

Journey with the Rabbi

Week 2 Source Sheet

The Donkey and the Material World

The Triumphal Entry is not an isolated moment. It is the convergence of a pattern woven throughout the entire story of Scripture. From Abraham saddling the donkey on the way to offer his son, to Jacob's prophecy of a coming King who would be bound to both the donkey and the vine, to the rabbinic expectation of a Messiah who might come either in glory on the clouds or humbly on a donkey, the image carries a consistent message. The material world is not rejected. It is meant to be brought under the authority of the King.

When Yeshua rides into Jerusalem, the crowds wave palm branches, symbols of victory, freedom, and national restoration, declaring Him to be the King of Israel. Yet in that moment, two expectations collide. A people longing for visible, political triumph encounter a Messiah bringing a deeper redemption over sin, death, and spiritual exile. What they celebrate in hope in John 12 is ultimately fulfilled in Revelation 7, where palm branches are lifted again, not in expectation but in the full realization that salvation belongs to God.

The Triumphal Entry, therefore, is both a revelation and a test. Will we recognize the King when He comes in humility, and will we understand the kind of victory He came to bring?

1. The Donkey and the Material World

John 12:14–16

Finding a young donkey, Yeshua sat on it, as it is written:

“Fear not, Daughter of Zion!
Look! Your King is coming,
sitting on a donkey's colt.”

His disciples did not understand these things at first.
But when Yeshua was glorified,
then they remembered that these things were written about Him
and that the crowd had done these things for Him.

God does not reject the material world—
He redeems it by bringing it under the authority of the King.

Hebrew

The Hebrew word for donkey is **chamor** (חמור)

It shares a root with **chomer** (חומר) meaning:
→ material, physical substance

The donkey represents:

- The material world
- The physical realm
- The body
- The tangible

Insight

The donkey is not rejected.
It is meant to be directed.

2. The First Messianic Hint

Genesis 49:10–11

“The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,
until Shiloh comes;
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

Binding his foal to the vine,
and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine.”

This passage was widely understood in Jewish interpretation as referring to the Messianic King from the tribe of Judah.

Insight

Kingship, abundance, and the donkey appear together—
linking the Messiah to both authority and provision.

3. How the Rabbis Understood It

Targum Onkelos

“Until the Messiah comes, whose is the kingdom.”

What is Targum Onkelos?

An ancient Jewish Aramaic translation of the Torah, reflecting how Scripture was understood in the centuries closest to the time of Yeshua.

Midrash — Genesis Rabbah 98:9

“Binding his foal unto the vine... This refers to the King Messiah...

Just as a vine produces abundance, so in the days of the Messiah there will be abundance of wine...

This teaches that there will be such an abundance... that one will wash garments in it.”

What is Midrash?

An ancient Jewish method of interpreting Scripture that explores deeper meanings and connections within the text, preserved in works like Genesis Rabbah.

Insight

Jewish tradition clearly connects:

- The donkey
- The vine
- The Messiah
- The age of abundance

4. The Vision of the Kingdom

Micah 4:4

“Everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree.

Insight

The Kingdom is marked by:

- Peace
- Security
- Abundance

5. The Tension — Two Ways Messiah Comes

Sanhedrin 98a

“If they are worthy, he will come with the clouds of heaven.
If they are not worthy, he will come humble and riding on a donkey.”

What is the Talmud?

A collection of rabbinic teachings (3rd–6th centuries AD) preserving how Jewish teachers interpreted Scripture.

Daniel 7:13

“Coming with the clouds of heaven...”

Zechariah 9:9

“Humble and riding on a donkey...”

Insight

The difference is not in the Messiah.
The difference is in the condition of the people.

6. The Fulfillment — Israel’s King Has Come

John 12:12–19

“They took palm branches...

‘Hoshia-na! Baruch ha-ba b’shem Adonai!

Blessed is He...

The King of Israel!’”

Palm Branches as National Symbol

A. Maccabean Context

1 Maccabees 13:51

Simon Maccabee welcomed into Jerusalem with palm branches

Jewish Coins

Palm trees used as symbols of national identity

Rome’s Counter-Message

“IVDAEA CAPTA” coins — symbol of conquest over Judea

Insight

The same symbol meant:

- Victory to Israel
- Domination to Rome

They recognized the King—
but misunderstood the Kingdom.

7. The Final Picture

Revelation 7:9–10

“A great multitude... with palm branches in their hands...

‘Salvation belongs to our God...’”

Insight

Palm branches move from:

Expectation → to → Fulfillment

8. Visual Summary

Element	Meaning
Donkey	Material world
Vine	Abundance and life
Palm branches	Victory
Clouds	Divine glory

9. Breakout Discussion

Avodah — Work as Worship

How would my work, finances, and daily routines change if everything I did was an act of worship?

The Great Reversal

What do I treat as “gold” in this life that heaven may see as temporary?

The Vine

What am I truly tied to?

Is my life anchored in God... or something temporary?

Am I more drawn to the wine...
or committed to the King who provides it?

Recognizing the Moment

Yeshua weeps because they did not recognize the time.

Am I attentive to what God is doing...
or distracted by lesser things?

Final Question

If Messiah comes in humility... will I recognize Him?
If He comes in glory... will I be ready?

Final Thought

The donkey was never the problem.
The material was never the problem.

The question has always been:

Who is leading it?

Jewish Texts:

What is Midrash?

Midrash is an ancient Jewish method of interpreting Scripture that explores deeper meanings and connections within the text, and one important collection is Genesis Rabbah (Bereshit Rabbah), a rabbinic commentary on Genesis compiled roughly between the 4th and 5th centuries AD in the Land of Israel. This work gathers earlier oral traditions and interpretations, helping us see how Jewish teachers understood these passages, and it provides valuable historical and cultural insight that can deepen a Christian reader's understanding of the Bible.

What is the Talmud?

The Talmud is a central collection of Jewish teachings and discussions that expands on the Hebrew Bible, especially the Law (Torah). Compiled between roughly the 3rd and 6th centuries AD, it brings together centuries of rabbinic debates, interpretations, legal rulings, and stories about how to understand and live out the Scriptures. It has two main parts: the Mishnah (earlier teachings, around 200 AD) and the Gemara (later commentary on those teachings). For Christians, the Talmud is significant because it reflects how Jewish teachers interpreted the Bible in the time period closest to Jesus (Yeshua) and the early church, providing valuable historical and cultural context that can deepen understanding of the New Testament and the world in which it was written.