

Symbols in Bible Prophecy

When it comes to understanding the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, many become overwhelmed by all the symbolism that is used. For this reason, many have abandoned studying the book of Revelation believing that it is impossible for us to draw the correct conclusions. However, God has placed a blessing on those who would read and understand this book. After all, this is a revelation of Jesus Christ, and God has given us this prophetic book with the intention that we can understand it.

“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.” Revelation 1:3

If God wants us to understand Bible prophecy, why then did He cloak it all in mysterious symbolism? We can find the answer to this question in Luke 8:10,

“And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.”

God uses symbols so that the mysteries of prophecy can only be understood by true Bible students. In part, God has done this to protect the messages.

When deciphering the symbols used in the prophetic books, we must be certain that we always allow the Bible to interpret itself. Many wish to take the symbols and force their own interpretation on them without consulting Scripture, but this approach only ends in confusion and will never give us the correct understanding. We must also approach the study of prophecy prayerfully, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide us into an understanding of the truth.

To help you on your journey to understand the symbols used, we have compiled a list of symbols and their Biblical meaning.

SYMBOL	INTERPRETATION	REFERENCE
Angel	Messenger	Daniel 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19,26; Hebrews 1:14
Ark of Testimony	Ark of the covenant/mercy seat where God dwells	Exodus 25:10-22; Psalms 80:1
Babylon	Religious apostasy/confusion/rebellion	Genesis 10:8-10; 11:6-9; Revelation 18:2-3; 17:1-5
Balaam	Advancing own interests, compromise, idolatry	Numbers 22:5-25
Beast	Kingdom, government, political power	Daniel 7:23
Bear	Destructive power/Medo-Persia	Proverbs 28:15; 2 Kings 2:23-24; Daniel 7:5
Binding of Satan	Symbolic chain of circumstances	Isaiah 14:12-20
Black	Moral darkness, sin, apostasy	Exodus 10:21-23; Jeremiah 4:20-28; 8:21; Acts 26:18; John 12:35; Joel 2:1-10

Blood	Life	Leviticus 17:11; Deuteronomy 12:23
Blue	Law	Numbers 15:38-39
Bottomless pit	Earth in chaos, torn up, dark and empty	Genesis 1:1-2; Jeremiah 4:23-28; Isaiah 24:1-4, 19; Revelation 20:1-3
Bow	Success in battle against evil	Psalms 7:11-12; Psalms 45:4-5
Bread	Word of God	John 6:35, 51, 52, 63
Brass, Tin, Iron, Lead, Silver dross	Corrupt, apostate church	Ezekiel 22:18-21
Corrupt woman	Corrupt, apostate church	Ezekiel 16:15-58; 23:2-21; Hosea 2:5; 3:1
Crowns	Kingship, victory	1 Chronicles 20:2; 2 Kings 11:12; Ezekiel 21:26, 27; James 1:12; 2 Timothy 4:7-8; 1 Corinthians 9:25
Clothing	Character	Isaiah 64:6; Isaiah 59:6
Cup	Meted out suffering and judgments	Psalms 11:6; Isaiah 51:12, 22-23; Jeremiah 25:12-17; 49:12
Day	Literal year	Ezekiel 4:6; Numbers 14:34
Door	Opportunity/probation	2 Corinthians 2:12; Revelation 3:20; Luke 12:24-25
Dove	Holy Spirit	Mark 1:10
Dragon	Satan or his agency	Isaiah 27:1; 30:6; Psalms 74:13-14; Revelation 12:7,9; Ezekiel 29:3; Jeremiah 51:34
Eagle	Speed, power, vision, vengeance, protection	Deuteronomy 28:49; Habakkuk 1:6-8; Revelation 12:1-4
Eating of the book	Assimilating the message	Ezekiel 3:1-4; Jeremiah 15:16
Egypt	Atheism	Exodus 5:2
Eyes	Spiritual discernment	Matthew 13:10-17; 1 John 2:11
Eye salve	Holy Spirit to help us see truth, discernment to understand word, antidote for spiritual blindness	Ephesians 1:12-19; Psalms 119:18; 1 John 2:20,27; John 16:7-13
Faithful witness	Christ	John 18:37; John 3:11; Revelation 1:5; 3:14; 19:11
Fallen/Fall	Apostasy/apostatise	Revelation 2:5; 1 Corinthians 10:12; Hebrews 4:11
False prophet	Apostate Protestantism	Revelation 16:13-14; 13:13-14; 19:20
Famine	Dearth of truth	Amos 8:11
Feet	Your walk/direction	Genesis 19:2; Psalms 119:105
Fish	People	Habakkuk 1:14-15; Ecclesiastes 9:12; Ezekiel 29:3-4; Matthew 4:19
Forehead	Mind	Romans 7:25; Ezekiel 3:8-9; Jeremiah 3:2-3
Fornication	Illicit connection between church and world	Ezekiel 16:15, 26; Isaiah 23:17; James 4:4; Revelation 14:4

Four beasts of living creatures	Heavenly beings with special responsibilities	Revelation 5:8-10; 4:6-9; 6:1-7; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4
Four corners of Earth	Four directions of compass	Jeremiah 49:36
Fire	Holy Spirit	Luke 3:16
Fig tree	A nation that should bear fruit	Luke 13:6-9
Field	World	Matthew 13:38; John 4:35
Fountains of water/springs	Pure living gospel	Revelation 21:6; Proverbs 13:14; 14:27; John 4:13-14
Fruit	Works/Actions	Galatians 5:22
Garments	Covering of righteousness	Genesis 35:2; Isaiah 61:10; 52:1; Zechariah 3:3-5; Romans 13:12
Gold	True riches of heaven, faith, pure character	Psalms 19:7-10; James 2:5; Job 23:10; Isaiah 13:12
Goat	Greece	Daniel 8:21
Hand	Deeds/Works/Actions	Ecclesiastes 9:10; Isaiah 59:6
Harvest	End of world	Matthew 13:39
Harlot	Apostate church/religion	Isaiah 1:21-27; Jeremiah 3:1-3
Heads	Major powers/rulers/governments	Revelation 17:3, 9, 10; Daniel 7:6; 8:8, 22
Healing	Salvation	Luke 5:23-24
Hidden Manna	Christ	John 6:49, 50, 53; Matthew 13:44
Honey	Happy life	Ezekiel 20:6; Deuteronomy 8:8-9
Horn	King of kingdom, Power and strength	Daniel 7:24; 8:5, 21, 22; Zechariah 1:18-19; Revelation 17:12
Horse	Strength and power in battle, special representatives/angel	Job 39:19; Psalms 147:10; Proverbs 21:31; Exodus 15:21; Isaiah 43:17; Jeremiah 8:6; Zechariah 1:8-10; 6:1-8
Image	Likeness	Exodus 20:4; Genesis 1:26; 5:3
Incense	Prays of God's people	Psalms 141:2; Revelation 5:8
Israel	True followers of Christ	Romans 9:6-8; 2:28-29; Galatians 3:29
Jar/Vessel	Person	Jeremiah 18:1-4; 2 Corinthians 4:7
Jezebel	Immorality, idolatry, apostasy	1 Kings 21:25; 2 Kings 9:22
Jordan	Death	Romans 6:4; Deuteronomy 4:22
Keys	Control/jurisdiction	Isaiah 22:22; Matthew 16:19
Lamb	Jesus/sacrifice	John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Genesis 22:7-8
Lamp	Word of God	Psalms 119:105
Lamb's Wife	New Jerusalem	Revelation 19:7-9; 21:2, 9, 10
Light	Jesus/Word of God/Gospel	Psalms 119:105; John 1:9; John 8:12; 2 Corinthians 4:4
Lion	Jesus/Powerful King i.e. Babylon	Revelation 5:4-9; Jeremiah 50:43-44; Daniel 7:4, 17, 23

Locusts	Destruction	Joel 1:4; Deuteronomy 28:38
Leopard	Greece	Daniel 7:6
Leprosy/Sickness	Sin	Luke 5:23-24
Lord's Day	Sabbath	Isaiah 58:13; Matthew 12:8; Exodus 20:10
Man Child	Jesus	Psalms 2:7-9; Revelation 12:5
Mark	Sign/seal/mark of approval or disapproval	Romans 4:11; Ezekiel 9:4; Revelation 13:17; 14:9-11; 7:2-3
Measuring Rod	God's Law/Word	James 2:10-12; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Isaiah 8:20; 2 Timothy 3:16-17
Merchants	Advocates of Babylon's teachings	Isaiah 47:11-15; Nahum 3:16; Revelation 18:3, 11, 15, 23
Moon	Permanence A lesser light that reflects the glory of the sun (Christ) – God's word, His people.	Psalms 89:35-37; Genesis 1:16; John 12:34-36; Ephesians 5:8, 14; Isaiah 8:20; Micah 3:6-7; Psalms 119:105; Luke 24:25-27
Morning star	Jesus	Revelation 22:16
Mountains	Political or religio-political powers	Isaiah 2:2, 3; Jeremiah 17:3; 31:23; 51:24, 25; Ezekiel 17:22, 23; Daniel 2:35, 44, 45; Revelation 17:9-10
Mystery of God	The gospel	Ephesians 1:9,10; 3:9; 6:19; Colossians 1:26,27
New Jerusalem	The Holy city of Heaven	Revelation 3:12, 21:2
Oil	Holy Spirit	Zechariah 4:2-6; Revelation 4:5
Open Door	Unlimited Opportunity	1 Corinthians 16:9; Acts 14:27; John 10:7-9 Hosea 2:15; Colossians 4:3
Purple	Royalty	Mark 15:17, Judges 8:26
Rainbow	Token of covenant keeping	Genesis 9:11-17
Ram	Medo Persia	Daniel 8:20
Red / Scarlet	Sin/corruption	Isaiah 1:18; Nahum 2:3; Revelation 17:1-4
Reapers	Angels	Matthew 13:39
Reins	Seat of will, affections	Psalms 7:9; 16:7; 26:2; 73:21; Proverbs 23:16; Jeremiah 17:10
Ring	Authority	Genesis 41:42-43, Esther 3:10-11
Rock	Jesus/truth	1 Corinthians 10:4; Isaiah 8:13,14; Romans 9:33; Matthew 7:24
Seal	Sign or mark of approval or disapproval	Romans 4:11; Revelation 7:2, 3
Seed	Descendants / Jesus	Romans 9:8, Galatians 3:16
Second Death	Lake of fire	Revelation 21:8; 20:2
Serpent	Satan	Revelation 12:9; 20:2

Seven Candle sticks	7 candlesticks in Holy Place of Sanctuary, Seven Churches	Exodus 25:31-40; Revelation 1:20
Ships	Commerce/trading/economy	Ezekiel 27:9, 25, 29; Revelation 18:17-19
Sickle	Symbol of Harvest-End of world	Matthew 13:39; Revelation 14:14
Silver	Pure Words & Understanding	Proverbs 2:3-5; 3:13-14, 10:20, 25:11, Psalms 12:6
Skin	Christ's righteousness	Exodus 12:5; 1 Peter 1:19; Isaiah 1:4-6
Sodom	Moral degradations	Ezekiel 16:46-55; Jeremiah 23:14; Genesis 19:4-14
Stars	Angels/messengers (including God's people)	Revelation 1:16, 20; 12:4, 7-9; Job 38:7; Daniel 12:3
Sun	Jesus/the gospel	Psalms 84:11; Malachi 4:2; Matthew 17:2; John 8:12; 9:5
Sword	Word of God Bloodshed, Destruction Civil authority	Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12 Isaiah 3:25, 13:15; Acts 12:1,2; Jeremiah 48:2; Romans 13:4
Tail	Lies	Isaiah 9:15
Testimony of Jesus	Holy Spirit/ gift of prophecy	Revelation 19:10; 22:9; 1 Corinthians 13:2
Thief	Suddenness of Jesus' coming	1 Thessalonians 5:2-4; 2 Peter 3:10
Thorns / Thorny Ground	Cares of this life	Mark 4:18-19
Tongue	Language / Speech	Exodus 4:10
Time	360 Day (Literal Years)	Daniel 4:16, 23, 25, 32; 7:25; Daniel 11:13 margin
Times	720 Days (Literal Years)	Daniel 7:25, Revelation 12:6,14, 13:5; 11:1,2
Trumpet	Loud warning of God's approach, a judgement against the oppressors of God's people	Exodus 19:16-17, Joshua 6:4-5; Numbers 10:8-9
Tree	Cross; People / Nation	Deuteronomy 21:22-23; Psalms 92:12; 37:35
Two-edged Sword	God's word	Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12; Matthew 10:34
Two witnesses	Old and New Testaments	John 5:39; Zechariah 4:1-14; Psalms 119:130, 105; John 12:48; Acts 10:43
Vineyard	Church that should bear fruit	Luke 20:9-16
Waters/sea	Inhabited Area-People/ Nations	Revelation 17:15
Water	Holy Spirit / Everlasting Life	John 7:39, 4:14; Rev. 22:17; Eph. 5:26
White	Purity	Daniel 12:10; 11:35; Mark 9:3

White Robes	Victory/righteousness	Revelation 19:8; 3:5; 7:14
Winds	Strife, Commotions, "winds of war"	Jeremiah 25:31-33; 49:36,37; 4:11-13; Zechariah 7:14
Wings	Speed / Protection / Deliverance	Deuteronomy 28:49; Matthew 23:37
Wine	Blood/covenant/doctrines	Luke 5:37
Woman, Pure	True Church	Jeremiah 6:2; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:23-27
Woman, Corrupt	Apostate church	Ezekiel 16:15-58; 23:2-21; Hosea 2:5; 3:1; Revelation 14:4
Wolf	Disguised Enemies that hunt in a time of darkness	Matthew 7:15
Wormwood	Sorrow/bitterness/corruption/apostasy	Jeremiah 9:13-15, 23:15; Lamentations 3:19; Deuteronomy 29:17-18; Amos 5:7

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