

Symbols in the Book of Revelation

Numbers

- One = the primary number; signifies absolute singleness.
- Two = the number of witness & support.
- Three = the number of unity, accomplishment (resurrection), & of the universe; also divine fullness.
- Four = an earth related number; the whole world; all of creation (e.g. four corners of the world); universality.
- Six = The number of man; one less than seven – therefore denotes imperfection.
- Seven = The number of God; invites mystical treatment; fullness, perfection, completeness. In Genesis it is the number of the completeness of creation.
- Ten = “Human” government.... completeness.
- Twelve = “Divine” government... completeness; suggests the twelve tribes of Israel as well as the twelve apostles & so associated with the People of God.
- 666 = Great imperfection (the number of the beast – Rev 13:18)
- Thousand = Magnitude, fullness; in number of years, reserved only for God; the “golden age” (Rev 20:4).
- One quarter, one third = incompleteness; partial in measure & intensity; temporary.
- Three & a half = as half of “seven” it denotes something precarious or disturbing; a relatively short period of time; a temporary situation.
- 10,000 = one myriad (the largest named number in the Greek language); indefinitely great number.
- 144,000 = The number of the elect; symbolises the fullness & the perfection of the People of God.
- 200,000,000 = (literally two myriads of myriads) – the largest conceivable gathering of people in John’s day.

Colours

- White = joy of victory, triumph, purity.
- Red = warfare, bloodshed, violence.
- Scarlet = royalty, bloodshed, wanton luxury, opulence.
- Purple = royalty.
- Black = famine, death.
- Pale green = plague, illness, the resultant death.
- Gold = royal splendour

Persons (individuals & groups)

- Angel = Messenger of God; one who carries out God's will.
- Bride of the Lamb = the People of God, the new Jerusalem
- Churches (the "seven churches") = Communities of believers in Asia Minor, symbols of the entire Church.
- Elders (the "twenty four elders") = Members of the heavenly court; they suggest the twelve tribes of Israel plus the twelve Apostles... & therefore, the entire People of God.
- Whore of Babylon = The "beast" – the Roman Empire.
- Woman = A people, or the city which represents a people.

Animals

- The Four Animals = God's greatness manifested in creation.
- Beast = "first beast": the Roman Empire or the Emperor
"second beast": represents local officials of the Empire
- Dragon = Satan.
- Horses = Devastating power; military invasion.
- Lamb = Jesus Christ.

Objects

- Coronets, crowns = Kingship, royal authority
- Diadems = Kingship, royal power, authority
- Eyes = Knowledge – "seven eyes" would therefore stand for infinite knowledge.
- Heads, horns = power, authority (sometimes they stand for the one who holds authority, such as an emperor or king).
- Jewels = Wealth, great beauty.
- Palms = Triumph, victory.
- Robes ("long robes") = Priesthood.
- Sea = destructive agent/force, evil element.
- Sword = The Word of God, the judgement of God; also devastation (cf 6:1-8)
- Thrones = Royal authority.
- Trumpets = The divine voice of command.
- Wings = Mobility; suggests both, the *swiftness* with which God's will is carried out, as well as the *omnipresence* of God.

Places

- Babylon = The wicked city; the people of the Evil One
- Egypt = A power or attitude representing rejection of & opposition to God's will & purpose (cf. The Book of Exodus); the people with such an attitude/lifestyle.
- Jerusalem (new Jerusalem) = the city of God; the People of God.
- Sodom = Symbolic of hostility to God & God's people (cf Gen 19:1-11; the way the inhabitants of Sodom tried to abuse Lot's angelic visitors). "Sodom" became a symbol of wickedness & is applied to Judah in the days of her apostasy (cf Deut 32:32; Is 1:9; Ezek 16:46, 49, 55; Jer 23:14)
- Armageddon = (Unknown in Hebrew literature!) The final struggle between the powers of evil & the Kingdom of God (cf Rev 16:16).