

**REVELATION
FOR YOU**

Symbols in Revelation

The word translated “made known” in 1:1 is literally “signified”. Revelation is written in the language of “Sign”. It may be an allusion to Daniel 2, where King Nebuchadnezzar dreams of a statue that is crushed by a stone that becomes a mountain. Daniel “makes known” this mystery to the king (Daniel 2:28-30, 45). The four parts of the statue are four great kingdoms, and the stone is God’s kingdom. The dream is clearly not to be taken literally. Its components are all symbols that signify something that takes place in history. The same is true of the book of Revelation. It doesn’t describe events that will literally take place at some point in the future. It’s written in the form of symbols that signify events in history. It’s written in symbols because its aim is not merely to convey information but to capture our imagination.

seven	completeness or perfection (perhaps from the seven days of creation)
six	incompleteness or imperfection (one less than the completeness symbolised by seven)
seven spirits or sevenfold Spirit	the ever-present Spirit of God (seven signifies his complete or perfect presence)
four	completeness, especially geographic completeness (e.g. the four corners of the earth)
horn	strength
eyes	sight or wisdom (insight)
sea	the forces of chaos (so a crystal sea represents complete control over the forces of chaos)
living creatures	power or imperial powers
white robes	God’s declaration of the wearer’s purity, righteousness and vindication, and therefore also their right to be in God’s presence

earthquakes	earth-shattering events
1,000	many
12	completeness for God's people (from the twelve patriarchs of the Old Testament and the twelve apostles of the New Testament)
144,000	12 x 12 x 1000 = completeness x many = all God's many people
rainbow	covenant faithfulness and mercy (from Noah's rainbow)
virginity	faithfulness to God (ready for the marriage of the Lamb)
adultery	unfaithfulness to God
trumpets	warnings of judgment, victory or battle

Time, Times and Half a Time

One phrase deserves particular comment: time, times and half a time. "A time, times and half a time" (Revelation 12:14) equals 3½ years if a "time" is seen as a year and "times" is two years. This is approximately 1,260 days (Revelation 11:3; 12:6) and 42 months (Revelation 11:2). The background to this is Daniel 9:24-27 (though turning to the latter half of Daniel to explain the complex imagery of Revelation is like understanding the theory of relativity through analogies to quantum physics!). There may also be echoes and associations with the Maccabean revolt, Israel in the wilderness, and the period during which Elijah brought drought in judgment on Israel (Revelation 11:6; James 5:17).

All these explanations and associations suggest that "time, times and half a time" is a **figurative** symbol representing a period of suffering for God's people which ends in victory. This is the period in which John's readers lived and the period in which we live.