

Matthew 21:1-7

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-21/matthew-211-7/>

Jesus and the disciples pause as they approach the Mount of Olives, just east of Jerusalem. Jesus sends two disciples to go retrieve a donkey and her unriden colt from the village of Bethphage. Once done the disciples lay their coats on the beasts and Jesus begins to ride the colt into Jerusalem. This fulfills a Messianic prophecy from Zechariah.

The parallel gospel accounts of this event are found in Mark 11:1-7, Luke 19:29-36, and John 12:12-15.

Jesus approached Jerusalem from Jericho in the east. Jesus and the disciples had traveled to the “region of Judea beyond the Jordan” at the beginning of chapter 19, an area that includes Jericho. When traveling from Jericho to Jerusalem, He went through the towns of Bethany and Ephraim (John 11:54; 12:1). “Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off” (John 11:18). Bethany is just east of Jerusalem, on the southeastern slope of the Mount of Olives. While He was in Bethany, Jesus raised His friend Lazarus from the dead (John 11:17-46). This miracle attracted much attention from the locals, the Passover travelers, and the Pharisees (John 11:45-46).

Jesus accordingly retreated to the city of Ephraim with His disciples. Ephraim’s exact location is uncertain, but it was not far from Jerusalem, and in a “country near the wilderness” (John 11:54). It is thought to be the Benjamite town of Ophrah (Joshua 18:23) and where the modern town of Taybeh is situated approximately 10 miles northeast of Jerusalem. After staying in Ephraim for an unknown amount of time, Jesus returned “to Bethany six days before the Passover” (John 12:1). That evening after supper, Mary anointed His feet with expensive oil (John 12:2-8).

“On the next day” (John 12:12) *Jesus and His disciples approached Jerusalem. They paused just before they arrived at the village of Bethphage. This village was located on the northern slope of the Mount of Olives, a short walking distance from Bethany. On the western side of this limestone hill, known as the Mount of Olives, was a ravine known as “the Kidron valley”—which is still its name to this day. Beyond the valley stood the walls of Jerusalem. Bethphage was no more than 1,000 yards from the holy city. This would make it a distance from Jerusalem that was near the outer limit of the distance allowed for Jews to walk on the Sabbath. The ridge of the Mount of Olives is on the order of 300 feet above the elevation of the temple area. See the map in the Additional Resources section.*

The Mount of Olives is an important place in Biblical history—especially Messianic history. It is first mentioned in the Bible in 2 Samuel 15:30 when King David (the forefather of the Messiah) ascended the Mount of Olives to weep after learning of the death of his rebellious son Absalom. The Mount of Olives is the location where Jesus, the Messiah, will later give his “Olivet Discourse” (Matthew 24-25) describing the end time. The Mount of Olives is where the Garden of Gethsemane is located where Jesus, the Messiah, prayed and was arrested the night before He is crucified. And the Mount of Olives is the location that Jesus, the Messiah, ascended into

Heaven (Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:12). The prophet Zechariah mentions this hill as the place where the Messiah will spectacularly appear and inaugurate His earthly kingdom:

“Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east...”

(Zechariah 14:3-4a)

With *the Mount of Olives* rising before *them* and *Jerusalem* in the distance, *Jesus* paused near *Bethphage* and *sent two disciples* on an odd but important errand. He said *to them* to *Go into the village* ahead of *you*. As soon as *you* enter it *you will immediately find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to Me*. *Jesus* explained to His *disciples*, *If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.*” The-matter-of-factness in which *Jesus* issued this request demonstrated His divinity.

Donkeys were beasts *of burden*. Donkeys were often linked with the theme of redemption in the Old Testament.

- Abraham set out with *a donkey* to sacrifice his son in obedience to God, where God would spare Isaac the son and offer instead a ram as the sufficient sacrifice, “Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son” ([Genesis 22:3](#)).
- Moses “took his wife and his sons, and set them on the donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt...” as he began his journey to redeem Israel ([Exodus 4:20](#)).
- Samson used the jawbone of a *donkey* to slay one thousand Philistines who oppressed Israel ([Judges 15:15](#)).
- David went to face Goliath of Gath with *a donkey*, “Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, and a bottle of wine, and a young goat, and sent them by David his son to Saul” ([1 Sam 16:20](#)).

Donkeys were often used as pack animals and on farms. This could symbolize *Jesus*’s humility. *A colt* was a young male *donkey* that was less than four years of age. This particular *donkey colt* seems to have been especially young, because it was still with its mother and it had never been ridden upon (Mark 11:2 and Luke 19:30). *The donkey and her colt* may symbolize the old and new covenants between God and Israel. And just as *a colt* must have a mother to give it birth, so too the new covenant was birthed from the old covenant.

The old covenant (contract, agreement) was the law which was given through Moses, and ratified by the people of Israel (Exodus 19:8). Even as He fulfilled the old covenant, *Jesus* was offering a new covenant with Israel. As the Messiah, *Jesus* was the prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-19) and He was the *king* like David (2 Samuel 7:8-16) whom God promised would come. In a way, *Jesus* had fulfilled the prophecy of the Messiah coming as a prophet like Moses when He spoke from a mountainside overlooking the Sea of Galilee, when He taught His *disciples* the principles of His new kingdom in the Sermon on the *Mount* (Matthew 5-7).

Now, at the *Mount of Olives*, *Jesus* was, in a way, fulfilling the prophecy that the Messiah would be a *king* like David. Matthew explained how *This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Zechariah* in Zechariah 9:9.

“Say to the daughter of Zion,
‘Behold your King is coming to you,
Gentle, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”

The Messiah, Israel’s *king* was about to enter the city of *Jerusalem* from *the Mount of Olives* riding on a donkey colt, as prophesied hundreds of years before. Matthew omits a line from Zechariah 9:9 which says “He is just and endowed with salvation.” *Jesus*’s name in Hebrew is “Yeshua” which means “God Saves.” Yeshua also is translated as Joshua. *Jesus* is a second Joshua who will return to defeat Israel’s enemies and inaugurate a new Israel that will in time have a New *Jerusalem* (Revelation 19:11-21; 21:10).

However, in this particular entry, *Jesus* was not functioning as the second Joshua, and will not save Israel from its enemies, because Israel rejected Him. This is likely why Matthew omitted the line from Zechariah, as that part of the prophecy is yet to be fulfilled. However, it will be fulfilled in the future.

This is the fifteenth time Matthew has explicitly pointed out how *Jesus* fulfilled Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. (The previous fourteen are found in Matthew 1:22-23, 2:5-6, 2:15, 2:16-18, 2:23, 3:1-3, 4:4-6, 4:13-16, 8:17, 10:35-36, 11:10, 12:17-21, 13:14-15, and Matthew 13:35. This list does not include the three additional Messianic prophecies that *Jesus* alluded to in Matthew 11:5-6).

The disciples went into the village of Bethphage. They found everything exactly as Jesus had told them and they did just as Jesus had instructed them. After they were given permission from a bystander who questioned what they were doing (Mark 11:5-6), *the disciples brought the donkey and her colt* back to *Jesus*. Then *they laid their coats on the donkey and the colt; and Jesus sat on the coats.* Mark and Luke specified that *Jesus* sat on the colt (Mark 11:7, Luke 19:35). It is possible that the reason *the colt*’s mother was brought along was to help comfort and sooth *the colt* because he had never been separated from *her*.

The act of placing *their coats on the donkey and her colt* not only gave *Jesus* a more comfortable seat to ride upon, it also was a sign of great respect honoring the royalty and worthiness of *Jesus*.

With this done and the prophecy fulfilled, *Jesus*, the Kingly Messiah, was ready to ride into His city. Would the people of *Jerusalem* receive their Messiah?

Biblical Text

21:1-7 When they had approached Jerusalem and had come 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 there and a colt with her; untie them and bring

them to Me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.”

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

“Say to the daughter of Zion,

‘Behold your King is coming to you,

Gentle, and mounted on a donkey,

Even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.”

The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them, and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their coats on them; and He sat on the coats.