

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 21:1 - 21:9



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this reading, Steve Gregg examines the account in Matthew 21:1-9, where Jesus sends two of his disciples to fetch a donkey and a colt from a village opposite Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. He then mounts the animals and enters Jerusalem while a vast crowd lays palm branches at his feet while hailing him as the "Son of David." Gregg provides valuable insights into the symbolism of the scene, which depicts Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah of Israel, fulfilling the prophecies of Zechariah 9:9 and Psalm 118:25-26. He also highlights the fact that the humble donkey on which Jesus rides is a sign of his meekness, as foretold by the prophet Isaiah.

### Transcript

Today we'll begin reading at Matthew chapter 21 and verse 1. Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to me. And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, The Lord has need of them, and immediately he will send them.

All of this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, your king is coming to you, lowly and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey. So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. And they brought the donkey and the colt and laid their clothes on them and set him on them.

Okay, let's stop there for a moment. We will read on, but let me make some comments here. Here we have a case where Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem.

This is just one week before his resurrection. This is, of course, what we call Palm Sunday. And the following Sunday was Resurrection Sunday.

And, of course, in between there was what we normally call Good Friday when Jesus was crucified. So at this point, we are beginning the narrative of the last week of Jesus' life on earth as a man. Now, it's interesting because we still have a good eight chapters ahead

of us here in Matthew.

And we've covered only 20. Almost a third of the chapters are still ahead of us. And yet we can see that the last week of Jesus' life is to be covered in these many chapters, whereas we had only about twice as many chapters to cover the rest of his entire career.

And this is pretty much the way the Gospels handle the life of Jesus in general. They do give disproportionate amount of attention to what Jesus did in the final week, especially his death and resurrection. And that is because although everything Jesus did and said were very significant, the Gospel writers were trying to present the Gospel, that is, the message of how Jesus died for our sins and rose again.

And so those events surrounding his death, especially what is usually called the Passion Week, based on the Latin word for suffering, passion, it's the week of suffering for Jesus. These incidents, these events are given much fuller coverage and much more detailed coverage than any other comparable week in the life of Jesus in the Gospel narrative. So here we have in Matthew 21 the beginning of what we call the Passion Week.

And it is Sunday. It is the day of the triumphal entry, as we usually call it. Now, Jesus, as we shall find, rode into Jerusalem on a donkey.

And Matthew tells us that this is to fulfill what is written in the prophet. He does not identify which prophet, although he does quote Zechariah 9. And Zechariah 9.9 says, Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, your king is coming to you, lowly and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey. As a matter of fact, this is kind of a combination of Zechariah 9.9 and a passage in Isaiah that says, Speak to the daughter of Zion, which is how this begins.

Matthew is really putting together a couple of Old Testament prophecies, but primarily Zechariah 9.9 is the one he's talking about. Now, Jesus did ride into Jerusalem on a donkey and thus fulfilled that particular prophecy. I might say that some have felt that Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy is not all that remarkable or impressive.

They say, Well, you know, Jesus was a Jew who knew the Old Testament pretty well. And as one wishing to identify himself or be identified by the people as the Messiah, he knew what the prophet said the Messiah would do, and therefore he did it. Not because he really was the Messiah, but because he knew what was expected of the Messiah, and he therefore did those things which the prophet said the Messiah would do.

Now, there's several problems with this theory. One is that Jesus never really tried to proclaim himself the Messiah. I mean, if Jesus really was some kind of a man who is not the Messiah, but wanted to convince people that he was the Messiah, it seems like he should have said so once in a while.

And actually, he never did publicly say he was the Messiah. He did tell the woman at the

well in John chapter 4 that he was the Messiah in a private conversation, and he also told his disciples privately at Caesarea Philippi that he was the Messiah, but he never made any public declaration to being the Messiah. In fact, on one occasion in the Gospel of John, when the Pharisees said, Well, how long will you keep us in suspense? Are you the Messiah or not? He said, I've already told you everything I can tell you, and you don't believe, so I won't tell you again.

But he had never actually said, I am the Messiah. Now, if Jesus was a man who was not the Messiah, but wanted people to think he was, one might expect him at some point to claim that he was the Messiah, but he never really did in any public forum. Now, a second problem with this theory is that if Jesus had wanted to convince the Jews of his day that he was the Messiah, even if he was not, he would have had to go about it differently, because the Jews, although Jesus, by the way, did fulfill Messianic prophecy, the Jews misunderstood Messianic prophecy.

They did not expect the Messiah to come and do the things that Jesus did. Jesus knew very well what they expected, and he could have done those things if he wanted to. The Jews would have soon recognized him as the Messiah if he, for example, marshaled an army.

to revolt against Rome, and to lead the Jews to victory against Rome, and out of that oppression that they had been under for a hundred years in Jesus' time. That's what they wanted the Messiah to do, and thought he would do. Jesus didn't do that at all.

He didn't even show an interest in it, although he knew that that's what they thought the Messiah would do. Furthermore, he had opportunity to do that, because in John chapter 6 and verse 15, we read that Jesus saw that the multitudes were about ready to take him by force and make him king. There was his golden opportunity.

If he wanted to prove to them he was the Messiah, the Messiah they were looking for, he could have just gone along with that plan. But the Bible says instead he sent the crowd away, and he went off alone to pray, so that this would not happen. Now, Jesus did not take the opportunity to be the Messiah they wanted, and the one they would have recognized.

And he did, however, things that, although the Scripture said the Messiah would do them, the Jews had overlooked those things, and were not anticipating the Messiah to do those things. So, it's not the case that he somehow knew what the Old Testament said the Messiah would do, and fulfilled Jewish expectations deliberately so that people would think he was the Messiah. He took an entirely different approach than a man would take who was trying to convince people he was the Messiah.

Now, a third consideration is that although in a case like this, any man might ride into Jerusalem on a donkey if he chooses, and say, ah, you see, the Scripture said the

Messiah would ride in on a donkey. Now, this is one prophecy, of course, of the Messiah that any man could have fulfilled if he wished, but there are many Messianic prophecies that Jesus fulfilled that a man could not choose to do. Micah said the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but how could a man choose where he's going to be born? The Messiah was to be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. Jesus was, but how does a man make a decision about how many pieces of silver his enemies will pay to have him betrayed? I mean, there are many things in the story of Jesus that were beyond the control of a man to make happen to himself, and which fulfilled prophecy nonetheless. And therefore, of course, this idea that Jesus was not the Messiah, but he simply went through the motions of fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies so that people would think he was the Messiah, it fails on all considerations.

Now, the Messiah would ride in on a donkey, on a colt of an ass. This is not the regal vehicle in most cases. Most conquerors would ride a powerful steed, a white horse at the head of their armies.

Jesus did not come in as that kind of a king. He came in humbly on a donkey. Now, by the way, a donkey is not the same thing as a mule.

David and his sons, I believe, had mules. And a mule is much more like a horse. And sometimes in Israel's history, the royal family did ride mules.

But a burro is a different thing than that. A burro is not anything as spirited as a mule or as noble. A burro is a very humble and unimpressive animal.

And that's what Jesus rode upon. He did not come in in a way so as to impress people with his military power. He certainly did not come in in an intimidating way to confront the Romans or anything like that.

And that's what the Jews hoped the Messiah would do, but he did not. He came in instead the way God said the Messiah would come. Now, we have here this story of Jesus sending the two disciples.

We do not know which ones here. They're not mentioned in Matthew by name. But he sends the two disciples to go and get this donkey.

Now, what he tells them is that they will find a donkey tied in a certain place. And that he would, if they loose the donkey, if anyone challenges them in their taking the donkey, they should just say, the Lord has need of it. And these people will surrender the donkey.

Now, Matthew does not give detail as to how this happened. It just says in verse 6, so the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. And they brought the donkey.

However, over in Mark, we do read more detail. We read in this in Mark 11, 4. So they went their way and found the colt tied to the door outside on the street. And they loosed it.

And some of those who stood there said to them, what are you doing loosing that colt? So they spoke to them just as Jesus had commanded, and they let them go. So Jesus told them, if anyone challenges you, just say, the Lord has need of it, and they'll let you take it. And sure enough, when the disciples got there, someone did challenge them on that.

And the disciples did say what Jesus said, and they were allowed to take it. Now, was this a miracle? Or was this prearranged? I know of at least one case of a group of Christians who got very upset at a friend of mine because he suggested that this was a situation that Jesus probably had prearranged. That he probably knew the owner of the donkey, and he had told him, you know, I'm going to need your donkey at a certain time.

I'll send a couple of my guys over to pick it up. And if you wonder whether the guys taking the donkey are my guys or not, just ask them. Just say, what are you doing with the donkey? And if they're my guys, they'll say, the Lord has need of him, and you'll know that you can let him go.

Sort of like a countersign. Agents identifying themselves to each other by some prearranged conversation. Well, I mean, that is a possibility.

However, when this theory that Jesus had prearranged all this was floated by one group of Christians I know, they got very upset because they thought, no, this is a miracle, and you're taking away from the miraculous. You're trying to say that Jesus didn't work a miracle here. Well, true, that would be suggesting that Jesus didn't work a miracle on this occasion.

But that's not the same thing as doubting that Jesus was a miracle worker. One might readily admit that Jesus worked all the miracles that the Bible says he worked without calling this a miracle. After all, the passage does not say that this is a miracle.

Jesus did not say anything supernatural was going to happen. He just told them there'd be a donkey. Go get it.

If someone says, where are you going? Just say, the Lord has need of it, and they'll let you go. All of this could have been prearranged, and there's nothing suggesting that this was miraculous. Jesus did have, apparently, a network besides his disciples of loyal people.

We know there were people who were loyal to him who didn't travel with him. For example, Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha, they were definitely loyal to Jesus, very close friends, but they never traveled with him. They lived in the vicinity of Jerusalem and hosted Jesus and his crew whenever they were in the area, fed them and

housed them.

But there's no evidence that they followed him. And that being so, we could assume there might have been many people like them that believed in Jesus. I mean, Nicodemus would be one of them in Jerusalem.

He didn't follow Jesus around, and yet he clearly was a believer in Jesus. And so there were people there whom Jesus knew were on his side. It's possible that the disciples had not even met all of them.

Or if they had, they didn't know of all the conversations Jesus had had with them. And so the disciples do not know of the arrangement Jesus has made about this donkey, so he tells them, and they go and get it. Now, that this would be prearranged by Jesus is not strange at all, and it is not demeaning to the miraculous element in the Bible in general.

This is not treated in the Bible as if it is a miracle. Any more than on another occasion, a week later or less, Jesus sent two disciples, maybe the same two, and they said, where do you want to celebrate the Passover? He said, well, you go into town, you'll see a man with a picture on his head. Follow him, go in the house where he goes, ask for the owner of the house, and when you meet the owner of the house, tell him that you're here to find out where Jesus wants to have the Passover, and you'll find the room.

Go prepare it. Now, you see, Jesus had apparently arranged with some homeowner to use his upper room for the Passover. And a similar kind of thing, he sends two disciples to encounter this man in an interesting way.

You find a man walking with a water picture on your head, follow him, go in where he goes. It all sounds very clandestine. It sounds very cloak and dagger.

And no doubt it was, because at that particular point in time, there were those who were seeking to kill Jesus, and he couldn't do everything publicly. Now, what's interesting, he did ride in on the donkey publicly, but it was so public that those who wanted to kill him could do nothing. They were very frustrated, in fact, that they could do nothing, but they couldn't because the crowds adored him.

Now, here the disciples go, they find this donkey, they loose the donkey, they bring it to Jesus. Now, it says that they brought the donkey, verse 7, and the colt, and laid their clothes on them and set him on them. Now, it's hard to imagine how Jesus could ride the two animals.

You can't ride two animals at once unless you're a circus rider, and Jesus wasn't doing that. I believe that probably what we'd understand is that Jesus rode on the colt, and the mother of the colt was brought along to keep the colt calm. Now, of course, we could suggest that Jesus, by a miracle, kept the colt calm himself, because we know he could still storms at sea, and this was a donkey colt that had never borne a man.

That is, no one had ever ridden on his back before. You notice he was an unbroken colt. Now, I don't know if you've ever seen a rodeo, but when you get a person on an unbroken colt, usually that animal is not real fond of having someone on top of him until he's broken.

This was an unbroken colt, and Jesus rode him. Now, the mother may have been brought along to keep the colt calm, but it would still require something of supernatural mastery, it seems to me, for Jesus to ride the colt, since it had never had a man on it before. Now, it says in verse 8, And a great, very great multitude spread their garments on the road.

Others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! Now, these cries of the people are rather interesting. We wonder, first of all, where did the crowd come from? How did they know he was coming? Was this prearranged also? Did Jesus send messengers throughout Jerusalem saying, Now, watch over this way, this entry to the city.

Jesus is going to be coming out on a donkey, and you guys all bring your palm branches and wave them and say these words. Well, we have no record that he did that, and we don't know that he didn't do that. I don't suppose there's any reason to assume this was prearranged.

They may have seen him coming in the distance. And because it was the Passover season, you see, we're not told that here, but we know from other places that this was the Passover season. There were many pilgrims coming to Jerusalem from all over the place, and the city was swelled with people.

And no doubt some of the people recognized him and began to pass the word around. Hey, Jesus is coming, Jesus is coming. So the people went out and thought, Wow, he's finally doing what we hoped he would do.

He's probably coming to present himself to be king. That's what they wanted him to do. And so they came out and they said, Hosanna, son of David.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. Now, the word Hosanna means save now.

So it's as if they are inviting him to play the role of deliverer of the Messiah. They called him the son of David because son of David was a title for the Messiah. And they said, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, meaning that they were receiving him as God's sent one, coming in God's name to be their deliverer.

Now, they didn't make these words up. They're actually quoting from a psalm. It's Psalm 118, verse 25 and 26, which says, Save now, I pray, O Lord.

O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. So save now is Hosanna.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord is these lines are taken directly from Psalm 118, verses 25 and 26. These people apparently were hoping that Jesus at this time would rally the support of the populace of Jerusalem and hopefully save them from the oppression of the Romans, to drive the Romans out and give freedom to his people. Well, that wasn't exactly the agenda that Jesus had in mind.

He was going to be delivered over to the hands of the Romans and subjected to the most excruciating form of execution that the Romans had innovated for the criminals they most despised. He was not going to overthrow the Romans. Not that way.

However, it should not be thought that the Jews were completely wrong in thinking that the Messiah was coming to deliver them. He was coming to deliver them, but from other enemies than the Romans. You see, in Matthew chapter 1, verse 21, the angel told Joseph the son of Mary would be named Jesus.

He says his name should be called Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. Now, the Jewish people in the days of Christ were oppressed by the Romans. They were politically oppressed and they desired to be saved from that oppression.

But God sent the Messiah to save people from another oppression, from another slavery, and that is the slavery of sin. And all men and all women and all children are born in that slavery. If you think that isn't true, if you've never received Christ and you think you're not a slave of sin, then I dare say just try to stop sinning.

Just try not to violate any of the commands of God for about a week. Just see if you can do it. Of course you can't do it.

You are a sinner, you're a slave of sin, and you need to be delivered from sin. That's what the Messiah came to deliver from, and he did this by dying. Not by conquering with a sword and with an army, but by conquering the enemy of man's soul, the devil, and sin.

By his death he died for our sins so that the penalty of sin might be covered in him, so that your sins would not need to be penalized upon you. That the penalty that your sins deserve was laid upon him. The Bible says, all we like sheep have gone astray.

We have turned everyone to his own way, and God laid on him, that is on Jesus, the iniquity of us all. And that is how Jesus came to save his people. He didn't come on a white horse with a sword and a spear and an army.

He came in humility, riding a donkey as an emblem of that humility, and he gave his life humbly and without resistance so that he could die to redeem you and me from our sins.



And he desires for us to follow him in that forgiveness.