

Symbols in the Book of Revelation

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*"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show unto his servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass: and he sent and **signified** it by his angel unto his servant John" - (Rev. 1:1, emp. added)*

Numbers

The following table is a general listing of symbolic meanings of numbers in ancient Jewish writings. Care should be taken to let the context dictate whether a number should be interpreted figuratively or literally. For example, there is no reason to suppose that the seven churches addressed in the Revelation are not seven actual churches in Asia, especially since each is addressed individually. On the contrary, the seven Spirits, introduced along with God the Father and Jesus, most likely is symbolic of the Holy Spirit.

1	unity, uniqueness, alone
2	strength
3	the divine
3 ½	imperfect, incomplete (see 7 below), time of waiting, trial ("time, times, and half a time" cf. Dan. 7:25; 12:7)
4	the earth, creation, humanity
5	limited power (see 10 below)
6	short of perfection, failure to measure up, evil
7	perfect, complete (sacred; union of earth (4) and heaven (3))
10	human completeness (fullness or power)
12	organized religion, religious completeness (4x3)
42	Months = 3 ½ years
666	See 6 above; evil, failure intensified
1000	completeness intensified (10x10x10)
1260	Days = approx. 3 ½ years

*This table is a hybrid of information gathered from Summers pp. 19-26 and Roper p. 37

Scripture References

It is often helpful to look at difficult passages in light of other passages (possibly difficult as well) that are talking about the same or similar things. The Bible is its own best commentary!

While there are no direct quotations from other Scripture in the Revelation, of the 404 verses contained in the book, there are nearly 400 allusions to the Old Testament (Jenkins, pp. 22-30). Just some of these, along with references to the New Testament, have been provided below.

New Testament Allusions

Rev. 1:1-3	Matt. 24:6; Lk. 21:9	Rev. 10:7	Lk. 21:22
Rev. 1:5	Col. 1:18	Rev. 12:9	Lk. 10:18
Rev. 1:7	Matt. 24:30	Rev. 17:14	1 Tim. 6:15
Rev. 1:16	Matt. 17:2; Heb. 4:12	Rev. 18:4	2 Cor. 6:17; Eph. 5:11
Rev. 2:10	Jas. 1:12	Rev. 18:24	Lk. 11:50
Rev. 2:20-24	Acts 15:28, 29	Rev. 21:1	2 Pet. 3:13
Rev. 3:3	Matt. 24:42	Rev. 21:2	Heb. 12:22
Rev. 3:5	Matt. 10:32		
Rev. 6	Matt. 24; Lk. 21		

Old Testament Allusions

Chapter 1	The description of the Son of man.	Dan. 7:9ff.; 10:5,6; Ezek. 1:7,26ff.; 43:2	
Chapter 2	Tree of life Balaam and Balak Jezebel Rod of iron	Gen. 2 Num. 22 1 Kings 16-21 Psalm 2	
Chapter 3	The book of life. The key of David.	Ex. 32:33; Ps. 69:28; Mal. 3:16 Is. 22:22	
Chapter 4	A throne set in heaven. The four living creatures.	Is. 6:1; Ezek. 1:26,28 Ezek. 1:10; 10:14	
Chapter 5	The scroll. The Lion that is of the tribe of Judah.	Ezek. 2:9; Zec. 5:1-3 Gen. 49:9; Is. 11:10	
Chapter 6	The horses and their riders.	Ps. 45:3,4; Zec. 1:8; 6:3	

Chapter 7	Sealing the servants of God upon the forehead. The blessedness of the redeemed.	Ezek. 9:4 Is. 49:10; 25:8; Jer. 20:13; 31:16; Ezek. 34:23	
Chapter 8, 9	The trumpets of judgment.	Ex. 7ff.; the plagues	
Chapter 10	The angel's sworn testimony. The little book.	Dan. 12:7 Ezek. 2:9; 3:3	
Chapter 11	The measuring reed. The two witnesses.	Ezek. 40:3; Zec. 2:1ff. Zec. 4:2ff.	
Chapter 12	The woman, the child, and the dragon. The angel Michael.	Gen. 3:15 Dan. 10:13,21; 12:1	
Chapter 13	The beast out of the sea.	Dan. 2:1ff.; 7:1ff.	
Chapter 14	The white cloud; One like unto the Son of man. The wine-press.	Dan. 7:13; 10:16 Is. 63:3	
Chapter 15	The song of Moses.	Ex. 15	
Chapter 16	Har-Magedon (hill of Megiddo)	Jdg. 5:2; 2 Chr. 35	
Chapter 17-19	The fall of Babylon. The invitation to the birds.	Is. 13; 14; 21; 46; 47; 48; Jer. 25; 50; 51; Dan. 2; 7; Hab. 3 Compare also Ezek. 27; the fall of Tyre Ezek. 39:17-20	
Chapter 20	Gog and Magog. The books of judgment	Gen. 10:2; Ezek. 38; 39 Dan. 7:10; 12:1; Ps. 69:28	
Chapter 21	The new heaven and earth. The new Jerusalem.	Is. 65:17ff.; 66:22ff. Is. 25:8 Ezek. 48:30ff.	
Chapter 22	The river of water of life; the tree of life.	Gen. 2; Ezek. 47:1-12	

* These tables are adaptations from Hendriksen pp. 47-48

References

- Hendriksen, William (1967), *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books).
- Jackson, Wayne (2004), *Revelation: Jesus Christ's Final Message of Hope* (Courier Publications: Stockton, CA).
- Jenkins, Ferrell (1972), *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (Temple Terrace, FL: Florida College), Second Paperback Edition, 1984.
- Roper, David L. (2002), *Truth For Today Commentary: Revelation 1-11* (Searcy, AR: Resource Publications).
- Summers, Ray (1951), *Worthy is the Lamb* (Broadman & Holman: Nashville, TN).