

“What did Jesus Ride?”

Intro: A while back a group of environmentalists began a movement to get religious people to consider that driving-gas guzzling cars was also a moral issue, since it supposedly adversely affects the environment. They conducted their campaign with a slogan, “What would Jesus drive?”

That’s a question nobody can answer; but there is a more important and related question—“What did Jesus ride?” And the Bible provides an answer to that question and the answer has great importance in identifying the Christ of the OT Scriptures. Let’s consider the prophecy of Zechariah 9.

Background of the Prophecy

Zechariah lived during the time of the rebuilding of the temple after the return from captivity in 538 BC. Zechariah was called by God to give encouragement to the people. His mission was two-fold: 1) To urge the people build the temple of the Lord; 2) To give assurance that their work would ultimately result in the glorious kingdom of the Messiah. The 9th chapter of Zechariah begins a new section in which the prophet addresses God’s plans for nations around Israel. It stresses three important truths about God’s purpose for the nation:

God’s enemies would be destroyed by judgment or conversion while He protected His people (Zech. 9:1-8).

The nations immediately surrounding Israel are particularly singled out, beginning from Syria in the north and following the coastline. God’s message was that all those nations who had oppressed His people would experience the justice of God. They would receive their just repayment and it would not be prevented either by wisdom, weapons or wealth! And it would be hard to read this without thinking of the devastating destruction of Alexander the Great and his armies on these people in the centuries that followed.

However, the prophet also reveals that God would graciously save a remnant of these Gentiles to be a part of His kingdom. In addition God’s promises to protect His true people from the invading army that will destroy the nations around Israel.

God’s people would be delivered from their enemies and blessed (Zech. 9:11-17)

God promises to provide deliverance by fighting for His people.

God promises to bless them as His people.

But how would these things be accomplished?

God would give His people a king again! (Zech. 9:9-10)

Zechariah’s Portrait of the Messiah

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem; and the bow of war will be cut off. And He will speak peace to the nations; and His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9:9-10)

What does this prophecy teach us about the Christ?

He would bring great joy to God's people.

He would rule with justice.

He would bring salvation to God's people.

He would be a humble king, his mount being that of the common man.

He would bring an end to Israel's conflicts by speaking peace to the nations.

He would rule over the whole earth.

Every Jew longed for the coming of this king!

Has He come? Or will He come in the future? Or was this just a wistful wish of Zechariah's without any fulfillment?

Jesus is the King of Zechariah's prophecy

No verse makes this clearer than Jesus' own self-identification with this prophecy in the final week of his ministry. On the Sunday before his death, now called "palm Sunday" Jesus by His actions sent a message to the Jews and ultimately to the world indicating that He was the coming King of Zechariah's prophecy.

And when they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them, and bring them to Me. And if anyone says something to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them." Now this took place that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold your King is coming to you, gentle, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.' And the disciples went and did just as Jesus had directed them, and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid on them their garments, on which He sat. And most of the multitude spread their garments in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees, and spreading them in the road. And the multitudes going before Him, and those who followed after were crying out, saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!" And when He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" And the multitudes were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee." (Matthew 21:1-11)

Who can read this and not see the fulfillment of Zechariah's words? By riding the lowliest of animals into Jerusalem (the apparently unbroken foal of donkey) Jesus declared Himself Zechariah's coming king. But in

addition, as the prophesied King Jesus fulfills all the promises of Zechariah's prophecy!

He brings great joy through the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life.

He rules with justice based on the teaching of God's law.

He brings salvation to those who believe in Him.

He speaks peace to the nations through the gospel message of reconciliation with God.

He rules over the whole world as He reigns at God's right hand.

What does it mean to us?

The question, "What did Jesus ride?" is no trivial question. It stands at the heart of who Jesus is and what kind of king He intended to be!

It clarifies our understanding of Jesus' claims.

Can one imagine that Jesus made this "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem without an awareness of Zechariah's prophecy? He was thoroughly schooled in the prophets and His actions made it clear that He considered Himself the Christ! Jesus actions present to us only three possibilities!

He thought he was the Christ and was not. He was a lunatic!

He knew he wasn't the Christ and pretended to be anyway. He was a liar!

He knew He was the Christ and boldly declared it! This king who rode a donkey was the Lord who Zechariah promised would visit His people!

Jesus' actions make us choose one of these three! Which does the evidence support?

It defines the nature of Jesus' rule.

When you read Zechariah's description of the king to come you see that he was so atypically royal! He was not like any king we are used to seeing in this world. Jesus' kingdom was never about wars of conquest and forced obedience. It was about His rule in the hearts of men. It was about universal peace among men based on a common commitment to God and His truth. It was about the spiritual salvation of mankind through His sacrifice and the joy and peace this brings to those who believe in Him.

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." Pilate therefore said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." (John 18:36-37)

Jesus never came to be a political ruler; this king who rode a donkey is the king of Truth and those who love it!

It reveals the hope of entering His kingdom!

You can imagine what hope this prophecy gave to a people who lived under the dominion of earthly rulers who made decisions based on who paid them the most rather than what was fair; who sought their own interest instead of the interests of the people; who were lifted up with pride and who used their power for conquest rather than peace, all of which would have been symbolized by riding the most expensive, impressive, and majestic horse and/or carriage available. Yet this king comes into town on a common man's mount. And it reflects the great difference in His character. He is a king all can obey, and with joy! His judgments are always fair! Our interests are always on his heart! He is not motivated by selfish pride but humble love for all his people. His message is one of peace, joy, and hope of salvation for all people. No wonder people of the ages have loved and served this king who rode a donkey into town!

Conclusion: There is great irony in that event in which Jesus declared himself king of the world. It would cost him his life. The enemies who saw the crowd realized that their time to deal with Him grew short. And ironically those who stood by the wayside and shouted "Save us now", six days later were shouting "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" They were disappointed that Jesus had not provided the kind of deliverance that they wanted!

Yet in His death, God's purpose was achieved and a kingdom was born made up of people all over the world who understand that their greatest need for deliverance is in their sins against God and who want to be "born again"—of water and Spirit so that they may enter the kingdom of God.

The great king of Zechariah now speaks His invitation to each of us!

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

"Behold your king has come! What will you do with Him?"