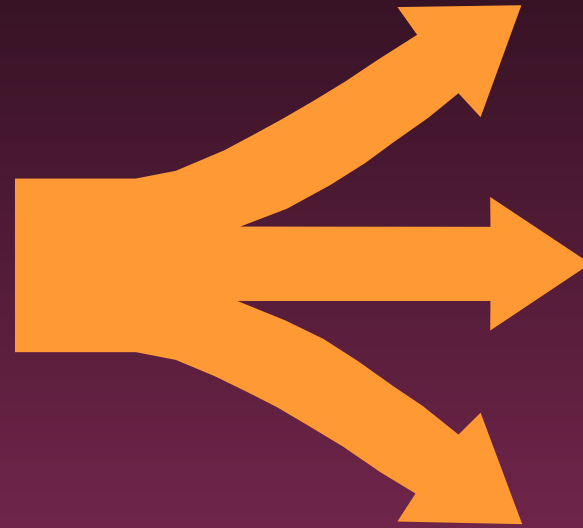


Interpreting Revelation



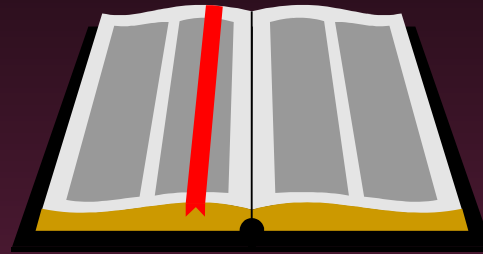
Vern Sheridan Poythress
Westminster Theological Seminary

A. Dangers and Rewards

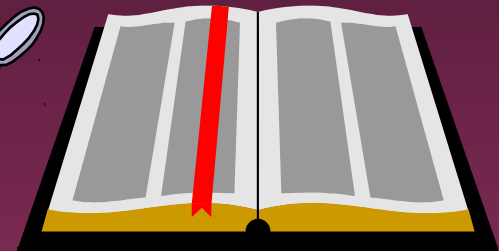


Extreme Responses

- Repulsion



- Unhealthy interest



Dealing with Disputes

- The interpretive challenge (Swete, p. ccvii)



Spiritually
challenging.

- and patience (Prov. 14:15)



Encouragements about Rev.

- Revelation is inspired Scripture.
- God knew the difficulties.
- Profitable, 2 Tim. 3:17.
- For servants of Christ, Rev. 1:1.
- With explicit blessing, Rev. 1:3.



Let's get going.

Relevance to Our Time





- It always speaks to people under persecution.
- Dispensationalism needs a positive answer.
- It attacks modern sins.



Attack on Sins

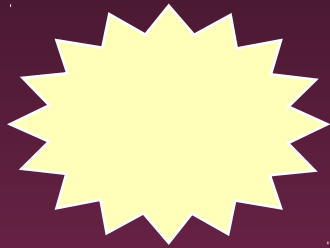
- **Disp. Literalism**
- **Modernist unbelief**
- **Secularist atheism**
- **Hedonism**
- **False religion**
- **Symbolically deep**
- **Supernatural**
- **Theocentric**
- **Exposing sin**
- **Exposing idolatry**

Resources in Scholarship

- **Biblical theology**  themes
- **M. G. Kline on theophany** 
- **Discourse linguistics showing structure** 
- **Interest in apocalyptic**  genre

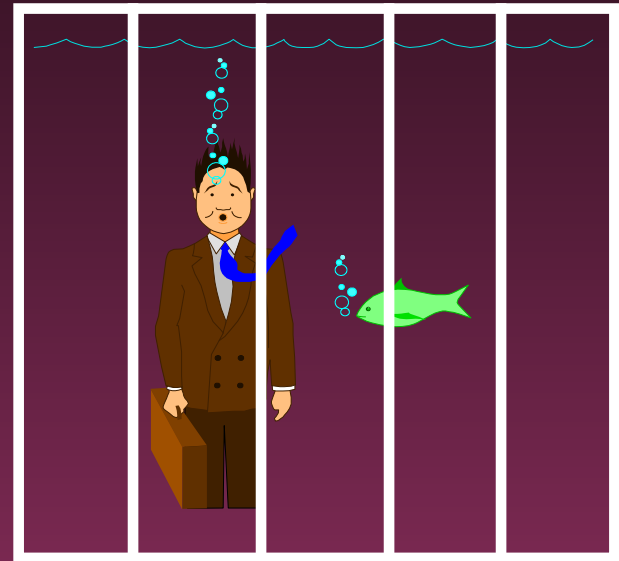
Renewing Your Mind

Glory of God in
Revelation



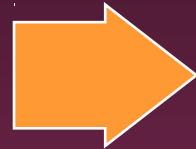
escape,
renewal

Western Culture



Envisioning the Future

View of
future



- ➔ **Dealing with bewilderment**
- ▢ **Grasping possibilities**
- ▢ **God's mind**
- ▢ **Cosmic framework**
- ▢ **New values**

Robert Scholes (Structural Fabulation, p. 19), quoting Olaf Stapledon, preface to Last and First Men:

Beauty of Revelation

- “Within this elaborate plan [of 7 7’s] is developed the action of a prophetic poem unsurpassed in sacred or profane literature in either the grandeur of its poetic imagery, or the superb sweep of its prophetic vision.” (B. B. Warfield: *Selected Short Writings* 2:86).

B. Four Major Views about Interpretation

Why Look at Others' Views?

- **Learn from others.**
- **Don't blindly adopt an approach.**
- **One's choice affects all of Revelation.**
- **No one view fits all the Scripture.**

Time of Fulfillment

When is the primary fulfillment?



- The four views differ about the primary time of fulfillment of Revelation.

Roman Empire View (Preterist)

- Beckwith (pp. 334-35): “fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and the fall of the Roman Empire.”



Two Strands of Roman Empire View

- **Modernist extreme: wholly in first century.**



- **Moderate: first century is chief focus.**



Final Crisis View (Futurist)

- Fulfillment occurs in the events of the final crisis immediately preceding the Second Coming.

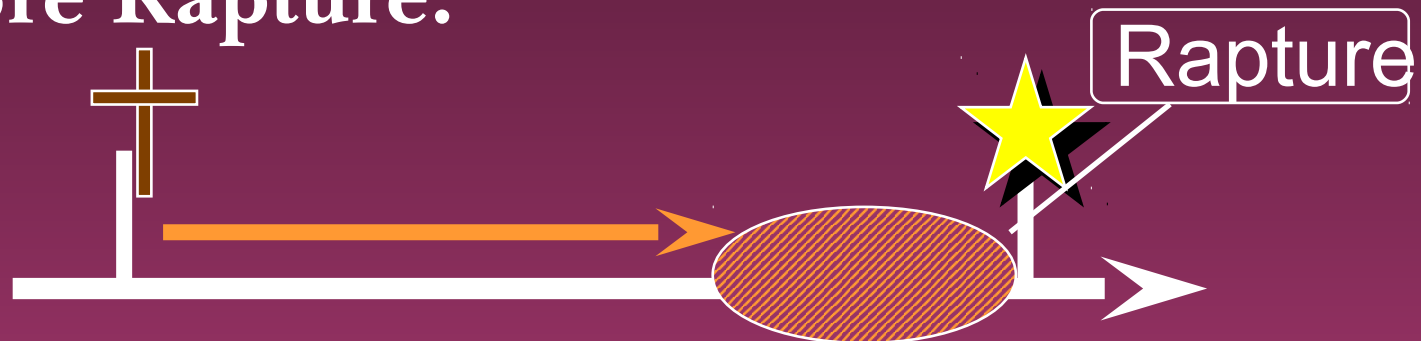


Two Strands of Final Crisis

- Pretribulationist places 4:1-19:21 after the Rapture.

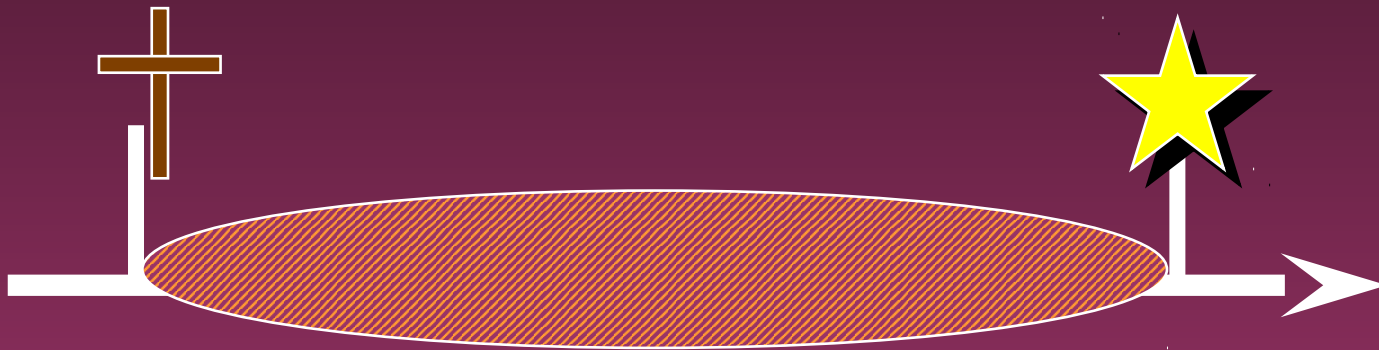


- Posttribulationist, usually more moderate, sees the bulk as relating to final crisis before Rapture.



Church History View (Historicist)

- Morris (p. 17): “setting out ... the history of western Europe ... until the second coming of Christ.”
- Rev 6-19 is in chronological order.



Two Strands of Church History

- Straight-line historicist treats Rev 6-19 as in chronological order.



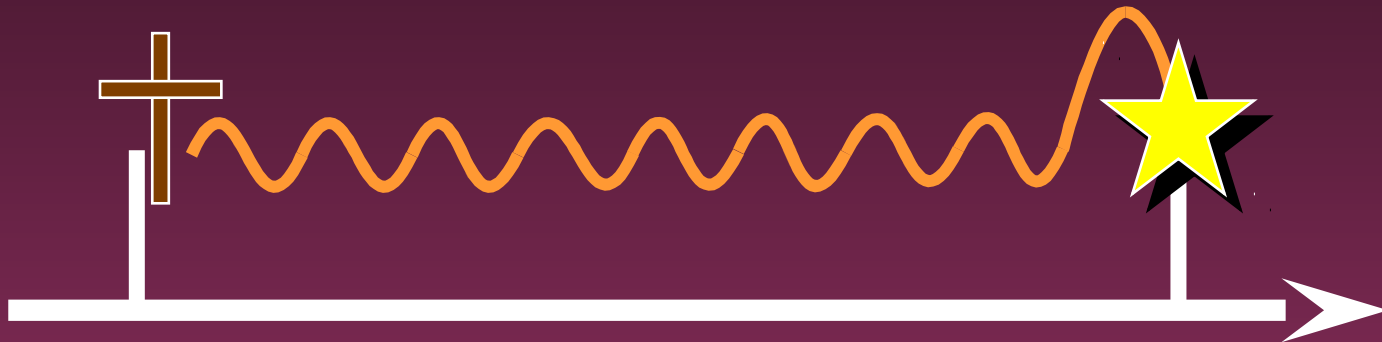
- Recapitulationist finds a number of recapitulations and nonchronological order in Rev 6-19.



- But recapitulationist is really a fifth view.

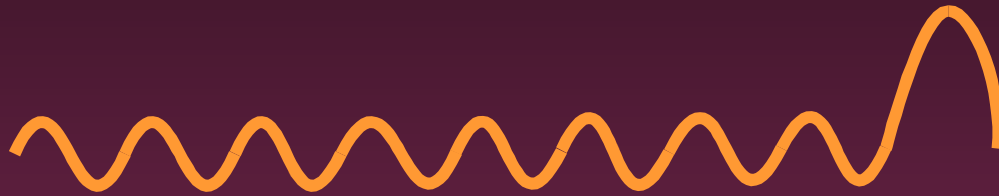
Repeated Pattern View (Idealist)

- Tenney (p. 143): “... represents the eternal conflict of good and evil which persists in every age.”



Two Types of Repeated Pattern

- **Consistent idealist: Eternal conflict, with no reference to specific events.**



- **Moderate idealist: repeated fulfillment**



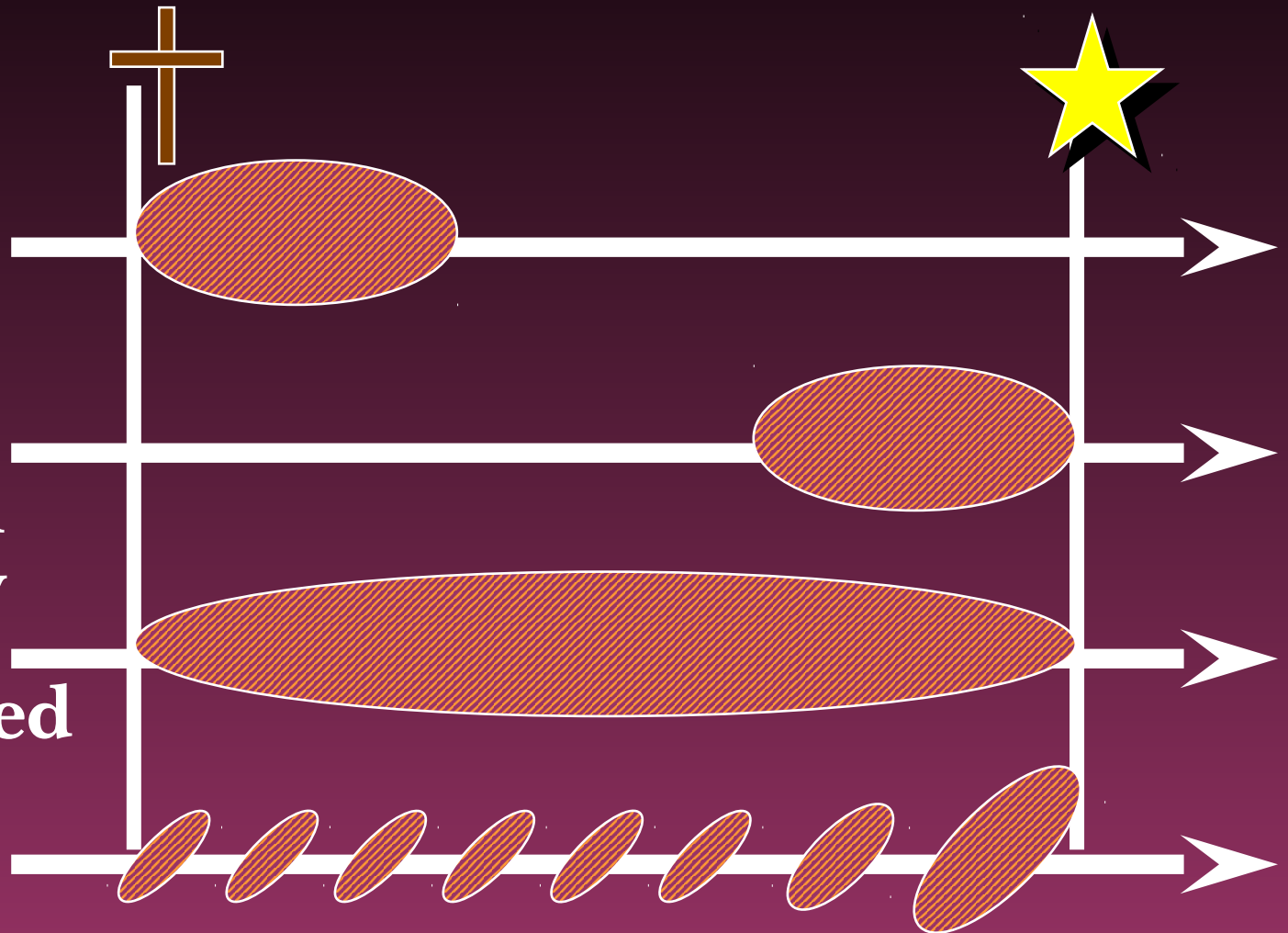
Summary of Views

- Roman Empire

- Final Crisis

- Church History

- Repeated Pattern



C. How the Four Major Views Work in Practice

Interpreting Rev 13:1-8 (Beast)

- **Roman Empire**
- **Final Crisis**
- **Church History**
- **Repeated Pattern**
- **Roman Emperor/Empire**
- **Final Antichrist**
- **The Pope**
- **Persecuting dominion wherever it appears**

Locusts of Rev. 9:1-11

- Roman Empire
- Final Crisis
- Church History
- Repeated Pattern
- Roman decadence
- Future locusts; or evil powers
- Islamic invasion

Interpreting Rev 9:1-11 (cont.)

- Church History

- Islamic invasion

- crowns

- women's hair

- five months

Mohammed opens
his mission

150 years

Caliphate to
Baghdad

612

762

Interpreting Rev. 9:1-11 (cont.)

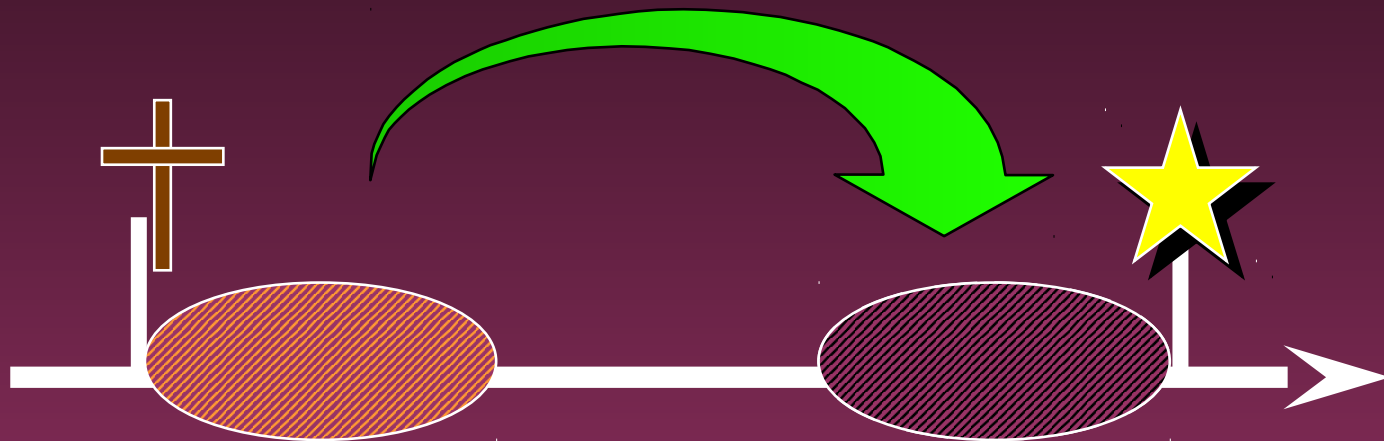
- **Roman Empire**
- **Final Crisis**
- **Church History**
- **Repeated Pattern**
- **Roman decadence**
- **Future locusts; or evil powers**
- **Islamic invasion**
- **Powers of evil in the wicked at all times**

Strengths of Different Views

- **Roman Empire**
- **Final Crisis**
- **Church History**
- **Repeated Pattern**
- **Relevance to 7 churches.**
- **Climax at Second Coming (22:20; 19:11-21).**
- **Draw a line between the two dates.**
- **Seize common principle; Satan as unoriginal.**

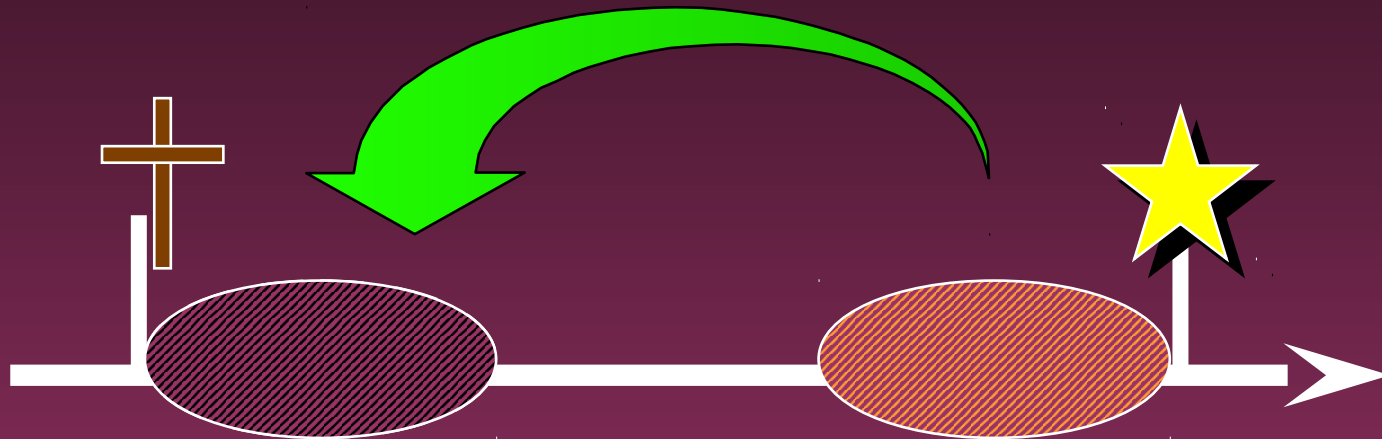
Transition from Roman Empire to Final Crisis View

- **Add a second fulfillment**



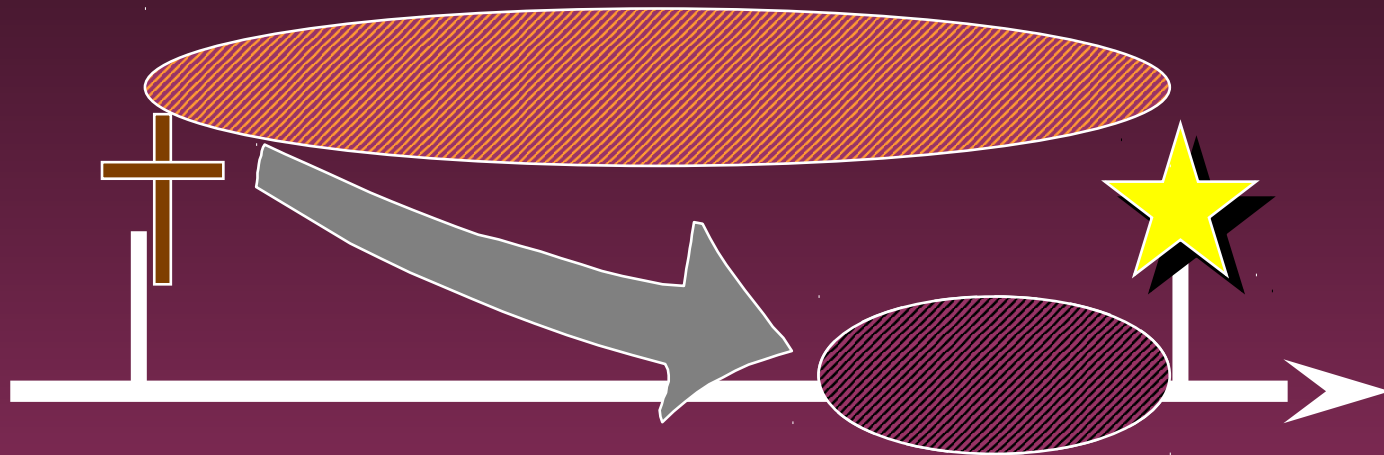
Transition from Final Crisis to Roman Empire View

- Add a foreshadowing



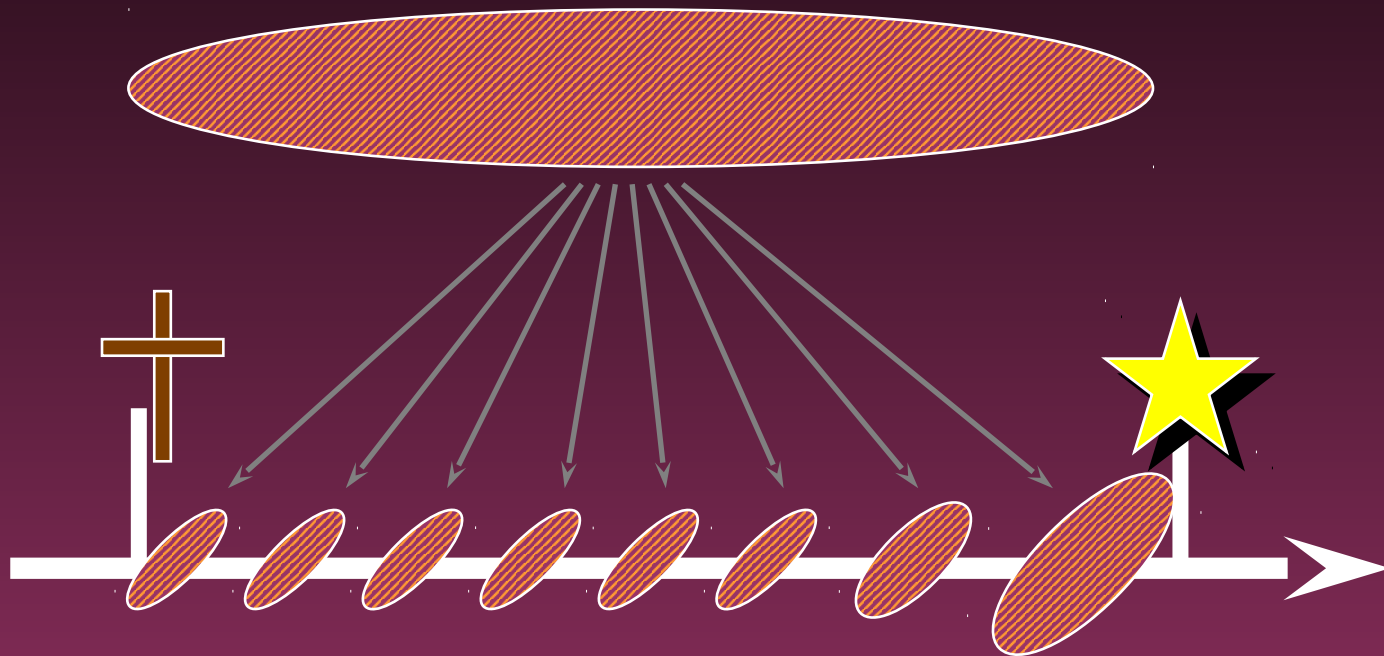
Transition from Church History to Final Crisis View

- Compress the time line



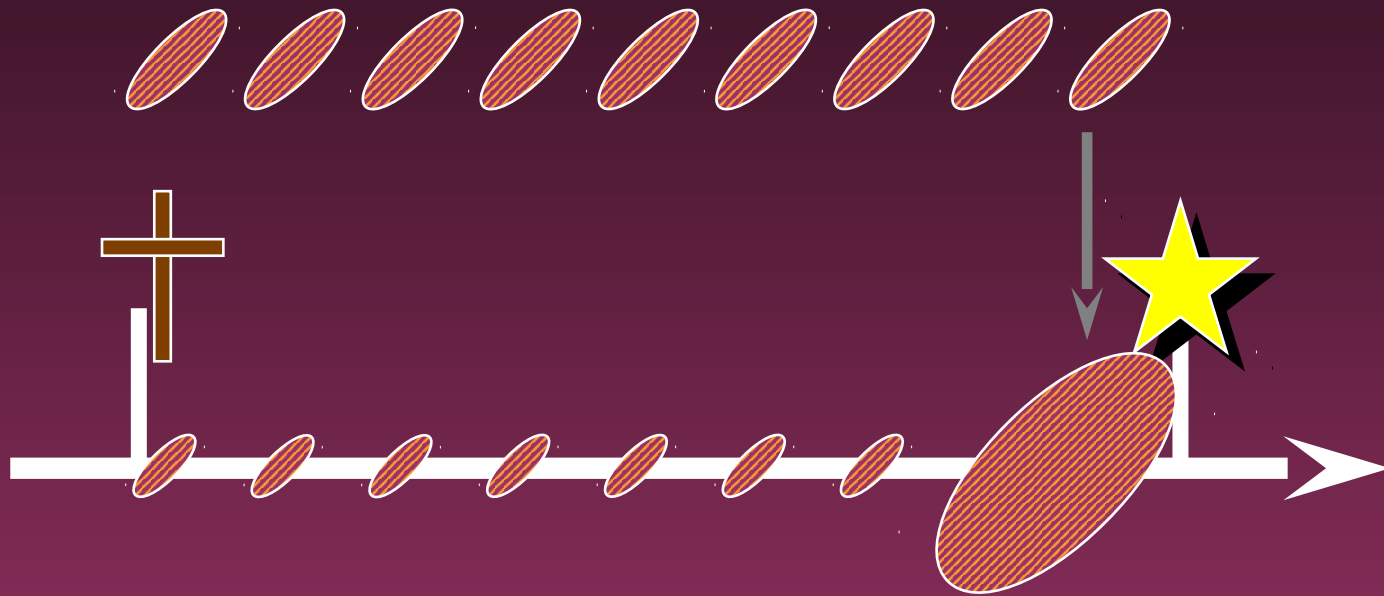
Transition from Church History to Repeated Pattern View

- **Recapitulate**



Transition from Repeated Pattern to Another View

- Find a primary fulfillment of the pattern



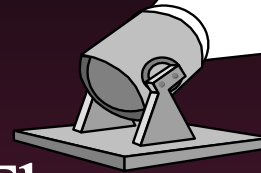
Variant Views

- **Early Roman Empire: Fulfillment in the fall of Jerusalem**
- **Recapitulationist.**
Revelation portrays the entire course of history from Roman times to the Second Coming, with the symbols possibly having more than one embodiment and with several “recapitulatory” accounts of this period.

D. Clarity of Revelation

Revealing (1:1)

God's
plan



unveiling, disclosure

Christ knows
our need

show, not
keep in the dark

to his servants (you!)

made known

The revelation of
Jesus Christ,
which God gave
him to show to his
servants the things
that must soon
take place. He
made it known ...

Blessing for Reading (1:3)

“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it.”



- **The only book of the Bible with an explicit blessing for reading. Extra encouragement.**
- **“Keep” means it’s practical. Strengthening the heart, not tickling the fancy.**

Are Its Symbols Difficult?

Yes

- Unfamiliar
- Apocalyptic
- Need OT background

No

- It's obvious.

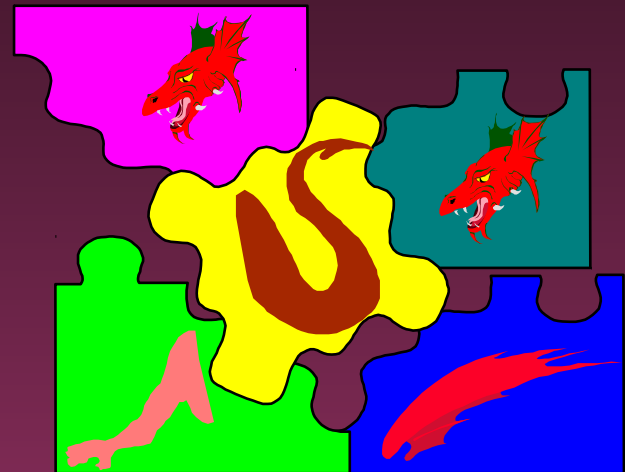


Fearsome!
Hideous!



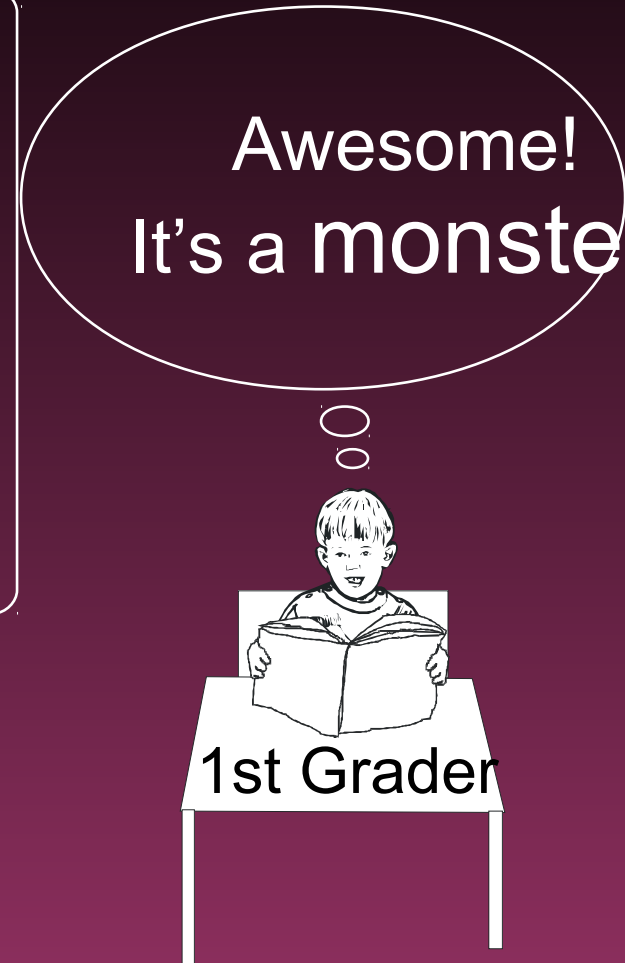
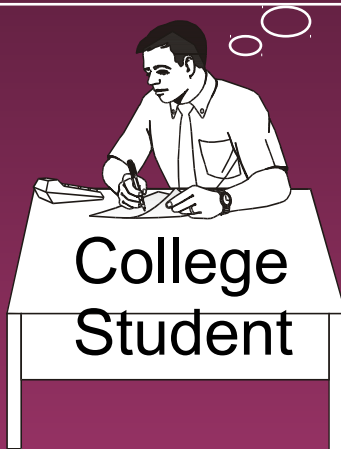
It's Simple

- A picture book, not a puzzle book.
- For children also.



See the Whole

Hmm.... Let's see now. What does the "locust" of Rev. 9 mean? The "horse" part must refer to one of the months of the Chinese calendar. "Crowns of gold" must refer to Babylonian kings. "Women's hair" surely suggests that it is women who will bring about the final downfall of mankind. "Scorpion tails" ... hmm... Now let me see.



Confidence in God

Don't be the "expert."

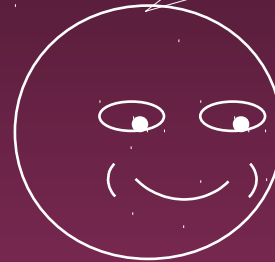
You can't possibly understand without my help!

You're right. I give up.



Encourage.

Look at God's greatness!



The Majesty of Christ

- Christ is our friend (John 15:14-15).
- He is also our majestic, awesome king!

Not a tame lion!



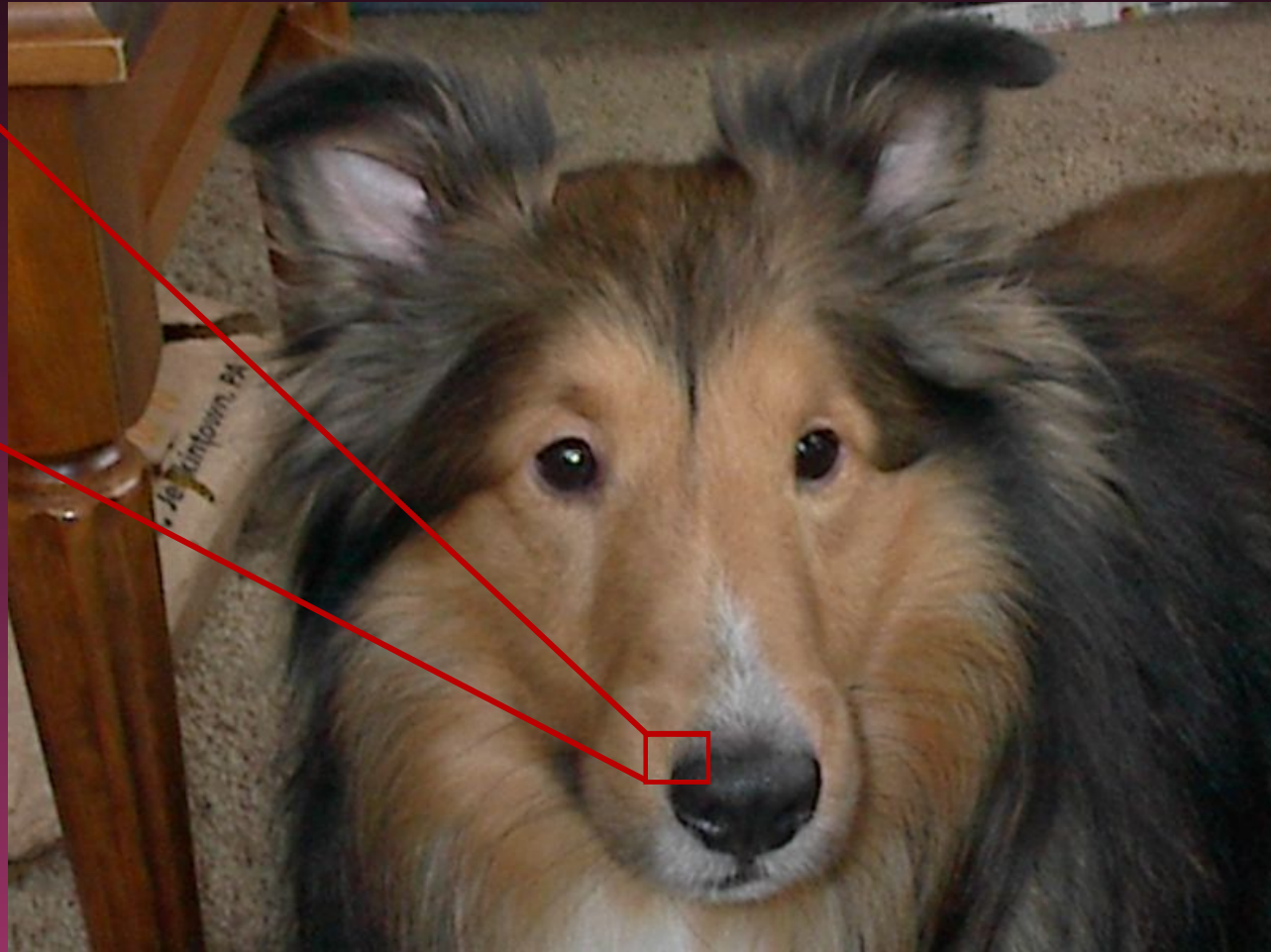
E. Symbolism

Why the Dispute over Revelation?



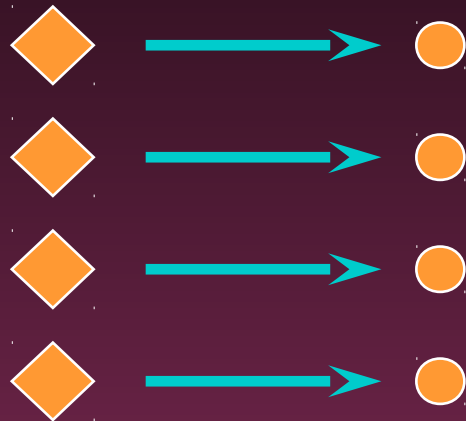
Due to:  **symbolism**

Meaning of a Symbol



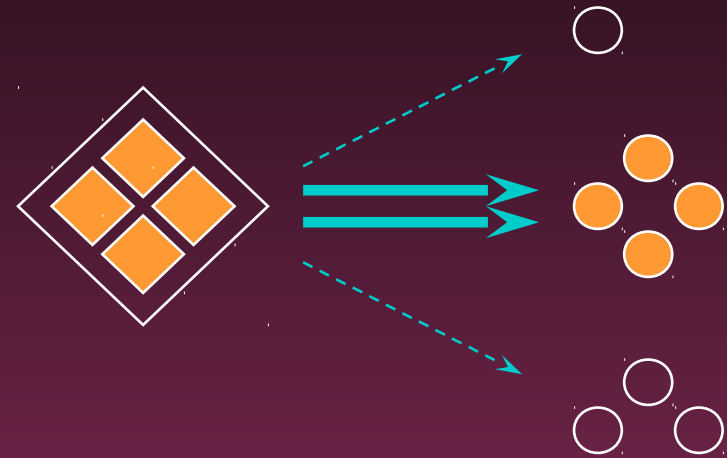
Two Approaches to Symbols

1. Code



- **One referent**
- **Meaning = referent**
- **Isolated**

2. Multifaceted



- **Multiple allusions**
- **Multifaceted impact**
- **Holistic**

Decoding by the Schools

Beast



Roman Emperor

Beast



Future Antichrist

Beast



Pope

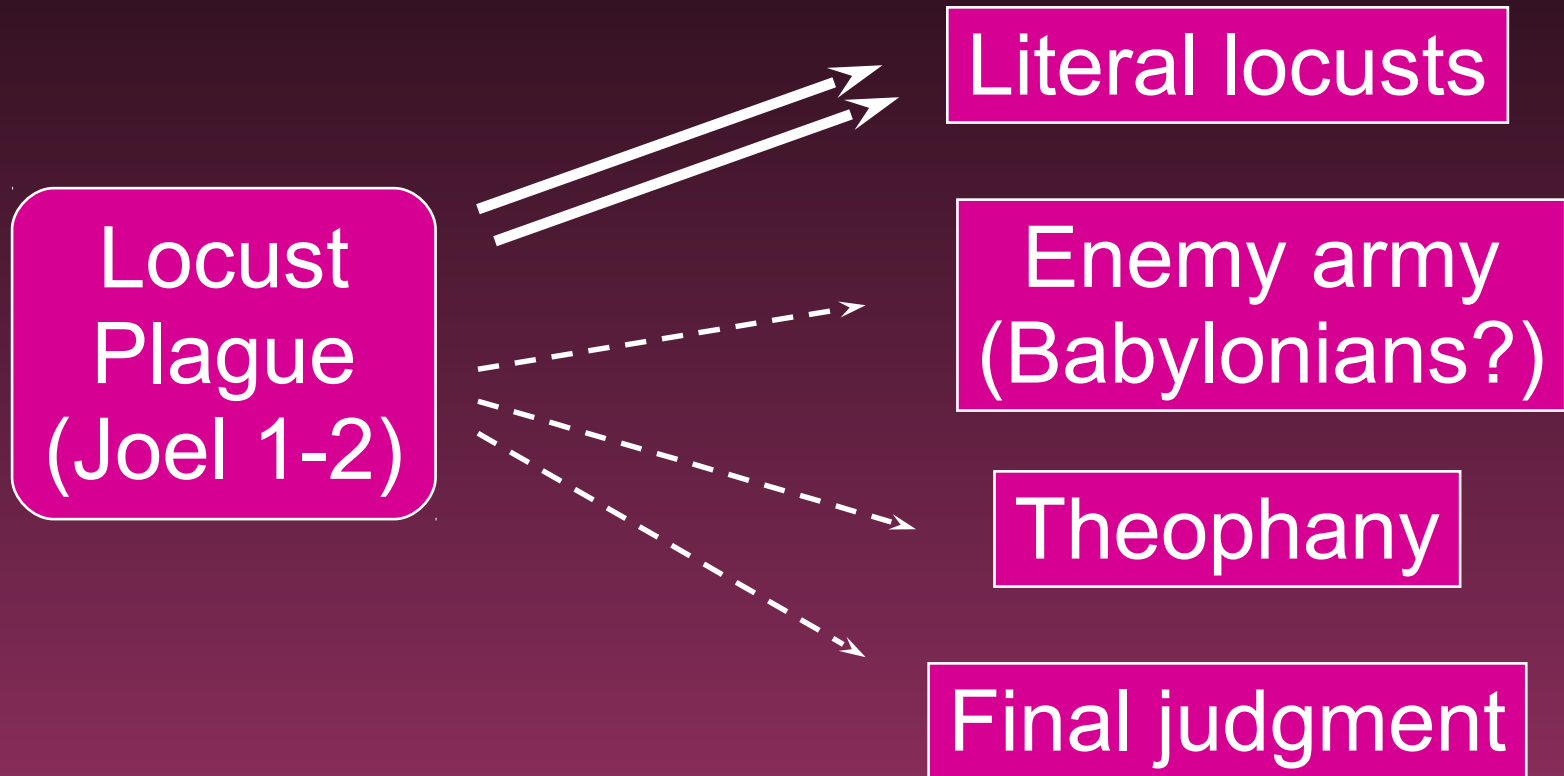
Beast



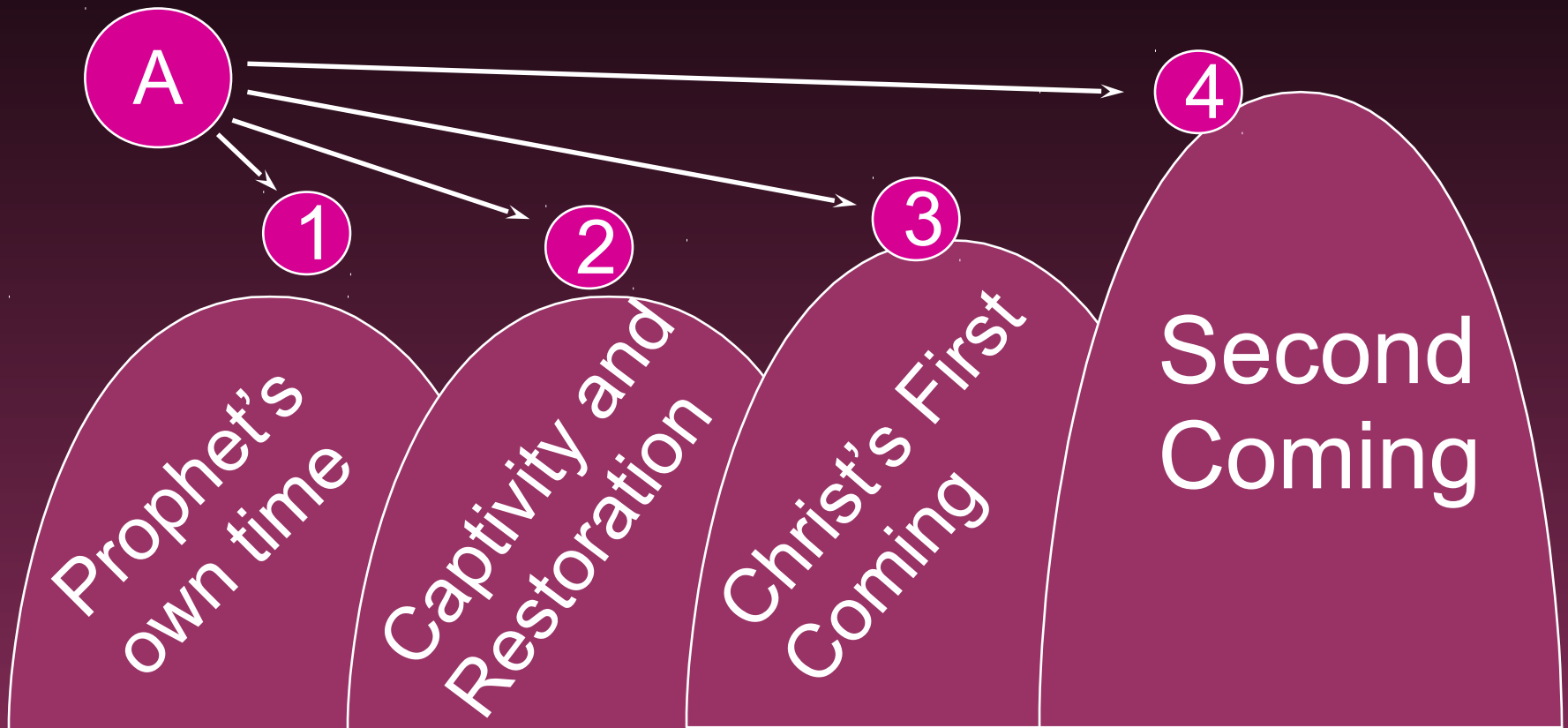
Idolatrour
Government

Prophecy is Poetic

Day of the Lord

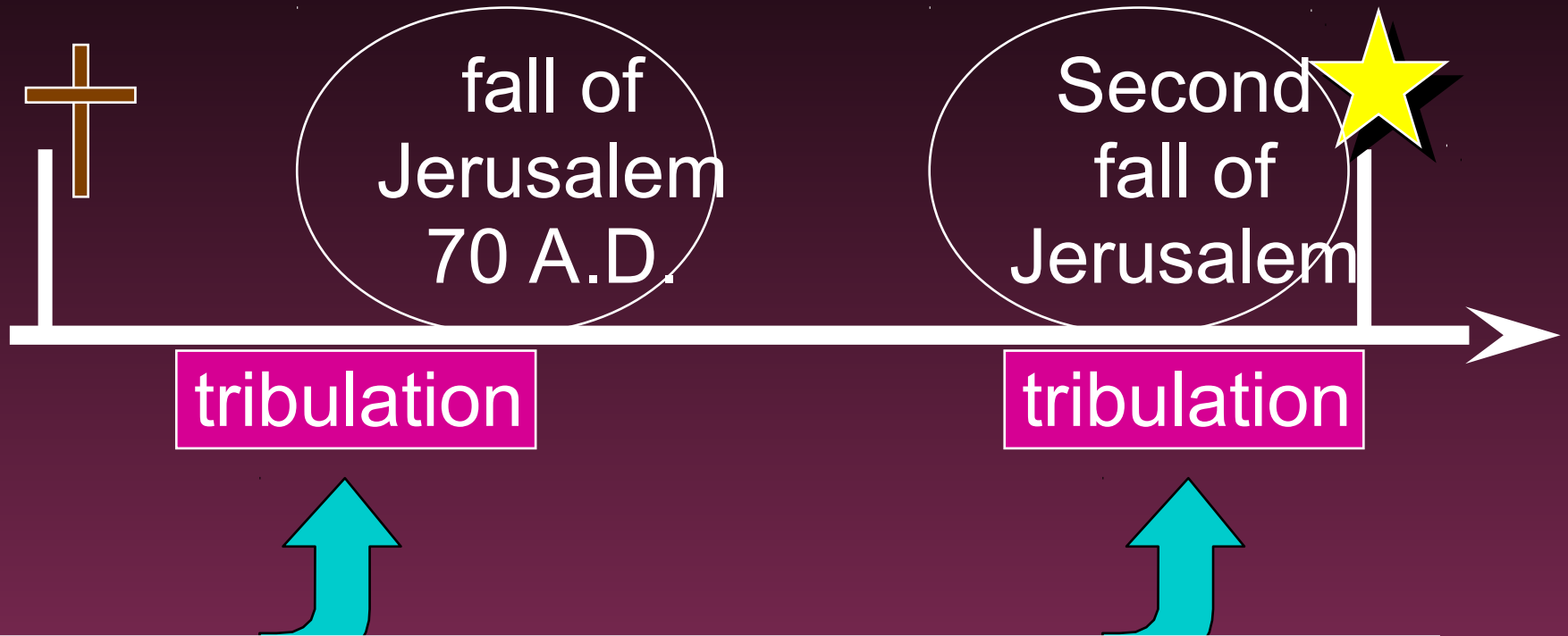


Expanded Understanding of Prophetic Fulfillment



Adapted from Irving Jensen, *Bible Study Charts*

Olivet Discourse (Luke 21)



Double Perspective of Olivet Discourse

Adapted from Irving Jensen, *Bible Study Charts*

Rev. 17:9 Has Two Referents

7 heads of the Beast



7 hills
on which
the woman sits.

(17:9)



7 kings,
5 of whom
have fallen.

(17:10)

More Than Two Planes of Interacting Meaning

For

Beast

- Referent (Roman Emperor?).
- Hideous monstrosity (repulsiveness).
- Combination of beasts from Daniel 7.
- With background of Genesis 1-3, where beasts are subordinate to man.

God-Centered Symbolism

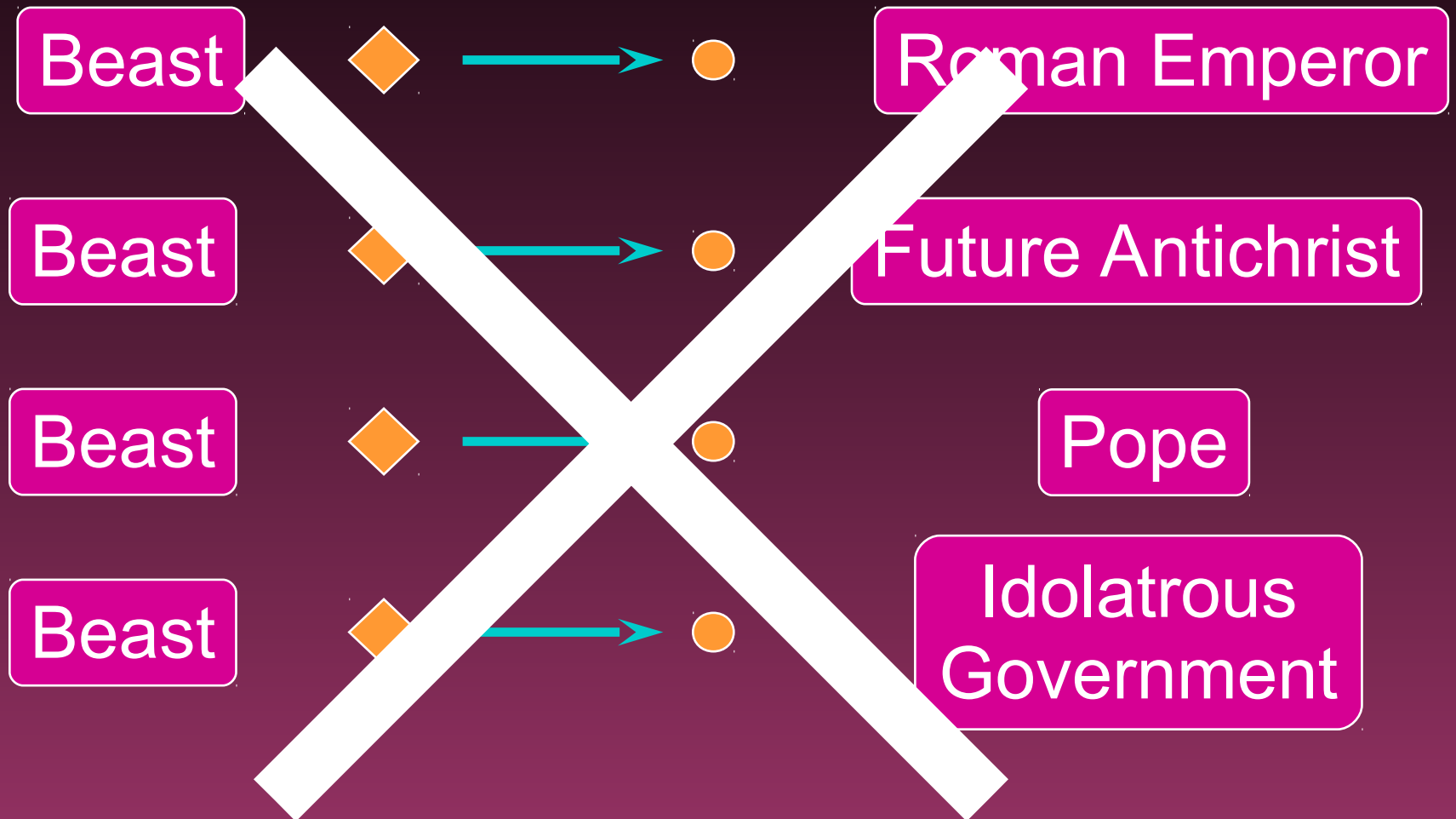


God in theophany is rich,
multifaceted,
nonexhaustible,
Trinitarian.



Symbolism of
Revelation is
multifaceted.

Schools' Decoding Is Inadequate



F. *A Positive Approach*

Attractions of the Schools

RE

FC

CH

RP



I'm not sure.
They all look good.



Insightful!

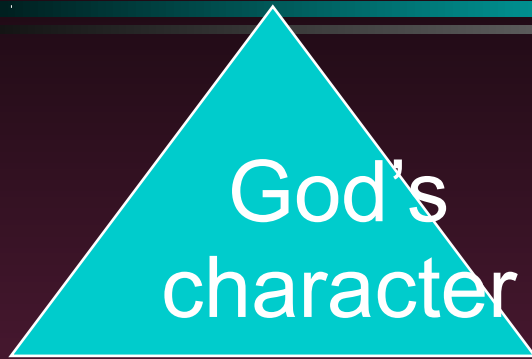
God Is Involved with Us

- Roman Empire
- Final Crisis
- Application NOW
- Repeated
- God loves 7 churches.
- God will come.
- God loves us NOW.
- God is the same at all times.

God is
central



Satan's Repeated Pattern



Satan's Pattern

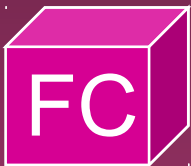


Nothing new here.

- Satan as a creature must imitate God; he cannot create anything new.
- Since God is the same, Satanic counterfeiting is the same for all times.
- Spiritual war shows a constant pattern.
- Satan suffers repeated defeats.

Some Truth in All Four

- God is always the same.
- God rules all history.
- Spiritual warfare is always the same.



All apply the same spiritual principles.

Evidence for Multiple Fulfillment

- **Flexible imagery.**
- **Speaks to people in all times.**
- **Evidence for all.**
- **Necessity of repeating counterfeiting.**

Starting with Repeated Pattern

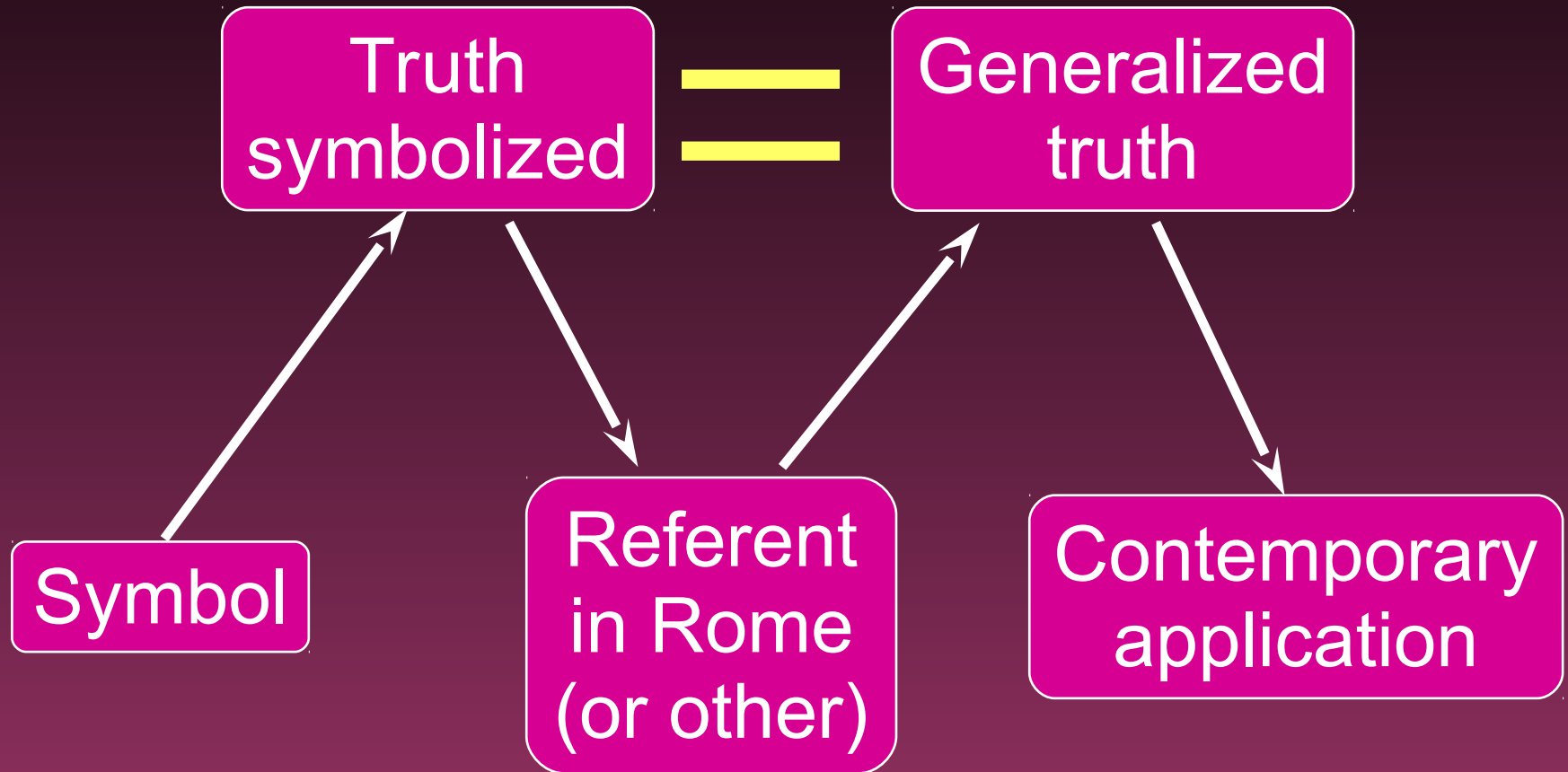
Symbol



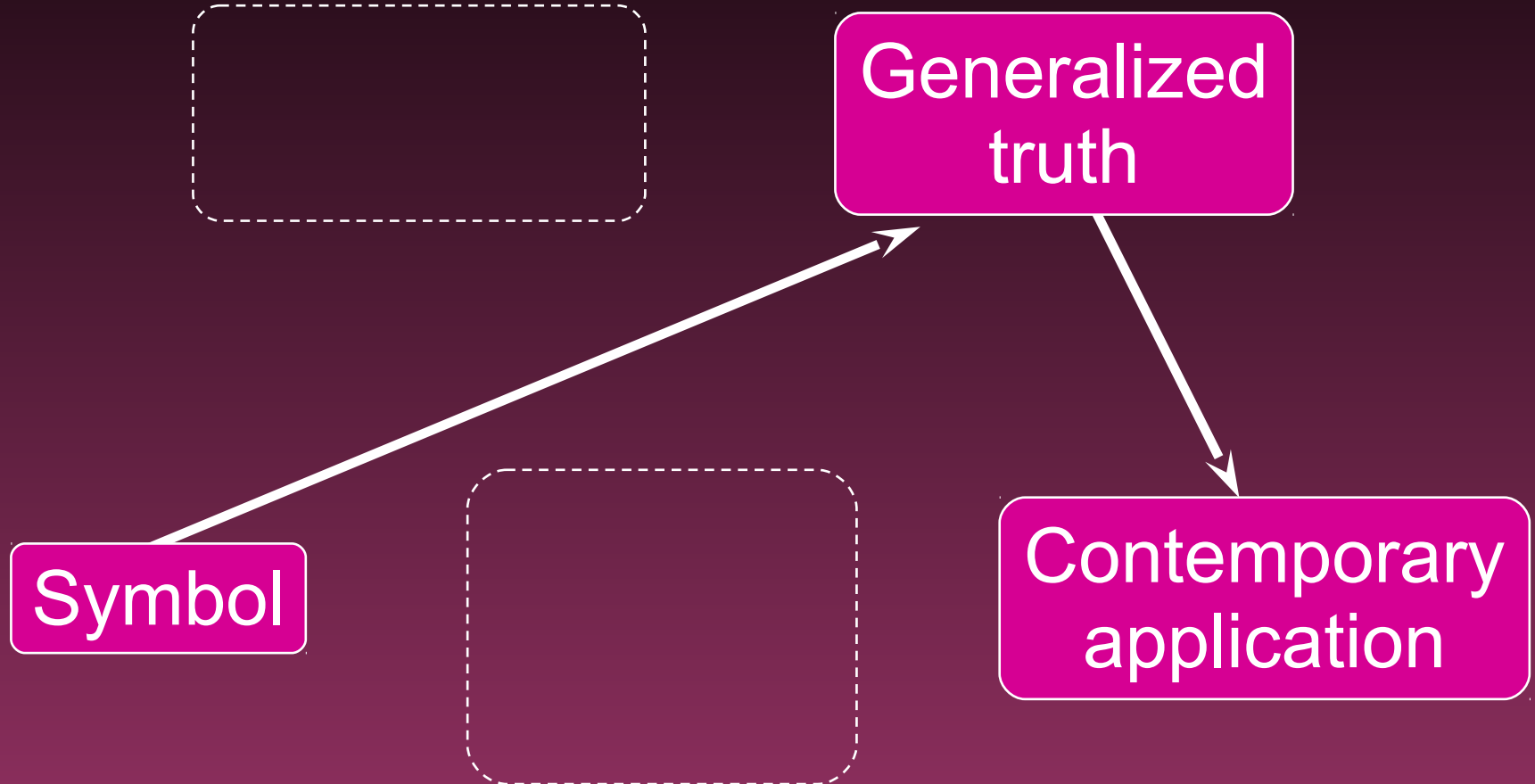
Embodied in other approaches



From Symbol to Application



From Symbol to Application in Repeated Pattern View



Fourfold Interpretation

A Symbol



represents

- Roman
- Final
- Church
- Repeated
- First century embodiment
- Final embodiment
- Embodiment NOW
- A general principle

G. Insight of Roman Empire View

Evidence for Roman View

- **Rev. 2-3.**
- **General principle of relevance to original audience.**
- **Nearness of the “time,” 1:1, 3; 22:10.**
- **Christ threatens to “come” in 2:5, 16; 3:11.**

H. Insight of Final Crisis View

The Endpoint of Fulfillment

- **Endpoint when Christ comes, 22:12, 20.**
- **For NT church, the Second Coming is next on the “calendar,” 2 Thess. 1-2.**
- **22:20 is prayer associated with Second Coming (cf. 1 Cor. 16:22).**

Does Revelation Focus on an Earlier “Coming”?

- Rev. 2:5; 2:16; 3:11 speak of Christ “coming”
- He judges the churches, short of final judgment
- This context qualifies 2:5, etc., but not 1:7; 2:12-17; 11:18; 22:7, 20; etc.
- Rev. as a whole offers a cosmic context.

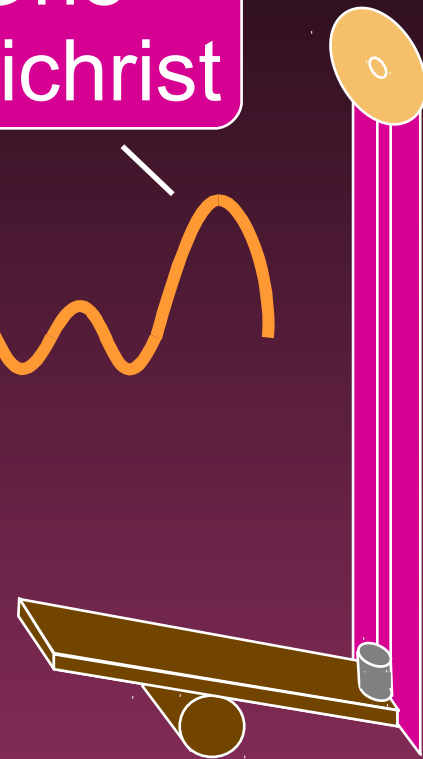
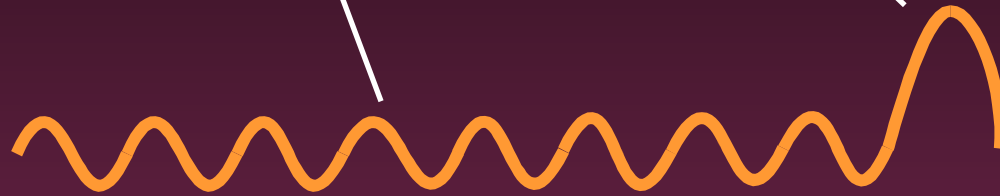
Nearness of Second Coming

- Preliminary judgments foreshadow the climactic judgment.
- Nearness is “structural”: 1 John 2:18.

Nearness

Many
antichrists

One
Antichrist



I. Insight of Repeated Pattern View

Universal Revelance

- **Revelation is canon, relevant to now (2 Tim. 3:17).**
- **Addresses servants of God, 1:1; 22:6, 18.**
- **“he who has an ear,” 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22.**
- **Pattern of spiritual war is constant.**
- **Flexible symbolism.**
- **Rev. 1:1 references Dan. 2:45.**

Dan. 2:45 and Rev. 1:1; 4:1

ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα (Dan. 2:45 Theodotion)

- **What? The eschatological kingdom of God.**

“what must take place” ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα (Rev. 4:1)

- **OT eschatological prophecy, in the process of realization (inaugurated eschatology)**

Daniel and John

