

Symbols in the Book of Revelation

Revelation is written in the apocalyptic genre of literature, containing many signs and symbols. The word translated “made known” or “communicated” in Rev 1:1 is literally “signified,” to communicate that Revelation is written in the language of signs and symbols. We should be careful not to interpret a symbol in a widely different way to the way other scriptures use it. John is building upon known historic Old Testament symbols and types. We should always look for the main sense of the symbol, not every part has to be significant.

| Symbol | Meaning |
|---|---|
| Adultery (Rev 2:20) | Spiritual unfaithfulness to God / idolatry |
| Alpha and Omega (Rev 1:8, 22:13) | Christ is the beginning and end |
| Babylon the Great (Rev 14:8, 17:5) | A place of worldliness and ungodliness |
| Balances / Scales (Rev 6:5) | Careful measurement |
| Balaam (Rev 2:14) | False prophecy, false teaching |
| Beast (Rev 13:1ff) | An ungodly political empire |
| Book of Life (Rev 3:5, 20:15) | The record of those who are saved. |
| Bowls (Rev 16:1) | Judgments of God / Wrath of God poured out |
| Bronze (Rev 1:14-15) | Purity of judgment |
| Clouds (Rev 1:7) | Coming in judgment (Dan 7, Ps 18:7-15)) |
| Crown (Rev 4:4, 6:2) | Victory, Reward or Sovereign authority |
| Eagle (Rev 12:14) | Swiftiness |
| Earthquakes (Rev 6:12, 11:19) | Earth shattering events |
| Eyes, Blazing eyes (Rev 1:14, 19:12) | God’s ability to see all |
| Dragon (Rev 12:3-9) | Satan in wide ranging power (Jer 51:34) |
| Golden altar (Rev 8:3) | Intercessory prayer |
| Face like the sun (Rev 1:16) | Glorified Christ, Jesus as warrior (Dan 10:6) |
| Hidden Manna (Rev 2:17) | A symbol of Christ (Jn 6:32) |
| Horn (Rev 13:1, 17:12) | Power, kings, rulers |
| Jezebel (Rev 2:20) | Sexual Immorality and Idolatry |
| Keys (1:18) | Authority to access, open |
| Lamb (Rev 5:6, 7:17) | Christ in his sacrificial death (Jn 1:29) |
| Lampstands (Rev 1:12-13, 1:20) | Churches |
| Lion (Rev 4:7) | Christ’s majesty, kingly power |
| Locusts (Rev 9:3) | Demonic forces, Destruction |
| Morning Star (Rev 22:16) | Christ, approaching day |
| Prostitute (Rev 17:1-5) | Personification of the unfaithfulness of God’s people |
| Rainbow (Rev 4:3, 10:1) | God’s covenant faithfulness (from Noah’s rainbow, Gen 9:13) |
| Robe (Rev 1:13) | Priestly or kingly attire, the longer your robe, the higher your rank |
| Scorpion (Rev 9:3, 10) | Torment, torture |
| Sea (Rev 13:1, 21:1) | Symbol of chaos, nations |

| | |
|--|--|
| Sickle (Rev 14:14-19) | Separation at harvest, either salvation or judgment |
| Sodom (Rev 11:8) | Place of wickedness |
| Stars (Rev 1:16, 12:4) | Angels, messengers of God (Job 38:7) |
| Stars falling (Rev 6:13) | Cosmic deconstruction language, devastation, sign of divine judgment |
| Sun darkened (Rev 6:12, 8:12) | Sign of divine judgment |
| Sword (Rev 1:16, 19:15) | Symbol of the piercing word of God |
| Times, time and half a time (Rev 12:14) | 3 ½ years, period of God's people suffering which ends in victory |
| Trumpets (Rev 8:6-13) | Warnings of judgment or battle |
| Two witnesses (Rev 11:3) | Faithful witnesses of God |
| Water (Rev 17:1, 22:1) | Cleansing (1:15), or suffering (12:15) |
| Walls (Rev 21:12) | Safety and security |
| White hair (Rev 1:14) | Sign of wisdom, purity |
| White horse (Rev 19:11) | Royal power, victory, conquest |
| White robes (Rev 7:9, 19:14) | Righteous acts of the saints, purity |
| White stone (Rev 2:17) | A new identity, vindication, divine favor |
| Wilderness (Rev 12:6, 14) | Place of testing, trial |
| Winepress (Rev 19:15) | Judgment and wrath of God (Isa 63:1-5) |

| Symbolic Color | Meaning |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Black (Rev 6:5) | Famine |
| Pale Green (Rev 6:8) | Plague, disease, sickness and death |
| Red (Rev 6:4) | Death (blood) |
| White (Rev 1:14, 6:2, 19:11) | Purity |

| Symbolic Number | Meaning |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1/3 (Rev 8:7-12) | A significant minority, a remnant |
| 7 (Rev 1:4, 5:1) | Completeness (Gen 1) |
| 12 (Rev 12:1, 21:12) | The people of God (the 12 tribes of Israel) |
| 666 (Rev 13:18) | The number of the beast, signifying allegiance, a symbol of humanity seeking to be God, gematria for numerical equivalent of Nero Caesar |
| 1,000 (Rev 20:2-7) | Many |
| 144,000 (Rev 7:4, 14:1) | A large number of the people of God (12x12x1,000) |

Revelation is filled with rich and layered symbolism, often borrowing from Old Testament imagery. Each of these symbols serves to communicate deeper spiritual truths about God's plan for the end times, judgment, and redemption.