

Great Expectations **Zechariah 9:1-10:12**

Suppose you promised your 14-year old son a new car for his 18th birthday. What would he expect?

- A Hyundai Getz?
- A Mitsubishi Lancer?
- A Ford Falcon?
- A Toyota Landcruiser?
- A Rolls Royce?

Would a second-hand car qualify? Would he interpret new as meaning "brand new" or simply "new to him"? Would a Tonka Truck qualify? What if you gave him all the individual bits of a new car and a manual on how to put them all together? Would that qualify? What sort of expectations would he have on the basis of your promise?

When we read the Old Testament, we find God making promises about a Messiah. People had various expectations about what that meant. This Messiah would be greater than anything they'd experienced. This Messiah would bring in God's kingdom.

- Would he be like a prophet?
- Would he be like a priest?
- Would he be a wise sage?
- Would he be a great warrior?
- Would he be a marvellous king?
- Would he be like superman?

People had various clues from different parts of the Old Testament. And they tried to fit them together to come up with the right idea of who the Messiah would be and what He'd do when He came. Zechariah adds a few more clues as to what they should expect. The question is: how did these clues fit in with the puzzle pieces they already

had?

Zechariah 9-14 form their own section of the book. The chapters are two oracles – one covering chapters 9 to 11 and the other chapters 12 to 14. The NIV has put the word as a heading at the beginning of each chapter. We'll spend two weeks on each oracle – so I'm only going to get through half the first one today.

The two oracles don't necessarily follow chronological order. We usually read that way – but that's not always the way things are written.

- So, it's not that the stuff in the first oracle comes first and then we get the stuff in the second one.
- Nor is it that the stuff in each of the oracles necessarily proceeds in chronological order.

We need to keep that possibility in mind as we read.

The Defeat of God's Enemies

Well, let's start to work our way through this first oracle. Zechariah 9:1-8. We read these verses a few moments ago. On the surface, they're fairly straightforward – once we work out where all these places are. It's talking about God's judgment that'll come on these various cities and nations.

- Hadrach isn't mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. There are Assyrian inscriptions that refer to it – and it seems likely that it's north of Damascus.
- Damascus was north of Israel.
- Hamath was also north of Damascus.
- Tyre and Sidon were two coastal cities west of Damascus. They were very wealthy cities.
- Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and Ashdod were four of the five Philistine cities west of Jerusalem. The

Philistines controlled the coastal plains on the Mediterranean. Enemies usually came from the north at this time – and if Tyre and Sidon fell, the Philistine cities knew they were next in line.

So, there's this list of places to the north and west of Jerusalem that'll be conquered and destroyed. One may well ask: Why these nations? They don't seem to have been particularly troublesome towards Israel at this time. Israel's problems had come from further to the east.

- It's the Assyrians who'd swept down and wiped out the northern kingdom.
- It's the Babylonians who did the same to Jerusalem.
- The Medes and the Persians were the current overlords. Sure, they let the Israelites go back home – but they still kept their finger on the pulse of what was happening and, ultimately, they called the shots.

Why not talk about the downfall of these nations?

It could be these nations are simply closer. God picks a selection of places as representing all His enemies. God's about to come and, when He does, He'll conquer all enemies. Or it may be that God's simply following the path taken by those earlier invaders. As they swept down from the north towards Jerusalem, this is the path they took. As God sweeps down to take His rightful place in Jerusalem, He deals with His enemies on the way. More significantly, these places are within the borders of the land promised to Abraham. As God establishes His kingdom, He rules over the whole land.

When will this happen? Clearly from Zechariah's time, it's still future. This is God's promise of what He will do.

Some scholars claim this was fulfilled in 332BC. Alexander the Great swept down and overran these places. As God used Cyrus of Persia to be His servant, so He could use Alexander of Greece in the same way.

But I don't think that's right. Verse 8 speaks of God setting up His house. Alexander didn't do that. Verse 8 speaks of God's people never again being overrun. Alexander did overrun them. Others have overrun them since. The most devastating time was AD70 – when the Romans took the rebellious city and destroyed the temple. God's promise here is that a time's coming when He'll deal with all His enemies and take control over His land and rule His people and defend them from their enemies. That still looks future to me.

Now, this is one of those places where you can see that these final chapters of Zechariah aren't presenting things in chronological order. Flip over to 14:2

I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city.

Zechariah sees a future where God's city will be fully safe and secure in 9:8 – but before that time, Jerusalem will again be ransacked in 14:2. It's like we've been given a stack of jigsaw pieces in these chapters – but we haven't been given the box with the picture on it to show us what it's supposed to look like.

Back to chapter 9. Look at verse 7.

Those who are left will belong to our God and become leaders in Judah,

and Ekron will be like the Jebusites.

When David conquered Jerusalem, he didn't destroy the inhabitants – rather, they were incorporated into the nation of Israel. So when God conquers His enemies – when God takes possession of His land – not all His enemies will be destroyed. Some will change sides. Some will become His people. Some will even become leaders.

That'll involve a change on their part. It's not simply that they keep doing their own thing – keep being Philistines but save their own skin by sending an annual membership fee to Jerusalem. No – they actually give up their anti-God practices – the things God's forbidden. They change their behaviour so it now conforms to what's required of God's people.

The Coming of God's King

That's the first part of God's promise – dealing with God's enemies. The second part has to do with the coming king. The familiar words of Zechariah 9:9

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!

Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,

righteous and having salvation,

gentle and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

I will take away the chariots from Ephraim

and the war-horses 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.

This passage brings together several images from various

parts of the Old Testament.

- Genesis 15 records a solemn covenant God makes with Abraham. At the conclusion of that ceremony, God promises Abraham several things – including the land from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.
- Genesis 49:8-12 brings together a king and a donkey. Jacob speaks about the future of his sons. When he gets to Judah, he says the kingship will remain with this tribe. And he says that the king will tether his donkey to a vine. It's a picture of prosperity – that grapes are so abundant it doesn't matter if the donkey eats his fill.
- Psalm 72 is a prayer for God's ideal king – perhaps the Davidic king in Jerusalem, perhaps the Messiah. This king will be righteous and rule in justice. He will bring prosperity to the people. He'll rule over his enemies. He'll *rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.*
- Isaiah 9:6-7 refers to the Child who'll be the Prince of Peace and who'll reign on David's throne with justice and righteousness.

Yet, there's a freshness to the way these images have been put together in Zechariah. Some important elements remain the same:

- This king brings a time of peace.
- This king rules over God's land.
- This king is righteous.

Yet, this king doesn't come in military conquest. He doesn't appear on the scene as the great military ruler. It's as if God's already achieved that in what He's done – or what He will do. God will take away the chariots and war-horses and break the battle bow. And so this King

doesn't come on a war-horse, but on a donkey. This King doesn't come prepared to lead the armies into battle. This King comes in gentleness and rules in peace. This King represents an alternative to being overthrown. For this King comes with salvation and proclaims peace. How does all this fit in with their expectations?

The Release of God's Prisoners

The rest of chapter 9 focuses on what the coming of this King will mean for those prepared to identify with Him and share in His rule. It's not all plain sailing.

- Some of them are prisoners who need release. They're still in exile. They live in the midst of a foreign kingdom and a hostile culture. They need to believe God's promise, see themselves as citizens of Jerusalem and live in the place of God's rule.
- And there are still battles ahead. There are enemies to fight. But they'll be victorious – because it's God who fights with and for His people. He'll ensure their victory. He'll protect them. He'll rescue them.

So, while there's this hint of difficulties and perhaps even suffering, it's not a cause for great alarm. The outcome's assured. The fighting won't last forever. God's King will win.

And when it's over, it's back to paradise under the rule of God's King. This is the future for God's people. This is the hope that should inspire them and enable them to keep going in the present. They will be God's own flock.

- They'll be precious in God's land – like the jewels you'd put in a crown.
- They'll enjoy prosperity that comes with bountiful harvests of good food.

So, there's this great picture Zechariah paints on his canvas. God's enemies defeated. God's King ruling over all the earth from Jerusalem. God's people living in peace and security and prosperity. It's a great future. This is what God will do.

The Upholding of God's Position

The beginning of chapter 10 introduces something of a negative note into this picture of the glorious future.

*Ask the Lord for rain in the springtime;
it is the Lord who makes the storm clouds,
He gives showers of rain to men,
and plants of the field to everyone.
The idols speak deceit,
diviners see visions that lie;
they tell dreams that are false,
they give comfort in vain.
Therefore the people wander like sheep
oppressed for lack of a shepherd.
"My anger burns against the shepherds,
and I will punish the leaders;
for the Lord Almighty will care
for His flock, the house of Judah,
and make them like a proud horse in battle
From Judah will come the cornerstone,
from him the tent peg,
from him the battle bow,
from him every ruler.
Together they will be like mighty men
trampling the muddy streets in battle.
Because the Lord is with them,
they will fight and overthrow the horsemen.*

There's a problem with God's people. It comes as a bit of

a shock after all this positive stuff of chapter 9. And it's hard to work out where it fits in relation to chapter 9.

- Is it before the coming of God's King – or after?
- Is it before the defeat of God's enemies – or after?
- In relation to Zechariah's time – is this in the near future or is it still a long way off?
- Has Zechariah gone back to before the exile?

The timing's not totally clear.

Yet, the principle is. Just as God's judgment comes to His enemies, so it comes to His own people. If there's to be a righteous rule of God's King, then it must truly be a righteous rule. And that righteous rule includes His rule over His own people. It's not that God gets rid of all His enemies so His people can enjoy their own unrighteousness without interference from their pagan neighbours. That doesn't make sense.

Here we see two wrong things in God's people.

- First, the people are looking for rain in the wrong place. They're turning to idols to provide rain – rather than asking God for it. They're turning to diviners to predict the best times to plant – rather than relying on God.
- Secondly, the shepherds – the leaders of Israel – aren't doing their job properly. They haven't cared for the people in the way they should. They haven't led the people the way they should.

I'm sure these weren't the only wrong things in God's people in Zechariah's time. We've seen others mentioned in earlier chapters.

Yet, these two are significant.

- The issue of idolatry points to lack of trust in God.

It points to substituting other things for God. Ultimately, it points to me staying on the throne of my life rather than submitting to God's King.

- The issue of bad leaders points to those who lead God's people in the wrong direction – leaders who teach them lies and falsehood instead of the truth.

How can the vision of chapter 9 become a reality if God's people are like this? This is the stuff that leads to aimless wandering and oppression and judgment – not paradise.

God promises to correct this situation. He'll punish the current crop of leaders. He'll provide proper leadership in its place – either a single leader or a plurality of leaders. They're unusual expressions used of this future leader – cornerstone, tent peg, battle bow. They're not used very often in the Old Testament as pictures of leadership. But the general idea's not too hard to work out. They're pictures of solidity and stability and security and reliability. Zechariah comes back to the issue of leadership and good and bad shepherds in chapter 11 – so we'll leave that issue till next week.

The New Exodus

Verse 6 returns to a positive note – to the earlier theme of victory and a great future:

*I will strengthen the house of Judah
and save the house of Joseph.*

I will restore them

because I have compassion on them.

They will be as though

I had not rejected them,

for I am the Lord their God

and I will answer them.

The Ephraimites will become like mighty men,

*and their hearts will be glad as with wine.
 Their children will see it and be joyful;
 their hearts will rejoice in the Lord.
 I will signal for them
 and gather them in.
 Surely I will redeem them;
 they will be as numerous as before.
 Though I scatter them among the peoples,
 yet in distant lands they will remember Me.
 They and their children will survive,
 and they will return.
 I will bring them back from Egypt
 and gather them from Assyria.
 I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon,
 and there will not be room enough for them.
 They will pass through the sea of trouble;
 the surging sea will be subdued
 and all the depths of the Nile will dry up.
 Assyria's pride will be brought down
 and Egypt's sceptre will pass away.
 I will strengthen them in the Lord
 and in His name they will walk,"
 declares the Lord.*

It's the language of God doing a new exodus.

- At that time, Pharaoh opposed God and refused to let the people go – but Pharaoh was no match for God.
- At that time, God brought them through the midst of the sea on dry ground – even nature can't prevent God achieving His purposes, since He made it and controls it.

It wasn't too hard for God to do that all those years ago.
It won't be too hard for God to do this new thing.

What did they Expect?

And so, what did Israel expect? They expected a warrior-king who'd defeat their enemies and establish the great Jewish state with the capital in Jerusalem. They expected the rule of their Messiah would be so absolute that there'd be no more wars. They expected him to rule in justice and fairness and to do away with evil. They expected the land to flourish so they became prosperous. They expected God would supply the rains in due season and the crops would grow abundantly. They expected the wealth of the nations to flow into Jerusalem.

What did we Get?

And what did we get? Turn with me again to John 12:12.

*The next day the great crowd that had come for the
 Feast heard that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem.
 They took palm branches and went out to meet Him,
 shouting,
 "Hosanna!"
 "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"
 "Blessed is the King of Israel!"*

That reflects their expectations. They quote Psalm 118 – a phrase that was thought to be about the Messiah. They wave palm branches – indicating nationalistic hopes. They want to make Jesus king and drive out the Romans.

Verse 14:

*Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is
 written:
 "Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion;
 see, your king is coming,
 seated on a donkey's colt."*

Jesus came as the King promised by Zechariah. This is how He chose to enter Jerusalem – the other gospels

indicate it's a deliberate choice. He enters Jerusalem, not as the warrior king expected by the crowds, but as the gentle king who comes in humility to bring peace. It's not the peace of this world – but the peace of God. And that's a peace He'd extend to the whole world.

Verse 16:

At first His disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realise that these things had been written about Him and that they had done these things to Him.

How is Jesus glorified? By going to the palace and kicking the current ruler out and taking his place? No. Jesus is glorified by ascending the cross and being lifted up from the earth. He doesn't come on a war-horse to lead armies in conquering victory. He comes on a donkey as the Prince of Peace who establishes peace by His death.

Verse 20:

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

Here we have the Gentiles coming to see Jesus – and Jesus sees that as the trigger for His crucifixion. Until this point in John's gospel, the hour is always future. Now it's arrived. Jesus sees it as arriving because the Gentiles have approached.

Jesus comes as the King promised by Zechariah. The Jews had fairly high expectations concerning this King –

expectations about their own well-being and security and prosperity and superiority. If those expectations had been fulfilled, they'd have just formed another world empire populated by corrupt people who still rebelled against God.

The sort of King Jesus is far exceeds those expectations – though most people don't see it. The problem is most people value the wrong things. They value wealth and position and prestige and dominance and having power. They pay lip-service to justice and goodness – as long as pursuing those things doesn't interfere with their power and wealth – but they aren't their real values.

The kingdom Jesus brings – the King God promised through Zechariah – is totally just and pure and gentle and good. The kingdom He rules values doing things right above economic prosperity. The peace He offers is peace with God – giving up the rebellion and submitting to God. The crowds that day didn't recognise it. A few days later they screamed for His crucifixion – and thus was God's King glorified.

We've been given the final piece to the jigsaw puzzle. We know Jesus is God's King. We know the sort of kingdom He rules over. We know where God is directing history. We know that now's the time to take the opportunity to give up the rebellion. What a tragedy it'd be if we failed to do that! Or what a tragedy it'd be if we just left Jesus on the edge of our lives and didn't truly treat Him as King – if we didn't live under His rule; if we didn't live as true citizens of His kingdom.