

The Identity of the Seven-Sealed Scroll in Revelation 5

by

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## The Seven-Sealed Scroll of Revelation 5

I saw in the right hand of Him which sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?" And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it; and one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals." And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen" And the elders fell down and worshiped.<sup>1</sup>

In Revelation 5:1, the Apostle John sees a scroll held in the right hand of the One seated on heaven's throne. The scroll has writing on the inside and the back, and it is sealed with seven seals. The hand of the One seated on the throne is open because the scroll is being offered to whomever is worthy to take it and to open its seals.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, only Christ is worthy to take the

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<sup>2</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7, an Exegetical Commentary*, ed. Kenneth Barker (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1992), 374-375.

scroll and to open its seals because He was slain for the redemption of God's people from every tribe and tongue and nation.

Biblical scholars disagree about what this scroll is, and numerous opinions exist. Proposals include the Lamb's Book of Life, the Torah, or the Torah and the Prophets. Some assert that the scroll contains all the blessings and curses stipulated in the Mosaic Covenant.<sup>3</sup> Still others see the scroll as representing the entire Word of God.<sup>4</sup> Some scholars see the scroll as representing the New Covenant.<sup>5</sup> But others maintain that the scroll is a last will and testament containing the saints' inheritance.<sup>6</sup> Many see the scroll as a divorce document that Christ will present to unfaithful Jerusalem so that He can marry the New Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup> Others believe that the scroll contains God's complete plan for the ages from beginning to end.<sup>8</sup> Other views exist as well, including the viewpoint that the identity of the scroll does not matter.

It is unfortunate that so many disparate views exist because it is evident that revealing this scroll and its opening by Christ is a pivotal moment in future prophecy. It is something about which God wants us to know and understand. When Christ the Lamb takes this scroll from the Father's open hand, great rejoicing erupts in heaven. Understanding the identity of the scroll should cause God's people here on earth to erupt in great joy and hope. This paper surveys various viewpoints encountered by theologically conservative students of the Bible and argues that the scroll represents the title deed to the earth that was forfeited by Adam in his sin and

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<sup>3</sup> J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), 120-123.

<sup>4</sup> William Bruce, *Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, Second Edition ed. (London: James Speirs, 1906), 125.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Govett, *The Apocalypse Expounded by Scripture* (London: C.J. Thynne & Jarvis, 1929), 118.

<sup>6</sup> George Raymond Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation: Based on the Revised Standard Version* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1981), 120-121.

<sup>7</sup> J. Massyngberde Ford, "The Divorce Bill of the Lamb and the Scroll of the Suspected Adulteress: A Note on Apoc. 5,1 and 10, 8-11," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 2 (1971): 136-143.

<sup>8</sup> Simon Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2001), 202.

regained by Christ through His atoning death and resurrection.<sup>9</sup> The breaking of its seven seals results in God pouring out His judgments to redeem creation and reclaim the earth. As each seal is broken, John sees the future judgments that will fall upon the earth just before Christ returns to establish His one-thousand-year reign on earth in Jerusalem upon the throne of David.

What should we make of the view that the scroll is the Lamb's Book of Life? After all, this book containing the names of all the redeemed has a prominent place in the revelation John receives; he mentions seeing it in Revelation 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:12, 15, and 21:27. Certainly, the Lamb is concerned about taking this book and opening it. Niles holds this view.<sup>10</sup> After pointing to the prominence of the Book of Life in the rest of Revelation, he goes on to support this idea by pointing to the song the Apostle hears sung around the heavenly throne, which states that Christ is worthy to take and open the scroll because He has redeemed a people for Himself out of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.<sup>11</sup> Caird suggests that if this identity is correct, then the writing on both sides of the scroll might indicate the vast number of those whom God has redeemed throughout history.<sup>12</sup> However, a significant problem with this view is that one would surely expect the purpose of opening the scroll to reveal the names of those whom God has chosen to redeem.<sup>13</sup> But, this is not what happens. Nowhere in Revelation are the names of God's elect unsealed for public viewing. Nor is there any direct mention that the scroll contains the names of God's redeemed. Moreover, identifying the scroll as the Lamb's Book of Life does not align well with the events that follow when the seals are broken to open the scroll. John foresees that God's wrath is poured out upon the earth each time Christ breaks one of the seven seals. The emphasis

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph Augustus Seiss, *The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 110.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Thambyrajah Niles, *As Seeing the Invisible*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper, 1961), 55.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>12</sup> G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 70.

<sup>13</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2002), 248.

of the following chapters of Revelation is to reveal the judgment events that are coming. The emphasis is not on the redemption of people.<sup>14</sup> Caird is correct when he argues that if the scroll is the Lamb's Book of Life, the whole process of opening the seals seems utterly meaningless because it is unrelated to the judgment events that follow the opening of each seal.<sup>15</sup>

Identifying the scroll as the Lamb's Book of Life seems untenable because the scroll mentioned in Revelation 5 is never referred to by such a name. The Lamb's Book of Life is opened, whereas this scroll must be unsealed. Moreover, the scroll does not seem related to the future judgment of the redeemed.<sup>16</sup> The song sung to the Lamb by the heavenly hosts naturally includes praise for His act of redemption. This is fitting since he appears as a Lamb who has been slain. The argument that the scroll is the Lamb's Book of Life is unconvincing.

Others believe the scroll in Revelation 5 could be the Torah and the Prophets.<sup>17</sup> Some, like Sweet, suggest that the scroll's writing contains all the blessings and curses stipulated in the Mosaic Covenant.<sup>18</sup> Others see a parallel in the writing on both sides of the Lamb's scroll to the two tablets containing the Decalogue, which, according to Exodus 32:15, had writing both sides.<sup>19</sup> They also see a parallel between the centrality of the scroll in John's heavenly vision and the centrality of the place that Torah scrolls occupied in the synagogues of John's day.<sup>20</sup> However, Sweet correctly observes that the content of the Law alone would not explain the weeping before the scroll was opened or the rejoicing that results when Christ steps forward to break its seals.<sup>21</sup> He also concedes that the Law was not sealed from God's people in any form or

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>15</sup> Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 71.

<sup>16</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation* (Downers Grove, Ill., USA: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 99.

<sup>17</sup> Sweet, *Revelation*, 123.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 123.

fashion.<sup>22</sup> It was available and plain to all. Sweet, therefore, suggests that the scroll should include the Torah and the Prophets. Stefanovic agrees when he asserts, “The scroll is clearly related to the Law and the Prophets.”<sup>23</sup> He appeals to Isaiah 29:11, which speaks of prophetic visions having become like the words of a sealed book.<sup>24</sup> One might agree, pointing out that, at present, the Jews are blinded to the true nature of God’s redemptive plan through Christ. Sweet makes this argument when he points out that the Scriptures are sealed unless God removes the veil over men’s minds (1 Corinthians 3:14).<sup>25</sup> He concludes that Christ is the only one able to open the book because He is the book's subject. His atoning sacrifice is the foundation of God’s whole redemptive plan. All of this might seem attractive, especially when we consider that after the breaking of the sixth seal, we see in Revelation 7 that God has opened the eyes of 144,000 Jewish men to the reality that Christ is their Savior and King, after which John sees a multitude who are saved during the Tribulation. However, this view still fails to connect to the purpose of the seventh seal and its breaking. Thomas argues against this view and perhaps overstates his case by saying that the things that happened after the breaking of the successive seals were not previously revealed in the Scriptures.<sup>26</sup> Against this, it could be argued that several Old Testament prophets had visions concerning the Day of the Lord and that certain past historical events were declared by the prophets to prefigure the coming Day of the Lord, for example, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Babylonians. Moreover, Jesus describes future judgment events in the Olivette Discourse. Yet Thomas is correct in seeing the scroll and its seals tied to future events instead of past ones. This author has difficulty seeing the scroll as

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>23</sup> Ranko Stefanović, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2002), 202.

<sup>24</sup> Sweet, *Revelation*, 123.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas, *Revelation 1-7, an Exegetical Commentary*, 378.

representing the Law and Prophets because of how John's original audience would have understood the imagery of the scroll in this way. First, the scrolls of the Torah and the prophets kept in synagogues were not sealed with seven seals. Instead, they would have most likely thought of a Roman title deed or other important legal document: a scroll sealed with seven seals only the owner could legally break. Second, by the end of the 1st century, we know that Christians in Asia-Minor were concerned not only about the Law and the Prophets but also the writings of the apostles they had received as Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16). Since they were receiving inspired letters from Peter, Paul, and John, it is likely that these letters would be emphasized in their assemblies and that they would not have immediately associated the scroll with the Law and the Prophets.

Bruce believes the scroll in Revelation 5 is the entire Word of God, the Old and the New Testaments, including the book of Revelation.<sup>27</sup> He believes that the scroll is written on both sides because the Scriptures have an external sense, which is natural, and an internal spiritual sense.<sup>28</sup> Bruce explains that all can understand the natural meaning of the Scriptures. Still, the spiritual sense of the Scriptures can only be understood by those who receive divine illumination.<sup>29</sup> He also believes that the fact that the scroll has writing on two sides indicates something about the coming judgment.<sup>30</sup> He says that those possessing only an external holiness are judged by the things written on the outside of the scroll, but those who have an internal holiness are judged by the things written inside the scroll.<sup>31</sup> To him, the fact that the scroll is sealed is relative to the Church's spiritual condition at the end of time. He says that the Word of

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<sup>27</sup> Bruce, *Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 125-126.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

God will become sealed to the Church on that day because the book of Revelation describes the Church as in a terrible state of spiritual darkness.<sup>32</sup> He explains the breaking of the seals as an act of God so that the Church can learn the Word of God anew.<sup>33</sup> However, while some of what Bruce argues can be conceded, this view fails to adequately explain the identity of the scroll or that which results from the breaking of its seals. It can be contended that late first-century people under Roman rule would have been more likely to associate a sealed scroll with a title deed or some other official Roman legal document. Moreover, breaking the seals does not teach the Church the Word of God anew. It results in judgment upon the earth. If Revelation is interpreted normally, that is literally–grammatically–historically, there is no retelling of the Word of God to the Church in the chapters that follow Revelation 5. Bruce can arrive at this viewpoint only because he disregards the priority of the literal meaning of the imagery in Revelation. Instead, he looks for spiritual meanings behind the symbols. He also tends to see all but the Second Coming passages in Revelation as describing events not in the future but rather contemporary with the original audience.

Govett sees the scroll in Revelation 5 as the New Covenant recorded in Jeremiah 31.<sup>34</sup> This theory is attractive because the New Covenant achieves ultimate fulfillment in Revelation 20, where Christ establishes His earthly kingdom. However, one problem with this view is that, once again, the New Covenant is not a sealed document. Its terms were laid out clearly in the Scriptures for anyone to read long before John’s day. Another problem is that when the seals are broken, judgments follow. The New Covenant is not an instrument of judgment on Israel. The New Covenant is a covenant of mercy and grace. It follows the harsh judgments that ultimately

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>34</sup> Govett, *The Apocalypse Expounded by Scripture*, 118.



refine the faith of Israel. The scroll contains more than mercy and grace; it contains God's wrath upon the world. Therefore, this view cannot be the correct one.<sup>35</sup>

Beasley-Murray and others see the heavenly scroll as a last will and testament containing the saints' inheritance.<sup>36</sup> He asserts that this type of sealed document was known throughout the Middle East in ancient times.<sup>37</sup> He explains that the Babylonians inscribed deeds on clay tablets wrapped with more clay. On the outside layer of clay were words explaining the nature of the contract within.<sup>38</sup> He states that this procedure was performed to exclude the possibility that anyone might try to alter the terms of the deed.<sup>39</sup> He then explains that when parchment and papyrus were used among the Egyptians and other nations, deeds were commonly folded and then sealed with seven seals.<sup>40</sup> Beasley-Murray further asserts that the Romans kept the tradition of sealing deeds with seven seals long past the first century.<sup>41</sup> Beasley-Murray concludes that the heavenly scroll must be a testament that conveys the kingdom of God to mankind.<sup>42</sup> To him, this is the best way to explain the weeping when no one can open the seal and the exultant joy that follows the Lamb's appearance to open it.<sup>43</sup> He states that the appearance of Christ to take the scroll from His Father points to the new age of salvation and the fulfillment of God's promised kingdom<sup>44</sup> and that "the important feature of the sealed document is not the judgments which accompany the opening of the seals, but the supreme event to which they lead."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas, *Revelation 1-7, an Exegetical Commentary*, 376.

<sup>36</sup> Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation: Based on the Revised Standard Version*, 120-121.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-121.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-121.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-121.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-121.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

The problem with this theory is that it doesn't fit the literary context of the book of Revelation.<sup>46</sup> The seals and trumpets do not seem, first and foremost, to have anything to do with the elect receiving their inheritance. Instead, the seals and trumpets are all about the pouring out of God's wrath upon the earth.<sup>47</sup> While it may be correct that the joy in Revelation 5 is tied to the victory that Christ will achieve as He comes to establish His kingdom, it is clear that the passage's emphasis is on the judgments that follow the unsealing of the scroll.

Ford sees the scroll in Revelation 5 as a divorce document.<sup>48</sup> He states that this particular scroll appears to be the *get mekushshar*, a divorce decree that was folded and signed on the back.<sup>49</sup> Each witness to the document would make a fold and affix his signature on the back.<sup>50</sup> Ford insists that Jewish priests commonly used documents of this kind for divorces. He states that there is evidence in the Babylonian Talmud that Jewish priests were hot-tempered and often divorced their wives for the slightest provocation.<sup>51</sup> He then offers that this type of document was adopted for divorce decrees among priests because the time involved in the various folding and signings protracted the proceedings to give a divorcing priest time to change his mind (because priests were not allowed to remarry a woman whom they had divorced).<sup>52</sup> Therefore, Ford sees the scene depicted in Revelation 5 as Christ divorcing the apostate Jews to marry the people of the New Jerusalem.<sup>53</sup> He sees the breaking of each seal and each subsequent judgment as a warning for the wife to repent.<sup>54</sup> He sees the song of praise declaring the worthiness of the

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<sup>46</sup> Thomas, *Revelation 1-7, an Exegetical Commentary*, 377.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.

<sup>48</sup> Ford, *The Divorce Bill of the Lamb and the Scroll of the Suspected Adulteress: A Note on Apoc. 5,1 and 10, 8-11*, 136.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*: 136.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*: 136.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*: 137.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*: 137.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*: 137-138.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*: 138.

Lamb as tied to the Talmudic tradition that a divorcing priest had to be free from guilt to affect a divorce decree against his wife.<sup>55</sup> Ford also supports this idea by pointing out the various Old Testament passages that refer to Israel as God's unfaithful bride.

God mentions divorcing Israel and Judah in the Old Testament on multiple occasions. We see this in Isaiah 50:1; Jeremiah 3:6–8; Hosea 2:2; and Ezekiel 16:8–63. Although God uses the language of divorce, it is never apparent that God has divorced His people because, like Hosea, the prophet, he continues to pursue His wife of unfaithfulness. God continually pursues Israel in Hosea and throughout the Old Testament. He finds her in her sin and offers her the right relationship with Himself. Moreover, the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12, 15; 18) is unconditional; therefore, it does not seem God can divorce Israel and keep His covenants.

Furthermore, the New Covenant, which is also unconditional, was made to the nations of Israel and Judah. God divorcing His people ignores these two critical promises of God to His people and calls God's promises and character into question. Even after tremendous unbelief, God sent John the Baptist and then Jesus to the lost sheep of Israel. Even in Romans 11, God affirms that all of Israel will be saved after the fullness of the Gentiles comes in (Romans 11).

There are several problems with the scroll being a divorce document. First, this theory does not fit the details of the Book of Revelation.<sup>56</sup> The idea of divorce is never mentioned. It does not appear anywhere in the book, so the idea of the scroll as a divorce decree is purely a matter of speculation and has no textual support from within the book itself.<sup>57</sup> Second, a major theme of Revelation is God's redemption of His covenant people. This is seen in Revelation

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.: 138.

<sup>56</sup> I am aware that many mid-tribulationists believe that God divorces Israel at the end of Acts 28:25–28. This view is unconvincing since a number of the Jews at that time left believing Paul's message (Acts 28:29).

<sup>57</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 248-249.

chapters 7 and 14, where God redeems 144,000 individuals from the twelve tribes of Israel. These passages make a divorce in Revelation 5 an untenable interpretation.

Some believe that the scroll in Revelation 5 contains God's complete plan of redemption from beginning to end. Kistemaker asserts that this scroll is written on both sides because it includes every detail of God's voluminous plans.<sup>58</sup> He says that the scroll God's complete plan and purpose for the entire world throughout the ages from beginning to end."<sup>59</sup> This theory is attractive because it magnifies Christ's sovereignty, displays His tremendous power, and shows him to be a righteous judge. However, this theory fails because the scroll's contents clearly state what will occur in the future, not what God has done. Second, the idea that the scroll contains God's entire plan for the redemptive history of the world seems to ignore the fact that judgments occur when the seals are broken. The breaking of the seals unleashes judgment, not redemption. The judgments that John foresees occupy a greater emphasis in the rest of Revelation than judgment.

A compelling theory for the identity of the heavenly scroll in Revelation 5 is the one Thomas offers. He sees the scroll as a document containing the judgments that will fall on the earth during a relatively brief period.<sup>60</sup> He sees these judgments beginning in chapter 6 and continuing until the coming of the Messiah's kingdom,<sup>61</sup> and that the scroll contains the successive steps leading to Christ's earthly reign.<sup>62</sup> He goes on to show that the scroll contains the seventh seal, the seventh seal contains the seventh trumpet, and the seventh trumpet contains the four bowls of wrath.<sup>63</sup> This interpretation explains why there would be weeping when no one

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<sup>58</sup> Kistemaker and Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 202.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 378-379.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 379.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 379.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 379.

could open the scroll. The righteous hosts of heaven are later seen as crying out for God's righteous justice to be administered on earth. It also explains why there was rejoicing when the Lamb appeared and could take the scroll. Moreover, this interpretation best explains how the unsealing of the scroll relates to the rest of the book. Each seal is broken to reveal God's subsequent activity, pouring out His wrath upon the earth. This view corresponds to the theme of Revelation, in which God establishes righteousness on the earth through the kingdom of His Son. It is difficult to argue against this view. However, it seems to ignore the Holy Spirit's choice of revealing these judgments with an image associated primarily with title deeds during Roman times and that this would have been an immediate association made immediately by John's readers. While it could be argued that the scroll, in this viewpoint, is still a legal document, Thomas does not directly connect it to anything beyond God's right to judge the earth. This seems unsatisfying because a critical theme of Revelation is the coming of Christ to reign in righteousness.

Showers sees Jesus as a qualified kinsman-redeemer to regain man's lost inheritance.<sup>64</sup> First, he asserts that in Genesis 3:15, God made the promise of a Redeemer- a woman's seed- immediately after man forfeited his inheritance through sin.<sup>65</sup> He promised that this seed would crush Satan's head.<sup>66</sup> Second, he asserts that Paul declared that the promised one was sent from God and born of a woman in Galatians 4:4-5).<sup>67</sup> Third, Showers states that the writer of Hebrews tells us that this promised seed/redeemer is Christ and that He took on man's flesh and blood to destroy Satan (Hebrews 9:12-15).<sup>68</sup> Next, Showers reminds us how, in Matthew 19:29, God

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<sup>64</sup> Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha, our Lord, Come!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church* (Bellmawr, N.J.: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1995), 85.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

promised the regeneration of the future. He states that the word translated regenerate means a falling back to a previous state or activity.<sup>69</sup> Then Showers recalls that in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul foretold that Jesus would return as the Second Adam to rule the earth.<sup>70</sup> Showers takes this flow of thought to mean that it is only logical that the scene depicted in Revelation 5 is that of Jesus standing up to reclaim the possession of the earth on behalf of those whom He has redeemed.<sup>71</sup>

Showers' theory is attractive and seems to fit the Bible's overall message, and it matches the theme and literary context of Revelation. However, it reads the concept of Kinsman Redeemer from the Old Testament book of Ruth into Revelation without any explicit textual basis in Revelation for doing so. Moreover, it should be stated here that the concept of inheritance doesn't seem to be a delineated theme in Revelation.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, this interpretation fails to explain the judgments that flow from breaking the seals.<sup>73</sup>

This paper contends that the scroll in Revelation 5 is the title deed to the earth.<sup>74</sup> This is the view held by Seiss, Vlach, and others. This view argues that God created the world and gave it to mankind to rule and subdue.<sup>75</sup> When Adam sinned, man lost his title (the right to subdue the earth and exercise dominion) to the earth, which has been in God's hand ever since.<sup>76</sup> Since the deed was initially made out to humanity, only a human being is qualified to take the title back from God.<sup>77</sup> However, to do this, a human must be guiltless.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, only the God-Man Jesus is qualified to take the scroll because He is the Lamb who has been slain for humanity's

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas, *Revelation 1-7, an Exegetical Commentary*, 379.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 378.

<sup>74</sup> Seiss, *The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation*, 111-112.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 111-112.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 112.

sins and is now risen. He alone can reclaim the forfeited title deed for His own redeemed people.<sup>79</sup> He will rule the earth and share the inheritance of His kingdom with us because He has made us joint heirs with Him through His death.<sup>80</sup> Having the risen God-Man reclaims and rule upon the earth fits well with themes of Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2. During the present dispensation, God allows Satan to possess the earth, but Satan's possession is temporary and in no way ever vitiates the proprietorship of the Almighty.<sup>81</sup> Seiss asserts that the seven seals on the scroll are numbered seven because seven is the number of completion.<sup>82</sup> He adds that the seven scrolls show the complete forfeiture of man's inheritance of the earth because of sin.<sup>83</sup> However, it would be better to say that Adam's sin made it impossible for him to subdue the earth and to rule it as God's regent. So, Christ the Second Adam came to redeem humanity because it is God's intention for man to rule the earth (Psalm 8). Each seal broken on the scroll represents judgment. The following judgments lead to Christ having victory over nature and His enemies, and He conquers to rule. This view largely agrees with Thomas' view but adds the idea of the scroll as a title deed. It significantly concurs with the view of Showers but leaves out the concept of Christ as Kinsman-Redeemer since this is not a concept named in Revelation. Some might argue that focusing on the scroll as a title deed might diminish the themes of redemption and judgment. But the scroll, as the title deed, explains Christ's right to subdue the earth and take dominion over it through judgment. It also shows that God's purpose is to redeem a people so they will participate in His righteous reign over creation. In doing this, they will be able to do what Adam failed to do.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 112-113.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 112.

Scholars have debated the identity of the seven-sealed scroll in John's heavenly vision, offering inventive interpretations. However, the scroll is best understood as containing the title deed to the earth that Jesus, the God-Man, will rightfully claim. Each broken seal reveals a new judgment that will fall upon the earth to subdue and conquer Jesus' enemies. Once the seal is open, He reigns upon the earth with His redeemed people for 1,000 years. When Jesus took the scroll out of the Father's hand, all the hosts of heaven rejoiced. Understanding the scroll should produce rejoicing in those who have trusted in Christ.



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