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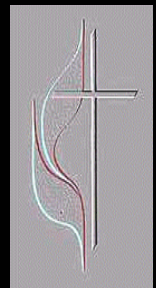
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St. Peter's Basilica



Where is salvation found?



Protestant

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4256-B Mockingbird Lane
Banning, California 92220-1123 USA
Phone: 951-922-1638
E-mail: christianheritagefo@earthlink.net
Web: www.endtimeissues.com

Franklin S. Fowler Jr., M.D. – Editor
Jeanne C. Fowler – Layout Editor
Brent Beardsley – Internet Administration

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Pope Benedict's Denunciation of True Churches Exposes His Own System

By Richard Bennett and Michael de Semlyen
(bereanbeacon.org)

On July 10, 2007, Pope Benedict XVI released a new decree.¹ In it the Pope restated his conviction that the Roman Catholic Church is the one Church founded by Jesus Christ and that other churches are either defective or not true Churches at all. What is new in this document is the authoritative statement that “Christian Communities **born out of the Reformation of the sixteenth century**” cannot be “called ‘Churches’ in the proper sense.”²

Prior to this, in September 2000, when Benedict was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Guardian of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,³ he stunned the ecumenical movement by launching an assault on all other Churches with the Vatican decree, “Dominus Iesus,” prepared by his office. As an arch-conservative, true to the pre-Vatican II doctrinal rigidity that viewed Bible Christians as heretics rather than “separated brethren,” Pope Benedict has long sought to correct what he describes as erroneous interpretations of Vatican Council II’s ecumenical intent.

Thus the 2007 document is formulated as five questions and answers to set the record straight on the real intentions of the Second Vatican Council. Benedict’s mission is to rescue its teaching and conclusions from Catholics who in their association with Christians are drifting away from the old hard-line Catholic dogma. In the context of this catechetical decree, the last of the five questions is of specific importance:

“Why do the texts of the Council and those of the Magisterium since the Council not use the title of ‘Church’ with regard to those Christian Communities born out of the Reformation of the sixteenth century?”

The response, which closes the decree, states,

“According to Catholic doctrine, these Communities do not enjoy apostolic succession in the sacrament of Orders, and are, therefore, deprived of a constitutive element of the Church. These ecclesial Communities which, specifically because of the absence of the sacramental priesthood, have not preserved the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic Mystery cannot, according to Catholic doctrine, be called ‘Churches’ in the proper sense.”

Biblical Truth Lays Bare the Papal Decree

In declaring the universal primacy of the Church of Rome and denying the faith of the Reformation, the Pope denounced all those Churches and Christians whose lives are committed to the Lord Jesus Christ and to His everlasting Gospel.⁴ Benedict is unable to see that these whom he is denouncing are the true Church founded upon the Rock, who is Christ Jesus Himself “*the Son of the living God*.” They are His people, His bride, the true Church; believers who adhere to God only and His Written Word; who are saved before the all-Holy God by grace alone through faith

alone, and in Christ alone and all glory and praise is to God alone. This is the Bride of Christ, the temple of the Living God, and His dwelling place forever. This is the Church, which Christ Jesus loved, and these are His disciples for whom He gave Himself that they might be washed in His own blood. It is the Church sanctified and cleansed by His Word “*that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church.*”⁵ It is the “*general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.*” As a Roman Catholic, Benedict must reject the Gospel rediscovered by the Reformation out of the darkness of the Papacy. Ironically, in seeking to reestablish hard-line Catholic dogma, he has in fact revealed his own church as biblically counterfeit and apostate.

The basis for Benedict’s denunciation is given in his answer to the second question posed in the document:

“Christ ‘established here on earth’ only one Church and instituted it as a ‘visible and spiritual community’ that from its beginning and throughout the centuries has always existed and will always exist, and in which alone are found all the elements that Christ himself instituted.... This Church, constituted and organized in this world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and the Bishops in communion with him.”

The presumption here is that the Apostle Peter went to Rome, and that each Pope is the successor of Peter. This conjecture is groundless. The Scripture makes mention neither of Peter ever being at Rome nor of successors to Peter or to any other Apostle. The criteria for apostleship are given in Scripture.⁶ The position of the Apostles was unique to them and to Paul—all directly chosen by Christ Jesus with no hint of succession. In the New Testament, the Apostles appointed elders⁷ and deacons rather than other Apostles. Yet the biblically unsubstantiated claim of “apostolic succession” is the very foundation of the Papacy. Papal primacy and authority are based on it. The Lord God never entrusted His truth to a personal succession of any body of men. Such a concept is hopelessly flawed. If one link failed, the whole sequence after it would be invalid. Yet, Benedict has again hitched his star to the notion of apostolic succession. The Papacy as usual rules by fiat, this time it is via Benedict’s dogmatic statement.

The True Legacy of the Apostle Peter

“Apostolic Succession” is the defining dogma for the Pope’s universal primacy and his reason for denouncing other Churches. It is important, therefore, to review the legacy of the Apostle Peter. Peter did not proclaim an institution, a system, or an organization but rather only the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He made known the fact that “*Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.*”⁸ The meritorious cause of Christ Jesus’ suffering was the sins of men. He offered Himself as the once and for all sacrifice to atone for the sins of His people. The Just suffered for the unjust. He substituted Himself in place of true believers and bore their iniquities in order to propitiate the just wrath of the all-holy God. He that knew no sin suffered in place of those that knew no righteousness. The blessed design of Christ Jesus’ sufferings was to bring us to God, to reconcile us to God, to give us access to the Father, to credit us with His righteousness, and finally to bring us to eternal glory. This is the bequest of Peter that he called “*precious faith*” as he began his second epistle, “*Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ.*”⁹

The teaching of Peter refutes the hierarchical organization as well as the “Holy Tradition” of the Papacy. Peter believed that all born-again Christians are “*a chosen generation, a royal priesthood,*”¹⁰ rather than a top-heavy hierarchical system, from layperson to Priest, from Priest to Bishop, from Bishop to Cardinal and from Cardinal to Pope. He taught salvation and redemption by the blood of Christ, “*forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*”¹¹

Pope Benedict, in contrast, insists that physical sacraments are necessary for salvation.¹² Peter endorsed the writings of the Apostle Paul who condemned the traditions of men. Peter warned of false teachers who would secretly introduce heresies¹³ into the Church—which is precisely what Roman Catholicism has done. The basis for the Gospel truth proclaimed by Peter to those who are “*born again*” is the Word of the Lord. Thus he writes of “*being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.*”¹⁴ The Pope’s foundation is not the word of God alone. He decrees, “Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.”¹⁵ Peter’s teachings totally demolish the foundational doctrines of Benedict and his worldly system.

A Radical Change of Policy

For more than forty years a spurious ecumenical strategy contrived at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) has been carried out by the Papacy. It is often said that “Vatican Council II changed everything,” but in this decree Pope Benedict has stated unequivocally, “The Second Vatican Council neither changed nor intended to change this doctrine [No. 28, Lumen gentium on the ecclesial doctrine of the Catholic Church].” Further, he cites John XXIII, the reigning Pope at the opening of the Second Vatican Council, who also clearly stated that while Catholic dogma on the church was to remain the same, the Papacy’s “manner” needed to change as “required by our times.”¹⁶ Hence that Council moved from a position of condemnation of, and separation from, other religions to a new program of false ecumenism. It was a public relations exercise on an allinclusive and global scale. The new warmth and acceptance was to be applied not just to the other major religions of the world, but also to Bible believers who were “welcomed back into the fold.” “Separated brethren” had replaced “heretics” in the Mother Church’s vocabulary. “Separated brethren” was the term to be used especially for those who before had always been considered heretics, while the major pagan religions of Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism now were to be regarded by the Papacy as “acceptable ways to God.”¹⁷ With this new strategy, the Church of Rome set out to win the world back to herself. This was necessary after the controversial reign of Pius XII and the uncompromisingly severe image that his pontificate had presented to the world. The popular Pope who followed him, John XXIII, was said to have prayed for “a new Pentecost” on his deathbed as his church set out purposefully to adopt the fledgling “Charismatic Renewal.” The backing of this movement with its blurring of doctrinal differences together with its emphasis on tolerance and unity was to prove to be a successful way forward for the Church of Rome in the 1960s and ‘70s. There were other important strands of the new policy. Another main approach was by dialogue. In 1970, the Catholic Church carefully spelled out the goals and rules of dialogue. The method of incremental advances into Bible believing churches was to be by means of “dialogue,” the purpose of which is clearly stated by the Catholic Church:

“Dialogue is not an end in itself...it is not just an academic discussion.”¹⁸ Rather, “...it serves to transform modes of thought and behavior and the daily life of those communities [non-Catholic churches]. In this way, it aims at preparing the way for their unity of faith in

the bosom of a Church one and visible: thus ‘little by little, as the obstacles to perfect ecclesial communion are overcome, all Christians will be gathered, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, into the unity of the one and only Church which Christ bestowed on his Church from the beginning. This unity, we believe, dwells in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose....’¹⁹

For the duration of more than four decades and four pontificates the ecumenical mood music from the Vatican has been soothing, reassuring, tolerant and conciliatory. Although the Second Vatican Council documents were published in 1975, only once before, in all these years since that Council, was the mask slipped. Pope Benedict in his less exalted identity as Cardinal Ratzinger, issued the decree “*Dominus Iesus*”²⁰ stating then what he has now chosen to state again, “...the ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery, are not Churches in the proper sense.”²¹

The Pontiff Again Shows His True Colors

It is one thing to declare that Christian Churches “are not Churches in a proper sense” as a Cardinal, but it is entirely another matter for a Pope to make the same statement and designate more particularly the Churches he has in mind. While he is most capable of continuing to woo Christian Churches to dialogue with the Vatican, it now seems evident that he is determined to uphold an older, traditional, aggressive stance that produced such evil fruit in the horrendous years of the Inquisition from 1203 to 1808. His present mindset was indeed already seen in his 2000 decree. In that decree he actually referred to the arrogant claim of the infamous Mediaeval Pope, Boniface VIII. In 1302, in the Papal Bull, “*Unam Sanctam*”, Boniface stated, “Furthermore we declare, say, define, and proclaim to every human creature that they, by necessity for salvation, are entirely subject to the Roman Pontiff.”²²

This presumed Primacy is the arrogant mindset of the Vatican hard-liners, those who oversee the strategy and wield the power, among whom is Pope Benedict, and those who elected him to preeminence. His dominant presupposition for Papal Rome is that the Lord has established a totalitarian hierarchy of Pope, Cardinals, Patriarchs, major Archbishops, Archbishops, Metropolitans, coadjutor Archbishops, diocesan Bishops, coadjutor Bishops, etc. This is the spirit of Diotrephes, “*who loves to have the pre-eminence*” ad absurdum. The biblical organizational structure of the bride of Christ is utterly different. In the true body of Christ, those ordained as elders and deacons are still only brothers within the same body and the one Master is Jesus Christ the Lord, “*for one is your master even Christ and ye are all brethren.*”²³

Damning Doctrine Resurfaces

Pope Benedict of the year 2007 now demonstrates that his nicknames were well chosen when as a Cardinal the media dubbed him as “the enforcer”, “the panzer” and “God’s rottweiler”. He has countless dictates of old to justify his present strategy. Besides the blasphemous imposition of subjection to the Pope as necessary for salvation contained in “*Unum Sanctam*”, another example of the damning Papal decree is that of The General Council of Florence in 1442. This official verdict of the fifteenth century is still published in present day papal documents. It announces:

“The Holy Roman Church...firmly believes, professes and preaches that ‘no one remaining outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans’, but also Jews, heretics or schismatics, can become partakers of eternal life; but they will go to the ‘eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’ (Mt. 25:41), unless before the end of their life they are received into it [the Catholic

Church]. For union with the body of the Church is of so great importance that the sacraments of the Church are helpful to salvation only for those remaining in it...and no one can be saved, no matter how much alms he has given, even if he sheds his blood for the name of Christ, unless he remains in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church.”²⁴

The force and substance of this 1442 decree reappear in the 2007 ruling of Pope Benedict XVI. As we have seen, responding to Question Five, as the document ends, the Pontiff determines:

“... These ecclesial Communities which, specifically because of the absence of the sacramental priesthood, have not preserved the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic Mystery cannot, according to Catholic doctrine, be called ‘Churches’ in the proper sense.”

This hard-line policy does in fact perfectly fit with much of present day official teaching. The Roman Catholic Church officially states, “There is no offense, however serious, that the Church cannot forgive. ‘There is no one, however wicked and guilty, who may not confidently hope for forgiveness, provided his repentance is honest.’”²⁵ Papal Rome broadcasts the focal point of its hope: “Priests have received from God a power that he has given neither to angels nor to archangels....God above confirms what priests do here below. Were there no forgiveness of sins in the [Roman Catholic] Church, there would be no hope of life to come or eternal liberation. Let us thank God who has given his Church such a gift.”²⁶

In Scripture, in complete contrast, salvation is mediated through Jesus Christ alone, the only mediator between God and man.²⁷ The instrument of salvation is not a Church but rather individual faith and a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The foundation of salvation is outlined by the Apostle Paul, “*being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*”²⁸ showing that God’s grace is the efficient cause, and the payment is made “*through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*” To attempt to bring the Papal church into the nature of the saving work of the Godhead, indeed to make her the centre of that work is grossest blasphemy. In Scripture, salvation is in Christ Jesus alone, “*to the praise of the glory of his grace.*”²⁹

Past and Present Hard-line Papal Policy

There is a distinct parallel between the hard-line policy during centuries of Papal Inquisition and the new policy of the present Pope. During the six hundred and five years of the Inquisition, Bible believers stood remarkably strong in faith and practice. In 2007, trusting in the same Lord Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and for ever, we must stand firm as they did. Bible believers of old confronted by ridicule, indifference and a deluded populace, still in no uncertain terms denounced the Pope along with his dictates and daily lived out the Gospel of grace.³⁰ We must do likewise. The Lord’s Glory, His Gospel, and His promise are at stake! “*Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.*”³¹ Christ Jesus prepared believers of old as He does today for condemnations and false charges. He promised,

“*Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad...for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*”³²

Those who are falsely denounced are to rejoice, showing forth His truth and His Gospel of grace because the Lord reigns. We, facing up to the hard-line policy of Pope Benedict, the continuing obdu-

rate lies, the error and blasphemies of the present day, must preserve awaiting the power and might of the Righteous Lord God to respond. Benedict expects to achieve greater control through his hard-hitting decree. What he fails to realize is that such decrees of Papal monarchy let it be seen that he rules an enslaved people. The Pope's arrogant pretensions reveal that by means of papal dictatorial rule, a lying system of works is ruthlessly imposed upon Catholic people for their entire lives.

The Absolute Response to the Decree

The conclusive response to the Pope's decree is the everlasting good news of the Lord God. The Lord Jesus Christ died in place of the true believer. His life and perfect unrepeatable sacrifice alone are the ransom payment for the believer's soul. "*The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*"³³ This was the price demanded by the All Holy God in order that His justice might be satisfied in the forgiveness of sins. As a result of this payment, the true believer who trusts in Christ Jesus alone is set free from sin, from the wiles of the devil and from the clutches of a counterfeit Church. "*For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*"³⁴ On the authority of the Bible alone, sinners turn by the conviction of the Holy Spirit to God in faith alone for the salvation that He alone gives, based solely on Christ's death and resurrection for His own. As they believe on Him alone, they realize the greatness of the Father's grace, "*being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*"³⁵ God's sovereign grace and forgiveness enables us to respond in faith and place our trust in the one who died in our place. No Church can save, no ecclesiology saves. We are made right with the All Holy God solely by His graciousness in Jesus Christ our Lord alone.

References:

- 1 "Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church." www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070629_responsaquaestiones_en.html 8/10/2007
- 2 Emphasis not in original.
- 3 Formerly known as the Office of the Inquisition, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is still housed in the same building in Rome as its predecessor had been during more than six terrible centuries of torture and death during which the Office made sure the inquisitorial papal decrees were carried out.
- 4 Matthew 16:16
- 5 Ephesians 5:25-27
- 6 Acts 1:21-22
- 7 The terms overseer and elder/pastor are used interchangeably (Acts 20:17, 28; I Peter 5:1-4).
- 8 I Peter 3:18
- 9 II Peter 1:1
- 10 I Peter 2:9
- 11 I Peter 1:18-19
- 12 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), Para 1129
- 13 II Peter 2:1
- 14 I Peter 1:23, 25
- 15 *Catechism*, Para 82
- 16 John XXIII, *Address*, 11 October 1962, in Footnote 1 of Benedict's *Responses*, "...The Council... wishes to transmit Catholic doctrine, whole and entire, without alteration or deviation...it is necessary that the very same doctrine be understood more widely...The deposit of faith itself and the truths contained in our venerable doctrine are one thing, **but the manner in which they are annunciated is another**, provided that the same fundamental sense and meaning is maintained."¹⁶ (Emphasis not in original.)
- 17 Vatican Council II Document No. 56, *Nostra Aetate*, 28 October 1965 in *Documents of Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Austin P. Flannery, Ed., New Revised Edition (1975, 1984) p. 739. All Vatican II Conciliar and Post Conciliar documents are taken from this volume.
- 18 Post Vatican Council II Document No. 42, "Reflections and Suggestions Concerning Ecumenical Dialogue", 15 August 1970, Sect. VI, Part 3, p. 549
- 19 *Ibid.*, Sect. II "Nature and Aim of Ecumenical Dialogue", p. 541

- ²⁰ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominusiesus_en.html 8/13/2007
- ²¹ “Dominus Iesus”, Sect. 17 (2000).
- ²² Bull, “Unam Sanctam”, November 18, 1302 in *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* Tr. by Roy J. Deferrari from the Thirtieth Ed. of Henry Denzinger’s *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, tr. revised by Karl Rahner, S. J., 1954 (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1957) #469.
- ²³ Matthew 23:8
- ²⁴ *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, J. Neuner, SJ, and J. Dupuis, SJ, Eds. (New York: Alba House, 1982) #1005.
- ²⁵ *Catechism*, Para. 982
- ²⁶ *Ibid*, Para. 983
- ²⁷ John 14:6; Acts 4:12; I Timothy 2:5
- ²⁸ Romans 3: 24
- ²⁹ Ephesians 1:6
- ³⁰ Watch our *Inquisition* video on ‘Youtube’ at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rx8PdvOELvY>
- ³¹ Hebrews 12:28-29.
- ³² Matthew 5:11-12
- ³³ Mark 10:45
- ³⁴ Romans 6:23
- ³⁵ Romans 3:24.

Sabbatical Year — the Shemita

An Amazing Spiritual Model

God introduced time during the creation week. In that perfect world, He established myriads of clocks that would guide the affairs of man. On the fourth day the sun and moon became the basis for the *signs, seasons, days* and *years*. The intricate purpose of those clocks in a world without sin is not elaborated on. Clearly, it was in His divine intention that Adam and Eve have routines in their lives that would relate to those time periods.

Many expositors¹ claim that these were established as time pieces to justify events, feasts and activities which God later set into motion after sin's introduction. In fact, their description is often elaborate, viewing Genesis 1:14 as if God brought into existence a perfect world structurally prepared for sin. Though sin's intrusion was anticipated, there is nothing in the Biblical account to suggest God modified His flawless creation plan. Only the moral choice of man could blemish the precincts of His handiwork.

Divinity also designed a unique cycle unrelated to the sun and moon. A time period of seven days would be divided into two main parts: six days of work and one day of rest.

"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God **ended his work** which he had made; and he **rested** on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God **blessed** the seventh day, and **sanctified** it: because that in it he had **rested** from all his work which God created and made" (Genesis 2:1-3).

Several unique things are noted regarding this particular day:

1. It was the seventh, the last day of God's new time period of seven evenings and mornings.
2. It was set apart from work which was associated with the previous six days.
3. It was a day of rest — *shabath* — it states in this original decree that *God rested*.
4. Intriguingly, God honored this time by:
 - a. **Blessing** the "time" (*barak*)
 - b. **Sanctifying** the "time" (*qadesh*)

Different than all other clocks at creation, this one was decreed as sacred (holy). Any man entering the portals of the seventh day enters sacred time. The verb for rested (*shavat*) infers that an *end has come* -- something has ceased. The context simply reveals that God's work has come to an end. It is quite emphatic, in fact. No residual work remained. Many scholars conclude that out of this has come the similar noun *shabbat* or Sabbath rest. Exodus 20:8 connects the observance of the Sabbath with God's resting during that seventh day of the creation week. "God rested" — therefore, "thou shalt not do any work."

Man's requirement to "keep" that Sabbath is found in many places in the Old and New Testaments. Instruction regarding this is given more space in the fourth commandment in the Decalogue than any other of the nine decrees. Only the Sabbath time was blessed or set apart and sanctified. *Qadash* distinguishes the time from the common, here compared with the six working days. It is holy and associated with worship and time with God. It elevates time to an

¹ Adams and Claris Commentary, Genesis 1:14 —
<http://www.studylight.org/com/acc/view.cgi?book=ge&chapter=001>.

exclusive period with God. It represents a pure relational day when man focuses on God without work interruptions. By this, God's sovereignty over His creation is not only remembered but now His sovereignty over "time" is honored.

When sin came, and it likely did within months after creation, based upon Great Week of Time studies,² the significance of the Sabbath was not done away with but was actually seen later embellished and expanded. There is a vast block of time from the loss of Paradise by Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:23a) to the post-deluge era of Israel when they left Egypt. During this space of approximately 2500 years nothing is said regarding the sacred Sabbath rest. God's law and the Sabbath requirements were apparently known to the ancient pre-deluge inhabitants: "Every man in God's world is under the laws of His government. God has placed the Sabbath in the bosom of the Decalogue, and has made it the criterion of obedience. Through it we may learn of His power, as displayed in His works and His Word. But today the world is following the example of those that lived *before the flood*. Now, as then, men choose to follow their own inclinations, rather than to obey the commandments of God. The inhabitants of the antediluvian world glorified themselves instead of commemorating the glorious works of creation. They did not obey the law of God; they did not honor the Sabbath. Had they done this, they would have recognized their duty to their Creator. This was the original and supreme object of the command, 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.'"³

When God finally had a corporate body that left Egypt, heading towards the Promised Land, God riveted the importance of the Sabbath into Israel's understanding through the manna miracle during the first 50 days before Sinai. Thirty days into the wilderness of Sin, that Bread of Life was given as a gift (Exodus 16). Then came Sinai and the Sabbath commandment written on tables of stone. God did not lead this group of people to simply "remember" His creative acts, but quickly made the Sabbath a redemptive symbol, representing the restoration rest of man's final deliverance.

- It became a perpetual **sign** of the everlasting covenant between man and God.
"Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it *is* a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I *am* the LORD that doth sanctify you.... It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed" (Exodus 31:13, 17).
- It became a reminder of the deliverance from Egypt: "And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and *that* the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day" (Deuteronomy 5:15).

In prophecy, "Egypt" symbolizes the "wicked world," a wilderness through which man passes with trials during his journey to the Promised Land, heaven. As for ancient Israel, so for us today, the Sabbath connects the promises of deliverance from sin **and** from this world to that heavenly Canaan. It unfolds the hope of man morally restored and the reality of a new home in heaven.

In the Sabbath, God is seen as an emancipator and a liberator.⁴ This bonds the people of the covenant with the God of the covenant. The Sabbath is a "time link" between sinful man and redeemer Jesus. It is set aside to celebrate the hope of restoration in a mini-heaven atmosphere.

² Fowler, Franklin S., Jr.; *God's Great Week of Time* (Christian Heritage Foundation, C.S.; Banning, CA – 2007).

³ White, Ellen G.; *The Signs of the Times*, March 31, 1898 (emphasis added).

⁴ Harris, R. Laird; *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol II, vol. 2, p. 903.

The Sabbath became also a humanitarian ordinance, affording laborers a day of rest: “But the seventh day *is* the sabbath of the LORD thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates” (Exodus 20:10). “But the seventh day *is* the sabbath of the LORD thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and *that* the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:14-15). “Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed” (Exodus 23:12).

The original holiness of the seventh-day rest was adapted to sinful man. It became a textbook of time for man to observe and reflect on the dynamics of deliverance and restoration – Egypt to Canaan, sinful nature to moral perfection. Through God’s agencies of type and anti-type, the issues of that journey were clarified and ennobled. Through the Sabbath, time was provided to give solemn honor to God for His promises of cleansing and a sinless future. That Sabbath remains a sacred moment in each life to restore and celebrate the man–God relationship the blood of the Lamb provides.

“If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, [from] doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking *thine own* words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*” (Isaiah 58:13-14).

God Introduced Another Sabbath

The expected march from Egypt to Canaan was to have been brief. It was 50 days to Sinai. There, at the base of that mountain of granite rock, Israel spent several years. That is when the camp was organized. There, the tabernacle was built with its symbolic furnishings and ordinances. It was then that God’s law, statutes and judgments were given. God is a Being of precision, order and holiness. The government was directed by God Himself. Everything from worship to physical hygiene had a directive, emanating from His divine government!

There was another set of decrees that God gave to Moses. Special Sabbaths were to be observed **when** they entered the Promised Land. As they moved from a wandering people to an established nation, those Sabbaths were to be symbolic of important principles related to citizenry of the heavenly Canaan. In fact, their observance was so important that God would bring a curse on Israel if they remained unhonored. They were to represent an even higher image of when all things would become new.

The first new Sabbath He gave was called the *Shemita*. Every seventh year was to be a special sacred year. The next new Sabbath was called the *Yovel*. The year **after** seven Shemitas – or the 50th year – was called also a Jubilee year. Ten Jubilees would bring the key way-marks to God’s covenant restorative promises to completion. After 490 Shemitas or ten Yovels (ten represents completion in prophecy), deliverance would come to God’s people – if they obeyed.

These two Sabbatical clocks ran under restricted conditions:

1. God must have a special people He could call *tsaba* or a “host.”
2. God’s people must be in a typological Promised Land.
3. There would be a corporate body in full compliance to His sacred directives.

Here are several of those directives:

Book of Leviticus: “And the LORD spake unto Moses in mount Sinai, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the LORD. Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard. That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed: *for* it is a year of rest unto the land. And the sabbath of the land shall be meat for you; for thee, and for thy servant, and for thy maid, and for thy hired servant, and for thy stranger that sojourneth with thee, And for thy cattle, and for the beast that *are* in thy land, shall all the increase thereof be meat” (Leviticus 25:1-7).

Book of Exodus: “And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof: But the seventh *year* thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, *and* with thy oliveyard” (Exodus 23:10-11).

Book of Deuteronomy: “At the end of *every* seven years thou shalt make a release. And this *is* the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth *ought* unto his neighbour shall release *it*; he shall not exact *it* of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD'S release. Of a foreigner thou mayest exact *it again*: but *that* which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release; Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee *for* an inheritance to possess it: Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day. For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee” (Deuteronomy 15:1-6)

“If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, *and* if thou turn unto the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul. For this commandment which I command thee this day, it *is* not hidden from thee, neither *is* it far off. It *is* not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither *is* it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?” (Deuteronomy 31:10-13).

Israel disobeyed those Sabbatical commands. Intriguingly, God waited 490 Shemitas or ten Jubilees before the promised curse came. Then the prophesied Babylonian captivity.

Book of Chronicles: “And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: *for* as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years” (II Chronicles 36:20-21).

As noted in the Chronicles of the Jews, this related to Jeremiah's day above: “The year was not well observed before the **Captivity** (cf. II Paralipomenon 36:21 and Leviticus 26:34, 35, 43). After the return, the people covenanted to let the land lie fallow and to exact no debt in the seventh year (II Esdras 10:31), and thereafter it was regularly kept. The occurrence of a sabbatical year is mentioned in I Machabees 6:49 and 6:53, and its observance is several times referred to by Josephus (*Jewish Wars* I:2:4; *Antiquities* XI:8:5-6; XIII:8:1; XIV:16:2).⁵

What was so important about the Shemita that God permitted a pagan king, Nebuchadd-nezzar, to desolate the land, kill thousands of Israelites and decimate Jerusalem? The “sev-

⁵ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13289a.htm>

enth” in Scripture always relates to something sacred. Why would the seventh year be so sacred that its dishonor brought murder and mayhem to those people and their land?

That’s a question that urgently requires an answer. There is more to those Sabbaths than liturgical value. This is why this document has been presented. Those Sabbaths had as much “holy” value as the seventh day. There is also growing evidence that a clock with one pending Shemita and one pending Jubilee was stopped at the Cross before a cycle was completed. At the end of a “tarrying time” alluded to in Habakkuk 2:2-3, Hebrews 10:36-37 and Revelation 10:6, the cycle will be completed – then the deliverance of God’s people will occur – at a Jubilee.

“And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make *it* plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision *is* yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry” (Habakkuk 2:2-3).

“For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (Hebrews 10:36-37).

“And sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer” (Revelation 10:6).

Remember those clocks only tick under the three conditions noted on page 12. Right at the end of time those circumstances will once again be established.

The Jewish Encyclopedia’s Executive Committee of their Editorial Board noted: “The septennate or seventh year and the laws regarding the jubilee were so important, like the Decalogue, they were ascribed to the legislation of Mount Sinai.”⁶

What were the general reasons given for the Sabbatical year?

1. Land was to lie fallow and all agriculture work suspended – it would be at rest. Work that man did to sustain himself was to cease totally.
2. The voluntary crops were to be for “common use.” What was not used by people, the domestic and wild animals could eat (Exodus 23:10-11, Leviticus 25:1-7). Thus, the poor would be served.
3. Supernatural crops would be experienced in preparation for this time. Thus, God’s power and sovereignty of the land would be revealed to sustain them. It would be His sovereignty and power manifested.
4. All debts to a fellow Israelite were to be forgiven, showing what community would be like without obligation.
5. During the Feast of Tabernacles of that seventh year, the law was read so everyone “might know and fear the Lord” (Deuteronomy 31:10-13), giving a corporate reminder of God’s character and what man was to become.

Since the sabbatical year was preceded by six sowings and six harvests (Exodus 23:10), it began with autumn, the time of sowing, coinciding with the civil year, which began with the month of Tishri (September–October).

Why would a death curse or captivity in a foreign land come to those resisting this Sabbath year? Either God was acting too harshly – or – there is a hidden truth of utmost importance that we must discover.

⁶ Jewish Encyclopedia.com

It All Begins with the Land

When God conveys a requirement that is to be obeyed, it is always based on a redemptive purpose. Those “super-Sabbaths” – the Shemita and Yovel – had an elevated design, a divine intension to simulate what heaven will be like in a most profound and unique way. In the Promised Land where sin still existed, those Sabbath years were devoted to observing and experiencing principles of God’s eternal kingdom where sin does not exist.

God introduced the details of those new Sabbaths in Leviticus 25. Verses 1 to 34 outline God’s directives regarding the land. Verses 35 to 55 detail the importance of these Sabbaths for the people – who represent the final perfect harvest of the redeemed.

Early in God’s appointment of leaders, Abraham was chosen to *leave* Ur and *journey to* Canaan – the Promised Land. God’s first instructions were generic and country/land oriented: “*Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee*” (Genesis 12:1 – emphasis added).

This *land* became a metaphor for the heavenly home, especially the New Jerusalem. Even during occupation, it remained symbolic of that better land. Paul captured the deep spiritual significance of this: “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. *For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God*” (Hebrews 11:7-10 – NIV).

As Abraham and his heirs, including Israel, would claim that place of promise, they would always be “strangers and pilgrims” waiting for their heavenly home.

As Abram neared his end, he purchased burial land in Canaan (Genesis 23). Then he instructed his servants to never permit Isaac to leave that promised land (Genesis 24:5-8). That land was to remain as a “set aside” for God’s people. But Jacob had to flee from the land of promise because of deception. In the Abrahamic covenant God promised “unto thy seed will I give this land” (Genesis 12:7). Thus, when Jacob fled, there would have to be a return. This promise was given to Jacob during the dream of “Jacob’s ladder” (Genesis 28:12-15): “I am with thee, ... and will bring thee again unto this land” (Genesis 28:15).

What Jacob said when he awoke was crucial information to God’s people through all time: “Surely, the Lord is in this place and I knew it not.” “This is none other but the house of God, and this is the *gate of heaven*” (Genesis 28:16-17). Canaan was more than the promised land, it was to be the gate to heaven where the eternal land of promise is.

This symbol of promise became a graphic reminder of God’s covenant. The land of promise was to be where God dwelled with His people. As He met with Adam and Eve, walking with them in the Garden (Genesis 3:8), He would forever meet with them in the Canaan land. “And he said, Certainly *I will be with thee*; and this *shall be* a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain” (Exodus 3:12 – emphasis added).

The Promise to Israel – Conditional

While they were en route to Canaan, God tied, once again, covenant promises to the land. When they entered Palestine, He would give rains in season, abundant crops and, at certain times before His super-Sabbath clocks, the land would miraculously flourish. This was embellished when God said:

“For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the LORD your God giveth you. But *when* ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God giveth

you to inherit, and *when* he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; Then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there” (Deuteronomy 12:9-11a).

Canaan was called:

1. Israel’s inheritance
2. Place of rest
3. Gate to heaven

There was a caveat. All covenants have two parties. Each fulfills their legal part to complete the agreement or transaction. God promises – man fulfills his obligatory part – a satisfying outcome occurs. With the promises came a warning: If you disobey my commands, you will be driven out of the land: “And it shall come to pass, *that* as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, *even* wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life: In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see” (Deuteronomy 28:63-67).

Deeper than ever, this revisits the solemn importance of those sacred times. Not only were they symbolic of the heavenly restoration, but they were an amazing end-time prophecy.

Super-Sabbaths – a “Gateway to Heaven”

In the land of promise, God stipulated that (Leviticus 25:1-7):

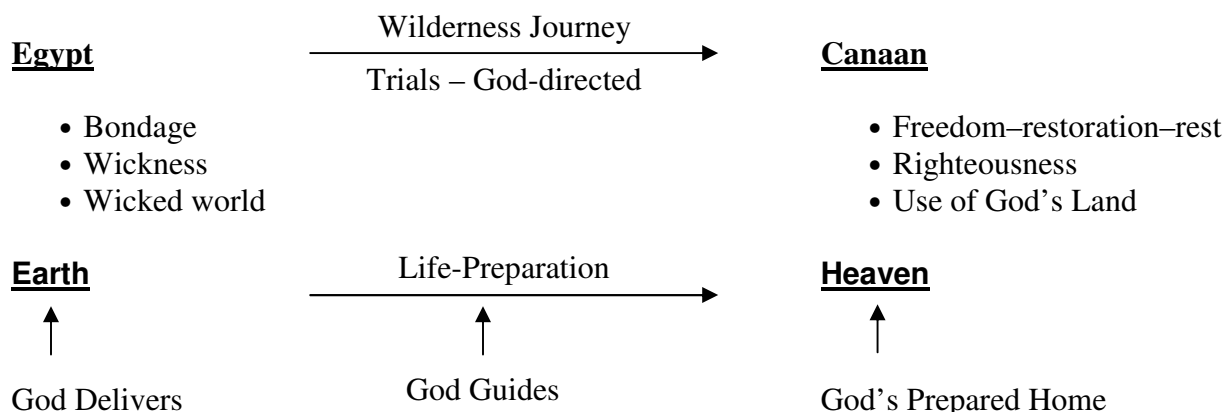
1. During the seventh year, the land was to rest.
2. No crops could be planted – no harvest made.
3. Permanent vines (i.e., grapes) and trees (i.e., olive) were to remain unpruned – and
4. All the people – everyone – could glean from the fields, vines and trees.
5. The land became, in essence, a borderless place.
6. All Israeli debts were to be forgiven (Deuteronomy 15:1).

This was a significant test to the Jewish agrarian society. To let the fields go unattended and permit the populace to trespass one’s own land seemed wasteful and full of risk. The preparation for food, extending into the eighth year happened only through God’s harvest miracles on the sixth.

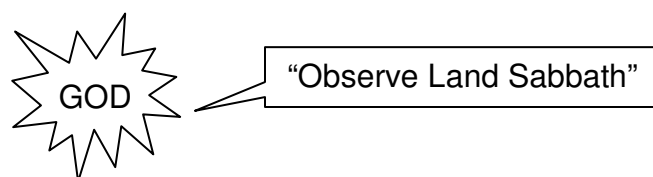
To strengthen faith in this plan, God noted: “Wherefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety. And the land shall yield her fruit, and ye shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety. And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase: Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years. And ye shall sow the eighth year, and eat *yet* of old fruit until the ninth year; until her fruits come in ye shall eat *of* the old *store*” (Leviticus 25:18-22).

That is stunning. God would provide a miracle during the sixth year so the Sabbath year could be observed as He directed. On the sixth would be a great harvest in preparation for the seventh. Then, a very important concept was riveted home: "The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land *is* mine; for ye *are* strangers and sojourners with me.... I *am* the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, *and* to be your God" (Leviticus 25:23, 38).

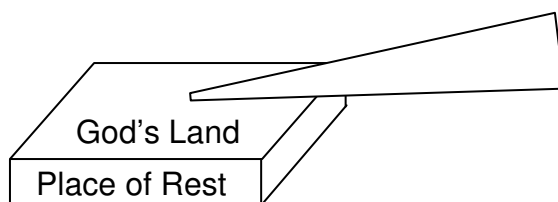
God establishes His authority and gives in this directive supreme reasons for obedience.



The Jubilee year was another high Sabbath. It followed the seventh Sabbatical year when, on that Day of Atonement, the shofar was sounded. All Hebrew slaves were freed and leased and land was returned to the original owner (it could not be sold – Leviticus 25:23). It was tri- bally protected, just like the great symbol of the 144,000 in Revelation 7.



Land was
Tri-bally Divided



Gateway to Heaven
(Jubilee honored the day
when deliverance would be
complete – at the end of
ten Jubilees)
144,000 are tri-bally divided.

Higher Purpose

God reminds His people that the land is His. During the preparation year (the sixth), man could watch the unfolding of a miracle of life. Like the birth of a child, there was a revitalization of the land and the harvest was enough to cover the seventh and eighth years when planting was done again at the Jubilee, into the harvest of the ninth.

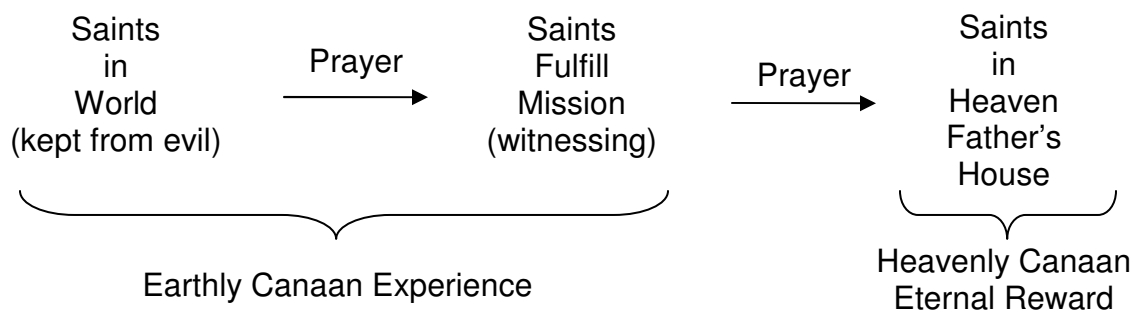
Since access was given to the whole populace, *everyone was equal*. There was no land owner, landlord or fences to keep one out. Suddenly, like heaven, all people would be at peace

and rest with no artificial subjection. The poor ate as the rich. The outcast associated with the highest classes.

These laws prevented hoarding of land, wealth and slavery of God's people – all of which would be gained at the expense of others. Lands assigned to tribes were to be kept within those tribes. This amazing system kept in check man's attachment to the land/world. It never permitted bondage beyond a predefined time limit. Thus, in God's appointed times, liberty would come and all would be one with Him. This symbolized the end-point to His wonderful redemptive plan. It would fulfill Christ's restoration prayer: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:20-23).

Then Christ prayed a geographic wish: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).

He pleads with the Father that in His future glory, where He will be (His Father's house – John 14:1-3), the redeemed can share that place with Him. They are in the world (17:11). At first He prays that they remain but be kept from evil (17:15). They have yet a mission (17:18). But then He prays that they will "be with me where I am." Where is that? He said that He was figuratively no longer in the world (17:11). His work was completed (17:4).



These laws were designed to try Israel. They would put to test man's dependence on heaven. They would create a check on man's aggressiveness to achieve and attain. The blessings promised did not include wealth, riches and a high place in this world. It was an assurance for sustenance. You will have enough to eat. BUT – the curse is so severe that it highlights the sacredness of the ordinance and laws for these high Sabbaths. The Promised Land would be lost if they disobeyed!

It is within this incredible context that the Hebrew word *shamen* is introduced. God will bring the land to *desolation* if they break these Sabbaths. Not only will the people be taken from the land, the land will become *desolate*. It will come under divine judgment and be destroyed. All of man's possessions and creations will be as nothing.

"And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation, and I will not smell the savour of your sweet odours. And I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye *be* in your enemies' land; *even* then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it" (Leviticus 26:31-35).

God's desolation curse is associated with the Sabbath; here, the high typological Sabbaths of the *Shemita* and *Yovel*. But there is another similar message to the seventh-day Sabbath. Jesus said the end of time would be related to an abomination that would lead to desolation (Matthew 24:15). That word is one of the most descriptive reactions of God against sin!

He then said to all students of His Word, go to Daniel to obtain deeper meaning. In Daniel 8:13 Gabriel speaks of a *transgression* that leads to *desolation*. Later, God's reactive term is used – the *abomination* (*shiqqus*) that leads to *desolation* (Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11). That transgression (*b^epcsha*) casts truth to the ground (8:12). God's Sabbath is desecrated. It is substituted by a false Sabbath. It is an abomination that God says leads to desolation, utter ruin of planet earth.

Limits to God's Mercy

The curse warnings from God when the Sabbaths are ignored have been reviewed.

1. Break seventh-day Sabbath – a transgression that God calls an “abomination.” It will end in desolation.
2. Break Shemita or Sabbatical year – God's wrath will bring a curse upon Israel (terror, no peace, no crops, wild beasts, pestilence). It, too, will end in desolation.

“I will make your cities waste” (Leviticus 26:31, 33).

“Bring your sanctuaries into desolation” (26:31)

“Bring your land into desolation” (26:32-33)

These all came true. It is a lesson to all people at the end of time who claim to be Christ's and reject the seventh-day Sabbath.

Why the desolation and utter ruin?

“Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye [be] in your enemies' land; [even] then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it” (Leviticus 26:34-35).

The word “land” (*eres*) is used as a metaphor for Sabbath obedience. The earth is the Lord's (Psalm 24:1). He is its king (Psalm 47:2) and its Lord (Psalm 97:5). The promised land of Palestine promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:18 – first intimation) is called the Lord's heritage (I Samuel 26:19). Thus, God in symbol is telling His people: When you are taken captive and the land decimated, My country will finally be at rest – void of rebellion against me – the atmosphere of the Sabbath rest will once again be over the land.

The Sabbath was God's sign to the world as to who His people were and then, in turn, who He was. It stood/stands apart as a unique obligation unrelated to any other religion, church, cult or organization. The seventh-day identifies this body of believers. The Seventh year identified the power of the God over those believers. The Jubilee announced the principles of His government, like no other.

Because of Israel's rejection of God, Jeremiah predicted that they would be taken into captivity. Their land would be made desolate (Jeremiah 25:11).

- The sins:
1. Serving other gods and works of their hands (25:6-7)
 2. Breaking the sacredness of the Shemita (II Chronicles 36:21)

- The duration:
1. 70 years – one year for each Shemita transgressed (36:21)
 2. Then the land could rest

That means that for 490 years of time (70 years captivity times 7 years in the Sabbatical year cycle) they had been in rebellion. This rebellion appears to have been counted from the time of Samson. God had an important work for Samson to do. He was a promised child to the childless wife of Manoah (Judges 13). Instead of the Sabbaths bringing distinction to Samson's leadership as a judge in Israel, he associated with the heathen and brought degradation to God's name.

We get insight into God's reaction to this careless indifference from the poor who were neglected – a special charge to God's people during the Shemita year.

"Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat?" (Amos 8:4-6).

"Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? *Is it* not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward. Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I *am*. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; And *if* thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness *be* as the noon day: And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And *they that shall be* of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in" (Isaiah 58:6-12).

The deliverance of God's people is the focus of redemption, the freeing of captives from sin, the power of Calvary's sacrifice and blood. Couched, intriguingly, in all of the restoration themes is a message of the importance of Sabbath loyalty. It represents so many themes tied to deliverance, freedom from sin, resting from worldly cares, newness and restoration. Breaking its sacred hours and bonds mocks redemption because it is the story in miniature of what He has been trying to do for mankind for 6000 years, ever since Eve ate of that forbidden fruit.

Amazingly, as Jeremiah rose up as the prophet of warning to apostate Israel, the promise of restoration was based on keeping the Sabbath: "And it shall come to pass, if ye diligently hearken unto me, saith the LORD, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but hallow the sabbath day, to do no work therein; Then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: and this city shall remain for ever. And they shall come from the cities of Judah, and from the places about Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the plain, and from the mountains, and from the south, bringing burnt offerings, and sacrifices, and meat offerings, and incense, and bringing sacrifices of praise, unto the house of the LORD. But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched" (Jeremiah 17:24-27).

Even when Israel's captives were freed, as God had promised, their loyalty to His laws was compromised (Nehemiah 5). They were unprepared for the first advent. These prophets and their many prophecies regarding Israel became future themes of restoration for His second advent. Everything will be repeated as of old, including desolation, fall of Babylon and the Messiah's return.

In those prophecies Gentiles – non-Jews – were also seen as part of those who receive God's inheritance.

"Thus saith the Lord GOD; If the prince give a gift unto any of his sons, the inheritance thereof shall be his sons'; it *shall be* their possession by inheritance. But if he give a gift of his inheritance to one of his servants, then it shall be his to the year of liberty; after it shall return to the prince: but his inheritance shall be his sons' for them. Moreover the prince shall not take of the people's inheritance by oppression, to thrust them out of their possession; *but* he shall give his sons inheritance out of his own possession: that my people be not scattered every man from his possession" (Ezekiel 46:16-18).

"So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, *that* ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel" (Ezekiel 47:21-22).

This latter prophecy foresees and predicts inclusion of the Gentiles (aliens) in the coming kingdom, which Messiah will establish.

Likewise, Micah foretold the day of Israel's restoration in the land: "But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make [them] afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken *it*.... In that day, saith the LORD, will I assemble her that hal-teth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted; And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever" (Micah 4:4, 6-7).

Thus, Paul could later note: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of [them], and embraced *them*, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that *country* from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better *coun-try*, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city" (Hebrews 11:13-16).

Once again, the land was the "place of blessing." The inheritances of one's "portion of land" kept their possession in the "country of blessings." Yet, those ancient prophets and peoples who remained loyal to God saw themselves as strangers and pilgrims, looking forward in faith to a "better country." Thus, the dwelling place of ultimate security is abiding with Christ: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me" (John 15:4).

And – Christ abiding in us: "To whom God would make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

There, Paul includes the Gentiles. God becomes the refuge, the dwelling place, the inheritance (cf. Psalm 91:1-2; 16:1-2, 5; 18:1-2; 27:31; 73:25-26, 28).

Great Metaphor of the Land, Laws and Jesus

With only a cursory scan of these "land laws" – the Shemita and Yovel – it would appear only to benefit the slave, the poor and serve as an administrative containment of tribal lands. There is a wonderful picture of Christ's character and mission encapsulated in these special Sabbaths.

Jesus uses "land" symbolism as His connecting link to earth, bridging heaven to mankind. This is revealed in Jacob's ladder vision in Genesis 28.

"There appeared before him a ladder, whose base rested on the earth and whose top reached into the highest heavens. God was above the ladder, and his glory shone through the open heaven and lighted up every round of the ladder. The angels were ascending and descending upon it. The plan of salvation was open to Jacob's mind in this dream....

“Christ was the ladder that Jacob saw. Christ is the link that binds earth to Heaven, and connects finite man with the infinite God. This ladder reaches from the lowest degradation of earth and humanity to the highest heavens. We are to ascend the ladder that Jacob saw, but not by our own strength alone. It is the goodness of God that leads to repentance and reformation. We are not left to struggle on alone.”⁷

Jesus riveted this theme firmly into Nathaniel’s mind when He said: “And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (John 1:51). There’s more: When Jacob finished witnessing that vision, a sinner and a fugitive, he was afraid. Divinity had made contact with humanity. He cried: “Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not” (Genesis 28:16). Earth, the home of rebellion, is the place where God links heaven’s greatest gift to – Jesus Christ. There is a great redemptive truth Jacob said: “This is the gate of heaven” (Genesis 28:17).

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

“Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10:7, 9).

In the days of the prophets and inter-testamental times, farms were a way of life. They were part of the inheritance that was passed on from generation to generation. In the Jubilee year land was returned to its original owner. The family inheritance was preserved in a direct line, and the purity of tribal ownership was retained.

That formed the educational basis for the “eternal inheritance” theme which God depicted through these special Sabbaths. God’s people would be part of a special family, given the ‘tribal name’ of “my God,” and claim the Jewish spiritual center metaphor “New Jerusalem” along with Christ’s “new name” (Revelation 3:12). The tie to land, ownership and inheritance were intertwined themes that were not only a Jewish reality but typologically created a foundation for the salvic fulfillment of His plans.

Within this framework, God decreed that “eternal rest” would be depicted by “land rest” or a Sabbath to the land. This metaphor became sacred. In fact, it was seen by God as one of His supreme educational tools. The seventh-day was stated to be a day of *rest*.

“But the seventh day *is* the sabbath of the LORD thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou” (Deuteronomy 5:14).

Then the land rest was like a Sabbath rest and eternal rest when everything is restored, unified and totally dependent on divine intervention.

“For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the LORD your God giveth you. But *when* ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God giveth you to inherit, and *when* he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; Then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there” (Deuteronomy 12:9-11a).

When Jesus came He announced: “Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). When Israel rejected the Sabbatical land rest and ignored the amazing land inheritance plan God had devised to remind them of His restorative grace, He permitted pagan forces to destroy their land, their spiritual center (Jerusalem and the Temple) and take them into a land where they wouldn’t need rest.

⁷ White, Ellen G.; *The Signs of the Times*, July 29, 1889.

When Jesus spoke in the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth (Luke 4), He quoted Isaiah 61:1-2. The Messiah would bring “release,” symbolizing rest from sin and oppression. He declared that that day those things were fulfilled and declared an “acceptable year of the Lord.” That was a Jubilee year message. He inaugurated the gospel message of restoration and deliverance – a message of hope and rest with Jubilee Sabbath language.

The land was a gate to heaven. Jesus became the gate to God’s throne. The land was to rest. Jesus would bring rest. The Jubilee would provide a proper inheritance; Jesus’ death guaranteed our inheritance. The Shemita brought the end of all debts, Christ paid all our debts. The depth of meaning to these Sabbaths brought one down to the very core of the meaning of restoration and deliverance. Canaan, the Promised Land, was to be a perpetual lesson book of what someday would be heaven with its glorious verdure and rest, the “new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness” (Acts 3:31, II Peter 3:13).

Christ carried the land theme, the rest, the decreed Sabbaths beyond the typology of the past with the “woman at the well.” In her brief discomfort at Christ’s initial engagement, she said, “Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship” (John 4:20). The “land” – the geography – was the focus of reality. Jesus elevated the message: “The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father (John 4:21). The land was a type – now the issue is a person, the Messiah. Then Jesus said, “I that speak unto thee am he” (John 4:26).

Because those Sabbaths were so vital in God’s scheme of training and reminding, their themes were adopted into end-time prophecy. This is why in Daniel 9 there were 70 Shemitas, 10 Jubilees and then the sanctuary would be cleansed, everlasting righteousness established and all opposition terminated. That plan was cut short by the rejection of Christ. A tarrying time was introduced, and the final three and a half years will be completed right at the end of time. Then the final Shemita will begin with the land becoming desolate (progressively, as rebellion is matured). That is why there are so many 42 months/1260 days/time, times and dividing of times in apocalyptic prophecies! Then – when all the land is at rest, the Jubilee will commence. Nothing will impede or distract from sacred time with Jesus. Then – the celebration of the marriage with the Lamb will begin.

From the land we are to raise our sights to Jesus, up the “ladder” to God and His throne. That is seen as another illustration when believers sold their land for the poor and the work of the gospel (Acts 4:34-37). The remnant believers will detach themselves from the “land” of this world and begin that journey, climbing higher and higher with Jesus Christ. That’s why He gave the shocking promise that those who give up their land, houses, even family “shall receive an hundredfold and shall inherit everlasting life” (Matthew 19:29) – from inheriting land to life. That is type to antitype, symbol to reality, physical to spiritual, temporal to eternal!

The Sabbaths are a “rest” to lead us from the land (earth) up the ladder (Jesus Christ) to God’s throne (the redemptive center of the universe). The “Old Testament saints delighted to be in the land; the New Testament saints delighted in being “in Christ.”⁸

“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in

⁸Deffinbaugh, Bob, Th.M., http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=287.

the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:13-22).



Prophecy Unfolds

The Seven Seals of Revelation

Commentary on Revelation 5:1-5

The Mystery of the Scroll

VERSE 1: “And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.”

Verse 1 – “And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne”

“Notice, first of all, that this passage starts out with ‘And’ (*kai* in the Greek) – often translated ‘then’ or ‘moreover.’ This is a continuation of the first part of the scene [in chapter 4]. These events occur in the throne room that was just described. All of the items and characters that were present before are still present. But some new items and new characters are now presented.”¹

“Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power: Thy, right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.” Exodus 15:6 (cf. Psalm 118:15-16).

The Occupant of “the throne” is God the Father, as noted in the previous chapter. John observes His right hand, a symbol of His power and complete authority.² The “book,” since it is being held in that “right hand,” suggests it contains material of utmost importance and draws on similar imagery of Jesus, who “had in his right hand seven stars” (Rev. 1:20), manifesting His sovereign control over the leaders of His church.³ The right hand and the book intimate a divine legal document.

There is a strong exegetical tie to Ezekiel 2:9-10: “And when I looked, behold, a hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein twelve lamentations and mournings, and woes.” From Ezekiel comes frequent parallel imagery tied to Revelation. Other Old Testament similarities are found throughout this vision (cf. Psalms 16:11, 18:35, 20:6, 89:13, 98:1, 118:16; Isaiah 41:10; Hebrews 1:3,10). Yet, in Ezekiel the scroll was open, here it is closed.

¹ Canter, Bryan; *Revelation – A Study of the Eschatological Application of Prophecy – Part 3, “The Seven Seals”* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 17.

² Gregg, Steve; *Revelation – Four Views – A Parallel Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN), 1997, p. 93.

³ LaRondelle, Hans, Th.D.; *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible*, (First Impressions, Sarasota, FL), pp. 110-111.

It would be good to step back and review what the mission statement was of the visions given to John in this book. The Apocalypse is to “unveil,” disclose or reveal what “must soon take place” (Revelation 1:1,19; 4:1). The imagery in this chapter will be seen as conflict, judgment and adjudication related. It is in this “time of the end” motif that the “soon to take place” will be shown as immediately preceding Jesus’ return (1:7).”

“Just like Ezekiel was called into God’s presence to be given a message, so was John. The voice that spoke to him in verse 1 of chapter 4 put him on notice that he was being called into God’s presence. He was to be shown continued information that must transpire before Jesus could return. This explains why John was so disappointed when he saw that the book was sealed. He desperately wanted to receive the information that had been promised. The position of the scroll in God’s possession indicates its divine source, the supreme authority of the revelation contained in it, and the assurance of adequate power to translate its contents.”⁴

“The fifth chapter of Revelation needs to be closely studied. It is of great importance to those who shall act a part in the work of God for *these last days*.”⁵ That scroll has end-time significance to God’s remnant people.

Verse 1 – “a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.”

“This raises a problem involving the phrase ‘with writing on both sides.’ Papyrus codices (which were like books as we know them) did not originate until the *second* century A.D., or perhaps the late first century (Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* 2nd ed. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1964], p. 6). In ancient times, papyrus rolls were used for public and private documents. Usually the writing was on one side only – the inside part, arranged in successive vertical columns. Occasionally a scroll was written on both sides; in that case it was called an “opisthograph.” Such double-sided writing was for private, nonsalable use in contrast to the usual scrolls written on only one side, which were sold (Edward Maunde Thompson, *An Introduction to Greek and Latin Paliography* [Oxford; Clarendon, 1912], pp. 49-50). In the context of chapter 5, an opisthograph would signify a scroll full of words. The importance of establishing the scroll rather than codex character of the document lies in the interpretation of the opening of the seals. If the book was a codex, the seals could have been opened one at a time and portions of the book disclosed; a scroll, however, could be opened only after *all* the seals were broken.”⁶

“This is very significant. The events associated with each of the Seven Seals do not describe portions of the content of the scroll. The contents of the scroll will not be made known until all seven of the Seals have been broken. The whole purpose of breaking the seals is to [eventually] reveal the contents of the book. The contents of the scroll cannot be made known without first going through the process involving the calamities described in Revelation chapters 6 and 7. Those calamities are an essential part of the process to reveal the contents of the scroll, not just to men, but also to all of creation in heaven and on earth [they are anticipatory warnings]. Surely the love of God would demand that the most merciful process be used to reveal the contents of the scroll. This is the same love that prompted God to send His son to die for lost humanity. If there were another way to make known the contents of the scroll, certainly God would have chosen it. The calamities, as disastrous as they are, are absolutely necessary.”⁷ The breaking of each Seal event heightens the anticipated review of its contents.

Archeological discoveries provide the likely picture of what John saw. “The sealed scroll would look like a cylinder held in the right hand of God who is seated on the throne, perhaps with the

⁴ Thomas, Robert L.; *Revelation 1-7 –An Exegetical Commentary* (Moody Press, Chicago), 1992, p. 375.

⁵ White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies of the Church*, vol. 9, p. 267.

⁶ Gaebelin, Frank E.; *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI), 1984, p. 465.

⁷ Canter, *Op. cit.*, p. 17.

scroll resting on his lap, an image with many parallels in Greco-Roman art (Birt, *Buchrolle*, 85-91, esp. plates 46-48)⁸

Because the vision is presented in John's era (~80 A.D.), the vision is of a *scroll*. That suggests additionally important elements regarding the document and its structure.

"That the scroll is written *on both the inside and the back* makes it all the more notable and suggests the **completeness** of its contents: 'That the scroll is also written on the back indicates how extensive and comprehensive are the **decrees** of God.' The scroll that was given to Ezekiel in his vision of God's heavenly glory was also written on both sides, suggesting that God's works were complete and extensive (Ezek.2:9-10)."⁹

The Seven Seals reflect the completeness of the closure of the scroll. The expression *katesphragismenon sphragisin hepta* (sealed with seven seals) is much stronger than simply sealing something shut. *katesphragismenon* is a strong verb meaning it is very secure. It is tightly sealed.¹⁰

We are told historically that: "'A written *will* sealed with the seals of the seven witnesses, though the heir therein named only became bonorum possessor, was veiled by praetorian practice confirmed by the Emperor, and possession under, being abundantly protected by interdict and otherwise, was good for all purposes.' R.V. Leage, *Roman Private Law*, p. 204.

"'A will according to the Praetorian Testament, in Roman law bore the seven seals of the seven witnesses on the threads that secured the tablets or parchment (see Smith, *Dict. of Greek and Roman Ant.*, p. 1117). Such a Testament could not be carried into execution till all the seven seals were loosed.' Charles, *International Critical Commentary*, Revelation, V. I, p. 137."¹¹

Thus the security of a legal document with seven Seals would not have necessarily been a surprise to John. "The Gospel of Peter [that] dates around 125-150 A.D. or earlier, says that the tomb of Jesus was sealed with seven Seals. It was a practice in Roman civil law for a last will and testament to be sealed with seven seals."¹²

The Seven Seals reflect complete security. It signifies the absolute inviolability of the scroll's contents. There are other issues to note: "The number seven places the scroll into the eschatological field of images, with all the other 'sevens' found throughout Revelation, thereby symbolizing the completion of God's promised salvation."¹³

"Filled to overflowing and sealed with seven seals to insure the secrecy of its decrees, it contains the full account of what God in his sovereign will has determined as the destiny of the world. Once again the background is Ezekiel, where in chapter 2 a book of lamentations with words written 'on both sides' is handed to the prophet (v. 10). The idea of a heavenly book containing the future course of history is reflected in such passages as Ps 139:16, 'All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.'"¹⁴

This final judgment or destiny record keeping picture is matured as we contemplate another tie in Daniel 7. "It should be recalled that 4:1-5:1 follows a structural outline that is identical to that of Dan. 7:9ff. and Ezekiel 1-2 ... [An] analysis of Rev. 5:2-14 will show that the outline of Daniel 7 continues to be followed ... [more than] that of Ezekiel 1-2. Further, while allusions to Ezekiel 1-2 do not disappear in 5:2-14, there are more numerous allusions to Daniel 7. The presence of all

⁸ Aune, David E.; *52A World Biblical Commentary; Revelation 1-5* (World Books; Publisher, Dallas, Texas), 1997, p. 338.

⁹ Brighton, Louis A.; *Revelation, Concordance Commentary* (Concordance Publishing House, Saint Louis), 1999, p. 134.

¹⁰ Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 380.

¹¹ Thiele, Edwin R.; *Outline Studies in Revelation* (Emmanuel Missionary College; Berrien Springs, MI), p. 95.

¹² Brighton, *Op. cit.*, p. 134.

¹³ Wall, Robert W.; *New International Biblical Commentary Revelation*, (Hendrickson Publishers; Peabody, MA), 1961, p. 101.

¹⁴ Mounce, Robert H.; *The Book of Revelation, Revised* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI / Cambridge, UK), 1998, p. 129.

these OT backgrounds enhances further the notion of judgment with which this vision is saturated.”¹⁵

This powerful parallelism will be detailed further as the narrative progresses. A judgment scene is being prepared. There seems to be no one worthy to open the book because it is associated with a need for witnesses and a special legal Representative in a courtroom scene. Only Jesus, the Lamb, will be authorized to instigate the strange acts of breaking the Seals.

“Cf. Dan. 12:4 (Theod.): ... (‘seal the book’); 12:9 (Theod.): ... (‘the words are sealed’); Isa. 29:11: ... (‘the words of this sealed book ... for it is sealed’). The texts are brought together because of their almost identical wording and the common idea of a sealed book that conceals divine revelation and is associated with judgment. Interestingly, Isa. 29:9-12 is a development of Isa. 6:9-10, a context alluded to repeatedly in Revelation 2–3 (note the hearing formula) and ch. 4; furthermore, in both Isa. 29:11-12 and Rev. 5:3-4 no one is able to look into the book to ‘read’ its revelation because it is ‘sealed’ and because all are ethically unworthy (Isa. 29:11 and Rev. 5:4 [2050 pc and one Armenian version]). These OT descriptions have been combined with Ezekiel 2 because of the clear association of the ‘book’ there with judgment.”¹⁶

Others have noticed intriguing internal sequences that help to define the meaning of the scroll: “Only from Revelation itself can the content and nature of the scroll be determined. Since the seals hinder the opening of the scroll till they are all broken, we may assume that the seals are preparatory to the opening of the scroll and the disclosure of its contents. This means that the seals have the effect of hiding the contents of the scroll till they are broken (Isa. 29:11).

“The following internal evidence relating to the contents of the scroll may be noted:

“1. Just prior to the opening of the seventh seal, in connection with the events under the sixth seal, we read, ‘For the great day of their [i.e., of the One sitting on the throne and the Lamb] wrath has come, and who can stand?’ (6:17).

“2. When the seventh seal is opened (8:1 ...), no immediate events as such follow on earth—except [possibly] for the earthquake—as in the sixth seal ...

“3. The seventh trumpet likewise is not immediately followed by any specific events on earth (11:15ff.), except for an earthquake and a hailstorm (11:19). However, just before the seventh trumpet is sounded, we read, ‘The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon’ (11:14). When the seven angels prepare to pour out ‘the seven last plagues,’ symbolized by the bowls, we read that with these bowls God’s wrath is completed’ (15:1, 7). Thus it seems reasonable to identify the content of the seventh trumpet with the seven bowls of judgment (chs. 16-19).

“Furthermore, frequent references to the events of the seals, trumpets, and bowls appear throughout the remaining visions in Revelation (cf. 19:19ff.; 20:4; 21:9), indicating that the content of the seven-sealed scroll ultimately includes the unfolding of the consummation of the mystery of all things, the goal or end of all history, for both conquerors and the worshiper of the beast. In 10:7 we are told that in the days of the sounding of the seventh trumpet ‘the mystery God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.’ From this it may be concluded that the scroll contains the unveiling of ‘the mystery of God’ that OT prophets foretold (cf. comments at 10:7). Thus the ‘seals’ conceal the mystery which only Christ can disclose (Dan 12:9; Rev 10:4), of how God’s judgment and his kingdom will come. In 11:15, when the final trumpet sounds, heavenly voices say, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ,’ indicating that the scroll also contains the announcement of the inheritance of Christ and the saints who will reign with him (5:10).

“The scroll, then, is not only about judgment or about the inheritance of the kingdom. Rather, it contains the announcement of the consummation of all history – how things will ultimately end for all people: judgment for the world and the final reward of the saints (11:18). Christ alone, as the

¹⁵ Beale, G. K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999), p. 337.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 335-339.

Messiah, is the executor of the purposes of God and the heir of the inheritance of the world. He obtained this by his substitutionary and propitiatory death on the cross (5:9).¹⁷

Does Someone Have to be Worthy?

VERSE 2: “And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?”

Verse 2 – “And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice.”

“By now, this ‘strong angel’ should be a familiar figure to us. He was the one to which Jesus said: ‘Gabriel, make this man [Daniel] to understand the ‘mar’eh (Dan 8:16) and later who Daniel conversed with while in the lion’s den (see Dan 9:21; 6:22). Then, after 600 years, he was sent to signify this vision to John (see Rev 1:1).”¹⁸

It alludes also to “the angelic spokesman in Dan. 4:13-14, 23 (cf. Dan. 4:23 [LXX]: ‘he saw that an angel was sent in strength from the Lord;’ 4:13-12 [LXX]: ‘behold, an angel was sent in strength from heaven and he cried out;’ 4:13-12 [10] [Theod.]: ‘a holy one came down from heaven and cried out in strength’).

“Not only are the descriptions of the two angels verbally alike but they also have the same kind of role: the Danielic angel is the spokesman for the heavenly council and proclaims a decree of judgment followed by restoration with respect to Nebuchadnezzar; the angel in Revelation 5 is also the spokesman for the heavenly council and proclaims a divine decree of judgment and redemption with respect to the cosmos.”¹⁹

The derivation of “strong” angel comes from the Greek word *ischuros*, suggesting mighty or powerful. The *emphasis* goes beyond the image of Gabriel, per se, to a “strong” voice. It must be heard by everyone. He asks a question in a *loud* voice.

Does this angel already know the answer to his question? Certainly. But, in the liturgy and anthems of heaven the loving passionate refrains were often expressed in a question by one group of angels and then another group responded, especially when the answer is a name of God. Here Gabriel, the head angel who took Lucifer’s place, poses the question to all creation.

“Proclaiming” (*kerusso*) really means heralding divine truth. The question, therefore, conveys a statement of truth only to be reinforced by the anthems of heavenly angels (vss 8-9).

“A loud voice (or loud voices) is rather common in the Apocalypse (cf. 1:10; 5:12; 6:10; 7:2, 10; 8:13; 10:3; 11:12; 12:10; 14:7, 9, 15, 18; 16:1, 17; 19:1, 17; 21:3). The utterances of these loud voices are always articulate.”²⁰ They also unfold a timing element related to the final “loud cry” of the gospel.

The “message in question” was not to be missed by one created being. Thus Gabriel, Hebrew word for “God is my strength,”²¹ is going to ask a *universal* question!

¹⁷ Gaebelien, *Op. cit.*, pp. 466-467.

¹⁸ Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁹ Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 338.

²⁰ Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 382.

²¹ Ford, J. Massingberde; *The Anchor Bible* (Doubleday, New York), 1975, p. 85.

Verse 2 – “Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?”

Scholars have noted the significance of mentioning the opening of the book preceding the loosening of the Seals in the text. “The best solution is to understand *kai* as exegetical, meaning ‘even’ and the breaking of the seals as a closer specification of what is involved in opening the scroll (Lenski). In 5:5, a comparable construction with an exegetical *kai* occurs: ‘to open the scroll, even its seven seals.’”²² The focus transcends the opening of those Seals to the “worthiness” of **the** One to accomplish that task. The cry has gone out to find a worthy being for this task.

That question cannot be answered unless those hearing it know the importance of the book. The opening of the book could have mechanically been done by any of the heavenly hosts. What did the being that would be found worthy be worthy of? What was in that book that even the Seal opening process demanded qualification? Intriguing is *when* the question is being posed. God the Father has the scroll with the Seals in His possession. He does not open it Himself. He is prepared to give it to a being that possesses some quality He does not have! That being would vindicate His record of destiny, which was made long before (Psalm 139:16). Logic itself suggests that the contents relate to judgment. A being is needed to be the judge who has no need to be judged. That judgment would authenticate something because of the worthiness of the judge. The judge must be more than a passive reader of a scroll. He must have the authority to rule on past judgment. It will be seen that the worthy being must be worthy to bring to a close the great *issues* of the sin conflict by vindicating God’s character through this “witness.” God’s character is vindicated through judgment.

Evidence clearly shows that this scroll is a Book of Destiny of the complete history (past, present and future) of mankind (vs 7 and references 6, 14-16, 19). The Seals are broken during a period of time that ties in with the unsealing of Daniel 8–12. This is a time of calamities and a call to repentance. This will be the final call, the final warning before probation closes. It refers to the beginning of the Tribulation or “little time of trouble.”

Who then is worthy to judge the whole world? Jesus has proven Himself the standard of all right. In humanity He remained Godlike. In humanity He achieved victory over all principalities and powers. In His divinity He now has the right to judge all the wrong of humanity. Jesus is fully worthy.

VERSE 3: “And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.”

“The challenge has gone out to all those dwelling throughout the entire creation, and no one is able to accept it. The tripartite division of the universe (heaven, earth, under the earth) is also found in Phil 2:10 – incidentally, in a scene of universal adoration of Christ – and probably stems from the second commandment, which forbids making an idol in the form of anything that is ‘in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below’ (Exod 20:4). As used here it stresses the universality of the proclamation rather than some particular cosmology.”²³

This trilogy adds another dimension:

Heaven	Angels
Earth	Humans
Under the earth	Demons

Thus, *where* would one turn to find a being worthy to open the Seals and book –logically nowhere. “A similar pattern is used in the Babylonian division of the world into heaven, earth, and wa-

²² Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 383.

²³ Mounce, *Op. cit.*, pp. 130-131.

ter. Here the comprehensive expression is an emphatic designation of the whole universe (Charles; Beckwith). A *quasi-ascensive* scale is implied in the three parts. As each region declines the challenge of producing someone able to open the scroll [decreases], eventually the possibilities are exhausted (Swete).²⁴

"There were 'a few names ... in Sardis' that were 'worthy' (Rev 3:4), but obviously, they did not qualify. Even those 24 elders or the onlooking angels failed to qualify. As amazing as it might seem, God the Father, who held that very crucial 'book' in His 'right hand' was 'worthy' (see Rev 4:11), but, apparently even that did not qualify Him to open it."²⁵

The very challenge that this heavenly dilemma gives to us reveals significant details about this scroll. If God Himself is unable to open it, then the Seals and contents must involve the execution of some event or activity that only the "Lamb" has authority to administer. Because of His victories, He began to vindicate God's character before the universe even while on earth. That gave Him legal authority to judge and even destroy anything that tries to alter a perception of God's loving nature. Jesus, therefore, actuates redemption and executes judgment. What God needs is someone who not only has authority to open the Seals but read (execute) what is in the scroll.

The book is a record undoubtedly complete in John's day, of the history of the whole world – past, present and future to him. This would not be mysterious to God the Father or the Holy Spirit. The breaking of the Seals activates major events. Once the scroll is ready to be unrolled, the issue is not one of "ability" but "worthiness." The content must relate to the victories of Jesus.

"For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed which *men* deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed:" Isaiah 29:10, 11.

"In *The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation 5*, Zdravko Stefanovic draws this comprehensive conclusion: 'With the taking of the biblion the whole destiny of mankind is put into the hands of Christ; hence it is indeed the heavenly book of destiny. On the basis of its contents he would judge, hence, the judgment book (p. 322).'"²⁶

Among scholars and expositors opinions vary as to the meaning of the scroll, the Seals and events surrounding this book. Often it is mentioned that the scroll is a title deed to this earth. But Jesus has already purchased mankind by His death. Paul beautifully outlined this: "In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." Ephesians 1:13-14.

The purchase has been made. The Holy Spirit is our "earnest money." His seal gives us the right to the kingdom, our inheritance. Yet the redemptive process is not finished. That is what Revelation 5 addresses. There are many settlement issues that need completion. One is a striking demonstration of the nature of warring forces between good and evil before probation ends. Not until that phase is worked can the *final* Day of Atonement occur. Then the Feast of Trumpets follows – and then Jesus returns. After that, the contents of the scroll will become especially important in the vindication of God's character. That impeccable character cannot shine with its utmost brilliance until every soul makes an irrevocable decision for their eternal destiny. The breaking of the Seals is of utmost significance to consummate the last steps of that end-time decision. In breaking the Seals, the way is opened to finally make up His kingdom and deal with those whom God has rejected.

"The fifth chapter of Revelation needs to be closely studied. It is of great importance to those who shall act a part in the work of God for these last days. There are some who are deceived.

²⁴ Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 384.

²⁵ Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

²⁶ LaRondelle, Hans Th.D.; *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible*, (First Impressions, Sarasota, FL), p. 114.

They do not realize *what is coming* on the earth. Those who have permitted their minds to become beclouded in regard to what constitutes sin are fearfully deceived. Unless they make a decided change they will be found wanting when *God pronounces judgment* upon the children of men. They have transgressed the law and broken the everlasting covenant, and they will receive according to their works.

“We need now to take heed to ourselves. Warnings have been given. Can we not see the fulfillment of the predictions made by Christ and recorded in the twenty-first chapter of Luke? How many are studying the words of Christ? How many are deceiving their own souls and cheating themselves out of the blessings that others might secure if they would believe and obey? Probation still lingers, and it is our privilege to lay hold of the hope set before us in the gospel. Let us repent and be converted and forsake our sins, that they may be blotted out.”²⁷

VERSE 4: “And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.”

Verse 4 – “And I wept much, because no man was found worthy”

“Chapter 5 of Revelation is unparalleled in all of scripture. As John opens the chapter his focus is initially on the book in God’s hand. But as the story progresses, we come to one of the most awe inspiring pictures of Jesus contained in the entire Bible. There is John, weeping and dispirited over the failure of anyone to come forward with the authority and right to open the seals. After all, God had placed these seals on the book, and no one with less authority would dare to touch them.”²⁸

Intriguing is this role in which John is portrayed. In other apocalyptic literature the seer often asks questions of meaning or timing. Here, John is not in that position. He is a passive scribe of the heavenly vision. But suddenly his emotions become part of the apocalyptic setting.

Why would John weep? The language “wept much” suggests that the experience covered a period of time. Much (*poly*) brings out the concept of “wept plentifully and long.”

“He wept at the prospect of an indefinite postponement of God’s final and decisive action. The universe itself was morally incapable of effecting its own destiny.”²⁹

Here John witnesses remarkable celestial beings expressing a void in the heavenly courts for a needed action. John is caught up in this question of concern as if no answer seemed possible.

Some have attempted to put this word wept (*klaio*) into a category of wailing as a “professional mourner.”³⁰ This has brought, in turn, *demeaning comments* toward John’s response. His response is elevating and of the highest concern. The question brings deep disappointment to John. His weeping was “audible.”³¹ An end to the controversy with sin is anticipated when the last Seal is broken. The question temporarily halts the anticipating.

“While the mighty angel introduces the whole action of seeking the worthy one to come forward, it is left up to one of the elders to bring the answer to John’s sadness and dismay.”³²

There is another allusion that might have disturbed John. In Daniel 7:10-13 we are told, the “judgment was set” and the “books were opened.” Is there truly a time lapse between the judgment being set and the opening of the books? Woods intimates that this might be called the “great

²⁷ White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol 9, pp. 267, 268.

²⁸ Clover, David; *Revelation, Chapters 4:1-8:5* (Prophecy Research Initiative document – 2002), p. 7.

²⁹ Mounce, *Op. cit.*, p. 131.

³⁰ Ford, J. Massingberde; *The Anchor Bible* (Doubleday, New York), 1975, p. 85.

³¹ Vincent, R. Marvin, D.D.; *Vincent’s Word studies in the New Testament*, vol. II (Hendrickson Publishers – 1886), p. 488.

³² Brighton, Louis A; *Revelation, Concordance Commentary* (Concordance Publishing House, Saint Louis), 1999, p. 135.

pause.”³³ But those were books related to the judgment of the righteous. Here we are dealing with the destiny of the world.

Verse 4 – “to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.”

Once again the dual challenge: to open (break the Seals) and look thereon (to read the book). However, the phrase “to read the book” appears to be supplied.

We now have this imagery of what is transpiring.

<u>Book</u>	<u>Sealed</u>	<u>Narrative</u>	<u>Judgment of Wicked</u>
Record of Destiny	With end-time events	Earthly deeds – Individuals to nations	Destiny will soon be decreed (Revelation 20)

[Note: Jesus comes during the sixth Seal.]

VERSE 5: “And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.”

Verse 5 – “And one of the elders saith unto me,”

“His [John’s] soul was wrought up to such a point of agony and suspense that one of the strong angels had compassion on him, and laying his hand on him assuringly said, ‘Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.’”³⁴

According to expositor White, at least one of the “elders” was a “strong angel.” And, if one was an angel the other 23 must be also.³⁵ This clearly is a semantic portrayal.

For 24 redeemed beings to be exalted to thrones around the eternal throne at the very center of the universe would have to be *highly elevated*. Since the redeemed will be equal with the angels, the description “strong angels” serves as an intriguing characterization of the elders. “For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are *as the angels* of God in heaven.” Matthew 22:30.

“We have the plain assurance of Christ that in the world to come, the redeemed ‘neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die anymore: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.’”³⁶

“At this point, a member of the angelic order of elders intervened to relieve his distress: ... ‘and one of the elders said to me, “Stop crying.”’ No symbolic meaning in such intervention is to be sought. The elder merely functions as a mediator, as angels of other orders do on occasion (cf. Rev. 17:1; 21:9) (Swete; Beckwith). An elder steps forward to inform or guide the seer ...

“His directive at this point is *me klaie* (‘stop crying’). The angelic messenger sees beyond John’s limited human perspective that such sorrow is inappropriate and instructs him to cease wailing. Essentially the same directive came from Jesus’ lips twice, once on the occasion of raising the widow’s son at Nain (Luke 7:13), and again when He was about to raise Jairus’s daughter from the dead (Luke 8:52). Weeping was not fitting on those occasions because of what Jesus was about to

³³ Wood, *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

³⁴ White, Ellen G.; *Manuscript Realses*, vol. 12, p. 296.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 20, p. 197, *Ibid.*, vol 12, pp. 296-297.

³⁶ White, Ellen G.; *Medical Ministry*, p. 101.

do – raise people from death. It was unfitting for John because of what Jesus was about to do – open the seven-sealed scroll: ... (*idou enikesen ho leon ho ek tes phyles louda, he rihiza David, anoixai to biblion kai tas hepta sphragidas autou*, ‘behold, the lion who is of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has overcome that He may open the scroll and its seven seals’). For this reason, the elder forbids John to weep any longer.”³⁷

“Throughout revelation angels help John as he receives and views the prophetic visions. They assist the prophet in interpreting scenes or lead him through a vision by pointing out details, focusing his attention on them (e.g. 17:1-3, 6-7). But in two instances an elder attends John (5:5; 7:13-14). The suggestion that the elder’s ‘intervention has no symbolical meaning’ misses an important point in the entire mediation of the prophetic message in Revelation from Jesus Christ through angels (1:1). *In the two visions that have most to do with the redemption and salvation of God’s people and with the resulting triumphal reign of Christ, an elder attends John, not an angel.* Who better than an elevated saint, who himself has gone through the suffering but now is at peace before God’s holy presence, to tell John to stop weeping by urging him to look at the Lamb of God? The elder has the honor of pointing John, in the midst of his tears, to the victorious Lamb of God. The imagery is reminiscent of the honor proclaiming the Gospel that God gives to his church, his people on earth – an honor that not even the angels have in this same measure (see Pet 1:12), though they had the honor of being the first heralds of Christ’s birth (Lk 2:8-14) and resurrection (Mt 28:2-6).”³⁸

Verse 5 – “Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.”

The elderly Jacob called his sons around him to give prophetic messages for each son as to “what shall befall you in the last days” (Genesis 49:1). Though projecting the imagery of their lives, it became a prophetic symbol for literal and spiritual Israel. Judah would be strong and the head of all the other tribes.

“Judah, thou *art he* who thy brethren shall praise: thy hand *shall be* in the neck of thine enemies; thy father’s children shall bow down before thee. Judah *is* a lion’s whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he crouched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; ... Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass’s colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: His eyes *shall* be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.” Genesis 49:8-12.

The Lion of the tribe of Judah by prophetic utterances would, over the years, become the strongest leader of Judah and in turn all of Israel. Jacob identified what that would finally be – Shiloh. “A term as ... understood by commentaries [as] ... an appellation for the Messiah.”³⁹ One elder said, “John, Shiloh the Messiah, is going to open the book.”

There is debate as to the deeper meaning of the imagery in chapters 4 and 5. Some conclude it presents the inauguration of Jesus, especially based on when He is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah. When John sees Him, he views a Lamb. When the rider of the white horse is described under the first Seal, he carries a crown but doesn’t wear it. Not until there is further progression of events (Revelation 11:15-18) do we see Jesus reigning. This is not the imagery in Revelation 5.

“The lion, king of the forest, is a fitting symbol of this tribe, from which came David, and the Son of David, Shiloh, the true ‘Lion of the tribe of Judah,’ to whom all powers shall finally bow and all nations render homage.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Thomas, *Op. cit.*, pp. 386-387.

³⁸ Brighton, *Op. cit.*, pp. 135-136.

³⁹ White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, p. 1003.

⁴⁰ White, Ellen G.; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 236.

Now the promise of 4:1 is possible. John was to see events that would occur in the future. This Lion, the symbol of power, Shiloh, would prevail (*nikao* – aorist tense). He has and continues to *conquer, overcome* and be *victorious*. He is also declared to be the root of David or a descendant of David. This would leave no doubt to John, though he is being hosted by Jesus, who the One is to break the Seals and open the book.

“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: ... And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people.... And he shall set up *an* ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.” Isaiah 11:1, 11-12.

Judah was to be symbolic of the 144,000. Shiloh, the root of Jesse and David, would be the deliverer because He had gained the victory. “And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.’” Matthew 21:9. They would be seen as the multitude that couldn’t be numbered.

To make this an unquestioned issue, Jesus winds the whole book of Revelation down by saying: “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.” Revelation 22:16.

“The emphases on the tribe of Judah and on Davidic descent together underline one of the crucial qualifications of the Jewish royal Messiah: he must be a descendant of the royal house of David (*Pss. Sol.* 17:21; Mark 12:35-37; John 7:42), sometimes conceived as David *redivivus* (Jer 23:5; 30:9), descent from the tribe of Judah (Heb 7:14), and more specifically the Davidic (Matt 1:1, 6; Luke 1:32, 69; 2:4; 3:31; Acts 2:30-32; 13:22-23; Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8; Ignatius *Eph.* 18:2; 20:2; *Rom.* 17:3; *Smyrn.* 1:1), and he is frequently called ‘son of David’ (Matt 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30; Mark 10:47-48; 12:35; Luke 18:38-39; *Barn.* 12:10).⁴¹

All the churches, all of God’s people throughout the ages, the remnant at the end of time are to recognize that what is about to happen occurs because He has authority (He is worthy) to carry out this judgmental task. “The fact that the verb *nikao*, ‘to conquer,’ is used without an object limiting the scope of victory suggests that his victory is unlimited and absolute (Rissi, *Int* 22 [1968])⁴² This is remarkable language, because we see pre-Day of Atonement, prejudgment language which establishes Jesus’ authority base to permit the terrible judgments to follow. Before Jesus’ death He declared “I have conquered” (John 16:33).

Exegetic ties to this include Matthew 22:41-46 where He ties the seed of David to the “Root of David,” where the latter refers to God (Son of God). In Isaiah 11:1-16 we find the branch from Jesse’s roots (Jesse was David’s father) as first being a judge then king and deliverer. Once again we see introduced in Revelation 5 the beginning of a progression where Jesus is first Judge and, finally, in Revelation 11 we find Him a reigning King.

Most scholars present Jesus as worthy to open the book because of what He did. Thomas carries this reasoning far beyond this thinking: “The purpose of Jesus’ victory is expressed by *anoixai* (‘that He may open’) [is worthy]. This is a shade different from calling the opening a result of His victorious redemptive work, because at the time of winning the victory the result was only anticipated. It is also better to see the opening as a purpose of rather than what constitutes the victory, because the significance of the opening of the seals is far-reaching, including also the implementation of what is revealed. The opening of the scroll is best seen as the object or purpose of Jesus’ conquest. The reason He won the victory was to enable Him to open this scroll of destiny and its seals and implement God’s purposes throughout the final stages of human history (Charles).⁴³

⁴¹ Aune, David E.; *52A World Biblical Commentary; Revelation 1-5* (World Books; Publisher, Dallas, Texas), 1997, p. 351.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 349.

⁴³ Thomas, *Op. cit.*, p. 388.

That means His redemptive life and death were a preparation to preside over the final events between good and evil. For this cause “He came.” Thus, the imagery of God sitting on the throne with the scroll is one of His waiting for the Son to arrive. In fact, wonder of wonders, Jesus invited John to accompany Him to observe and record a future event – Jesus joining the Father in the Most Holy Place. The question raised as to who was worthy, then, becomes rhetorical; heaven anticipated His arrival. John became a witness to this. One of the elders wanted him to stop weeping so he would capture the joy they knew and see the event about to unfold.

The repeated advice to the churches was to overcome. Here we find Jesus has overcome, and He now has the power and authority to prepare the universe for the overcomers.⁴⁴

“Then Jesus rose up from the throne, and most of those who were bowed down arose with Him. I did not see one ray of light pass from Jesus to the careless multitude after He arose, and they were left in perfect darkness. Those who arose when Jesus did, kept their eyes fixed on Him as He left the throne and led them out a little way. Then He raised His right arm, and we heard His lovely voice saying, ‘Wait here; I am going to My Father to receive the kingdom; keep your garments spotless, and in a little while I will return from the wedding and receive you to Myself.’ Then a cloudy chariot, with wheels like flaming fire, surrounded by angels, came to where Jesus was. He stepped into the chariot and was borne to the holiest, where the Father sat. There I beheld Jesus, a great High Priest, standing before the Father.”⁴⁵

“The Saviour is presented before John under the symbols of ‘the Lion of the tribe of Judah’ and of ‘a Lamb as it had been slain.’ Revelation 5:5, 6. *These symbols represent the union of omnipotent power and self-sacrificing love.* The Lion of the tribe of Judah, so terrible to the rejectors of His grace, will be the Lamb of God to the obedient and faithful.”⁴⁶ He has the final word and is filled with redeeming love.

The imagery of the judgment is beginning to mature. Judgment preparation is underway. A question that must be addressed: “What phase of the judgment are we about to witness?”

“In the time of trial before us God’s pledge of security will be placed upon those who have kept the word of His patience. Christ will say to His faithful ones: ‘Come, My people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.’ Isaiah 26:20. The Lion of Judah, so terrible to the rejectors of His grace, will be the Lamb of God to the obedient and faithful. The pillar of cloud which speaks wrath and terror to the transgressor of God’s law is light and mercy and deliverance to those who have kept His commandments. The arm strong to smite the rebellious will be strong to deliver the loyal. Every faithful one will surely be gathered. ‘He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.’ Matthew 24:31.”⁴⁷

What language is portrayed here? The symbolism explicitly shows Jesus *with* power and love to *execute* warning and judgment. The breaking of the Seals begins both the final warnings and the onset of executive judgments.

⁴⁴ Beale, *Op. cit.*, p. 350.

⁴⁵ White, Ellen G.; *Early Writings*, pp. 54-55.

⁴⁶ White, Ellen G.; *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 589.

⁴⁷ White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 6, p. 404.



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