

## Under The Fig Tree



### WEEK 46

The Book of Revelation is often considered a difficult book to understand. It is only difficult if it is read in isolation from the rest of the Bible. In these studies, we have first established foundations in the Tanach. While reading the Books of the Tanach we have, where relevant, referred to sections of Revelation. We have, therefore, already understood the essence of this Book. Revelation repeats and expands what other Prophets foresaw. We will now read the Book in its own right and discover that it is much easier to understand than we might have expected.

Having said that, we will not fully understand everything that is in the Book; we cannot interpret it through human logic alone. We can interpret enough of the imagery to understand what God wants us to understand: the rest is understood only by Him. In some ways, Revelation is like the first Chapters of Genesis. Time began with mysteries that only God understands and time will end in the same way. Genesis Chapter 1 is a view of the Creation from *God's perspective*. God established the world, told us how He did it in words we understand, but we only go so far with our human logic. Genesis Chapter 2 is an account of Creation from *man's perspective*, beginning in the Garden of Eden, where his experience began. It is the same in Revelation. We begin with consideration of the assemblies of disciples in seven towns of Asia, seeing this from man's perspective. We are then taken into heavenly perspectives, and into mysteries that we cannot fully unravel. At the Creation, the main issue for Adam and Eve was how to live on earth. At the end of time, the main issue for Yeshua's disciples is the same. The visions of eternity are for our encouragement and will take place at God's appointed time. At that time, those who are on this earth will have fuller understanding of what is taking place. They will say, *this is that which the Prophets foretold*.

The Book is called both *Revelation* (sometimes *Revelations*) and *Apocalypse* (meaning *unveiling*).

Events in the Bible are presented in two ways. Sometimes they are in chronological order, and sometimes they are thematic, so that they do not necessarily fit into a time-line. This is true of Revelation. The chronological sequence of the end-times can be interpreted in part, but we are left with some uncertainty. God may not want us to know the fine detail of the ordering of events. His purpose is for us to trust Him and trust the timing of the various events to Him. The events that are described give us expectation for what is coming to this earth so that we will obey Yeshua's command to *watch and pray*.

The situation of our world today is like a “wake-up-call” to study the Book of Revelation, in the context of all the Prophets. The time of fulfillment is upon us. Read each chapter carefully, seeing how the Holy Spirit draws attention to details.

## Day 1

Revelation Chapter 1. John was an old man, exiled to Patmos, when an angel from Yeshua visited him. This reminds us of the times when the Prophet Daniel was visited by an angel, who revealed to him many events that would come to pass. Daniel foresaw, in mysterious ways that he did not fully understand, events leading up to the return of Yeshua. It was the same for John. John was deep in prayer, *in the Spirit*, on the Lord’s Day (Verse 10). In Greek, *Lord’s Day* is *kuriake emera*. This was first thought to be the day that disciples of Yeshua met together. The term has now come to mean the day Christians meet for worship on a Sunday, the first day of the week. This was not so, however, in the days of the Apostles. In those days they observed the Sabbath, resting on the seventh day of the week. Then, according to Jewish tradition, they met at sundown in the evening following the Sabbath. This was the beginning of the first day of the week according to tradition, based on the days of Creation in Genesis 1, where evening came before morning for each new day. This was the circumstance in Acts 20:7, when the disciples met together in the evening of the first day. Thus, we must be careful not to put an interpretation on Revelation 1:10, based on later Christian tradition. More recent discoveries have shown that in Asia was the tradition for the first day of the month to be celebrated as *Emperor’s Day*, in reverence for the Emperor of the time. At this time the Roman Emperor was Domitian, who considered himself to be a god, like others also did. This assumes that the Revelation was given to John between 80 AD and 90 AD. The entire Roman world paid homage to the Emperor on this day every month. John refused to pay such homage and set himself aside to pray to God Almighty instead. It was at this time that Yeshua sent His angel. This is comparable to the time when Isaiah was called to be a Prophet, and when God showed him a vision of Heaven: *In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple* (Isaiah 6:1). Isaiah was given a vision of the Son of God, not yet come to earth as a Man. This emphasized a contrast between the Son of God and the earthly king Uzziah. John was likewise given a vision of the Son of God, now revealed as the Son of Man, contrasted with an earthly Roman emperor. It gave greater emphasis to the message. John was then shown a vision of the Lord in the midst of His people, represented by the seven congregations of Asia.

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Chapters 2 and 3. In a sense, these are the most important chapters of the Book. Comparing this with the beginning of the human race, Adam and Eve were given instructions for their life in the Garden of Eden. This was all they needed to maintain their walk with God, trusting Him for what they did not understand. In a similar way, human beings live on this earth, until the Lord returns, within the limits God has ordained. The Lord has left us like this until He returns. He has equipped us with Spiritual gifts and we have responsibilities to establish strong communities of disciples on this earth. The seven congregations of Asia are typical of all congregations. We must study what Yeshua said about them, noting both the encouragements and the condemnations. We must then consider our own situations measured against all of Yeshua’s teaching, realizing that Yeshua

is concerned that we maintain His standards in all things. All of the seven congregations disappeared over time, despite the warnings. We must take our responsibilities on earth while He deals with matters of eternity. If we get just one message from Revelation it is that we must live our life in ways which please God.

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Chapter 4. Having established the priorities for Yeshua's disciples on earth, John was given visions of Heaven. This brought a wonderful insight into the domain of God's existence which contrasts with our earthly experience. We, on earth, may not see this through our own eyes, but it is behind the scenes of our experience here. The vision helps us to assess the importance of what John was shown concerning the seven congregations in Asia. John was taken up in the heavenly experience to gain insight into the future of God's people. He saw events that would take place on earth, and how they were linked to events in Heaven. He would also be given prophetic understanding of the end-times and the establishing of Yeshua's Kingdom.

It is instructive to note the context of the Revelation. At this time, Jerusalem had fallen to the Romans and the Jews were scattered. Persecutions had come upon both Christians and Jews. We can compare this with the time of the exile to Babylon. At this time the Prophets were given insights to encourage God's people. Jeremiah was shown that the exile was to be for 70 years. Daniel was reminded of this and, while he was praying, he was visited by an angel who confirmed God's plan for restoration. The angel also gave insights concerning the first and second coming of Yeshua. Ezekiel was shown a wonderful vision of a Temple. These prophecies were both for immediate encouragement and for a greater fulfillment in the future. It was similar for John. Aspects of what God showed him were for immediate encouragement of the disciples, helping them to persevere through their present trials. The visions also point to the end-times. As John said in his letters, there were many antichrists at the time he was writing. The picture of *the* antichrist in Revelation applying, in part, to the satanically led leaders of his day, culminates in the world leader who will appear just prior to the Lord's return.

What John saw has application through every age, with a final major fulfillment at the end of the age.

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## Day 2

Chapter 5. The final events of this world could not be allowed until Yeshua came. The scroll that Daniel sealed up (Daniel 12:4), referring to the events that would eventually take place, could only be opened by Yeshua once He paid the price for sin. After this, while the world was allowed to be tested by the antichrist, Yeshua would gather His covenant community of disciples. Yeshua's victory on the Cross was like the release of the final phase of a spiritual war, which was to have manifestations on earth.

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Chapter 6. Horses represent power. God allowed these powers to go out across the world. There is significance in the colours of the horses and with every detail of these visions. We may not understand all of the symbolism, but we are able to interpret what they mean so far as God intends. Revelation 6 is not new prophecy. It is a confirmation of what Daniel and others foresaw. It was most clearly stated by Yeshua in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. If we go back and reread these passages, we will also be reminded of why Yeshua told us what was coming on the earth. Read these chapters again, and also Matthew 25.

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## Day 3

Chapter 7. Here is a vision to confirm the eternal promises of God. The full force of the tribulation that was prophesied in the previous chapter will not take place until God's purposes are fulfilled. This applies to what happens *on the earth* (Verse 3). Our studies of the Prophets emphasized time and again that God will not renege on His promises to the physical descendants of Israel. Here, all but the Tribe of Dan is mentioned. God confirmed His promises to John for the physical descendants of Israel, that a remnant would be restored to fellowship with Him. We do not know if the number 144,000 is symbolic or literal. We must wait and see. What we do know is, before the full force of the Tribulation is felt, God will identify whom He will save from the Tribes of Israel. The seal of God is through the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). Out of the tribulations of this world will also come multitudes from every nation. That, too, is a promise from God, brought about through the ministry of the Gospel.

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Chapters 8 and 9. This is a fuller picture of what was prophesied earlier in the Bible. There will be manifestations on earth of the Tribulation released from Heaven. Each trumpet announced another aspect of the troubles that God will allow to come to the earth. We do not need to understand the imagery in all its detail. It is enough to understand that God will allow these trials on the earth. It is a vision of warfare, famine, plague and "natural" disasters. When these events come about we know that it is because God gave authority for their release. This is a vision into the spiritual powers behind what will be manifest on earth, and a confirmation that God is sovereign over all.

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Chapter 10. There are a number of groups of *seven* in the Book of Revelation. Here we have seven thunders, symbolic of something that John was not allowed to tell us. We will not know all that will take place or understand why, but we must stand firm in faith as various trials come upon the earth. This is a glimpse into the heavens, describing what the Prophets foretold in other places. Haggai put it this way: *once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven* (Haggai 2:6-7) The Writer to the Hebrews quoted this verse from Haggai (Hebrews 12:25-29), after his exhortation to live by faith. We may not know what the thunders are, or be able to fully interpret what John was shown in other visions. These revelations were given so that we would not lose heart when the trials come to this earth. We would be wise to read the Book of Hebrews in the context of Revelation.

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## Day 4

Hebrews 1 to 13. The Letter to the Hebrews can be read in one sitting. Read it in the context of Revelation. We were not meant to dwell on the visions that John received isolated from the rest of the Bible. These revelations were intended to strengthen our faith for the days ahead. God knows why He will allow evil to grow in the world prior to Yeshua's coming. Let us trust Him for this and strengthen ourselves in anticipation of these days.

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## Day 5

Revelation Chapter 11. Here is mention of a period of three and a half years when an evil power will impose itself on the City of Jerusalem. This is the second half of the last period of 7 years prophesied by Daniel (Daniel 9:27). This follows the deceptive covenant foretold through Daniel, at a time described in Daniel 11:31. The antichrist world system will bring about an agreement whereby, promising world peace, Jerusalem will be annexed and turned to a multi-faith centre, becoming like Sodom. God will ensure that He has two witnesses in the City. We do not have clear enough details to be sure who these two witnesses may be or the exact outworking of this terrible time on earth, but we will know by the signs when it happens. We must especially look out for a world agreement, in the form of covenant, to be made resulting in Jerusalem becoming available to all religions, possibly with a rebuilt Temple as a joint centre for worship. We must take these prophecies seriously. Recall how God fulfilled His Word in previous generations, including the first exile, the manner in which Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the Temple as a forerunner of the antichrist, and, in John's day, the fall of Jerusalem, as foretold by Yeshua, in 70 AD. The days of the two witnesses remind us of the days of Elijah when there was no rain, and of the time of the woes on Egypt, when God wrought signs and judgments through Moses. Verse 4 reminds us of the two olive trees in Zechariah 4:2.

Just as for the other 69 weeks of years of Daniel's prophecy, we will find that the three and a half years (1260 days) will be exact. Take encouragement from this. This short phase will precede the announcement of the coming Kingdom of God! The earthly Jerusalem may decay into a Sodom-like city, but let this cause us to *look up*, as Yeshua said (Luke 21:28), to the Heavenly Jerusalem. The temporary shadows of earthly experience will be fulfilled in the Eternal Kingdom.

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## Day 6

Chapter 12. Revelation is sometimes chronological and sometimes thematic. The vision in this Chapter covers the time from the birth of Yeshua to the time of the trials experienced by His disciples. Recall when Yeshua said, *I saw satan fall like lightning from Heaven* (Luke 10:18). When He was on earth, He was also aware of what was happening, or had already happened, in the heavens. Satan fell and became *the ruler of this world* (John 12:31) This Chapter, through its imagery, gives us some knowledge of this. The woman with the twelve stars around her head represents the Twelve Tribes of Israel, from whom was born the Messiah. Satan fell to earth bringing the fallen angels with him, seen as a third of the stars in the sky falling to earth. Isaiah 14:12-27 foresaw what John was shown. A battle broke out in heaven when Yeshua was born. It had immediate effect on earth when Herod ordered the slaughter of innocent children in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16-18). Spiritual battles were not new. Daniel had insight into this (Daniel 10:13). The spiritual battle goes on today, as Paul understood (Ephesians 6:12). John was shown that the intensity would increase as the Gospel went out into the world and as the end times drew near. The response of Yeshua's disciples is found in Verse 11.

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Chapter 13. Again, we must turn the pages of our Bible back to the Prophets of the Old Testament, to find that John's vision simply confirms what was already prophesied. The vision gives glimpses into the heavens. This helps us to see that what we see on earth is a physical manifestation of what is happening in the heavens. Seven heads reminds us of the seven hills on which Athens was built. Rome is also built on seven hills. A revived Roman Empire will dominate the world in the last days, founded on the earlier empires, as Daniel was shown. Ten power centres will emerge. The spiritual battles in the heavens will manifest themselves on earth through the antichrist. When he demands that a mark be put on human beings, signifying his control of them, it will be a sign of the spiritual power that is being wielded through him by satan. The number 666 was first associated with the evil Roman Emperor Nero (54-68 AD) who was persecuting Jews and Christians. He is a type of antichrist, whose nature we will see arise again, with even greater manifestation of evil.

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Chapter 14. Here, again, we have a reminder of God's faithfulness to the physical descendants of Israel. In contrast to those marked by the *beast*, these are marked for salvation by God. Verse 4 describes them as *virgins...following the Lamb wherever He goes*. *Virgin* means *pure*: they are those who remained in their Tribes, not intermarrying with people from other nations. We recall the account of Acacia Grove, when there was intermarriage with the Moabites and Midianites (Numbers 25). God promised a remnant from the Tribes of Israel, so He intended that a remnant would be identifiable at the end of time. The 144,000 are physical descendants of Israel who follow Yeshua – the *Israel of God*. We also have a reminder that during the time of the antichrist system the Gospel will be taken throughout the world. The warning of Verse 9 and 10 must be



heeded. We must not be marked by the antichrist: we must be sealed by the Spirit of God. Two harvests will be reaped, one for the Kingdom of Heaven and the other for the wrath of God.

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Chapter 15 and 16. Here are further signs that will come to the earth, with the victory song of Moses and the Lamb in the background. These bowls of wrath are not the same as the Great Tribulation. Many are saved out of the times of Tribulation, but the woes are of an altogether different dimension. There are many theories as to whether God will take His people out of the earth during these last days of trouble. This is seen as fulfillment of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, and Matthew 24:36-41. It would be reasonable to assume that God will take His people out *at this stage* and not before. We must endure the days of the antichrist and will be preserved from the days of wrath. The days of the antichrist are when evil powers take control of world affairs. The days of woes are when God takes action. Chapter 16, Verse 11, describes how people will react, deceived by the antichrist to follow his wicked ways. They had the opportunity to respond to God's invitation through the Gospel, now they will not even repent when the woes come upon them.

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Revelation 17 to 19. Here is a description of the final evil world empire and its fall. The Fall of Adam and Eve meant that all mankind entered a world of sin. Sin, when kept in check through the Laws of God does not descend to such depths, but sin when it is unbounded, descends to the evil described here. God is allowing us to see this ahead of time. We can glimpse, with John, into the spiritual world and its battles. We also read here how the evil will manifest itself on earth. This is the way God has decreed that the world will go prior to the return of Yeshua. We are to consider the contrasts between the Kingdom of Heaven and the kingdoms of this world, and we must decide where to stand. There will be no in-between. The final world system will control world trading and impose a one-world religion. We are moving towards this time in our world today.

Finally, Yeshua will return for His Bride (Chapter 19:7-10) and the Kingdom of Heaven will come to earth. We must wait to see how this comes about. Chapter 19, Verse 17 is what Ezekiel foresaw (Ezekiel 39:17-20).

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## Day 7

### A Day for Rest and Further Reflection

Revelation Chapter 20. In one brief Chapter, we have insight into the 1000 year reign of Yeshua on this earth. His disciples will be with Him. We may imagine what this Kingdom will be like, but since no-one has ever been there and since we have just brief information, we must wait for the details to be shown *at that time*. What we know is that Yeshua *will* return and defeat the evil empires of the world. Then we will experience what the Spirit empowered Torah society will be like. Until then, as Peter realized, Yeshua remains in Heaven (Acts 3:21). The final Judgment of all people waits until after these 1000 years.

Revelation 21 and 22. Read the details for yourself. This is the fulfillment of the promise given through all the Prophets. We have sufficient description of this wonderful Kingdom to help us to prepare, but not enough detail to be sure of how it will be experienced. Let us live within the reality of all that we have been shown, and also within the limits of our understanding.

There are many ways in which we might respond to what we read in Revelation. We have now covered the entire Bible and this was our last Book. We must begin again and turn over the truths of the Bible once more. See how the Lord leads you to do this. Ask Him to show you. The purpose of the Book of Revelation is not to give us all details about the future. It would be fruitless to spend our time seeking full understanding of the timing and exact nature of the future. The purpose of the Book is that we strengthen our commitment to the Lord and to one another during the remaining days of this existence. Let us, therefore, respond accordingly and turn to one of the letters that defines our present position and responsibility on this earth.

1 Peter and 2 Peter. Read these two letters again, with all that we have read in mind. Let this bring conclusion to our present studies.

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