

# Beast of Burden

## *Part I of The First Burden of Zechariah*

- <sup>1</sup> The oracle of the word of the LORD is against the land of Hadrach and Damascus is its resting place. For the LORD has an eye on mankind and on all the tribes of Israel,
- <sup>2</sup> and on Hamath also, which borders on it, Tyre and Sidon, though they are very wise.
- <sup>3</sup> Tyre has built herself a rampart and heaped up silver like dust, and fine gold like the mud of the streets.
- <sup>4</sup> But behold, the Lord will strip her of her possessions and strike down her power on the sea, and she shall be devoured by fire.
- <sup>5</sup> Ashkelon shall see it, and be afraid; Gaza too, and shall writhe in anguish; Ekron also, because its hopes are confounded. The king shall perish from Gaza; Ashkelon shall be uninhabited;
- <sup>6</sup> a mixed people shall dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of Philistia.
- <sup>7</sup> I will take away its blood from its mouth, and its abominations from between its teeth; it too shall be a remnant for our God; it shall be like a clan in Judah, and Ekron shall be like the Jebusites.
- <sup>8</sup> Then I will encamp at my house as a guard, so that none shall march to and fro; no oppressor shall again march over them, for now I see with my own eyes.
- <sup>9</sup> Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

- <sup>10</sup> I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.
- <sup>11</sup> As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.
- <sup>12</sup> Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.
- <sup>13</sup> For I have bent Judah as my bow; I have made Ephraim its arrow. I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior's sword.
- <sup>14</sup> Then the LORD will appear over them, and his arrow will go forth like lightning; the Lord GOD will sound the trumpet and will march forth in the whirlwinds of the south.
- <sup>15</sup> The LORD of hosts will protect them, and they shall devour, and tread down the sling stones, and they shall drink and roar as if drunk with wine, and be full like a bowl, drenched like the corners of the altar.
- <sup>16</sup> On that day the LORD their God will save them, as the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land.
- <sup>17</sup> For how great is his goodness, and how great his beauty! Grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women.

### **Zechariah 9:1:17**

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## **Idols and the Supernatural**

“**PRIMAL TEMPTATIONS DON’T GO AWAY,**” says Al Mohler on the Sept 1, 2015 episode of *The Briefing* Podcast. “**Sin**

remains very basic. At its root is the temptation to idolatry.” Mohler then takes 12 minutes to discuss four different articles all appearing in that days’ *New York Times*. One was on **ISIS** damaging a 2,000 year old temple of Baal in Palmyra, Syria—a temple built to idols. Another was about an **Indian scholar** who was murdered for criticizing the worship of idols. Another was about how the government is renaming **Mt. McKinley**, the highest mountain in North America, back to its original native name: Denali. The “Cultural Imperialism” of the white man has got to go is our present government’s war-cry, so we will call the giant white mountain once more “The Great One,” which plays a central role in their creation story. “Another idol,” Mohler says. Finally, he discusses a story of many **psychics** revealing that huge percentages of Americans are going to see them, but how it is all “a scam.”<sup>1</sup> Idols, idols, and more idols.

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<sup>1</sup> Al Mohler, “The Briefing,” Sept 1, 2015, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2015/09/01/the-briefing-09-01-15/>, last accessed Sept 2, 2015. Links to the various articles are on the site and are listed here: [ISIS Damages Temple of Baal in Palmyra](#), New York Times (Kenneth Rosen); [Indian Scholar Who Criticized Worship of Idols Is Killed](#), New York Times (Swati Gupta); [Mount McKinley Will Again Be Called Denali](#), New York Times (Julie Hirschfield Davis); [Seeing Freedom in Their Future, Psychics Reveal All: ‘It’s a Scam, Sir’](#), New York Times (Michael Wilson).

Mohler's point is to show **how deeply theological** so much of today's new is, even though no one would call it that. There is little to no theological reflection. Nevertheless, it is all about pagan religion, and insisting that we don't say anything bad, whatsoever, about it. Idolatry. That's Mohler's conclusion. Human beings are fixated on idols, even when they claim to be purely secular.

Yet, while I very much appreciated the point he is making, something struck me potentially ironic about Mohler's piece. In the modern mind, what is idolatry? I'm convinced that most people think of idolatry as the worship of things that have no real ontological existence—no minds, no intelligence. We just make it all up. We worship money. We worship sex. We worship food. But those aren't beings. Well, maybe we worship celebrities, and they are real beings, but they aren't *elohim*.

Though he didn't say it this way, he also didn't *not* say it this way, yet I know this is how so many Christians think about the supernatural. Baal, a god? No. He didn't really exist. Just an idol of someone's imagination. A cosmic mountain? Denali? Nah. Just another idol. Why, we could even read these psychics own testimony after being

asked, “Is it real or just a bunch of baloney?” “It’s a scam. The whole thing’s a scam.” We could hear that and think, “Yeah, it is. Just more idols. There’s nothing to any of that stuff.”

This is what frightens me about the way so many of us read the Bible. Why, even in one of the most supernatural books I’ve ever read—Zechariah—it is tempting to miss it, as we seem to be more influenced by secularization, materialism, scientism, and rationalism, than we are the worldview of the ancient prophets and Apostles. Zechariah 9 struck me in just this way this week. It is totally supernatural.

## The First Burden

**Zechariah 9-11** is one of two “oracles” (ESV) in Zechariah (the other being **12-14**). These two oracles make up the second half of the book that is quoted more than any other prophet in the NT. The word is *massa*, and it refers to a prophecy that is of great and heavy weight to carry, much like the load a donkey would bear on its back for its master. Hence, it is often translated as a “burden.” The only way to unload the burden is to speak it forth, to announce it.

This burden belongs to the Word of the LORD. It is the oracle or burden “of the Word of the LORD” (Zech 9:1). You see, the LORD is carrying at the same time a grievous, yet joyous message that He must proclaim through the prophet. It is grievous in that it is “against” (1). There is judgment: “stripping of possessions,” “striking down,” “devouring fire”(4), “fear,” “anguish,” “hopes confounded,” “perishing,” land that becomes “uninhabited” (5). Cities are filled with “bastards”(KJV, “mixed people” ESV) and “pride is cut off” (6). Yet, it is joyous for bloody mouths are wiped clean, abominations from the teeth are removed, a remnant is saved, people’s are engrafted into a glorious kingdom (7). And this is less than half of the chapter.

All of this might seem like pretty standard language for prophets and for Zechariah. In one way it is. It isn’t like if all we heard was this that we couldn’t understand the message anymore than an atheist couldn’t understand Dr. Mohler’s point even if he didn’t believe in anything supernatural at all. But there is something here about who the LORD picks to speak “against” that if you know the history will help you get below the surface. Like an

iceberg, the truly amazing (and dangerous) part is that which is just under the water. This is where the supernatural lay. To get at this, we need to look at who the LORD is against, and then do a little research into earlier biblical revelation to see why he might have these places in mind. In doing so, it will truly help your wonder grow as you come to understand the victory that Messiah gains and who he delivers from danger.

## Judgment against Israel's True Enemies

Ask yourself, **who are God's enemies?** “**Godless kings,**” you might reply. “**Anyone who is an unbeliever,**” you might say. OK, true enough. But how many kings, nations, and unbelievers are there to single out in a prophecy? The numbers are almost infinite. Yet, the Burden of the Word comes against a select group of places: cities and regions that are not Israelites. They are not random.

**Ten places** are mentioned in the first five verses: the land of **Hadrach**, the city of **Damascus**, the cities of **Hamath**, **Tyre**, **Sidon**, **Ashkelon**, **Gaza**, **Ekron**, **Ashdod**, and the land of the **Philistines**. These are the people's to whom the Burden comes against. The question I want to

ask is, why these places? Some of them you have undoubtedly never even heard of. Why not more well-known enemies like Egypt, Babylon, or Assyria? This question becomes all the more acute when you understand that “Historically, none of the cities mentioned here posed any significant threat ... during the postexilic period.”<sup>2</sup> So why go after them?

Following Amos, he begins with Damascus. Both then go after Tyre and Gaza. But Amos’ prophecies against the nations serve a different purpose than Zechariah. Amos is really concerned with the northern kingdom of Israel, before the captivity. He selects his targets for geographical purposes. Like playing a game of darts around the board, first he hits the northeast (Damascus; Amos 1:3-5), then to the southwest (Gaza; 6-8), then the northwest (Tyre; 9-10), then the southeast (Edom, Ammon, Moab; 11-12, 13-15, 2:1-3), then the north (Judah; 2:4-5). It is like he has gone around the target: 1, 2, 3, 4 ... 20. Each of these nations gets closer and closer to home: first pure pagans (Damascus, Gaza, Tyre), then cousins through Esau and

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<sup>2</sup> Bryan R. Gregory, *Longing for God in an Age of Discouragement: The Gospel according to Zechariah*, ed. Tremper Longman III, *The Gospel according to the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 162.

Lot (Edom, Ammon, Moab), finally **brothers** (Judah). That's when the dart hits the middle. "Now I'm coming after you, Israel."<sup>3</sup> **Bulls eye!**

But Zechariah isn't prophesying against God's people here. And though he starts off the same way as Amos, his ten targets serve a different purpose. What is it? Scholars have long puzzled over this, but because they aren't interested in the supernatural history of the Bible, their answers miss the mark. Of the ten, **five** are found in **a single verse back in Joshua**, as the cities the Israelites were never able to conquer. "This is the land that yet remains: all the regions of the Philistines, and all those of the Geshurites (from the Shihor, which is east of Egypt, northward to the boundary of Ekron, it is counted as Canaanite; there are five rulers of the Philistines, those of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron), and those of the Avvim" (**Josh 13:2-3**; *underline is in Zechariah*).<sup>4</sup> Five of

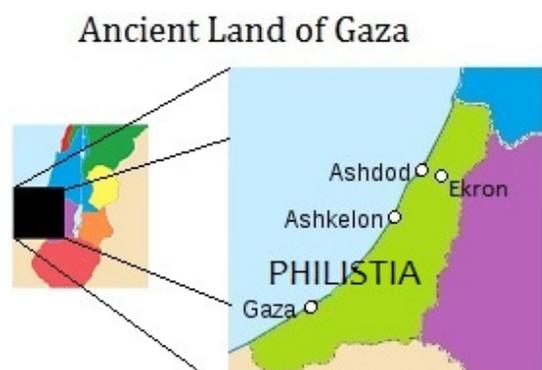
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<sup>3</sup> One scholar who attempts to explain the nations in Amos is Andrew E. Steinmann, "Critical Note: The Order of Amos's Oracles Against the Nations: 1:3-2:16," *JBL* 111/4 (1992): 683-89. [http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jbl/1992-4\\_683.pdf](http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jbl/1992-4_683.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Gregory (above) is a good example of a commentator who mentions this verse in relation to Zechariah 9, but then does not bother to look into the history of what is going on, other than to say that Israel did not conquer these people, which is very important and true. See Gregory, 163.

ten in one verse is not a coincidence. Who are these people? There is something supernatural going on here. More than mere “idolatry.” Something terrifyingly real. These places are chosen for this and another reason.

The key is Philistia (**Zech 9:6**; **Josh 13:3**), an ancient enemy of God. There was a Pentapolis of ruling cities in Philistia. Zechariah mentions all but one of them.



Who is the most famous Philistine? It has to be **Goliath**, the giant. Goliath came from Gath (**1 Sam 17:4**), the only city Zechariah does not mention of the five. I think this is probably because David defeated Goliath and four other giants from this city (**1 Chron 20:8**). But Goliath was technically not a Philistine. Rather, he was enlisted by the

Philistines to fight in their army. Philistines were perfectly normal people. Rather, Goliath and these other four were, as the Literal translation puts it, “born to the giant in Gath” (1Ch 20:8 YLT) or as the LXX has it, “born to Rapha.” Rapha means “giant,” even as the Valley of Rephaim is translated “the Valley of the Giants” throughout your English Bible. Rapha may be a name, or it may refer to a different giant, perhaps a fellow named Anak (Num 13:22 etc.).

Anak had three giant sons: Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai (Num 13:22). They were terrifying to the spies who went into the land and returned to Moses (Num 13:33). Those spies called these and other giants “nephilim.” In Joshua’s day, Caleb drove them out (Josh 15:14). Yet, Joshua repeated tells us, perhaps telegraphing the stories in the days of David, After this, “Only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod did some remain” (Josh 11:22). Again, Gath is where Goliath came from. Ashdod and Gaza, right next to Gath, are in Zechariah’s prophecy. The point made in Joshua is that because these *gibborim*-giants (*gibborim* means “mighty” and is translated as “giant” by the LXX) were here, Joshua’s “mighty” men—tiny but

spiritual *gibborim*, did not conquer those cities. Therefore, enemy Gentiles peoples remained unconquered with giant clans ruling over them. Perhaps it is a lot like the poor people of the Gaza Strip today who are being ruled over by tyrant Palestinian Hamas, keeping them subject to profound poverty as they seek any way to destroy the Jewish State.<sup>5</sup>

So why bring this up, and how is it related to anything in the introduction about idolatry and the supernatural? Well, The giants are seen from Genesis 6 onward as the chief enemies of God, enemies which wicked nations like Babylon come to embody spiritually (perhaps they were even founded by giants, i.e. Nimrod). They were enemies because of the way they lived, but also because their fathers were heavenly beings called the “sons of God.” In other words, they were half-breeds, “mixed peoples” if ever there were any.

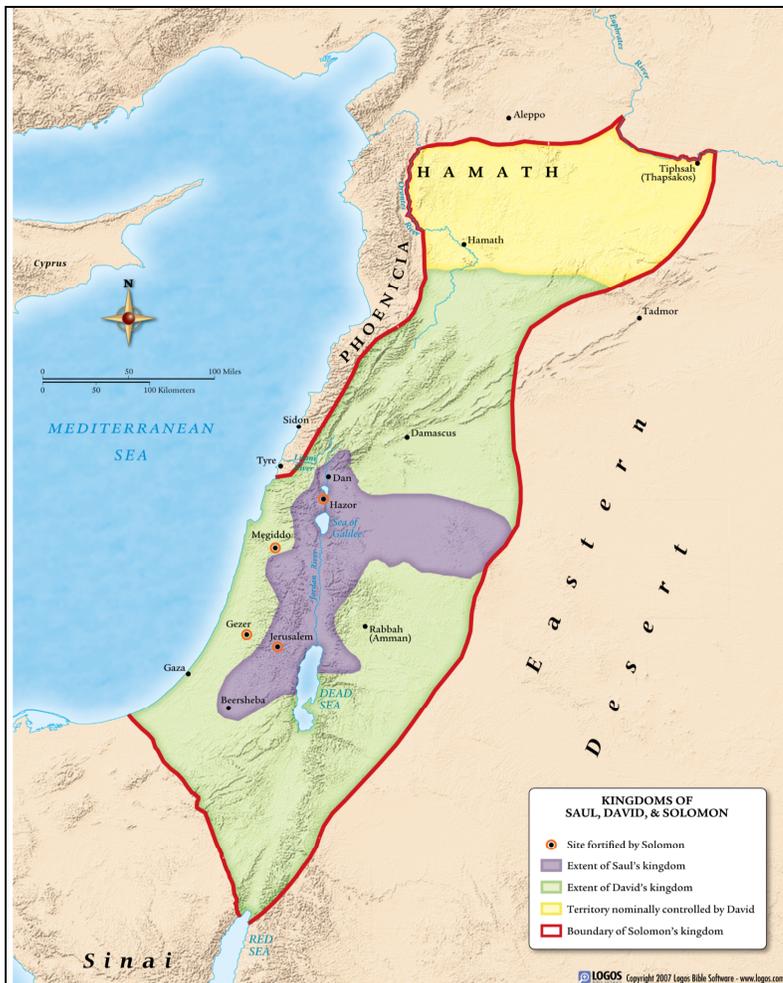
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<sup>5</sup> **Going Deeper:** There is more we could talk about. Back in the Joshua verse it mentioned the Avvim. The only time the [Avvim](#) are found prior to this is in the strange chapter on Rephaim giants—tall as the Anakim ([Deut 2:10, 21](#))—that were dispossessed by the nations surrounding Israel. There were giant clans living throughout the land of Canaan, mixing with the ordinary peoples and ruling over them as tyrant-kings (like Og and Anak). It says, “[The Avvim, who lived in villages as far as Gaza, the Caphtorim \[closely related to the Philistines; Gen 10:14\], who came from Caphtor, destroyed them and settled in their place](#)” ([2:23](#)). They lived as far as Gaza.

The point being made by these five cities, then, is that, in accordance with the Warrior Christ's Word to Joshua, he would subdue the enemies and conquer them himself. Since that did not happen even up to this very moment in Zechariah's day, the Burden of the Word is still inside of Him, and He now seizes upon those old promises, using the supernatural enemies of God as examples of Messiah's glorious conquering power to come. These cities are there to force your mind to go backwards in time to consider what kinds of persons lived and ruled there. This isn't just random. They are directly calling our minds to supernatural things, but indirectly, for the person who cares to dig into the history, hence the berg under the ice. But what about the other five places?

**Tyre and Sidon** almost always go together. They are just above the border of Israel, again on the coast. They were powerful **seafaring peoples**, who rules the Sea and therefore amassed great wealth and military strategy. It refers to them as being very "**wise**," as well as **wealthy**, and this takes us back in time to a prophecy in Ezekiel 28, where the **king of Tyre** is called "**wise**" six times (**Ezek 28:3, 4, 5, 7, 12, 17**), and **wealthy** three times (**28:4, 5[x2]**). Yet, this

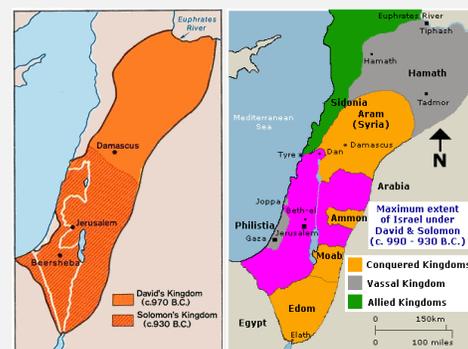
passage is also *extremely* supernatural in orientation, as it likens the king of Tyre to the “guardian cherub” of Eden. So in lifting not only places, but terms used to describe them from Ezekiel’s prophecy, our minds are meant to go back there as well.



On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates." (Gen 15:18)

And I will set your border from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates, for I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. (Ex 23:31)

Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt. (1Kgs 4:21)



**Note:** The Logos map has Gaza conquered, but many maps do not. The text does not seem to say that Solomon conquered them, but that he ruled as far as them. Other maps (left) show this as the case.

The other three places seem to me to serve a different purpose, though a related one. **Damascus** (south) and **Hamath** (north) are both inland (see above map), in the land

of Syria. They compose the southern and northern end of an ancient land called **Hadrach**. This is the ancient land of **Nimrod**, his westernmost conquest. Here, they worshiped the **Baals** and the **Serpent**.<sup>6</sup> But this also happens to belong to the **farthest extent of the idealized Promised Land** (**Gen 15:18**; cf. **1 Kgs 8:65**; **1 Chr 13:5**).<sup>7</sup> We have seen the peoples who had to be destroyed or taken over that lived in the Promised Land, so all of this involves the covenant promises that God gave to Abraham. Thus, in calling these ten places to mind, the LORD has brought to our mind the ancient, supernatural past, along with the full promises of the extent of the land as given to Abraham in covenant, as well as the promises of himself to fight to defeat his enemies until all have been put under his feet.

All of this sets the stage for the actual oracle. What does it say about them exactly? First, it tells us that “**the LORD**

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<sup>6</sup> **John Bathurst Deane**, *The Worship of the Serpent* (1833, reprint Health Research Books, 1970), 85. **Going Deeper:** Deane says, “The Hivites who were left ‘to prove Israel,’ inhabited Mount Lebanon, ‘from Mount Baalhermon unto the entering in of Hamath’ (Jdg 3:3).” “Hivite” is the term the LXX chooses to translate Avvim. Mt. Lebanon happens to be the mountain just east and between Tyre and Sidon.

<sup>7</sup> This all gets a little tricky, as Hadrach was both a land and a city and Hamath is both a city (to this day) and a land. “Lebo-Hamath” is found throughout the OT and means “entrance to Hamath.” It is not known exactly where it is. But it seems to have been far to the north, by the Euphrates, perhaps as far as Antioch.

has an eye on mankind and on all the tribes of Israel” (Zech 9:1). “Mankind” here is *'adam*, a term used only for the children of Adam. If you ask how all of the supernatural stuff fits in, ask yourself **what kind of an eye this is?** Is it an eye for evil or an eye for good?

At first, it appears that it is an **eye of judgment**. This Burden is “**against**” these lands. God is going to strip Tyre and Sidon of their possessions (Zech 9:3). They will be “**devoured by fire**” (4; found also in Amos 1:10 and reminding us of **Sodom and Gomorrah**). When the cities of the giants see it, the mighty *gibborim* are not so tough now. They are afraid, in anguish, and confounded (5), like the demon Legion when the Lord came and cast them into a herd of swine (Matt 8:29-32). The king of **Gaza** (reminding us again of the five kings/rulers of these cities in Joshua 13:3) will perish. **Ashkelon** will become uninhabited out of terror. Strangely, “**a mixed people**” shall dwell in **Ashdod**. This is the word translated “bastard” by the KJV, possibly reminding us of the Nephilim.<sup>8</sup> The entire pride of **Philistia**

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<sup>8</sup> A “bastard” is a person whose parents are not married. Genesis 6 says the sons of God “took” “wives.” This could refer to some kind of legitimate marriage or it could refer to a kind of raping of women with no marriages involved at all. The stories of the nations when they talk about this have both ideas in their stories.

will go down into ruins. This is what hadn't happened yet. Can you see, then, what is being said? God is finally going to remember his promise.

## From Judgment to Grace

But suddenly, in **Zech 9:7**, the theme of judgment reverses itself very dramatically. Here is where knowing the background should help you internalize the good news that much more.

The Eye of the LORD softens towards the children of men. Knowing that the nations are full of blood-lust (“**blood in its mouth,**” “**abominations from between its teeth**” referring to the spoils of war; **7**), he nevertheless has **mercy**. Suddenly, out of the greatest enemies of God “**a remnant for our God**” is saved. Not the supernatural enemies, mind you. The humans that is upon them. As the Church Father Ambrose says, “**He will destroy all the powers and principalities ... [but] Peace and tranquility of soul**” will be given to men (**Ambrose, Letter 80**). Not to all, but to those who turn to Messiah.

The way this unfolds is one of the most **amazing displays of prophecy** in the Bible. It begins by saying that this remnant shall be like a clan in Judah (**7**). “Clan” (*alluph*)

is often translated as “leader” or a “chief.” The thing is, these are Gentiles! Gentile chiefs among Judah? Furthermore, they (here “Ekron”) will be like the **Jebusites**. The Jebusites were the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the days when king David made the city his capitol. They are found in many of the archenemy lists of the OT. David finally conquered them (**2 Sam 5:6-8**) saying, “**Whoever strikes the Jebusites first shall be chief and commander.**’ And Joab the son of Zeruah went up first, so he became chief” (**1Ch 11:6**). But they were not exterminated. They were engrafted and became part of the people of God.

This recollection of royal conquest of Jerusalem then becomes the focus of the Divine Warrior of Zechariah protecting his house. “**I will encamp at my house as a guard, so that none shall march to and fro; no oppressor shall again march over them, for now I see with my own eyes**” (**Zech 9:8**). This is great news after a long captivity. Greater if you understand the captivity you were under in spiritual places. This is the Commander of the Armies of Heaven himself, Yahweh Sabaoth, going out to war. But in war, he makes peace. How? And When?

Behold! **Zech 9:9** is one of those amazing, specific prophecies of the OT that tells us exactly how. In the first vision of Zechariah, the Angel of the LORD, the Word of God, was **riding on a great war steed**. The same was implied in the last vision. But now, “**Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, o a colt, the foal of a donkey.**” This is the Beast of the LORD’s Burden.

Many of the Father’s spiritualized the donkey as being a type of the Gentiles, because Balaam rode on one. This seems strained to me. The figure does not come from Balaam, but rather recalls King David’s entering into Jerusalem. **R.T. France** writes of the fulfillment of this in Matthew, “**Jesus’ ride on the donkey [is] the fulfillment of Zech 9:9. Even without an explicit quotation of that prophecy in the text, any Jewish reader of the story could hardly fail to be reminded of it and of the royal ideology which underlies it. Zechariah’s prophecy of a humble and peaceful king coming to Jerusalem ‘vindicated and saved’ is based on the story of David’s return to the city after the**

defeat of Absalom's rebellion, when he came in triumph as king, and yet humbly and in peace (2 Sam 19–20). When the Son of David chose to ride down to the city from the Mount of Olives on a donkey [2 Sam 15:30; 16:1-2], the acted allusion was unmistakable. A further messianic nuance is added by the 'foal' and 'donkey's colt' which feature in the royal oracle of Gen 49:10–11 [the great prophecy of Messiah coming from the line of Judah], and observers might also have remembered how Solomon, the son of David, rode on a mule to his enthronement in 1 Kgs 1:38–40.”<sup>9</sup>

This then is the great plot twist of Messiah. One that was not expected because of the Rider on the Horse. One that no one expected during Jesus' own lifetime, because these things were hidden from them in plain sight. **The king saves his people by riding that beast of burden.** What kind of Savior does this? Certainly not the military commander that the text talks about. And yet, this is exactly what it says the Donkey-Rider is. He achieves his great conquest on the humble back of a jackass.

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<sup>9</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 773–774.

Look at what it says accompanies this humble ride, and notice all the supernatural elements that it contains. “I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem. There will be no more war. The battle bow shall be cut off” (Zech 9:10). “He shall speak peace to the nations.” As he makes his ride into Jerusalem, he goes to war to bring peace. Peace? To Israel’s enemies? What kind of a King does that? Our kings want to destroy, not save our enemies. King Jesus came, that he “might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near” (Eph 2:16-17). As the Apostle says, this was done at the end of that ride, as our Lord came to that lonely hill and died on the there. This was a supernatural war and victory. He used no iron sword. It was the power of God in Heaven.

“His rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth” (10). Not only will he rule all the way to the Euphrates, as David and Solomon did. No. This king will rule over the entire world. He is greater than Nebuchadnezzar, greater than Darius, greater than Alexander and Caesar to come. Hence, the Revelation

begins, “From Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood” (Rev 1:5). Therefore, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts” (Col 3:15). Today, this kingdom is “within you,” as it spreads throughout the world. It is spiritual. It is supernatural. It belongs to the realm of heaven. You are in it if the Lord Jesus knows you by name. It is glorious.

“As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit” (Zech 9:11). Some believe this refers to the sacrifices of the Jews under the Mosaic covenant (perhaps Ex 24:8). Others, to the Abrahamic covenant and perhaps the circumcision that produced blood (perhaps Ex 4:26 and earlier). But with Calvin and John Owen, I believe this is a mistake. As Owen says, this blood “represented the blood of Christ, and fore-signified the necessity of it unto the confirmation of the new covenant. See Zech 9:11; Matt 26:28; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25.”<sup>10</sup> This is as we saw in chapter six when we saw the new covenant there as well

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<sup>10</sup> John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. W. H. Goold, vol. 23, Works of John Owen (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1854), 362.

(the covenant of peace). It is the Messiah “making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20).

“I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.” In the first vision of Zechariah, God’s people were there by the murky deep, the watery abode of evil. Now, they are trapped, as it were, in waterless pits, like Joseph—unable to drink, to eat, to live. They are dead. In the desert, the people symbolized this in Moses’ day until “He opened the rock, and the waters flowed, rivers ran in dry places” (Ps 105:41 LXA). In Jesus’ day, unclean spirit go out of a person, and passes through waterless places seeking rest, but find none. So they return to the person with a vengeance (Matt 12:43-44). For you see, people who do not know Christ and have never tasted the living water are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm” (2Pe 2:17) and “waterless clouds, swept along by winds” (Jude 1:12). But Jesus came “proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” by evil spirits (Luke 4:18). Owen agrees with the Venerable Bede who adds, “[Christ] had cast down and triumphed over the closed places of the lower world by his power, so that he might lift up to the light

and the rest of paradise all of his own whom he found there, according to the prophet's [statement], "You also because of the blood of your covenant, have led your prisoners back from the pit, in which there is no water." (*Homily on the Gospels* 2.7). This is a supernatural salvation over terrifying evil for the good of his people.

Therefore, when the Gospel goes out from the prophet's mouth, he calls the captives, "Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double" (**Zech 9:12**). Return and repent, the theme of the Introduction to the Burdens. That is the call to you now. Submit to him. Have hope of release. Believe in the promises. What is coming is better than what you have today. Don't be fooled by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Come to Jerusalem, to the Holy City. See the Lord riding on a donkey, dying on the cross, and gaining the victory over heaven and earth.

To instill this hope further into your heart, the language of the Divine Warrior returns. "I have bent Judah as my bow; I have made Ephraim its arrow. I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior's sword" (**13**). "Greece" is actually the

word Javan, and takes us all the way back to Genesis 10 and the Table of Nations. Javan was a son of Japheth who settled in the land of Greece. God said, “**May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant**” (**Gen 9:27**). God is returning now to this covenant prophecy made even before Abraham.

But does this refer to the physical Jews conquering the physical world? Well, that hasn't happened to this day, nor is there any prophecy I know of that says that it will, other than perhaps here. No, it refers to **the Gospel** coming first to Jews, and then spreading through them to the Gentiles. Judah is the southern kingdom, Ephraim is the Northern. **Martin Luther** says God “**shall use their conversion not only to convert the Jews but also to convert all nations throughout the world when [He] spread the Gospel throughout the world through them. [He] shall use their works that these works may declare also to the Gentiles that salvation has been offered to them through [Christ's] blood. [He] shall stretch Judah as [His] bow. That is, with Judah [He] shall shoot [His] arrow of the preaching of the**

Gospel in order that many nations may be wounded by that bow of [Christ's] and become subject to [Him].”<sup>11</sup>

Christ is the Divine Warrior of the OT. We've seen him in the Night Visions commanding supernatural armies. Moses sings of him that he is “a man of war” (Ex 15:3). Joshua bowed down to him who is the Commander of the Armies of God (Josh 5:14-15). Now, he appears before us in the language of the great theophanies of his coming in the OT. “Then the LORD will appear over them, and his arrow will go forth like lightning; the Lord GOD will sound the trumpet and will march forth in the whirlwinds of the south” (Zech 9:14). This is the Flood with God's bow picked back up. This is Sinai with the lightning and horns and storms. This is the Warrior of the Songs, “The LORD thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered his voice. And he sent out arrows and scattered them; lightning, and routed them” (2Sa 22:14-15).

But you cannot see this storm unless you see with the eyes of faith. For this is not the Second Coming, but the First. And that coming was in humility and suffering and dying. But it was a coming of great, supernatural power.

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<sup>11</sup> Luther, 99–100.

Power to those with eyes to see. Luther again, “The Word will go forth with great power. Like a whirlwind and a storm, it will snatch up nations and peoples. It will humiliate and scatter them in such a way that it will first mortify and condemn them and then bring them back to life and save them.” This is the way the Holy Spirit operates in converting the wicked.”<sup>12</sup> You see, this is supernatural work of the Triune God, changing people who were his worst enemies.

As we can see, if these things happened in the past, then this doesn't necessarily have to move us into the Apocalypse. Rather, this is the language the whole OT uses for God's presence when he comes to his people. Here, he is coming to protect them and to save them from evil. “The LORD of hosts will protect them, and they shall devour, and tread down the sling stones, and they shall drink and roar as if drunk with wine, and be full like a bowl, drenched like the corners of the altar” (15). “With all of these, he describes the power of the Gospel as it is preached, and commends its magnificence and glory. But He indicates that ministers of the Word have been, in times

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 100.

of persecution, exposed to many perils and have been destined for death, as we read in Ps 44:22. They are prisoners of hope.”<sup>13</sup>

The ride on the Donkey goes with all that follows it. “On that day the LORD their God will save them, as the flock of his people; for like the jewels of the crown they shall shine on his land” (Zech 9:16). This isn’t to take anything away from the Glorious Second Coming, but that is not a coming of salvation to everyone. It is a coming of Judgment. Today is the day of salvation to anyone who understands the power of Christ and his Almighty Father in heaven. To these, he makes himself known. To these, he saves. To these, he protects from all harm.

Therefore the prophet finishes in a victory song, “For how great is his goodness, and how great his beauty! Grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women” (17). Zechariah has been all over the OT. He began with Amos. He went to Joshua, to Ezekiel, to Samuel, to Genesis. He finished with Amos again. And that is why knowing your whole Bible is so important when interpreting it. “I will restore the fortunes of my people

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<sup>13</sup> Ibi., 100–101.

Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them,' says the LORD your God” (Amos 9:14-15).

Beautiful is the LORD in his habitation. Beautiful is the LORD upon the earth. Beautiful is LORD of the Universe. For he has made these things come to pass just as he said he would. They are real. They are not just in our minds. This is the supernatural truth that the world stammers for, but knows nothing about, because they sit in darkness, loving their idols, in bondage and slavery to Satan, doing his will and loving darkness until the Gospel sets them free.

These things have now begun to be fulfilled. Great power has come to the Gentiles through the Jews through Christ. Who here today knows this? I shall leave you with the very ancient book called the Apostolic Constitutions as you consider the last verse.

“Now concerning the several sorts of food, the Lord says to you, ‘You shall eat the good things of the earth’ (Isa

1:19) and ‘All sorts of flesh shall you eat, as the green herb’ (Gen 9:3) ... If anything be pleasant, it is his; and if there be anything good, it is his: wheat for the young men, and wine to cheer the maids. For ‘who shall eat or who shall drink without him’ (Ecc 2:25)? [So] “Go your way, and eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and do not be sorrowful” (Neh 8:10). (*Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 7.2.20). Christ has conquered his enemies and brought salvation near. He is Beautiful. Praise the Lord.