

Triumphal Entry
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2 Sam 16:2a

(BHS)

(NIV)

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־צִיבָא	The king asked Ziba,
מָה־אַלְהָה לָךְ	“Why have you brought these?”
וַיֹּאמֶר צִיבָא	Ziba answered,
הַחֲמֹרִים לְבֵית־הַמֶּלֶךְ לָרֶכֶב	“The donkeys are for the king’s household to ride on

Pretty straightforward, isn't it? Sorry about not closing the quote.

Although NIV jazzes it up with “asked” and “answered,” the Hebrew boringly uses the same generic, “said.” The donkeys are for the king and his people.

Much of this essay draws on Adrian Leske’s 2000 article in *CBQ*.

In the David cycle, royals do not ride on donkeys, which are mere service animals. They ride on fine steeds and use strong pack-mules. See 2 Sam 13:29, 18:9, and 1 Kgs 1:33. David, however, at this very low point in his career, was reduced to riding on a donkey like a commoner. “Come! We must flee, or none of us will escape” (2 Sam 15:14). He fled for his life from his son, driven from his home and cursed along the way. Part of that lowliness was in riding a domestic ass.

A few chapters later he returned to Jerusalem, “victoriously.” Yet it was a hollow victory. David was in mourning for his beloved rebel son. The kingdom had been torn apart. Zech 9:9 reflects upon this picture—of the great but humbled king of Israel, riding back into Jerusalem on a donkey.

Rejoice 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.

The word “victorious” needs some explanation. It is from the verb “to save,” from which also comes the name “Jesus.” But the verb is passive. It means something like, “needing salvation,” or “having been saved”—in other words, “having received victory.” Thus, “victorious”—but not exactly a triumphant “victorious.” Rather, in humility he was graciously handed victory.

Zech 9:9 envisions future rejoicing in Jerusalem at a coming king, even though he will be modest and unassuming in his arrival—like David weeping for his son as he rode. And see NIV’s “lowly.” That is a gloss of *‘ānî*, “poor,” “afflicted”—often used for the oppressed and downtrodden exiles, never elsewhere for a king. Despite the people’s happiness, this king is sorely burdened.

Zechariah understood that David’s deprecatory travel is a paradigm for what was to come; apparently he expected another humble king in the new age. The Messiah will come again to Mount Zion, but unpretentious, like David tearful and crying on his unimposing beast.

Jesus also rode into Jerusalem lowly on a donkey. The people rejoiced—but he wept. He wept for the inhabitants there and their children, who did not recognize the hour of their visitation (Luke 19:28 – 44). Matt 21:5 and John 12:15 both cite Zech 9:9 to show that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy then.

The history of David became a pattern of what was to come. Jesus reenacted David’s ride into Jerusalem, as Zechariah foresaw. But as David wept for his son, now we see Jesus weeping for all of the sons of Israel. They, like Absalom, had rejected the king whom God had anointed. They will be dashed to the ground as Absalom was when they cut him down from the tree where he died, hanging by his hair.

We call this Jesus' Triumphal Entry. But I don't think he felt very triumphant that day. He knew that soon after, he would be crucified. But he did not weep for himself—he wept for his people and for their future sufferings.

Christian people, this is our King. He knows our sufferings and he weeps for us. And soon he will return for us.

So in the meantime, while we wait for him, we are called to show forth our loyalty and allegiance. Let the world see whom you consider to be your King. Let all who know you feel your unwavering commitment to your great Lord. This of course is hard to do in an unbelieving world. But the difficulty will not be forever. Someday he will return, triumphantly riding on the clouds, and our waiting will be over.

Amen, Come Lord Jesus, our King!