

## The Peaceful King

Through the eyes of a child, a donkey seemed a strange animal for King Jesus to ride through a crowd. A horse would be better, I thought. Horses were stately and majestic—fitting for royalty. But when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey, He knew what He was doing. He was fulfilling prophecy. “And Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written, ‘FEAR NOT, DAUGHTER OF ZION; BEHOLD, YOUR KING COMES SITTING ON A DONKEY’S COLT’” (John 12:14–15, cf. Zechariah 9:9).

What I didn’t know as a child was that a horse was a symbol of war and a donkey a symbol of peace. But the crowds gathered around Jesus would have known.

From ancient biblical times, horses and chariots were associated with war. When God instructed the people of Israel in the Old Testament in choosing a king, He warned them that “he shall not multiply horses to himself” (Deuteronomy 17:16), which would have been representative of one who wages war. One of the greatest military conquerors in history, Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.), is often portrayed with his legendary war horse Bucephalus. Even horses at the end of time are horses of war and violence and death (Revelation 6)

Jesus riding on a donkey followed a cultural pattern that would have been well understood in the Middle East. Ancient Babylonian archives reveal that “Riding on a donkey for ceremonial entry into a city” was an act of kingship. “A man on a donkey is not looking for war.” The riding of a donkey was a symbol of peace and a “sign of royalty” (*Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*).

When the crowds came out to greet Jesus, their royal welcome also followed a cultural pattern of receiving a dignitary or king. With shouts of acclamation, they escorted Him into the city of Jerusalem. On this day, the people waved their palm branches to welcome the King. The people cried out a Hallel psalm they were accustomed to chanting on the way to Jerusalem for Passover: “Hosanna! BLESSED is HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, even the King of Israel” (John 12:13, cf. Psalm 118). The Prince of Peace had come to save.

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