

2. SYMBOLISM IN REVELATION

The book of Revelation consists of a series of visions communicated to the apostle John by an angel. The visions are like little video clips that illustrate end-of-world events. The events are real future events that should be interpreted literally. Many words and phrases used in these visions have a symbolic meaning, and those words should not be interpreted literally. The symbolic meaning of the words is often found in the OT. In the following list of symbols, relevant references from the OT and Revelation are given in parentheses.

word or phrase	symbolic meaning
12 (Gen 49:28)	number for God's people (Rev 21:12)
144,000 (12 x 12 x 1000)	number for total Church (7:4, 14:1)
24 elders around God's throne	Church representatives (4:4) (Israel 12 + Church 12)
666	Antichrist's number (13:18) counterfeit trinity (16:13)
7 spirits/lamps (Ex 25:37)	Holy Spirit (1:4, 4:5)
7 (Gn 4:15, 7:2)	completeness
Abyss	home of evil spirits (9:1, 20:1)
altar (Gn 8:20)	prayer of martyrs who sacrificed their lives (6:9, 8:3, 9:1316:7)
ancient serpent (Gn 3:1)	Satan (12:9, 20:2)
Armageddon (2 Ki 23:29)	great battlefield in Israel (16:16)
Babylon (Dn 4:30)	capital of world empire (14:8, 16:19, 17:5, 18:2, 10, 21)
Balaam's teaching (Nb 31:16)	making money through preaching (2:14)
beast (Dn 7:3)	world empire or its leader (13:2) Antichrist (13:8)

False Prophet (13:11)

blood flowing to a horse's bridle	enormous bloodshed (14:20)
book of life (Ex 32:32)	register of redeemed (3:5, 20:12)
bride (Hos 2:19)	Church (19:7, New Jerusalem (3:12, 21:2, 9)
chain	restrainer (20:1)
crown kingship	(3:11, 4:4, 6:2, 13:2, 14:14, 19:12)
crown of life	reward of eternal life (2:10, 3:11)
desert, wilderness (Hos 2:14)	place of refuge (12:6, 14)
double-edged/sharp sword (Isa 49:2)	authority of God's word (1:16, 2:16, 19:15)
eagle (Ezek 1:10)	representative of birds (4:7)
eagle flying overhead	universal proclamation (8:13, 14:6)
eagle's wings (Ex 19:4)	divine providence (12:14)
Egypt (Ex 7:13)	stubborn inhabitants of Jerusalem (11:8)
fiery mountain falls into the sea	nuclear bomb? (8:8)
fire (Isa 66:16, Mt 5:22)	hell (14:18, 20:14) anger (19:12)
foundations (Eph 2:20)	teaching of the apostles (21:14)
Gog and Magog (Ezek 38:2)	eschatological enemies from the north (20:8)
gold	genuine riches/value (3:18, 21:18)
great blazing star	ballistic missile? (8:10)
Hades (Gn 37:35)	home of spirits of the dead, Hebrew: Sheol (1:18, 20:13)
hail and fire mixed with blood	modern warfare (8:7)

harp	worship instrument (5:8, 14:2, 15:2)
head	king (13:2, 17:3)
horn (Dan 7:24)	leader and his authority (12:3, 13:2, 11, 17:12)
incense (Ps 141:2)	prayer (5:8, 8:3-4)
iron scepter (Ps 2:9)	toughness/strictness (2:27, 12:5, 19:15,
Jezebel (1 Kings 16:31)	false prophetess (2:20)
key of David (Isa 22:22)	access to Messiah's kingdom (3:7)
keys of death and Hades	Jesus' power to redeem (1:18)
Lamb (Jn 1:29)	Christ as sacrificial victim (5:6, 12:11, 13:8) Messiah as victorious military leader (14:1, 17:14)
Lamb's wedding feast (Hos 2:19)	celebration of union with Christ (19:7)
lampstand (Zech 4:2, 11)	local church giving light (1:12, 20) two witnesses (11:4)
leaves of tree of life (Ezek 47:12)	healing for the nations (22:2)
lightning (Ex 19:16)	God's royal decrees (4:5, 8:5, 11:19, 16:18)
linen, bright and clean	righteous acts of the saints (15:6, 19:8, 14)
lion (Gen 49:9)	king of Judah (5:5)
lion (Ezek 1:10)	representative of wild animals (4:7)
lion's teeth (Joel 1:6)	fierceness (9:8, 17, 13:2)
living creatures (Ezek 1:6)	representatives of creation (4:6, 5:6, 7:11, 14:3)
living water of life (Zech 14:8)	life communicated by God's Spirit (7:17, 21:6, 22:1, 17)
locusts (Joel 1:4, 6))	great army (9:3, 7)
morning star (Num 24:17)	Messiah as harbinger of a new dawn (22:16)

New Jerusalem	glorified Church (3:12, 21:2)
1/3 of the stars	fallen angels? (12:4)
open door (Isa 22:22)	evangelistic access (3:8)
opening the seals	revelation of world's destiny (6:1)
ox (Ezek 1:10)	representing domestic animals (4:7)
pale horse (Zech 6:3)	harbinger of death (6:8)
palm branches (Lv 23:40)	celebration (7:9)
precious stones/jewels (Ex 28:15-21)	glory (18:12, 21:11, 19)
prostitute (Isa 23:17)	immoral commerce (17:1, 15)
	immoral attraction of city life (19:2)
rainbow (Gn 9:13)	covenant (4:3, 10:1)
red dragon (Isa 27:1)	Satan (12:3)
rider on black horse (Zech 6:2)	harbinger of hunger (6:5)
rider on red horse (Zech 6:3)	harbinger of war (6:4)
river of the water of life (Ps 46:4)	Holy Spirit (22:1)
river spewed by Satan	wave of persecution or distress
(Isa 43:2)	(12:15-16)
root of David (Isa 11:1, 10)	Messiah, descendant of
	David (5:5, 22:16)
scales	food scarcity (6:5)
scroll (little, open) (Ezek 3:1-3)	message in scroll 10:2, 8, 12-16
scroll (rolled up) (Ezek 2:9-10)	message in scroll 5:1, 6-18
sea (Dan 7:2-3)	rebellious nations (13:1, 20:13, 21:1)
sea becoming blood	'red tide' algae? (16:3-4)
sea of glass (Ex 24:10, Ezek 1:22)	calm of God's throne (4:6, 15:2)
second death	hell (2:11, 20:6, 14, 21:8)
sickle (Joel 3:13)	harvesting tool (14:14, 18)

Sodom (Gen 19)	immoral city (11:8)
star that fell from heaven (Isa 14:12)	Satan (9:1, 12:9)
stars in Jesus' hand (Gn 1:16)	luminaries, pastors (1:20)
sun and moon & 12 stars (Gen 37:9)	Jacob and family (12:1)
sword (Isa 3:25)	war (6:4, 13:10)
throne (Isa 6:1)	kingship (2:13, 3:21, 4:2, 6:16, 7:9, 13:2, 16:10, 20:4, 21:5, 22:5)
thunder (Ps 18:13)	God's voice (4:5, 8:5, 10:3, 11:19, 16:18)
tree of life (Gn 2:9)	source of eternal life (22:2, 14, 19)
trumpet (1 Sa 13:3)	news announcer (8:2, 10:7, 11:15)
white hair (Dan 7:9)	venerable (1:14)
white horse (Zech 6:3)	harbinger of conquest (6:2, 19:11)
white robe (Rev 3:4)	imputed righteousness (6:11, 7:9)
white throne	final judgment (20:11)
wine (Jer 51:7)	attraction of city life (17:2, 18:3)
winepress (Isa 63:2-3)	God's punishment (14:12, 19:15)
woman's hair	antennae (on tanks)? (9:8)
Zion (Ps 2:6, Isa 24:23)	seat of Messianic rule (14:1)