

Exegetical Notes, Matthew 21:1-11
“The Triumphal Entry”

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen, Pastor, Cornerstone Fellowship
101 Kylies Road, Coatesville, PA 19329
610-384-1375
charleshjensen@aol.com

Matthew 21:1-11

Verse 1-3

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

- Jesus approached Jerusalem from the east passing down the Mount of Olives and through the village of Bethphage. In Bethphage there was a donkey tied with her colt apparently waiting for Jesus’ use.
- The donkey was an animal that symbolized humility, peace and Davidic royalty. It was the animal that a king rode in victory.

Verse 4-7

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: “Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’” The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them.

- The quotation comes from Zechariah 9:9 or Isaiah 62:11. Both passages reflect the promise of the coming of Israel’s Messianic King. By applying this passage to Jesus, Matthew is claiming that Jesus is the Messiah.
- It appears that Jesus is doing an acted-out sermon in the tradition of Isaiah and Jeremiah. He is not preaching with words but actions. He is acting out this passage of scripture, with himself in the role of Messiah, to say to the people that he is the Messiah.

Verse 8

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

- The size of the crowd is to be noted. Many people joined in the parade.
- The people in the crowd literally used their clothing and leafy branches cut from the trees lining the route to make a carpet over which Jesus rode. This was an act reserved for welcoming visiting royalty. By so doing the crowd was acknowledging that they recognized who Jesus claimed to be and welcomed him as Israel's Messiah.

Verse 9

The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!"

- The quotations come from Psalm 118:25-27. The word "Hosanna" means "save now." Psalm 118:25-27 is a festival psalm. The title "Son of David" is a Messianic title. By singing this greeting to Jesus the crowd was again acknowledging their acceptance of Jesus as Israel's Messiah and proclaiming their desire/need for salvation.
- Scholars believe that the crowd's understanding of the Messianic role was political and not religious. The salvation that they sought was not salvation from sin by freedom from Rome. They believed that the Messiah would bring them political freedom by setting them free from Roman occupation. Thus, while they were willing to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, they did not understand his role in God's plan. This explains why they were so willing to turn against him at the time of the crucifixion. He had failed to perform according to their expectation and, therefore, could not be the Messiah as they had assumed he was.

Verse 10-11

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

- The parade into the city, because of the large number of people involved, caught the attention of an even larger group of people. They

- wanted to know what was going on and who was receiving this royal greeting.
- The answer given to the larger group by those involved indicates that they did not really understand the full impact of who Jesus was. They explained that they were welcoming a prophet. In itself, this was a great thing for Israel since the Jews had not welcomed a prophet for 400 years. However, it also shows their lack of full understanding. Jesus was a prophet, but more than a prophet. He was “great David’s greater son.” He was the Messiah of God sent to take away the sin of the world.

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