

Peace to the Nations

Ruben fingered the knot in his tie again. He was scheduled to meet with the news crew in 30 minutes. The conflict started more than a year ago, when a group from Peace Tabernacle began holding Bible studies at a woman's group home. One 18-year-old woman confided to Sister Monique that she was pregnant. Monique prayed and counseled the woman, who decided to keep her baby.

The group home administrator learned of the young woman's predicament. She accused Sister Monique and the church of forcing their beliefs onto the young woman, which aroused some protestors. The media got wind of the story, and it sparked a local debate on abortion. Thankfully, the young woman's name was never released.

Several months later, the women's group home got a new administrator—a Christian. They entered into "listening sessions" with Peace Tabernacle. It was decided if anyone wanted to attend the church, Peace Tabernacle would pick them up. However, no more Bible studies would be held at the group home, which was receiving federal grant tax dollars.

The press conference went well. Ruben and the administrator talked about their partnership. The young woman said she was happy to be a mother. And Ruben said, "We want to live at peace with everyone, and I'm glad the Lord has made it possible for us to do so with the women's group home."

1. *Why does lasting peace between nations inevitably fail?*

2. *Why is it difficult for there to be peace between people in conflict?*

3. *How does the peace of Christ transcend even the most bitter hostility between people?*

The Arrival of the True King

Zechariah 9:9-13, KJV

9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

10 And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: 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.

11 As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.

12 Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even to day do I declare that I will render double unto thee;

13 When I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man.

Zechariah 9:9-13, NIV

⁹Rejoice 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.

¹⁰I 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.

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

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

¹³I 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.

Zechariah's book is a mixture of exhortation, prophetic visions, and judgment oracles. The first 8 verses of chapter 9 describe the defeat of Damascus, Tyre, Sidon, and many Philistine cities. This was a prophecy of Alexander the Great's military campaign through the Holy Land. Zechariah foretold that Judah would be protected from these forces.

Then, in verse 9, Zechariah encouraged the people of Jerusalem (the "daughter of Zion," KJV) to rejoice and to shout with joy—not because of a victory over an army, but for the arrival of their true King.

The prophet described the sacred city's Monarch as being righteous (Isa. 9:7; 11:4-5; 32:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15). Unlike other princes, He was fully qualified to reign on the throne of David. The Hebrew verb rendered "having salvation" (Zech. 9:9) indicates that He was the divine Warrior who brought deliverance to the chosen people.

The humbleness of this uniquely gifted Ruler was demonstrated by His arrival into Jerusalem on a donkey. In the times of the judges and at least through the lifetime of David, rulers and princes in Judah would occasionally ride on donkeys (2 Sam. 16:2; 1 Kings 1:33-34). However, Greek kings entered cities on armor-bearing horses to strike terror into the hearts of those whom they defeated.

The New Testament reveals that the Lord Jesus dramatically fulfilled Zechariah 9:9 when He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey less than a week before His crucifixion (Matt. 21:1-11). In contrast to Greek kings, the Messiah came for the eternal benefit of the lost.

While much of Zechariah's prophecy was realized during Jesus' earthly ministry, its complete fulfillment awaits His second advent. One day the King will usher in a time of universal peace (Zech. 9:10; see Isa. 2:4; Mic. 4:3). Only the Messiah can do this on His return. The context of Zechariah 9:10 indicates that this total cessation of hostilities would exist throughout the planet. On the final day, He would completely fulfill the prophecy by firmly establishing His rule to the ends of the earth (Ps. 72:8).

Zechariah 9:11 reveals that the “blood” of the Lord’s “covenant” was the basis for His blessing on His people. This recalls Exodus 24:6-8, which refers to the ratification of the covenant of Moses through offering a sacrificial animal. The blood symbolized His faithfulness to His promise to free the exiles from their captivity in Babylon.

The reference to a “waterless pit” (Zech. 9:11) points to the practice in ancient times of imprisoning people in dry cisterns (Gen. 37:23-24; Jer. 38:6). Deliverance from such a pit was comparable to being rescued from death. When God released the captives from exile, it was as if they received a new lease on life to return to their land. They could do so based on the sure “hope” (Zech. 9:12) that God would return “twice as much” as their enemies had stolen from them—at least a doubling of joy and possibly also a doubling of possessions and land (Isa. 61:7).

Prior to being exiled, God’s people experienced the humiliation of being defeated and uprooted from their homeland. The Lord pledged to upend the power dynamic by portraying Himself as a warrior, with “Judah” (vs. 13) as His “bow” and “Ephraim” as His arrow (signifying that the former northern and southern kingdoms would be rejoined). Together, the reunited people, under His rule, would once again have an opportunity to flourish.

The former captives, referred to as “Zion,” would prevail against “Greece.” In fact, Zion would be comparable to a “warrior’s sword” whom God would brandish against Greece. Centuries later, under the leadership of the Maccabees (Mathias and Judas), the Jews enjoyed a period of freedom from Greek control (see Dan. 8:9-14; 11:32).

4. *God’s people were to rejoice for what reason?*

5. *What would characterize the reign of Israel’s King?*

6. *What would God do for His people?*

7. *How does Zechariah 9:13 figuratively describe God’s people?*

The Lord's Deliverance of His People

Zechariah 9:16-17, KJV

16 And the LORD their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people: for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land.

17 For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids.

Zechariah 9:16-17, NIV

¹⁶The 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.

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

Zechariah 9:16-17 describes the Lord's appearance to Israel as its deliverer. A "day" (vs. 16) was coming when God would set His people free from all the hardships they experienced like a shepherd who watched over, protected, and rescued His flock of sheep. In that future time of restoration, the returnees would flourish. Verse 16 depicts God's people as "jewels in a crown." One interpretation is that these precious "stones" (KJV) would be raised like an "ensign" (or banner) over the promised "land." Another view understands Zechariah as prophesying that the former captives would "sparkle" (or shine) as radiant gemstones throughout Judah.

Verse 17 in the KJV reflects the view that the unsurpassed "goodness" and "beauty" refer to the Lord. The NIV shifts the focus to God's people, superlative in their attractiveness and allure.

In either case, it remains clear that the Creator would not abandon His people to fend for themselves. Instead, under His protection, the returnees would experience His unending goodness and grace.

8. *What future awaited God's people?*

9. *What regard would God have for His people?*

A Special Kind of Peace

At the Last Supper in the upper room, Jesus told the apostles, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives” (John 14:27). Although the apostles did not understand that their Lord would soon die and ascend into His heavenly kingdom, Jesus not only knew what would happen to Him, but He also knew that His friends would suffer for His sake. Therefore, He promised to leave them with His peace—a peace unlike any worldly peace, but one that would strengthen their faith and calm their spirit in any situation.

Jesus can give peace because He is the King over all creation. Therefore, Jesus has the authority and the power to bestow this peace to His faithful followers. This peace is a precious gift that we should value and in which we need to trust, for if we ignore or snub it, our spiritual journey will become far more difficult and contentious.

How the peace of Jesus brings victory in our lives is so wondrous and majestic that our hearts should overflow with joy—so much so that we cannot help but acclaim Jesus as Lord to all we know, especially those who do not comprehend how Jesus can bless their lives as well. In fact, God has commissioned us to proclaim Jesus to the world, which is in dire need of the peace only He can give.

Jesus’ peace is special in many ways, but the most important feature of His peace is that it gives us peace with God Almighty. The enmity between God and us was so formidable that there was nothing we could do to restore our relationship with Him; only the atoning work of Jesus on the Cross could accomplish that miracle.

10. *In what ways do you perceive Jesus as king?*

11. *How is the peace of Jesus manifested in your life?*

12. *Why does the peace of Christ inspire you to share that peace with others?*

The King Has Come!

The prophecies of Zechariah to the Jews during their captivity conveyed God's promise to restore them to their homeland and shower them with His peace between themselves and with their neighbors. Such a glorious promise, Zechariah noted, should prompt them to shout with joy. On a grander scale, the prophet announced the coming of the King who will bring not a worldly peace, but a sacred peace that would change lives and the world. That King, of course, is Christ Jesus.

► *Thank Jesus for the peace He has given you, and write here some ways you might share that peace with others.*

KEY VERSE

And the LORD their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people: for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land. —Zechariah 9:16, KJV

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, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of July 3 through July 9

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Luke 11:1-13—Teach Us to Pray.
- Tues.** Matthew 6:5-15—Your Kingdom Come.
- Wed.** Psalm 97—The Lord Is King!
- Thurs.** Psalm 47—Shout to God, the King.
- Fri.** Matthew 12:1-14—The Lord of the Sabbath.
- Sat.** Matthew 12:15-21—God's Gentle Servant.
- Sun.** Matthew 12:22-32—The Kingdom of God Has Come.