

Born to Win

A Great King to Come

by Ronald L. Dart

The prophecies of Zechariah are among the most difficult in the Bible. It's not only that Zechariah is so rich in imagery and symbols; it's a strange mixture of the past and the future—an odd mixture of events in history, of people, personages, places, things that happened...and of things that never happened then, but *are* going to happen before man's age is finished.

There's *absolutely* no doubt that some of Zechariah has been fulfilled in history. It is just as certain that much of it is prophetic; and I was debating with myself as to whether more of it is future or whether more of it is past, and I think I have come down on the side of "more of it is future". Some of it is prophetic to the coming of the Messiah. Some of it looks all the way to the Millennium. And right in the middle of this *difficult* prophecy is a prophecy of a great king to come. But, oddly, it is not what we would expect to hear about a great king. He says,

Zechariah 9

AKJV

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, your King comes to you: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding on an ass, and on a colt the foal of an ass.

This is not what one would expect. A king, you would think, would ride into town on a chariot. A king would ride in on a chariot with someone holding a laurel over his head and with crowds of people praising him. Or maybe he would come in on a horse; but of course, in the Bible, horses and chariots are the cavalry—they are instruments of war. They are the tanks and the Bradley Fighting Vehicles of that age. They are war-making instruments.

Zechariah 9

AKJV

⁹ [...] your King comes to you [...] lowly, and riding on an ass, and on a colt the foal of an ass.

And the Hebrew word for "lowly" [*ani*, אָנִי, Strong's H6041] means, basically, "poor, needy, and in depressed circumstances". Not exactly the sort of thing you would ever think would in any way represent a king.

Now, when Jesus was ready for his triumphal entry into Jerusalem... Here *is* the Messiah, here *is* the Savior, here *is* the one who is coming to save his people. He comes to a point where...

Matthew 21

AKJV

¹ [...] when they drew near to Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, to the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,

² Saying to them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway you shall find an ass

tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them to me.

³ And if any man say ought to you, you shall say, The Lord has need of them; and straightway he will send them.

⁴ All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,

⁵ Tell you the daughter of Sion, Behold, your King comes to you, meek, and sitting on an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

Right in the middle of Zechariah, this prophecy is found; and Jesus fulfills this prophecy in his (if you want to call it) “triumphal” entry into Jerusalem, where the people who are *praising* him are children, and the things that they’re laying out in front of him on the road as he goes through are palm fronds.

And so, what does all this mean? Why is it that the king, when he comes, why is it that the Messiah, when he comes, is coming “lowly”? And I can’t imagine, frankly, how the first readers took Zechariah. For indeed, the expectations of a messiah were there, but the expectations generally were of a restoration of the Kingdom of Israel. The restoration was, “We’re going to throw the Romans out. We’ll do what the Maccabees failed to do; we will actually *succeed* in establishing once again the Kingdom of Israel.” What did they think when they read Zechariah? “And your king is going to be just, and he’ll have salvation, and he’ll ride into town *lowly*—riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.” All of this must’ve seemed very, very strange to people long ago. I think it even seemed strange to Jesus’ own disciples when he did it.

But this was prophesied long before this by Isaiah. And Isaiah is another prophet whose work is convoluted, and kind of confusing in a way, and a little hard to follow. It’s a strange admixture of history and prophecy, of the past and of the future. Isaiah wrote, chapter 9:

Isaiah 9

NIV '84

¹ Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan[.]

Now, I imagine the casual reader going through here doesn’t have a clue what in the world he’s talking about here, because if you have no idea of the prophecy of the times you won’t get this. The fact is, Zebulun and Naphtali were in the far north of Israel; they were very far removed from Jerusalem. And they were in the area that Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, created as the new House of Israel, separated from the House of Judah. And this is the man who *stopped* the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles, and established a new feast a month later—on the 15th day of the eighth month [**1 Kings 12**]. He established a new center of worship in Bethel, before you got to Jerusalem. He said, “It is too much for you people to go all the way to Jerusalem, and also the feast is too early. So we’re going to put it a month later; we’re going to do it down in the 15th day of the eighth month. And you *don’t* have to go to Jerusalem; you can stop at Bethel or, if you live in the north, you can go on up to Dan.” And he “made priests of the lowest of the people” and established a *whole new* worship for the northern tribes of Israel, *plunging them* into darkness. They were indeed neglected and cut off, and finally went into captivity. Then, in verse 2 (it’s probably a familiar scripture to you):

Isaiah 9

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² The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.

Zebulun, Naphtali, the northern tribes in the far north, were left completely in the dark because they were cut off from the Temple. They were cut off from the worship of God. They were cut off from the ritual, the ceremony, the normal calendar. Everything was taken away from these people, and they were left in the dark.

Isaiah 9

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- ² The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.
- ³ You have enlarged the nation
and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest,
as men rejoice
when dividing the plunder.

It is a *celebration*. It's a *happy* time.

Isaiah 9

NIV '84

- ⁴ For as in the day of Midian's defeat,
you have shattered
the yoke that burdens them,
the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor.
- ⁵ Every warrior's boot used in battle
and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
will be fuel for the fire.

"This is *over*. We're not *doing* things this way anymore. We're not coming into town on a horse or in a chariot. I'm coming to you meek, and lowly, riding upon an ass and upon a colt, the foal of an ass."

Isaiah 9

NKJV

- ⁶ For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
- ⁷ Of the increase of His government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever. [...]

This is a prophecy *well off* into the future for us.

Isaiah 9

NKJV

⁷ [...] The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

Now this, folks, is a *staggering* prophecy. The implications are *enormous* to this passage, because this passage is telling us that the Messiah will be born of a woman. “Unto us a Son is given, unto us a child is born”, and that Messiah will be called... “the Mighty God”. Now, this is a matter of controversy sometimes among Christian peoples, as to whether or not Jesus would be *truly* God, whether or not Jesus preexisted before his human birth. And here is a prophecy that says: when he comes, when he brings light to Zebulun and Naphtali, when he finally comes on the scene, he will be called “the Mighty God”. What do you do with this? Well, my suggestion is you just take it as it is. Matthew, chapter 1, verse 18:

Matthew 1

KJ2000

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ happened this way: When his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹ Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, decided to put her away privately.

²⁰ But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto you Mary your wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

²¹ And she shall bring forth a son, and you shall call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

That Wonderful Counselor, that child that was to be born, was to be a *savior*.

Matthew 1

AKJV

²² Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

²³ Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

Now, you would expect great things at the birth of a king, wouldn't you? You would expect a massive, national celebration. You would expect *huge* things. I guess when a child is born of the Queen of England, it must be an enormous experience—a time of great celebration throughout the whole land. You'd be disappointed in this case. The story is told again in Luke, chapter 2, verse 1:

Luke 2

AKJV

¹ And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.

An old, familiar, comfortable scripture.

Luke 2

AKJV

⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, to the city of

David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

⁵ To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

⁶ And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

This is not what one would expect for a great king. Now, here's my question: Was it possible for God to find them a room? It's silly, isn't it? Was it possible for God to have a house prepared for Jesus to be born? Well, of course it was. Couldn't he have worked things out so that Jesus could have been...not only a house, but perhaps even born in a *palace*? Well, of course he could! But he didn't! Have you ever asked *why*? Have you ever asked why it was that God allowed his son to be born in a stable, wrapped up in swaddling clothes, and laid on hay in a manger as his place of birth? Why did he do it that way when everybody knows he could have easily done it any way he wanted to do it? I have to conclude there was a purpose behind it. Just as there is a purpose behind the scripture in Zechariah that said, "Behold your king will come to you lowly, and riding upon an ass and a colt, the foal of an ass." Just as all these things were said of Jesus, this also I think had a point and a purpose.

And you would expect announcements to be made to all the high-level people, but they weren't. Not one single person in Jerusalem was even told, much less the high priest, the king, any of the Levites—nobody at Jerusalem. The scribes and the Pharisees—all left completely in the dark about the birth of the Messiah. No one was told. The people who were told were a bunch of shepherders, not far from Bethlehem, who were sleeping in the field that night keeping watch over their flock. They were out there with their flock taking care of things.

Luke 2

AKJV

⁹ And, see, the angel of the Lord came on them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

¹⁰ And the angel said to them, Fear not [*Relax. Don't be afraid.*]: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

¹¹ For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

Now, I'm sure this meant a *whole bunch* to these shepherds. These were religious men, obviously; otherwise I don't think they would've gone to them; and I don't think it would have meant anything to them if they had not been religious, if they had not been expecting.

Luke 2

AKJV

¹¹ For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

¹² And this shall be a sign to you; You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

¹⁴ Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

One of my *favorite* choruses in the *Messiah* is this one: "Glory to God in the highest"—the song of the angels on this night. And I *really* would have liked to have heard the real thing. It must've been *amazing* to behold.

But what on earth did the angel mean when he said, “This shall be a *sign* to you”? Did he mean, “This is how you’re going to recognize him”? When he says, “This shall be a *sign* to you”...a sign is a very important thing in the Bible. Whenever a type or a sign is given to somebody, it’s very meaningful. What in the world did this mean? It’s almost as though the angel said, “Listen up! This is important! You will find this child wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.” Why? Why do we want to tell them that? I think it was a meaningful thing that the Savior, the newborn Savior, was of humble birth.

But there’s more. As I said, Jesus’ birth was not revealed to the kings and priests in Jerusalem, but it was revealed to somebody else. We find in Matthew, chapter 2...

Matthew 2

AKJV

¹ Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

² Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

Who are these people, and why were *they* told? You kind of halfway understand the shepherds, but why drag these people halfway across the world for this newborn Savior, and why did God bother with them?

Legends have abounded about the wise men. They even have names created for them. Let’s see, it’s Gaspar, Melchior...I forget the third guy’s name [Balthazar]. Of course, it isn’t his name anyway; they were made-up names for them. Nobody knows what their names were, or even who they were. Nothing can be said with certainty about these men, except that they came from *the East*. That seems to be important.

I would like you to add a little footnote in your Bible; if you’re making notes, you might want to make a reference to this: Isaac and Ishmael were not Abraham’s only sons. Did you know that? After Sarah died, and after Ishmael was gone, Abraham married a woman named Keturah, and he had six more sons by this woman—they’re all named in the Bible [**Genesis 25:1–2**]. And you might want to make a note of the scripture by the one I just read you about the Magi. Genesis 25, verse 5; it says,

Genesis 25

AKJV

⁵ And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac.

⁶ But to the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had [*Which suggests there may be more than Keturah.*], Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, to the east country.

He sent them away in the East. Now, this is absolutely the *only* rationale I can find for why on earth God would’ve said anything to a bunch of magi in the Far East over there about the birth of a son, except for the fact that this was a son of Abraham; he was the promised seed of Abraham—that God may have announced the birth of the promised Son of Abraham to Abraham’s other sons. Maybe? Maybe not? But at the same time, it’s the only rationale I can find that makes any sense to me at all as to why he would bother telling those people about the birth of the promised seed in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed [**Genesis 22:18**]; for I don’t doubt at all that the children of Abraham knew that promise, and *hoped* for it, and *waited* for it like the rest of the world did.

I think, at this season of the year, because (for those of you that may be new to us) we believe that Jesus was born not far from this night somewhere at this season of the year, I think it’s good to remember that

Jesus came as one of us. And by that I don't merely mean that he was born of the flesh. We have really gone over that pretty thoroughly in years gone by—that it was necessary that Jesus come in the flesh, he that denies that Jesus is come in the flesh is of the Antichrist [1 John 4:3]. We know all that stuff. I think it's important, though, that we understand that Jesus not only came in the flesh, but he came of *lowly birth*. He came like *one of us*, of a working-class family; and that he as a young man worked with his hands to earn a living for himself, for his mother, for his dad, for his family. When he was born, he was as helpless as any of us, and he was laid in a manger; he didn't even have a proper crib. He was not in a house; he was in a stable. And I think all that is there so that we can know our Savior is *one of us*. And we know that when he finally came into Jerusalem he came not as a conqueror, but he came as a Savior, riding on the colt of a donkey.

The next time he comes, it will be different.

Transcript of a sermon by
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