



[Matthew 21:1-7](#)

(1) Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, (2) 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. (3) And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.” (4) All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying:

(5) “ *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.’ ”

(6) So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. (7) They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set *Him* on them.

New King James Version

[Zechariah 9:9](#), quoted here, seems to be one of those places in the Bible where the repetition of an idea should make us sit up and take notice. He writes, “Rejoice. . . . Shout. . . . Behold”! This tells us something significant is about to happen, and we would do well to pay attention! The scribes and Pharisees, well-versed in Scripture, undoubtedly knew this prophecy, but they failed miserably to make the proper connection. As Luke's account reveals, they were more interested in rebuking the disciples for “making a scene” and perhaps getting the Roman authorities involved.

In [Matthew 21:2](#), [Jesus](#) instructs His disciples to go into a nearby village, and there they would “find a donkey tied, and a colt with her.” This agrees with Zechariah's prophecy, but the accounts in Mark, Luke, and John mention only one animal. Mark and Luke both indicate that Christ rode the colt,

adding that the colt had never before been ridden. John, on the other hand, just says Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it and then quotes [Zechariah 9:9](#). To them, this was yet another fulfillment of an Old Testament sign that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Few others, it seems, understood it or believed it.

Why was a donkey the chosen means of transport? How much planning and forethought did [God](#) give to this one seemingly insignificant detail?

Contrary to common perception, donkeys are anything but stupid. In fact, once their owner gains their trust, they can be willing and companionable partners and very dependable. It is said that they actually do not work their best unless they trust the one they are working for. Once they feel comfortable with the owner, donkeys will do almost anything within their limits, and as a bonus, they need minimal training.

Being surefooted and having excellent eyesight, they are able to navigate rocky desert terrain and find paths that the human eye may not even be able to see. They will actually lead the way without having to be guided.

Another trait the donkey possesses is an acute predator-detection instinct. For this reason, many modern farmers are adding them to their herds as “guard donkeys”! Having a keen sense of smell along with excellent hearing and the aforementioned exceptional eyesight, they are quick to sense predators and sound the alarm, baying wildly. Even more, they will position themselves between the predator and the other animals they are protecting. They have been known to kill foxes, coyotes, and even mountain lions with their sharp hooves and powerful kicks.

The donkey has been perceived as a stubborn animal, but many experts believe that it is because the donkey has such a strong survival instinct that it is difficult to get them to do something they perceive to be dangerous. Recall Balaam's donkey, which saw the angelic danger ahead, but Balaam, ignoring God's instruction and being spiritually blind, tried to force the donkey to move on ([Numbers 22:22-33](#)).

Donkeys were used throughout the times of the Bible. According to the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, the riding of a donkey was a sign of royalty.

From the archives dug up in the Babylonian city of Mari, it was learned that the riding of a donkey for entry into a city was an act of kingship. The donkey and the mule were a staple in the Near Eastern royal ceremonies as well.

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem while riding on a donkey was not just an afterthought, using whatever beast was available. This was a well-considered part of God's plan for a specific purpose. Although the use of the donkey was widespread in those times, Jesus' riding on the donkey did not show Him to be a poor or common man but a King, just as the Mari archives show was commonly understood across the Middle East.

The *New Testament Commentary* makes an interesting observation on [John 12:14-15](#):

The ... donkey is commonly associated with the pursuits of [peace](#) ([Judges 10:4](#); [12:14](#); [II Samuel 17:23](#); [19:26](#); [Isaiah 1:3](#)); the horse, with warfare ([Exodus 15:1,19,21](#); [Psalm 33:17](#); [76:6](#); [147:10](#); [Proverbs 21:31](#); [Jeremiah 8:6](#); [51:21](#); [Zechariah 10:3](#); and [Revelation 6:4](#)). This king is [meek](#) (*prautes*), peaceful, gentle. He comes to bring salvation.

So Jesus, riding on a donkey, fulfills the characterization shown in [Zechariah 9:9](#), that the King would be “lowly.” The symbolic character of the donkey as an animal used for peaceful purposes stands in marked contrast to a horse, whose imagery associates with war. A man riding on a donkey is not looking for war, and in Jesus' case, He came instead to save, carried on perhaps the lowliest of animals.

That Jesus chose a donkey that had never been ridden was yet another miraculous part of this prophecy. Given what we have learned about donkeys—that they will not work until they trust the one they work for—we would think that the colt would have balked. But when the disciples brought the colt to Jesus, the colt immediately trusted Him and instinctively carried Him down the path into the city. Would we be surprised if he did not even need to be guided?

— Ronny H. Graham

To learn more, see:

[Lowly and Riding on a Donkey?](#)

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