

An Exegesis of Zechariah 9:9-13 by a Zesty College Student

Michaela Jaeger

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Professor Kyle Chalko

The hardest part about exegesis is not knowing where to stop. There is no end to learning when it comes to God's Word. You can study one thing forever, always getting new perspectives and learning new information. Even the writers of the Bible didn't know it all. It is humanly impossible to contain the amount of knowledge that is in the Bible alone. The thought that even that amount of knowledge can't even compare to God's is overpowering.

What I have learned about a simple passage in Zechariah doesn't even scratch the surface. All I have uncovered is a brief history of the book, the author, and the events surrounding the writing process. Truthfully, the only person to really **grasp** the message in this passage would have been Zechariah.

Zechariah was a prophet and poet during the reign of Darius Hystaspis and the early days of Uzziah (Robinson). He preached for two years, from 520 to 518 BC (Robinson), and also wrote the book of Zechariah during this time ("The Messiah"). He may have continued writing, but no one knows for sure (Robinson). He was considered an influential prophet, and was well known for advising the king regarding the "fear of God" (Robinson).

Zechariah's mission was very much tied to the events of the time and the state of the people. Jeremiah's prophecies about the domination of Babylon had been fulfilled, so the Persian empire was upset, to say the least (Robinson). The liberated captives were depressed because God had not restored Jerusalem or the temple (Robinson). Granted, the altar had been built, but there were no people worthy of being priests (Robinson). The prophet Haggai had a part in motivating the people, and Zechariah's job was to finish what he started and rebuild the temple (Robinson). Thus, the book of Zechariah was most likely written for the people of the land. The audience of Zechariah 9, however, is specifically the people of Jerusalem.

The purpose of the book of Zechariah was to show that sin brings punishment, but also that salvation is available to anyone (“Book”). Zechariah was written at a time when the people of Israel needed hope. Zechariah prophesies the coming of the Messiah in chapter 9, which would’ve given the people the hope that they needed, motivating them further to work at rebuilding the temple.

There is a little bit of controversy surrounding when this chapter was written. The pre-exilic theory says that chapters 9 through 14 were written before the fall of Jerusalem, but the post-Zecharian theory says that they were written in the Greek period after 333 BC (Robinson). According to Got Questions Ministries, it was “likely written in two primary segments, between 520 and 470 BC” (“Book”). The segments were chapters 1 through 8 and chapters 9 through 14 (Robinson). Both segments began with the present, but ended up looking toward the future (Robinson). The first segment was primarily meant as encouragement to rebuild the temple, but the second segment is a promise for Israel: promise of a nation, a return from exile, victory over enemies, blessings, and national strength (Robinson). They are also promised a King: the Messiah (Robinson).

Let’s get down to business. In order to interpret Zechariah 9:9-13, one must examine it line by line. At first glance, one might think that this passage is a riddle, or a pretty piece of poetry. Often, the words and phrases are taken at face value when, in reality, the meaning is quite different.

***“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!”***

Here the intended audience is introduced: whoever the daughter of Zion is. At first glance, one would think that “daughter” actually means “town” or “village,” as it sometimes does. However in this case it literally means “daughter” (Strong’s H1323). “Daughter of Zion” is

also used in Micah and Zephaniah (“Daughter”). Some versions say “daughter Zion” instead of “daughter of Zion.” Something I find fascinating is that in biology, “daughter” refers to the division and production of cells (Pollard). “Daughter” could also be described as branches, something that has stemmed from an original, like offspring (Pollard). In other words, “daughter of Zion” is whatever Zion is. Zion can also be spelled “Sion” (“Strong’s H6726”). It is traditionally a mountain of Jerusalem, or the permanent capital: Tsijon (“Strong’s H6726”). Zion, then, is either Jerusalem or the areas surrounding it. This means that “daughter of Zion” most likely translates into the people of Jerusalem. Thus, in the first line, God is instructing Jerusalem to rejoice!

***Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!***

Not much interpretation is needed here. “Daughter” is the same Hebrew word used in the first line. “Jerusalem” is the Hebrew word Yeruwshalaim, which means “dual” (“Strong’s H3389”). The city of Jerusalem, which is the capital of Palestine, was probably named because of its two main hills (“Strong’s H3389”). Like in line one, some versions use “daughter Jerusalem” instead of “daughter of Jerusalem.” Thus, in this line, God is telling the people of Jerusalem to shout in addition to rejoicing.

***Behold, your King is coming to you;***

“King” means exactly what it sounds like: a king (“Strong’s H4428”). It is used in general for kings all over the Old Testament—the only difference here is it is capitalized, signifying importance. It applies not only to worldly kings, but to God as well (Press). Therefore, line three states that God—or some form of God—is coming to the people of Jerusalem.

***He is just and having salvation,***

“Just” means “just, lawful, righteous” (“Strong’s H6663”). It is “an attribute constantly given to Messiah in connection with salvation” (“JFB”). “Salvation” means to be open, wide, free, save, to avenge, defend, deliver, help, rescue, etc. (“Strong’s H3467”). In other words, the King has right-standing with God and is bringing salvation to the people of Jerusalem.

***Lowly and riding on a donkey,***

This is where the words start to get fun. “Lowly” means “depressed, in mind or circumstances...afflicted, humble, lowly, needy, poor,” mild, gentle, and meek (“Strong’s H6041”; “JFB”). It corresponds to Him riding a donkey/ass, which wasn’t a despised animal back then (“JFB”). In fact, it was a necessity, like a car; donkeys were used to carry belongings and people. “Lowly” has nothing to do with our modern view of a donkey. The “donkey” here is the Hebrew word “chamowr,” which was a male donkey—or a red-colored donkey—mainly used for carrying possessions (“Strong’s H2543”). As many people know, Jesus rode a donkey in Jerusalem on what we now call “Palm Sunday.” At the moment, we may assume that the “King” that Zechariah is writing about is Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and that this is a prophecy of that day in Jerusalem hundreds of years later.

***A colt, the foal of a donkey,***

Just by looking at these two lines, you can tell that this donkey is important. By now, we understand what a donkey is, but Zechariah goes on describing it—and elaborating the previous line. A colt is a young donkey that needs to be or is being raised and is also known as a foal (“Strong’s H5895”). A colt is untamed, which means no one has ever sat on it (“JFB”). Jesus rode such a colt in the New Testament (*Spiritual*, Luke 19.30; “JFB”). It is “the symbol of a triumphant conqueror and judge” (“JFB”). The Hebrew word for “foal” is “ben,” which is also a word for “son” (“Strong’s H1121”). A filly would be a female. So, it is emphasized in this line

that the young donkey that the King is riding on is a male. The last word in this line is “donkey.” However, it isn’t the same male donkey as before. This is “athown,” a female or docile donkey that was mainly used for breeding (“Strong’s H860”). This just alludes even more to the fact that the colt in question is young. Matthew 21 confirms our suspicions that this is a prophecy of Palm Sunday:

*“Tell the daughter of Zion,  
Behold, your King is coming to you.  
Lowly, and sitting on a donkey,  
A colt, the foal of a donkey” (Spiritual, Matt 21.5).*

***I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim***

The phrase “cut off” intrigues me. We mostly hear it in the sense of cutting off blessings, so right away we see that it is possible that this line has something to do with blessings. The word “cut” itself is “karath,” meaning “to cut...off, down or asunder...to destroy or consume...specifically to covenant” (“Strong’s H3772”). The “chariot” is not only a vehicle for transportation, but also used when describing a cavalry or a multitude (“Strong’s H3772). The famous story of chariots is when God destroyed the Egyptian army during the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt under Moses. Chances are, a chariot here symbolizes an army. Ephraim is a tribe that descended from Joseph, and it’s also a territory north of Jerusalem in Palestine (“Ephraim (1)”; “Ephraim (2)”). Most likely, Ephraim here refers to the territory.

***And the horse from Jerusalem;***

A horse was often used to symbolize war, since horses were used for war and to pull chariots (Day). The word is “cuwc,” and it’s from a word that means to skip (“Strong’s H5483”).

This same word is also used for cranes and swallows, but here it means “horse” because of the sense of war (“Strong’s H5483”). We already know what Jerusalem means. The past two lines must be God saying that he will sever or remove the military forces from Ephraim and Jerusalem—or from their enemies to protect them.

***The battle bow shall be cut off.***

“Battle bow” is probably the most difficult phrase to translate in this passage, especially when it’s used with “bend/bent.” To understand it, one must uncover a great deal about archery in the biblical times. The word “bow” itself is “qesheth,” and it refers to an archery bow (“Strong’s H7198”). However, it comes from root words that have to do with bending (“Strong’s H7198”). Throughout the Old Testament, it is used primarily with the verb “bend,” the action of shooting an arrow, and in the phrase “battle bow.” A battle bow was a bow intended for war or hunting, and made out of strong wood or bronze; it was very difficult to bend (Eager). It required a very strong man to use this bow.

***He shall speak peace to the nations;***

“Speak” could mean to command, declare, promise, or destroy (“Strong’s H1696”). It is used mainly when describing conversations between people and God, like a command. We can assume that “speak” in this line has to do with commanding or “speaking over.” “Peace” can also mean “prosperity,” “welfare,” or allude to safety (“Strong’s H7965”). “Nations” essentially means the Gentiles or foreigners of the world (“Strong’s H1471”). In other words, this line states that the King will bring peace to the whole world.

***His dominion shall be from sea to sea,***

“Dominion,” can also be used for an empire or government (“Strong’s H4915”; “Dominion”). The center of the Messiah’s dominion is Jerusalem and the Holy Land (“JFB”).

The “seas” mentioned in this line are the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea (“JFB”). This line could be describing the throne of God after the tribulation period in Revelation, or the area in which the Messiah will preach.

***And from the River to the ends of the earth.”***

The “River” here is likely Euphrates (“Strong’s H5104”; “JFB”). We can see here that the Messiah’s dominion will be the whole world, while the center—and probably the throne—is Jerusalem.

***“As for you also,***

***Because of the blood of your covenant,***

God is still referring to Jerusalem, here (“JFB”). This part is about a blood covenant. A blood covenant is a pact sealed with blood, like the covenant that has to do with circumcision. This covenant is probably about animal sacrifices (“JFB”).

***I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.***

At first glance, “waterless pit” sounds like hell, but it is in fact most likely a cistern/well—a pit dug into the ground to collect water—like the one Joseph’s brothers threw him into (“Strong’s H953”; Lewis; “JFB”). Empty pits were used in the process of enslaving people (“JFB”). This is what the waterless pit is referring to, not hell. Depression may also have something to do with it, as well as hopelessness.

“Prisoners” are simply people who are bound in or to something (“Strong’s H615”). The prisoners in question are “prisoners of hope,” which is further in the passage (*Spiritual, Zec.* 9.12). “Prisoners of hope” are those who, “in spite of afflictions maintain hope in the covenant-keeping God” (“JFB”). Unbelievers say that there is no hope, but believers have hope—thanks to the Messiah (“JFB”). So, this line is about God answering believers’ hope with deliverance.



***Return to the stronghold,***

***You prisoners of hope.***

A stronghold back then was a fortress—which is in contrast to a waterless pit and is an image of security (“Strong’s H1225”; “JFB”). This line could be for the captives returning from the recent war (“JFB”), or for modern day believers waiting for the rapture of the church.

***Even today I declare***

***That I will restore double to you.***

“Today” could be a very significant word in this line. In some cases, it has to do with the “day of the Lord,” when “Zion’s King shall come to her deliverance” (“JFB”). It is very likely that this passage is not only talking about the coming of the Messiah, but also about the coming of the King after the tribulation. Similar to how God restored Job, these lines are a promise that God will bless the “prisoners of hope.” He will restore double to those who have suffered for Him.

***For I have bent Judah, My bow,***

***Fitted the bow with Ephraim,***

“Bending” has to do with war or setting a target—especially when it comes to stringing a bow (“Strong’s H1869”). Judah is a tribe and a territory between Geba to Rimmon (Robinson). Jerusalem is also between Geba and Rimmon, so Judah here is Jerusalem. “Fitting” has to do with notching an arrow, and in this case it involves overcoming Greece, as stated here (“JFB”):

***And raised up your sons, O Zion,***

***Against your sons, O Greece,***

***And made you like the sword of a mighty man.”***

“Greece” was a place in Arabia (“Strong’s H3120”). “Sword” is used as a symbol of authority, power, or destruction in war (“Sword”). A “mighty man” is a warrior, usually a strong man (“Strong’s 1368”). God ends this passage with a promise of strength to Jerusalem.

This passage was a message from God saying that the people of Jerusalem should rejoice because He was sending the Messiah, who would deliver them. The purpose of this was to give hope and inspire. The people of Jerusalem were discouraged and needed hope in order for them to do what needed to be done and rebuild the temple. For us, this could be a message for Christ’s second coming. He came as a lamb once, but will return as the lion—the King—to rule over the earth. Everyone knows His throne will be in Jerusalem, but His kingdom will be the world. He will return to earth on “the day of the Lord,” which could either be the rapture of the church or the start of the millennium—or both. If this passage inspired people to build a temple, then it should inspire us to build up the kingdom of God by reaching out to unbelievers and training fellow Christians.

Above all, we shouldn’t let the world bring us down. Terrorism is on the rise, the weather is getting insane, crime is ridiculous, the economy is on the fritz, and immaturity spikes with each new generation. We shouldn’t feel doomed or scared; many Christians are afraid of Nibiru and terrorists and the government. But this passage commands us to rejoice and to have hope, because one day Christ will return and set it right.

This is only the beginning of the exegesis of this passage. There is still much more to discover; I have only covered the basics. Like I stated before, there is no end to learning—no end to God’s Word. How much more then should we be **glad**! If God’s Word is so great, then He is surely greater! We should all have hope and remember that the blood of Jesus has set us free.

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