THE DIVORCE BILL OF THE LAMB AND THE SCROLL OF THE SUSPECTED ADULTERESS.
A NOTE ON APOC. 5, 1 AND 10, 8 — 11.

BY

J. MASSINGBERD FORD
Notre Dame (Ind.), U.S.A.

Generally scholars have assumed that the seven-sealed scroll mentioned in Apoc. 5, 1 is a rolled scroll with seven seals attached to the outside. The seals are broken one by one but the contents of the scroll do not appear to be proclaimed even after the last seal is opened. This note will attempt another explanation.

The scroll itself has three interesting features. Firstly, it is written both on the obverse and the reverse. Secondly, if the number of seals indicates the number of witnesses, it has more than the two witnesses required to make a document legal. Thirdly, the contents may be revealed as each seal is broken rather than when the last one is removed. What ancient document has these characteristics?

The one which resembles the Apocalypse scroll most closely appears to be the get mekushshar, the tied deed, that is, one which apparently was folded, signed on the back, then folded and signed again and so by each witness. This deed required more than two witnesses, it was obliged to have at least three witnesses. The contents were revealed as each fold was unwrapped. This type of document is described in Baba Bathra 10:1 1 and 2.

“A plain document has [the signatures of] the witnesses inside, and a folded [document] has [the signatures of] the witnesses on the back.... A plain document requires [at least] two witnesses, and a folded [document] must be signed by no less than three [witnesses]. If a plain [document] were signed by but one witness or if a folded [document] were signed by only two witnesses, they are both invalid.” 1)

The Babylonian Talmud gives a little more information. The document was knotted or stitched and written on every other line. This type of document was written on every other line. Thus the blank lines and written lines alternated and the written one

was folded over the blank one 1). Each fold bore the signature of different witnesses on the external upper side, that is, the witnesses wrote on the reverse, the contents of the document were on the obverse 2). Further, the more folds the more witnesses were required 3). Thus the talmudic description of the get mekushshar appears to be similar to the scroll in Apoc. 5, 1.

However, the Talmud adds three further points of interest. 1) The description of a document as "sealed" is understood by some, but not all, Rabbis to refer to the folded get 4). 2) The number of witnesses is increased to give the document greater publicity 5). 3) It is said that the folded get originated because priests wished to divorce their wives:

What is the reason why the Rabbis instituted a folded [deed]?—They were [in] a place [inhabited] by priests, who were very hot-tempered and they divorced their wives (for the slightest provocation). Consequently the Rabbis made [this] provision, so that in the meantime they might cool down 6).

While this explanation of the origin of the folded get may be questioned, the fact that it was used in divorce cases is interesting. This type of document was supposed to protract the proceedings in order to give the husband time to change his mind. This was especially desirable in the case of priests who could not accept their divorced wives again.

One may ask, therefore, whether the Lamb's scroll was a get mekushshar. If so, was it a nuptial document, either the ketubah, or a bill of divorce or a command of jealousy (vide infra p. 138)? In support of the fact that it may be a nuptial document one may note the bride and adulteress motifs in the Apocalypse and also the fact that the Lamb appears to be espoused to a priestly community (cf. Apoc. 1, 6). Perhaps the most likely interpretation is that it is a bill of divorce 7), the Lamb divorces the unfaithful Jerusalem and marries the New Jerusalem 8). Biblion is used for a bill of divorce in LXX

2) Ibid. 160b and 161a.
3) Ibid. 160b.
4) Ibid. 160b.
5) Ibid. 161a and note 18 (p. 703).
6) Ibid. 106b.
7) A bill of divorce was required to dissolve a betrothal as well as a marriage.
8) The writer is in agreement with P. Carrington, The Meaning of the Revelation, London 1931 that the harlot is not Rome but rather Jerusalem.