Decoding Revelation

Learn how to interpret Bible prophecy for yourself.

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Christians everywhere are thoroughly confused about the book of Revelation and the other prophetic books of the Bible. Many years ago, I was involved in a public seminar for the community explaining the prophecies of the last days, and there was a young man attending every night. He loved what he was hearing and was especially fascinated by what he was learning because at the time, he was currently enrolled at a local seminary in the area studying to become a minister. During his time at seminary they had only one single class period to cover the entire book of Revelation. That’s a single one-hour class session! His professor summed up the class by saying that the book of Revelation is so full of symbols and strange scenes that we can’t really know for sure what it means. Right at this time, he gets a flyer in the mail for the meetings I was involved in which advertised that we would be spending over a week explaining the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. He was there. And as he heard the mysterious prophecies of the Bible being clearly and powerfully explained night after night, he was blown away. He found it a far cry from his one-class session at seminary that had essentially ruled out the entire book of Revelation as too hard to be understood.

Friends, God gave us the book of Revelation to be understood — to be “revealed” as the book’s name indicates — not to be locked in darkness! It can be understood, and I’ll go so far as to say that it needs to be understood! The truths that it reveals which apply specifically to us living in the last days are so important that it says that anyone who adds or takes away from it will have their name taken out of the book of life and the plagues added to them (Revelation 22:18, 19). It also says that if anyone worships the Antichrist power and receives his mark, he will have the wrath of God poured out upon him without mixture (meaning without it being watered down). And how will anyone avoid worshiping an Antichrist they can’t identify? How can you avoid the mark when you don’t even know what it is? Understanding prophecy is 100% necessary in order to remain undeceived in the last days.

Five Keys

But how can it be clearly understood, with all the beasts and symbols and scenes that sound like something out of a science-fiction novel? We’re going to look at five keys...
that will enable any Bible student to correctly understand the prophecies of Revelation. The first of these keys to understanding the book of Revelation is revealed in the following passage.

“For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.” — Galatians 4:22-24

Did you catch that? I’m sure the bold emphasis helped, but Paul, under inspiration, speaking about the two sons of Abraham said that they were an “allegory.” That’s the Greek word “allegereo” the textbook definition of that word meaning a picture or symbol.

Key #1

The Bible often speaks in allegories or symbols to convey a hidden or secret message.

Did you notice from which part of the Bible the symbolic language is coming? The story of Abraham. Which part of the Bible is that story located in? The Old Testament. This is our second key.

Key #2

You must read and understand the rest of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, to understand the book of Revelation.

There’s a common error taught by some churches today that the Old Testament is the dusty, old, dead letter and that the New Testament is what Christians today need to be focused on. What a big mistake! Did you know that out of the 404 verses in the book of Revelation, 276 are either direct quotes or references from the other books of the Bible and most of them from the Old Testament? No wonder many Christians don’t understand the book of Revelation; they don’t read and understand the Old Testament, which Revelation is drawing from almost continually. If we really believe the New Testament, then we will also believe the Old because it says in 2 Timothy 3:16 that, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God,” which would include the Old Testament. That was the Bible that Jesus used, as well as the early church.
So we now have two keys to understand how to properly decode the book of Revelation. The first is that it speaks in symbols, and second is that the meaning behind many of those symbols will be found in the Old Testament. Third, we need to establish a very important principle that applies to all Scripture — prophecy included.

Key #3

The Bible must be its own interpreter. And it will interpret itself by the Holy Spirit speaking to your mind through other passages of Scripture.

It’s not up to you, or to me, or to any church or denomination to decide what the symbols mean. It’s up to God. They are His symbols and therefore His interpretations. Anything short of this would be following man and not God, and then you would have a cult, not a church. Notice how Peter puts it...

“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.” — 2 Peter 1:20

He also says,

“For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” — 2 Peter 1:21

Scripture cannot be interpreted privately. Its author is the Holy Ghost who will teach you its true meaning by using other passages of Scripture. Thankfully, God has promised to do this very thing if we’re willing to listen.

It says in John 16:13,

“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth... and he will shew you things to come.”

“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”

— Luke 11:10-13

I know it sounds too easy, but it’s true. Cherish no sin in your life (Acts 5:32), just ask for the Holy Spirit, and He will come and guide you into the truth!

And will the Holy Spirit contradict the Holy word that He inspired? No. That would be a house divided against itself. The Holy Spirit is not bipolar. We’re the ones who have that problem. God says of Himself, “For I am the LORD, I change not” Malachi 3:6.
Now let’s look at our fourth key.

Key #4
Context.

Context is always king. Without context, we are like a floating bottle in a sea of symbols, not knowing how or when to apply them. Context tells us when a word is to be understood literally or spiritually, whether it’s referring to something past or something future, or if its application is for a limited, local setting only or if it’s spiritual and universal. For instance, we’ll see shortly that a woman in the Bible is a symbol for God’s people, His church. Does that mean that every time we read the word “woman” in the Bible that it actually means church? No, that’s where context comes in. It directs us as to when to apply a prophetic meaning or not. Some Bible symbols even have multiple meanings such as the symbol of a lion. In Revelation 5:5 and 10:3 it’s a clear symbol of Christ, but in 1 Peter 5:8 it refers to the devil. Context will always tell us which application applies. We will cover this concept more later.

Let’s summarize our first four foundational keys before we can come to our fifth.

**Key #1:** The Bible will often speak in allegories or symbols to convey a hidden or secret message.

**Key #2:** You must read and understand the rest of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, to understand the book of Revelation.

**Key #3:** The Bible will interpret itself by the Holy Spirit speaking to your mind through other passages of Scripture if you ask for Him.

**Key #4:** Context will always determine how to apply the word or phrase in question.

Our fifth key isn’t a principle like the first four, but rather a comprehensive list of many of the Bibles main prophetic symbols and what their decoded symbolic meaning is.

Key #5
The Bible’s symbols decoded.

The Bible is filled with symbols. So much so, that when you realize just how much symbolism is in it, you wonder how anyone could ever understand the Bible without
understanding the symbols it’s filled with. And of course Bible prophecy heavily relies on symbols. It is IMPOSSIBLE for anyone to correctly understand Bible prophecy without correctly understanding what the prophetic symbols mean. Therefore, I am going to spend some time covering the many different types of symbols there are in Bible prophecy. You might be surprised at how many different types of symbols we find in Bible prophecy. Below is a list.

There are symbolic:

- things and objects
- time periods
- colors
- numbers
- names
- people
- animals
- places and directions
- actions

Now let’s look at some examples of each of these different types of symbols. For some, we will just look at a list of examples of the symbols and what they mean prophetically. With others, I’ll discuss a little bit more.

**Things and Objects**

Yes, things and even objects carry symbolic meaning in prophecy. Notice this list…

- **Bread** = Word of God (John 6:35, 51, 52, 63)
- **Clothing** = character (Job 8:22; Isaiah 61:10; Revelation 19:8)
- **Forehead** = mind, character (Exodus 28:36-38; Deuteronomy 6:6-8; Ezekiel 9:4; Revelation 14:1)
  - **Fire** = Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4:1-6; Acts 2:3)
  - **Hand** = work, control (2 Samuel 18:2; 2 Kings 8:20; Ecclesiastes 9:10; Genesis 39:23; Judges 9:29)
  - **Heads** = major powers/rulers/governments (Deuteronomy 28:13; Daniel 7:6; Revelation 17:3, 9, 10)
  - **Horns** = powers — political or religious (1 Samuel 2:10; Lamentations 2:3; Daniel 7:7, 8)
  - **Lamp** = Word of God (Psalm 119:105; Zechariah 4:1-6)
  - **Oil** = Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4:1-6; 1 Samuel 16:13)
  - **Mark** = sign or seal (Ezekiel 9:4; Romans 4:11; Revelation 13:17; 7:2, 3; 14:9-11)
  - **Mountains** = kingdoms (Daniel 2:35, 44; Jeremiah 51:25)
  - **Rock** = Jesus/truth (Deuteronomy 32:15; Psalm 62:7; Isaiah 8:13, 14; Matthew 7:24; Romans 9:33; 1 Corinthians 10:4)
Seal = sign or mark of approval or disapproval (Romans 4:11; Revelation 7:2, 3)
Stars = angels/messengers (Revelation 1:16, 20; 12:4, 7-9; Job 38:7)
Sun = Jesus, the gospel (Psalm 84:11; Malachi 4:2; Matthew 17:2; John 8:12; 9:5)
Sword = Word of God (Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 1:16)
Trees = people (Psalm 1:3, 92:12; Jeremiah 17:8)
Waters = people and multitudes (Isaiah 17:13; Jeremiah 46:7, 8; Revelation 17:15)
Winds = strife/commotion/“winds of war” (Jeremiah 4:11-13; 25:31-33; 49:36, 37; Zechariah 7:14)

**Time Periods**

When there is a prophetic time period in the Bible, there is a formula the Bible gives us to apply to know how long the prophetic time period is in actual, literal time.

> “After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.”
> — Numbers 14:34

> “…I have appointed thee each day for a year.”
> — Ezekiel 4:6

**1 Prophetic DAY = 1 Literal YEAR**
(Genesis 29:27; Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6)

Therefore, when you do the math using the above formula which the Bible gives us to interpret prophetic time periods, you get:

- **Prophetic Week** = 7 literal years (Daniel 9:24)
- **Prophetic Month** = 30 literal years (Revelation 13:5)
- **Prophetic Year/“Time”** = 360 literal years (Revelation 12:14)
- **Prophetic 2 Years/“Times”** = 720 literal years (Revelation 12:14)
- **Prophetic Half Year/“Half a time”** = 180 literal years (Revelation 12:14)

You might be wondering, how will I know how if it’s a literal time period or a prophetic time period? After we look at all the different symbol types, we’ll also be looking at principles of prophetic interpretation so you can know how and when to apply them.
COLORS

**White** = purity (Revelation 19:8)

**Blue** = law/truth (Numbers 15:38-40)

**Red** = blood/sacrifice (2 Kings 3:22; Numbers 19:2-4)

**Purple** = royalty (Esther 8:15; Mark 15:20)

**Gold** = character and faith (1 Peter 1:7; Zechariah 13:9)

**Black/Darkness** = sin, error, powers of darkness
  (Matthew 8:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:4, 5)

PLACES and DIRECTIONS

**Sodom** = perversity

**Egypt** = defiance against God

**Babylon** = apostate religious system

**Israel** = God’s people, His church

**Jerusalem** = God’s people

**King of the North** = God or one who tries to stand in the place of God

**King of the South** = anti-religion, secularism

ACTIONS

**Eating a scroll or book** = understanding the Word of God
  (Jeremiah 15:16; Revelation 10:9)

**Adultery** = being spiritually unfaithful to God
  (James 4:4; Revelation 17:2)

**Drinking** = receiving a powerful experience or judgment
  (Jeremiah 25:15; Matthew 26:39; Revelation 14:10)

PERSONS

In the book of Revelation, persons are often symbolic. Let’s take an example from the messages to the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3. (Though these messages were to literal, local churches that existed in John’s day, most scholars agree that each message also applies to a different phase of the Christian church from the time of Christ’s ascension to our day.) The Old Testament character Balaam pops up in the third church period, which is Pergamos. Why is he mentioned during this church period? The history that this church period covers is the sad period of compromise. Did you ever wonder how the church went from the on-fire early church of the apostles...
to the staunch, persecuting Catholic church of the Middle Ages? The church period of Pergamos explains that. In the previous time period of Smyrna, Christians were terribly persecuted, but it was a pure church. There were no phony Christians in that church. But during the time period of Pergamos, an edict was issued by the Roman emperor Constantine that made Christianity the official region of Rome, and persecution suddenly stopped. It was during this time of ease that compromise after compromise entered the church and it got further and further away from the pure truth of the Bible. Satan changed his tactics and was successful. Instead of attacking the church from the outside which only seemed to make it more pure, he decided to attack it from the inside by compromise and infiltration.

Now who was Balaam? The Bible initially describes Balaam as a prophet of God. But did he stay a good prophet? No! He was a prophet of God who became corrupt. Did Balaam try to curse Israel? Yes. But did it work? No. However, he then put in motion plans that caused Israel to be infiltrated and attacked from the inside which caused them to apostatize. Can you see why Balaam is pictured during the third church period of Pergamos? What Balaam did was exactly what the church did during the church period of Pergamos.

Here’s a list of persons, or types of persons, mentioned in Bible prophecy.

**Angel** = messenger (Daniel 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26; Hebrews 1:14)

**Thief** = suddenness of Jesus’ coming
(1 Thessalonians 5:2-4; 2 Peter 3:10)

**Pure Woman** = true church (Jeremiah 6:2; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:23-27; Revelation 14:4)

**Corrupt Woman/Harlot** = apostate church/religion (Isaiah 1:21-27; Jeremiah 3:1-3, 6-9; Ezekiel 16:15-58; 23:2-21; Hosea 2:5 3:1)

**Animals**

**Beast** = kingdom/government/political power (Daniel 7:17, 23)

**Dragon** = Satan or his agency (Isaiah 27:1; 30:6; Psalm 74:13, 14; Revelation 12:7-9, Ezekiel 29:3; Jeremiah 51:34)

**Lamb** = Jesus/sacrifice (John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7)

**Serpent** = Satan (Genesis 3, Revelation 12:9; 20:2)

**Names**

Knowing the symbolic meanings behind names in the Bible will be a tremendous help
in giving you understanding of a prophetic passage that you might be studying.

The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. 3, pp. 500, 501 says,

“In Biblical thought a name is not a mere label of identification. It is an expression of the essential nature of its bearer. A man's name reveals his character. Adam was able to give names to the beast and birds because as Milton says, he understood their nature.”

This is why God’s name is so important and that we not take His name in vain. Because to do something in someone’s name is to represent them and participate in their authority. One of the worst things we can do is claim God’s name (His character and authority) and yet be living like child of darkness.

Here is a short list of names and their meanings.

The names of the Seven Churches:

- **Ephesus** = desirable (The condition of the apostolic church is a desirable one)
- **Smyrna** = bittersweet, myrrh (myrrh was a spice that was added to sacrifices that made them smell sweet. This church period was one of great persecution, thus they were a sweet smelling sacrifice to God.)
- **Pergamos** = acropolis or height (This church became haughty and exalted after being made the state religion by Constantine.)

The names of People:

- **Eve** = mother of all living
- **Nimrod** = rebellion (The builder of Babylon who defied God.)
- **Babylon** = confusion (To babble like a baby because it was there that God confused the languages of the people.)
- **Lucifer** = light-bearer (From originally being in the presence of God as the covering cherub.)
- **Satan** = accuser
- **Devil** = slanderer
- **Michael** = who is like God? (Christ is referred to as Michael when He's in conflict with the devil.)
- **Sari** = laughter (When God said she would have a child she laughed.)
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**Esau** = red (He had red colored skin and hair.)

**Jacob** = supplanter (Deceived His older twin brother Esau.)

**Israel** = prince of God (Jacob became a prince with God after he repented for his sin and wrestled with Him through the night.)

**Moses** = one drawn out (He was drawn out of the river and was also drawn out from Egypt.)

**Delilah** = the consumer (Her love consumed Samson.)

**Solomon** = peace-giver (Solomon was supposed to give peace to Israel.)

**Naabal** = fool (He foolishly offended David and almost got killed for it.)

**Elijah** = my God is Yaweh (Not Baal.)

**Isaiah** = salvation of the Lord (The book of Isaiah declares God’s salvation more than any other prophet. It is sometimes referred to as the fifth gospel.)

**Daniel** = God is my judge (Daniel was given many visions about the judgment.)

**Ezra** = help (He helped rebuild Jerusalem.)

**Christ** = anointed one (He was anointed, or set aside, for His holy mission.)

**Lazarus** = may God help (Jesus raised him from the dead.)

**Apollyon** = destroyer

### Places

Christ was born in **Bethlehem** which means “house of bread.” Jesus is the bread of life, and after He was born He was laid in a feeding trough. He grew up in **Nazareth,** which means “to spring or shoot up.” The Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 53:2 says, “he shall grow up before him as a tender plant.” Christ suffered in **Gethsemane** which means “the olive press,” where His life was almost crushed out of Him. Christ was crucified at **Golgotha** which means “the place of the skull” because it was there that Christ crushed the head/skull of the serpent/devil and sealed his fate as was prophesied in Genesis 3:15.

### Numbers

**4 = Earth**

Four rivers watered the whole earth before the flood. There are four points on the compass, and the four winds are a symbol for all the world.

**7 = Fullness, completion, perfection**

God took seven days to create the earth. The city of Jericho came down after a seven days march around it. Naaman dipped in the Jordan seven times to be healed.
Nebuchadnezzar heated the fire seven times before throwing in Daniel’s three Hebrews companions. There are seven churches in Revelation that represent the entire Christian era from Christ’s ascension to the end of time. Blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat seven times during the day of atonement. The totality of God’s wrath will be poured out in seven last plagues. The Lamb in Revelation 4 has seven horns and seven eyes, symbolizing perfect wisdom and perfect power.

3 = Godhead
Number of persons in the Godhead — the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

6 = Man in apostasy against God
Day six was the day in which man was created, therefore is a type for humanity. 666 is the “number of a man” Revelation 13:18. According to 1 Kings 10:14, Solomon’s yearly income was 666 talents of gold. Immediately after that in next chapter (1 Kings 11), it speaks of his apostasy. And what is cited? His heart was turned away from God through riches and women. In the book of Revelation do we find the number 666 connected with a power that controls the riches of the earth and fornicates with women? Yes.

10 = Wholeness
The 10 horns on the dragon-beast of Daniel 7 and Revelation 12, 13, and 17 represent all 10 different apostate powers that uphold the dragon-beast in each scene.

40 = Trial and purification
Jesus was tempted for 40 days. The flood during Noah’s time which purified the world of unrepentant sinners lasted 40 days. How many days did Goliath challenge Israel? 40 days. How long was Israel wandering in the desert? 40 days.

Many pastors don’t even know what many of these symbols mean. These lists of decoded symbols are a goldmine, and yet this is by no means all of them. There are plenty more; these are just some of the major ones. Understanding the meaning of the symbols in the Bible will help you tremendously in decoding many important last-day prophecies.

Prophetic Principles
Now let’s discuss some very important principles of prophetic interpretation that will keep us from making mistakes and guide us to safe Biblical interpretations.
1.) Prophetic symbols are fluid.
Symbols can have several different applications. They can take on different meanings depending on the context in which they appear. Sometimes a symbol can have an exact opposite meaning in one passage versus another passage. Notice this list of symbols that have multiple applications.

**Lion**
- Christ (Revelation 5:4-9)
- Devil (1 Peter 5:8)
- Judah (Genesis 49:9)
- Babylon (Daniel 7:4)

**Sword**
- Word of God (Hebrews 4:12)
- Civil power (Romans 13:4)

**Star**
- Christ (Revelation 22:16)
- Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12)
- God’s people (Daniel 12:3)
- Angels (Isaiah 14:4; Revelation 12:4; Job 38:7)

**Wine**
- Blood of Christ (Luke 22:20)
- Blood of the wicked (Revelation 14:20)
- Doctrine (Luke 5:32)
- False doctrine (Revelation 14:8)

**Male goat**
- Christ (Leviticus 16:9)
- Satan (Leviticus 16:8)
- Prominent political rulers (Daniel 8:1-8)

**Leaven**
- Sin (Luke 12:1)
- Righteousness (Luke 13:21)

Many of the symbols can have the exact opposite meaning depending on the context! Why? Because God wants us to think. He wants us to dig. He wants us to study and pray. When we spend time meditating on the Word, it grows us spiritually and gives us a much deeper experience with God than if we just had a symbolic cheat sheet. We’re studying to know, but God also wants us to study to be changed in heart and character.

2.) Don’t isolate a symbol from its context.
A symbol is just a piece of the greater puzzle. Once all of the pieces are put together, you get the full picture of what God is trying to convey. Then finally, once you see the full picture, you can understand the deep, significant lesson that God is trying to drive home.

3.) Look at the main characteristics of the symbol.
Not every single detail of the symbol is meant to have spiritual significance. Just the main theme. For instance, Jesus is symbolized by a Lamb. Does that mean we need to
find symbolic significance for the fur, its four legs, and the little tail? No! Just the main theme to which the verse is pointing. In the case of John 1:29, it’s that Christ takes away the sins of the world. Jesus was like a lamb in the fact that He was the sacrifice for sin. People are symbolized as trees (Psalm 1:3.; 92:12; Jeremiah 17:8). Does this mean each leaf represents something about us, and the bark represents something about us? No, just the main point that the verse brings out. The righteous are like a flourishing tree because they are well watered. Those who plant themselves in Christ who is the water of life will flourish! That’s how we’re like trees.

So in Revelation 8:7 when it says a third of the trees were destroyed during the first trumpet, does that mean we should look for a natural disaster where a third of the earth’s trees are destroyed? No, but a time period in history where a third of God’s people were destroyed. In Revelation 7:2, 3 when it says to “spare the trees,” is that a prophetic passage talking about the non-profit organization Green Peace? No, it’s a time when people are being protected from held-back judgments. However, trees can also symbolize the wicked. So remember, it’s always the context that decides the final meaning.

4.) Don’t put modern meanings on Bible symbols.

When we see the term “red” that doesn’t mean it’s Communism. When we see the term “bear” that doesn’t mean it’s Russia, or that a “lion” means England. We can’t just put our modern day terminology and current news headlines into Scripture. People have attempted this over and over for centuries. The Bible itself reveals what the symbols mean. The symbols can only resemble something modern if the Bible makes it very clear that it does. We do not have to force the latest headlines into the Bible, for you will find that when the Bible is allowed to interpret itself, there are in fact many contemporary events and powers brought out in Scripture.


This is a big tip. The ancient symbols borrowed from the Old Testament were literal and local back then, but when applied in the New Testament era are now spiritual and worldwide. For instance, Passover was a local ceremony among the Jews which had to be literally kept, but now being fulfilled in Jesus Christ, it symbolizes the spiritual truth of the ultimate Lamb of God who was slain for our sins whose saving blood is now available worldwide to be applied to anyone who accepts Him.

Another example is in Revelation 7 where it mentions the 144,000 being made up from 12 tribes of Israel. How could that possibly have a literal end-time application?
It says there will be 12,000 from each tribe. Can you find even a dozen Jews from, let’s say, the tribe of Gad? The entire northern kingdom, which was pretty much all the tribes accept Judah, Benjamin and Levi were taken captive by the Assyrians almost 700 years before Christ. They intermarried with the Assyrians and became so intermingled that after they were settled back into their own homeland, the Jews didn’t even regard them as true Jews any longer. They became the “Samaritans” whom we know the Jews hated. They were half-breeds in a sense. Therefore, we know that the 144,000 being made of 12 tribes of Israel has a symbolic meaning, not literal.

So when we see different Old Testament symbols in the New Testament, especially in the book of Revelation, it doesn’t mean that they are literal objects and literal scenes that must take place in literal Jerusalem or in literal Israel. The New Testament application will always be spiritual and worldwide. The history of Israel in the Old Testament is an object lesson for events that affect the entire world today.

6.) To understand the book of Revelation, you must understand the Hebrew sanctuary.

The prophecies of Daniel and Revelation are built on the system of the Hebrew temple service that was set up by God. Revelation is actually patterned after the sanctuary, even in the order of its chapters. You will notice that in Revelation chapters 1-10, every time Christ is pictured He is seen with articles that were found in the Holy Place in the sanctuary. Chapter 1 pictures Him among the seven-branched candlesticks that’s in the first compartment of the sanctuary called the Holy Place. In chapters 4 and 5, we see the slain Lamb that represents Jesus amongst the elders who have vials with burning incense, another article found in the Holy Place. Then in Revelation 11:19, we see the way opened into the Most Holy Place which was the second and last compartment of the sanctuary. And the ark of the covenant and the law of God is seen there. Then in chapter 15, we see the sanctuary services come to an end, which is signified by the temple being filled with smoke and no man being able to enter it.

Revelation is built on the system of the Hebrew sanctuary/temple, so spend time reading and studying its physical structure and services. It’s fascinating; it was the first Bible that God ever gave to His people.

7.) Understand that Revelation doesn’t go in chronological order.

Many major theologians have made a big mistake because they’ve assumed that the book of Revelation is written in exact chronological order. It was written in somewhat of a chronological order since it begins with John being on the island of Patmos around AD 95 and ends with the destruction of the world and the wicked and the
establishment of the new earth. But it’s not in exact chronological order like a novel or biography. The reason is because it follows the principles of the Hebrew literary structure. In Hebrew literary structure, it will often give a broad, sweeping, general view of a situation. Then, it will repeat the same information again in the next chapter but now focusing more on a certain aspect of the situation. That’s why there are seven churches, then after that the seven seals, then after that the seven trumpets. They are all roughly covering the same time period, but just from different perspectives. We shouldn’t be surprised at this because we see the exact same thing happening in the four gospels. Why have four different books all telling mostly the same stories? Because each gospel has its own unique perspective and adds details the others didn’t cover. Hebrew literary structure goes in cycles covering the same information from a different perspective and with a little more detail each time. You could call this “repeat and enlarge.”

This will really help you in not getting confused in trying to look for fulfillments of the different symbols in the wrong era. Because many scholars miss this fact, they think that everything from Revelation 4:1 and onward must be happening during the tribulation period. This is a BIG mistake. Looking at Revelation from a pure modern day chronological perspective, they suppose that since Revelation 3 ends with the last church period, Laodicea, which symbolizes our day, that everything after that must be the tribulation. Most of these people believe that the tribulation begins with a secret rapture, so we would expect to see a secret rapture in Revelation chapter 4 right? First of all, there is no secret rapture brought to view in chapter 4 or 5, or even in 6 through 13 for that matter. Also, Jesus doesn’t say “Behold I come as a thief…” until Revelation 16:15. Yet another problem is His second coming is also presented in chapters 14 and 20. And in both of them He destroys the earth and the wicked! How many times can you destroy the earth and the wicked? So are there two more second comings after a secret rapture? This all makes perfect sense if you understand the Hebrew literary structure of Revelation, and that it was written in cycles that slowly advanced from the time of the apostolic church to the end of this world and the establishment of the new earth, often covering the same periods of history over and over giving new information every time.

8.) It takes time to understand.
Don’t expect to understand the book of Revelation in a week or a month or even a year. It’s a continual journey. And that’s really exciting because there will always be something new and fascinating to learn. But, you’d better get into it fast because it won’t be very much longer till the book of Revelation will no longer be a prophetic book but a history book. These prophecies are fulfilling fast!
Decoding in Action

Let’s put these five keys of interpretation principles to use so you can see for yourself how they work. I encourage you to pull out your Bible and follow along with me as we go through this passage together. We are going to take a prophetic passage and decode it using all the interpretation tools we’ve gathered. The passage that we’re going to look at is Revelation 12:1-5.

But before we even start, let’s put one of our first keys to use, Key #3. Let’s ask for the Holy Spirit to guide us to the correct interpretation.

“Father in heaven would you please send us the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth, that we would understand the message you have for us in these verses today. Thank you in Jesus name Amen!”

We’ll read through the passage once, then come back to the beginning and start using the keys. Revelation 12:1-5:

“And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars:

2 And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.

3 And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

4 And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.

5 And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.”

Let’s start with the first verse. Revelation 12:1:

“And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.”

Now let’s use Key #5, context.

What is the setting here? Is this to be understood literally or symbolically? This question is pretty easy. We see here that we are in the middle of the book of Revelation, and the clear context is that the apostle John is in vision. Also, did you notice John said that, “there appeared a great wonder in heaven…” That word “wonder” also means “sign.” Don’t think that you have to be a deep theologian to figure that out. I found that out by just looking at the alternate reading in the margin of my Bible. So we know this passage is symbolic.
Next let’s use Keys # 1 and 2 which would be looking for the hidden message behind these symbols by going to the other parts of the Bible, especially the Old Testament to decode these symbols. Here are the key symbols...

“…a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars...”

We’ll start with the symbol of a woman. I mentioned earlier that prophetically a woman is a symbol for a church; let me prove that to you now.

“Woman”
“For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”
— 2 Corinthians 11:2

“Husbands love your wives even as Christ loves His church.” — Ephesians 5:25

“I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate woman.”
— Jeremiah 6:2

“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” — Revelation 19:7, 8

A woman in prophetic language symbolizes God's people, or His church.

“Clothes”
In Biblical prophetic language, clothes is a symbol of character.

“Let mine adversaries be clothed with shame” — Psalm 109:29

“Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let thy saints shout for joy.”
— Psalm 132:9

“The LORD reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the LORD is clothed with strength...” — Psalm 93:1
“And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” — Revelation 19:8

In Bible times, when someone was very sad or beside themselves they would tear their clothes. This was to symbolize they had a torn or broken heart.

When they were in deep repentance, they would clothe themselves with sackcloth. That’s like the material of old potato sack. Can you imagine wearing that rough, coarse, chaffing material? They were trying to communicate that they were chaffing inside their hearts.

“Sun”
The sun is a symbol of Christ.

“But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings” — Malachi 4:2

Let’s stop here and unlock the meaning of Revelation 12:1-5 based on what we’ve learned so far. We’ve seen that a woman symbolizes a church, clothing symbolizes character and the sun is a symbol for Jesus. This woman is pictured clothed with the sun, meaning this church has the character of Christ. This is a picture of God’s true church. Not those who are just playing church but those whose characters actually reflect the character of Christ their Lord. But at what time period in history is John seeing this snapshot of His church? The rest of the symbols will tell us.

“12 stars”
How many tribes were there in the nation of Israel? Twelve. We will see that these 12 stars are a symbol of the 12 tribes of Israel. In Genesis 37:9, 10, Joseph has a prophetic dream that his father and older brothers would bow to him one day. In the dream, his 11 brothers are depicted as stars. Joseph of course was also one of the 12 sons of Israel, which later became the nation of Israel. In Bible prophecy, stars can be a symbol for ancient Israel. Do you remember what God told Abraham the number of Israel’s population would be compared to? “I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven” Genesis 22:17. Therefore, this view of the church in Revelation 12:1-5 is during the Old Testament period. This will be further confirmed by seeing what happens afterwards.

“Moon”
What about the moon that the woman is standing on? This one is a little trickier
because it takes a little more digging and thinking. What is another name the moon is
given in Scripture? (Later in this book, I’ll show you how you can use Bible software to
find information like this.)

“His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be
established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah.”
— Psalms 89:37

We see that the moon in this passage is referred to as a “faithful witness.” What is the
moon a faithful witness to? The sun! The moon is our assurance during the night that
yes, there is indeed the sun even though we can not directly see it.

So in Revelation 12:1-5 if the sun is Christ, what is that which most faithfully witnesses
to Christ? The Scriptures are the most faithful witness we have to the character and
record of God. The moon that the woman of Revelation 12 stands on, the moon which
is known as a “faithful witness,” is the Old Testament Scriptures.

Notice what Peter said about the Old Testament prophets during his sermon in Acts
10:42, 43:

“And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he
which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.
To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever
believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.” — Acts 10:42, 43

Just like the literal moon faithfully reflects the literal sun, so the Old Testament prophets
were a faithful reflection and witness to their Lord Jesus who is called the Sun of
Righteousness.

Let’s use Key #4 now by looking at the context of the moon in this scene. Where is the
moon positioned in this scene?

“…and the moon under her feet,”

The woman (the church) is standing on it. In other words, the moon here is her
foundation. She relies on it; it’s holding her up. It was Jesus who said the wise man
builds his house upon the rock. So the hidden message that this symbol is conveying
is that God’s true church is founded upon the word of God!
Let’s look at the rest of the passage to see what God wants us to understand about this church. Revelation 12:2-5:

“And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.  
3 And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.  
4 And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.  
5 And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.”

So we see this woman was going to give birth to a “man child,” and then a seven-headed, red dragon comes on the scene which is waiting for the woman to give birth so he can destroy the child. What does this mean? Let’s put our keys to use again, trusting in God to lead us to the truth. It’s always best to start by decoding the major players first before we get into the rest of the details. The major players are the man child and the red dragon. We’ll start with the “red dragon.”

Using the key of context again, if we just keep reading it tells us later in the chapter exactly who this dragon is.

“And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world,” — Revelation 12:9

I was once talking with a man about this passage, and he was insisting that this red dragon symbolized China. I opened the Bible and showed this verse to him and said, “That seems pretty clear, don’t you think?” He stared at me for a few seconds and said, “Yeah, it’s China.” So much for the Bible and the Bible only! I’m sure you’re not that stubborn and want to stick with the Bible, so let’s give attention to the other details regarding this dragon.

It says he had seven heads and ten horns with crowns on them. When you understand what these heads and horns represent, you’re set up to know who the Antichrist is. This is an entire study in itself that would unlock much more than we have time to deal with in this book. In my message entitled “Unveiling the Antichrist,” I dive head first into this truth revealing the Bible’s 11 identifying marks that will make the identity of the Antichrist undeniable. You can see a preview of this presentation on the “Order” page of my website RevelationRevealedToday.com.
There are clues in the next verse that give us more details about this dragon that are very important to understand. Revelation 12:4 says,

“And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth”

This is where context becomes so important again because we see the dragon draws a third of the stars of heaven to the earth. Now we saw earlier that the stars symbolized the 12 tribes of Israel, but here they symbolize something different. Remember I mentioned that some symbols have double meanings and therefore we must look at the context to understand which application to give it? What “stars” were previously in heaven which Satan drew out and cast to the earth? Was it the 12 tribes of Israel? That doesn’t make any sense. Using our key list of symbols let’s look at the other symbolic meaning of “stars.”

“The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.” — Revelation 1:20

“Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?... When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” — Job 38:4, 7

We see these stars symbolize angels. Have you ever wondered where demons came from? They were once happy, holy angels in heaven until Satan convinced them to join in his rebellion against God. Also, did you notice which body part the dragon used to cast these angels out of heaven?

“And his tail drew the third part of the stars...” — Revelation 12:4

Remember, nothing is an accident in the book or Revelation; it’s symbolic. God’s trying to tell us something. Why did it say the dragon used his “tail”? What is a tail a symbol of in Scripture?

Let’s use Keys #2 and 3 and allow the Bible to interpret itself by using the rest of the Bible to unlock the symbols in Revelation. Here’s a good opportunity to show you how to use Bible software. There are many different kinds of Bible software out there, ranging from free to costing thousands of dollars. You can easily download most of them online. If you have a term or phrase that isn’t in the prophetic key I’ve provided
you, which you often will, the next best way to find its meaning is by looking at other passages that use the same terminology and see what light they can bring.

I’ll show you how I do this on a free software for Mac called Eloquent since it’s free and simple to use. If you don’t have a computer, you could also do it the old fashioned way and look up the word in a concordance. If you pull up the Bible study software on your computer and click on the word search icon, then simply type in the word “tail” it will pull up nine different verses in which “tail” is used. As we read through all nine verses, we’ll see that one is the verse in question, Revelation 12:4. Several other verses are speaking of a literal tail on an animal, but two of the hits come from a passage that is very interesting and will be the answer to crack the prophetic code.

“Therefore the Lord will cut off from Israel head and tail, branch and rush, in one day. The ancient and honourable, he is the head; and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail.” — Isaiah 9:14,15

Did you catch that? According to the Bible, what is the tail a symbol of? A liar. How did Lucifer go about gathering support among the angels in heaven against God? Lies, deception. And he’s still pushing the same campaign on earth using lies to gather support in his movement of turning people against God. This wicked campaign continued until the Bible says all out war broke out in heaven (Revelation 12:7). To find out more about this war that took place in heaven that has now moved to earth, take a look at the preview on my presentation entitled “The Origin of Evil, If God Exists Why is There Evil?” on the “Order” page of my website RevelationRevealedToday.com.

The next main character in this passage is the “man child.” Using the key of context again, notice the prophetic clues given in the text.

“…and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.” — Revelation 12:4, 5

Using the rest of the Bible to understand these clues, let’s answer these questions.

- What child did the devil attempt to murder at birth?
- Who rules the nations with a rod of iron?
- Who has ascended into heaven to the throne of God?

There’s only one person who fits all of those descriptions… JESUS.
To answer the first question, we need to use Key #2 and use the rest of the Bible to get the answer. In Scripture, where do we see the devil trying to murder someone at birth? There are two places actually, the first being Moses but the second in Matthew 2:16. At the time Christ’s birth, the dragon worked through King Herod and the Roman empire in an attempt to murder Jesus. God warned Joseph in a dream and told them to flee into Egypt with Mary and Jesus.

Next, who does the Bible say “rules with a rod of iron”? I still have my Bible study program open, so I type in “rod of iron” and four hits pull up. Notice this first one.

> “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” — Psalm 2:9

Who is this talking about? I wanted to know so I clicked the option that pulls up the verses before and after so I could get some context (Key #4) to help. Look at what the context brought out by just looking two verses before.

> “I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.” — Psalm 2:7

Bingo! The context tells us that this passage is talking about Jesus! The Bible is amazing! Who, according to Psalms 2, will rule with a rod of iron? The begotten Son, Jesus.

Also, the last text the search brought up is Revelation 19:15, which clearly describes Jesus coming to judge the earth, and one of the things it says about him is that, “he shall rule them with a rod of iron.”

Our last question, Who has ascended into heaven to the throne of God? Again using our Bible software search engine, I type in “throne of God.” Six hits pull up. The second verse is Hebrews 12:2:

> “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

If I made my search more simple and just put in, “throne” and “God” it pulls up a lot more to comb through, but you would also find this confirming verse.
“Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne.” — Acts 2:30

So allowing the Bible to answer its own questions...

- What child did the devil attempt to murder at birth? = Jesus.
- Who rules the nations with a rod of Iron? = Jesus.
- Who has ascended into heaven to the throne of God? = Jesus.

Now this is building on solid rock! No assumptions, no guessing games here, we’re simply using God’s keys and allowing the Holy Spirit to use the Bible to interpret itself.

So let’s bring it all together. Based on what we’ve studied so far, here is the correct interpretation of Revelation 12:1-5.

1 “And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.

2 And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.

3 And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

4 And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.

5 And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.”

= A view of the God’s faithful people who had Christ’s character and relied on the Word of God during the Old Testament period just before the coming of Christ.

= An introduction to the great red dragon.

= A behind-the-scenes look into how Satan used lies to deceive a third of the angels in heaven which caused them to be cast down to the earth. Satan’s attempt to murder Christ at His birth through the Roman empire.

= Three clues telling us this “man child” is Jesus.
As you continue to read through Revelation 12, you will find that it accurately tracks the identity and location of God’s faithful, true church in every age from the time of Christ’s ascension in verse 5 leading up until today in verse 17. The presentation entitled “Revelation’s Remnant and the Wrath of the Dragon” breaks down this entire chapter which concludes with a surprise ending.

Now that you have seen God’s five keys for decoding prophecy and demonstrated how to use them, you now have the tools to go and “rightly divide the word of truth” and learn the hidden messages that are found everywhere in Bible prophecy! This was really an introductory course, and there are many more Bible interpretation keys than the five we have covered. You will pick them up along the way as you keep studying. Also keep checking in with my website RevelationRevealedToday.com as I continue to post new blog articles and videos where I will be discussing more of the keys not covered here.

If you would like to see more, take a look at my 20-part DVD series entitled “Revelation Revealed” in which I go through the major events in prophecy. It’s currently being sold at a discounted price.

Closing Thoughts

In the year 1799, Conrad Reed went to do some fishing in a creek on the family farm. While fishing, he noticed a strange-looking, heavy, black rock in the creek and decided to take it home. The family didn’t think much of the strange-looking, heavy, black rock and used it as a doorstop for three years. Eventually, the Reeds sold the rock to a jeweler for a scanty $3.50. It was later discovered when someone mined into it that the 17-pound rock was actually a solid gold nugget worth thousands! Can you imagine how Conrad and his family must have felt when they discovered they had been tripping over a treasure for three years?

Bible prophecy is a priceless treasure friends. So many have it in their homes within their reach only to just spend years in confusion tripping over it. The messages of Bible prophecy are indispensable for us living in the end of time, yet multitudes are only getting a minuscule $3.50 worth of understanding out of it when they should be getting thousands!

It is the duty of every Christian to not just read but to study the Bible. Especially should we study prophecy, as we are now living in the last days! Prophetic fulfillment is happening left and right and many don’t realize it since they don’t know what the real messages of Bible prophecy are. I encourage you to take this seriously and put these keys to use. It is God’s great desire to share more truth with you. He is waiting and longing to reveal truth to you that will change your life forever! Prophetic passages that
now appear confusing and too hard to understand will eventually be made as clear as
day for the diligent student who is willing to take God at His word and use correct Bible
study principles.

God Bless you my friend! And if you’ve been blessed, don’t forget to share what
you’ve learned!

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