

PRISONERS OF HOPE

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The first “oracle” or “burden” (KJV) announces the victory that will be achieved over the traditional enemies of the covenant people, namely, from the north, Hadrach (near Hamath), Damascus (Aram and Syria), Tyre and Sidon, and from the west, the Philistines (9:1-6), who will come under the judgment of Yahweh’s word. But not all inhabitants of these regions will be destroyed; some will be incorporated into the people to be claimed by our God (9:7). Here there is a reminder of how the covenant people will include more than just the biological descendants of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). This universalism, to be realized in the New Testament age of the kingdom and of the eternal redeemed people of God. A lasting peace is assured because Yahweh will watch over his people (9:8). These blessings to come lead Zechariah to call his fellow Jerusalemites to joy.

The terms used by Zechariah as he calls the people to give expression to their joy indicate that he expects to hear a great noise. The reason for this joyous, tumultuous sound is given: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee.” Zech. 9:9. Zechariah had assured his audience before that Yahweh promised to reside in Jerusalem (Zech. 2:10). Now he sees their king coming in. Zechariah calls the people to great expressions of joy because their messiah King is on his way to them.

Zechariah describes the coming king with four ascriptions: “He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.” Zech. 9:9.

1. He is *saddiq* (righteous). The righteous king demonstrates this quality in his administration: right conduct will be encouraged and wrong behavior punished. The poor and oppressed will not only get a hearing but also the help they need. Those who are in the right will triumph under the righteous king’s reign. In short, the messianic king will meet and execute all covenantal requirements; he will be the perfect covenant keeper and administrator.

Take a closer look at the procession which attends Jesus in His triumphal march into the city. Who are these who are thus raising their voices in honor of “the Son of David”? And what is the

significance of their presence in His train? The record speaks of “a very great multitude,” and of “the multitudes that went before, and that followed,” but who are they? The closing part of the twentieth chapter will indicate the answer to this question. There were “two blind men sitting by the way,” and they cried, “Lord, that our eyes may be opened.” And when their request was granted, “they followed Him.” And so it was that His followers were largely those whom He had relieved from disease, or affliction of some kind. And among the rest was Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead, for some had come “not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom He had raised from the dead.” John 12:9.

2. He is *ndsd* (a saving one, niphal of *ydsa*, to save). This term could be read to say—the saved or delivered One. If that nuance is present, it does not exclude the thought that as such He brings deliverance. Being a victory, he brings victory. Recall that the name *Joshua* is also derived from the same Hebrew root, and the name *Jesus* (Gk. *Iesous*) reflects the same thought (Savior from sin) (Matt. 1:21).

3. He is “lowly” (*ani*). This Hebrew term carries various nuances: being poor, weak, oppressed, gentle, and humble. Since it is combined with the following phrases, the preference here would be “gentle” (NIV) or “humble” (RSV). Victorious and righteous as He is, the king will not employ brute force; He will not be harsh and lacking in compassion. Having experienced affliction and oppression, being a delivered One himself, he will identify with His suffering people who sorely need compassion, mercy, gentleness, and sympathetic understanding. It should be noted that the priestly dimension of the messianic concept is present as much as, if not more than, the royal. Zechariah, as he had proclaimed previously (6:9-15), combines these two offices, functions, and tasks in one person.

4. And he is *werokeb* (riding) upon a donkey, upon the colt of a female ass. He rides a donkey rather than a horse (Zech. 9:9). Resumed there is the patriarch Jacob’s testamentary blessing on Judah (Gen. 49:8-12), in which Shiloh, the coming one, tethers his donkey to the vine. A special designation for the donkey, shared by these two passages alone in the Old Testament, has been found to refer to a particular kind of animal that was used in the death-ritual by

which ancient covenants were ratified.¹ Accordingly, in the fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah 9 at the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (Mt. 21:4, 5), the donkey on which the Lord rode presaged the cross and the shedding of the blood of the new covenant. This donkey colt identified the lion of Judah as the lamb of God. Summed up in the two images of the mounted Messiah in Zechariah 1 and 9, the rider of the red horse and the rider of the donkey colt, is the dual status of Jesus as covenant Lord and covenant Servant; his double advent for sacrificial atonement and the judicial conquest; his two-stage career of humiliation and exalted glory.

The idea of a royal descendant having a donkey had been stated by Jacob as he blessed his son Judah (Gen. 49:11). The preferred conclusion then is that as the righteous, victorious, saving, and gentle king comes to his people, he comes as one of the humble and poor. Indeed, he is the representative of Yahweh, the owner of all the wealthy of the nations (Hag. 2:8-9), but as the royal Priestly One he comes to his people in humility and poverty (Isa. 52:12-53:5).

The public ministry of our Lord was now drawing to its close, and with His disciples He was on the way to Jerusalem to the last Passover. The prophecies concerning the Messiah, marking out the course of His life with great definiteness, had found their fulfillment in Him. He was the Word made flesh, and naturally we read “that it might be fulfilled” and “as it was written” as the key notes to all His experiences. So it is in this case. Jesus had so carefully studied “in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself,” and had found His own mission and work so plainly set forth in them, that His every act was guided by them. So He sent His disciples for the ass and the colt, and “all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.” Verses 4, 5.

So it was as “King” that He entered Jerusalem. His disciples and those who had witnessed His works had long desired that He should take the throne, and on one occasion Jesus “perceived that they

¹ “To my lord say: Thus Ibal-Il, thy servant. The tablet of Ibal-Adad from Aslakka (5) reached me and I went to Aslakka to ‘kill an ass’ between the Hanu and Idamaras. . . . I caused the foal of an ass to be slaughtered.” See *Archives royales de Mari*, II, No. 37:5-14. An English translation of the text is available in J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (3rd edition, 1969), p. 482c.

would come and take Him by force, to make Him a king,” but He had hitherto firmly restrained any such tendency. Now however the hopes of the disciples were raised to the highest pitch, for He had allowed them to put their own garments under Him (see 2 Kings 9:11-13), “and a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way.” Moreover they see that Jesus does not attempt to quiet the multitude as they shout with one accord, “Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.” Surely, thought they, the time of deliverance has come, and He is about to set up the throne. And this was true, but not as they were anticipating. It was an infinitely greater deliverance than from the Roman yoke that He was about to make sure for them, even “from the power of darkness;” and while the Scripture was now to be fulfilled, “and the Lord shall give unto Him the throne of His father David,” yet that throne was in the New Jerusalem above, and not in old Jerusalem below. And they did not understand that the way to the throne was by the cross of Calvary.

And so the procession moved on. And “much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet Him,” and they also joined in the cry, “Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.” John 12:12, 13. “And when He was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?” So great was the stir that when the priest blew the trumpets to call the people to the temple at the time of the evening sacrifice, there was not one to answer to their call to worship, and they, stirred to envy, said, “Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after Him.” John 12:19.

In the days of Rome, when some leader had been especially successful in conquest, it was customary for the Senate to grant him a triumph, and in the triumphal procession there would often be led some captives brought from the conquered province as evidences of the victory gained. Now it was the mission of Jesus to this world “to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound,” and to wrest this world from the hands of the enemy by His death on the cross. And as evidence of His Messiahship, Jesus told His inquiring disciples, “Go and show John again those things which you do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead

are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them.” Matt. 11:4, 5.

Thus Jesus, in proof of the success of His mission, was attended in His triumphal entry by those whom He had released from the power of His and their enemy. There was Lazarus, who had been rescued “from the power of the grave,” leading on the way; there were those who had been dumb, now using their tongues to shout His praise; there were those who had been deaf, who now hear their own voices calling the chorus of shouts; there were those who had been blind, looking with gratitude upon their benefactor; there were those who had been lame, now conspicuous among those “that went before.” This is a triumphal procession indeed, and the evidences of victory are abundant. No such triumphs as this had ever been accorded to any Roman consul, since no such victory could be gained by force of arms. Infinite love had gained the victory and it was Love’s triumph.

But after all, this triumphal entry into old Jerusalem is but typical of that triumphal entry into the New Jerusalem which was then so near. It was when He ascended up on high, after His resurrection, that he “led a multitude of captives” (Eph. 4:8, margin) who had been raised from the dead at His crucifixion and resurrection (Matt. 27:52, 53), and then as He neared the gates of the heavenly city, the cry was raised, “Who is this King of glory?” And the answer was given, “The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.” This was the same Jesus who rode into Jerusalem “meek, and sitting upon an ass.” His meekness was a genuine meekness of true greatness.

The results of the coming and the presence of the Priest-King are stated in 9:10. But it is not the king who takes the initiative. “And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim.” Zech. 9:10. The Septuagint, which some English translations follow, has changed the personal pronoun / of *wehikrati* (and I will cut off) to *he* will cut off (Gk. *exolothreuoēi*). It is Yahweh himself who continues to care for his people and uphold his covenant with them. But it is through his agent, the messianic son of the Davidic house, that He will bring to pass the following:

First, the means of warfare will be “cut off,” namely, chariots of Ephraim, war horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow, all referring to both offensive and defensive warfare. In other words, war will be no more!

Second, another great blessing will follow naturally from the first. “And He shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the

earth.” Zech. 9:10. He will declare *salom* (peace) (cf. Hag. 2:9; Ezek. 37:26; Isa. 9:6). Harmony and wholeness will surely be present. They had been promised to the covenant people before; now Zechariah proclaims it to be for the *goyim* (nations, i.e., all people). And the peace so declared can and will be realized because of *maslo* (his reign)—that of the messianic Priest-King which, as stated in Psalm 72:8, was to be exercised “from sea to sea” and “to the ends of the earth.”

The Messiah Priest-King will achieve this great victory by virtue of the blood of the everlasting covenant. “As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.” Zech. 9:11.

Animal blood was used to ratify the old covenant which was the people’s promise to obey God’s words. “And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.” Exodus 24:7, 8. Israel’s promise to obey was soon broken and so their covenant brought no forgiveness of sins and power to deliver from its bondage. The blood of animals pointed forward to the greater blood of salvation and deliverance in the Messiah Jesus. His sinless and endless life provides the power to forgive sins and deliver from sin’s bondage. It is this blood which ratified the new covenant. When Jesus gave the cup to the disciples at the Passover He said, “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” Matthew 26:28. Since there is no deliverance in the people’s promise of the old covenant, the blood of “thy covenant” to which salvation is attributed in Zechariah is the promise of God’s everlasting covenant.

God declares that He will liberate the prisoners from “the waterless pit.” The metaphor recalls the waterless pit in which Joseph’s brothers threw him (Gen. 37:24). Similarly, Jeremiah’s foes sought to rid themselves of God’s faithful, weeping prophet by casting him into a pit without water (Jer. 38:6). Isaiah described the ministry of the Servant of the Lord as a work of freeing “captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness” (Isa. 42:7).

“Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even to day do I declare that I will render double unto thee.” Zech. 9:12. When the prophet exhorted his readers to “return to your fortress” he reminded

them all that only the Lord can serve as a true fortress for the people. God can and will preserve and protect His people. Why should anyone vainly seek elsewhere for blessing? Accordingly, Luther's famous hymn leads the faithful to remember the God who serves as their true Protector and Benefactor:

A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing:
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe:
His craft and pow'r are great,
And, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

"Ask ye of the LORD rain in the time of the latter rain; so the LORD shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field." Zech. 10:1.

There is nothing that Satan fears so much as that the people of God shall clear the way by removing every hinderance, so that the Lord can pour out his Spirit upon a languishing church and an impenitent congregation. . . . Satan can no more hinder a shower of blessing from descending upon God's people than he can close the windows of heaven that rain cannot come upon the earth. RH 3-22-1887.

Perhaps no other subject should receive our attention as the subject of the Holy Spirit and the close relationship to the plan of redemption. We are told that the Holy Spirit was given as a "regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail." Why? Because "sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead" (DA 671). The Holy Spirit is the "representative" of Christ Himself, and is "accessible to all" (DA 669). "This promised blessing, claimed by faith, brings all other blessings in its train" (DA 672). This was the subject upon which Christ "dwelt most largely" during his earthly ministry (1SM 156).

During the last one hundred and fifty years Seventh-day Adventists have given much attention to the subject of the Holy Spirit. In the Index to the Writings of E. G. White, thirty pages of references are listed for the topic of the Holy Spirit. Many Adventist books have been written over the years on the subject, all seeking to present more clearly the work of the Holy Spirit and our need of His indwelling.

The “early rain” and “latter rain” are intimately connected with this topic for they also “represent the work of the Holy Spirit” (TM 506). “The outpouring of the Spirit in the days of the apostles was the beginning of the early, or former, rain, and glorious was the result” (AA 54, 55). The disciples, who only a few days before had all deserted Christ, now boldly testified of Him. The “result” of the early rain was soon realized; three thousand were “converted” in a day and in a short time the world was “turned upside down” (Acts 17:6).

Those of us living at the close of this earth’s history have reason for rejoicing: “The great work of the gospel is not to close with less manifestation of the power of God than marked its opening. The prophecies which were fulfilled in the outpouring of the former rain at the opening of the gospel, are again to be fulfilled in the latter rain at its close” (GC 611). For us today the early rain represents the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion and the process of spiritual growth “from one stage to another.” The latter rain, ripening earth’s harvest, “represents the spiritual grace that prepares the church for the coming of the Son of man.” But if the early rain has not done its work “the latter rain can bring no seed to perfection” (TM 506).

The loud cry is closely connected with the latter rain, for those who receive the heavenly showers will give the final message of God to the world. “It is the latter rain, the refreshing from the presence of the Lord, the loud cry of the third angel” that enables God’s people to “speak forth the truth with great power” amidst the most trying circumstances (EW 271). This “refreshing from the presence of the Lord, will come, to give power to the loud voice of the third angel, and prepare the saints to stand in the period when the seven last plagues shall be poured out” (EW 86).

This “last message of mercy to be given to the world is a revelation of His character of love” (COL 415), “the message of Christ’s righteousness” (6T 19), the message of “justification by faith” which is the “third angel’s message in verity [truth]” (1SM 372). This message God has “commanded to be given to the world . . . which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of His Spirit in a large measure” (TM 92). We may look forward to the time when “the events of the Day of Pentecost shall be repeated with even greater power than on that occasion. John says, ‘I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory’ [Rev. 18:1]” (6BC 1055).

Everybody on earth is called to learn about the work of the Holy Spirit, especially in these last days. He is doing a mighty work; the vast universe of intelligent beings is concerned about what He is doing here on planet earth; how much more, we!

(a) The “early rain” of the Holy Spirit enables people to overcome all *known* sin (John 16:8).

(b) But the “latter rain” prepares believers to overcome *all sin*, even that now *unknown* to them. Don’t say that’s impossible: David prays our daily prayer, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23, 24).

(c) Many great saints died before our Day of Atonement in which we now live, not knowing they were in transgression of God’s holy law; for example, Wesley who never kept the Bible Sabbath and Luther, died drinking his beer. Their level of faith was sufficient for their time; but now we face the final Time of Trouble and the call to be ready to be translated (1 Thess. 4:15-17). Frightening? No! Not if we understand the “everlasting gospel” (Rev. 14:6, 7)

(d) The greatest sins ever committed were *unknown* sin.

(e) “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,” prayed Jesus at His cross.

(f) The “latter rain” prepares a people to sit with Christ on His throne, and exercise executive authority with Him in bringing to a *close* the great controversy with Satan (Rev. 3:21). The “early rain” merely *extenuates* it. Christ wants and deserves closure.

(g) The Lord cannot translate sin buried deep in a human heart, unknown. His presence is death to sin.

(h) The “latter rain” is not emotional excitement, but solid truth not previously perceived. That truth will enable believers to overcome, even as [Christ] overcame.

(i) If ever the gospel has been the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes (Rom. 1:16), it is now when it’s to be understood in the light of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary.