

OPENING
THE TITLE DEEDS.

An Address

BY

G. F. TRENCH.



LONDON:

J. E. HAWKINS, 36, BAKER STREET, W.;
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Read REVELATION V.

IN his earlier stages of knowledge the death of our Lord Jesus Christ is only understood by the child of God as the means of his salvation. The extremity of the peril, just discovered, is met and averted for each believer by this grand and merciful provision. He is saved. Christ's death it is that saved him. That is all he knows.

But as Scripture unfolds its secrets, and the cause and remedy for all the evils now afflicting this universe are ap-

prehended, the cross of Christ assumes a far deeper and wider significance.

By the death of His Son the outraged character of God is vindicated; the authority of His throne is re-established; the discord of many ages is resolved to harmony.

And the coming glory of Christ, of which all the prophets speak, is founded on His cross.

The book of the Revelation points occasionally forward to this future. It tells of the coming of the King in His kingdom, though for the most part treating rather of the events that shall lead up to that consummation.

The instruction of chapter v.—veiled, as I may say, under the figures of a glorious drama—is simply this: that the Christ of Nazareth and Golgotha shall

be Lord of all, and shall find His title to this glory in the blood He shed, the purchase-price He paid in death.

How this is shown we must discover by a somewhat critical examination of the passage.

THE SEALED BOOK.

“And I saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the back close sealed with seven seals.” You will observe what a prominent feature this book is in the chapter before us, and in those which follow. First, the book is seen in the hand of Him that sits upon the throne. Then comes the strong angel’s loud proclamation: “Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?” Then follows a dreadful pause, in which

no voice was uttered, and no step could be distinguished coming forward; then the apostle's tears, his much weeping; then the rebuke of the elder, as he says, "Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof." Then the Lamb takes the book, and the result is that we have those three wonderful doxologies which occupy the latter part of the chapter. Then in the sixth, seventh, and eighth chapters is found the opening of the seven seals of this book, and the consequent judgments upon earth. Therefore it is very important, if we want to understand these opening chapters, and indeed the whole of the Revelation, to ascertain what is the meaning of the sealed book.

Now I want you to remember that this book was not in the form of our books. The Eastern book was a roll, which, when it was to be closed, was rolled up and sealed along the outer edge. But, as I understand it, there is a slight error in the punctuation of the first verse. It should run thus: "A roll written within, and on the back side sealed with seven seals." That is what was presented upon the hand of Him who sat on the throne. The common interpretation of these seals is, that there was one seal on the outside, when the roll was closed; and when one opened or unrolled the book a little, there was found another seal, and so on; and that thus there were seven seals, by which the seven chapters of the book were successively sealed up. That is the

common notion ; but those who are learned in Eastern customs tell us that no such form of roll was known. By the Eastern custom, from which we must conclude this figure was derived, the whole of the seven seals were placed along the edge of the roll to secure it. If you follow that explanation (which is not mine, but that of the late valued Dr. Alford) you will see that the four chapters are perfectly intelligible. As the opening of the seals was preparatory to the unrolling of the scroll, so the events which are described as transpiring upon the breaking of each seal are preparatory to some great event of which the roll itself treats.

WHAT IS IT ?

But the attempts to explain the mean-

ing or contents of the roll have been various and conflicting. Some say it is the Old Testament; some say it is the New; some say it is both together; and some of the best interpreters consider it to be the prophecy of the seal-judgments which follow. This is perhaps the most common view. If this last interpretation be true, the roll is simply a book of judgment; and the angel's question apparently was, Who is worthy to inflict these judgments upon the earth? But there are many objections to that view. First, the construction of the book. Such a thing as a book sealed in chapters was impossible, or, at least, unknown. What we may be sure of is that, preliminary to the opening of the book, it was necessary that the whole seven seals should be opened. At the opening of each of

the seals certain events take place ; but nothing is read from the book, for it is not till the whole seven are opened that it would be possible to unroll the book, or to read its contents ; and the question still remains, after we have interpreted these seal-events, What does the book contain ? You will see, if you refer to the ninth verse, that there is another reason why this book cannot be simply an account of the troubles about to take place on the earth ; for it says, "And they sung a new song, saying, 'Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof : for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed to God by thy blood men of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.'" Has any one ever held that the Lord Jesus Christ, because of His redeeming us, gains a

title to send wars, and plagues, and famines on the earth?

There is yet another reason. The apostle wept. Why should the apostle weep because there was no one found worthy to inflict wars, and plagues, and famines on the earth? No; this book cannot be a book of sorrows, but these woes were evidently preliminary and preparatory to the glorious transaction to which the book itself relates.

ANOTHER SEALED BOOK.

Now, for the interpretation of this book I want you to refer to Jer. xxxii., which, I think, you will agree with me, throws light upon the subject; for there is no key to Scripture so safe as Scripture itself. In this chapter you will see a simple story. It is that Jeremiah was in

prison, and (*v.* 8) Hanameel, his uncle's son, came to him in the prison, and said, "Buy my field, I pray thee, that is in Anathoth; for the right of inheritance is thine, and the redemption is thine; buy it for thyself. And I bought the field of Hanameel, my uncle's son, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver, and I subscribed the evidence;" or (as it stands in the margin), I wrote in the book (now we have got "a book" again), "and sealed it" (now we have a "sealed book"), "and took witnesses and weighed him the money. So I took the evidence of the purchase, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open." It was the custom in those days, as in these, to have two copies of a deed; one was sealed up and

put by for safe keeping, and the other left open for reference. “And I charged Baruch before them, saying, ‘Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days.’” (*v.* 13.)

If you look on, without reading Jeremiah’s prayer, you will find a wonderful promise from the 36th verse to the end, how God would restore Israel, how He would be their God, and they His people, and (*v.* 40), how He will make an everlasting covenant with them. And in the last verse, “Men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe evidence, and seal them, and take witnesses in the land of Benjamin . . . for

I will cause their captivity to return, saith the Lord." Thus we perceive that this was no insignificant affair, this act of Jeremiah in his cell; it was a very important type. By the purchase of a single field, an event of vast magnitude in the divine purposes was foreshadowed. The prophet's act was typical of no less a transaction than the redemption of the Holy Land, and the restoration of Israel.

But Jeremiah was still a captive. He might redeem it, but he could not enter upon possession of the field. But when he should be set free, he would naturally go at once to Baruch, and claim the deed of purchase, as his title to the field; and none but the man who had weighed out the money, and subscribed the roll, would Baruch have thought "worthy

to take the roll, or to open the seals thereof."

Now this prisoner was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, prophet of Israel, and Redeemer of Israel, and the many days, during which the deed was sealed up and enclosed in the earthen vessel, represent the long present period of Israel's apostacy, and the world's rejection of its Saviour. But though He has never claimed possession of His great inheritance, being still exiled and rejected, the purchase has been made, the mighty price has been paid, not in silver, nor in gold, but in His own precious blood; and, like the imprisoned prophet, Jesus waits above for the moment to arrive when the angelic crier of the court of heaven shall summon the true Redeemer of this "purchased possession" to appear

and take His title-deed, and enter upon His kingdom.

I cannot think that this is a mere accidental coincidence. There is a designed connection between Jer. xxxii. and Rev. v., and the roll upon the hand of Him who sitteth upon the throne is thus proved to be nothing less than the title-deed of the Redeemer to the throne of the world.

Thus, the moment Christ appears to claim it, the vociferous acclamation of the living creatures and all the elders proclaim that "Worthy art thou to take the Book and open the seals thereof: for thou wast *slain*, and hast redeemed to God by thy blood."

The sealed book or roll then is (using Jeremiah's words) the EVIDENCE OF THE PURCHASE of the kingdom of the universe

by the blood of the cross. It was Christ's death that gave Him title to claim the throne of the kingdom of heaven upon earth.

The seals of the roll are what hinder its unfolding. The judgments which transpire on their being broken are the necessary purging of the earth for Christ's worthy reception. The Revelation tells us little of the kingdom itself; its purpose is to disclose the preparing of the way of the Lord to His kingdom.

And now can we feel any difficulty in explaining why the apostle wept so bitterly? Do we not remember the sorrow, the bitter disappointment of the disciples, when they thought that Jesus was no more? Recall what took place on the occasion of that holy walk to Emmaus, when they told the risen Stran-

ger how He had been slain, and how they supposed it had been He who should have redeemed Israel. But all their expectations had been dashed to pieces. They had thought that Israel's redemption was at hand, that the Messiah's kingdom would immediately appear; instead of which, said they, He was dead, and all their hopes were dead also. The tears of John may be explained by theirs.

Again, Rom. viii. tells us of much groaning. "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." (v. 22.) Why is this? It is waiting for redemption; it sighs and groans for its Redeemer. And, need we ask, what made the apostle weep? It was because he had imagined that the very moment the question was raised, "Who is worthy to take the roll,

and possess the kingdom?" immediately He would have come forward upon whom his hopes, and those of all creation, were centred. He knew that upon the opening of that book depended, not indeed plagues, and famines, and death, but, on the contrary, the drying up of the great flood of tears which had flowed from human eyes for six thousand years; on that, the hopes of Israel, and of all the earth. And if there should be none found worthy to take it up (and so it did appear in the dead silence of that awful moment), then all creation's hopes were ended, the triumph of sin and Satan would be complete, and the tears of human hearts must flow on for evermore. Was it any wonder that he wept, that he "*wept much*" at such a prospect?

In this then we see a further confirmation of the explanation given as to the contents of the sealed roll. As the book of Jeremiah was a record of the weighing of the money in the presence of witnesses, this is the *record of the cross of Christ*, and the testimony of the satisfaction which God has found in it. And though the Lord Jesus Christ be rejected, and His holy name is trampled under foot, and the world will have none of Him, this is our confidence and consolation, that there is a record reserved in heaven these nineteen centuries past, and there so safely kept, that none can touch, or falsify, or alter it, testifying to this glorious fact, that that despised and rejected Christ has, at the cost of His own precious blood, redeemed our souls out of every nation, and tongue, and kindred,

and people, and that He is worthy to sit upon the throne of God.

THE CHALLENGE.

And so the angel comes forth with the challenge, "Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?" You know what it is in a court of justice when some name is called out, and the proceedings are brought to a pause ; while every eye is turned to see him enter who has been called. Well, this is somewhat like the scene presented to us here. "Who is worthy to take the book?" We can imagine all the wondering hosts in waiting, every eye intent to catch the first view of the Prince of the world coming forth in answer to the challenge. Then, in an anxious moment, the whole human family passes in review before the

eye of Him that sat upon the throne, and all the heroes of faith are scanned—such mighty men as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham the father of the faithful, Moses God's friend, Joshua, David, Daniel, and Job. But no man was found worthy to open the book, neither so much as to look thereon.

But though man was found unworthy, there are glorious beings there around the throne, wearing no soil or stain of sin; and we may suppose that every eye is turned to the four living ones whose appearance you will find described in chap. iv. May not one of these be qualified to take the book of the kingdom? There were the Lion, the Eagle, the Ox, and the Man, whose glory is more fully given in Ezek. i., in words so wonderful and mysterious, that the mind is quite

overcome in the effort to take in the exceeding splendour and brilliancy of the description. But the four living ones sit motionless and dumb.

But then there are the four-and-twenty royal elders, crowned, enthroned, and white-robed. Will not one of these rise up to claim the roll, and take the kingdom? No; not one is found worthy. "No one in the heaven, or on earth, or under the earth, was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon." Then flow forth the seer's tears.

It may be that some eye, often moist with like tears, may fall upon these lines—some eye that has, though not too plainly, seen its own unworthiness, the ruin wrought by sin, but which as yet has searched in vain for light, and life,

and peace. If so, if indeed such a heart has felt sympathy with the scene so far, God grant it grace to enter also into that which follows, where tears are turned into loud and joyful hallelujahs !

THE TRIUMPH OF THE LAMB.

John is rebuked by the elder's words, "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath conquered" (that is the word) "to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof."

And now, can we conceive for an instant that any of these glorious hosts expectant could have realized, in the smallest, faintest degree, what was about to transpire ?

A king was called for. An occupant for the world's throne was demanded—a worthy one, where all the unfallen princes

of the great court of heaven had proved unworthy. An elder had pointed to the Lion of Judah—and who appears?

“Lo! in the midst of the throne, and of the four living ones, and in the midst of the elders, stood—a Lamb” (or, as it is in the Greek), “a *little* Lamb, as though it had been slain: and He came and took the book out of the hand of Him that sat on the throne.”

What a moment of amaze! Who would have expected this? Where all had stood abashed, disqualified, a “little lamb” prevails.

Many have inquired the reason of this, the diminutive form, being used. Why is He called, as only in the Revelation, a *little* Lamb? The answer is not far to seek. It is to present in strongest relief our Lord in His lowly, humble, patient,

sacrificial character, with the majesty of His glory.

My friends, that lowly Sufferer who lay in the manger at Bethlehem, whose hands and feet were pierced, who died before heaven, earth, and hell, in agony upon the cross, is an object familiar to all the world. *We* know very well what glory was hidden behind that awful lowliness; *Christians* know it, they have by faith discerned it; but before *the world* the Lord Jesus Christ has never yet been presented, except as He was seen in His lamb-like walk on earth, and on that cruel cross. He died by their wicked hands, and was hurried away to His grave. That was the last they saw of Him. And the scene before us describes the glorious moment when our Lord Jesus is to be presented alive before the

world. And so from out the four living ones, and the four-and-twenty elders, He comes forth a Lamb—a little Lamb; a *little, little* wounded Lamb; a Lamb as it had been slain! It is because the public manifestation of the Lord as King of kings, and Lord of lords, has not yet come, and when it comes, the whole world will first see the Lord Jesus as they may recognize Him, in the very same character in which He lived, and died, and disappeared. The little Lamb, which they had shorn and slain, comes forth, to the surprise of all, to take the book of royal majesty, and universal dominion.

This fifth chapter of Revelation is then a prophecy in dramatic form of the fulfilment of all the purposes of God for the whole world, founded and based upon the cross; it is the assertion of the

Lord Jesus, coming forth so meekly, so lowly, so mildly, yet so confidently, that to Him, by right of His shed blood, belongs the Throne and Crown. What is His reception? There was first the throne, and then the little Lamb, and then the four living ones, and then the four-and-twenty elders, and then the angels, and then the distant earth, and, outside all, the whole wide universe. First, the inner circle perceives what has occurred (it was only those who were nearest who could see the little Lamb), and they break forth into song, saying, "Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and

priests ; and they reign upon the earth.” The notes of the anthem, new, and ever new, have hardly died away, when the next circle catches them up, and then ten thousand times ten thousand angels echo the triumphant words, “Worthy is the little Lamb !” And now their lusty voices, reaching far beyond the heavenly precincts, touch a chord in the heart of every creature. “And every created thing which is in the heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, and all things that are in them, heard I saying, Unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honour, and the glory, and the dominion, for ever and ever.” Oh ! then the Lord Jesus shall get His due. He whom men now despise and slight is found worthy to receive blessing, and honour, and glory,

and power. "And the four living creatures said, Amen. And the elders fell down and worshipped."

Oh, my friends, does it not seem almost too much for the mind to realize that we ourselves shall take part in that glorious scene, and join in those songs of praise—that we who have sought, amid pain, and tears, and temptations, to be disciples and followers of the Lamb of God in His humiliation and rejection, shall actually, with our very eyes, behold His triumph! "Father, that which thou hast given me, I will that, where I am, they also may be with me; that they (who have seen my weakness, my sufferings, my death) may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." (John xvii. 24.)

May this hope so fill our hearts and sustain us, that as a living sacrifice we may henceforth be wholly surrendered to His service, and be ready and glad to labour anywhere, and suffer any loss, for His dear name's sake.

“ Hark ! ten thousand voices crying,
‘ Lamb of God ! ’ with one accord ;
Thousand thousand saints replying,
Wake at once the echoing chord.

“ ‘ Praise the Lamb ! ’ the chorus waking.
All in heaven together throng ;
Loud and far, each tongue partaking,
Rolls around the endless song.

“ Grateful incense, this ascending
Ever to the Father's throne,
Every knee to Jesus bending,
All the mind in heaven is one.

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