

# LECTURES ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION

By

H. A. Ironside, Litt.D.

*Author of Notes On Jeremiah and Lamentations; Notes On Ezekiel the Prophet;  
Lectures On Daniel the Prophet; Notes On the Minor Prophets. etc., etc.*

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## CHAPTER SIX

### THE SEVEN-SEALED BOOK

(Lectures 5:1 - 6:8)

LAST Friday evening our subject was the 4th chapter - the redeemed gathered around the throne of God and the Lamb in heaven. We noticed that the four and twenty elders, seen by John in vision sitting around the throne, represent all the heavenly saints of this and past dispensations. I cannot reiterate, except to remind you that the symbol is evidently taken from the twenty-four elders of the priesthood of Israel. We can see how aptly the entire heavenly company would be represented by these heads of the Levitical priesthood. In heaven there is no special sacerdotal family. All of God's people are priests.

In the 5th chapter we are still occupied with the same vision as in chapter 4. There we saw the Lord Jesus Christ worshiped as Creator. Here a higher glory is His - He is worshiped as Redeemer.

“ ‘Twas great to speak a world from nought;  
‘twas greater to redeem.”

The first thing that attracts our attention is what is said of the seven-sealed book in the right hand of Him who sits on the throne. We have already seen in our review of chapter 4 that the Son is on that throne; but we must not forget that it is likewise the throne of God the Father. And so here we have in the Father's right hand a book written within and on the backside, and sealed with seven seals.

When we read of a “book” we must not think of a volume such as we are familiar with, but rather of a roll of parchment. The ancient books of Israel were generally sheepskin rolls; and when we are told that this book was sealed with seven seals, we are to understand that the book was rolled up to a certain point, and there a seal was put upon the edge, so that it could not be opened until that seal was broken.

It was rolled up a little farther and another seal put on, and so on, until there were six seals on the edge of the book and one seal closing the entire scroll. When the first seal was opened a certain portion of the book was exposed to view, and so with each one following. When the seventh was broken then the entire book would be unrolled.

What is this sealed book?

I will again remind you of a principle which I want to keep before you in all of these lectures, and that is, in studying the Book of the Revelation it is never necessary to fall back on our own imagination as to what a particular symbol means. Every symbol is explained, or alluded to, somewhere else in the Bible.

Turn to the 32nd chapter of Jeremiah.

The prophet Jeremiah lived in a day just previous to the fall of Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar. He had been telling the people of Israel that they were going to be carried captives to Babylon. For seventy years they would be in captivity; but, at the end of that time, they would be restored, and would build again the waste places (ch. 29:10). Hanameel, Jeremiah's cousin, who had a piece of ground, knew well that it was soon to be absolutely worthless. and he was anxious to get it off his hands and realize what he could from it. He concluded to try to sell it to his prophetic-cousin who was in prison at the time for the truth's sake.

The Lord said to Jeremiah, "**Buy the field.**"

He was commanded to accept it as though it were really worth having, because the time was coming when it would be worth having; for just as surely as God's people were going down into Babylon, so surely were they coming back again. That land would be worth far more in that day, and he would have it in his family.

So we are told, in chap. 32:8, that Hanameel came and besought him to buy the field. Jeremiah acquiesced. The title-deeds were made out and sealed and hidden away. The land was purchased by Jeremiah, but he was not going to enter into possession of it. He, too, was to be driven out - to be rejected and set to one side; but some day that sealed roll would be of great value, when the restoration took place.

He gave it to his secretary to hide away with a view of making known to his heirs where the deed was which was to give them the title to the land. The sealed book was the title deed to Jeremiah's inheritance, and when the people of Israel came back from Babylon there would be a man who could go into court and say, "This deed belongs to me. I am Jeremiah's heir. I have the right to break the seals and take the property."

With this illustration from the Old Testament before us, we have no difficulty in seeing what the seven-sealed book in Revelation means. The book that John saw in the hand of Him that sat upon the throne is the title-deed to this world; and when God says, "**Who is worthy to take the book and to loose the seals thereof?**" it is just another way of saying, Who is the rightful heir?

Who can say, "I have title to break those seals, title to claim that world, it belongs to me?" Who is worthy to take possession of that world and subject it to himself?

Adam, what about you? Wasn't that world given to you? When God created you and placed you in the Garden of Eden, did He not say that all of this was yours? Why do you not come forward and take this title-deed and claim your property? Adam says, "I forfeited my inheritance because of sin. It was mine, but I sinned it away. The devil cheated me out of it, and I have no longer any title to it."

Is there any angel who can step up and take the book? No, not an angel among all the serried ranks of heaven's hosts can say, "I have title to that world." Not a man in all God's universe can say, "It is mine."

And John says, "**I wept much, because no one was found worthy.**"

But as he was weeping, one of the elders said, "**Weep not, the Lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed to take the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.**"

And John looked for the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the majestic roaring King of Beasts, ready to spring upon the prey; but he beheld a Lamb. Why, the Lamb is the Lion! The Lamb of God is the Lion of Judah's tribe. The lamb that speaks of innocence, of meekness, of gentleness and sacrifice, is the One who is to go forth as the mighty conqueror and claim this world as His own, and drive all His enemies from before His face.

I like the paraphrase from Weymouth where he says, "I saw in the midst of the throne a lamb that looked as though it had been offered in sacrifice" - the Lamb in the very glory of God that will have through all eternity the marks of death upon His glorified body! It is right to sing as we sometimes do,

"I shall know Him, I shall know Him,  
As redeemed by His side I shall stand;  
I shall know Him, I shall know Him,  
By the print of the nails in His hand."

When He came forth from the tomb the print of the nails was there. When John saw Him many years after in vision up there in glory, he saw a Lamb that looked as though it had once been offered in sacrifice; and when we get home to heaven we will never make any mistake in identifying Him. We will never be found worshipping Gabriel instead of Christ; we will not mistake so loving an apostle as John even for his Lord. We will have only eyes for the Lamb upon whose body will be for all eternity the marks that tell of our redemption.

Ah, what a sight that will be for God's beloved people - when we look upon His face, feel His gentle touch, behold the print of the nails in His hands and feet, and see the mark left by the Roman spear in His side!

The prophet Habakkuk describes Him as having “bright beams coming out of His side, and there was the hiding of His power” (Habakkuk 3:4, literal trans.) . There, where the cruel spear pierced Him, is the hiding of His power.

“Oh, the Lamb, the bleeding Lamb,  
The Lamb of Calvary;  
The Lamb that was slain, that liveth again,  
To intercede for me.”

Do you know this blessed Lamb of God? Are you acquainted with Him? Is He your own Saviour? Have you cast yourself on His mercies?

It says that the Lamb in the midst of the throne had seven horns.

Horns speak of power. In the Old Testament we read of the “**strong bulls of Bashan**,” of great heads, thick necks, and powerful horns. Israel would thus be accustomed to connect the thought of power with the horns. But it is not a mighty bull that is seen, but a lamb, and the diminutive form of the word, “*a little lamb*” with seven horns!

Just as horns speak of power, seven speaks of perfection. Perfect power belongs to the Lamb of God. And we are told He had seven eyes, which is interpreted as meaning seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the world, which we have connected with Isaiah 11:1, 2. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. “**In Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.**” All spiritual graces are His. He is anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows, and He it is who gives the Holy Spirit to us.

He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne. What right had He thus to act? Because He went to the cross in infinite grace to pay the great debt of sin, thus to redeem this forfeited inheritance and free it from Satan’s domination. The Lamb has title to the book!

The Lamb can claim the title-deed to this world because when He died on Calvary’s cross He purchased the entire world to be His own - in which the glory of God is to be displayed through a thousand wondrous years.

It was His because He treated it. He gave it to man, but man forfeited it through sin; and the Lord Jesus Christ bought it all back when He hung on Golgotha’s tree; but for 1900 years He has been waiting patiently up there in the glory until the appointed time for claiming His inheritance.

So the book of the title-deeds has been sealed. In this interval, men have been having pretty much their own way down here; the devil has been running things to suit himself, but in a little while Christ is coming again. He is going to put everything right, but He will have to act in judgment to do so. For the very world in which the Lord Jesus died is going to be the sphere in which the glory of God will be displayed, and that not only in the Millennium, but afterward in the new earth, as well as in the new heaven.

The moment that the Lamb takes the book, in verse 8, the four living ones and the four and twenty elders fall down before Him, having every one of them harps, and golden bowls full of odors, which are the prayers of saints.

You know, I am very sentimental about the harp. I love it. I always think when I hear the harp being played that it is the instrument I am going to play in heaven. It is a figure, of course, but a very lovely one.

**“And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”** (vers. 9, 10).

It is not merely of themselves they sing, but of all the redeemed; so the living ones, the divine attributes, join in it, too.

And note the great throng suggested by the words of the song.

Far more people will be in heaven than will ever be lost in hell! All the babes that died in infancy will be there. What a throng will fill that Home! And oh, how wonderful the fellowship! We shall have the society of all the pure and holy, made pure by the blood of Jesus.

But notice carefully what they sing up there. They ascribe their redemption entirely to the Lamb and His work. Those are the saints of God. Then you find another company in the next two verses, but they are angels. You will notice that you have an inner circle composed of sinners that were redeemed. That will be the glory of heaven.

You often hear of the angels singing; but it is remarkable that when you go to the Bible there is only one place where you read of angels singing; it is in the 38th chapter of the Book of Job.

The morning stars there are angels, and they sang together when this world in its pristine beauty sprang from God’s hand. But that ancient song was stilled. Sin came in and marred that beautiful creation, and from the time that sin came in we never read again that angels sang.

At the birth of our Lord Jesus a multitude of the heavenly hosts praised God, saying, **“Glory to God in the Highest,”** but we do not read that they sang. It is the redeemed that sing, and they sing **“a new song.”** It is the song of redemption. Will you be able to sing that song? Angels will praise the Lamb, truly, though it does not say they will sing.

Let me read the passage,

**“And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the living ones and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.”**

What a host! You would think that God had enough without us.

Old John Bunyan says, "Oh, this Lamb of God! He had a whole heaven to Himself, myriads of angels to do His pleasure, but this could not satisfy Him. He must have sinners to share it with Him!"

If you are ever going to sing up there you will have to start in down here. Can you say, "**Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed me by Thy blood**"?

The angels stand in an outer circle. In other words, the angels stand off and look on and say, "The Lamb deserves all the honor He is receiving."

Then there is a third company, a third circle, embracing all creation. John looks throughout the universe, and he sees every creature extolling the Lamb. The day is coming when all created intelligences will join in saying, "**Glory to the Lamb.**"

And now the Lamb, having taken the book, proceeds to open the seals.

Here I want to pause for a moment in the course of the exposition. Many have come to me since the great world-war began and said, "Don't you think that, perhaps, the Great Tribulation has already commenced? There have been events following one another in the last few years which so nearly answer to this opening part of the Book of the Revelation that one would be justified in believing we are already in the throes of the Tribulation."

My answer is this: There can be no period of tribulation such as is depicted here until the Lamb breaks the seals of the seven-sealed book. But the Lamb does not break the first seal of this book until the redeemed are seen crowned in heaven; and no redeemed one will ever get his crown until they are taken up at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to the air, and the setting up of the judgment-seat. All the crowns are going to be given out at the judgment-seat of Christ before the Lamb takes the book, and before the seals, are broken.

A lady said to me, "But, dear brother, what tribulation could be worse?"

Well, conditions are certainly terrible, but there has never been a war in which the organizations that profess to stand for righteousness have done so much for the soldiers, and the relatives, and the afflicted, as in this awful conflict.

Consider the Red Cross, for instance. It was the spirit of sacrifice that caused people to start the society, and many of the founders of it were devoted to Christ; wherever the red cross was seen it was the reminder of the cross of Christ. There will be no Red Cross in the Great Tribulation. The cross of Christ will be so hated then that it will never be seen anywhere.

Then look at the Y. M. C. A. I know all about the criticisms, and I have had to speak plainly myself, but the Y. M. C. A. movement was started by a man of God, and its original objective; was to bring men to Christ.

Much of their recent work is indeed open to just criticism; it is a shame that it has added to and detracted from its original purpose, yet we can thank God for the New Testament and the comforts it has brought to millions of men.

Take the work of the Salvation Army: I have heard scores testify about the Salvation Army preaching the gospel of God in the trenches. Now think of a greater war than this (and it is in the future), a war in which there will be no Salvation Army, no Y. M. C. A., no Red Cross, no Bible Societies, no Christian workers - absolutely no spiritual ministry of any kind to alleviate the awful conditions that will then prevail. The thought is unspeakably terrible, but such a war is predicted in this Book.

But, I repeat, that tribulation time cannot begin until the redeemed are gathered around the Lord in the glory and crowned there. And it cannot be emphasized too much that no saints in heaven now have crowns. The apostle says, **“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord . . . shall give to me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”**

**“That day”** when the saints are gathered around the judgment-seat of Christ: that is the day when they will get their crowns.

Well then, after the church has gone, what is going to take place in the world? When I get to this chapter, I always like to view it this way: that we are in heaven already, the rapture having taken place.

Look at it with me from that standpoint. Let us suppose that last night, while things were going on in the ordinary way, suddenly there was a heartening shout heard from the glory and every redeemed one responded to the trump of God: and in a moment the graves were opened, and in every place where the believing dead were resting, the bodies were raised and the living saints were changed. We found ourselves caught away, and we entered with Him into the Father’s house, and gathered around the throne and fell down to worship. We will say that we have had twenty-four hours in heaven.

O sinner, you wouldn’t be there. It is saved people I am talking about.

At first our hearts would just be too full of Christ to think of anything else. But He, Himself, stirs us at last to think of what He is about to do. We say to ourselves, What is going to be the next thing in that world we have left behind? We look down to that poor scene where we lived yesterday. Men are going on much as before, only in great excitement. Look at the streets of the great cities. We can see the newsboys shouting, “Extra! Extra! a great number of people have disappeared!” There is a rush to get the newspapers to find out all about this strange event. Throngs are crowding the popular churches to hear the Rev. Dr. Ananias and his like give their explanation of the great disappearance of so many people.

I believe there will be lots of church-going for a little while after the rapture of God’s people; they will be crowding into the churches as never before.

I think I see the Rev. Mr. Smooth-things standing in his pulpit, with pale, wan face, as he looks at scores of parishioners he hasn't seen for many years, and thinking to himself, "Now, I see I have got to explain to these people. I have been telling them for twenty years that this talk of the Second Coming is false."

People who believed in the Second Coming were looked upon as idiotic ranters who didn't know what they were talking about. I think I hear mutterings down in the congregation: "We trusted our souls to you. You had been to the colleges, seminaries and universities, read a whole library of books, and we believed you when you told us the old idea of salvation by the blood of Christ was all worn out, and that we could save ourselves by culture. We believed you when you said Christ's second coming was only a fantastic notion; now explain this to us."

Another cries, "What about my grandmother? She believed in her Bible to the last. She was reading just the other day, '**In an hour when ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.**' Now Grandmother is gone, and I am here. Now, Doctor, explain all this."

Oh, there are going to be some wonderful meetings after the Lord has come! There is that world seething with corruption, men's hearts failing them for fear. Christian statesmen will have gone; Christian business men, people of all ranks who knew Christ will have disappeared. Cities and communities will be in turmoil. What are they going to do? Let's look at the Book and see.

**"And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come! And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer."**

We behold the Lamb as He breaks the first seal, and John hears a noise as of thunder.

Thunder speaks of a coming storm, though the scene seems peaceful enough. What is this? A warrior comes forth on a white horse, and a bow is in his hand.

A bow speaks of distant warfare. Horses, as in Zechariah 1, symbolize providential movements. This rider on the white horse evidently pictures man's last effort to bring in a reign of order and peace while Christ is still rejected. It will be the world's greatest attempt to pull things together after the church is gone. It will be the devil's cunning scheme for bringing in a mock millennium without Christ. How long will it last?

**"And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come! And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword."**

He opens the second seal, and a red horse appears. Anarchy, a bloody warfare! **"When they shall say, Peace and safety, sudden destruction cometh upon them."**



The first effort, down in the world we are supposed to have left, will be to bring in universal peace, apart from Christ; but it will end in universal, bloody warfare, greater far than has ever been known.

The rider on the blood-red horse has a sword; it speaks of warfare of a different type altogether from that of the bow: man wrestling with man, nation with nation. Internal strife, class-wars, civil wars, the breaking up of all established order is here set forth.

**“And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come! And I beheld, and lo, a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.”**

Very naturally, when he had opened the third seal, a black horse appears, with his rider holding a pair of balances. We have that which inevitably follows world-wide war - world-wide famine.

I don't wonder that people think they have seen all this in the last four years. An effort to bring in universal peace, but almost universal war; and famine in many parts of the world. But, by and by it is going to be all over the world. We know a little better now what this means than when these things were first opened up by men of God. We have had our food sold to us by measure, and we have known much of the high cost of living, but, in this coming day, conditions will be so dreadful that it will be a measure of wheat for a denarius, or three measures of barley for the same amount.

The word translated “**measure**” means *just enough wheat to make a man one meal*, and the denarius was a full day's wages. Enough food for one meal for a whole day's wages! That is, if one is going to eat wheat. Now if they will take barley they will get three meals for a day's work. What hard conditions! We thought war prices exorbitant, but they are going to be unprecedented in those days of the tribulation.

**“But see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.”**

The oil and the wine are put in contrast with the wheat and the barley. The wheat and barley are the food of the poor - almost out of reach; but the food of the rich, or the luxuries, are not touched.

**“And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come! And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.”**

And now he opens the fourth seal, and a pale horse ridden by Death appears. The word rendered **pale** means *green, chrome*. We might call it a livid horse, in the sense of being the color of a corpse. Of what is it a picture? Of pestilence, which always follows war and famine. We have known something of that in this last year, but the complete fulfillment awaits a not far-distant day. \*

\* I thought at first of recasting this lecture, as it seemed somewhat too colloquial and localized. But I concluded to let it remain largely as given. The reader will understand it was delivered during the armistice year, and while the influenza plague was still in progress.

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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