

The Triumphal Entry

Over the last few weeks we have talked about the Feast of Tabernacles, the setting for Jesus’ teaching at the temple, offering of living waters, and his proclamation of being the light of the world (John 7 and 8). As I mentioned in our lesson about the Feast of Tabernacles, it was a long held belief that the Messiah would reveal himself to the nation of Israel at that particular feast giving it a messianic implication. The Triumphal Entry too has messianic overtones and is also deeply rooted in one of the ceremonies during the Feast of Tabernacles which will be the focus of our lesson today. We will study the Triumphal Entry more closely in a future study when we cover the Passion Week.



Read John 12:12-16. Notice how Jesus comes to the Feast of Passover boldly and publicly compared to his arrival at the Feast of Tabernacles. For the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7) he came quietly on his own, not announcing his presence until he appeared at the temple to teach.

Verses 12-13

In John 12: 1 and 12 we are told Jesus’ timing. Verse 1 says, *“Six Days before Passover Jesus arrived at Bethany...”* which is only two miles from Jerusalem. Then in verse 12 we are told, *“The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.”* Jesus arrives in Jerusalem five days before the Feast is to commence and his presence is observed before he even enters the city. Thousands of pilgrims from Galilee and all over Israel had come to the city for the Feast of Passover. Previously Jesus had shunned being hailed as Messiah (6:15), but now the time had come for Jerusalem to receive her King. The crowds shout *“Hosana! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!”* The crowds are quoting the great messianic psalm of the Hallel, Psalm 118. Hosanna is a cry for deliverance and help, it means “please save” or “save now”. The crowds were calling for salvation. The “One who Comes” is the long awaited messiah, the longed for King of Israel. This particular hymn would have been sung in connection with the three great Feasts: Tabernacles, Dedication, and Passover, when hopes for Israel’s deliverance would be at an all time high. By quoting Psalm 118 the crowds were ascribing messianic titles to Jesus.

Jesus is greeted with these shouts and the waving of palm branches. Men and boys would wave palm branches during the both the Feasts of Passover and Tabernacles as the Hallel was sung in anticipation of the coming messiah; and traditionally palm branches were waved to welcome home Jewish heroes returning home from battle or in times of great rejoicing.¹ The crowd was welcoming Jesus their hero and king. There is irony in the crowd’s rejoicing and calls

¹ New American Commentary

“Who Do You Say I Am?” Part 2
Lesson 3 Supplemental Reading

of “Hosanna”. They are calling for “salvation now” imploring for something so far beyond what they realize. Their hopes for a king to deliver them from Roman oppression would be met with a very different salvation. The crowd’s ideas of salvation and a kingdom were not what this entry was about. Jesus, the king and prophet had come to usher in God’s Kingdom which led to a cross, not a military victory.

Verses 14-15

Jesus’ riding into the city on a young donkey was a sign of peace. He didn’t enter the city on a war horse wearing a sword and crown, prepared for battle. Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem “fulfilled Zechariah’s prophecy which contrasted Jesus’ coming (Zech. 9:9) with the coming of Alexander the Great (Zech. 9:1-8)². Daughter of Zion is a poetic way of referring to the people of Jerusalem, the city built on Mount Zion. Here, in quoting Zechariah 9:9, John called Jesus Israel’s King.”³

Zechariah prophesied during the Medo-Persian Empire, this particular prophecy was written around 480 BC. He was in Jerusalem after the Jews had returned from the Babylonian Exile under King Cyrus’ decree in 538 allowing them to return from Babylon and rebuild Jerusalem and its Temple. Zechariah Ch. 1-8 were likely written 520-518 BC. Chapter 9-14, around 480 BC. We will be looking at Ch 9, which was written some 500 years before the events were fulfilled.



Zechariah 9:9

The coming of the Prince of Peace

Those who lived in Jerusalem were personified as the Daughter of Zion and the Daughter of Jerusalem represented the entire nation of Israel. They all were exhorted to welcome the arrival of the King with joy and rejoicing. The coming king is the long awaited Messiah and King who is righteous both in character and his rule will also be righteous. The words “having salvation” means that he will come as a Deliverer bringing salvation to others. The fact that he enters the city on the back of a donkey denotes attributes of his character and his reign: peaceful.

Not unlike other Old Testament prophecies, this one blends two events into one perspective. What the New Testament divides into a first and second coming of Christ separated by a period of time known as the Church Age⁴, this prophecy obscures that perspective, blending the events into what appears to be one event. In Christ’s first advent he rode on a donkey and presented himself as Messiah to the nation of Israel, but they rejected Him as their King. His

² Zechariah 9:1-8 are a prophecy of Alexander the Great and his conquering of Palestine and the Persian Empire in about 330 BC

³ Bible Knowledge Commentary

⁴ (cf. Isa. 9:6-7; 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-21)

second advent will be marked by his universal rule described in Zech. 9:10-17 and will be established when he comes again.

John 12: 16-19

*“Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been **written** about him and that they had done these things to him.” (John 12:16)*

Scripture tells us that though the disciples witnessed and participated in these events, they did not understand them. They lacked the perspective of history, of the rest of the story. Not until after the Cross and the Resurrection could they understand what had come to pass. Then they could see that Zechariah’s prophecy of the Messiah was about Jesus and that their own actions were part of the fulfilled prophecy.

The triumphal entry concludes in verse 19 with the Pharisees seeing the crowds clamoring around Jesus, but this time they are celebrating the coming of their king and deliverer, and Jesus isn’t stopping them. Their understanding of prophecy, if they were thinking of it, would have been much the way it is presented in Zechariah, as a single time frame. They were not anticipating that Jesus was a spiritual messiah ushering in the spiritual kingdom of God. They saw Alexander the Great fulfilling the beginning of this prophecy. They knew the stories of Moses and David. They were anticipating the political messiah they believed would come. The Pharisees greatest fear has come to pass. They fear an insurrection that will topple the delicately balanced status quo and bring the wrath of Rome upon them.