

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

HOPE RESTORED

Zechariah 9:9–12

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Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

9Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!

Lo, your king comes to you;

triumphant and victorious is he,

humble and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

10He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim

and the war-horse from Jerusalem;

and the battle bow shall be cut off,

and he shall command peace to the nations;

his dominion shall be from sea to sea,

and from the River to the ends of the earth.

11As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,

I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

12Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;

today I declare that I will restore to you double.

DIAGNOSIS: False Hope

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Prisoners of Hope?*

Zionism is a great idea—believing that God will protect your whole nation because that’s how much God loves you. But does it ever work out that well? The evidence seems to say otherwise for Israel. After all, Zechariah is writing during a time when the people have just returned from exile; the enemy (in the most recent case, Babylon) had prevailed, and Israel had been dislodged from the very home that they thought God had assured them he’d protect. Were they hopeful people? Or were they prisoners of hope (v. 12)?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Prisoners without Hope*

Maybe the words of Zechariah should have alerted them to the hopelessness of this arrangement: God will put their champion, their would-be king, on a donkey (v. 9)—not exactly the animal on which to ride into battle. A warhorse might work in battle, but not a donkey. (Never mind that post-exile Israel didn’t have kings.) Perhaps the people’s hope was misplaced. And how could God possibly achieve peace for Israel without first undergoing warfare (v. 10)?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Self-Made Prison*

Ezekiel called such misplaced hope “dried up” (37:11). Zechariah calls it a “waterless pit” (v. 11). Either way, Israel is dying of thirst; their misplaced hope will kill them. They will be left high and dry without hope, without any god to save them.

PROGNOSIS: Real Hope

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Hope on a Donkey*

But what if the misplaced hope is merely in the misreading of Zechariah's prophecy, not the prophecy itself? What if the one who rides in on the donkey (v. 9) actually chooses humility over power? What if, more than humility, he is willing to shed his own blood (v. 11, the blood of the covenant) to set his people free? For that is precisely the king God chooses for Israel in the person of Jesus. This king chooses the way of humility, to shed his own blood, to hand himself over to a death that he didn't deserve, in order to assure Israel's well being. In Jesus God surrenders hope in this life, and receives a new resurrection life—a life in which he becomes “a spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (John 4:14). In Christ Israel will never be thirsty again.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Hope Set Free*

And that spring of water is cause to “rejoice greatly” (v. 9). To be dried up and have such a thirst quenched is cause for joy, for deep and abiding gratitude, for trust. Jesus sets hope free, makes it possible for us to trust that God's promises through the prophet Zechariah are not vain. This is how God protects his children (Israel), brings peace, and rules from sea to sea. He rules the heart by filling it to overflowing, he makes a people by the blood of the covenant. In his humble, self-giving nature, he restores life—a life that we long for and live for.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Hope for Prisoners*

So why would we want to keep such free hope to ourselves? If it's free, there's enough to go around. So those (we) who have received such hope, seek to share it. We share it without regard for national boundaries or the old divisions that distinguish us. We share this hope believing that Christ's love breaks down barriers so that enemies are freed to become friends. In Christ we are restored double.