

Table of Symbols

This list is from “[The People’s New Testament Study Notes](#)”, by Barton W. Johnson.

It must always be kept in mind, however, that this book is a book of prophecy, intended to “shew the things which must shortly come to pass.” John was a Seer. He recorded what he saw. The future was portrayed to him in a series of visions. The pictures which passed before his eyes represented future events. Hence, each is a symbolical representation of what was then future, and may now be past history.

Thus, when the first seal is opened in Revelation 6:1-2 , and a warrior is seen with a bow in his hand riding on a white horse in conquest, this must be interpreted as a sense-image which appropriately represents an event or epoch of history which was future when John was an exile on Patmos.

Symbolical pictures follow each other in rapid succession as the seals are opened and the trumpets blown, a correct interpretation of which is to be sought not in literal fulfillment, but in events of which the sense-visions might be appropriate symbols. It will be a help in understanding the text to have an explanation of the meaning of the various symbols employed as they are ordinarily used in prophetic writings; hence I give a TABLE OF SYMBOLS.

In this table I aim to give only the leading Symbols used by John, with their apparent meaning. The definitions have been obtained from Mede, Elliott, Lange, Campbell, Archdeacon Lea, and other sources

Adultery – Idolatry or apostasy; especially the latter. As Christ is represented as a bridegroom and the church as a bride, apostasy, or unfaithfulness to him, would be spiritual adultery, and a false church properly represented as a harlot.

Angel – Any agent or messenger of the divine will. The term may be a symbol of any movement of nations, or in history which carries out the divine purposes.

Ascension to Heaven – Exaltation in power and glory. Prosperity.

Babylon – The city which carried Israel into captivity. Hence, a symbol of any power that renders them captive, whether it be Pagan or Papal Rome.

Balances – A symbol of justice, but when used to denote the weighing out of food, a symbol of scarcity.

Black – The color of mourning; hence a symbol of calamity and sorrow.

Black Horse – The horse was not used as a beast of burden by the ancients, but for purposes of war. Hence it is a symbol of war, and a black horse is a symbol of calamitous war.

Blood – A symbol of the carnage of war.

Beast – The term rendered beast in the Revision means a savage wild beast. Hence it is a symbol of a cruel, tyrannical persecuting power. The term used in chap. 4, rendered beasts in the Common Version, is not the same. Instead of “Four Beasts” that should be rendered “Four Living Creatures.”

Binding – This symbol means to restrain, to hold; also to deprive of power and render helpless.

Book – The record of the divine will. To seal a book is to conceal its meaning, since ancient books were rolls and could not be read when sealed. To open seals is to disclose the meaning. To devour a book is to become master of its contents. The book with seven seals is the book of human destiny, an outline of the great events which connect themselves with the church until its final triumph. The opening of its seals is the revelation of future history.

Bow – The bow, a warlike weapon, when held in the hand is a symbol of war.

Bride – The spouse of Christ, the Church, the New Jerusalem.

Bridegroom – Jesus Christ. (Yahusha)

Candlestick – A symbol of a church, which should be a light in the world. The seven golden candlesticks are the seven churches. A symbol of any light-giving agency.

Chain – A symbol of bondage or affliction. To chain is to render powerless. To bind Satan with a chain is to destroy his power.

Cloud – An emblem of power and majesty. To ride upon the clouds is to appear in glory and exaltation.

Crown – The symbol of royal majesty. To enjoy exaltation and honor. To receive the crown of life is to receive the honors of eternal life.

Darkness – The well known symbol of calamity and affliction.

Day – “I have given you a day for a year.” One revolution of the earth on its axis is a symbol of its annual revolution in its orbit. “Twelve hundred and sixty days” means as many years.

Death – A symbol of destruction.

Dragon – The old pagan Roman Empire. The dragon was originally a symbol of a monarch. In Revelation it means the persecuting monarchy of Rome.

Earth – The ancient civilized world, which corresponded in John’s time with the Roman Empire. Political powers.

Earthquake – Political and moral revolutions and convulsions of society. The shaking of the established order of things. The subversion of states and fortunes.

Eclipse – Or the darkening of heavenly bodies, means the obscuration of the glory of kings and potentates of which sun, moon and stars are symbols.

Egypt – The place of spiritual bondage. A condition of sinfulness. Opposition to Christ.

Euphrates – The symbol of the Turkish power. To be “bound by the Euphrates” is to be restrained at that river.

Elders – Probably princes of righteousness.

False Prophets – A false spiritual power which falsely claims divine authority for its teaching.

Fire – Fierce destruction. Never the symbol of a blessing, but of a curse.

Fire from Heaven – Divine destruction; but fire brought down from heaven by the two- horned dragon means excommunication and anathemas of a false spiritual power.

Flood – Symbol of overpowering. Distress from persecution or any cause.

Forehead – A mark in the forehead means a public profession.

Fornication – Idolatry. See Adultery.

Grave – To put in the grave, signifies to consign to oblivion. “Not to suffer dead bodies to be put into the grave,” means that they shall be remembered.

Hail – Ravages and destruction.

Hand – A mark in the hand means the manner of life, or practice.

Harlot – An idolatrous community. The great Harlot is the apostate church. See Adultery.

Heavens and the Earth – The world. The political and religious universe. A new heavens and new earth imply a passing away of the old order of things and the establishment of a new order.

Horse – Used only for warlike purposes by the ancients and hence a symbol of war. The color of the horse indicates the condition of his rider and the state of the war.

Horns – “The great horn of the first king;” Daniel . A symbol of kings, kingdoms, or power. Seven horns indicate enormous power. They point to powerful leaders, such as the Little Horn of Daniel 7, the Popes of Rome.

Incense – The prayers of the saints.

Islands – European states. In the prophets the “isles of the sea” meant the countries in and beyond the Mediterranean; hence, Europe.

Jerusalem – The capital of Judea and the seat of the temple becomes a symbol of the church of Christ. The “holy city” is contrasted with the “great city,” Jerusalem with Babylon, or the true with the false church.

Jezebel – An unholy woman is a symbol of an unholy influence in the church.

Key – A symbol of power to deliver or imprison, to open heaven or hell, or to shut them; of power to save or destroy.

King –Supreme power of any kind. A government; a kingdom.

Lamb – The symbol of a sinless, sacrificial offering. The Lamb of God is Christ slain as a lamb from the foundation of the world.

Lion – A symbol of kingly power.

Locusts – The locusts, a devouring pest bred in the deserts of Arabia, are a symbol of devouring Arabian armies. The Arabians under Mohammed.

Manna – The bread of life. The truth of Christ.

Measuring Rod – The standard by which the church is measured. The Word.

Mountain – Some person or power conspicuous among men. Highly elevated. A great prince or government. A burning mountain is a baleful, destructive power.

Moon – A symbol of powers, rulers and great men which are not supreme. A light which shines by reflecting another light.

Merchants – A symbol of those who make a gain of godliness and traffic in religious privileges.

Palm – A symbol of joy or victory.

Pale Horse – An image of desolating war, and a reign of death.

Red Horse – An image of cruel, bloody war, distinguished by awful carnage.

River of Life – Christ is the fountain of life. The abundant, ever flowing life that Christ bestows, is fitly symbolized by a river. The river, and tree, of life mean essentially the same.

Rod – The symbol of rule. The rod of iron is a symbol of resistless sway.

Scarlet – This color, the color of blood, symbolizes bloody cruelty. A scarlet woman is a persecuting church.

Seven – The perfect number. Completeness.

Stars – Shining lights in the world. Conspicuous men, whether in the church or the state.

Sun – As the great light giver, in one sense a symbol of Christ. Also, a supreme ruler. The moon and stars indicate great lights of society, but inferior to the sun.

Sword – A symbol of slaughter. Also of conquest. A sword in the hand indicates by carnal weapons. A sword proceeding from the mouth indicates conquests by the word of God.

Temple of God – The church of which the tabernacle and temple were types. The temple of God in heaven, open, is the abode of God, heaven itself, the church above.

Throne – A symbol of authority.

Trumpet – The blast of a trumpet signifies the forward march of armies, carnal or spiritual. Also the proclamation of war or peace.

Time – Time, times and half a time is an annual revolution of the earth, a year, two years, a half year, or three and a half years. “Seven times” passed over Nebuchadnezzar, or seven years.

Wine Press – A symbol of an effusion of blood and of distress.

White – To be clothed in white is to be innocent, pure, and to be triumphant.

White Horse – Triumphant and glorious war.

Whore – Apostate church. See Adultery.

Winds – Symbol of commotion; of mighty movements. The “Four Winds” are four invasions of the Roman Empire.

Witness – The two witnesses are the two Testaments, for such is the meaning of the latter word.

Woman – The “woman clothed with the sun” is the pure and faithful church. The Great Harlot is the false, faithless, apostate church. The church is often symbolized by a bride, or a woman bearing children. A pure woman represents a faithful church; an adulterous woman, “a harlot,” a false, apostate church.