

## ***“Book of Revelation: An Introduction”***

### **Special Presentation**

Various Scriptures

Pastor Craig Gyergyo

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**Sig Tragard:** Oh, do you know what we normally do? We normally have Don play the piano. The piano's not working. So if you want me to sing I have a couple solos.

*(Laughter)* It's all yours.

**Craig:** All right. So just for a moment I want us to have a moment of silence here.

**Transcriber's Note:** Birds are singing.

**Craig:** Do you hear that?

**Brave Men:** Yes; birds.

**Craig:** Okay. So I don't know if you've noticed this, but there are a couple of holes burrowed in the siding outside. The birds have made their nests here. And I've been in this room now for about four hours for the past couple of days. They've never stopped.

*(Laughter)* It's amazing; they never stop! So I think there are some baby birds on the other side of that wall. So we have other guests this morning, which is great.

It's good to be with you. I was thinking. I haven't often been with Brave Men. I know great things about this group. I really appreciate Jeff's teaching.

The first time I came was at the invitation of Frank Melnick. I was thinking about that this morning. I can picture coming into this room. And Frank was looking for me, waiting for me to get here, and greeted me. What a great guy he was!

**Brave Man:** Amen.

**Craig:** Frank is a great testament of a life lived in faith. I think he has four wells dedicated to his memory in Uganda. There's a bench out here. So many people want to honor Frank. And I think that speaks to the way he loved people, the way he loved Christ. I'm grateful for Frank. I think it would be appropriate for us on that note to pray for Shirley this morning. You know, Shirley continues to muddle through this time. She's mourning. So I'd like to pray for Shirley before we begin as well.

I'm grateful to be with you this morning. I'm grateful that this group meets here. It's interesting. We talk about ministries of the church, and this is a ministry of the church. And though it's been led by teachers who aren't specifically on our church staff, we consider it a ministry of our church. You're here with us, and we're grateful that the group meets here. And many of our people, as I see, are part of the group. So we're really grateful that you're here, and I'm grateful to share with you this morning. So let's pray.

Lord, as we hear these birds chirping over our shoulders here, we're reminded that all creation sings your praise. Even the birds of the air proclaim Your goodness and Your greatness. And so now we join with them this morning. We give praise to You early in the morning. We thank You for Your faithfulness. We thank You for Your love exemplified in Christ. We thank You for the hope that we have that is eternal.

And Lord, as we come into this place, I'm reminded of our friend Frank Melnyk. We miss Frank. We know he's with You. And we look forward to the time when we'll be rejoined with him and other saints, faithful members of Your church. We pray for Shirley,

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Lord, in these days that she learns to live without Frank, which is something she never wanted to do. We pray that You'd strengthen her and encourage her. We pray, Lord, that You would give Shirley Your hope—the hope of eternity with You, and even to be reunited with Frank.

Thank You, Lord, for this group and their dedication to knowing You through Your word. We do pray for Jeff; we're thankful for him, Lord, and for his ministry, for the great gifts You've given him and insight into Your word. I pray, Lord, that You use him this morning, today as he is at the conference, that You would fill him with Your love, and refresh him as he goes through this experience.

God, this time we turn to Your word. We pray, Lord, that You would teach us this morning. I pray, Lord, that these things that I share would not be of me. But my hope is, rather, that they would be of You. So I pray that if there is anything that is not consistent with Your truth that it would evaporate and be burned off, and what only would remain would be Your truth in Your word. O God, at this moment we come before You panting, praising You, presenting our supplications. O Lord, would You meet us here? We pray all this in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen.

**Craig:** So as I watch the news during the past few months I see confusion. I see a lack of leadership. I see an unclear future. I mean quite honestly, as I look at the last few months, even the last few weeks, I see embarrassment. I'm talking about the Pittsburgh Pirates, of course. *(Laughter)* It's true; I see your shirt there. How does a guy miss first base when he's trotting a home run? I understand that was the first time that happened in thirty years.

You know, your mind might have been in other places when I was saying this because we also feel that tension beyond sports. You know, these times that we live in are clouded with a sense of confusion and a curiosity about the future and what it holds. I think there's a sense for many of us who have children or grandchildren—maybe some of you have great-grandchildren—that we wonder what kind of world they're going to inherit. What's happening, even in the church?

I was reading this morning as I was preparing to come here that the Southern Baptist Convention yesterday appointed a new president, and it's one who is labeled to be a moderate liberal. That's quite a departure for the Southern Baptist Convention. And so there are questions and there are things that are swirling in the world.

And any time there are things that seem uncertain and we wonder what's happening in the world, of course our curiosity is piqued. Does this mean that the Lord's return is soon? We know it's soon in a certain sense. But we wonder, what does this mean? What is this all leading up to? And so of course this takes us to the book of Revelation.

By the way I hope that the Lord does return soon. Don't you? I mean, there's a certain sense of praying, “Lord, come quickly! Lord Jesus, come quickly!” At the same time I pray that He would tarry so that we can win others to Christ, so that we can share the gospel, that He would give us more time. And so there's this duality to the whole thing.

The book of Revelation usually comes to mind whenever people have questions about where the world is headed. And the truth of the matter is that a lot of us avoid the book of

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Revelation. How many people in a certain sense have avoided the book of Revelation? Bishop Rodgers is honest; he has avoided it. (*Laughter*) Thank you, Bishop Rodgers.

And I think that the book of Revelation ends up lots of times presenting more questions than it does answers. That’s one of the challenges of the book. And quite honestly there’s a lot of misinformation about the book of Revelation. And so I thought that with the state of the world in mind, and the fact that you’re between books—you’ve just finished Ephesians; is that right?

**Bishop Rodgers:** Right.

**Craig:** It’s one of my favorite books to study. And you’re about to go into Romans, as Sig has mentioned. I thought it might be an interesting opportunity to do something. And I’ve been wanting to share this here at Christ Church. At some point we’re going to put this together, either as a teaching series on Wednesday nights or even a Sunday morning sermon series, and talk a little bit about the book of Revelation. We won’t try to take on the whole thing.

I’ll tell you this. The book of Revelation actually has more known background information than any of Paul’s letters by far. It’s interesting. There is actually a lot known about the book. And we’re going to get into a little bit here this morning.

So look, this is a little different. If you know me—and I know a lot of you do—I typically love to go into the Scriptures and teach the Scriptures directly. This is a little bit different. What I want to give you today is a lens that might help you in your own personal study to understand the book of Revelation. It might help you in terms of when you’re presented with a book that someone hands to you and he says, “You should read this. It’s got insight about what’s happening in the world and where things are going.” This might give you a lens and a sense of footing as you approach the book of Revelation and its teachings.

So of course when we’re talking about the book of Revelation we’re talking about this. We’re talking about *eschatology*. Eschatology is the theology that is specifically looking at the end of all things. So this is a book that is eschatological in nature.

Some of you are familiar enough with things of theology. So are we going to be talking today about a view of the millennium that is amillennial or pre-millennial or post-millennial? How many people are familiar with those terms? Many of you are. By the way, those terms refer to Revelation 20, I believe, when it talks about the millennium—the thousand-year reign. And people wonder. Will the return of Jesus happen before that? Will it happen after that? Some people believe there won’t be a millennial reign at all. That refers to that.

So we’re not talking about that. So if you’re someone who says, “I’m a pre-millennialist,” that’s fine. This should be compatible with that view. If you say, “Well, I’m a post-millennialist,” this should be compatible with that view. There isn’t a problem there. We’re talking about a lens to begin to approach the entire book of Revelation.

It’s interesting. During the election season my now 16-year-old daughter—she was fifteen at the time—came and had lots of questions. I don’t know if she had a conversation with a friend or if it was something in youth group or just something that she had been thinking about in light of the election. But she came and she was filled with

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worry and anxiety about where the world was headed. And someone must have pointed her to the book of Revelation where something meant something.

And it gave me the opportunity to share with her some background about the book of Revelation that I am going to share with you. And it was interesting how it gave her such peace and gave her such calm. So let’s look at this, okay?

Let’s talk about the history of the book of Revelation. We won’t spend a lot of time here. But let me give you a sense of where it’s coming from.

First of all, there was immediate controversy. I hope you have your Bibles because we’re going to need them. There was immediate controversy with the book of Revelation.

If you would look at the end of the book, go to chapter 22—Revelation 22. And let’s look at verses 18 and 19. Would someone read those aloud? Revelation 22:18 and 19. Who’s got it?

**Don Maurer:** I have it. *“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to these things God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book. And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the book of life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”*

**Craig:** Amen; thank you. So there was immediate controversy. You see it reflected there in what the author here is alluding to. Controversy has already sprung up even before the letter is finished. There are questions about what it says. And some people want to take away and some people want to add to it. So there has always been controversy around the book of Revelation.

Let’s talk about its acceptance into the New Testament canon of Scripture—the books that comprise the New Testament. In the second century, going to the earliest days or some of the earliest days of the church, the book of Revelation was widely accepted. It was a book that people affirmed as part of the canon of Scripture at the time.

From the third to the fifth century though there was a change in that. There was controversy. There were questions about the book of Revelation and its place in the New Testament canon.

You know, if you wanted to do a little side study you could look and find that there are certain books of the Bible that are widely accepted as a part of the canon. There are others that are questioned. There are some that are rejected. And Revelation is the only book in the New Testament that falls into all three categories. It is accepted, it’s questioned, and by some it’s rejected.

I’ll give you an example. Go to the Reformation period. If you go to the Reformation period you’ll find there that figures as prominent as Martin Luther certainly questioned the canonical nature of the book of Revelation. He said, and I quote here, that *“It was neither apostolic nor prophetic.”* He rejected the book of Revelation. John Calvin, I believe, wrote commentaries on every book of the Bible except for Revelation. And so there were some heavy hitters who questioned the authority of the book of Revelation.

And today will people misinterpret? How many people remember the *Left Behind* series?

**Don Maurer:** Oh yeah.

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**Craig:** It’s entertaining, right? And there is lots of other literature and books that have come up. And I think often that one of the reasons that Revelation is so divisive is that people are able to take it and use it to say what they want it to say. There’s a lot of symbolism there. And so because it’s not clear in an obvious sense, people can take it and use it to tell whatever message they want to share. And so we’re going to look at the details today.

You know, it’s interesting. When I heard this it was new. But the fact of the matter is that what I’m going to share with you today is not new at all. In fact, if you were to look at some study Bibles in the introductions to the Book of Revelation you are going to find some of what I say here today. If you went to the scholarly Biblical community you will find that what I am going to share is widely accepted.

Let’s talk about the authorship. Who wrote the book of Revelation? Does anyone know who wrote the book of Revelation?

**Brave Man:** John.

**Craig:** John. Very good.

**Sig:** Which John?

**Craig:** Exactly. Sig said, “Which John?” What do you mean by that, Sig?

**Sig:** Well, there are a lot of Johns mentioned in the Bible. It’s my understanding that it would have been the disciple, the apostle John, as he was drunk on the isle of Patmos after a wild party. *(Laughter)*

**Craig:** Sig asks a great question. The question is, which John is the author of the book of Revelation? Of course there is the apostle John. There’s the one who is known as the seer John. There is the prophet John.

Now this particular John, even if you read the first few verses of Revelation, identifies himself as a prophet. He never identifies himself in this book as an apostle. And so the question is, which John? There were a lot of Johns in those days. Which John was it? And the truth of the matter is that we’re not sure. You know, it’s 50/50. Was it the apostle John? Perhaps. Was John of Patmos another John, a prophet? Perhaps. We’re not entirely certain. You can make your own distinctions, but it doesn’t necessarily affect what we know of the book of Revelation. That’s just an important tidbit.

Let’s briefly talk about the date of writing. There are a couple different interpretations about the date of writing. I will share with you a quote from Irenaeus who said this. *“John’s apocalyptic vision was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian’s reign.”*

So that was spoken by him. And that helps us to have an idea of the date. Some people believe it’s around 60 A.D. Others believe it’s around 95 to 96 A.D. That’s probably more commonly held—95 to 96 A.D. But that gives you a sense of when it was written, which is important in terms of the context of history.

Now what I want to spend some time talking about here are the literary styles. This is where I think that we really get into this idea of the lens of understanding the book of Revelation, okay? First of all I want to say that there are a couple of literary styles that we see reflected in the book of Revelation.

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And by the way, this is an important concept to understand, because when you're reading you read the newspaper differently than you would read poetry. You approach it differently. You understand that a person who is writing an article in the newspaper is writing it with a certain position. Unfortunately, today it seems like it's one that is completely and utterly biased. But we know there's a certain sense in the way this was written.

And that's probably a good example. We know that there is so much bias in the news. And so therefore, depending on what the source is, we have to take that into account, right? It affects how you read the news. And you recognize that, okay. I can't take everything here at face value, because some of this is being formed by a person's particular world view. We understand that.

When we read poetry we don't read it like the news at all. We read it, understanding that there is something being expressed in artistic fashion. Okay, so it's understanding that there is a literary style. There are genres represented in the Bible. That's very important. There are books of history in the Scriptures. There are books of poetry in the Scriptures. There are books of prophecy in the Scriptures.

Let's take a look at this. First of all, you can look at Revelation as a letter, okay? Revelation is a letter. And by the way, the conventions of the genre help us to understand the message. That's really important to consider. The conventions of the genre help us to understand the message.

So if Revelation is a letter, you know, we can see an opening. Again, if you look just at the first few verses you can see an opening, much like one of Paul's letters. You see this. It says, *“The revelation from Jesus Christ”*, beginning in chapter 1, *“which God gave Him to show His servants what must soon take place, by sending an angel to His servant John who testifies to everything he saw,”* right? He goes on and he makes an introduction, even then in verse 4. *“John: To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace.”*

This is familiar. We see this kind of thing in Paul's letters. We can see a letter structure emerge here in a certain sense.

What's the important thing about letters? This is a very important point. *Letters are occasioned.* In other words they are written for a particular occasion, okay?

A good example of this would be in the book of 2 Corinthians. If you go to the book of 2 Corinthians in chapter 8, Paul is writing to the Corinthian believers. And he's writing about a collection, an offering that has been taken up on behalf of the poor Jews in Jerusalem. And so he's writing specifically to a group of people, an audience, about this particular subject.

This is interesting, because there's a premise that maybe some of you have heard me share before. It's important to keep in mind as you read the book of Revelation, keeping in mind that letters are occasional. And the principle is this. *All Scripture is written for us, but not all Scripture is written to us.*

Okay. So consider that, for instance, in light of 2 Corinthians 8. That message from Paul was about that offering that was happening at that time. That was written

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specifically to the church at Corinth; it was to them, to tell them that “you better live up to your commitment to give.”

The people in Macedonia are giving and they’re poor; they’re dirt poor. But they have been super generous. But what about you, church of Corinth? And so he’s writing to a specific audience.

But it’s also written for us. Though it was written 2000 years ago or so, and it has a particular meaning and message to a particular people, it has meaning to us. In fact I’ve preached out of this text a couple different times. It has a message to us. Does that make sense?

So all Scripture is written for us, but not all Scripture is written to us. This particular letter was written to the Corinthian Christians, that passage I’m pointing to. In the same way, when we look at the book of Revelation we have to understand that it’s a letter that’s occasioned. And it is written to a specific audience. But that does not at all diminish the fact that it’s written for us. All Scripture is written for us, not always to us, in that sense, okay? It has a specific audience and a particular people that it was written to.

Let’s go ahead and keep talking about the different literary styles. So you can see that this is a letter. You can see the book of Revelation as a prophecy. If you go to Revelation 2:18, I just picked one verse. Would somebody read Revelation 2:18? Would someone read that?

**Sig:** *“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.’”*

**Craig:** Yes. And what translation are you reading from there?

**Sig:** ESV.

**Craig:** ESV? There are some translations that say this: *“Thus says the LORD,”* or *“These are the words of the Son of God.”* This is what the NIV says. There are translations that have this pronunciation that give us the sense that this is a prophecy.

And listen. Biblical prophecy is more about seeing behind the present than it is to seeing into the future. That’s also an important thing. When we think about prophecy we tend to think about predicting the future, forecasting what’s going to happen. Biblical prophecy is about seeing behind the past and present. In fact, we should suggest that preaching would be prophetic in a certain sense that helps us to see behind what’s happening at our present times that God’s word illumines for us.

And so when we consider the book of Revelation as a prophecy we have to also consider the fact that it is something that is looking and telling us about the present more than it is seeing into the future.

I wrote this down. *Prophecy is diagnosing the situation of the prophet’s readers.* That’s what a prophet is doing. The prophet is diagnosing the situation that his readers are in. He’s speaking to their situation.

And we see here—and this is also important as we consider the book of Revelation—that John, the author, is speaking to a particular people. Again, in terms of the letter, it’s a prophecy. And he is helping them to see behind their present situation. That’s important.

Does that mean that it doesn’t have meaning for us today? Not at all. It has meaning for us, absolutely. But we also need to understand that it was written for a particular

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audience. It’s a prophecy; it’s helping us see behind the present, just as much or perhaps more than it is seeing into the future.

Okay, now let’s go and talk about this. This is where we get really important. So you can see the book of Revelation as a letter. We see it as a prophecy. But this is a very important one. It’s a very specific genre of literature, and that is this. *Revelation is an apocalypse.*

Now this is not a genre that is popular. Let’s say you were going to the beach and picking up a library book for the week. You wouldn’t say, “You know, I think I’m going to pick up an apocalypse for this week.” (*Laughter*) It’s not a popular genre of literature. In fact, it’s kind of a dead genre of literature.

However, at the time of the writing, the apocalypse was a popular genre or type of literature. And we have to see or understand that genre of literature, because again I told you that the conventions of the genre help us to understand the message. There are things that we understand about the conventions of an apocalypse that will help us to understand the book of Revelation as we read it. So we’re going to spend the rest of our time talking about it.

Most of us aren’t familiar with an apocalypse. But it’s an important element for us to consider as a genre. Would someone look up Revelation 4:1? This is one of the bits of evidence that highlight this book as an apocalypse. Who has Revelation 4:1?

**Mike Davis:** “*After this I looked. And there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had heard that was speaking to me like a trumpet said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.’*”

**Craig:** Okay; there you go. There is some of the chief evidence of the apocalypse. There is one of the tip-offs that this is that kind of writing, right?

Now there is something that we have to understand about an apocalypse. And that’s the way it’s written—the structure. I’m going to read this to you. This is understanding that the genre of apocalypse is cyclical rather than linear. “*Apocalyptic literature rarely follows a linear scheme of development, in which events unfold in a logical progression.*”

So most of us are familiar with narratives from movies and books. And when you have that there’s an advancing linear narrative. There’s rising action, there’s a climax. There’s conflict, there’s falling action, there’s a resolution. We’re accustomed to that understanding when we read.

Well, the book of Revelation as an apocalypse is cyclical. And so what happens is that the pattern is cyclical, with events described more than once, but from a different perspective and with gradual intensity. I want to show you how this works in the book of Revelation. This is where we’re going to read a few different passages.

Okay. So I need someone to read Revelation 6:16. We’re talking about the fact that this is an apocalypse, and that the writing is cyclical. And so it revisits certain themes. It talks about certain events but from different perspectives, and with a gradually mounting intensity. Actually read 6:15-17. Who has that? Okay, Don.

**Don Rimbey:** “*Then they came to the earth—the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty. Every slave and every free man hid in caves and under the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks: ‘Fall on us, and hide us from the*



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*face of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.’ For the great day of Their wrath has come, and who can stand?”*

**Craig:** Okay. So this is talking about the final wrath. It’s talking about the wrath of God. Now we’re going to see this in at least four different passages, again described in different ways. Okay, so let’s look up another one. You’ve heard 6:16. Now look at 11:18. Who has 11:18? We’re flipping around here in the book of Revelation. Who has 11:18?

**Sig:** *“The nations raged, but Your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding Your servants, the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.”*

**Craig:** Okay. Thank you, Sig. So again the wrath of God, described from a different perspective. This is the cyclical nature.

You might wonder why this is going back and forth. Is the wrath possibly being poured out? No, we’re hearing the same event described from different perspectives with mounting intensity. Would someone read this passage: 14:19? Revelation 14:19.

**Don Maurer:** *“So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.”*

**Craig:** We tend to read all these things in a linear fashion, like we would read a book we would pick up off the shelf of a library, like a narrative. No, this is an apocalypse. And so there is a different structure; there’s a different way you have to read it. One more selection here: Revelation 19:15. Yeah. Go ahead, David.

**David:** *“From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations. And He will rule them with a rod of iron. And He treads the winepress of the fierce wrath of God Almighty.”*

**Craig:** So again the wrath of God is described this way. Do you see it? This is the cyclical nature of the apocalypse that we see. This is the genre of literature. And so it’s important for us to understand that the wrath of God is real! It shows up over and over again. It’s described in different ways and with different sorts of symbolism. We tend to want to read it and decode it and try to see it and figure out what’s happening and how does this apply to today? It’s referring to the wrath of God which is coming. And it’s described in different ways. It’s something for us to be aware of and ready for. It’s something to motivate us toward holiness and obedience to God. It’s something to motivate us to share the gospel. It isn’t something for us to use as a lens to consider the events of our times which are uncertain.

But I think that in the church we spend a whole lot of time on trying to decode and figure out what does this mean? Who is this person? Well, there’s the general understanding that the wrath of God will be poured out; there will be judgment. And our understanding is to be ready and prepared, and to give ourselves to Christ in light of that.

So there’s this structure of the apocalypse that’s really important. As you read it that will help you to understand. And then there’s another part that is very important. And that is the use of symbolic language. Let’s spend some time talking about this because this is the marker of an apocalypse—that kind of literature.

Again I’m going to read this to you. *“In understanding the visionary imagery of the apocalyptic, it’s important to recognize that the picture symbols of Revelation*

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*communicate fundamental spiritual truths, and that the pictures themselves are not meant to be taken as literal descriptions.*” That’s really important. Apocalypse uses imagery; it uses symbolism. We’re going to talk about some of them.

And remember this. *“A vision is not a photographic reality. John is not a recorder, cataloguing facts about the heavens, angels or demons. Just because something is seen in a vision does not make it a physical reality in time and space, outside the context of the vision.”*

So for instance, think about Joseph in the Old Testament in the book of Genesis. Pharaoh has a dream. And one of the dreams has seven big cows swallowing seven smaller cows—thin cows; skinny cows. Does that mean that somewhere floating in space that there were actually cows that were being swallowed? Of course not! It’s a vision; it’s imagery that represents something else.

We also see this in the Bible in the New Testament. Remember when Peter had the vision of the table cloth descending, and the foods that were on it? Was there actually somewhere in the cosmos a floating table cloth? No; it’s imagery. It’s sending a certain message.

In the same way we see that there is imagery here of a vision that needs to be translated from symbol to substance, from medium to message.

I’ll read you this; here’s a quote I came across. This is by Eugene Peterson. Some of you have heard of Peterson. You might have some negative thoughts about him because of this. He’s the guy that put together the paraphrase of “The Message” Bible. It’s not a translation but a paraphrase—the paraphrase of “The Message” Bible.

Here is what Peterson had to say about the book of Revelation and this symbolism we’re talking about. Talking about the book of Revelation he said, *“There is not a line here that is not rigorously theological. But because we have an unhealthy curiosity, a deficient comprehension, and because we are always attracted by the spectacular and the emotional, in the Apocalypse we generally become interested in what is only an envelope.”*

Okay. So in other words, we get a letter and we open up the envelope. There’s a letter inside that’s the important part. He’s suggesting that in our fascination with the symbolism of Revelation, it’s like we’ve thrown away the letter and been fascinated with and pay attention to the envelope. Okay?

This symbolism is merely an envelope. It holds the message. And so let’s talk about the symbolism a little bit because it is the medium. It’s not the focus; that’s just the envelope. There are a couple of conventional apocalyptic symbols that I want to share with you. There are four of them, okay? I think you’ll find this really interesting.

By the way, I’m excited for you to go in and dig into the book of Revelation, so I want you to hear these things. I think it’s going to help you understand. Look at my time; I only have ten minutes! I’ll go fast with this.

**Sig:** You can go beyond 7:30.

**Craig:** I’ll try to get through this. The first one is *colors*. There are a lot of colors that are represented in the book of Revelation.

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Colors mean something today, right? Have you ever been to the beach and felt those flags that tell you about the tides? Here’s a red flag and here’s a white flag and here’s a yellow flag and here’s a green flag. Those colors all mean something. Does it mean that the water is red? Does it mean that the water is green? No, it doesn’t mean that. They are symbols that point to a condition that’s happening.

Well, in the same way colors are symbolic. So it says, “*The use of symbolic colors in apocalyptic literature does not so much relate to color or hue as it does to quality or condition. So with Revelation 19:8.*” Would someone read Revelation 19:8 aloud for us?

**Don Rimbey:** “*White linen, bright and clean, was given to her. (The fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.)*”

**Craig:** Thanks, Don. In that case John actually puts it in parentheses, doesn’t he? He tells us what it stands for. I wish he did that all the time. In this case he tells us. “No, I’m not talking about literal white robes. They stand for something. This represents something. They’re righteous deeds.” It’s beyond John’s purpose to imply that Christians will literally wear white robes in heaven.

There are other examples of this. For instance, if you look at chapter 16 verse 15. Does someone have that—16:15?

**Don Maurer:** Behold, I am coming as a thief! Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.”

**Craig:** Okay. So again there is talk of nakedness. He’s talking about white garments. This is not all literal. Is that a literal nakedness? No, it’s talking about ethical living. It’s talking about people who are living and seeking to live according to the ways of God. That’s what it’s talking about: a righteous living in Christ. And so this is symbolic.

You can also go to the church in Sardis in chapter 3, verses 3 and 4. Let me go there quickly and read it for you. When I was a middle school kid this was one that stood out to me, and I thought it was hilarious. “*Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothing.*” (*Laughter*) As a kid I go, “Oh, is the Bible talking about pooping your pants?” (*Laughter*) Is it literally talking about that? No, it’s symbolism. So colors have meaning.

Let’s talk about *animals* in the book of Revelation. Let’s talk about these symbols. The use of animal imagery in apocalyptic literature is very common. And it’s usually representative of character qualities, either good or bad. So in Revelation the lamb versus the beast, for instance, is an intentional contrast between a figure of meekness and sacrifice and one of arrogant power and aggression. The Lamb and the beast—that makes sense.

There are other examples that you can see in the book of Revelation. It reminds me of the book *Animal Farm*. Do you remember *Animal Farm*? Did any of you read *Animal Farm* when you were in school? I did. And that is a book where political figures related to Russia are symbolized as animals. So in a similar way that is what the book of Revelation is doing with animals.

Now this is where I think it gets really interesting. There are *numbers*. There are lots of numbers in the book of Revelation, again in apocalyptic descriptions. Numbers rarely

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express a literal time frame or mathematical equivalent, but more often they designate a relative or general duration, or symbolize a quality or idea associated with the number.

For example, *seven*. Does anybody know what *seven* represents?

**Brave Man:** Completion.

**Craig:** Very good, Jim; completion. Seven represents completion or fullness. How about *four*? Does anyone know what *four* represents?

**Sig:** It's a grand slam. *(Laughter)*

**Craig:** We're going back to baseball. That's the number of the nature of creation, okay?—the four winds, the four directions. It's a number that speaks to the form or nature of creation. How about *12*? What does *12* represent?

**Sig:** The apostles?

**Craig:** It represents the people of God, or the leaders of the people of God. There are other examples too. For instance you see 3.5 years—3&1/2 years represented in the book of Revelation. And also there are 1260 days or 42 months. And it's describing a time of crisis. Apocalypses will do this. They describe a time of crisis. And in this case that 3&1/2-year period symbolizes a time of persecution that's coming to the people of God.

But it's set in contrast to the millennium, a time when there will be everlasting peace, and the lion and the lamb will lie down together. And so the idea is that contrasting 3.5 years is not necessarily a literal 3&1/2 years. It means a short time compared to a very long time. It's saying that if you can endure the persecution for a short time there is something far greater that outweighs that.

Of course, another number that is prominent in the book of Revelation,--and this is one of my favorite things to talk about,--is the number 666. Now this is one that we have a curiosity about, don't we? People are constantly trying to figure this out. Who is 666? Who is it?

There was a time, and some of you remember this. There was a time when people believed that Ronald Reagan was 666. Does anyone remember this?

**Brave Man:** No, I don't remember it.

**Craig:** Okay, think about it. Ronald Wilson Reagan. How many letters in each of those names? Six. There were people who were trying to pass off Reagan as 666. Of course, since then Barak Obama has been 666. Just in this past election cycle there were the Biden/Harris signs. And there was this whole thing where it said: “Text 2020 to 30330,” okay? And someone did some kind of math crunching with that. And what they came up with was 666! Biden and Harris are the antichrist, right? This is something where people are constantly trying to figure out who 666 is.

Here's what I would suggest to you today. We know who 666 was. We do. I bet bishop Rodgers knows this. Who is 666, Bishop Rodgers?

**Bishop Rodgers:** Satan.

**Craig:** Pardon me?

**Bishop:** Satan.

**Craig:** Satan? Yes, that's true. It ultimately has representation, right? But there's a historical figure.

**Don Maurer:** Nero.

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**Craig:** Nero, okay? And do you know how we derive that? Does anyone know how we derive Nero as 666?

**Gary Dunbar:** Because he ended up being associated with the letters of his name.

**Craig:** Very good. What’s your name?

**Gary:** Gary.

**Craig:** Gary? Very good. So in Hebrew and in Greek the characters stand for both numbers and letters—letters or numbers. And so with Nero, if you add up the name, it is 666.

**Don Maurer:** I’ve heard that it can also be translated as 616.

**Craig:** Yes, it can. I actually have it in my notes; I’m glad you brought that up. Let me see. 616, what is that? Some Greek manuscripts have 616 which represents the Latin form of Nero. That’s where that comes from. So it could be either translation.

Now Bishop Rodgers makes a great point. It doesn’t mean that it was only about Nero. It points to a greater spiritual picture. Ultimately yes, the antichrist is Satan; there is the evil power. But remember, this letter was written to a particular audience. This apocalypse was given to a particular people. And it’s speaking to their situation. It was written to them.

Nero was persecuting Christians. But it is written for us. So will we see evil men arise in the world who are doing demonic work, who are minions of darkness? Absolutely; that will arise. But if we look and we try to find out who 666 is, we know that it was a particular figure in history. But there have been other Neros who have unfortunately risen to power throughout history. Hitler was a 666.

**Don Bishop:** Stalin.

**Craig:** Stalin was a 666. There are others. And so can you imagine? To Christians in Germany this would have meaning.

And what’s the meaning? There will be dark times. There will be persecutions. There will be evil men who arise to power. But you, persevere. You, remain faithful. You trust God because He will ultimately be the Victor.

That’s the message of Revelation. The book of Revelation is a message that is to all people that says, look. There will be difficulties. It will get worse before it gets better. But it’s only a short time in comparison to God’s glorious reign in eternity.

There is an enemy. There is a coming judgment. There is coming wrath that is to be poured out. Ready yourself. Persevere; fight the good fight. Be true to the Lord. You see, that’s the message of Revelation. And I think that’s the takeaway of Revelation more than trying to decode who all these people are today. There is application for us. But there is a greater message. Do you hear what I’m saying?

Let’s go through one more symbolic part. And that is *some traditional apocalyptic or prophetic symbols*. Let me read this to you. “*Because Revelation stands chronologically towards the end of the period of apocalyptic literature which began centuries earlier, John adopts many symbols which have become in the genre conventional for expressing certain ideas. Also because John sees himself as a prophet in the tradition of Old Testament prophecy, he re-uses traditional prophetic symbols, metaphors and poetic hyperbole to express and illustrate his own visions. Some of these conventional symbols*

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*are: a woman representing a people or a city, crowns symbolizing dominion or kingship, trumpets denoting voices.”*

Here are a couple of other examples. “*Horns.*” We see beasts with horns. Does anyone know what horns symbolize in the book of Revelation?

**Brave Man:** Strength.

**Craig:** Strength; power. That’s right; very good. Strength or power. How about stars? What do stars represent? Angels. Okay, what about eyes? You see the creatures with the multiple eyes. What do the eyes represent? It’s knowledge.

So it’s all representation. The sword and keys, they represent authority. And so we see these visions. There’s this part where there’s a vision of Jesus with seven horns. What would that represent—Jesus with seven horns?

**Sig:** Complete power.

**Craig:** You got it, Sig; I think you’re catching on. Okay, so it speaks to the complete power of Jesus Christ. So you see that this opens up the book of Revelation. And all of a sudden I start to read it a little bit differently. And I’m not so much obsessed with trying to figure out who’s who, and what this means today. No, it has meaning for us, and it’s meant to encourage us if we remain faithful.

I’ll close with this. I’m going to close with three verses that I think are important. These are what I would say are some of the key verses of the book of Revelation. Would someone read Revelation 1:8?

**Sig:** *“I am the Alpha and the Omega, ’says the LORD God, ‘who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.’”*

**Craig:** Do you hear that? That’s the message of the book of Revelation. If you have to sum it up, there it is. Jesus says, “I am the Beginning and the End. Everything has its beginning in Me. Everything will have its ending in Me; it concludes in Me. I am the hope of the world.” That’s what Jesus says. Or how about Revelation 3:20? Who will read that?

**Don Maurer:** *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and dine with him, and he with Me.”*

**Craig:** There we see symbolism again. It’s not a cosmic door that Jesus is knocking on, but do you know what? No, it’s symbolic; He knocks on the door, and He asks to come in. I love that, and I love that picture. And there’s this invitation that Revelation leads us to. The invitation is to know the Lord, to have this hope and to go on. We can persevere, even in the days of evil men. It’s right there for us. And finally Revelation 21:1-4. Who will read that?

**Don Bishop:** *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away; the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from the sky, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with men, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, for the former things have passed away.’”*

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**Craig:** Amen. So there is your quick jaunt through the book of Revelation. I hope that provides a lens for us whereby we can understand the book of Revelation; there is so much to understand. And it’s meant to be a book that actually gives us comfort and shows us the ultimate end of all things: that God wins and that He is victorious. And so therefore, even in the midst of great trial and tribulation and dark days and evil men, we can persevere. We should strive to be faithful and to be holy, because at the end of the day He wins. He is our hope. He is the Alpha and the Omega. He stands at the door and He knocks. And there will be no more death, or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things will pass away. Amen?

**Brave Men:** Amen.

**Craig:** I’ll have a little bit more to share. We’ll do a series again at some point at Christ Church on the book of Revelation. I hope it will be helpful to people and inspire us to faithfulness.

Let’s pray. Lord, thank You so much for this time with this group of men. We thank You for this incredible letter, this prophecy. It’s marvelous that it is given to us by Your servant John. And Lord, it’s a great book to inspire us to faithfulness. I can only imagine what it has meant to other audiences throughout history—audiences that found themselves in peril, perhaps believers in Russia. Someone mentioned Stalin. Those under his reign, or under the reign of other evildoers, who were faithful to you and could read this and say, “I have hope that Jesus is the Beginning of all things and the End of all things; He is the final Word. I have hope at the end of all this that the Lord will be victorious, and we’ll live with Him forever and ever and ever. So I endure this present hardship.” I pray, Lord, that this would be in our hearts, because we don’t know what’s ahead of us. We don’t know what’s ahead for our children or our grandchildren. I pray, Lord, that we would prepare to face a day of tribulation, and do it with great hope because we know in the end that You’re the King over all the universe. You are the great Ruler, the righteous King. And so we worship You, Lord.

We thank You for this time together this morning. We thank You, Lord, for Your word. We thank You for the fellowship we have among believers. And we do all this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen.

**Craig:** Good being with you, gentlemen. (*Applause*)