

NEW TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lesson 48

Revelation - Structure

I love to see superhero movies. It was easy when our son was growing up, he loved them and would go with me in a heartbeat. After Will, however, we had four daughters. They were never so fond of superhero movies. My sweet wife Becky would go with me to these great films, but all too often, at a critical point in the middle of the film, I would find her sound asleep next to me.

As our girls got older, there seemed to be a constant group of boys that would come and hang around my daughters. On occasion, I have found it necessary to get them to go with me to see the films. On one occasion, I was able to get five or so of them to go with me to Avengers: Age of Ultron.

Have you seen X-Men: Apocalypse?

It is a 2016 film of the “superhero” genre using characters from Marvel Comics, like the shape-shifter Raven, Magneto (who can control magnetic fields and manipulate metal), the teleporting Kurt Wagner and more. This is the 9th installment in the series, and it is based on a character named En Sabah Nur. According to the movie, Nur was an early mutant who ruled ancient Egypt until a betrayal left him entombed in 3600BC. Nur awakens in modern times and decides to “fix” the world by destroying it and rebuilding it as he sees fit. Nur’s alternate name is “Apocalypse” because of his ability to destroy civilizations when “things start to go awry.”

I have a litmus test for seeing if someone is suitable for going to movies like this. I will tell them, “I am eager to see this movie. I hear it is based on a true story.” If people moan or laugh, they are suitable to go. If people seem to believe me and say, “Really?” then I dismiss them. They should not go see the superhuman/mutant movies if they think they might be real!

“Apocalypse” as an alternate name for the character En Sabah Nur is based on the common modern meaning of “apocalypse” as signifying destruction or an end-of-the-world event. This is not what the word has always meant, however. Apocalypse derives from the Greek word that is translated “Revelation.” As discussed last lesson, it comes from the Greek ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalupsis*), which means an unveiling or disclosing.

There is an entire genre of literature (perhaps even more entertaining than the superhero genre of movies!) that existed between 200BC and 200AD called

“apocalyptic literature.” This was a distinctly Jewish-sourced literature that most scholars readily associate with the Old Testament book of Daniel.

There is a host of non-biblical Jewish writings from the time between the Old and New Testaments that are also apocalyptic, including writings found among the Qumran community in the Dead Sea Scrolls. As a part of their debates, scholars parse through what features make certain writing apocalyptic.¹ Among the features commonly assumed a part of apocalyptic literature are visions about the future, often given through an intermediary, using symbols and other means of cloaking the meaning such that it needs uncovering, or interpreting.² Often the vision of the future includes a period of the “last days” or “end times.” As such, that aspect of the apocalyptic material is “eschatological” in nature.

A Christian writing of this apocalyptic genre is the New Testament book we call “Revelation.” We pick up our study of it in this lesson, looking at its structure and ways that helps us understand its meaning.

THE STRUCTURE OF REVELATION

Whenever we read an ancient writing, or even a modern one, it is important to understand the structure of the writing. Many, if not most, writings today are what I term “linear” in structure. By that I mean a writing that is read in a straight line to the end. It has a start and a finish. It is akin to a timeline, with the time proceeding in a linear fashion till the end.

Other writings aren’t so much linear as they are circular. These are writings that don’t follow the modern convention of an outline of time and points from A to Z. Instead, they deal with ideas and themes going back and forth over them without regard to time. This writing is not unlike a symphony, where the musical theme is repeated in a variety of forms and arrangements as the piece is played.

As we look at Revelation, there are a number of strong godly scholars who take differing views on the structure of Revelation. The views I offer are the fruit of my study and represent my best understanding. I would never be so presumptuous as to insist my view trumps all others. There must be an extra measure of humility among any who are trying to understand or teach Revelation.

I see Revelation as a bit of both linear and circular in its structure. The book seems best understood in light of the Old Testament book Daniel, not only in many of its

¹ In his overview book, Leon Morris points out that, “‘apocalyptic’ is our term. It is not one which the ancients used, at least in this way.” *Apocalyptic* (Eerdmans 1972), at 21.

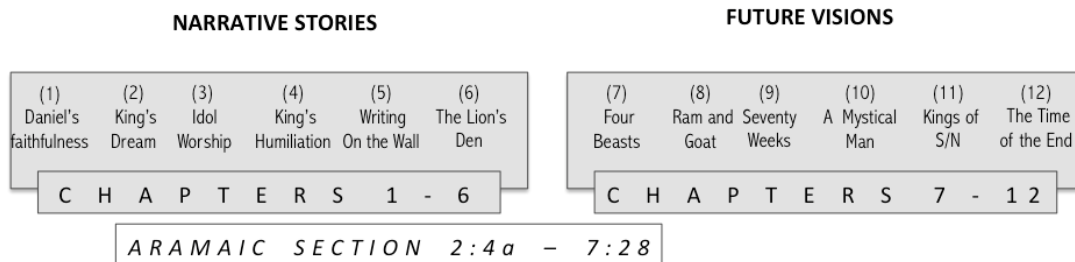
² Chisholm, Robert, *Handbook on the Prophets*, (Baker 2002), at 292.

symbols, but in the structure itself. So before we look at Revelation, consider the structure of Daniel.

Daniel

Daniel is easily divided into two parts. Daniel's twelve chapters divide into a first section of narrative stories (chapters 1-6) and a second section of futuristic visions (chapters 7-12). The first stories are focused on the events relevant to the audience. They speak of Daniel's faithfulness (Chap. 1); a dream by the king (Chap. 2); idol worship (Chap. 3); the king's humiliation (Chap. 4); God writing on the wall at a banquet (Chap. 5); and Daniel in the lions' den (Chap. 6).

DANIEL – STRUCTURE



The last six chapters of Daniel contain visions that seem to record events that would follow the days of Daniel himself. (I should add that one of the narrative stories, that of the king's dream in chapter two, seems to be a future vision or dream that is closely linked with that of chapter seven.) Unlike the Old Testament prophets, Daniel's section on visions is not wrapped up in the world of Israel or Judah. Daniel has visions that are very much on the world's stage. His visions foretell Alexander the Great, the Persian Empire, Greeks, Romans, and more. This is in contrast to the writings of Ezekiel, Isaiah, or any of the minor prophets that spoke to Israel or Judah.³

³ In the Hebrew grouping of Scripture, Daniel is not gathered into the group of the "prophet" writings. The Hebrews divided their Scriptures into three sections: "Law," "Prophets," and "Other Writings." Daniel is included in the section of Other Writings. While some scholars believe this reflects a late date of composing Daniel, so late that it was after the Prophet section was "closed," there is no real authority for this view. It is supposition. Scholars have no bright line indicator of when the Prophet section was closed. Furthermore, the Prophet section is not the only place of prophetic writings. The Law section, for example, is made up of the writings of Moses, and Moses is still reckoned as Israel's first and maybe greatest prophet. Another very viable explanation given is the nature of Daniel as a prophetic writing. While the other prophets spoke forth in a "Thus saith the Lord" voice, setting out God's warnings, instructions, and coming judgments to Israel and Judah, Daniel does something much different. Daniel's focus is what one might expect from one active in foreign courts and in service of foreign kings. Daniel's focus is on the world's stage, not

The visions in Daniel are repetitive, even as they are linear. Each vision is linear within itself, but the successive visions unfold the same periods of history as the earlier visions.

So in Daniel 7, we have a vision of four beasts that represent four kingdoms. The lion is the Babylonian kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 7:4). Scholars differ on which kingdoms are represented by which animals in the succeeding verses, but each scenario still bears out the point that the animals are successive kingdoms. (One theory holds that the kingdoms are Persia, Greece and Rome. Others find the other kingdoms to be Medes, Persia, and Greece.) Then in Daniel 8, we have another vision. In this one, we have a ram that represents the Medes and Persians, followed by a goat that is Greece/Macedonia, then the four kingdoms that arose after the dissolution of Alexander the Great's Greek/Macedonian kingdom.

We can see that the vision in chapter 7 covers the same historical time period as the vision in chapter 8. If we continued to work through Daniel, we would see the same time period up to the Messiah in chapter 9. Then in chapter 10, we again have the prophetic foretelling of kingdoms of the Medes, Persians, Greeks, with Alexander's kingdom divided into four parts. Each of the five visions in Daniel cover the same time period of the future.

Scholars debate over the parameters of what is or is not "apocalyptic" literature, but generally scholars agree that in the Bible, the second half of Daniel (the visions) and the book of Revelation are both apocalyptic. Scholars have also pointed out the similarities in structure between the two.⁴

Revelation

Some scholars believe that Revelation reads in a normal time sequence like a book we might read today.⁵ In other words, it starts with material relevant to the contemporaneous church in the first century, but then as it progresses, it moves through history until at the end, it recounts the end of days with a window into eternity. This necessarily dictates different conclusions about what the text is referring to in a number of places.

that of Jerusalem or Israel. Daniel's ideas and insight are international in scope in a way unseen in the Prophet books.

⁴ Notable works on this are from Beale, G. K. See, e.g., "The Influence of Daniel Upon the Structure and Theology of John's Apocalypse," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, De. 1984), at 413-423. A fuller treatment is found in the book based on his doctoral dissertation from Cambridge, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John*, (Wipf & Stock 2010). Beale also has the outstanding commentary on Revelation from the series, *New International Greek Testament Commentary*.

⁵ See, e.g., Charles, R. H., *The Revelation of St. John*, (T&T Clark 1963).

The structure of Revelation, I believe, makes most sense when read with the same approach as Daniel. Like Daniel, Revelation has a beginning section that is more narrative in fashion (also including a vision as in Daniel chapter 2), followed by a section filled by visions punctuated with symbols. If we track the Greek translation of Daniel in usage at the time of Revelation (the “Septuagint”), we see John setting up Revelation with the same phrases used in Daniel to set up the visions there.

Daniel 2:28-29, 45 reads,

There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known ... what will be in the latter days. ... he who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be... A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this.

Revelation uses some of the precise same language (in the Greek), noting the Revelation was,

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place... those that are and those that are to take place after this... I will show you what must take place after this... the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place (Rev. 22:6).

Just as Daniel covered the same basic prophetic time period in five visions, so Revelation gives a series of visions that cover the same basic time period.

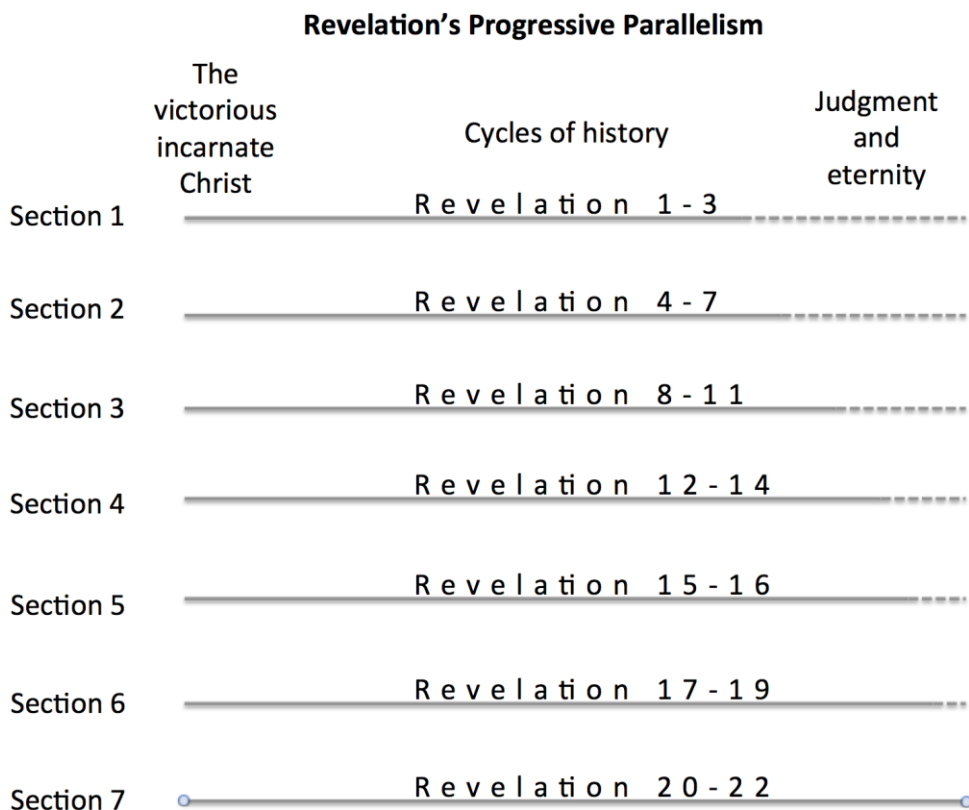
Much like the book of Daniel, we are using an approach that explains Revelation as a series of cycles that repeat themselves. In a parallelism reminiscent of Hebrew poetry, the book proclaims material past, present and future, speaking to the time between the first and second coming of Christ.⁶ It then proclaims material again – past, present and future. It then takes another perspective as it explains the material

⁶ Parallelism was an artistic construction in ancient Hebrew writing and thought, as well as in other Semitic cultures. We see in many poetic and prophetic writings this parallelism where the second phrase repeats the ideas of a previous phrase, giving a slightly different or fuller meaning to the concept expressed. This is also found in a fuller sense in books like Daniel where the future events were set forth multiple times in five different visions. Daniel chapter 2, 7, 8, 9, and 11 all cover the same general time period, but as different visions with differing emphasis. For example, in Daniel chapter 7 we read of four beasts that represent coming kings, likely with the leopard representing the Greek Empire under Alexander the Great. Then in Daniel 8 we read again of the same future, but this time in a vision of a battling ram and goat. The ram has two horns, representing the Medes and Persians, while the goat is Alexander’s Greek conquest. Then again in Daniel 11, we read of the coming successive kingdoms from another approach and in different detail.

again, past, present and future. This happens for seven (the “complete” number) cycles throughout the whole book.⁷

As an illustration of this, think of an onion. You peel a layer of an onion, and then you get another layer that is much the same, just slightly smaller. The illustration breaks down a bit because in Revelation, as the same cycles get repeated throughout the book, the later time periods get fuller and fuller treatment. It is the onion peeled from the inside out! Each successive layer is larger and has more depth.

We can chart this approach:



The first “layer” of the onion occurs in chapters 1-3. Jesus walks among the lampstands, (symbolic for walking “among the churches”). He is present with John

⁷ A classic explanation of this approach, although modified a bit in these lessons, is that of New Testament scholar William Hendriksen (1900-1982) in his book *More Than Conquerors* (Baker 1967). This book was initially published in 1939 and is still in print today. Hendriksen was the principal translator of the book of Revelation for the New International Version. Hendrikson’s ideas are used in multiple places in this lesson. Another scholar who sets out this approach is Leon Morris in his commentary, *The Revelation of St. John* (Eerdmans 1980). See also the discussion of this versus other approaches in G. K. Beale, “The Influence of Daniel Upon the Structure and Theology of John’s Apocalypse,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, (Dec. 1984) 413-423.

and displayed as one in power and victory, one who has conquered the grave (Rev. 1:13-1:18). He proceeds to speak of things that are to come (Rev. 1:19). From there, we read letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3. These letters speak to those churches and to all churches. The messages contain not only concerns of what was happening in the churches, but also promises of what *was going to happen*, should the churches not pay attention and make changes.

The second layer of the onion is found in Revelation chapters 4 through 7. These passages started with John's vision of the throne, showing the holiness and authority of God, the Lamb, and the Spirit. This scene includes a scroll that has seven seals, containing the future of God's people and the earth. With Revelation 6, the opening of the seven seals began. Like many of the "sevens" in Revelation, these seals are divided into a group of four and a group of three. The first four were horsemen followed by three other seals.

The third cycle or layer of the onion is found in Revelation 8-11, centered around the seven trumpets. While the first cycle focused on the churches and their holiness, the second cycle emphasized the effects of outside persecution on the saints. This third cycle is more focused on the effects of the coming history on the people outside the church. The trumpets are warnings of things to come that should drive people into the safety of God's arms and belief in his Son. Unfortunately, the same vision indicates that many will not be moved to faith but will rather deepen their disbelief, much like Pharaoh did in the midst of the plagues sent as warning to him. (Observe how key language in the trumpet warnings echoes the plagues used in Egypt over a millennium earlier.)

The fourth cycle is found in Revelation 12-14. As with each other cycle, the vision begins with the conquering Christ and proceeded with the history that will culminate in the victory of Christ at the end of time.

The fifth cycle is found in Revelation 15-16, which begins with the birth, death and ascension of Jesus and treks through the Gospel Age pronouncing God's judgment upon the nations through his pouring out bowls of wrath. This cycle, like the others, ends with the final judgment and Christ reigning over his enemies at the close of the age.

As we move to the sixth cycle, found in Revelation 17-19, we again returned to the beginning of the gospel age and the defeat of the seductress and Babylon by the victory Christ won on the cross. The victory started at Cavalry, but is brought to conclusion at the end of time as Jesus rides forth to end the enemy's evil deeds and influence.

The final seventh cycle is found in Revelation 20-22. In this cycle, we see the driving reasons that William Hendriksen entitled his classic work on Revelation

*“More Than Conquerors.”*⁸ In these chapters we see that the believers in Christ do not simply win – it is not simply that evil is defeated. But the believers sit in union with God in an eternity of goodness and joy. We are *more* than conquerors.

These cycles speak to the churches in John’s time, explaining the events of the world, but they also speak to the churches in our day and throughout history. Just as the letters to the churches in chapters 2 and 3 reach out and speak to all churches, so these cyclical visions give a measure of understanding and encouragement in their insight for the churches of every age.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

While it is beyond this survey to do a full detailed analysis of each chapter and verse in Revelation, it is useful to hone in on one cycle to demonstrate the approach of parallelism in understanding the book. I have chosen the last cycle both because it is my favorite, and because it shows some clear differences in understanding that can arise, based on your interpretation.

Revelation 20-22

If our structure of Revelation is right, then this section starts with the beginning of the cyclical period. That would mean that we are first looking at the advent of Jesus Christ and his life on earth followed by his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. This will mean a different interpretation of a core passage in Revelation in comparison to those who read Revelation linearly.

The question centers on the verses at the start of the seventh section (and seventh cycle) of Revelation:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while (Rev. 20:1-3).

The core difference is seen in the binding of Satan for 1,000 years, a time commonly referred to as the “millennium.” If someone is reading Revelation linearly, then this is an event that happens at the end of time. These people generally believe that this

⁸ Hendriksen, William, *More Than Conquerors* (Baker 1967).

event follows the return of Jesus and hence this approach is termed “premillennial,” for it means that Jesus returns *before* (pre-) the millennium.

The premillennial linear approach is commonly seen in a lot of the popular material on Revelation, such as the Lahaye/Jenkins *Left Behind* series of books and movies. (That is not the only version of the linear understanding. Many read the “millennium kingdom” differently, even as they read it linearly.)

Others read Revelation linearly, and accordingly place this millennium event at the end of time, but they do not have Jesus returning until *after* this time. Accordingly, they are called “postmillennial” meaning Jesus returns *after* (post-) the millennium.

If, as I suggest in this lesson, we agree with those scholars that ascribe to structuring Revelation like Daniel, then we are seeing repeated cycles through the same time frames. This means that the thousand-year binding is something that happened much earlier! We would then understand these verses as constituting what happened when Jesus began the Gospel Age during and in his earthly ministry and ascension. (For those keeping track of the names associated with the various views, this approach is called “amillennial” meaning that Jesus’ second coming is not related to the 1,000 years. In keeping with the approach of these lessons, we will examine this section of Revelation as part of the cyclical approach.⁹

Now some will read these first three verses of Revelation 20 and wonder at first blush how anyone can claim that these verses recount the first coming of Christ. That is why we need to carefully consider these verses as John would have understood them, that is, in light of Scripture itself.

John was writing Revelation at the end of the New Testament time, and likely all other books were written, even if all were not in full circulation throughout the churches geographically. The rest of Scripture, however, gives us insight into how the church spoke of and thought of the work of Jesus while on earth. From such

⁹ Here is a very graphic example of the difference in a linear and a cyclical reading of Revelation. It is like what we have already seen in Revelation 8-11 and then 12-14. The cycle of 8-11 ends with judgment day as the seventh angel blows his trumpet and “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (Rev. 11:15). Then in the very next chapter we saw the start of the cycle anew with the incarnation/birth of Christ, “She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne” (Rev. 12:5). This is what we see in the end of the cycle of Revelation 17-19 and the start of Revelation 20-22. Revelation 19 ends with the Second Coming of Christ “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.” (Rev. 19:11). Revelation 20 then starts again with the cycle as set out in the lesson above.

Scriptures we can derive some important considerations for understanding what John saw and recorded.

So as we read this, we need to read it first as people in John's day would have. The questions we ask are:

- Can we find where Satan was “bound?”
- Can we find where Satan was “thrown” or “cast out” into the abyss?
- Is there meaning to ending Satan's ability to “deceive the nations” for “1,000 years”?

The answers are found in our Scriptures, in experiences that John knew quite well, and in doctrines taught to the early church. Let us break out each question:

The Binding of Satan

The Greek verb for “bound” is *deō* (δέω). It is the precise word used to describe Jesus' actions during his earthly ministry in reference to his activity over Satan. In Matthew 12 we are told of when a “demon-oppressed man” who was both blind and mute was brought before Jesus and his apostles (John!). Jesus healed the man to the amazement of the crowd, who started rumblings about Jesus being the awaited Messiah. Certain Pharisees critical of Jesus accredited the casting out of demons to Satan.

It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons (Mt. 12:24).

Jesus then pointed out that he worked those miracles because he *bound* (*deō* - δέω) Satan.

Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds [*deō* - δέω] the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house (Mt. 12:29).

The same word is used in the accounts of this in Mark 3:27.

Furthermore, this is the same power that Jesus gave to his apostles:

Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind [*deō* - δέω] on earth shall be bound [*deō* - δέω] in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Mt. 18:18).

Jesus' binding and victory over Satan begins in the wilderness and is brought to completion on Calvary. This defeat is part of his parting cry, "It is finished!" (Jn. 19:30).

The Casting Out of Satan

John speaks in Revelation 20:3 of Satan as being "thrown" or cast into the abyss. The Greek word he used to describe his vision is *ballō* (βάλλω). We find John using this same root word in his Gospel (written close in time to the Revelation). In John 12, Jesus' betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion are imminent. In the words of Jesus, his "hour is at hand." Jesus prayed,

"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." (Jn. 12:27-28).

When those nearby heard the voice from heaven, Jesus made an interesting remark:

"This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be *cast* [*ballō* - βάλλω] out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." (Jn. 12:30-32).

Jesus' ministry on earth bound Satan. Jesus' death on the cross cast him out. But what of question three? Has Satan lost his power to deceive all nations?

Deceiving Nations for 1,000 Years

Over and over in Revelation we see numbers used figuratively. (See appendix I am attaching.) I suggest that here, the 1,000 years is not a sudden departure into mathematics, but rather a significant number in the same respect we have seen with the others. 1,000 is not a "total" or everlasting number. For that, we would expect 7 or 12 in some permutation. But 1,000 is a magnifier number. It is used to show a grand length or significance to whatever it is describing. So it is here. 1,000 stands for a very long time, but not a permanent time or an eternity.

The ability of Satan to deceive the nations *was* ended with the crucifixion of Christ, and especially his resurrection, his ascension, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Before, even Jesus' disciples were unclear about what Jesus was doing. None of them went to the tomb on Easter Sunday expecting it empty! Everyone was deceived. Everyone believed Jesus to be dead forever! Everyone was sad and despondent. Thomas didn't even believe Jesus' resurrection when told about it by other apostles!

But look how rapidly things changed with the resurrection, ascension and coming of the Holy Spirit. The apostles believed. Other followers believed. Then on Pentecost, with a rush of the Holy Spirit, thousands from all the nations believed. During what we are terming the Gospel Age, Satan's ability to deceive all the nations has remained curtailed. He is not without influence. His reach, even from the abyss, and that of his minions is not unnoticed. History shows great persecution of the church and attacks on the saints. But there *is* a church, one that started with a few folks in a ragtag corner of the Roman Empire and spread throughout the world – *fast!*

Paul described it as “the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead” in Colossians 2:13-15 adding,

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. *He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*

And so if we begin Revelation 20 understanding the cycle beginning again with the Gospel Age, we now open up some important vistas of teachings in the succeeding parts of John's visions.

John again sees the thrones he had seen earlier in heaven, representing the place of authority given to those under the Old Covenant (12 tribes of Israel) as well as the New (12 apostles). He also sees the souls of martyrs (“those beheaded for the testimony of Jesus”). In addition, he sees other believers who have died on earth, but live on in the presence of the Savior in a “soul” sense (“those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark”). These are believers who die before the end of days. They live on before God in what John calls “the first resurrection” (Rev. 20:5). This was not a foreign concept to the church. Hebrews 12 speaks of the “great cloud of witnesses” that surround us as we live, having recounted them as examples of faithful people under both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant in Hebrews 11.

The Gospel Age is not forever, however. As the age winds down, the 1,000 year binding will end and Satan will be released. He will gather armies and descend on the church in a final fury. He will seek to bring to utter destruction and annihilation the presence of any who trust in the Lord Jesus. His attack will be deceptive and

will come from the four corners of the world. They will surround the “beloved city” and things will look dire indeed!¹⁰

As we are considering Revelation a set of visions and sections repeating the same cycles of the Gospel Age, it gives added significance to this final “battle” to see that it was also described in the earlier cycles, especially Revelation 16 and 19.

Revelation 16:14, bringing the fifth cycle to the close of the Gospel Age, described it thus:

For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.

Revelation 19:19, bringing the sixth cycle to the close of the Gospel Age, described it similarly:

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army.

This battle was forecasted long before John’s visions. Isaiah himself wrote of the fearsome Day of the Lord, “a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up” (Is. 2:12). This is a day when the rebellious are brought low and “the LORD alone will be exalted” (Is. 2:17).

Having already read through the events in the other cycles, and knowing the echoes found in Old Testament prophecies, we are not surprised by the outcome of what John sees. Satan’s final brutal assault is not successful. His defeat is thorough and his temporary reprise is simply ushering in the second coming of Jesus.

Fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev. 20:9-10).

Satan meets his final verdict of eternal torment, but what happens to humanity? What of the believers who are caught up with the Lord in the air? (Paul explained

¹⁰ The full description of the besieged is “camp of the saints -- the beloved city,” an apt description for the people of God with echoes not only of the Old Testament (Isaiah 60:14 explains God’s people “will be called the City of the LORD”; the people called out of Egypt were “the camp” with passages speaking of God “moving among the camp”), but of Revelation itself. In Revelation 3:12 we read that the believers who overcome are directly associated as the “City of God.”

that at the second coming of Christ, “Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.” 1 Thess. 4:17). What of the unbelievers who deny the Lord and serve the beast?

John gives us that in his vision as well. Jesus sits on a great white throne. He sits in judgment. Those whose names are not written in his book of life, are judged by their own deeds, are cast into the lake of fire, and die a second death. But for those whose names *are* in the book of life, something altogether different happens. The earth and sky have “fled away” at the coming of Christ (Rev. 20:11) and a new heaven and new earth take their place! (Rev. 21:1).

The story of Genesis 1-3 is made complete. The Bible closes in a very appropriate fashion, and history does as well. In Genesis 1, God created the heavens and earth. In Genesis 2, he made humanity and placed them in Paradise, walking and communing with them. But in Genesis 3, things went awry with sin, borne from the temptations of the deceiver himself, and fallen humanity was no longer suited for Paradise, for the presence of God, or for eternity and the tree of life. Now with the end of Revelation, we read the old fallen world is finished. The deceiver lives on, eternally tormented for what he did in rebellion to God. And for those who embraced God’s redemption, a new heaven and earth come, there is a bodily resurrection, and a new life in true Paradise with the tree of life in a new Holy City, “the New Jerusalem.”¹¹

Jesus makes everything new, the believers as the bride of Christ are transported into his presence where the dwelling of God is *again* with his people.¹² The New Jerusalem is described in magnificent detail, albeit symbolic, but even without understanding the symbols, it is beautiful! Radiant like a jewel – high walls (in 1st century speak, that meant great security”) – 12 gates (complete believing Israel¹³) 12 foundations (complete apostles/church) – 12,000 stadia long and wide (complete

¹¹ Over and over in Scripture we read of echoes and themes repeated in how God works. The new city is “New Jerusalem.” The old covenant is in contrast to the “new covenant.” The old “tent” becomes the new presence of Jesus. The old passes away and gives birth to a new and fuller expression. This is shown well by the ideas in Hebrews 8 and 13:20-21.

¹² The Bible is clear, God will not dwell in the midst of the unholy. It would degrade God. Something that cannot be done. See, e.g., Ezek. 43:1-12.

¹³ Understanding the “gates” of the New Jerusalem in this way, brings a special touching significance to Psalm 87:1-2,

On the holy mount stands the city he founded; the LORD loves the *gates* of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob.

size) – pearly gates – streets of gold – lit by the glory of God and the Lamb – always day, never night – nothing detestable or deceptive there¹⁴ – INCREDIBLE!

John then ends his book assuring his readers of the truth of what he has seen and written and its implications. It should change how we live, attentive to the times and the promised coming of our Savior! The risen Jesus is the one we worship! He is the self proclaimed, “root¹⁵ and the descendant of David, the bright morning star” (Rev. 22:16). We do not worship angels or saints (Col. 2:18-19), but God alone!

With John’s own closing (Rev. 22:20-21), we close this lesson:

He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.”
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all.
Amen.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD! (Ps. 117).*

Scripture is the story of God’s victory over sin. This victory was won on our behalf. God wasn’t the sinner trying to fix himself. God was at work for us. God has defeated the power of sin. He has conquered the grave’s power over the sinner. Praise God!

2. *“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen” (Jude 24-25).*

God’s victory over sin isn’t just for the end of days. It is here and now! We can live a victorious life over sin. That doesn’t mean we quit sinning. It

¹⁴ John contrasts those who go into the city with those outside:

Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood (Rev. 22:15).

This is not a reference to real *dogs*! The expression was for those who were living in open rebellion, akin to prostitutes. See in this sense Dt. 23:17-18.

¹⁵ Paul used the same phrase for Jesus in Rom. 15:12 claiming for Jesus the prophecy of Isaiah 11:10.

means that we work toward that end, empowered as never before, growing in our Christlikeness day by day. Praise God!

3. *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”* (Rom. 8:18).

I am excited about the future. I am excited for what God has laid up in store for his children. Praise God!

SYMBOLIC USAGE OF NUMBERS

(Appendix)

We live in a “numbers” society. We have numbers for identification where one digit makes the difference between you and someone else. Numbers are the reference points for whether we can legally drive. We memorize our date of birth in number form. We calculate our gas mileage and follow rules of the road based on numbers. The time of day is expressed in numbers, as are the days of the month. Our recipes are number intensive both for the amounts of ingredients and the cooking temperature. We have numbers in our passwords, numbers for our bank accounts and credit cards, and numbers for our ATM usage. Most every financial transaction involves math and numbers. Few of us barter for our electricity!

Importantly in our number society, we all take many years of math in school. Although many of us forget a good bit of it (how many can recite the quadratic equation without help?) we all know many basic math formulas. We live by the literal values of numbers. Rarely do we use numbers for any symbolic meaning. They are concrete representations of specific values or quantities. In almost thirty years of practicing law, I have heard many bizarre things, but I have never heard someone defend a traffic court case by arguing,

“But your Honor, I thought the 70 m.p.h. speed limit sign was symbolic! I thought it meant I could drive a perfect speed!”

That is not the way we think in our society. But it has not always been so. In ancient times, math was not so readily known, nor was there as great a need. The advent of coins was relatively late, and while silver and gold were metals of commerce, bartering was much more common. As the ancients experienced and explored numbers, they quickly identified mysterious things. Not surprisingly, the earliest trades associated with the usage of math were builders and priests!¹⁶ Builders naturally needed to know how to make a square corner. Priests were ones who

¹⁶ Farbridge, Maurice, *Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism* (Wipf & Stock 1970), at 93.

stared at stars, kept calendars and clocks, and were more carefully observant of seasons. Moreover, priests were involved with music, and music demonstrated core principles of math, from counting to scales.

The approach to the ancient view of numbers includes the following:

1. Primarily, a review of the extant ancient literature to see primary accounts of using numbers,
2. Secondly, a review of other books written on the subject.
3. A focus on the Ancient Near East (those communities in the sphere of influence on Israel, including Israel), as opposed, for example, to the Far East, and,
4. A focus on the time period expressed in the Bible.

SYMBOLIC NUMBER USAGE

In typical 21st century number fashion, the temptation is to start with number one and march numerically through each number searching for a symbolic usage. However, lines are not so clean cut in ancient days. It is clear from reading the ancient documents and texts that many times numbers are used for their clear numerical value, much like we would today. There are passages where four means four and two means two. There are also passages that demonstrate a symbolic usage of numbers where the number used is clearly not the actual number meant! Yet another group of passages are those where the number appears to have an actual value as well as a symbolic value. A few passages are somewhat ambiguous, and do not readily indicate whether the number is referencing a specific value or symbolizes something else. With that warning in mind, let us consider some of the more common numbers that held significance beyond simply a numerical value we associate with them today, focusing on those found most frequently in apocalyptic literature.

3 Scholars analyzing Scripture and writings of the Ancient Near East see the number three often used symbolically as a small well-rounded total that typically is associated with something sacred.¹⁷ Farbridge's review of Babylonian literature (remembering that Daniel is placed in Babylon with an author steeped in a Babylonian royal education) indicates,

¹⁷ Driver, S. R., *The Book of Genesis*, (Methuen 1907), at 176.

An examination of the frequency with which the number three occurs in Babylonian Literature suggests that here also the number had some symbolic or sacred significance.¹⁸

Our review of the literature confirms both Driver's and Farbridge's conclusions, yet with the caveat. Rarely does it mean that the number three is not *also an actual number value*. In other words, the number might be used simply as a symbol, but it is not definitely used only that way. Many times it seems to be used as an actual number *because of its associations as a symbolic number*. Here are a few examples:

Biblical Examples

- Num. 24:10 – Balaam blesses Israel three times.
- Jonah 1:17 – Jonah is in the belly of the whale serving his sentence for three days and nights.
- 1 Kings 18:34 – In his showdown with the prophets of Baal, Elijah has the sacrifice watered three times before calling down God's fire.
- Gen. 15:9-10 – Abram's covenant with God involves cutting in half a group of three threes: a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old goat, and a three-year-old ram. (There are also two birds, but the birds are not cut in the story and there is no way to know the ages of the birds.)
- 1 Sam 3 – Samuel is called by YHWH three times before Eli the priest perceives it is YHWH calling.
- Num. 6:24-26 – The priestly blessing is a three-fold repetition of YHWH. (YHWH bless and keep; YHWH make his face shine and be gracious; YHWH lift up his countenance).
- 1 Chron. 21:9ff – YHWH gives David three choices of threes for his punishment on conducting a census (three years of famine, three months of devastation, or three days of pestilence).
- Dan. 6:10 – Daniel kneels and prays three times a day.
- Ex. 23:17ff – The Israelites are to journey to festivals honoring YHWH three times a year.

¹⁸ Farbridge, at 101.

- Jer. 7:4 – the people were wrongly taking solace in a three-fold chant of “This is the temple of YHWH.”
- Isa. 33:10 – God’s actions are in threes. (“Now I will arise, now I will lift myself up, now I will be exalted.”)
- Isa. 6:3 – The angels exalt YHWH in a three-fold repetition (“Holy, holy, holy...”)
- Hos. 3:19-20 – God’s betrothal of Israel is announced in a three-fold formula (“I betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness.”)
- Jer. 22:29, YHWH uses a three-fold repetition in pronouncing his word (O land, land, land, hear the word of YHWH!“).

Babylonian Examples

- The head of the Babylonian pantheon was a triad¹⁹ of gods in space: Anu (god of heaven), Ellil (god of earth), and Ea (god of water).²⁰
- Marduk makes three times one-hundred gods for Anu in heaven as well as for the god of the underworld.²¹
- The gods used for times and seasons were another triad: Sin (the moon god); Shamash (the sun god); and Ishatar (the earth mother god of life and fertility).
- If a man broke a drinking vessel while drinking, three days of troubles would befall him.²²

¹⁹ These triads are not to be confused with the concept of the Trinity. This was not “three in one” but were three distinct gods who were fully independent and even capable of fighting and plotting against each other.

²⁰ These are referred to as the “great gods” in the late Babylonian version of Nergal and Ereshkigal (dating from roughly the time of Daniel). See Hallo and Younger, *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (Brill 1997), at 386. See also the *Enuma Elish* (the Babylonian creation account) at tablet IV, line 146.

²¹ *Enuma Elish*, tablet VI, line 42, 43.

²² Mesopotamian Omens, Hallo and Younger, at 423.

- The pathway of the sun was divided into three divisions, each associated with a separate deity.
- Magical texts were frequently written with incantations of threes.²³
 - Witches manifested in three night divisions (evening, midnight, and dawn).
 - The influence of witches was destroyed by reciting an incantation three times.
 - There was a magical effect of tying a cord three times around the neck of one sick.
 - Incantations over a house were recited three times²⁴
- Exorcisms were more effective if performed three times.
- Toothaches were cured by three ingredients incanted over three times and then applied to the tooth.
- War sacrifices were performed to three gods with a three-course meal including three sheep.
- At a temple dedication, there were three meal-offerings made. In the temple program for Babylon's New Year's festivals, the three-time temple blessing occurred, *inter alia*, on the third day of the month three hours after sunrise.²⁵

4 Four is frequently cited by scholars as a number that symbolized for the ancients, the completeness of the world in its physical aspects.²⁶ We see this in Biblical usages as well as Babylonian. There is also a substantial similar symbolism for the Greeks. In this regard, it is helpful to know that there is a good scholarly consensus that Pythagoras, the “father” of Greek mathematics and

²³ See, e.g., the stone ritual from Assur where seven gods were incanted three times. Hallo and Younger at 444.

²⁴ Maklu series.

²⁵ Pritchard, James, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, (Princeton 1969), at 331ff.

²⁶ Farbridge at 114.

numbers apparently travelled into the Ancient Near East as far as Egypt and Babylon.²⁷

Biblical Examples

- Gen. 2:10 – The river from Eden divided into four to encompass the land.
- Isa. 11:12 – God will gather Israel from “the four corners of the earth.”
- Ezek. 7:2 – YHWH announces the end has come to the four corners of the land.
- Acts 10:11, 11:5 – Peter sees a sheet descending by its four corners announcing God’s approval for eating non-kosher meats.
- Gen. 15:13 – Abram’s offspring are foretold to live in Egypt for four times one-hundred years.
- Jer. 49:36 – God brings judgment on Elam from “the four winds from the four quarters of heaven.”
- Ezek. 37:9 – God instructs Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath for resurrecting the dry bones: “Come from the four winds.”
- Dan. 7:2ff – Four winds stirred up four creatures that represent four kingdoms in the world.
- Zech. 2:6 – God has spread his people to the four winds.
- Zech. 1 – God has four horses to patrol the earth. He also raises up four craftsmen to cast down the four horns that have scattered the land of Judah.
- Rev. 7:1 – God will set four angels to stand at the four corners of the earth and hold back the four winds.

Babylonian Examples

- The god Anu forms and produces the four winds of earth.²⁸

²⁷ Guthrie, Kenneth, *The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library*, (Phanes 1987), at 12ff.

²⁸ *Enuma Elish*, tablet I, line 105.

- Marduk is the greatest god over the earth with his “fourfold vision” and “fourfold hearing.”²⁹
- In exercising dominion over the earth, Marduk deploys “the four winds,” the “south wind, north wind, east wind, and west wind,” and the “four-ways wind.”³⁰
- Marduk hitches his storm to fall on earth to a four-steed team.³¹
- The gods worked in drudgery on earth for four times ten years before man was made to relieve them from their labors.³²
- The gods created “the four quarters of the world.”³³
- After the flood the Babylonian Noah released all the animals to the four cardinal points of the earth.³⁴
- Nebuchadnezzar was motivated to rebuild a temple when Marduk “aroused the four winds and removed the sand inside.”³⁵
- The Babylonian kings used the term “king of the four corners” to describe themselves as rulers of the world.³⁶

Greek Examples

- The Greeks identified the entire world as a composite of four different elements: fire, air, earth, and water.³⁷

²⁹ *Ibid.*, at lines 92-95.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, tablet IV, at lines 42-46.

³¹ *Ibid.*, at line 51.

³² *Atrahasis*, line 37.

³³ *Etana*, at Hallo and Younger, 453.

³⁴ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Hallo and Younger, 458ff.

³⁵ Nebuchadnezzar’s Restoration of the Ebabbar temple in Larsa, Hallo and Younger, at 308-9.

³⁶ See, e.g., *The Sippar Cylinder of Nabonidus*, Hallo and Younger at 310.

³⁷ Plutarch, *De Plac. Phil.*, at 878.

- Pythagoras reportedly divided the world into a double quadrant.³⁸
- Philo-Judeas considered four the earth's perfect number.

7 Seven as a symbolic number dates back as far as any other in written records. Going back several thousand years BC³⁹, seven seems to indicate a godly perfection or totality. While the origin of this thought is not known, some scholars believe it derives from adding three, the well-rounded sacred number to four, the completeness of the world. This provides the number seven, a complete number of things sacred and earthly. (The same principle is cited for the number 12, which is three times four, and is also indicative of godly perfection or totality.) This number carries the symbolic meaning in a number of references throughout Biblical times and geography/cultures. As we see the examples, we will see reasons for Farbridge's comment,

When the number seven is insufficient to express the complete thought required, then multiples of seven are used.⁴⁰

Biblical Examples

- Gen 2:2 – There were seven days of creation and God finished on the seventh day.
- Gen 2:3 – God made the seventh day of the week a holy day that brought the week to completion.
- Gen. 4:15 – God announces a seven-fold vengeance on any who kill Cain.
- Gen. 4:24 – Lamech announces that, “If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold”
- Gen. 7:2ff – Noah is instructed to take seven pairs of all clean animals into the ark. Noah also takes seven birds. God is set to commence his rains in

³⁸ Plutarch, *De Anim. Proc.*, at 1027.

³⁹ The Gudea inscriptions date 2,000BC, and most every scholar agrees that their employment of seven is symbolic.

⁴⁰ Farbridge, at 126.

seven days. (The rains last 4 times 10 days, a full compliment for covering a full earth!)

- Gen. 8:4-12 – Noah’s ark rests on the seventh month the seventh plus ten day. After seven days Noah sends out a dove. Seven days later he sends another dove.
- Gen. 29 – Jacob serves Laban seven years for Rachel and seven years for Leah.
- Gen. 33:3 – Jacob bows to the ground before Esau seven times, seeking his forgiveness.
- Gen. 41 – Pharaoh dreams of seven cows twice and seven ears of corn twice, Joseph interprets the dream as seven years of goodness and seven years of famine.
- Gen. 50 – Joseph and others lament the death of his father for seven days.
- Ex. 21:2 – Hebrew slaves were to be released after seven years.
- Ex. 22:30 first born cattle were to be given to YHWH after seven days of life.
- Ex. 23:11 – Fields were to be left fallow in the seventh year.
- Ex 24:16 – YHWH had Moses wait on Sinai until the seventh day before he spoke to him.
- Ex 25ff – The priests rituals before YHWH repeatedly are built around sevens: seven lampstands, seven days of priestly garb, seven days of consecration, etc.
- Lev. 4ff – The priests would sprinkle water and blood seven times in rituals before YHWH.
- Josh. 6 – Jericho is taken as seven priests with seven horns lead the people seven days marching around the city, seven times on the seventh day. Then the wall came down.
- Judg. 6:1 – Because of Israel’s disobedience, YHWH gave them into the hand of the Median for seven years.
- Judg. 16 – When Samson was giving bogus reasons God had assured him strength, he built the false explanations around seven, as if imparting a

special Godly significance: tie with seven fresh bowstrings, weave hair in seven locks, etc.

- 1 Sam. 10-13 – Samuel tells Saul to wait for him seven days. Saul takes the seven days literally and when Samuel does not show up, Saul offers the sacrifice himself. Samuel then shows up and judgment falls on Saul for not waiting until Samuel got there, at the fullness of time, whether it was seven precise days or not.
- 1 Kings 18:43ff – Elijah sends his servant seven times to look at the sea for indications of rain. The clouds are seen on the seventh time.
- 2 Kings 5 – Elisha had Naaman dip in the Jordan seven times to cure his leprosy. (Lev. 13 sets seven days as important times in the assessment of leprosy.)
- Prov. 24:16 – The righteous fall seven times but get up again.
- Prov. 26:25 – Do not believe a hater, because there are seven abominations in his heart.
- Jer. 25:11 – The exile was set to last seven times ten years.
- Ezek. 3:15ff – YHWH comes to Ezekiel after seven days of waiting.
- Ezek. 40 – Ezekiel's model temple in his vision has seven steps for the people to approach the temple and YHWH.
- Dan. 3:16 – Nebuchadnezzar has the furnace heated seven times normal for the failure of the Jewish men to worship his gods.
- Dan. 4:23 – The king was set to live as a beast for “seven period of times.”
- Zech. 4:10 – Zacheriah cites the seven eyes of YHWH that range throughout the whole earth.
- Mt. 15 – Jesus feeds the masses with a few fishes and *seven* loaves (the number is specified) and leaves seven baskets of leftovers.

There are 70 times 7 more examples in Scripture (including Jesus responding to Peter that he must not forgive seven times, but seventy times seven – Mt. 18:22), but these give a good flavor.

Babylonian Examples

- In the Babylonian flood account, the storm lasts seven days and the dove is released after seven days. This is followed by a sacrifice with seven and seven cult vessels.⁴¹
- The Ashipu ritual for temple sacrifice included seven altars with seven vessels of incense and seven cups of wine.
- The Bavian inscription of ten gods names each of the ten, but ends calling them the “seven great gods,” a clear indication of seven as a symbolic number.⁴²
- The temple of all the gods was known simply as the “house of seven gods.”
- The penitent offered the prayer, “My god, my sins are seven times seven, pardon my sins. My goddess, my sins are seven times seven, pardon my sins.”
- The descent into the underworld involved going through seven doors to enter and seven to exit.⁴³
- The version of Nergal and Ereshkigal contemporary to Daniel not only has the seven doors to the underworld, but also seven doormen who are struck down as the god Nergal (Erra) lays with the goddess Ereshkigal for seven days.⁴⁴
- Seven day feasts were used to install the storm god’s high priestess, where seven dried cakes and seven pots of beer were offered as seven and seven men ate and drank.⁴⁵
- In divination prayers to Shamash, the penitent offers seven and seven sweet loaves.”⁴⁶

⁴¹ Hallo and Younger, at 459ff.

⁴² Farbridge, at 127, comments, “There are ten gods mentioned here, so that the number seven cannot refer to the names of the previously mentioned deities, but can only be taken as a symbolic round number in which all the gods of the pantheon are included.”

⁴³ *The Descent of Ishtar to the Underworld*, Hallo and Younger, at 382f.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, at 388f.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, at 427.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, at 427.

- In the Erra and Ishum myth, the god Anu impregnates the earth and the earth bears seven gods.⁴⁷
- In the Tel El-Armana documents, a number of letters feature the writer bowing to the king and lord, “seven times and seven times”⁴⁸

Greek and Roman Examples

- Aulus Gellius (123-170AD) wrote philosophy and history. Writing of the Greeks views, he noted the symbolism rich in seven noting seven stars in each dipper (the “greater” and “lesser” bears), seven stars in the Pleiades, seven rotations in the heavens, moon cycles of four (the earthly number) times seven, seven wonders of the world, seven sages of old, and seven laps in a circus race. Gellius also noted the Babylonians building a life off of seven cycles.⁴⁹
- Jewish writer Philo of Alexandria (a contemporary of St. Paul’s) was trained in Greek and Jewish thought. He believed the “seventh number does indeed bring with it perfection.”⁵⁰ Philo placed the significance of seven as deriving from three plus four, the holy and the profane. He cited Hippocrates’s seven ages of man, built around seven year cycles (a little boy for seven years getting all the baby teeth by seven; a boy until 14 years and the onset of puberty; a lad until 21 and the full growth of the beard; a young man until 28 when all growing is done; a man until 7 times 7 or 49, an elderly man until 56, after which one is an old man.) Philo started observing seven first in the heavens, mentioning the same sevens as Aulus above. He then noted that “the principle of the number seven, after having begun from above, descended also to us and visited the race of mortals.” In this regard, Philo pointed to the seven parts of the soul (five sense plus the power to speak and procreate); seven entrails to a human (stomach, heart, lung, spleen, liver, and two kidneys); seven parts to the body (two Legs, two arms, belly, chest, and head); seven features to the head (two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and a mouth); seven bodily emissions; seven Greek voice inflections; seven vowel sounds, seven strings to a lyre (and notes on a musical scale). Philo also noted the religious significance and summarized, “I doubt whether anyone

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, at 405.

⁴⁸ See the Archival Documents volume of Hallo and Younger which translate the letters on pages 237-242.

⁴⁹ Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights*, Tran’d by John Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard 1946), book III.x

⁵⁰ Philo of Alexandria, *On the Creation*, XXXVII.

could adequately celebrate the properties of the number seven, for they are beyond all words.”

10 In antiquity, ten was an independent and distinct symbol. It was “employed as a round number” and was used to express “indefinite magnitude” when used itself or in some power of ten (one hundred, one thousand or even a myriad). Ten was a number that represented the whole, regardless of how big the whole might have been.

Biblical Examples

- Gen. 31:7 – Jacob points out he was cheated in his wages “ten times.”
- Ex 12 – the tenth plague was the final plague that brought about deliverance.
- Num. 14:20ff – God uses ten as the number of times the Israelites put him to the test.
- Dt 32:29ff – these numbers are used roundly and symbolically asking how one could chase a thousand and two chase ten thousand.
- Dt. 23:3 – No Ammonite or Moabite was allowed to enter into the assembly of YHWH “even to the tenth generation.” Nehemiah 13:1 interprets this passage as meaning, “no Ammonite or Moabite *should ever* enter the assembly of God”
- Ten words were used to summarize the Ten Commandments.
- The Holy of Holies was ten cubits high, long, and wide.
- The tithe as ten percent represented the whole amount being given to God.

Babylonian Examples

- The Babylonians would add ten to the number of each of their gods (this might be confusing in English, but in the cuneiform, they would add the symbol for ten to the word/number for each god.) The total pantheon was the cuneiform for “god” added to the cuneiform for “ten.”
- Many of the examples above include numbers that are raised to some multiple of ten. Each of these examples show the same influence of the number’s symbolism.