



THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

"Scroll Down"

5:1-4

Revelation 5:1 And I saw in the right *hand* of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

Revelation 5:2 Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?"

Revelation 5:3 And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it.

Revelation 5:4 So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it.

The word 'scroll' means something very different to the modern computer literate age than it once did.

Books were written on scrolls prior to the 2nd century AD. The papyrus, or bulrushes, used for scrolls grew fifteen feet high and six feet under water and were thick as a man's wrist. Pith was extracted from them and cut into thin strips with a sharp knife. Rows were laid out vertically and then horizontally. They were then moistened with

water and glue, pressed together, beaten with a mallet, and smoothed with pumice stone.

Ancient scrolls were read horizontally, not vertically. The scroll had wooden rollers on the left and the right, and the writing lay in narrow columns about three inches wide. The scroll was held in the left hand, and unrolled with the right, and as the reading went on the previously read portion was re-rolled.

On such a typical scroll the Book of the Revelation would be fifteen feet long.

Scholars distinguish between a scroll and a book of bound pages by referring to the latter as a *codex*. The codex was invented around the time of Christ and popularized largely by Christians. Both Jews and Gentiles continued to use scrolls well into the fourth century especially for Scripture and important works of literature but by that time Christians had moved to the codex format for nearly all of their literature.

A scroll captured John's attention:

Revelation 5:1 And I saw in the right *hand* of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back...

Apparently, scrolls of this nature were extremely rare in New Testament times as typically the writing was done on one side only. The writing side, called the *recto*, was the side in which the fibers of the document ran horizontally thus making writing easier. The reverse side, the *verso* was usually for the title or address of the document, and was only used when there was inadequate space on the *recto*. Documents with writing on both sides are so rare in fact that there is even a technical name for it, an *opisthograph*.

Revelation 5:1 ...sealed with seven seals.

Robert van Kampen owns one of the world's most extensive private collections of biblical manuscripts with many dating back to the second century. He writes in his book, *The Sign*, that when one seal is present it was usually placed there by the author of the scroll. When more than one seal is present it indicates a series or set of conditions that must be met before the scroll can actually be opened.

What might this scroll have written upon it? Remember that our guide for unlocking the meaning of the Revelation is the Old Testament. We have a clue in the Old Testament book of Jeremiah. There is an important reference to a sealed document. In chapter thirty-two you have the account of Jeremiah redeeming some land. It was not really the time for real estate investment. Jeremiah had been predicting the imminent invasion of Babylon. Land would be worthless. Why redeem land if it was about to be forfeited to a foreign invader?

The “why?” was Jeremiah’s point. Yes, the Jews would be held captive for seventy years. But after the seventy years ended they would return to their land. Jeremiah redeemed the land by faith.

Here is how the passage reads:

Jeremiah 32:7 'Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle will come to you, saying, "Buy my field which *is* in Anathoth, for the right of redemption *is* yours to buy *it*." '

Jeremiah 32:8 Then Hanamel my uncle's son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the LORD, and said to me, 'Please buy my field that *is* in Anathoth, which *is* in the country of Benjamin; for the right of inheritance *is* yours, and the redemption yours; buy *it* for yourself.' Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD.

Jeremiah 32:9 So I bought the field from Hanamel, the son of my uncle who *was* in Anathoth, and weighed *out to* him the money - seventeen shekels of silver.

Jeremiah 32:10 And I signed the deed and sealed *it*, took witnesses, and weighed the money on the scales.

Jeremiah 32:11 So I took the purchase deed, *both* that which was sealed *i a* *according* to the law and custom, and that which was open;

Jeremiah 32:12 and I gave the purchase deed to Baruch the son of Neriah, son of Mahseiah, in the presence of Hanamel my uncle's *son*, and in the presence of the witnesses who signed the purchase deed, before all the Jews who sat in the court of the prison.

Jeremiah 32:13 "Then I charged Baruch before them, saying,

Jeremiah 32:14 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Take these deeds, both this purchase deed which is sealed and this deed which is open, and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may last many days."

Jeremiah 32:15 For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land." '

One important thing to notice is that there was a [sealed](#) deed that was kept safe through the years of the captivity until the Jews returned to their land.

The apostle John would know this story. He would understand that land that had been granted by God, even though it had been forfeited to a foreign invader, would one day be fully redeemed by the rightful owner.

We can assume that the scroll in God's hand is a deed to land. It is most likely the title document to planet earth.

The title to the earth was originally given to Adam in the Garden of Eden when He told him to subdue the earth. But Adam forfeited his rights, and the rights of all his future descendants, when he ate of the fruit of the forbidden Tree of Knowledge.

Adam's sin forfeited title of the earth to Satan. That is why Satan is called [the god of this world](#)¹ and [the prince of this world](#).²

Why is there disease? Why are there disasters? Why do people die? Why is there suffering and sorrow, trial and tragedy? Because mankind has forfeited God's good and perfect creation to Satan.

Just as the land Jeremiah purchased was forfeited but would later be redeemed by a rightful owner, so the earth that Adam forfeited would (will) be redeemed by its rightful owner.

In the Jeremiah story you might have noticed that his uncle's son said that Jeremiah could redeem the property because he had a right to do so. Land-laws among the Jews were quite different than ours. Since the land was originally given to the twelve tribes by God their inheritance had to stay within the original tribes. Land could be mortgaged or forfeited but it could never become the permanent possession of someone other than a family member from the specific tribe to whom it had originally been granted by God.

¹ 2 Corinthians 4:4

² John 12:31

A search is initiated for someone who has the right to open the seven-sealed scroll:

Revelation 5:2 Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?"

An unidentified **angel** throws down a challenge. If you are **worthy**, come forward.

The angel doesn't ask, "Who is willing to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" Many throughout history have been willing - Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, Napoleon, and Hitler were all willing.

But they were not **worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals**.

Since under Jewish law the land had to remain in the possession of the original family only a specific person could redeem it. This person was called (in Hebrew) a *goel*. The translation into English is *kinsman-redeemer*. He had to be a blood relative who was willing to act as the redeemer and who was both willing and able to meet the conditions necessary to redeem the property.

If the 'property' we are talking about is the earth itself then the kinsman-redeemer must meet the following conditions:

1. He would have to be a kinsman of Adam's. Since it is mankind's rights to the earth that were forfeited by Adam, only a relative of Adam's could be the redeemer.
2. **He would also have to be God!** Adam forfeited more than real estate. The very souls of lost men and women have been forfeited and are included in the estate to be redeemed. No mere man who was born a sinner could ever qualify to be the kinsman-redeemer unless he were also God - born without sin and having lived a perfect, sinless life.
3. This person who was both God and man would then have to fulfill the obligations of the forfeiter. In the case of Adam, his obligation was to die. Thus Adam's kinsman-redeemer would have to offer himself willingly as a sacrifice and die in his place.

Sound like anyone we know? *Sure does!* And it is only One; there can be no other.

Revelation 5:3 And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it.

John could not have put it any stronger. No created being can answer this challenge. If creation and its creatures, including man, are to be redeemed then God must do it Himself. He must become fully man to do it. And He must die to accomplish it.

Revelation 5:4 So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it.

John **wept much**. It means he sobbed convulsively.

Tears in Heaven. Remember that John was transported to Heaven in a spiritual vision. He knew he was on Patmos and that he would return there. He understood that he was looking forward to the future.

Perhaps he thought that what he was witnessing was a daily ceremony in Heaven. Everyday, around the throne, the cherubim worshipped and led the twenty-four elders in worship. Then this mighty angel stepped forward issuing his challenge... But day-after-day, decade-after-decade, century-after-century, **no one was found worthy**.

John knew that Jesus was **worthy**. It means God has a perfect time for Jesus to step forward and take the scroll and opens its seals.

When you think of the suffering that has occurred over the course of the centuries since Adam sinned it makes you want to sob convulsively. In His longsuffering, not willing that any should perish eternally, God has told His Son to wait. Jesus is busy building His church. One day, and we believe it is imminent, the Father will send the Son to retrieve the church from the earth. Then this ceremony in Heaven will occur once-and-for-all as Jesus takes the scroll and breaks its seals.

Tears are mentioned a few more times in the Revelation. In relation to the saints we are twice told God will wipe away all tears (7:17 & 21:4).

If God is to wipe away every tear then it must be that our eyes will be filled with tears until we get there.

You and I will weep while we're waiting for Jesus to step forward. We're hit everyday by some tragedy – whether distant, local, or personal.

Your tears are precious to God. In Psalm 56:8 you read,

Psalm 56:8 Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: *are they* not in thy book?

This is an allusion to a very ancient custom of putting the tears which were shed for the death of a person into small bottles called *lacrymatories*. The psalmist indicated that God not only saves your tears but can give an account of exactly how many were shed.

John's weeping will be turned into worshipping later in the chapter. It happens when he sees Jesus.

When you and I weep; when our eyes are wet with tears; we need to 'see' Jesus and be led in to worship.

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