

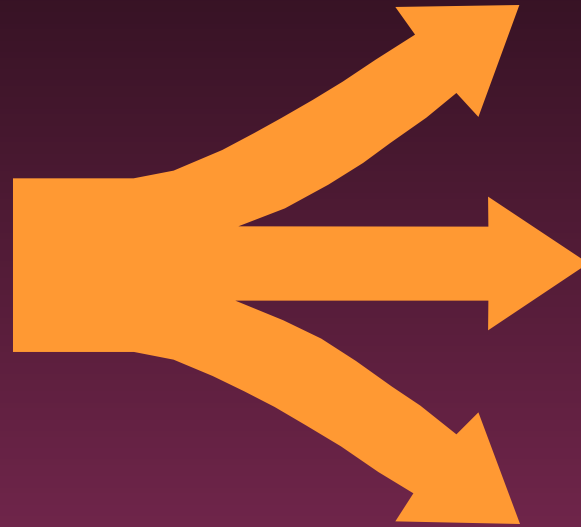
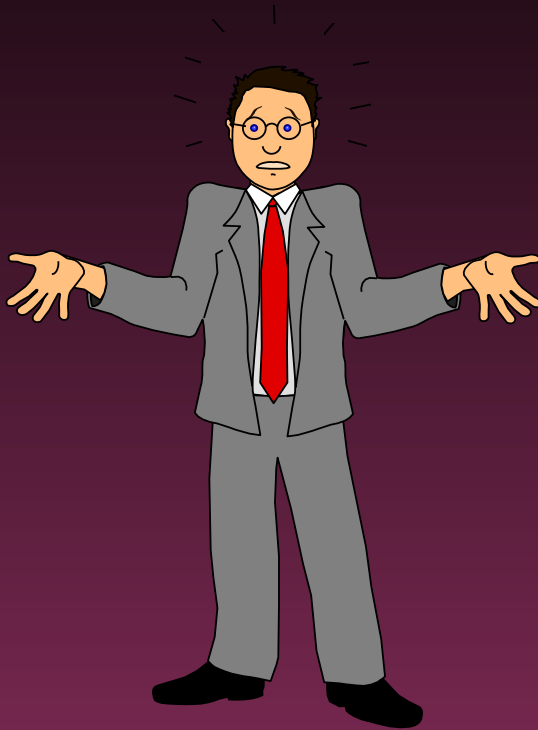
# Interpreting Revelation



**Vern Sheridan Poythress**  
**Westminster Theological Seminary**

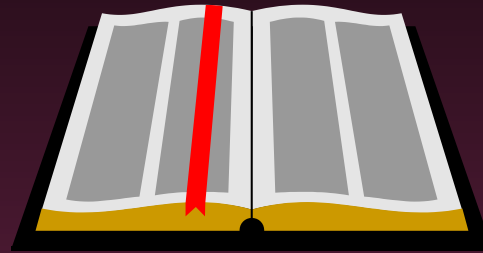
# A. Dangers and Rewards

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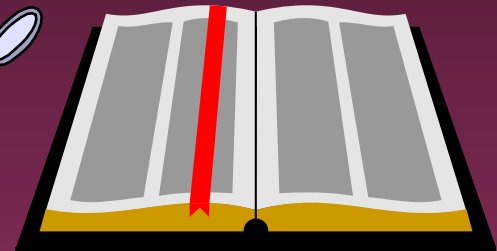


# Extreme Responses

- 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**
- **M. G. Kline on theophany**
- **Discourse linguistics  
showing structure**
- **Interest in apocalyptic**

themes

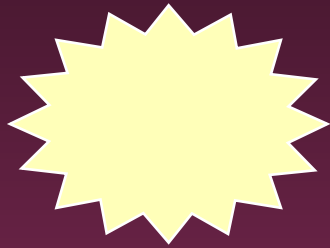


genre



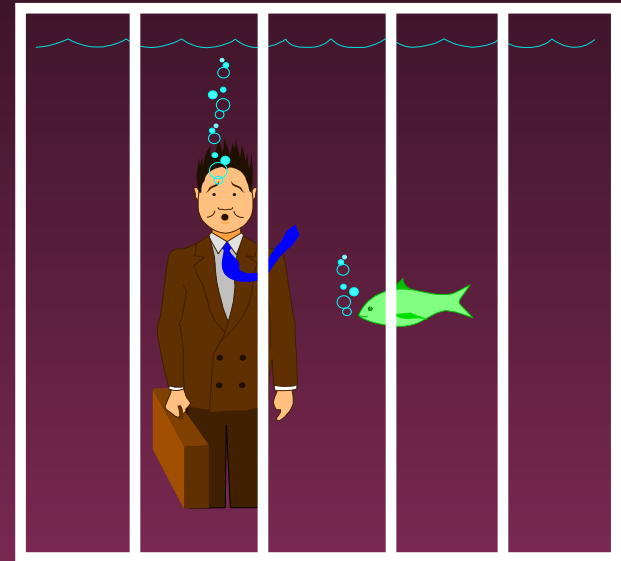
# Renewing Your Mind

Glory of God in  
Revelation



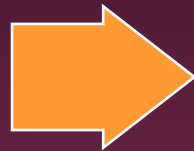
escape,  
renewal

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.**
- **Affects all of Revelation.**
- **No one view fits all the Scripture.**

# Time of Fulfillment

When is the primary fulfillment?



- Four views differ about time.

# 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.**





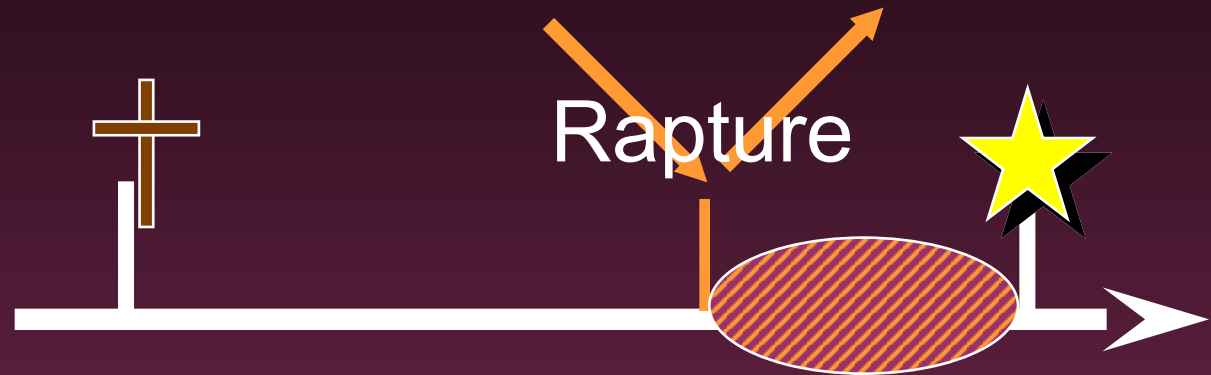
# Final Crisis View (Futurist)

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

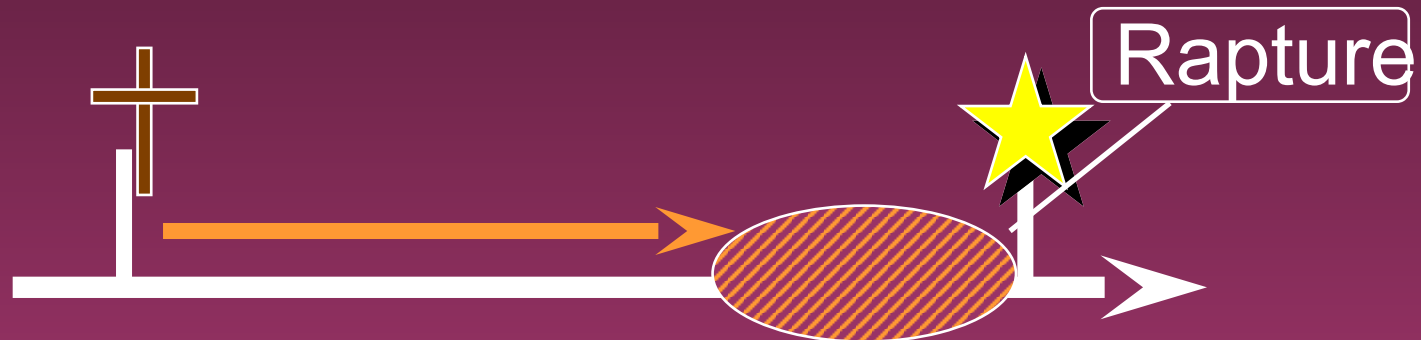


# Two Strands of Final Crisis

- **Pretribulationist: 4:1-19:21 after Rapture.**



- **Posttribulationist: 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 in chronological order.



# Two Strands of Church History

- **Straight-line historicist: chronological order.**



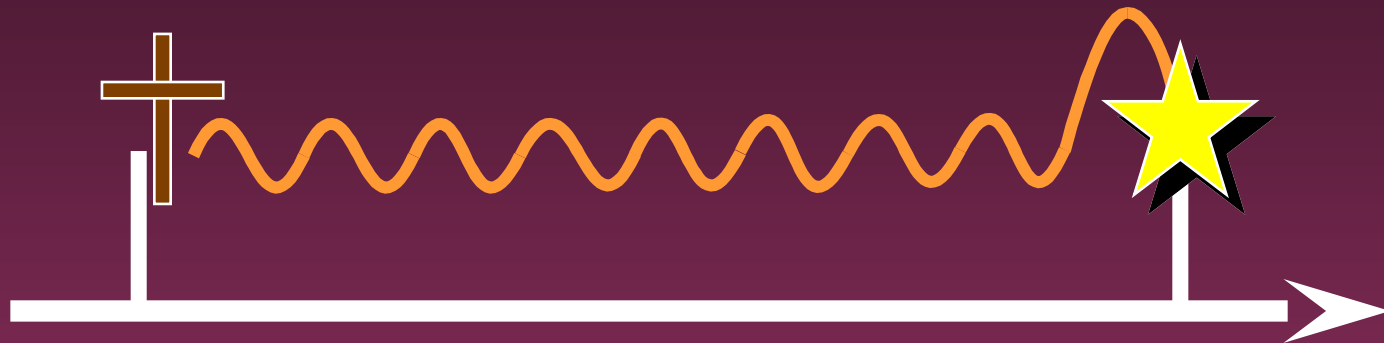
- **Recapitulationist: recapitulations in Rev. 6-19.**



- **But recapitulationist is really a fifth view.**

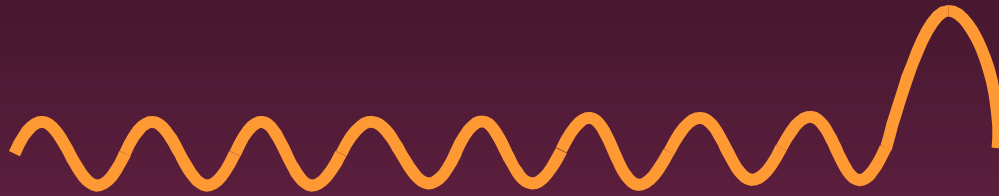
# Repeated Pattern View (Idealist)

- 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.**

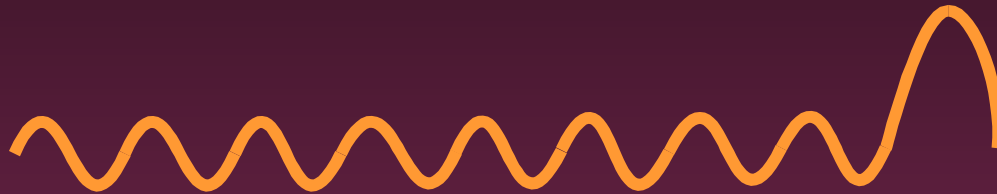


- **Moderate idealist: repeated fulfillment**



# Two Types of Repeated Pattern

- **Consistent idealist: Eternal conflict**

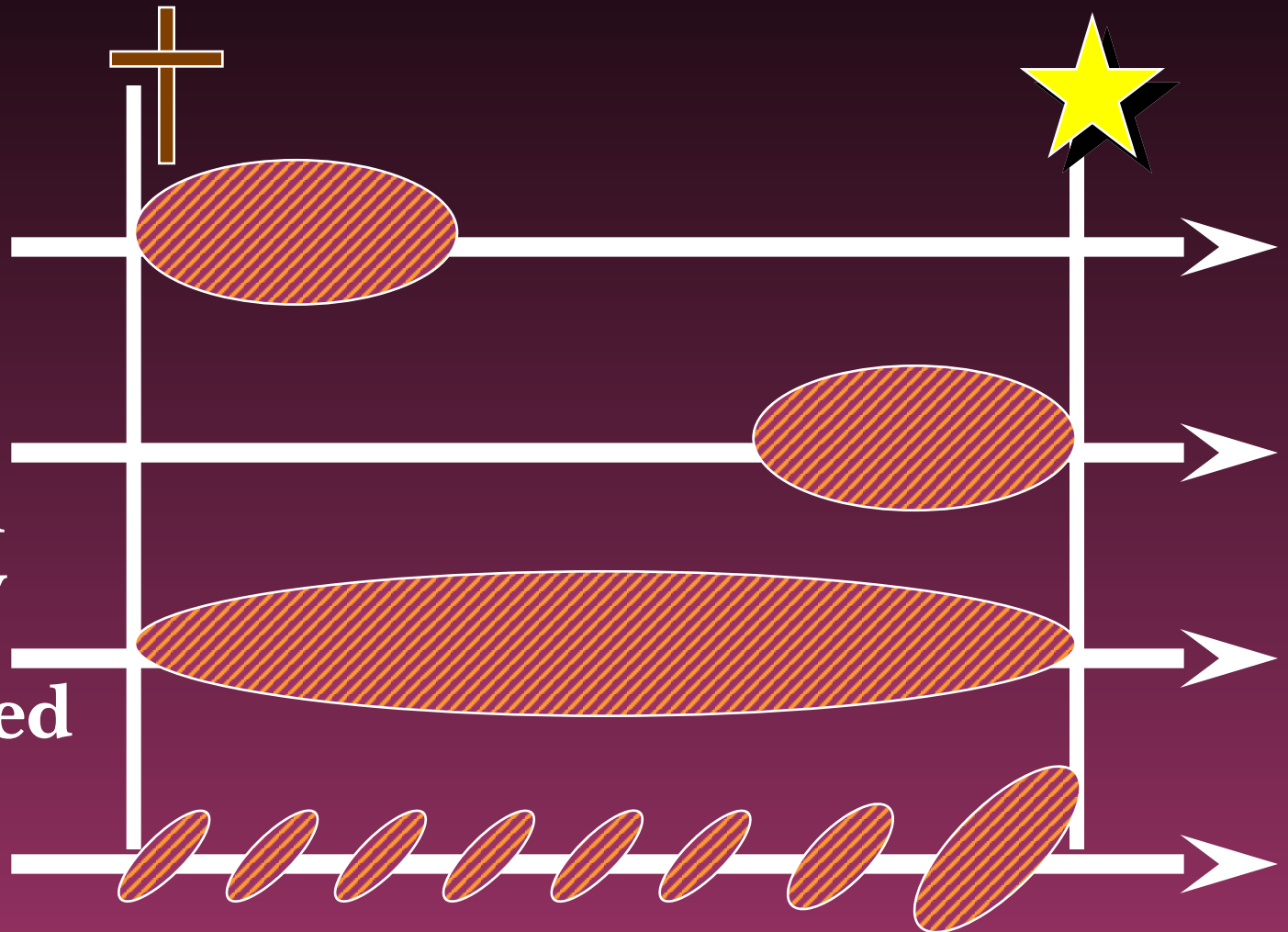


- **Moderate idealist: repeated fulfillment**



# Summary of Views

- Roman Empire
- Final Crisis
- Church History
- Repeated Pattern





## C. How the Four Major Views Work in Practice

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# 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



Caliphate to  
Baghdad

# 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

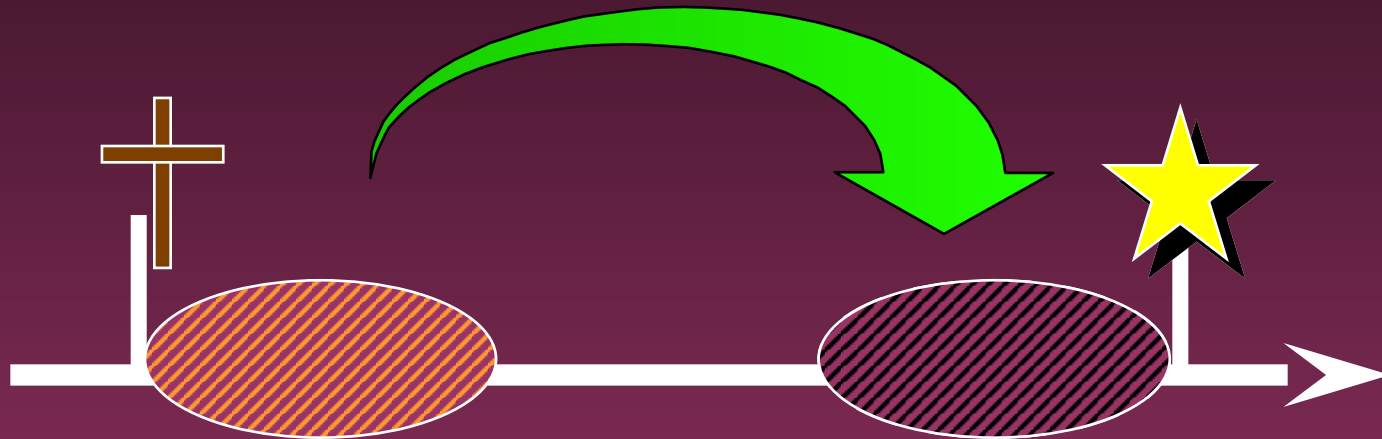
# Strengths of Different Views

---

- 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.

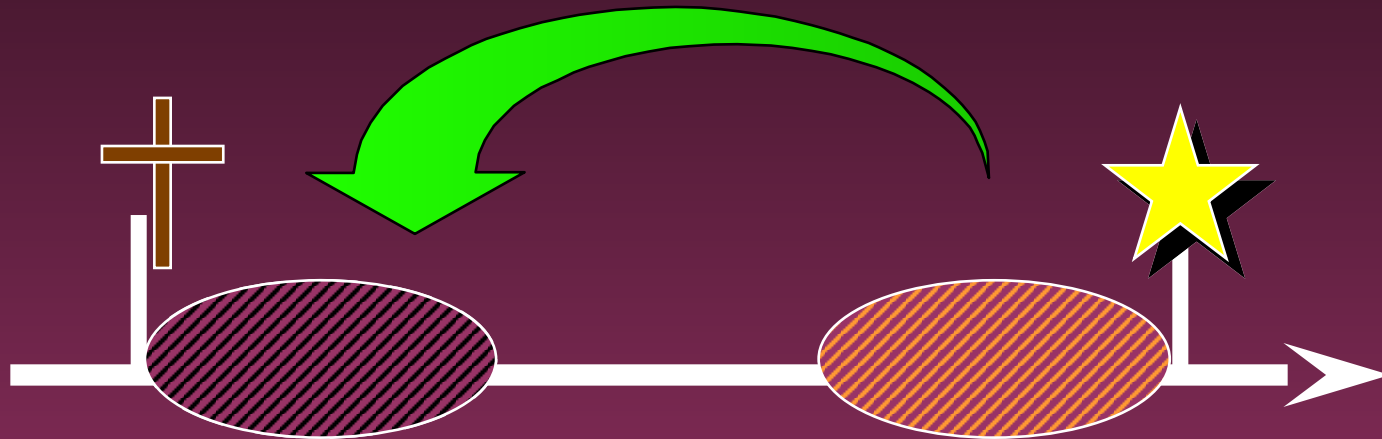
# Transition from Roman Empire to Final Crisis View

- **Add a second fulfillment**



# Transition from Final Crisis to Roman Empire View

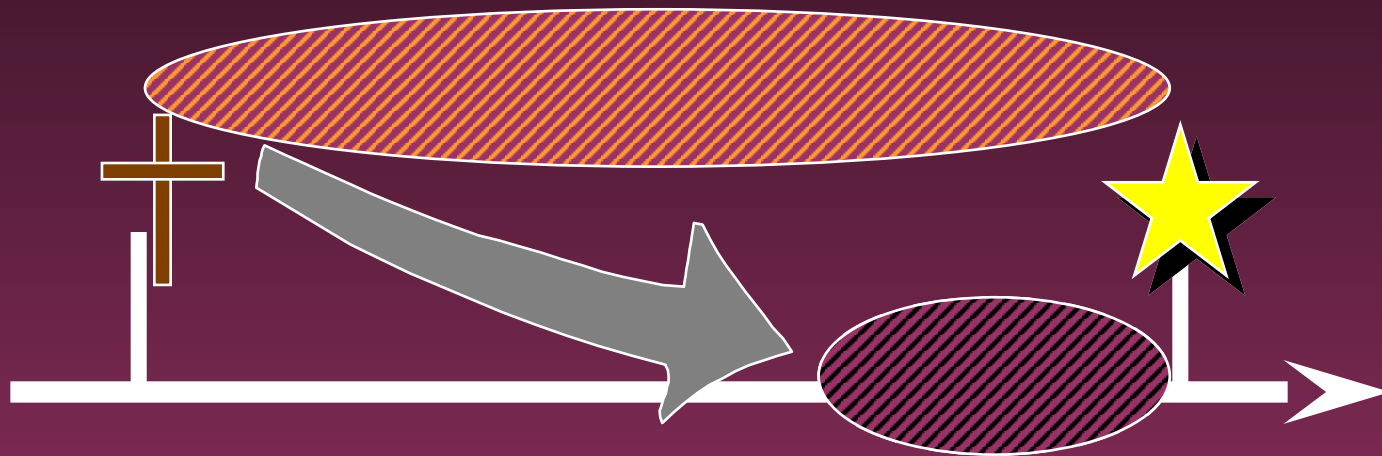
- Add a foreshadowing





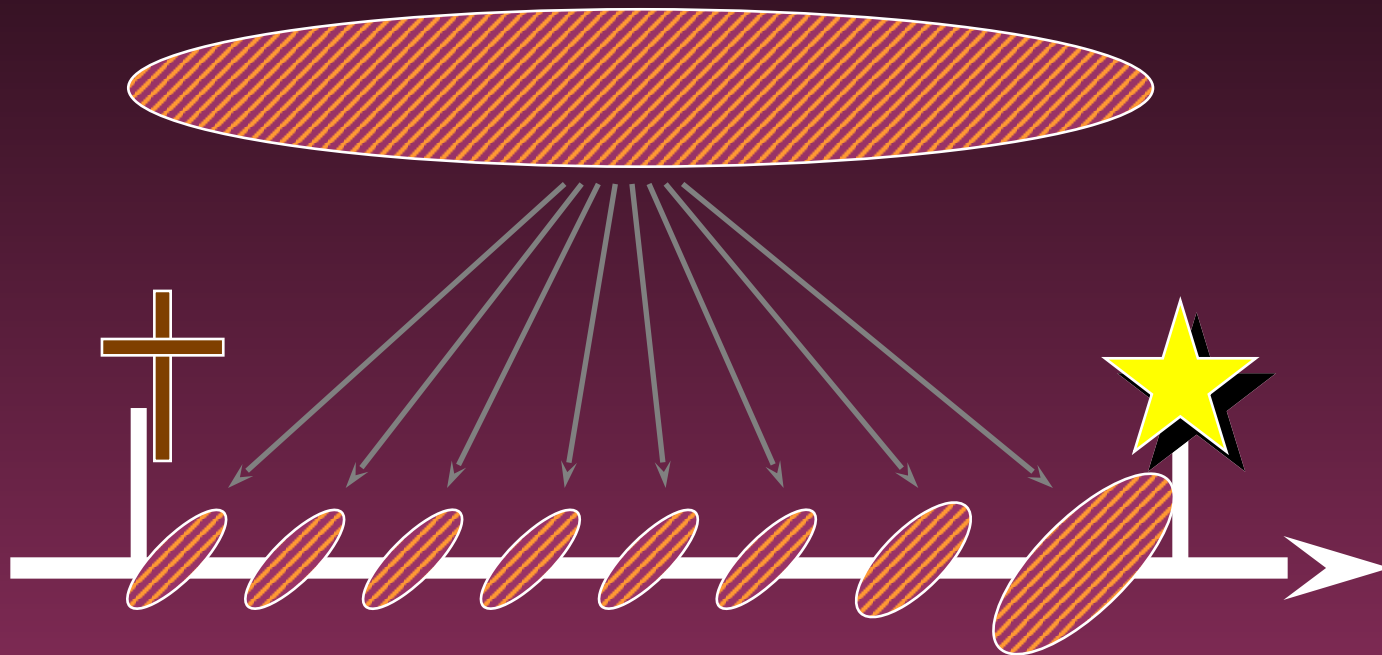
# Transition from Church History to Final Crisis View

- **Compress the time line**



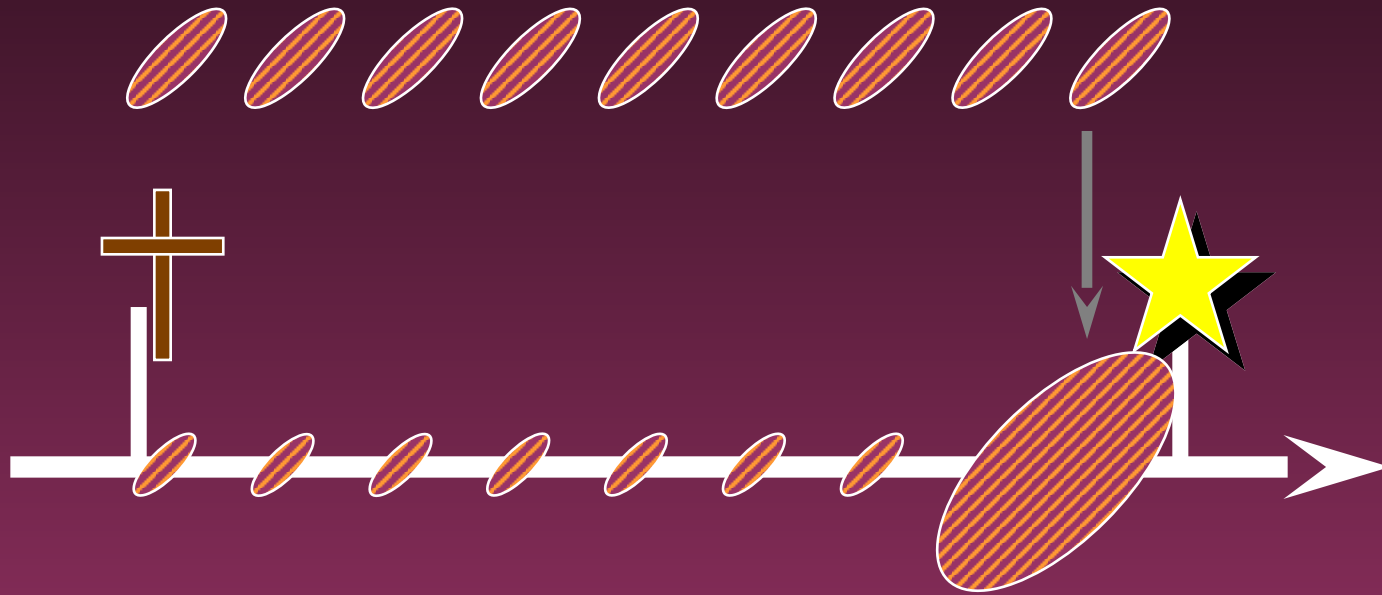
# Transition from Church History to Repeated Pattern View

- **Recapitulate**



# Transition from Repeated Pattern to Another View

- Find a primary fulfillment



# Variant Views

---

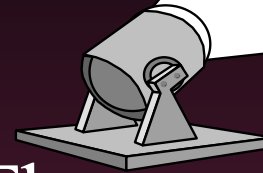
- **Early Roman Empire: fall of Jerusalem**
- **Recapitulationist.**  
**Several successive accounts of church age.**

## 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.”



- **Explicit blessing for reading.**
- **“Keep”: it’s practical.**

# Are Its Symbols Difficult?

Yes

- Unfamiliar
- Apocalyptic
- Need OT background

No

- It's obvious.



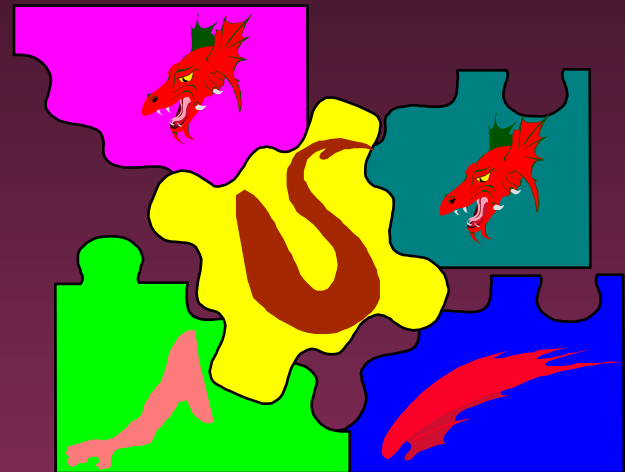
Fearsome!  
Hideous!





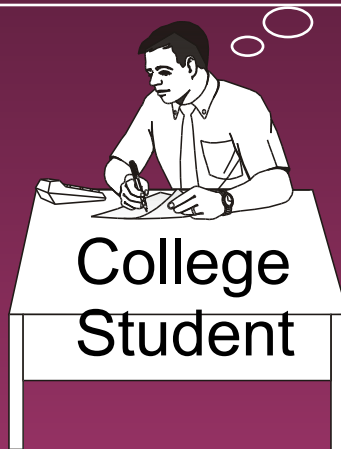
# It's Simple

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

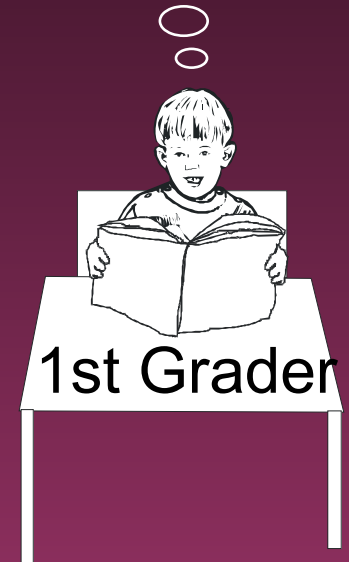


# See the Whole

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.



Awesome! It's a monster!



# Confidence in God

Don't be the "expert."

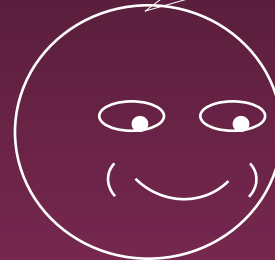
You can't possibly  
understand  
without my help!

You're right.  
I give up.



Encourage.

Look at God's  
greatness!



# The Majesty of Christ

- Christ is our friend (John 15:14-15).
- Also our majestic king!

Not a tame lion!



## E. Symbolism

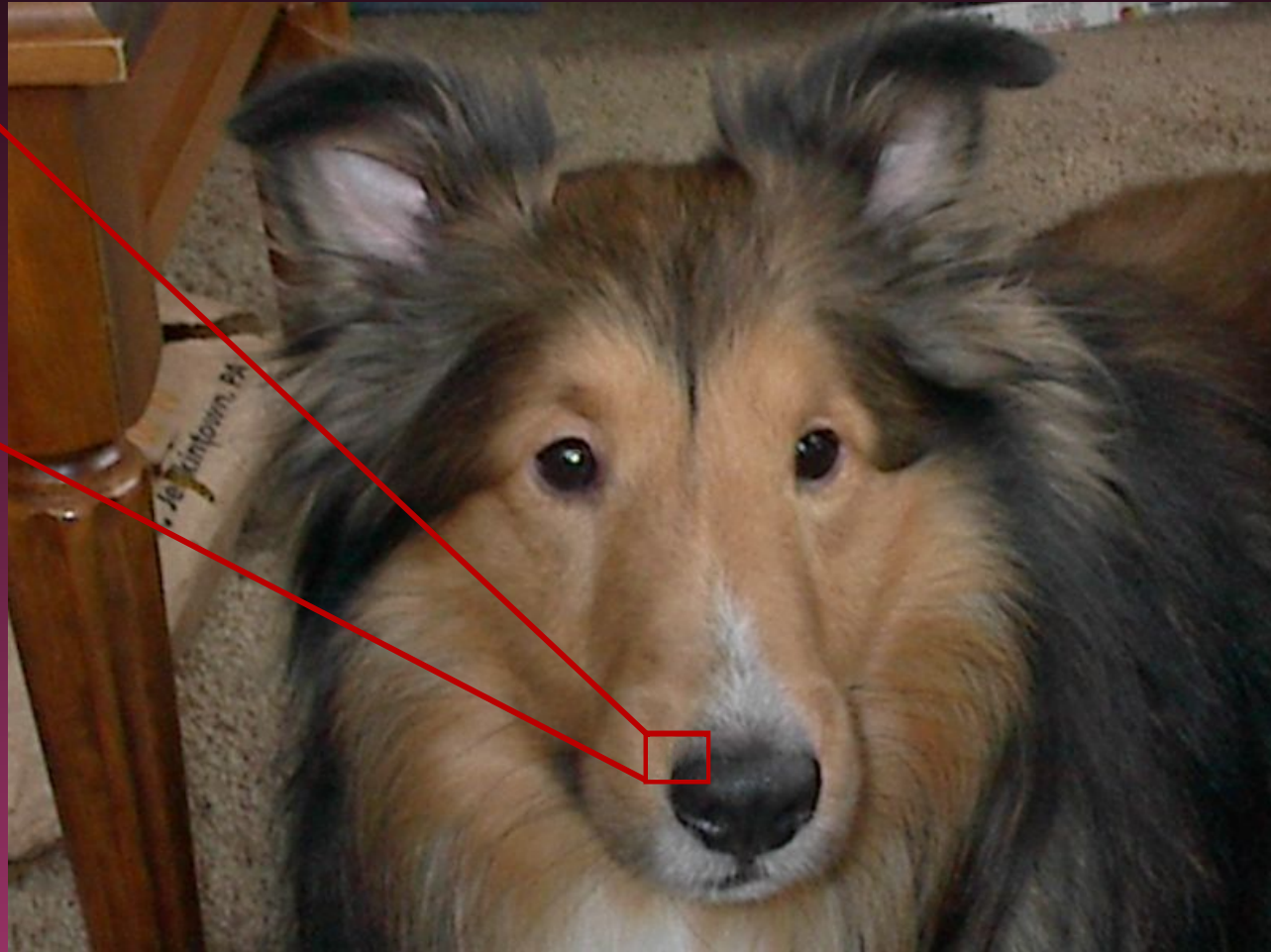
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# Why the Dispute over Revelation?



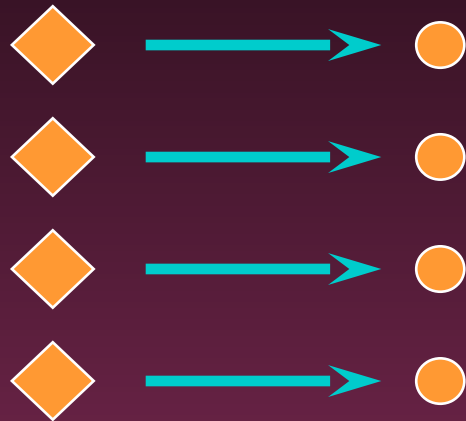
Due to:  symbolism

# Meaning of a Symbol



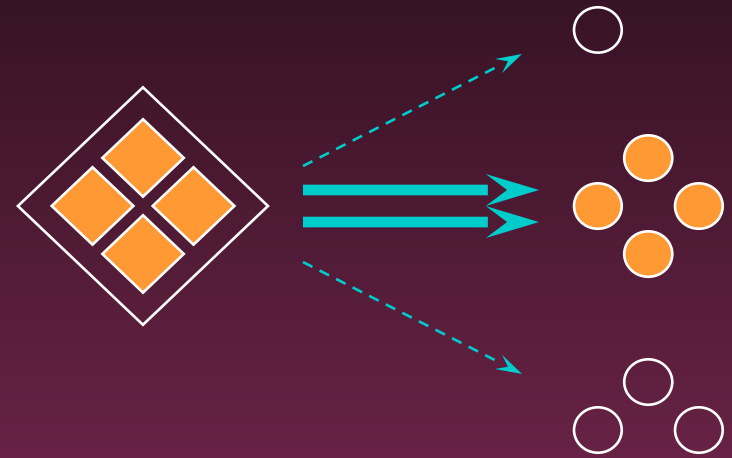
# Two Approaches to Symbols

## 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

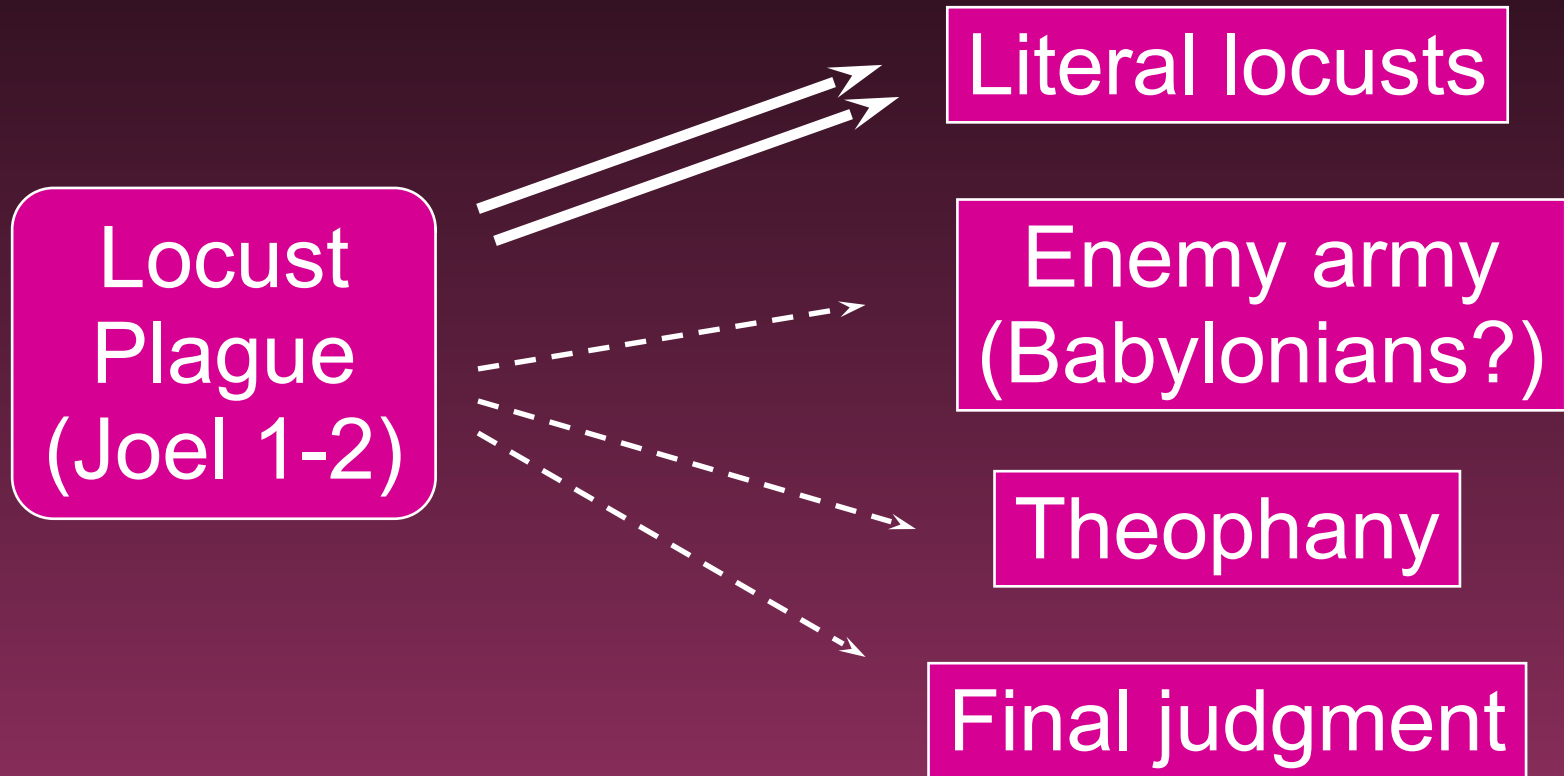
Beast



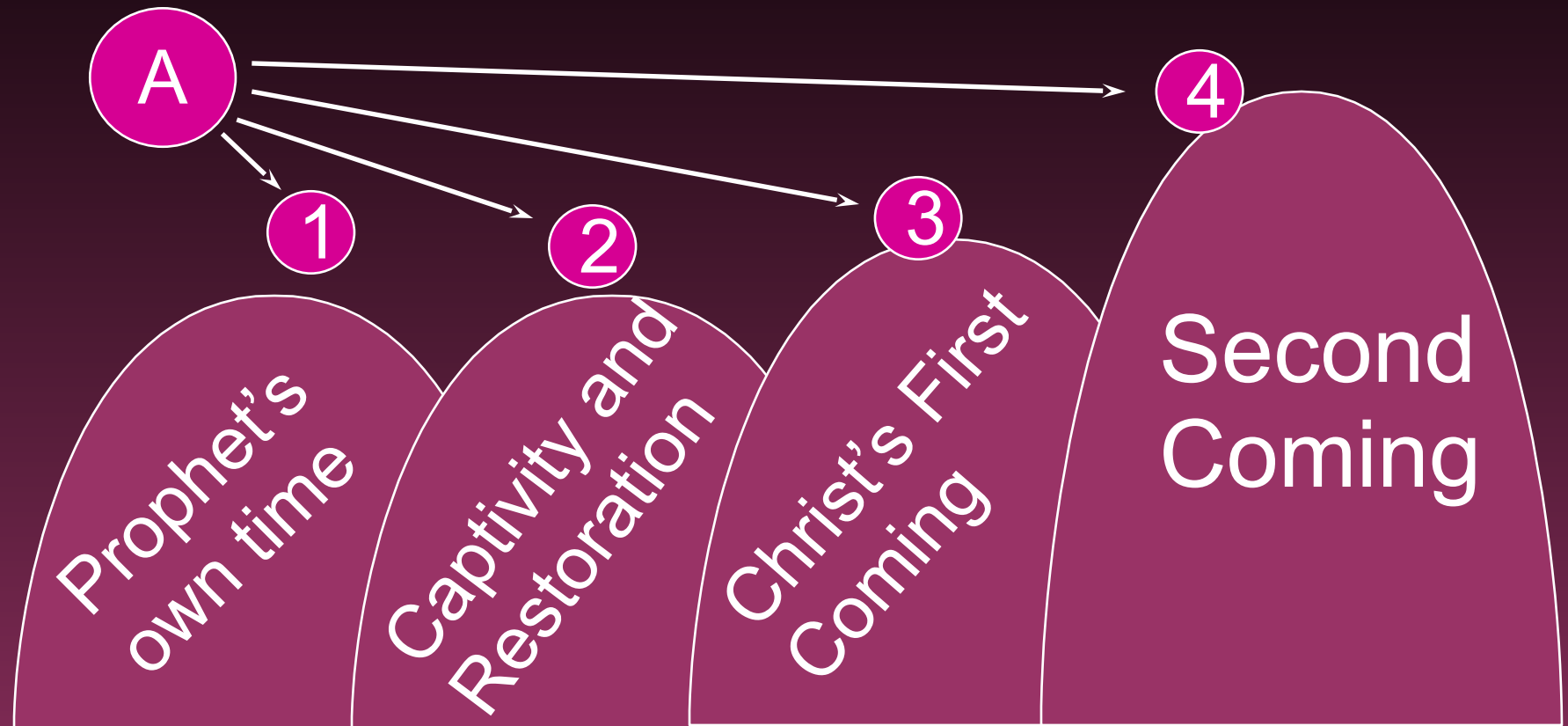
Idolatrous  
Government

# Prophecy is Poetic

## Day of the Lord

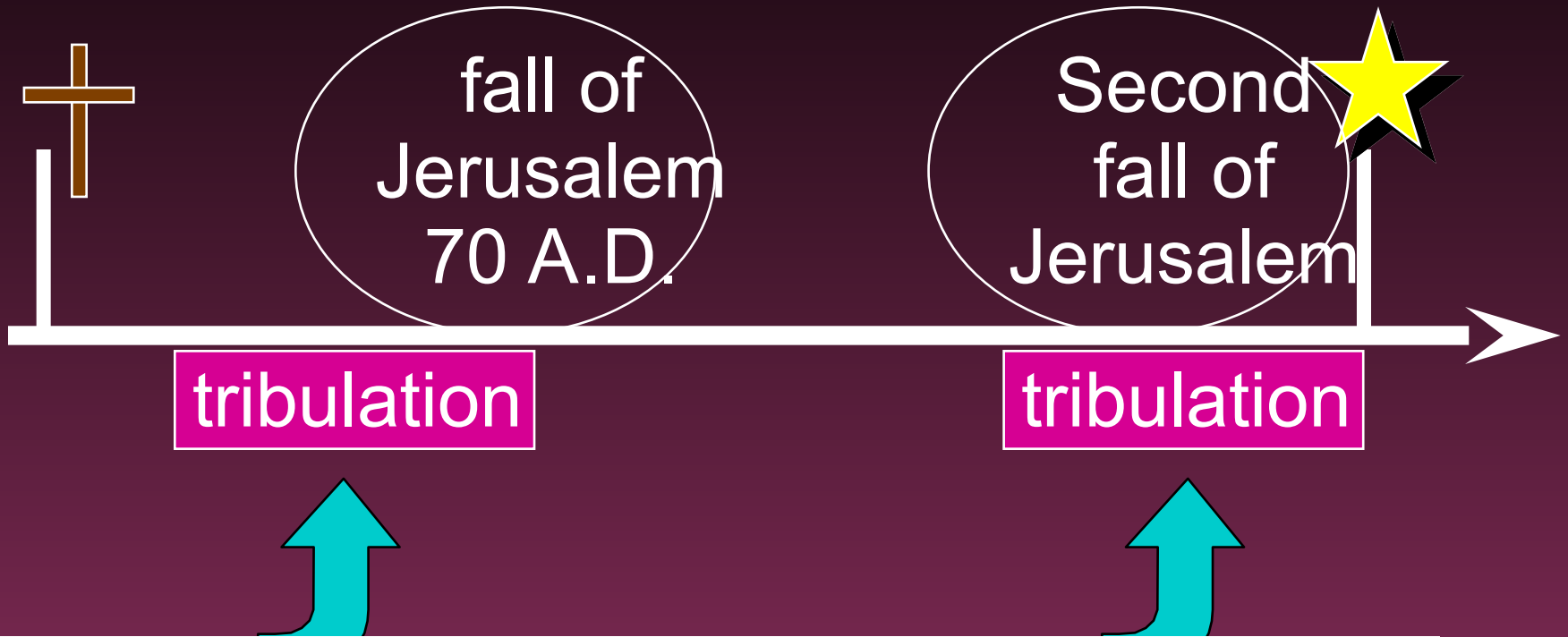


# Expanded Understanding of Prophetic Fulfillment



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

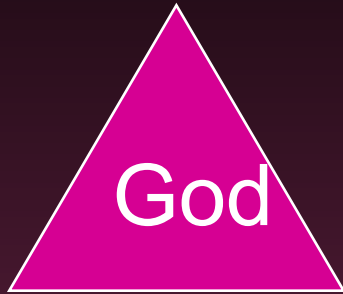
For

Beast

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

# God-Centered Symbolism

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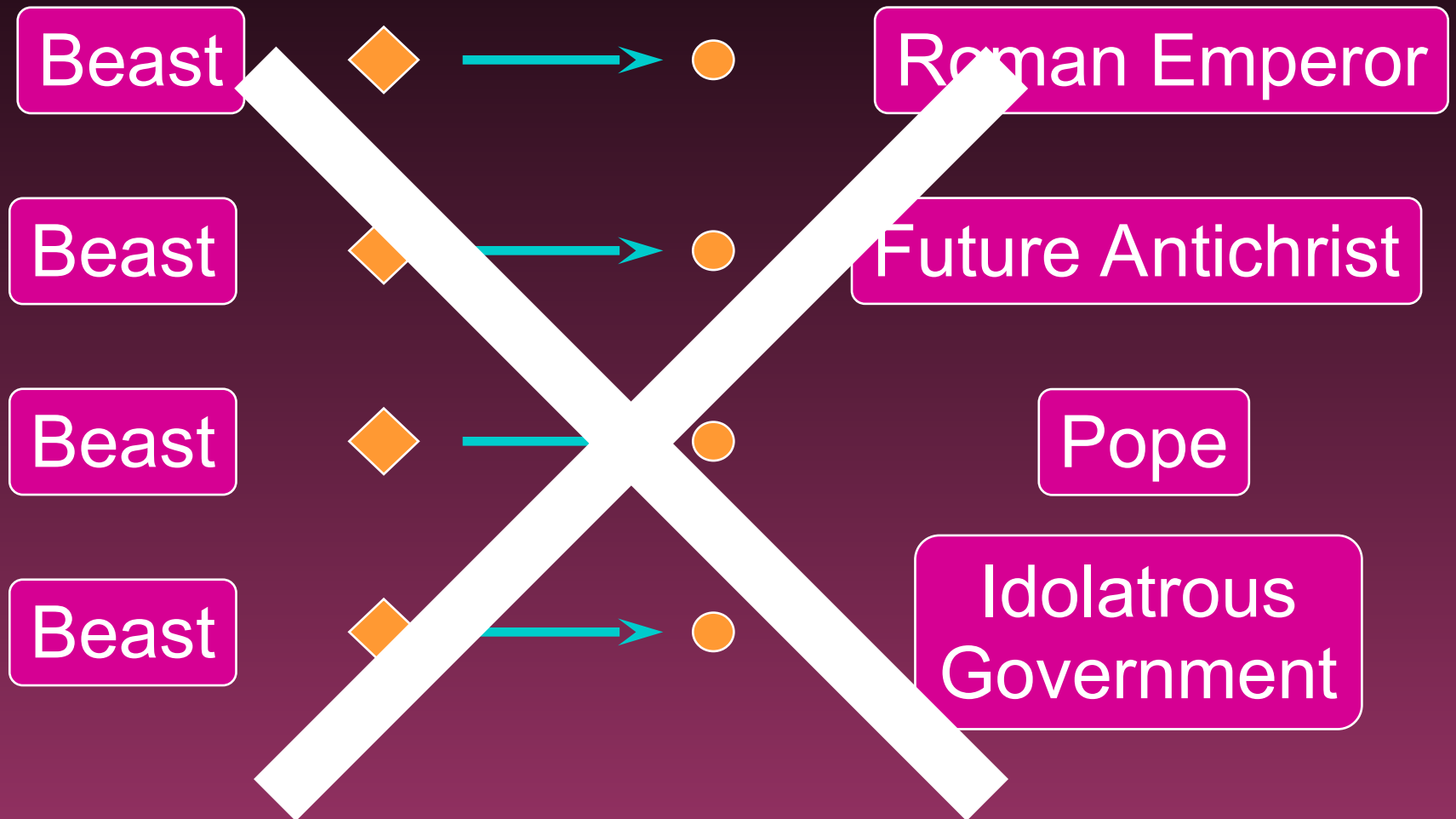


God in theophany is rich,  
multifaceted,  
nonexhaustible,  
Trinitarian.



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

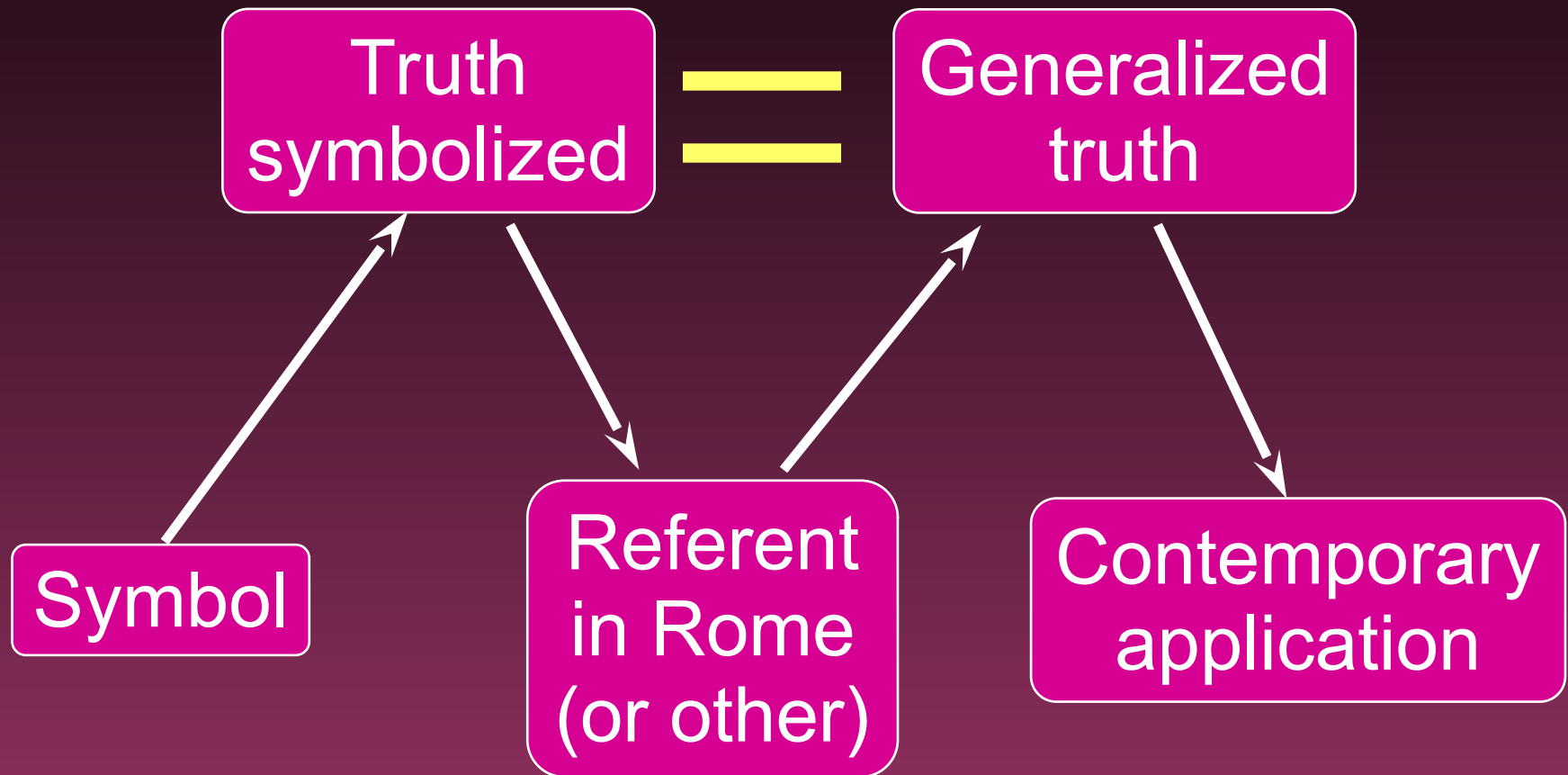
Symbol



Embodied in other approaches

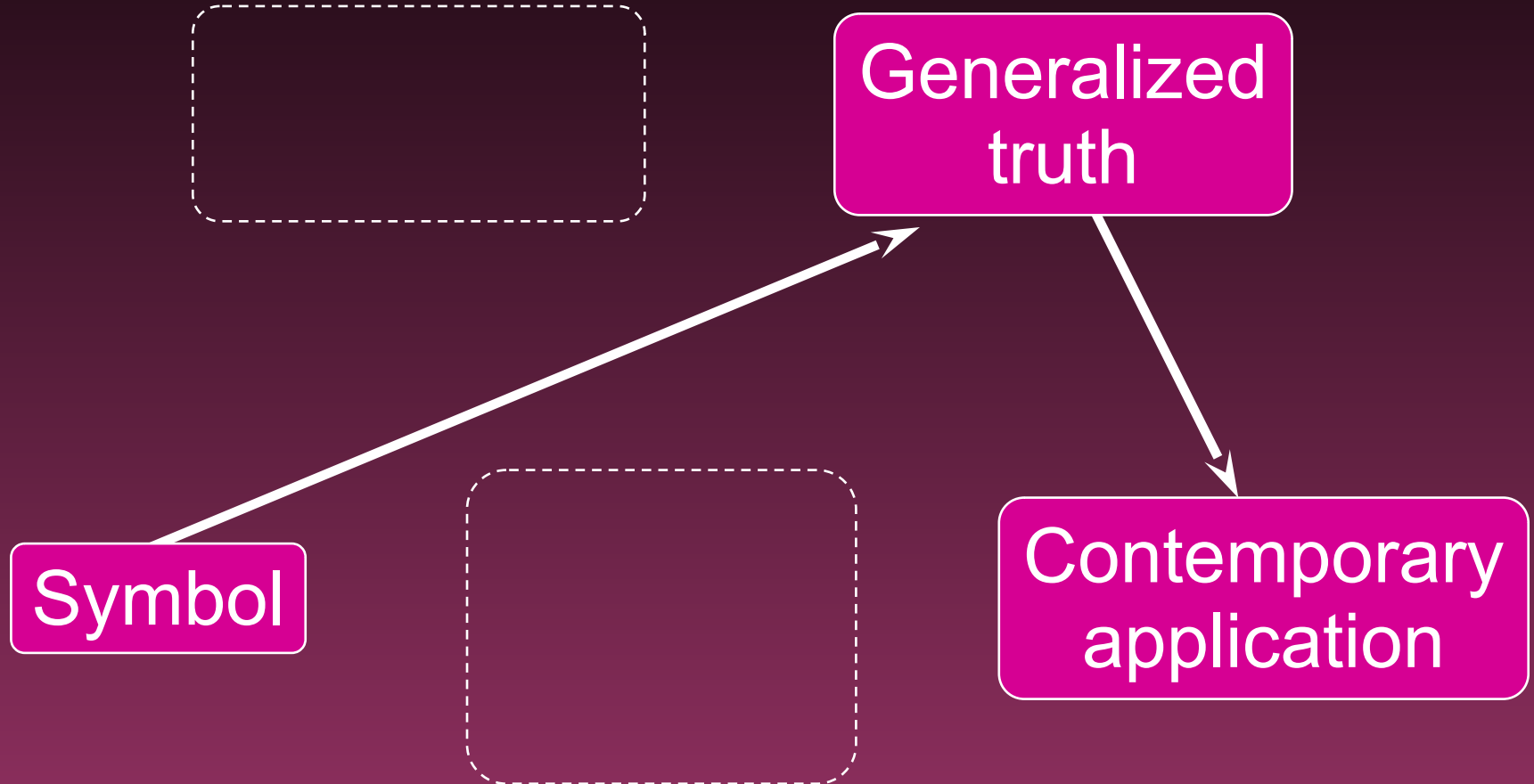


# From Symbol to Application





# 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

---

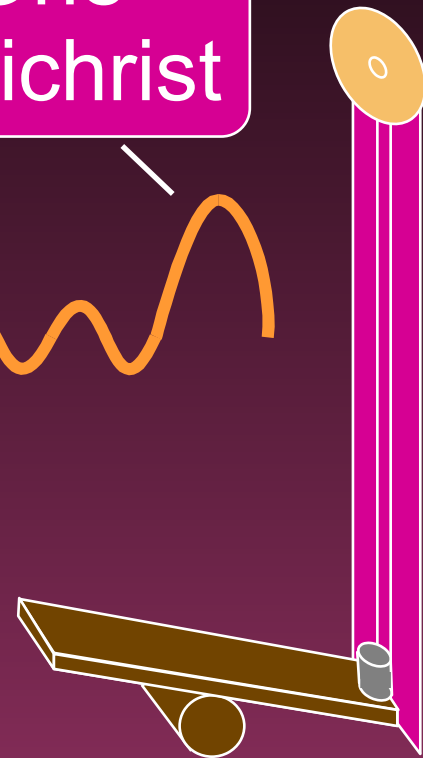
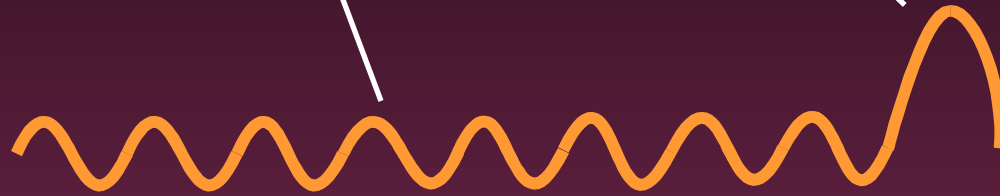
- Preliminary judgments foreshadow the climactic judgment.
- Nearness is “structural”: 1 John 2:18.



# 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

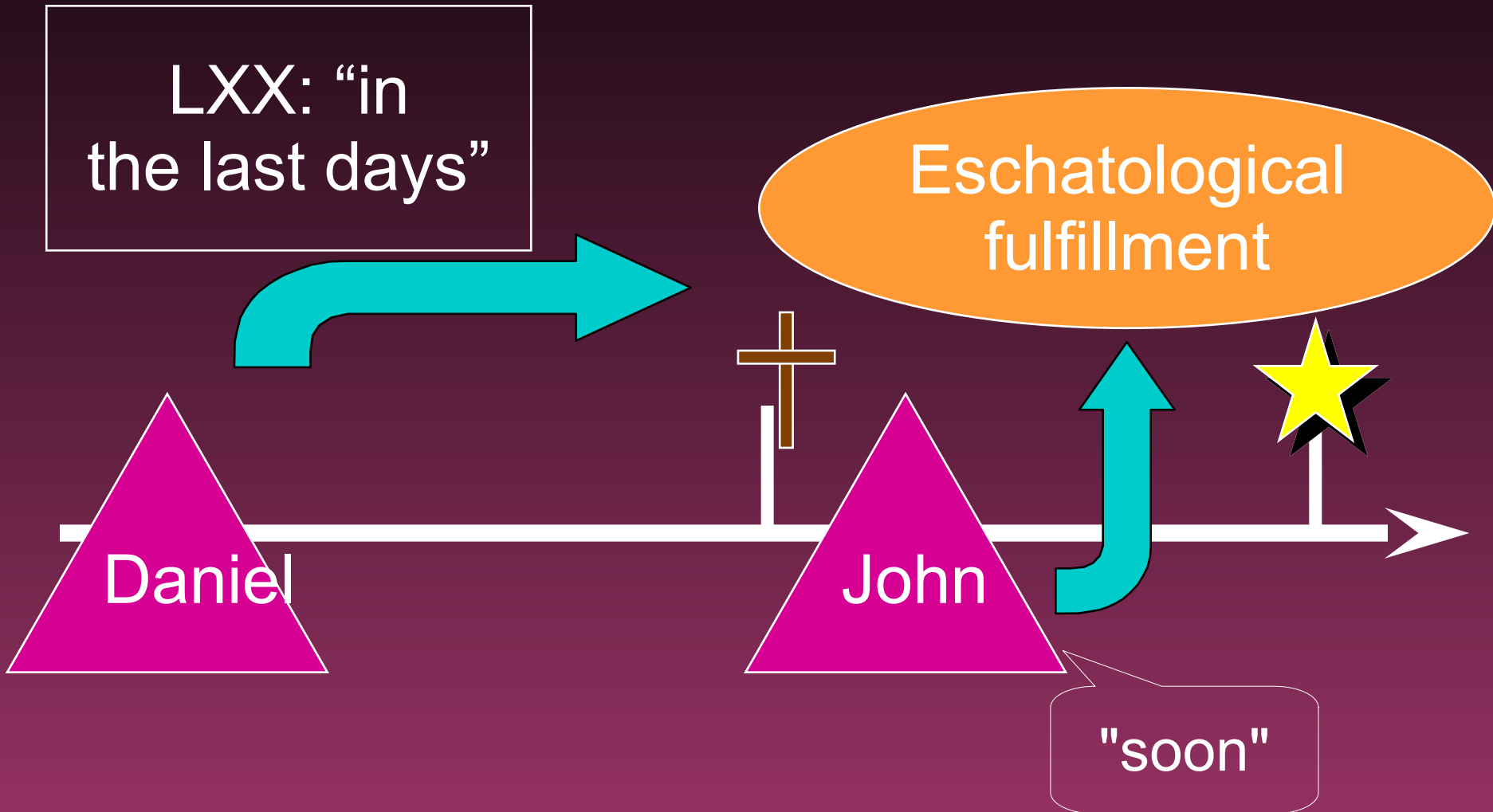
ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα (Dan. 2:45 Theodotion)

- 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



# Multiple Fulfillments

---

- **Truth in each**
- **Flexible fulfillments**