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Symbolism in Revelation

by Hugh DeLong

As you are reading through Revelation, one of the things that should be abundantly evident is that the book is not about literal events. We see dragons with tails able to knock a third of the stars of heaven onto the earth (and yet the earth not only survives but is only partially destroyed). We see dragons and beasts, some with 7 heads. We see Jesus but he is a lamb with its throat cut riding on a white horse. We observe a bottomless pit and behold, it is 'in the earth'. We **know** that a bottomless pit would just open up "in China" and those thrown into it would just come out the other end.

In chapter one John beheld Jesus holding seven stars in his right hand and standing in the middle of seven lampstands. We are then specifically told that the lampstands **are** the churches and the stars **are** the angels of the churches. What John **saw** were lampstands and stars; What they **signified** (stood for, meant, are) were angels and churches. What you **see** in Revelation is **not** simply to be understood literally but one must understand what is signified.

Thus, John wrote concerning the things in this book that God "*signified it by his angel unto his servant John*" (Revelation 1:1). The verb here (Greek: *semaino*) appears six times in the New Testament and is translated as 'signify' all six times in the KJV. Strong's defined it as "to give a sign, to signify, indicate. 2 to make known". The noun form of the Greek is translated as "sign" 50 times, "miracle" 23 times, "wonder" three times, and "token" once. This then was the word used for the miracles that Jesus did -- they were **signs**. They signified something about Jesus. They pointed to a truth about Jesus (that he was the Son of God - John 20:30-31). In Revelation, many of the things we see in these visions are signs that point to something. They are not literal.

People seem to understand this -- **until** they want to make something literal. People see 'harps' and 'clouds' and take them as literal materialistic things. They see 'times' (1000 years, 3 1/2 years, etc.) and want to make them literal years. They see dragons with stingers in their tails that hurt only ungodly people and want to make them ICB missile launchers (how is **that** taking things literally?).

The biggest problem for me is that with all this selective literalism, they make the book totally non-understandable to John and the Christians who were being persecuted in the first century. What would a war over oil in the Middle East mean to a suffering church in Ephesus? What would the destruction of a Chinese army mean to the Christians in Smyrna (who had never even heard of a place called China)?

When the various beasts are understood to signify the instruments that Satan was using to bring persecution to the church of the first century, they would be comforted and strengthened in their faith to know that the church would be victorious in this struggle. Though **our** enemies may be different now, the principle of our victory by remaining faithful to Jesus yet is applicable.

John began this book: "*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near*" (Revelation 1:3).

God is Not Big

David Diestelkamp

Isaiah 40:28 – “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.”

An atheist said he rejects divine creation because of the size of the universe. Why would God care about people on one insignificant planet around one small star among 400 billion stars in one galaxy among over two trillion galaxies in the universe? Why would God make a universe this big and complex to waste it on some plan on a speck with people who are made of dust?

This isn't the first time that someone asked, “What is man that You are mindful of Him? And the son of man, that You visit him?” (Ps 8:4). It's a question rooted in who and what God is, and why He would be interested in man.

The atheist's objection shows ignorance of what the Bible and the universe is saying about God. The problem with the immense size of the universe argument is that God isn't big; that is, He isn't measurable in literally any way. God is eternal and limitless. The entire universe isn't big to God because God isn't big; God is immeasurable. The universe is of a different kind than God because it is big, measurable, quantifiable—and God is not. So, it doesn't use up or somehow waste God's resources or power in literally any way to create or maintain what we see as a big universe!

When the heavens declare the glory of God (Psa 19:1), they are declaring more than just that God can make something amazing and big. The things that are made are clearly showing “His invisible attributes...His eternal power and Godhead” (Rom 1:20). His eternal power is seen in His creation! Not just super-super human power. The universe is so big that it declares that God isn't big; He is infinite, immeasurable, and eternal. God is not just bigger than our universe; He is outside of it and isn't limited in any way.

I recognize that even the Bible uses physical and anthropomorphic terms as it grapples to help us understand what we cannot fully understand about God. But the looming danger is what I'll call the Super-Superman god mentality. Amplifying human capabilities to unimaginable levels creates an idol god, not the God who is not man, not material, not limited in any sense.

Nothing is hard for God. Nothing is big or complex for God. A single drop of water contains about 10,000,000,000,000,000,000 atoms (10 sextillion – more than all the stars in our galaxy). Now try to wrap your thinking around the fact that God is capable of knowing the exact position of every atom in the entire universe at all times – without taxing His power, attention, or abilities. It's impossible for us to imagine anyone like this because we can only think in terms of big and small. But God isn't big.

Instead of disproving God, a big and complex universe is what we would expect from an eternal God. A minimalist universe might suggest a limited god with limited resources and abilities. A big universe isn't somehow a waste as skeptics might charge. Let science show us God's amazing creation—both big and small. But remember, our creation is not a waste because of God's unlimited resources and power; and it also is not a waste because what it says about God causes us to believe in and glorify Him for Who He really is.

“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen” (1 Tim 1:17). Think on These Things Vol. 57 No. 3 2026