

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Symbolic Language in Revelation

The Worship Setting

John was “in the Spirit” on the “Lord’s Day”

He sees Jesus between the lampstands

Revelation’s lasting influence on modern worship

Hymns of Praise (4: 8, 11; 5: 12—13; 11: 15; 19: 6, 16)

The Source of Revelation’s Symbolism

The description John gives of the one standing in the midst of the lampstands (Jesus) is an early indicator of the kind of symbolism that appears in the rest of the book. It is Daniel’s Son of Man arrayed in the splendor of Ezekiel’s cherubim (Daniel 7:9,13; Ezekiel 1:7). His only weapon is his word (Isaiah 11:4), his face comparable to the sun, the greater light created to rule the day (Genesis 1:16). His voice is described like God’s voice is described: like the sound of a trumpet (Exodus 19:16,19), like the sound of many waters (Ezekiel 43:2). His head of hair was “white as white wool,” like Daniel’s Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:9), and around his waist was a golden sash, the sacred vestment for Israel’s priests (Exodus 28:4, 29:5).

Seven Letters

Ephesus: active, patient, steadfast, guards truth in a loveless way

Smyrna: suffering persecution

Pergamum: faithful in pagan society; some struggle w/ faithfulness

Thyatira: love, faith, service, false teaching sparks controversy

Sardis: a church going through the motions with little substance

Laodicea: wealthy, lukewarm, paralyzed

Philadelphia: have remained faithful in the face of pressure

Two Scenes of Heaven

The Present Heavenly Court (Rev. 4: 1—5: 14)

The imagery which describes God’s throne room comes straight from the Old Testament. Jasper and carnelian are among the stones of paradise in Ezekiel 28:13. The rainbow around God’s throne recalls the promise to Noah that God’s rule would be featured by his covenant with the whole earth, God’s mercy toward every living creature (Genesis 9:12-17). The twenty-four elders on twenty-four thrones (Rev. 4:4) reflect the ancient idea of the heavenly court which keeps closest counsel with God regarding affairs in heaven and on earth (Job 1-2; Psalm 82). The number twenty-four also suggests the totality of God’s people, a combination of twelve patriarchs and twelve apostles, now doing priestly service (1 Chronicles 24:4-5). The lightning and thunder that proceed from God’s throne (Rev. 4:5) recall the many Old Testament passages that describe God’s awesome power in terms of the activity of nature (Exodus 19:16ff.; Psalm 18:12ff.). The four living creatures—lion, ox, man, eagle—represent for John all living things, (recalling the “living creatures” of Ezekiel 1) and they join the twenty-four elders, creation, and people of God, in praising the Creator. The scroll in God’s right hand (Rev. 5:1) is a symbol that all of world history is subject to the power of God, and no one is able to unlock that scroll but “the Lamb who was slain.”

The Future City of God (Rev. 21: 5b—22: 5)

The Vision Cycles

Different Perspectives of the Same Event

**Seven Seals (suffering caused by man) (Rev. 6: 1—8:1—5)
Seven Trumpets (plagues/nature) (Rev. 8: 6—11: 19)
Church Preserved Against Satan (Rev. 12: 1—14: 20)
Seven Bowls (God’s Judgment) (Rev. 15: 1—16: 21)
Babylon (all things Anti-Christ) Overthrown (17:1—19:21)
The Binding of Satan (Rev. 20:1—20: 10)**

The text itself suggests this approach. For example, compare the Seven Trumpets (8: 6—11:19) with the Seven Bowls (15: 1—16: 21).

