

Peace to the Nations

Devotional Reading: [Isaiah 55](#)

Background Scripture: [Zechariah 9:9–17](#)

[Zechariah 9:9–13, 16–17](#)

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**9 Rejoice 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.

10 I 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.

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

12 Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope;
even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.

13 I 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.

16 The 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.

17 How attractive and beautiful they will be!
Grain will make the young men thrive,
and new wine the young women.

Key Text

The 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.

—**Zechariah 9:16**

The Righteous Reign of God

Unit 1: The Prophets Proclaim God's Power

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the biblical fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy.
2. Explain the significance of that fulfillment.
3. State one reason why that fulfillment should make a difference in his or her life.

Lesson Outline

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- C. Lesson Context: Zechariah as Prophecy
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- A. Play Money vs. Real Money
- B. Prayer
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How to Say It

apocalypse *uh-pock-uh-lips.*

Babylonian *Bab-ih-low-nee-un.*

Ephraim *Ee-fray-im.*

Ezra *Ez-ruh.*

Haggai *Hag-eye* or *Hag-ay-eye.*

Judah *Joo-duh.*

Mediterranean *Med-uh-tuh-ray-nee-un.*

Zechariah *Zek-uh-rye-uh.*

Zephaniah *Zef-uh-nye-uh.*

Zion *Zi-un.*

Introduction

A. 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.

B. 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 BC 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 will be rebuilt” ([1:16](#)). In that regard, those two prophets lived during the time of King Darius of Persia, who reigned from 522 to 486 BC.

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 BC). He defeated the Persian army under Darius III at the famous battle of Issus in 333 BC, 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.

I. The Lord’s King ([Zechariah 9:9](#))

A. Rejoicing Commanded (v. [9a](#))

**[9a](#). Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,**

Parallelism, a feature of Hebrew poetry, is seen when the writer repeats a thought by using words that are synonyms or are nearly so. We see two instances of parallelism before us: the words translated *rejoice* and *shout* both imply a celebration in this context; likewise, the designations *Zion* and *Jerusalem* are parallel. Those two designations combine with the word *daughter* in nine instances in the Old Testament. One such is [Zephaniah 3:14](#), which expresses an imperative that is virtually identical to the one in our text (see [lesson 4](#)). Recognizing parallelism keeps us from the error of seeing two actions, locations, etc., being described when in fact there is only one.

The celebration is to be in response to the arrival of a *king* in the city. This royal arrival is not one of conquest, given the commands to rejoice

and shout. Monarchs sometimes came with armies to conquer or punish a rebellious group (2 Chronicles 36:17; etc.). But the arrival of this king is to be an occasion of rejoicing; the rest of verse 9, below, tells us why.

B. Reasons to Rejoice (vv. 9b–c)

9b. righteous and victorious,

To be *righteous* is to be just, which is how the same Hebrew word is translated in 2 Chronicles 12:6. This is definitely a quality that you want in your king! His righteousness is to be one hallmark of his reign. This king will rule for the benefit of the people, doing what is best for them. We see the ideas of being just and having *victorious* salvation together in several other passages, especially Jeremiah 23:5–6.

9c. lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Kings are often arrogant in wielding power. Amazingly, this king will be exactly the opposite! We see this trait of lowliness throughout the earthly life of Jesus, from birth to death. The animal that he chose to ride in his triumphal entry into Jerusalem is but one example. It was his city and his temple, but he entered it in the same way as thousands of others.

Each of the four Gospels tells of the fulfillment of this predicted event (Matthew 21:1–11; Mark 11:1–10; Luke 19:28–40; John 12:12–19). And all four Gospels refer to the animal on which Jesus rode into the city. A donkey was for common people; kings were expected to be on horses or in chariots (compare 2 Kings 9:21).

Matthew 21:4 affirms specifically that “this took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet.” John 12:14 is more succinct in declaring the fulfillment to be “as it is written.”

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 or hopelessness?

A Surprising Nature

When my parents were newlyweds in the 1960s, they accepted a large loan from an elderly relative as a down payment on their first house. What appeared to be an unselfish act of generosity soon turned into misery for my parents, however. The anxious gentleman repeatedly called them to ask about repayment. He fretted to other relatives about the loan, even though my parents were making all their payments on time. My dad worked overtime hours in order to be able to repay the loan early and be freed from this emotional pit.

Thirty years later, my parents loaned money to me and my wife for the same purpose. But the loan actually turned out to be a gift because they ultimately refused to accept repayment. Which of these two accounts better illustrates the surprising nature of King Jesus? How should your conclusion be reflected in your service to him?

—A. W.

II. The Lord's Kingdom **(Zechariah 9:10–13)**

A. Peace Secured (v. 10)

10. I 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.

Ephraim is the name of one of the 10 northern tribes of Israel ([Numbers 1:33](#); etc.). As that designation is used here, however, it stands for the entire northern nation of divided Israel. Similarly, *Jerusalem* in this context stands for the southern kingdom of divided Israel, sometimes called Judah. The intention is to show that the entirety of Israel is included in this promise (compare [Isaiah 7:17](#); [11:13](#); [Ezekiel 37:16](#); [Hosea 5:12–14](#); [6:4](#)).

Through the use of various images, Zechariah foretold the *peace* that the coming king was to bring to the nation. This peace would not be only for the nation of Israel, but for everyone—pictured as being *from sea to sea* and *from the River* (perhaps the Euphrates River) to *the ends of the earth*. His reign will extend throughout the planet; no place will be exempt. There will be no small regional wars, no pockets of resistance. It will be peace, peace, peace, forever and ever!

This prediction calls again to mind the concept of prophetic foreshortening, discussed above. The events of [Zechariah 9:9](#) have already occurred, but those of the verse before us are yet to happen in a physical sense and are still in progress in a spiritual sense. This peace is more than mere absence of conflict between humans. It is the peace of reconciliation between God and people.

This verse features a subtle change that is easy to overlook. Notice that the verse begins with what *I will* do with the chariots, and then it shifts to the fact that *he will proclaim peace*. From our perspective in the year 2023, it is obvious that the reference in [Zechariah 9:9](#) is to Jesus, so the *he* here in verse [10](#) refers to what the Son of God would do. Even so,

[Matthew 10:34–36](#) speaks of the conflict he brings as well.

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?

B. Prisoners Released (v. 11)

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

This verse raises an important question: Is the phrase *the blood of my covenant* looking to the past (as in [Exodus 24:8](#)) 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*. The additional description of such a place being waterless brings to mind the prophet Jeremiah, who as a prisoner was once confined in such a place ([Jeremiah 38:6](#); compare [Genesis 37:24](#)). The shedding of Jesus' blood gave hope to the hopeless—those trapped in the bondage pit of sin.

Visual for [Lesson 5](#). *Point to this visual as you ask learners how they have been “saved to shine” in light of this lesson’s Scripture text.*

Even so, a double reference may be intended. 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.

C. Promise of Plenty (v. 12)

12. Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.

Those who are *prisoners of hope* are commanded to go to a place of security. The original word being translated *fortress* is difficult; this is the only place in the Old Testament where the Hebrew word occurs, so there are no other texts to compare it with. The most likely meaning is that it refers to Jerusalem. At the time Zechariah prophesied, Jerusalem's walls had not yet been rebuilt. So any safety experienced in that location would have to come from God personally (compare and contrast [Joel 3:16](#)).

The imagery indicates that when one returns to God, he will give more than was expected. The ancient Israelites had received a double portion of God's wrath for their idolatry; but they could experience a double portion of God's blessing by returning to him (compare [Isaiah 40:2](#); [51:19](#); [61:7](#); [Jeremiah 16:18](#); [Revelation 18:6](#)).

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"?

D. Promise of Power (v. 13)

13. I 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.

On the extended references to *Judah* and *Ephraim* and the ultimate disposition of weapons of war, see on [Zechariah 9:10](#), above. The phrase *against your sons, Greece* reverses the problem noted in [Joel 3:6](#) (compare

[Daniel 8:21](#); [10:20](#); [11:2](#)). Although the arrival of the Messiah is some 500 years beyond the time of Zechariah’s prophecy, God promises to rescue his people during that (to the readers, uncertain) interval.

After Alexander the Great died in 323 BC, his Greek Empire was divided among four of his generals. The boundary between two of their territories ran through Palestine, which became a flash point for conflict. The Apocrypha, nonbiblical writings from the time between the Old and New Testaments, documents these conflicts. The most significant was the Maccabean Revolt of 167–160 BC. It wasn’t until 152 BC that the Jews regained their autonomy. But it didn’t last. By 63 BC, the land of Judah and surroundings were again under foreign domination: the Roman Empire. More details about God’s plan to defend his people are found in [Zechariah 12:1–9](#).

III. The Lord’s Care ([Zechariah 9:16–17](#))

A. The Lord Saves (v. 16)

16a. The LORD their God will save his people on that day as a shepherd saves his flock.

The figure of speech for the Lord’s *people* changes from military action 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.

16b. They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown.

The imagery changes yet again. 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 sparkle in his land like jewels* as a witness for all to see.

What Do You Think?

Who in your life demonstrates an attitude befitting a jewel in God's crown?

Digging Deeper

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

The 50-Cow Wife

In a certain African tribe, it was the custom for a man to give a gift of cows to his bride's father as compensation for the father's expenses in rearing her. A particularly desirable match from a prominent family might fetch a bride-price of 20 or even 30 cows. Much more common was a gift of 10 cows or fewer, due to the poverty of the area.

A young man once came to a village with a vast herd of 50 cattle, and he offered a father the whole herd in exchange for his daughter—a plain, shy girl with dim marriage prospects. Shocked, the father hastily agreed.

The village did not hear from the couple for a year. But one day the man returned with a glowing, beautiful woman by his side. She was adorned like an African princess and was carrying a healthy baby. At first the people of the village thought he had taken a different wife. But looking closer, they realized she was the one from their village! "How did you know that she would actually become a beautiful woman?" they

asked. He replied, “A woman’s true beauty is found in the eyes of the man who values her most.”

God values you more than anything—so much so that he purchased you at an astounding price. Are you willing for God to hold you up like a crown for the whole world to see how and why he values you?

—A. W.

B. The Lord Supplies (v. 17)

17. How attractive and beautiful they will be! Grain will make the young men thrive, and new wine the young women.

Two sudden praises are a response to the promises of the previous verse. God is great—all the time! The language of *attractive and beautiful* 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; they would thrive because of the food. Food was not taken for granted. When the word *grain* 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](#)).

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?

Conclusion

A. 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?

B. 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. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Jesus’ kingdom is superior to any alternative—now and forever.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Start with an activity to get people thinking about gratitude. Draw a large heart on your board. Distribute small sticky notes and pencils. Invite participants to quickly write things they're grateful for (each on a separate note) and then attach them to the large heart. Read aloud some of the responses as you discuss together what people put in the large heart.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Attitude of Gratitude” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it individually (in a minute or less) before revealing the answers.

After calling time on either alternative, invite responses to these questions: 1—What does gratitude do for us? 2—How is gratitude connected to worship? Transition by talking about how the group will be studying verses from Zechariah to discover that there is much to rejoice about and be thankful for!

Into the Word

Divide the participants into small groups. Distribute a handout (you create) of the questions below for in-group discussions. At the top put the heading *Prophecy Fulfilled*. Then include the instructions and questions with space for them to write answers. Do not to include the

answers in italics: Read [Zechariah 9:9](#) and answer the following questions. 1—At the time when Jesus lived on earth, what were the people’s expectations about the Messiah? (*They thought he would be a king who would come in great power and conquer the Romans.*) 2—What was included in this prophecy that should have given them different expectations? (*It says he would be “lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey”.*) 3—All four Gospels tell the story of Jesus’ triumphal entry. What are the four references? ([Matthew 21:1–11](#); [Mark 11:1–10](#); [Luke 19:28–40](#); [John 12:12–19](#)) 4—How is Zechariah’s prophecy fulfilled by Jesus? (*He enters the city of Jerusalem riding on a donkey, and the people are praising him and rejoicing.*) After calling time, ask groups to share their answers with the class.

Ask for a volunteer to read [Zechariah 9:10–13, 16–17](#). Invite the group to describe what the coming king will be like. Write the descriptors on the board throughout the discussion. Use the following questions to help frame the discussion. Possible answers are in italics: 1—What word will he speak to the nations? (*peace*) 2—How far will his dominion extend? (*from sea to sea and to the ends of the earth*) 3—How will he set prisoners free? (*by the blood of the covenant*) 4—What word does he give to the prisoners? (*hope*) 5—In what way will he be like a shepherd? (*He will save his flock.*) 6—Which image does he use to show how God will view his people? (*jewels in a crown*)

Bring everyone back together for a whole-class discussion on how Jesus fulfilled the position of king as described by Zechariah. Write their ideas on the board.

Into Life

Have participants form their small groups again. Ask groups to dis-

cuss the wrong ideas many people today have about who Jesus is. Then ask groups to compare those wrong ideas with the description of Jesus as king. After allowing time for the groups to discuss, invite the whole group to share ideas about how to present Jesus as he really is.

Alternative. Distribute copies of “Play by the Rules” exercise from the activity page. Have participants work in groups of three or four to complete as indicated before sharing their rules with the larger group. Allow several minutes for groups to complete this activity.

In the remaining minutes, have participants each write a short prayer rejoicing and thanking God for the many wonderful qualities in Jesus, our king and Messiah.