

THE RECEPTION OF ZECHARIAH 9:9 IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND IN THE EARLY CHURCH

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Abstract. The present paper analyzes the reception of a classical messianic prophecy – Zechariah 9:9 – in the Gospels of Matthew and John, respectively, highlighting the particular way in which the two evangelists quote and embed this text into their own theological fabric. The second part of the paper presents the early *Rezeptionsgeschichte* of Zechariah 9:9, surveying a wide variety of Christian authors who span five centuries (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine and Caesarius of Arles). Our analysis shows that while some early commentators read the text allegorically, others see in it an important witness about the earthly life of Jesus or, more generally, the history of salvation. A few important commentators use the text polemically as they wrestle theologically with various categories of opponents (Jews, Ebionites, Valentinians, Marcionites, pagans).

Keywords: Zechariah 9:9, *Rezeptionsgeschichte*, the use of OT in the NT, allegorical reading of the Bible, Early Christianity

Introduction

Chapter 9 of the book of Zechariah has enjoyed a complex reception in early Christianity. Although it does not contain many verses which can claim the status of “theological proof-texts”, it does contain one – namely verse 9:9 – which has had a distinguished career. The present paper will focus on this particular verse, since an exhaustive treatment of the whole chapter would require an amount of research which would greatly exceed the constraints of a single paper.

In the first part of this paper I will analyze the reception of Zechariah 9:9 in Matthew (21:4-5) and John (12:15), the only two Gospels that quote this verse. I will look at the way in which the OT text is introduced, at the Gospel context in which it is inserted, at the changes it undergoes and at the theological bearing it has on the image of Jesus in each of the two Gospels. The second part of the paper will survey the early history of interpretation, namely as it appeared to the most representative patristic authors such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine and Caesarius of Arles. Of course, not all these early authors comment at length on the