

Digging Deeper

Numbers and Their Meaning

Numbers figure prominently in Revelation (and a few other books of the Bible) and are often found in apocalyptic literature. Their symbolic use and accompanying interpretation were readily understood by John's readers, but may cause confusion for some Christians when trying to understand his vision. Here are the most common numbers, and their meanings, used in Revelation and other apocalyptic literature:

3—God the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

4—The world created by God, represented by the four "corners" of the earth, the four winds, the four directions of a compass, and the four seasons.

6—Mankind, created on the sixth day of creation, although because of the Fall this number may also represent sin.

7—Perfection, completeness, holiness. God rested on the seventh day. We are to forgive "70 times 7" times, meaning fully or completely. Seven also represents the Holy Spirit's work among God's people, or God's work in the created world ($3 + 4 = 7$).

8—Restored creation brought about the Holy Trinity ($7 + 1 = 8$).

10—Also refers to completeness and is frequently used in combination with other numbers. There were ten plagues against ancient Egypt. God gave the Ten Commandments to Israel. The Old Testament describes victories over enemies numbering tens of thousands ($10 \times 10 \times 10$).

12—Frequently refers to God's people. There were twelve sons of Jacob (and thus twelve tribes of Israel), and twelve apostles.

24—Represents all of God's people of both the Old and New Testaments ($12 + 12 = 24$).

40—A time of testing and trial. During the Flood rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights. Israel's wandering in the desert was for forty years. Christ's fasting and temptation in the desert lasted forty days.

1,000—The highest number of completeness ($10 \times 10 \times 10 = 1,000$)

The "Forest" View of Revelation

Part I: The Prologue (1:1-5:14)

The Revelation of Jesus Christ (1:1-8)

John's Calling and The Seven Letters to the Seven Churches (1:9-3:22)

Christ's Enthronement (4:1-5:14)

Part II: The Prophetic Message (6:1-22:5)

First Cyclic Vision – Seven Seals (6:1-8:5)

(First description of end of the world – 6:12-17)

Second Cyclic Vision - Seven Trumpets (8:6-11:19)

(Second description of end of the world – 11:15-19)

Cosmic View - Spiritual Battlefield (12:1-14:20)

(Third description of end of the world – 14:14-20)

Third Cyclic Vision - Seven Bowls (15:1-16:21)

(Fourth description of end of the world – 16:17-21)

Vision of the End - Conquering of Evil Forces (17:1-18:24)

Vision of the End - Celebration of God's Saints (19:1-21)

Vision of the End - The Final Judgment (20:1-15)

Vision of the End - New Creation (21:1-22:5)

(Fifth description of end of the world – 17:1-22:5)

Part III: The Epilogue (22:6-21)

The affirming "Amen" to the certainty this prophetic message is the last Word from Jesus Christ, Lord of the Church, until He returns. Amen. Come Lord Jesus!

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