



– an uncluttered approach –

SIMPLIFYING

REVELATION

vocabulary meager, one Hebrew word sometimes was compelled to do duty for a score of diverse meanings. Under such conditions men came naturally to use numbers as we use words. They were the symbols of moral and spiritual truth. A certain number would suggest a definite concept. The conceptions arose quote naturally through certain primitive associations. Just as the sound of a given word by long habit calls up the corresponding idea, so a certain number, by acquired association, called up a definite concept. Such numbers become symbols and cannot be read with the literal exactness that we employ when interpreting mathematical formulae” (Revelation, Truth Commentary series, introduction).

- That is not an exclusively antiquated concept.
 - Of course there are plenty of numerology theories out there. But there are cultural significance to certain numbers:
 - Lucky number 7 – in culture, the number

“7” has transcended its mere numeric value.

- How about 13? It is so unlucky, a lot of elevators skip a 13th floor & airplanes skip row 13.

- ❖ $\frac{1}{4}$ | $\frac{1}{3}$ | $\frac{1}{2}$ – a portion of the whole
- ❖ 1 – unity, a short time
- ❖ 2 – strength, commonality
- ❖ 3 – complete, whole, sacred, divine
- ❖ 4 – widespread, worldwide
- ❖ 5 – small/short, but definite
- ❖ 6 – number of a man, less than divine
- ❖ 7 – complete, whole, sacred, divine
- ❖ 10 – complete, total, power
- ❖ 12 – religion, God's people
- ❖ 1000 – complete, total, greatness, vast
- ❖ $3\frac{1}{2}$ – half of 7

BY THE
n u m b e r s



• FRACTIONS.

- These are used to represent a portion of the whole, but not necessarily a literal quantitative amount.
- In Revelation 8-9, a third of the trees are burned up, a third of the sea became blood, a third of the sun was struck, a third of mankind was killed, etc.
- In the context, we are reading about God's efforts to cause the wicked to repent.
- The significance throughout the text is not the third which is destroyed, but the $\frac{2}{3}$ which are not.
- It is used as an emblem of God's mercy and patience.

• ONE.

- Typically used to represent unity, which is no surprise.
- Also used to speak of a short time
 - Rev 17:12, the ten kings who had received no

kingdom yet would receive authority for one hour.

- Rev 18:10, 17, 19 – the fall of Babylon took one hour.

- **TWO.**

- “Two are better than one...” (Ecc 4:9-11).
- Jesus sent His disciples out two-by-two (Lk 10:1)
- The Law required two or more witnesses to convict (Deut 17:6)
- Rev 11 has 2 witnesses, pictured as two olive trees and two lampstands.
- There is strength when there are two; they share a commonality.

- **THREE.**

- The number 3 is in the Bible 100s of times.
- Homer Hailey gives a lengthy, but not an extensive list of 3s in his commentary on Revelation:
- *“In the creation there was God, the Spirit of God, and the Word of God. Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The three patriarchs are thought of as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Daniel had three Hebrew friends who were carried with him into Babylon and*

who were cast into the fiery furnace. Daniel prayed three times each day. Esther urged the Jews to fast for her three days and three nights. Peter denied the Lord three times, and then confessed his love for Him three times. The three apostles, Peter, James and John were with Jesus on three special occasions: the raising of Jairus' daughter, the transfiguration, and the night in Gethsemane, the sacred place of prayer. The sheet which Peter beheld while in a trance, filled with all manner of creatures, was let down from heaven three times. Paul thrice petitioned the Lord on behalf of his thorn in the flesh. Jesus endured a threefold temptation and the avenues through which the lusts of our own temptations come are three. The three persons of the Godhead were present when one of their number was baptized, the three are associated in name at the baptism of all believers since the issuing of the Great Commission. Over and over the number

the number to believes is the resurrection of our Lord on the third day.”

- 3 is used throughout the Bible to represent that which is complete and whole, and often (not always) involves God or things related to Him.
- It has been called God’s signature, which to a degree may be true; but we need to be careful not to carry such an idea beyond the bounds of the Scripture.
- **FOUR.**
 - Four is a common number in the Bible.
 - 8x in the book of Amos we find the phrase, “...for three transgressions of __insert nation__, and for four...”
 - If the number three indicates completeness, then the nations described by Amos went beyond, they exceeded God’s patience.
 - Other prophets (Daniel, Ezekiel, & Zechariah) use the number for a lot: “four corners of the earth,” “four winds,” “four living creatures,” “four faces,” “found wings,” “four sides,” “four wheels,” “four horns,” “four smiths,” “four chariots,” “four horses,” “four colours,” “four spirits,” etc..

- Some of those same images are repeated in the book of Revelation.
- Four carries a few ideas with it, dependent on the image it appears with:
 - It can mean widespread (whether for good {living creatures in Rev} or bad {transgressions}).
 - It is representative of the whole world (four corners, four winds) and things taking place in the world.
- FIVE.
 - 5 is used symbolically in the gospels and the epistles.
 - There were 5 wise & 5 foolish virgins in Matthew 25. Ten is a complete number (more to say on that in a bit). 5 is a portion of 10, used to speak of a particular segment (not literal).
 - When Jesus fed the people with 5 loaves and 2 fish, there's no reason to think that it was a figure. It was a small quantity (especially when compared to the size of the crowd gathered).
 - Paul extolled "...five words with understanding..." over 1,000 words in a

tongue (1 Cor 14:19). Not a literal 5 words, but a small understood statement.

- 5 appears in Revelation in ch. 9, locusts would hurt men for 5 months. Not necessarily literal, but a short, definite period of time. It would come to an end.

- **SIX.**

- Appears 2x in Revelation.
- 4:8 – the four living creatures each have six wings. Of course wings come in pairs. I believe this image is more a case of 3 pairs of 2 (a combination of strength, and completeness), especially when understand what the four living creatures represent (will address that when we get into Ch. 4).
- The only other appearance is when it is used in triplicate – 666 (Rev 13:18), the number of the beast.
- The text itself says, “...it is the number of a man...”
- **SEVEN**, is much like 3 in it's use.
- It is by far the most prevalent number in the book of Revelation.
- As indicated before, there are at least 49 sevens used in Revelation. Some are obvious,

some are not so.

- It is used to represent perfection or completeness. It is used as the number of God.

- **TEN.**

- Then is also used to refer to things that are complete, or the total of something.
- In the parable of the 10 virgins, the 10 are representative of all God's people, both the faithful & unfaithful.
- In Luke 15, the woman's headdress had 10 silver coins – an image of completeness, with one lost, it was less than complete or full.
- We find the fullness of the 5 talent man's service when he comes back with 10 talents. In a similar parable, 10 servants are given 10 minas to work with. The reward for the faithful would be authority over ten cities.
- The Ten Commandments, though a literal 10, are representative of the whole of God's law in the OT (613 laws).
- In the days of Hezekiah, at the prayer of Isaiah, the sundial went backward 10 degrees (literal, likely; but greater than that, a demonstration of power).

- Ecc 7:19, *“Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers of the city.”* Literal? Perhaps (though wouldn’t 11 then be better??) But the completeness, the perfection, the power of wisdom is extoled.
- Daniel asked to be tested for 10 days on the vegetable & water diet (Dan 1:12-15). Literal 10 days, but it also is a figure of a complete time, and a demonstration of God’s power over Daniel & his circumstance.
- Daniel, as well as John in Revelation, speaks about ten horns, which are ten kings, with ten crowns. Images of power.
- Revelation 2:10 speaks of ten days of tribulation – a complete period (but small, compared to say 100 days or 1000 days).
- **TWELVE.**
 - Twelve is used as a religious number, often representing God’s people or their service.
 - Israel had 12 tribes. The breastplate of the high priest had 12 stones in it, one for each tribe.
 - There were 12 cakes of showbread on the table in the temple. Often sacrifices made on holy days would come to twelve.

- Jesus had 12 apostles. Jesus began to teach at the temple at age 12.
- After feeding the 4,000, twelve baskets of fragments were taken up.
- Revelation is filled with images of twelve. The 144,000 of Revelation 7 & 14 are identified as 12,000 (12x1000) of the 12 tribes of Israel (different listing of the tribes than anywhere else).
 - The woman in Revelation 12 has a crown of 12 stars on her head.
 - The city described in Revelation 21 has 12 gates with the names of the 12 tribes, guarded by 12 angels.
 - There are 12 foundations to the city, on them the names of the twelve apostles.
 - Rev 21, the wall of the city measured 144 cubits (12x12).
- **ONE THOUSAND.**
 - 1000 is similar to, but greater than 10.
 - 1000 is 10x10x10 (it combines two images that convey completeness or perfection).
 - Ps 50:10, the Lord owns "...the cattle on a thousand hills."
 - Ps 84:10, "...a day in Your courts are better

than a thousand.”

- Ps 90:4, “...a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past...”
- Ps 105:8, “He remembers His covenant forever, ... for a thousand generations...”
- Rev 20 uses the number 6x to speak of the binding of Satan and those who reign and live with Christ.
- It is not a literal time – it is a complete, total, vast time.
- 1000 is also in images like the 144,000 (12x12x1000), which is used to represent all of God’s people & the dimensions of the city in Rev 21.
- **THREE AND A HALF.**
 - Obviously, 3 ½ is half of 7.
 - Seven is complete, whole, a divine number. 3½ is used to speak of hardship for God’s people; trials.
 - There was a drought in the days of Elijah for 3½ years.
 - Daniel spoke about the days of the fourth beast, when God’s people would be given into his hands for “a time and times and half a time” (Dan 7:25), which is 3½.

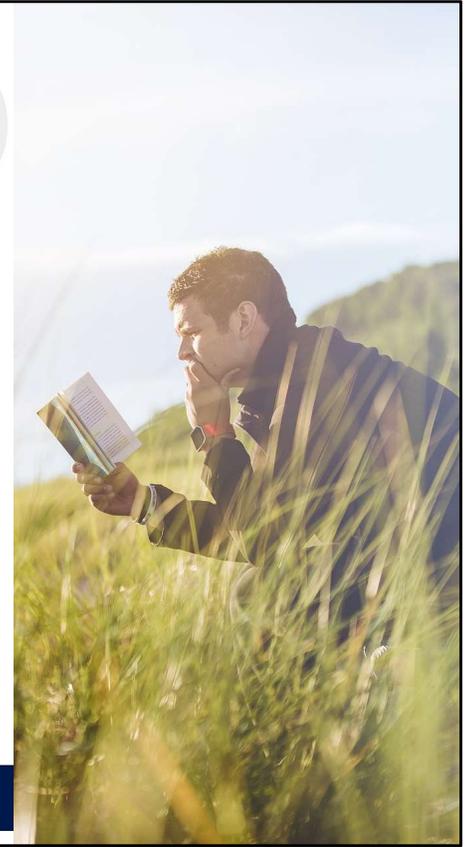
- In Daniel 9:27, the sacrifice was cut off “...in the middle of the week” (that would be 3½, half of seven).
- The same image was used in Daniel 12:7 to speak of a period of trials for the holy people.
- In Revelation 11:2, the holy city would be trodden under foot for 42 months. That’s 3½ years.
- In Revelation 11:3, the 2 witnesses would prophesy 1260 days – which is the same period – 3½ years.
- At the end of the 1260 days, the 2 witnesses were overcome & put to death (Rev 11:9). Their bodies were left in the street 3½ days while the wicked rejoiced.
- In ch. 12, the woman who gave birth to the child fled for 1260 days (12:6).
- In ch. 13, the beast was given authority to continue 42 months (13:5) to make war against the saints.
- As seven is representative of fullness or completeness, 3 ½, a broken seven, reveals a time of persecution, oppression and trials.
- Other numbers we come across in Revelation are

combinations of the numbers we've looked at.

BY THE numbers

Whatever interpretation one gives this grand book, he must recognize its unique style in contrast to the other books of the New Testament. The careful student will not interpret numbers, sometimes literally and sometimes figuratively, **in order to satisfy a particular theory**. A proper interpretation will follow a consistent pattern while analyzing the meaning of both the pictures and the numbers revealed in the Apocalypse.

Truth Commentaries, **Revelation** (ROBERT HARKRIDER)



- As the images in the book are figurative, so are the numbers.
- We need to be honest in our use and interpretation of the numbers in Revelation.

Next week...

- ❖ The Throne Room Scene
 - ❖ God's glory on His throne
 - ❖ The Lamb is Worthy
 - ❖ Praise to the Lamb
 - ❖ Look for groups of sevens and threes

REVELATION 4-5

