. Nothing can stand against this mighty hero. At the proper time, Israel will be called to defend her faith, follow her righteous King, and go to holy war against the sons of Greece.

b) Called to Battle (9:14)

¹⁴*Then the LORD will appear over them, and his arrow will go forth like lightning; the Lord God will sound the trumpet and will march forth in the whirlwinds of the south.*

The enemy is engaged in verse 14, and it is God who leads them. This is the language of theophany, of the appearing of the LORD (cp. 2 Sam. 22:8-19; Ps. 29; Hab. 3:3-11). Descriptions of God’s power and presence in the Old Testament often include loud sounds like trumpets or thunder, lightning flashes, earthquakes, smoke, and storm or tempest imagery, much of which are present here. The Lord God sounds the trumpet to call His troops to advance on the enemy. The battle is enjoined.

Historically, the Jews had fewer men and inferior weapons to the much more powerful army of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The only advantages they held, from a human perspective, were their

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knowledge of the local terrain and their cause, a fervent desire to defend their religion against the desecrations imposed upon them by Antiochus. Outwardly, it would have seemed unlikely for them to emerge victorious. However, with the Lord God leading them, could the outcome ever be in doubt?

c) Triumphant over Enemies (9:15)

¹⁵*The LORD of hosts will protect them, and they shall devour, and tread down the sling stones, and they shall drink and roar as if drunk with wine, and be full like a bowl, drenched like the corners of the altar.*

The result of the war with the sons of Greece and its aftermath are described in verse 15. Because of the protection afforded them by the LORD of hosts, success is assured. He protects them like a shield (cp. Ps. 18:2). The victorious Jews are pictured as feasting and drinking in celebration of their triumph, which not only defeated Antiochus IV Epiphanes, but also effectively secured their independence as a nation for the next century. In their eating, they are like a wild lioness who is devouring her prey (Num. 23:24; cp. Mic. 5:8). Notice that the victors are not actually “drunk with wine”; rather, their boisterous and loud rejoicing is *as if* that were the case.

The Jews have trampled down their enemies like *sling stones*. Although the “sling stone” brings to mind the duel of David vs. Goliath (1 Sam. 17:40), the reference here is more likely related to the thoroughness with which the enemy has been defeated. “The weapons their enemies have hurled at them are seen as spent and exhausted, and they victoriously walk over them as if they signified nothing at all” (Mackay, p. 193).

The final phrase of verse 15, *and be full like a bowl, drenched like the corners of the altar*, reminds us that this is a spiritual, holy war that has been won. The enemies of God’s people sought to defile the sacrificial altar of the temple by sacrificing a pig on it. The religious ceremonies required in the Mosaic law had been suspended by the Greeks. But nothing would prevent true religion from being practiced, including those pagan Greeks under Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Here we have pictured a full return of the sacrificial system, a reinstatement of the covenant religion, which took the vicarious blood of atoning sacrifice and applied it to the horns of the altar (e.g., Lev. 4:7).

In New Covenant terms, verse 13 speaks of equipping the saints for spiritual service, verse 14 of the spiritual warfare in which the church engages, and verse 15 of spiritual victory through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Taken together, verses 13-15 thus describe for us the process of *sanctification*, which according to WCF SC Q&A 35 is “the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.” Our Christian lives are active spiritual battlegrounds, as we are equipped by God through His Word to grow in holiness. “This requires militant activity, like that which we see in our text, as we strive and fight against the flesh, the world, and the devil, through faith in Christ and by the power He gives. In spiritual terms, it is a bloody affair, and Christ gives us the victory as He reigns through us” (Phillips, p. 216).

3. Glorified (9:16-17)

¹⁶*On that day the LORD their God will save them, as the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land. ¹⁷For how great is his goodness, and how great his beauty! Grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women.*

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The final two verses of this passage describe the resulting peace and prosperity that the people of God achieve after their victory against the sons of Greece. It is a grand and gracious portrait of the blessings of God. Although the period of the Maccabees in many ways was a rest from foreign domination and outside oppression, nonetheless, the promised benefits here far exceed any literal, physical situation achieved in the history of Israel. Therefore, while the general tenor of these verses could be applied to a *historical* fulfillment, it is to the *spiritual* and *eschatological* perspectives we must turn to fully understand the promises contained herein.

Zechariah makes three statements about the blessings of God toward His people. The first promise is contained in verses 16. “God would not only give victory but afterwards peace, and hence the warrior and the lion are now exchanged for the shepherd and the flock, and the spent and worthless stones of the sling scornfully trampled underfoot are contrasted with the brilliant and costly gems of the diadem that are honorably placed upon the head” (Moore, pp. 236-237).

In short, this promise is that we are *saved for glory*. When God saves a people for Himself, it is both for His glory and for theirs. His name is glorified as Savior and Lord. We become as precious jewels, adorning His crown for His glory. This picture of the church becoming a precious ornament of the most holy Savior is picked up by the last prophet of the Old Testament:

They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him (Malachi 3:17).

This idea also figures prominently in hymn #325 in the Red Trinity Hymnal (words by William O. Cushing):

When he cometh, when he cometh
To make up his jewels,
All his jewels, precious jewels,
His loved and his own.

Chorus: Like the stars of the morning,
His bright crown adorning,
They shall shine in their beauty,
Bright gems for his crown.

He will gather, he will gather
The gems for his kingdom,
All the pure ones, all the bright ones,
His loved and his own.

Little children, little children
Who love their Redeemer,
Are the jewels, precious jewels,
His loved and his own.

Secondly, we are to *sing His greatness*. Just as this passage opened in v. 9 with a joyous celebration for the coming King, it closes with another call to rejoice in the first half of v. 17: *For how great is his goodness, and how great his beauty!* This attitude of rejoicing and appreciation for the greatness, goodness, and beauty of God should characterize our Christian walk. “And the more we behold it even now by faith and with the veil of flesh between, and inquire about it, the more shall we be changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as

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by the Lord the Spirit” (Baron, p. 333). If we truly understand our justification and our sanctification, it will inevitably lead to gratitude and praise. This is a reminder of the Psalmist’s desire:

One thing have I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to inquire in his temple (Psalm 27:4).

We have been saved for glory in order to sing His greatness. The third aspect of the divine blessing described in the second half of v. 17 is that we are *satisfied by God*. The description of young men and women flourishing with the produce of the land is a portrait of the peace, prosperity, and satisfaction that living in God’s presence provides (cp. Joel 2:26 3:18; Amos 9:13-14). Grain “and wine indicated peace and prosperity that permitted the performance of agricultural labor, whilst the increase of young men and maidens indicated the peaceful increase of population, and showed that children were not cut off, as they commonly are, in a state of war or trouble” (Moore, p. 237).

Spiritually speaking, we enjoy these benefits already, if we are in Christ. We have been saved for glory, we sing His greatness, and we are satisfied by God in this present age. However, the eschatological fulfillment of these promises will be completely realized only in heaven in *glorification*, which “is the culmination of Christ’s saving work. Sanctification leads to glorification, for as we now are becoming more holy we are growing in glory, in Christ’s likeness. Yet we all look forward to the day to come when the words of verse 16 and 17 will be so wonderfully fulfilled in us (cp. 1 Jn. 3:2-3)” (Phillips, p. 216).

Conclusion and Application

In Zechariah 9:9-10, the prophet describes the coming Messiah and the impact of His person and work upon the people of God. Jesus is presented as our coming King, full of righteousness, having salvation, and humble and gentle. He comes to protect His people, proclaim peace to the nations, and extend his universal reign over the entire earth. These promises had a fulfillment in His first advent, but they will have an even greater realization in His second coming

At one level, verses 11-17 of Zechariah chapter 9 can be interpreted to describe the Maccabean triumph over Antiochus IV Epiphanes, but there is more for us to learn there. The entire salvific work of Jesus Christ is summarized in the way God delivers and restores His people, equips and prepares them for victory over their enemies, and provides them with peace and prosperity. The success depicted over foreign enemies is symbolic of the greater triumph Christ has won over sin and death.

The Triumphal Entry was merely a foretaste of the eternity of rejoicing that awaits us in heaven. Because *our triumphant Messiah, is righteous in His person and comprehensive in His salvation*, let us rejoice in the salvation—justification, sanctification, and glorification—that we have through our Savior, Jesus Christ.

For next time: Read Zechariah 10:1-5.