

“Peace to the Nations”

Lesson Text: Zechariah 9:9-13, 16-17 **Background Scripture:** Zechariah 9:9-17

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 55

Zechariah 9:9-13, 16-17 (NIV)

⁹Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ¹⁰I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. ¹¹As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit. ¹²Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you. ¹³I will bend Judah as I bend my bow and fill it with Ephraim. I will rouse your sons, Zion, against your sons, Greece, and make you like a warrior's sword.

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¹⁶The Lord their God will save his people on that day as a shepherd saves his flock. They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown. ¹⁷How attractive and beautiful they will be! Grain will make the young men thrive, and new wine the young women.

TODAY'S LESSON AIMS

Learning Facts: To identify the biblical fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy.

Biblical Principle: To explain the significance of that fulfillment.

Daily Application: To state one reason why that fulfillment should make a difference your life.

INTRODUCTION

Extreme Preparations?

When overnight guests are expected, a host is faced with the decision of how to prepare for the visit. The preparations may vary according to the status of the visitor. At one extreme of preparation, a regularly used room may be vacated and receive a deep cleaning—windows washed, bedspreads laundered, carpet steamed, etc. At the other extreme are situations calling for little or no preparation, with the guest being expected to sleep on the couch; relatives or the kids' friends are more likely to experience no special preparation for their overnight stay.

A brief description of what was to be done to prepare for the arrival of the ultimate dignitary, the Lord God, is found in Isaiah 40:3–4. This passage is cited in the New Testament as being fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:2–3; Luke 1:76; 3:4–5; John 1:23). All this leads to the conclusion that the preparation was to be spiritual in nature, a preparation of the heart.

People reacted to John's message in various ways. At one extreme were reactions of sincere repentance by unlikely people (examples: Luke 3:7–14); at the other extreme were attempts to discredit John (example: Matthew 11:18). Only those at the proper extreme of heart preparation were able to recognize a prophetic fulfillment when it happened right before their eyes.

LESSON CONTEXT: Zechariah the Prophet

There are about 30 men in the Bible named Zechariah, and the passage Zechariah 1:1 allows us to identify the one of interest today. The names of the man's father and grandfather listed there point to the prophet whose

work can be dated from 520 B.C. onward. He and his contemporary Haggai played a leadership role in rebuilding the temple following the return from Babylonian exile (Ezra 5:1; 6:14; Zechariah 1:7; 7:1). Zechariah joined Haggai with a general exhortation (1:1–6), followed by a series of eight visions that provided encouragement in the project of building a new temple. A tremendous assurance is given toward the end of the first vision when, the Lord declares that “my house shall be built” (1:16). In that regard, those two prophets lived during the time of King Darius of Persia, who reigned from 522 to 486 B.C.

LESSON CONTEXT: Zechariah as Prophecy

The book of Zechariah is located in a section of the Old Testament known as the Minor Prophets. It is the longest of those 12 books, comprising about 22 percent of that section.

Following an introductory paragraph (Zechariah 1:1–6), the book falls into three major parts. The first part, Zechariah 1:7–6:15, features eight night visions, and the format is apocalyptic—vivid, unusual visions of future events. This type of literature seems to have its origins during the time that the Jews were captives in Babylon. Some text in the books of Daniel and Ezekiel also are examples.

Zechariah 7 and 8 constitute the second major part, revealed to the prophet about two years after the night visions (compare 1:7 with 7:1). This segment records responses by the Lord to observances of fasting that were asked by a delegation from Bethel. The Law of Moses prescribed only one day of fasting for the Israelites: the Day of Atonement. That fasting is inherent in the phrase “deny yourselves” (Leviticus 23:26–32; Numbers 29:7). But while the Jews were in Babylon, they had introduced more fasts into the calendar (Zechariah 7:3, 5; 8:19).

Zechariah 9–14, the third major part of the book, presents itself as two undated prophecies. The first prophecy, chapters 9–11, speaks of God’s forthcoming actions of judgment and mercy; today’s lesson text is part of this prophecy. The second prophecy, chapters 12–14, describes a coming Day of the Lord. The book of Zechariah is quoted seven times in the New Testament:

Zechariah 8:16 in Ephesians 4:25

Zechariah 9:9 in Matthew 21:5 and John 12:15

Zechariah 11:12–13 in Matthew 27:9–10

Zechariah 12:10 in John 19:37

Zechariah 13:7 in Matthew 26:31 and Mark 14:27

As Zechariah 9 begins, the first eight verses are believed to focus on events during the time of Alexander the Great (lived 356–323 B.C.). He defeated the Persian army under Darius III at the famous battle of Issus in 333 B.C., near the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea. Alexander then turned south, and the places named in Zechariah 9:1–8 parallel his route. Verse 8, which immediately precedes the text of today’s lesson, is thought to refer to the fact that Alexander’s Greek army did not attack Jerusalem but continued on to Egypt. God blessed and condemned empires and kings throughout the centuries. Each one had a role in God’s plan that would ultimately bring the Messiah into the world at just the right time in history (Galatians 4:4). Alexander’s conquests are considered very important, for they fulfilled what God intended!

If the time line references above are correct, it means that there is a gap of more than 300 years between the events predicted in verses 8 and 9, given how this text is seen to be fulfilled in Matthew 21:5 and John 12:15. Some students have called this literary feature “prophetic foreshortening”: what appears at first glance to be prophecies that are to be fulfilled closely together in time turn out to be separated by centuries. Another example of prophetic foreshortening is found in Isaiah 61:1–2, given where Jesus stops His quotation of that text in Luke 4:16–19. The time gap between the utterance of the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 and its fulfillment is even wider: at least 500 years.

The Lord's King and Kingdom: Zechariah 9:9-13

Zechariah parallels this prophecy about *Jesus* “your king” (v. 9) right after his prophecy concerning Alexander the Great (v. 8), he was obviously inviting his readers to contrast the two conquerors (more than 300 years between, see LESSON CONTEXT: Zechariah as Prophecy above). History affirms that Alexander the Great passed by Jerusalem more than once and never harmed it. Alexander’s arrival brought fear to people, therefore Alexander the Great obviously cannot be the king for whom Israel looks. Thus, the prophet turns his attention to the King for whom Israel does look—Messiah—and views His coming, first in humiliation (v. 9), and then exaltation (v. 10). The coming of the Messiah (Jesus) will be a joyous time for Israel, hence the exhortation to “rejoice greatly.”

Jesus was righteous in all that He did, and His purpose in coming was to bring salvation to those who would trust Him. How different from Alexander! Jesus’ kingdom is a spiritual kingdom. It shall not be advanced by outward force or carnal weapons. His gospel shall be preached to the world, and be received among *the nations* (v. 10).

1. Who was Zechariah talking about when he mentioned “your king comes to you” (Zechariah 9:9-10)?

What Do You Think?

How does this description of Jesus differ from what you see in world leaders?

Digging Deeper

How can recalling the contrast between Christ and other leaders prevent cynicism (distrust) or hopelessness?

What Do You Think?

How can your congregation promote peace among the nations as a sign of the coming eternal peace Jesus brings?

Digging Deeper

What local strategies can be employed in pursuit of this lofty goal?

This verse raises an important question: Is the phrase the blood of thy covenant looking to the past (as in Exodus 24:8, i.e., the Abrahamic covenant which was an unconditional covenant which was ratified by the blood sacrifice, hence, the most binding of covenants) or to the future (as in Matthew 26:28)? The context implies that the redemptive work of the Messiah is in view (compare Luke 4:16–19). Throughout history it was a hopeless situation to be sentenced to a pit. Dry cisterns were frequently used as places to detain prisoners (c.f. Joseph, Gen. 37:21-24 and Jer. 38:6). Graphic picture of what God considers Babylon to be.

The exiles are viewed as *prisoners of hope* (v. 12), looking forward to the time when they will be free of Persia’s control. They are urged to *return to the stronghold* (Zion/Israel). God promises that in *even now* (i.e., the day in which they return) “I will restore twice as much to you.” The double portion was the inheritance of the first-born son. They can expect that God will abundantly fulfill His promise to them—He will deliver them from their exile in Babylon and then will deliver the nation out from under Persian control. Even so, a double reference may be intended here. In that case, the physical release from Babylonian captivity (fresh in the memory of Zechariah’s original audience) serves as a type (that is, a pattern) of spiritual freedom that Messiah was to bring.

2. What type of freedom is Zechariah speaking of? (Zechariah 9:11-12)

What Do You Think?

What areas of your life might you describe as a prison?

Digging Deeper

While you wait for deliverance, how do you demonstrate that you are also a “prisoner of hope”?

This verse refers to the deliverance of Israel experienced when Greece restored a little freedom to them and later in the 2nd century B.C. after Maccabean Revolt of 167–160 B.C. when they experienced deliverance from Antiochus Epiphanies. The conflict is set forth graphically. Judah is likened to God’s bow (“I will bend Judah”), And Ephraim is likened to the arrow placed in the bow (“fill it with Ephraim”). A bow is considered to be filled when the arrow is placed on the string ready for release. With the mention of both Judah and Ephraim we see that the entire nation, both northern and southern kingdoms, is involved. This unification is confirmed as the entire nation is addressed in the name of its religious capital, “rouse your sons, Zion.” The sons of Zion would be raised up against the sons of Greece. The nation will be an effective fighting force because of the Lord made them “like a warrior’s sword”—invincible. Their deliverance will be accomplished because of divine intervention. More details about God’s plan to defend His people are found in Zechariah 12:1–9.

3. What did Zechariah say about God’s plan to defend His people? (Zechariah 9:13)

The Lord’s Care: Zechariah 9:16-17

The figure of speech for the Lord’s people changes from military action (bows and swords) to the familiar picture of caring for a flock of sheep (compare Psalm 100:3). God’s care had seemed distant or nonexistent during the Babylonian exile (Psalm 137; Lamentations 3:43–44; etc.). But the prophet expresses confident trust that such an outlook was to be temporary. However, before their enemies, they were sheep in the midst of wolves. If the Lord God had not saved them and enabled them to accomplish His bidding, they would have perished.

The imagery changes yet again (Zech. 9:16b). This promise reveals the great value that the Lord saw in the people; they were indeed as precious gemstones that adorn a *crown* (compare 2 Samuel 12:30; Isaiah 62:3). The nature of the blessings won’t be hidden. Rather, they will be lifted up as an ensign upon His land as a witness for all to see.

4. What did Zechariah’s prophecy have to say about God’s care for His people? (Zechariah 9:16)

What Do You Think?

Who in your life demonstrates an attitude befitting a stone in God’s crown?

Digging Deeper

What prevents you from carrying yourself in a manner that communicates God’s valuation of you?

Having delivered His people from every enemy, God also blesses them with a bountiful land as an expression of “How attractive and beautiful they will be!” These two sudden praises are a response to the promises of the previous verse. God is great—all the time! The language goes back to the results of what God will do. Bread, made from grain, was a staple in the diet, so it was a blessing that would bring life and health. Food was not taken for granted. When the word corn occurs with wine (about 30 times in the Old Testament), the picture is either one of prosperity (example 2 Kings 18:32) or its opposite (example: Deuteronomy 28:51). God would give bountifully!

5. How did Zechariah’s prophecy describe the future prosperity of the Israelites? (Zechariah 9:17)

What Do You Think?

How does a time of feasting remind you of God’s goodness?

Digging Deeper

Are these reminders limited to religious feasts (such as the Lord's Supper)? Why or why not?

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Accepting Jesus into our lives brings about celebration! (Zechariah 9:9a)
2. And we rejoice because of our loving God's humble sacrifice. (vs. 9b-9c)
3. We must remember, as well as tell others that only God offers true peace in our lives. (v. 10).
4. Only God provides spiritual freedom. (v. 11)
5. Only God provides for His people. (v. 12)
6. God wants to give us His best and will supply the needs He see fit. (vs. 16-17)

CONCLUSION

Play Money vs. Real Money

Imagine a father playing a board game with his young son. The game involves buying and selling things with play money; thus the youngster learns quickly the value of the money in his hand. As the lad expresses his appreciation in that regard, his father responds, "Someday I'm going to give you thousands of dollars." The boy is eager to receive the gift, but what he doesn't realize is that his father is referring to real money. The father doesn't make the distinction at the time of the promise because his son hasn't yet reached the age where he can appreciate the difference. The son is focused on the apparent value of play money.

So it would seem with today's text. God is intent on bringing eternal life ("real money") to those created in His image. But He made promises to those under the old covenant in terms of physical, earthly deliverance ("play money") because that was their frame of reference. Even into the New Testament era, people had a hard time seeing the spiritual as surpassing the earthly, of seeing beyond the temporary to the eternal (Matthew 13:10-13; Acts 1:6; etc.).

Where are you in that regard?

PRAYER

Almighty God, as we think about Jesus as King, we resolve that our goal every day will be to remember that our citizenship is in Heaven and to be the best citizens possible of His kingdom as we pass through here on Earth. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Jesus' Kingdom is superior to any alternative—now and forever!