

# Christ Builds His Kingdom

The Book of Revelation as Master Plan

## Introduction

[S1] Good evening. Thank you for your presence here tonight.

[S2] If a lecture on the Book of Revelation has brought you here, you may already have read the books and seen the movies. To inspire such artistic license might be expected from a book that has frustrated Christian teachers for thousands of years.

I want to thank Dave Rohde and the WPC Adult Christian Formation committee for inviting me to speak. Given that I am a new member, you might wonder what inspired the honor. That is a natural question. What can I offer you as evidence that I can do better than interpreters of John's prophesy who, twenty-two years ago, promised the Second Coming?

[S3] I might satisfy you with a recounting of the fields of study that I have drawn upon in coming to my understanding. They include:

- Physics,
- Philosophy,
- Sociology and economics,
- Psychology,
- Spirituality and Religion, and
- Paleontology.

Unfortunately, that would lead us into many controversies, perhaps driving you to conclude, "What a stuck-up bore!" So, let's leave it at this: I have studied broadly, and my conclusion is that love is the answer.

Here at church, that seems a solid start. After all, in his Gospel John testified that "God is Love." We are told, however, that love without works is void. The wise would then ask, "What evidence can you present, Brian, of **your** love?"

[S4] To qualify a practice of loving, a speaker with training in divinity would present a diploma and offer professional references. The best that I can do in that regard are personal references. I have been a son, father, therapist, sibling,

colleague, friend, and husband. But if you spoke to my references, would that establish my credentials? In their middle school years, my sons, for example, complained when I spoke of spiritual matters, “That’s not in our science books, Dad!”

But assemble their testimony and you could gauge the depth of my commitment to loving.

[S5] Are we getting anywhere? Perhaps, because in fact **who I am** is not important. My goal is not to prove that you should believe in me. My goal tonight is to convict you, in the difficult years ahead of us, to **lean into** the Holy Spirit.

So, setting myself aside, if I may pray with you:

Dearest Abba, may the words that I offer tonight soften any resistance, in the hearts of those present, to acceptance of the gifts that emanate from the Holy Spirit. AMEN

[S6] Now just as you might best know me by talking to those that I have loved, so we are given the Book of Revelation: so that God might reveal Himself to our understanding through the testimony of those He did, does, and will love.

Does anyone have any concerns regarding my premise? If so, can you summarize the interpretations that you are familiar with?

As I have encountered them, prior interpretations of Revelation are of three types. The literalists see it as a brutal plan to bring humanity to obedience. Those that celebrate Christ as the Prince of Peace read Revelation as an inspirational allegory. Finally, atheists prefer to read it as political screed.

[S7] What I will assert, regarding all prior interpretations, is that they suffer from a false premise. At the start of Rev. 4, a voice from heaven extends an invitation to John:

“Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”

Every interpreter of Revelation has been misled by this statement to believe that John’s visions foretell the future. In Rev. 10, however, we have an indication that the writing is in part historical, for John is told:

“You must prophesy again about many people, languages, nations, and kings.”

In considering the angel’s invitation to John, then, I am going to ask you to give weight to “what **must** take place.” That “must” suggests that there will be **reasons**, and reasons *always* originate in the past. How far into the past? Well, Jesus testified that he would “remake heaven and earth.” So, we might start with the arrival of the angels in Genesis 1:2:

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

[S8] Remembering that long list of subjects in my introduction, we should be mindful that John did not have the advantage of our knowledge. He saw events across the great span of time and tried to describe them in the terms known to his culture. Given our deeper understanding, it is *our* burden to translate his descriptions. Of course, Revelation is almost 800,000 words long. A full translation would take many hours. I can provide that, and if the community is interested, I would be happy to lead a study group. But for tonight, I am going focus on the main points.

In broad terms, Revelation has five parts. Chapters 1-3 establish the authority of the book to the readers of the age. The next three parts describe the redemption of heaven (Rev. 4-7), the living creatures (Rev. 8-11) and the human heart (12-20). The final two chapters describe the New Creation.

(Questions)

### Revelation 1-3: Prophetic Authority

[S9] When presented to John’s readers, Revelation might have been only one among many prophetic writings. How to establish its authority? This is the addressed in Chapters 1-3.

[S10] Who would have been the readers of Revelation? John was known to have lived in Ephesus, in modern-day Turkey. Ephesus was a coastal city, one of seven church communities linked by major Roman roads. Ephesus was also close to Patmos, the island of John’s exile. John might expect that his writing would reach these communities.

In Rev. 2 and 3, John writes of Jesus' diagnosis and prescriptions for these churches. It is not clear how much this may reflect John's knowledge of their affairs. A critic might suggest that John was simply dressing up his own counsel to shore up his position while he was in exile. But to the faithful, this would have been evidence that Jesus had not forgotten them.

In interpreting the rest of Revelation, furthermore, we should pay particular attention to the symbolism of these chapters. Jesus testifies that he has appointed seven angels to watch over the seven churches. The churches appear as lamps, the angels as stars. Remember now what was said of the Wise Men, that they "followed a star" to the Holy Land. What was witnessed as a baby upon their arrival might, to the perception of these sensitive men, have been perceived from a distance as a light on the horizon. Thus, at a distance, so might angels be perceived as bright lights in the spiritual darkness.

In concluding his counsel to the seven churches, Jesus promises to each an element of the New Jerusalem described in Revelation 21 and 22. These are:

1. The Tree of Life
2. Safety through the Second Death
3. Stones with New Names
4. Rule over nations
5. Registration in the Book of Life
6. A station in the Temple of Heaven
7. The Throne of Heaven

Why forecast these elements? Some of them appear elsewhere in scripture, but as Revelation concludes, we understand their significance, relationships, and power. Rather than abstract promises, Revelation describes the heaven promised to the faithful.

I think that elements are given here at the start, however, because Revelation documents a painful process. As a therapist, I know that if people understand what they are striving for, they face adversity with greater fortitude.

We will see this principle at play again in the testimony of the angels.

To summarize, then, the main point of the first part of Revelation is that we are not forgotten, our God is powerful, and our faith will receive an appreciative reward.

[S11] (Discussion.)

### Revelation 4-7: Redemption in Heaven

[S12] Now we turn to the witness of the angels. John is invited to heaven, where he sees twenty-four “elders” sitting on thrones. They appear to him as people, but recall Genesis 1:26:

And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”

So, John perceives the heavenly host as people, and in later chapters we should be mindful of this confusion. In Daniel, the angel Michael is described as “one of the chief princes” of heaven. Thus, the Elders, pictured as wearing crowns, might be thought of as the highest among the angels of heaven.

The twenty-four elders sit around the Most High, but are unable to approach His Throne, which is warded by a powerful shield. Is this desirable? If the angels knew love, wouldn't the elders be interacting?

Fortunately, between the Throne and Elders are the “living creatures,” of which it is said [Rev. 4:9-10]:

Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship.

Remember – this is before the first day of Creation in Genesis. This is the plan of creation, offered by the Most High upon the arrival at the earth. The elders are to be joined under the compact of love. They resist, but the opportunity of living on the earth will redeem them.

[S13] But what of the implementation? [Rev. 5:1]

Then I saw in the right hand of him who sits on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals.

Biblically, what would be the “two sides?” From Eden, we were sent into the world to master “the Knowledge of good and evil.” This seems the most natural

association: the “two sides” are “good and evil.” But among the elders, none can approach to break the seals. A terrible grief arises, reflecting the angels’ yearning for love.

The Most High offers a solution. He brings forth a part of himself in service to the angels [Rev. 5:6]:

Then I saw a lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne.

Remember that in Eden, it is said that Adam is made a “living creature” when God breathes his spirit into him. The lamb, conversely, volunteers to surrender his bond to the Most High.

We then learn why the angels could not open the scroll, for the keepers of that knowledge are revealed as the seals are broken. The first six are unleashed, and go forward to take possession of the earth:

- Domination
- Conflict
- Opportunism
- Death
- Vengeance
- Wrath

[S14] The lamb then marshals the allies that will work to wrest the Knowledge of Good and Evil from these corrupting influences. Twelve of the angels are identified as the patrons of the tribes of Israel. In the final chapters, they will also represent the Apostles. From them go forth 144,000 representatives. In Biblical terms, “1000” is “a countable many.” “One hundred forty-four,” of course, is twelve times twelve. Since no relationships have been established, the masculine angels simply join in all combinations with the feminine angels, next seen as twelve stars in the crown of the Sacred Mother in Revelation 12.

And then – perhaps for the benefit of John’s sanity – the story skips to the end. An angel tries to point this out, asking, “These in the white robes – who are they, and where did they come from?” As the book progresses, these sights and signs appear again at the end of the two remaining parts. For now, we learn that the

144,000 return from the “time of tribulation,” their robes “made white in the blood of the lamb.” The barrier to the throne falls, and the angels rush forward to receive the gifts known only when we are yoked to the service of love. Among these are healing of past sorrows, shelter, and celebration.

Sounds like something worth living for, does it not?

But what happened in between?

(Discussion.)

### Revelation 8-11: Redemption of the Living Creatures

[S15] With Revelation 7, we learn that the Most High will be united with the angels. In the plan laid out in Revelation 4, that is achieved through the mediation of the living creatures. This is the subject of chapters 8 through 19, though there is a bridge at chapter 12 when we look in depth at the human journey of redemption. What we see, indeed, is that humanity is the medicine that God uses to redeem all else.

In that effort, suffering is inescapable. To the wise, however, that suffering always follows a pattern: the pattern of seven. We can anticipate, in each episode of Revelation, that things will get worse and worse until we get to seven – and then redemption will follow.

[S16] I know – numerology. There is a cottage industry that takes apart numbers in the Bible to reveal hidden meanings. But as concerns seven in Revelation, the story rubs our face in it. Jesus speaks to seven churches. The lamb has seven eyes and horns. The scroll has seven seals. The angels sound seven trumpets. The wrath of God falls from seven bowls.

And this is not yet to speak of the seven halves in “a time, times, and half a time” – which in specific cases is “three and a half years” (equally “42 months” or “1260 days”), but also “three and a half days,” or – in the case of “let there be light” – three and a half billion years since the first cells evolved photosynthesis.

The key to this is Genesis. Six is the number of the mammals, with man arriving in the middle of the day. Seven is the number of redemption. Thus Peter, in his last letter, offers us seven steps toward Christian maturity. And priorly, Jesus gave us seven beatitudes.

Revelation 8, though, begins with the breaking of the seventh seal. The first six were forms of sin, so how does the seventh lead to redemption? What is its nature?

With the breaking of the seventh seal, seven angels appear with seven trumpets. When each trumpet is sounded, a terrible calamity befalls the “people of the earth.” The seventh seal, in a word, is destruction. How does destruction serve to redeem the world?

[S17] To understand, we must remember the principles of Darwinian evolution. Living creatures of all sorts have two primitive drives: survival and procreation. These are inherently selfish. In the animal kingdom, the strong do not give way to the weak.

As regards survival, different environments present different opportunities and threats, and so life evolves wondrous diversity. Even so, at some point the environment fills up. Evolution stalls. No new forms of life arise, and so love is blocked from entry to the world. If love is to redeem the living creatures, then, something must make space for new creatures to evolve.

[S18] This is the role of destruction. In paleontology, the seven trumpets are known as “extinction episodes.”

The other forms of sin are collectors – particularly death. They take possession of living creatures and try to prevent love from entering the world. Destruction, though, leaves nothing behind. It undoes the work of its brothers. This is how the seventh trumpet serves love – destruction, in the right moment, creates opportunities for love to enter the world.

The first extinction episode occurred before shells evolved, so paleontology knows of five extinction episodes. The first two involve underwater volcanic rifts that changed the chemistry of the ocean. These are described in Revelation 8 as “something like a mountain was thrown into the ocean.” This should give pause to all those that interpret Revelation through the lens of the Bible. We can understand John’s imagery only if we understand the science. What is critical, however, is that the events described happened tens and hundreds of millions of years ago.

Revelation 8 describes four of these disasters, and the sense of geological upheaval is obvious. [S19] The descriptions of the episodes in Revelation 9, however, have a different character. The “people of the earth” suffer greatly. Life, at this point, had developed sophisticated brains.

Using electrical signals, brains are essential to sight, hearing, and migration. They were a huge evolutionary advantage, allowing reptiles to dominate the earth for tens of millions of years. The sixth trumpet corresponds to the extinction of the dinosaurs that made way for the mammals. Alarming, the imagery indicates that reptilian behaviors continue to influence the mammals. As concerns human culture, this is detailed in Rev. 12 and 13.

With Revelation 10, a creature finally arises that can understand love: humanity. A powerful angel, obviously a manifestation of Christ, appears to announce that redemption will no longer be held at bay. John is told to eat a smaller version of the scroll of seven seals. This is the heavenly metaphor for the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge consumed by Adam and Eve. The scroll is small, though, and can be thought of as a vaccination.

[S20] Revelation 11 describes the support offered to us by the Most High as we seek to master that knowledge. These are the religions of Abraham. The “Temple” represents Judaism, the two Gentile prophets represent Christianity and Islam. Here we have the first reference to “42 months,” which is seven times six: the number of redemption multiplied by the number of man. This is the era in history between Jesus crucifixion and his return.

The seventh trumpet then sounds, and we have a reprise of the opening of the temple described in Revelation 7. Through recognizable methods – intelligence and religion – love is victorious among the living creatures.

Ready for a break?

(Discussion)

### [Redemption of the Human Heart: Revelation 12-19](#)

[S21] Love is always an invitation. For this reason, to my heart, the most sorrowful words in the Bible are those spoken by the Most High upon returning to the Garden of Eden:

“Adam? Eve? Where are you?”

How was it, we must wonder, that an all-powerful, all-knowing God could lose his children? The answer is hinted at in death’s nature, that dark veil that separates us from those that we love. Adam and Eve had hardened their hearts against love, and in their shame, taken refuge in death.

The Darwinian urge to survive shows up in the human mind as fear of death. As we read of the trumpets, we are given testimony regarding Death’s power. As each trumpet sounds, one-third of the “people of the earth” fall into Death’s grasp. Doing the math, in our era, only eight percent of the angels sent to the earth remain free!

This is the spiritual struggle that Jesus waged on the cross. Jesus challenged Death, “Come and take me!” When it did, the sun poured its light through Him, lighting up every corner of Hades. And with His resurrection, Jesus proved that death has no power over those that love.

So why do we fear death? Because our hearts are hard. We are predisposed, as are all those on earth, to sin, and too many take pleasure in the thought that Christ will return to wash them clean. To sin, you see, is to put God under our control.

So how does love solve this problem? Well, remember Genesis:

“It is not good for the man to be alone. Let us make a helpmate suitable for him.”

[S22] Revelation 12 introduces this lady with my favorite Bible verse:

Then I saw a wondrous sign: a woman robed in the sun. Her feet rested on the moon and a crown of twelve stars adorned her head.

This is the Sacred Mother, who appears in the New Testament as the Virgin Mary. Against mother and son arises the dragon, representing the Darwinian drives of aggression and lust that reached their peak in the dinosaurs. The son is called back to heaven, but the mother remains with us.

[S23] What is most important, however, is that while Jesus suffered on the cross, Michael and his allies threw the dragon out of heaven. Rev. 12:12 gives us this terrible warning:

Therefore you heavens rejoice, and all who reside in them.  
But woe to the earth and the sea  
because the devil has gone down to you!  
He is filled with terrible anger,  
for he knows that he has only a little time!

[S24] Revelation 13 explains how the devil exacts his revenge: he uses his power to foment tyranny and religious hypocrisy. This manifests as a beast with seven heads and ten horns. Its power seems unshakable, for as it is said:

“Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?”

In our day, we witness the horrors of industrial warfare, and income disparity that traps billions in poverty.

The methods of the beast’s downfall are outlined in Revelation 14. Christ rallies the 144,000, teaching them a “new song.” Three angels prophesy regarding the events of chapters 16-19: the eternal gospel (the return of Christ in Rev. 19), the overthrow of lust (the rider of the beast known as “MYSTERY”), and the wrath of God (the golden bowls of Revelation 16). Lastly, a promise is made to the faithful: in this terrible era, those that “die in the Lord” will rest until the end of the age.

[S25] Revelation 14 closes with an image that some find terrifying. An angel announces that it is time to harvest the earth. The reaper, obviously Christ, swings his sickle and the grapes are thrown into a winepress. Blood flows forth to the “height of the horses’ bridles.” Recall, though, that it is said that the 144,000 washed their robes in the blood of the lamb. The winepress is Jesus’ heart, and the bridles are on the horses that sin rode when liberated by the breaking of the seals. Jesus’ love perfects our hearts, purging us of sin.

[S26] Reading the description of the golden bowls of Chapter 16, the wise can recognize the events of today. Soil depletion, poisoning of the oceans and groundwaters, energy shortages, drought, global warming, and war in the Middle East. With the seventh bowl, fortunately, we hear Jesus’ words from the cross:

“It is finished.”

From the cross, His will reaches forward into the future, and with those words we know that it succeeds in transforming human nature.

[S27] With Revelation 17, the action shifts to the feminine realm. The rider of the beast is revealed as the architect of a culture of sexual immorality that motivates men to seize wealth. Her overthrow is described in Revelation 18. While the means are not detailed, we can imagine that it is related to the economic collapse that will follow the golden bowls. In the end, pleasures are listed as “never being found in [Babylon] again.” This means that in the New Creation, pleasures are not offered for sexual reward, but in celebration of our capacity to love.

[S28] Properly understood, to love is to bear witness to virtue so that it may be strengthened by the Most High. Having completed the work of gathering the virtuous into her heart, in Revelation 19 the Sacred Mother, described as the Bride, welcomes Christ back to earth. He brings with him heavenly allies to banish sin.

We might understand now why Revelation is so hard to interpret. Suffering in this age, with the marvels of modern technology turned toward oppression of what is good, many of us would read Revelation 12 and ask, “Why have we been abandoned to fight the devil that heaven could not destroy?” I can respond to that question, but the answers amount to “because that’s the way it is.” There is no satisfaction in understanding, except that now is the moment to seize the gifts offered by heaven through the intercession of the Sacred Bride. In our day, we are very close to the end of the story.

(Discussion)

### [Revelation 20-22: The New Creation](#)

[S29] [S30] Revelation closes with the assembly of the New Jerusalem from the elements promised to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3. The twelve masculine elders, seen as “pearly gates,” form protective walls (the “white stones”) around the Tree of Life. The tree of life bears the twelve feminine elders, each providing sustenance to the city’s inhabitants according to the needs of the moment. From the throne flows the waters of life to nourish the tree. The inhabitants of the city walk freely in the presence of the Most High. The kings of the earth lay down their

great deeds in honor of love (“rule of nations”), and the Spirit and Bride invite all who honor life to come and partake freely of the waters of life.

Thank you for staying with me to the end of this story. You have been introduced to many ideas tonight. If you would like to consider them at length, add your name to the e-mail list and I will send you a transcript of my remarks. I will be happy to answer any questions and am available to lead a study group for any that want to tie this understanding to scripture in detail. I can be contacted via the church office or at [brian@love-returns.org](mailto:brian@love-returns.org).

Before concluding, I will offer one point of counsel. We should all ask, in this understanding, what role we can play in furthering this magnificent manifestation. The seven seals show what we must resist: domination, conflict, opportunism, death, vengeance, wrath, and destruction. Sadly, in this day these infect our public discourse. So how to subdue them? I hold to my earlier testimony: Love is the answer. Add love to the sins, and they become virtues: stewardship, harmony, innovation, peace, justice, passion, and creativity. When encountering someone trapped in sin, ask them, “Besides yourself, who do you hope to serve with your zeal?” Then join yourself with them in broadening that service, and see their hearts transformed.

To close, then, if I may pray:

Dearest father, thank you for this opportunity to consider these mysteries. The power, grace, and mercy that have been revealed to my understanding have brought comfort and strength to me in these difficult days. I pray that what I have offered tonight will be of similar benefit to others. As all good flows from you, continue to inspire your children to participate without doubt or fear in your great work of redemption. AMEN.