

# Bible Numbers

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**Have you ever thought that numbers have meaning in the Word of God? Here are some wonderful thoughts as to their significance.**

## One

The number one has for its fundamental idea the exclusion of difference.

- (1) It excludes any other: "The Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4). "In that day there shall be one Lord, and His name one" (Zech. 14:9). It speaks thus of:
  - (a) sufficiency which needs no other; of power, omnipotence;
  - (b) independency, which admits no other.

And from both these thoughts, of what abides, is perpetual, eternal.

- (2) It excludes external difference, and speaks of:
  - (a) identity, identification;
  - (b) concord, peace.
- (3) It excludes internal difference ("The dream is one", Gen. 41:25), and speaks of:
  - (a) harmony of parts or attributes. Thus of consistency, congruity, and of righteousness, which is congruity with relationship.
  - (b) of individuality: one body, limb, branch; in the highest thought of it, personality; in the lowest, of life, which is the basis of all that is truly individuality.
- (4) As an ordinal number, the first, the beginning:
  - (a) In the highest way, true of God as Creator, Life-Giver, Father, Source of all.
  - (b) Headship.
  - (c) Implies precedency in thought and sovereignty in will: under which together we have counsel, election; promise, grace.
  - (d) Birth.

Primarily, then, and very naturally, this number speaks of God; but it may be also applied to men, and may have then (as all numbers) an evil sense:

- (1) It may speak of righteousness, as before seen; obedience, practical recognition of divine sovereignty, and so of "repentance toward God;" integrity, which is indeed "wholeness," oneness.
- (2) Of independency, as disobedience, rebellion, self-will.
- (3) I think it speaks of single state, barrenness.

## Two

The fundamental thought is the opposite of the first number: there is now another. It speaks, therefore, of difference, division (it is the first number which divides), and thus often becomes symbolical of the power of evil.

In a good sense, it speaks of addition, growth, increase; so of help, confirmation, fellowship. We have this idea expressed in our word "seconding" (cf. Eccl. 4:9-12).

Here we have:

- (1) Confirmation in the way of testimony: "The testimony of two men is true." And the power of this confirmation depends much on the very diversity of the witnesses: take the Old and New Testament as God's great witness to man. The Second Person of the Godhead is "the True Witness" and "the Word of God."
- (2) Salvation, help.
- (3) Fellowship, relationship, covenant, the legal one.
- (4) Dependence, humiliation, service. Here again the idea of "seconding" assists the thought.

It will be observed how these various meanings unite in Christ, the Second Person of the Godhead, the Second Man, and uniting these two natures, the divine and human, in His own Person; the Saviour, humbling Himself to death to serve us.

This is the good sense; in the bad one, we have:

- (1) Difference, division, contrast, contradiction, opposition, conflict, enmity, the enemy's work. The unclean beasts were in the ark in two's; the mother of a female child was to be unclean two weeks after its birth, double the time for the man-child. And I may notice here how the woman herself illustrates this number, full of contrasts as she is: dependent on man, but his help-meet; the type of increase, yet through whom came sin, death, and yet, through her victorious "Seed," salvation.
- (2) Death is division, separation, the last enemy; yet the death of the cross, in which the conflict between good and evil rose to its height, is once again salvation. Nowhere is there so great a contrast, such apparent contradiction, as in the cross.

### Three

This is the symbol of cubic measure, solid measure, solidity; of fullness, realization. Take any two dimensions, and multiply them together: what have you? A measure of surface merely. Take a third dimension; now you have more than surface: the third dimension strikes in deep below the surface, and gives you a measure of solidity. Three stands, then, for what is solid, real, substantial; for fullness, actuality. What are length and breadth without thickness? A line that you can draw upon paper is no more than that.

Three is the number of Persons in the Godhead, of the divine fullness, therefore — and until we reach this, God is not fully manifested. Thus it is the number of manifestation. It is that of the Spirit, who realizes in the creature the counsels of God.

When the deep lay over the waste and desolate earth, the Spirit of God brooded upon the face of the waters. When men are born again to God, the gospel comes to them, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost. What is sanctification, the work of the Spirit, but that in which salvation is actualized in the soul? Without the work of the Spirit, there is nothing but outside work: "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit;" this is that third dimension which every saint has.

The sanctuary, God's dwelling-place, is a cube: ten cubits in the tabernacle; twenty in the temple; the final city, which the glory of God lightens, is a cube also: the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. There the counsels of God are realized, the holiness He seeks is attained. In the sanctuary, God is manifested, where all human power is prostrate in the dust. Resurrection is therefore on the third day. Revival, restoration, and recovery naturally connect themselves with this.

In connection with these thoughts, we have:

- (1) Glory, which is indeed, with God, but the manifestation of Himself.
- (2) Possession, portion, dwelling-place: heaven as the sanctuary and dwelling-place of God. Worship and praise, the sanctuary-work.
- (3) Fruit manifests the tree.
- (4) Union, as in marriage, which is the image of sanctification, a separation to.

### Four

Four is the first number which allows of simple division, as two is the number which divides it. It is the symbol of *weakness* therefore; so of the creature in contrast with the Creator, the material that yields itself to be fashioned by the divine hand, and may, alas! yield to another. In Scripture, it divides either as *three* plus *one*, the numbers of manifestation and creative sovereignty, or as *two* times *two*, true division, and signifying evil.

Four is also the number of the four corners of the earth, of earthly completeness and universality, which has thus on it, the stamp of weakness, whatever men may boast. It is the number of the four winds of heaven, the various and opposing influences of which the earth is the scene. This brings in the thought of testing and experience, which with man connects itself so constantly with failure. Practical walk in general comes under this number.

Four beasts sum up the Gentile empires, with their sovereignty over all the earth; four cherubic living creatures (Rev. 4 and 5) watch over it. The fourth book of the Law, Numbers, expresses in the most vivid manner the various thoughts connected with this number.

### Five

In the cleansing of the leper and the consecration of the priest alike, the blood is put upon three parts of man, which together manifest what he is: the tip of the right ear, the thumb of the right hand, the great toe of the right foot. By the ear, he is to receive the word of God; with the hand, to do the enjoined work; with the feet, to walk in His blessed ways. This is evidently man in his whole responsibility.

Each of these parts is stamped with the number five. The ear is the avenue to the higher parts, and there are just five senses by which man is connected with the scene around: the avenues of perception, by which alone he can be appealed to.

The *hand* of man is that by which he moulds and fashions the natural world around him. It is the expression of active power: the four fingers with the opposing thumb, the consecrated because the governing part. These on the two hands give *ten*, the number of commandments in the two tables of the law, the measure of natural responsibility. The *foot*, the expression of personal conduct, gives a similar division (much less marked, however) and the two feet a similar ten. Five stands thus as the number of man, exercised and responsible under the government of God.

Notice, moreover, how carefully man's power is characterized as creature, dependant power. His hand is the instrument of it, as the vice-regent of God in the world: no beast has, in any proper sense, a hand. Yet the power is in no way like divine power, simple, and without effort, but a co-operation of forces, in which, as he recognizes, union is strength: the four fingers, whose symbol is weakness, helped by the strong opposing thumb; the two hands also assisting one another.

The common scriptural division of seven into four plus three helps us to realize the present one into *four* plus *one*, the symbol of the creature under the government of God. And this approached from the creature side: and the throne of God thus approached is encompassed with clouds and darkness. The divine ways with him give him constant and needed exercise, though the throne is there, steadfast, and towering above the clouds. *Five* will be found constantly associated with this thought of exercise as under responsibility; but also with the kindred one that, under God, the way, according to its character, leads to a corresponding end. This whole lesson, Deuteronomy, the fifth book of Scripture, enforces throughout. The creature in relation to the almighty Creator, gives the fundamental thought.

## Six

Six is the second number which is not a prime number. Divided, its factors are *two* and *three*, which easily yield the thought of the manifestation of evil, or of the enemy's work. Six is the number of the days of man's working week, the appointed time of his labour, type of his life's labour, his "few and evil" days, that are limited because of sin.

In its full meaning, it seems to speak of sin in its full development, limited and controlled by God, who thus glorifies Himself in the issue of it. The discipline of God for His own would come under this. In the number of the beast (666), we find three successively higher powers of the decimal scale. It speaks of evil in its fullest activity; yet its feebleness is abundantly clear, and God's hand controls it: it increases only responsibility and judgment. The "number of his name" stamps it as what it is, and is only the "number of a man" vainly and impiously aspiring to be as God (Rev. 13:17-18).

In the tenth psalm is the description of this "wicked one" (Ps. 10:2-11). It is, conjointly with the preceding one, an alphabetic psalm, from which in this place exactly six letters are missing. The description of the wicked occupies the gap in the structure of the psalm. Goliath's height was six cubits; a giant of his race had six fingers and six toes.

Nebuchadnezzar's idolatrous image was sixty cubits high, six broad. One sixth of Gog's host is spared (Ezek. 39:2). That is, six parts are the measure of the host, of which God spares one in divine sovereignty. Lastly, the darkness at this cross began at the sixth hour and ended at the ninth (3 x 3).

## Seven

This is the symbol of perfection; the sense, however, being sometimes evil, though prevailingly good. The number seven is in Scripture, where divided, in general *four* plus *three*. This speaks of the creature as manifesting the Creator, which, being attained, is for the creature its perfection, and for God His rest.

It often seems merely to indicate a complete view or accomplishment, as the parables of Matthew 13 give a complete view of the kingdom of heaven: the first four, the external world-aspect; the last three, the divine mind. The seven addresses to the churches give in like manner the complete inspired church-history (Rev. 2 and 3). The seven seals secure the book completely (Rev. 5). In the seven vials is "filled up the wrath of God" (Rev. 15). The seven more wicked spirits which the unclean spirit associated with himself (Matt. 12:45), is an example of the bad sense; as are the seven heads of the beast in Revelation 13. Perfect divine accomplishment we may take as the meaning of this number in a *good* sense.

## Eight

This number is indicating a new beginning, as the eighth day is the first of a new week. It thus speaks of what is new in contrast with the old, and thus of the new covenant, new creation. Thus circumcision was to be performed on the eighth day. It typifies "the putting off the body of the flesh" (Col. 2:11), and is connected with the new creation in Christ Jesus unto good works (Eph. 2:10).

So seven days were occupied with the consecration of the priesthood, and on the eighth day they entered on their work (Lev. 9:1). With the transfiguration on the eighth day began, as it were, the new age with "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Luke 9:28; 2 Pet. 1:16-18). And the eighth psalm announced His Kingdom (cf. Heb. 2:5-9).

But this, like other numbers, can be applied to what is evil; and so we have the “seven other spirits” associated with the first “unclean spirit” making eight, and introducing the “last state” of the man into whom they enter. So the ten horns of Daniel’s fourth beast have three uprooted before the little horn, becoming, thus, eight with this; the last state of the beast being thus brought about, in which judgment falls upon the whole. And in Revelation 17, where from another side the same things are recounted, the eighth head gives to the beast its blasphemous form, and “goes into perdition.”

## Ten

In connection with *five*, and as very near akin to it in meaning, we may take the number *ten*. It is but *two* times *five*, as I have already said. The ten fingers and toes are plainly so, and they give us respectively man’s capacity for action and competence for an upright walk. But the measure of capacity is that of *responsibility*, and the measure of responsibility is that of *judgment* or of *reward*.

Thus ten plagues fall upon Egypt. The Ten Commandments were on the two tables of testimony, the measure, on the divine side, of man’s responsibility. In the kingdom of the ten tribes, Ephraim was set on its own responsibility, apart from the rule of the house of David.

The ten toes of the image of Nebuchadnezzar’s vision enabled the feet to stand firm (Dan. 2). This answers to the ten horns upon the fourth beast in the prophet’s vision (Dan. 7). Here again we have the measure of power.

In the ten virgins of the parable, responsibility is enforced; and here they are five wise, five foolish. The testimony here is that of the bridegroom’s return. Finally, in the tithes demanded by God in Israel, we have the whole (of whatever it might be) looked at as composed of *ten* parts, the measure of responsibility, of which God took *one* part in token of His sovereignty.

## Twelve

It is, in Scripture, at least as commonly divided into *four* times *three*, as the number seven is into four plus three. The factors are the same; but whereas in the one case they are added, in the other they are multiplied. It

is only in the relation of the two numbers to one another that it differs from seven. The number of the world, and that of divine manifestation, characterize it; but these are not side by side merely. It is God manifesting Himself in the world of His creation, as *seven* is, but now in active energy laying hold of and transforming it.

Thus *twelve* is the number of manifest sovereignty, as it was exercised in Israel by the Lord in the midst of them, or as it will be exercised in the world to come. *One* and *five* are also governmental numbers; but *one* speaks simply of supremacy, of sovereign will and power, while *five* speaks of God’s governmental ways. Both apply to providential as well as manifest government.

In the new Jerusalem, it is plain why the number of manifest sovereignty is everywhere apparent: twelve gates, twelve foundation; twelve thousand furlongs its compass every way (Rev. 21). This is its blessedness, that God here rules entirely. Upon earth, according to the Lord’s promise, the twelve apostles “sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28).

## Forty

Forty is, again, but *four* times *ten*, that is, full testing according to the whole responsibility.

And now looking back at this series of numbers, we can easily trace in it a connection of thought, which unites it together, and manifests also its completeness as a series. It will serve as confirmation of the meaning of the whole, and of each separate part also. The order of thought gives it a new beauty, and its fullness becomes a demonstration. It is plain that the sum of all truth is contained in it, and that we cannot go beyond it for anything.

In the first three numbers, thus, we have God in His fullness: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. God must, if our thoughts are right, take precedence in them of all else, and the display of Himself is what is accomplished and designed in all that follows. We have next in the number *four*, the creature; and here the display of God in it is noted and emphasized in the Scripture division into *three* and *one* which has already come before us. The connection of the first three numbers with the fourth is here made plain to us.