

3. The first burden opened with Yahweh's pronouncement of judgment upon the Gentile nations touching the land of Israel. Though it would delay for a century and a half, devastation was coming to them through the hand of the Greek king Alexander. The Gentiles' idolatry provoked the Lord to wrath and the work of His wrath was destruction – ultimately, the destruction of idolatry, not the idolaters: The goal of His zeal was purgation, liberation and ingathering and this zeal was directed toward the exiles of Judah and Israel as well as the nations, as the Lord's second burden would make clear.

Thus verses 9:7-8 provide the transition between the Lord's pronouncement of judgment and His announcement of the coming king. They do so in at least two ways:

- First of all, they bring to a head the preceding passage, highlighting the critical truth that restoration is the Lord's ultimate purpose in judgment, not destruction. He was going to arise against the idolatrous nations (in the person of Alexander) in order to eradicate their idolatry and reconcile them to Himself so as to become part of His covenant household (cf. again 2:10-11 with Isaiah 11:1-12, 49:1-7; Micah 4:1-4; Amos 9:11-15; Haggai 2:1-9; cf. also Zechariah 14:1-9).
- But these two verses also point forward into the next passage which introduces Yahweh's king. As they look backward, verses 7-8 emphasize that God's design in judgment is restoration; as they look forward, they provide a framework for understanding the person and work of the coming ruler announced in 9:9-10. Specifically, verses 7-8 indicate that the Lord's purpose in sending His king – a ruler who is “just and endowed with salvation” – is the purging, reconciliation and ingathering of the estranged nations as well as the exiles of Judah and Israel.

Yahweh was going to judge the world of men in their idolatry, but in order to deliver the idolaters and eradicate idolatry itself. And He was going to do so in connection with the coming of Zion's promised king. This regal ruler would secure his kingdom and its peace, but not through the sort of conquest the people of Israel were expecting.

- a. The Lord concluded His word to the nations with the affirmation that His eyes “have now seen” (9:8). In context, this points to both His purpose and His accomplishment of it. He was looking upon the world of men with intentional eyes – eyes which would one day gaze upon His accomplished work in the world. Though the idea of fulfillment is in the forefront here (“*now* I have seen with my eyes”), this referring to the future as though already present served to emphasize to the prophet and his audience that Zion's restoration would surely come to pass.

The Lord proclaimed as presently fulfilled what was yet to come: His eyes were beholding the liberation, purging, ingathering and preservation that awaited a future day. His triumph in the world was yet to be realized, but it was fully assured and so He could speak as though already looking upon it. Thus verse 8 highlights the absolute surety of Yahweh's accomplishment of His restorative purpose for the nations and the tribes of Israel; verses 9-10, then, announce the One in whom He would obtain His great victory.

And that One is the *King of Zion* – the Ruler in whom Zion was to obtain her restoration and glorification; the One in whom Yahweh’s zeal was to come to full expression and complete satiation (ref. again 1:13-17, 2:7-13, 8:1-3). In the context of Zechariah’s prophecy, this king is clearly to be identified with the Branch of David – David’s royal son ordained by the Lord to build His house and secure its well-being (cf. 9:8 with 6:9-15). But this Branch was also revealed to Zechariah to be Yahweh’s *King-Priest* – the ruler whose priestly mediation would secure the purging of Zion’s iniquity (3:1-10). And because Zion was to embrace within her walls the nations as well as the remnant of Judah and Israel (2:7-13, 6:15, 8:11-13, 9:4-7), Zion’s purging meant the purging of mankind.

David’s Branch was coming to Zion and on her behalf to restore her and her children. Considered within Zechariah’s prophecy and historical context, the implication is that the coming of the Branch meant the *end of Israel’s exile*. The Lord had pledged His return and so their return to Him (1:1-3, 2:1-12, 8:1-8) and this reconciliation was to be realized in His king. The great longing and hope of the Judean exiles wasn’t a rebuilt temple or restored Jerusalem, but the return of their covenant King – Yahweh, the Lord of Israel – whose presence made the temple a *sanctuary* and Jerusalem the *city of the great God*. Zion’s children were longing for the day when her exile would come to an end and, throughout the prophets, this event was associated with the coming of the Davidic king (cf. Isaiah 8:21-9:7, 11:1-12, also 40:1-11 with 42:1-13 and 43:1-44:23, 49:1-13, 53:1-54:17; also Jeremiah 23:1-8, 30:1-33:26; Ezekiel 37; Hosea 1-3; Micah 4:1-5:5; etc.).

The coming of her king meant the end of Zion’s exile and the ingathering of her children. It meant that her long season of alienation and bitter anguish had come to an end, and thus the announcement of the Branch was to be attended with great rejoicing and exultant shouts of triumph.

- b. The text doesn’t specifically identify this king with the Davidic Branch, but it does provide a remarkable depiction of him. First, it describes his *person* and then the *circumstance* of his coming.

- In terms of his person, this individual is described as “just and endowed with salvation.” The adjective rendered *just* has many nuances of meaning (righteous, upright, faithful, lawful, etc.), but its general sense is conformity to what is true and therefore right. Thus it can carry a moral or ethical connotation, but it also connotes integrity or fidelity where the idea is truthfulness, trustworthiness or faithfulness to fulfill one’s word.

The latter is the most common way this Hebrew word group is used in reference to God and it best suits the present context. For the point here is not that this king is moral, but that he is committed to what is right and true. And what is right and true is the creation’s conformity to its divinely-ordained nature and purpose. This king’s “justice” (righteousness) is his agreement with and faithful devotion to Yahweh’s goal for His creation.

Thus this righteous king is “endowed with salvation.” This Hebrew noun (“salvation”) carries the basic sense of *deliverance*. In the scriptural parlance of Israel’s history with Yahweh, He “saved” His people when He delivered them from their enemies or other powers which were oppressing or subjugating them. Thus “salvation” in Old Testament usage refers primarily to physical deliverance (ref. Exodus 14:30; Numbers 10:9; Deuteronomy 20:1-4; Judges 2:10-16; 1 Samuel 7:1-8; cf. also Psalm 3:6-8, 7:1-2, 18:1-3, 20:1-9, 27:1-3, etc.); even when the prophets spoke of a future day of salvation they did so in the language of deliverance from enemies (cf. Isaiah 43, 45, 49; also Jeremiah 23:1-8; 30:1-11, 33:1-16; Ezekiel 34:1-24; etc.). It is with Christ’s coming that the connotation of salvation as deliverance shifts from the physical and temporal to the spiritual and eternal (ref. Luke 1:67-79; cf. esp. vv. 69-71 with vv. 76-77).

As to this king, the Hebrew grammar indicates that he is the *recipient of deliverance*, but not in terms of being delivered himself. (Indeed, the time of fulfillment would show that David’s regal Branch was not Himself delivered from His enemies, but was delivered over to them; cf. Psalm 22:8 and Matthew 27:43). Rather, this king was to be the recipient of deliverance in the sense that Yahweh would give him the authority and power of deliverance (salvation) – an endowment given for the sake of delivering another. Here that “other” is Zion. *Zion was to rejoice and shout in triumph because the coming of her king meant her deliverance from her subjugators, and therefore the end of her exile.*

- Regarding the circumstance of his coming, this king’s entrance is depicted in a manner that suggests a regal procession. Since he is here being presented to Zion as her king, the imagery points toward a coronation procession (cf. 1 Kings 1:33). Others believe the scene should be interpreted as depicting a victory procession – a celebratory parade honoring a king who’s just returned from a successful military campaign. The first view is likely correct, but this doesn’t eliminate altogether the idea of a victory celebration. For, in the case of Messiah, His coronation as Israel’s king was to follow upon His conquest of Yahweh’s enemies.

This language depicts a regal procession, but one that is unusual. For this individual presents himself to Zion as her king in a most unexpected fashion: not standing triumphantly upon the platform of a battle chariot or riding a magnificent war horse, but sitting on the back of a donkey – a lowly beast of burden. And not even a mature donkey, but a donkey’s colt. If a donkey conveys an image of insignificance and relative weakness, how much more its foal? This imagery has been variously explained, but it seems clear that its basic intent was to highlight a critical point of irony: Zion’s long-awaited deliverer-king – David’s covenant son ordained by Yahweh to conquer and rule in His authority and power – was going to secure and fulfill His glorious reign as a man marked by lowliness.

Mark and Luke's accounts of the fulfillment of this prophecy punctuate this irony by noting that the foal Jesus rode into Jerusalem had never been sat upon, indicating that it was still a very young animal (Mark 11:1-2; Luke 19:28-30). Far from being an impressive and powerful steed, it was likely smaller than the man who sat upon it and weighed it down, creating a strange and unimpressive, if not almost comical, sight for the spectators.

This paradoxical image of Zion's king – triumphal, yet marked by lowliness – distinguishes him from all other kings. The earth's rulers, no matter who they are and the setting and circumstances of their reign, rule according to the "procedure of the king": They exercise their authority and power with ultimate reference to themselves – their judgment, concerns and interests (1 Samuel 8:1-17). But not so with Zion's king: The Son of David, He was going to carry out *in truth* David's reign as Yahweh's chosen ruler – the man after His own heart; He was going to establish Yahweh's kingdom and exercise His rule as His *Servant* (Isaiah 42-53).

- c. The Branch, Zion's messianic king, was coming to bring her long-awaited deliverance. Other rulers and kings in Israel had accomplished this in some measure through military victory over subjugating powers, but never in the true sense. There was never a time in Israel's history when her warfare was ended such that her instruments of war, let alone the very notion of war, had become obsolete. From the Egyptian exodus to the dawn of the first century, Zion would never know true peace. Yet Yahweh continued to promise that day – a day of deliverance that would see, not the temporary inactivity of Israel's war implements, but their destruction (9:10a). They would be utterly obsolete, for His anointed king was bringing true and everlasting peace – *shalom* – not only to Judah and Israel (here referred to under the designations of Ephraim and Jerusalem), but also to the nations of the earth (9:10b; cf. again 9:7-8).

Thus the double irony: The triumphal Son of David – Yahweh's Servant empowered by His Spirit to bring about His absolute rule over the world – was going to achieve this unparalleled victory, not through assertive might and domination, but poverty of spirit, lowly submission and self-giving. But this irony was to be matched by another: Zion's deliverance wasn't going to be accomplished through the conquest of her enemies, but through the defeat of enmity itself. *The king was going to destroy Zion's enemies by destroying all enmity.* Zion would no longer have any need for instruments of war because her king had spoken peace to her enemies and gathered them into His kingdom.

A profound principle of Yahweh's everlasting kingdom – and one lost upon the sons of Israel – was that the peace, security and blessing He promised were not going to result from the natural human means of superior martial power and the deterrence it provides. The almighty Lord of Hosts, through His Servant-King, was going to establish His universal, everlasting dominion (9:10c), not through the exercise of overwhelming might and constant vigilance, but love's self-giving. Yahweh's king would conquer His enemies by overcoming their enmity, and He would accomplish that feat by taking up their enmity and destroying it in Himself (cf. Luke 19:28-44; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 1:15-23).