

Numbers in Scriptures

Have you ever wondered why numbers in the Scriptures seem to be important?

Many writers have called attention to this great subject.

May we not look for and expect to find numbers used not only with the same wondrous design but here, with significance also?

Every Word of God's Book is in its right place. It may sometimes seem to us to be deranged. The lock may be in one place and the key may sometimes be hidden away elsewhere in some apparently inadvertent word or sentence.

Numbers of the Writing

A. Numbers and Arithmetic.

1. System of counting followed by the Hebrews and Semites generally was the decimal system which seems to have been suggested by the use of the ten fingers.
2. Hebrew language (twenty two letters - all of which are consonants) had separate words only for the first nine units and for ten and its multiples.
3. The consonants of the Hebrew alphabet are used for figures with the first ten for 1-10 combinations of these for 11-19, the following eight for 20-90 and the remainder for 100-400 (letters of Greek alphabet used same way).

B. Numerical Symbolism.

1. The first usage of numbers not merely with their literal numerical value but with symbolic significance, sacred or otherwise, was widespread in the ancient East, esp. in Babylonia and regions influenced by Babylonian culture.
The numbers with their inner significance have always had fascination for the oriental mind.
2. In Jewish literature, these symbolic numbers are found in many passages of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha along with examples of later Jewish literature.
3. The number seven is the most prominent of the numbers with clear evidence in the Babylonian cuneiform (wedge-shaped characters) texts that they regard it as the number of totality, of completeness. The Sumerians, from whom the Semitic Babylonians seem to have borrowed the idea, equated seven and "all." (Seven storied towers of Babylonia represented the universe.)

a. The entire book is built around a system of sevens.

- 1) "Seven letters" to "seven churches."
- 2) "Seven stars" and "seven candlesticks."
- 3) "Seven spirits," "Seven lamps."
- 4) Lamb with "seven eyes" and "seven horns."
- 5) "Seven thunders."
- 6) "Seven bowls of wrath."
- 7) "Seven thousand killed in earthquake."
- 8) "Seven diadems" upon the "seven-headed" dragon.
- 9) "Seven heads" on the sea beast.
- 10) "Seven headed" scarlet beast on "seven mountains" and "seven kings."

b. The number 7 is a conspicuous number throughout the Bible.

1) Seven days of the creation (i.e., including the 7th day of cessation).

2) The Levitical system of the Old Testament (Leviticus).

a) 7th day - Sabbath.

b) 7th month - especially holy.

c) 7th Sabbatical Year - followed by year of Jubilee.

d) 7th year - a Sabbatical year.

e) 7 weeks between Passover and Pentecost.

f) 7 days - duration of Feast of Tabernacles.

g) 7 lambs - offered at Pentecost.

3) The walls of Jericho fell after:

a) 7 priests -

b) with 7 trumpets -

c) Marched around them for 7 days -

d) Blowing their trumpets 7 times on the 7th day.

4) Naaman dipped 7 times in the Jordan before being miraculously cleansed of leprosy.

5) Seven (7) is a favorite number in God's system of numbers.

a) Seven days in a week,

b) Seven notes in music and

c) Seven colors in a rainbow.

3. The next number of prominence in the Revelation is the digit 12. (The Dodecad.)

a. The Spiritual Israel consists of 12 tribes.

b. The persecuted woman is crowned with 12 stars.

c. The Heavenly City has:

1) 12 portals,

2) 12 foundation stones and

3) 12 names engraved.

d. The tree of life bears 12 manner of fruits.

NOTE: Multiples of 12 are found (e.g., 12,000; 144,000; 24 elders).

D. The numbers and their symbolism viewed specifically:

1. That numbers had an inner significance to the Oriental mind must be understood in order to grasp the meaning of numbers used symbolically.

a. When one word (as in the Hebrew) is compelled to do duty for a diversity of meanings, men came to use numbers as we use words.

b. Numbers were the symbols of moral or spiritual truth.

c. A certain number would suggest a definite concept.

d. Therefore, in understanding numbers in the symbolic setting we must divorce our minds from the limited and restricted idea of numbers to the Western mind - i.e., only numerical value for use in mathematical calculations.

- 1) Hence, no literal exactness is intended.
- 2) Therefore, no literal exactness should be expected or sought. (We are not interpreting mathematical formulae!)

2. The individual numbers examined.

a. **The number 1**

- 1) This number, because of its solitary position, came to be associated with the idea of “unity” or “independent existence.”
- 2) Excludes all differences, for there is no second with which it can either harmonize or conflict.
- 3) It stood for that which is “absolute, unique or alone.” One mind - cf.17:13.
- 4) It marks the beginning and we must begin with God
- 5) Although the numeral 1 does not occur in the Revelation, it is at the base of other numbers that do appear. (e.g., 10; 1,000) CF. 17:12.

b. **The number 2.**

- 1) Two were far stronger and more effective than one: courage in companionship.
- 2) This digit came to stand for power, for strengthening, for confirmation - redoubled energy and courage.
- 3) Jesus sent His disciples out “two by two.”
- 4) It is the symbol of division
- 5) It was “two” witnesses who confirmed truth (Rev 11).
- 6) It is “two” beasts - a formidable enemy. (Rev 13:1ff).
- 7) It is, also, a “two-fold” instrument of warfare against the “two beasts” - the “conquering Christ” and the “Sickle of Judgment” (14:1ff).

c. **The number 3**

- 1) Because of father love, mother love and child love, the oriental mind came to think of this number as divine.
- 2) This finds its thought in the Divine Triad: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.
- 3) The idea of the number 3 is of that which is Divine. (God’s number.)
- 4) It denotes completeness/perfection. (“Three Woes” - 8:13; “The three parts of the “great city,” etc., the “three-thirds wrath.”)
- 5) The number $3\frac{1}{2}$ (a time, times and a half time - 42 months - 1,200 days ($1,260/30 = 42$) ($42/12 = 3\frac{1}{2}$)).
- 6) This is one-half of the perfect number 7.
- 7) It expresses the thought of incompleteness, imperfection. It (and its equivalents) stood for the:
 - a) Indefinite,
 - b) Incomplete and
 - c) Dissatisfied.
- 8) It, by context, always pointed to the hope of a better day or the end of an evil period.

e. The number 4

- 1) It is the symbol of the world number
- 2) 4 great elements – earth, air, fire, water
- 3) 4 regions of the earth – north, south, east, west
- 4) 4 division of day – morning, noon, evening, midnight
- 5) 4 seasons – spring, summer, fall, and winter
- 6) 4 variations of the lunar phases
- 7) Four winds from four sides of the earth.
- 8) Four walls to a city; a house, etc.
- A) In Revelation there are:
- B) Four living creatures,
- C) Four angels at four corners of earth,
- D) Four horsemen, etc.

f. The number 5

- 1) It is the symbol of grace

g. The number 6

- 1) It is the symbol of man
- 2) Six is the number stamped on all that is connected with human labor.
- 3) The number falls short of the perfect number.

h. The number 7

- 1) It is the symbol of God
- 2) This, as the Bible portrays, is the most sacred number to the Hebrew mind.
- 3) “7” - earth crowned with heaven.
- 4) “7” - expressing completeness via union (man & God) (Perfection).
- 5) “7” - multiplied “70” (70 members of Jewish court; 70 sent by Jesus; the ultimate in forgiving - “7 x 70”) (Equivalent of always) (cf. Mt. 18:22).

I The number 8

- 1) It is the symbol of a new era

j. The number 9

- 1) It is the symbol of judgment

k. The number 10

It is the symbol of perfection of divine order

l. The number 11

It is the symbol of addition too

m. The number 12

- 1) It is the symbol of governmental perfection
- 2) This number became the well-known Hebrew symbol of organized religion.
 - a) 12 tribes of Israel - Old Testament.
 - b) 12 Apostles - New Testament.
 - c) 12 gates to the city - Eternity.

n. The number 13

It is the symbol of sin

o. The number 20

It is the symbol of expectancy

p. The number 30

It is the symbol of higher degree of perfection of divine order

Marking the right moment

q. The number 40

It is the symbol of probation

40 years Israel was in the wilderness

40 days Moses was in the mount

40 days the spies were in Canaan.

40 days Jesus was tempted of the devil

r. The number 50

It is the symbol of deliverance

s. The number 666

Man at his worst sin

The duration of the old Assyrian Empire was 666 years before it was conquered by Babylon.

Jerusalem was trodden down by the Roman Empire exactly 666 years from the battle of Actium BC 31 to the Saracen conquest in AD 636.

Goliath height was 6 cubits.....6 pieces of armour.....600 shekels of iron on spear head

(1 Samuel 17:4-7)

t. The number 888

It is the number of Jesus

u. The number 999

It is the number of Sodom and also the number of judgment (9).

Judgment fell upon Sodom and it was destroyed.

v. The number 444

It is the number of Damascus and also the number of the world (4).

One thing, however, is certain, and that is, that we have, in the Scriptures of truth, a revelation from God absolutely without error, and whatever difficulties we may encounter in seeking to understand it, they are all the outcome of our own infirmities.