

## **TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons**

### **202 - The Numbers Of God**

#### **1. Introduction**

You can't go very far or have too many discussions with people before the subject of numbers comes up. Lottery players, athletes and others are notoriously superstitious about numbers. Lucky numbers, unlucky numbers and of course the dreaded 666 as the mark of the devil. In this lesson we're going to discuss the Numbers Of God and find out just what power lies in numbers if any.

#### **3. Numbers and the Bible**

From earliest times mankind has been preoccupied with numbers. Certain superstitious beliefs such as numerology have resulted from this and impacted entire cultures. The physical universe obeys certain natural laws that operate with regularity and precision. Scientists have utilized the numeric underpinnings of creation to understand the human body, explore space, map subatomic structures and many other things. Although this regularity and predictability are viewed as phenomena, it doesn't rule out the existence of the Creator and his power. In the mind of the believer, this confirms the existence of a higher power that ordered the universe and see numeric constancy as proof of a higher intelligence.

Some believe that there's power in numbers themselves. In the occult world the use of certain numbers is believed to have the power to invoke results by manipulating spiritual and elemental forces to accomplish certain tasks or make predictions. There's even a tendency on the part of some Bible believers to think in these terms as well. The number 666 is often seen as the number of Satan and therefore to be avoided. But is there really any power in numbers? As we'll see, numbers that appear in scripture are powerless in themselves but are used by God for specific reasons.

Throughout the Bible a number of symbols or representative forms appear to wield power and influence. One statement I'll make from time to time is that there's no power in the object, symbol or number. The power is God. But what's the relationship between numbers that appear in the scriptures and the Lord. We can answer that in part by taking a look at the context and nature of their use. Patterns emerge that help define just exactly what they mean.

We can use a simple example to illustrate the use of numbers in the biblical text. Authors are known by their vocabulary and writing style. Film directors are known by the visual and creative conventions they use. These things serve to identify the individuals that produce certain things such as art and literature. We may have a favorite author and as we become familiar with their style, we get a feel for how they express things. We learn to anticipate certain phrases or the language they employ to describe scenes, emotions and details. These create an environment so that each story or narrative reflects the personality of the author. An author's writing style is as

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personal and familiar as their signature and the same is true for the Bible.

God signs his work through the use of various forms that appear throughout the Biblical text. God doesn't have a signature in the sense that we do so uses various devices to convey his identity through the written word. In this lesson we're exploring the use of numbers that God uses to identify himself in the biblical text. These numbers demonstrate consistency in how they're used and this consistency is one of the characteristics that supports the idea of divine inspiration. The Bible was written over a period of about 1200 years by forty different writers in three principal languages and yet the patterns of use remain constant. We'll be reviewing the most prevalent numbers and their significance in the scriptures. These include

- a. 7
- b. 40
- c. 12
- d. 1 & 3
- e. and 666

As we discuss these I'll illustrate their usage and what they mean as they're utilized in the Bible. Let's take a look at our first number - seven.

#### 4. The number seven

Just about anyone who is familiar with the scriptures is aware of the prominence of the number seven. In the beginning this number emerges as the days of creation with the final day being sanctified by the Lord as the day he completed his work and rested in Genesis chapters one and two. From the beginning of creation God set a precedent by reserving or sanctifying time for himself and his purpose. To that end he set aside, or sanctified, the Sabbath day and dedicated it as a day of rest. I'll talk about the Sabbath day in another lesson but I want to point out that the term Sabbath doesn't mean seventh. Sabbath is a word that means to cease working or rest. This is a common misconception but the point that needs to be remembered is that God chose the last day of creation as a day of rest. Later God commanded the children of Israel to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (**Ex 20.8**). For them the Sabbath day would mean rest but falling on the seventh and last day of the week would remind them of creation and the end of God's work. In essence the Sabbath, with many restrictions that could mean death, fell on the seventh day and was a focal reminder of God's power, presence and judgment.

One of the characteristics of God's use of forms such as this is that he mirrors spiritual realities in the physical world. The last day of the week - the seventh, was sanctified. The physical reality of the seventh day would stand as a representation of God and ultimately his law and power over life. We see a pairing of life and death as well as a statement of God's judgment

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and power in the life of Noah.

Genesis chapter six reveals that the world had become violent (**Gen 6.11**). The law of marriage was being violated (**Gen 6.1-2**) and finally God decided to destroy mankind with the exception of Noah who was a righteous man who found grace in the sight of the Lord (**Gen 6.8**). God revealed his plan to destroy the world with a flood and gave instructions for the construction of the ark that would save Noah and his family (**Gen 6.14-16**).

God sent animals to Noah to put aboard the ark to save them as well. This is a familiar story but once more we see the number seven playing a significant role. God gave Noah instructions to take on the animals in certain proportions. *“And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation. Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female. Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth.”* (**Genesis 7.1-3**). In this instance the number seven is associated with the command and providence of God and the preservation of life.

As work on the ark was completed we find the number seven appearing once more in the form of a warning and instructions from God. Noah and his family were told that the flood was coming seven days before it started (**Genesis 7.4**). From passages elsewhere in the scriptures, such as one made by Christ in **Matthew 24.37-39**, no warning was given to people in general. Only Noah was told that there were seven days left. If we think about this its not hard to see the combination of God’s command, his providence and the impending judgment on the world all starting on the seventh day after he spoke to the patriarch. Noah and his family were saved giving us the added association of the number seven with salvation.

As the story of the Bible progresses we see Jacob, Abraham’s grandson, leaving his home as he fled the wrath of his brother Esau. Jacob would be the son through whom the promises made to Abraham would be fulfilled. We’re told that Esau, Jacob’s brother, was a profane person (**Heb 12.16**) and was willing to part with his birthright over a bowl of soup (**Gen 25.29-34**).

After being blessed by Isaac Jacob was sent to Rebekah’s brother Laban to avoid Esau’s anger. While there he fell in love with Rachel, Laban’s daughter, and bargained with him to marry her. Laban agreed that if Jacob worked for him seven years (**Gen 29.15-30**) he would allow it. At the end of the seven years Laban tricked Jacob and for that Jacob had to work another seven years. The number seven in this instance indirectly shows how God was working to bless Jacob. Jacob was the recipient of the blessings stated to Abraham. Through Jacob the nation of Israel would be established which would provide the environment in which Christ would live and

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offer himself as the ultimate sacrifice for sin. This is more than a story of family dysfunction and intrigue. It was God's will to bless all nations of the Earth through Christ and we can see the Lord working to achieve his purpose in spite of the failings and emotions of humans.

Jacob's son Joseph was hated by his brothers who sold him into slavery and was carried to Egypt. While in Egypt he was imprisoned after being accused of attempting to assault his master Potiphar's wife (**Gen 39.7-20**). God however was at work in Joseph's life preparing a way that would save he and his family from a famine that was coming.

While in prison Joseph interpreted dreams for Pharaoh's cup bearer, or butler, and baker who had offended the king. In these dreams God revealed that the cup bearer would be restored to service while the baker unfortunately would be executed (**Gen 40.5-13**). Both interpretations came true. When the butler was called back to duty, Joseph asked him to remember him (**Gen 40.14-15**). A period of about two years passed before Joseph would be remembered (**Gen 41.1**).

Pharaoh was disturbed by a dream in which seven fat cows were consumed by seven lean cows (**Gen 41.2-4**). In another dream Pharaoh saw seven full ears devoured by seven lean ears of grain (**Gen 41.5-7**). Pharaoh was disturbed by these dreams and called for the magicians of Egypt to interpret them but none were able to do so (**Gen 41.8**).

Pharaoh's cup bearer then remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh about the man in prison who was able to interpret his dream for him (**Gen 41.14**). Joseph was summoned and asked to interpret the dreams. Joseph first stated that it was not within him to determine what the dream meant, that the interpretation would be from God (**Gen 41.16**). After hearing the dreams Joseph confirmed they had come from God who was showing Pharaoh what he was going to do. Joseph then explained that the two dreams depicted the same thing - seven years of plenty were to be followed by seven years of famine. As a result of this Joseph was promoted to a position second only to Pharaoh himself. (**Gen 41.1-46**)

The result of this in time was the preservation of the family of Jacob and the rise of the nation of Israel by the providence of God who worked through these events to achieve his end. The number seven in this case can obviously be linked to the Lord's care, power over dreams, and knowledge of future events. The number seven once more identifies this as a work of the Lord.

Four generations later, as Israel left Egypt and entered the promised land they began the work of conquering the inhabitants. This was the judgment of God as he had told Abraham referring to a time when the wickedness of the Amorites would be full (**Gen 15.16**). As the Israelite army prepared for the first conquest, the city of Jericho, they were given specific instructions. They were to march around the city of Jericho once a day for six days, led by seven

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priests who had seven rams horns. They were not to speak or make any noise as they did this. On the seventh day they were told to march around the city seven times. At the end of the seventh circuit around the city the priests were to blow their horns and all the people were to shout. When they did this God delivered the city to them by causing the walls to fall down. (**Josh 6.1-21**). The spoils of the city however were sanctified as offerings to God and were not to be taken by the people. In this episode we see the number seven tied to the instructions of God which led to a display of his power. The number seven is also associated with the idea of sanctification as the city was reserved as an offering to the Lord.

The number seven is also associated with judgments by God against pagan powers as well. Nebuchadnezzar had been blessed with the interpretation of dreams by Daniel (**Dan 2.1-49**) and had seen the deliverance of Meshach, Shadrach and Abed-nego (**Dan 3.1-30**). In spite of the fact that he had seen God's work, not to mention that fact that his conquest of Judah had been allowed by God (**Hab 1.6**) he remained arrogant. God pronounced a judgment against him and condemned the proud king to spend seven years living with the beasts of the field (**Dan 4.10-34**). Seven in this case is connected with God's judgment and his ability to humble even a proud king. Driven from humans, living in the wild and being out of his mind, we can also see that God preserved Nebuchadnezzar and eventually restored his mind and returned him to the throne. In this instance a king, used as an instrument of judgment against God's own people, was subject to the Lord as all people are.

Seven and the nature of God is also demonstrated in the description of the coming Messiah. Isaiah describes the promised one stating, "***And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD***" (**Isa 11.2**). John describes Christ as having the "***seven spirits of God***" (**Rev 1.4, 3.1**) demonstrating that Christ is the fullness of God and his plan to save mankind.

While on Earth Christ demonstrated the power of God by performing miracles confirming that he is the son of God. One of the miracles had to do with feeding a multitude who had been following him. Christ had compassion on the multitudes and using seven loaves and a "***few fishes***" he fed four thousand men beside the women and children that were gathered (**Matt 15.32-38**).

The idea of completion or fullness is also connected to the number seven. Christ addressed the seven churches of Asia (**Rev 1-3**) issuing warnings and exhortations to do what was right in the sight of God. Again, there's no magic in the number itself. It's God who is at work and he uses this to let us know that he's exercising his power.

There are other examples of the number seven appearing throughout the scriptures. This

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includes:

1. The seven lamps of the candlestick or lampstand placed in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle. We'll discuss the lampstand in another video but the placement and design of this object is one that brings several representative elements together as they appear in the scriptures.
2. Images of seven stars in the book of Revelation depicts the power and supremacy of Christ as the message progresses. This is coupled in the context with the appearance of seven lampstands representing the seven churches, all of which depict the authority of Christ and his role as head over the church.
3. Christ is also represented as a lamb in the midst of the twenty-four elders who has seven horns and seven eyes as well as the seven spirits of God. These descriptions once more capture the essence of Christ as the complete expression of God's power. The lamb is worthy of worship and exercises dominion over the entire earth. The writer of Hebrews describes Christ as the author and finisher of our faith (**Heb 12.2**). The book of Revelation depicts the power of Christ over the church and worldly powers.
4. The number seven is also used to depict the totality of evil as we see in the book of Revelation. John discusses the great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns which is later explained as representing the city of Rome situated as it was on seven hills. The book as I stated earlier is a statement of God's power and vengeance over a worldly kingdom that opposed him and killed his children. (**Rev 12.3, 13.1, 17.3, 17.7**)

We can see that the number seven is used by God and appears in the scriptures to denote that something...

1. Is a work of God
2. Represents the judgment of God
3. Denotes completion or finality
4. Demonstrates the power and authority of God and
5. Produces images of strength in the case of defending the faithful against evil

These are only a few of the uses of the number seven and I want to emphasize once more that there's no inherent power in the number itself. The power being represented is God's and the number becomes a convention the Lord uses to supply the signature that what's being done or spoken of is from him.

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#### 5. The number 40

The number forty appears early in the scriptures and is used by God many times in the text. While some numbers refer directly to God, as we'll see later in the numbers three and one, the number forty occurs within the context of a display of God's power or as part of a process involving God, his judgment and preservation. The earliest occurrence of this is in the story of the flood during the days of Noah. The world was consumed by wickedness with the exception of Noah who found grace in the sight of God (**Gen 6.8**). When the ark was completed God told Noah, "***For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth.***" (**Gen , 7.4**). The Genesis account of the flood has more detail and reveals that there were three sources of water - the fountains of the great deep, the windows of heaven and rain. We're not discussing all of that in this study but the details are very interesting. God stated that the rain however would continue for a full forty days which it did as well as water from the fountains of the great deep (**Gen 8.2**). During this forty day period the waters destroyed the evil of mankind while preserving the eight souls aboard the ark. Peter refers to this salvation by water in his writings (**1 Pet 3.20-21**). Later, as the vessel came to rest on the mountains of Ararat, Noah waited another forty days before he opened the window waiting for God to allow them to leave it (**Gen 8.6**).

Salvation and judgment are also found in the commandments, ordinances and statutes given to Moses at mount Sinai. Having set boundaries around the mountain, God descended and commanded Moses to come up to him. "***And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights.***" (**Ex 24.18**). During this period the children of Israel made a golden calf and began to worship it (**Ex 32**) which brought a judgment against them by God. Moses later went back into the mountain for another forty days and received a second copy of the commandments from God. "***And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments***" (**Ex 34.28**).

As the children of Israel approached Canaan, spies were sent to search out the land and were gone for a period of forty days (**Num 13:25**). Upon their return ten of the spies gave a negative report concerning the inhabitants of the land which angered God and brought a judgment against them. God stated, "***After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.***" (**Num 14.34**). Their unbelief led to this judgment against them but even in this the element of preservation is found as God continues to care for his people. "***And the children of Israel did eat manna forty years, until they came to a land inhabited; they did eat manna, until they came unto the borders of the land of Canaan.***" (**Ex 16.35**). Moses reminded the people that this wasn't the only way God cared for them as he prepared them for his departure. Moses states, "***Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty***

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years.” (Deut 8.4). The forty years was a judgment but it also provided a way for the people to prove their faithfulness to God while being cared for at the same time.

After defeating 450 prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel, Jezebel vowed to have the prophet Elijah killed. Elijah fearing for his life fled into the wilderness where he prayed for God to let him die (1 Kings 19.1-4). God intervened and preserved the life of the prophet by sending an angel to him. *“And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.”* (1 Kng 19.5-8). Not only was Elijah’s life sustained but he also learned that he wasn’t alone in his service to God. The Lord informed him that there were 7000 who had not bowed down or worshiped Baal (1 Kng 19.18). The image of the forty days here demonstrates God’s power and providence in caring for Elijah who faced idolatrous Israel.

Ezekiel was to demonstrate the judgment of God against Israel by lying on his right side for forty days (Ezek 4.6).

After being baptized by John (Matt 3.13-17) Christ fasted for forty days before being tempted by Satan. The first temptation of the Lord came as a command from the Devil to turn stones into bread (Matt 4.1-4). Christ didn’t give in to his physical needs and told Satan, *“It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”* (Matt 4.4). Later, after the resurrection, Christ was with the disciples and others for a period of forty days before he ascended (Acts 1.3).

There are other references we could go to but these are sufficient to demonstrate the general use of the number. As we’ve seen this can refer to

1. God’s judgment as seen in the flood
2. The judgment implemented carries with it an aspect of purification. This can be seen in the destruction of evil during the flood and the wilderness wandering during which an entire generation of twenty years old and above died before Israel could enter the promised land.
3. God’s care and providence are seen in the food prepared for Elijah strengthening him for forty days.
4. Prophetic statements made such as Ezekiel lying on his right side for forty days.
5. The power of God’s word and Christ’s identity can be seen in the temptation of the Lord by Satan. Weakened by fasting for 40 days would have affected Christ to the point that his

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will would be vulnerable to the suggestions of the Devil. The result demonstrated Christ's strength of will and the importance of God's word.

We can see these at work as we read the scriptures. One thing that some believe is that the number forty, like others, is only a literary convention that doesn't refer to the actual time but is a device that is not used in a literal way. There are times that the number appears and is used in a purely figurative way but there are also literal uses as well. The context is very specific as to how the number is used and this has to be taken into account as part of the interpretation. Like all numbers that we've seen so far, it is used by God to convey part of his message.

#### 6. The number 12

The number twelve figures prominently in the scriptures and appears in both the Old and New Testaments. The first thing that comes to mind perhaps are the twelve sons of Jacob. Jacob, or Israel as he was renamed by God, was the grandson of Abraham. Jacob inherited the promise made to Abraham which would be realized through his family. In order to do that God blessed them and raised up a nation beginning with the twelve sons of Jacob that would eventually bring Christ into the world.

Israel blessed each of his sons including two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh (**Gen 49**) as a double portion for Joseph among his brethren. God told Abraham that his seed would be strangers in a foreign land but would return to Canaan in the fourth generation (**Gen 15.16**). This referred to the 430 years of Egyptian bondage (**Ex 12.40**). After leaving Egypt they were given the task of subduing the land of Canaan which had been promised to them. The number twelve in this instance stands as a testimony to the preservation of God in the creation of the nation of Israel and stands as a representation of his promises. These promises and their fulfillment are the foundation for all that follows and therefore speaks of the faithfulness of God by showing that he'll do what he promises. The number twelve can be associated with a foundation representing a physical aspect at the start that later has spiritual overtones.

As Moses received the Law, and instructions for the garments to be worn by the priests, God instructed that a breastplate was to be made. Into this were set stones that represented the twelve tribes (**Ex 28.21**). This was to be worn by the high priest in the discharge of his duties and thus represented not only the faithfulness and presence of the Lord with his people, but that the promises made would be fulfilled.

As the Israelites crossed the river Jordan they were to take twelve stones from the dry riverbed and used to establish a memorial showing that God caused his people and the ark of the covenant to cross the river on dry land (**Josh 4.1-7**).

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The Tabernacle, the place where God communed with his people, represented the ongoing relationship Israel had with the Lord. Each week unleavened bread, referred to as the bread of the presence, or shewbread, was laid out on a table in front of the vail. This vail separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place where the ark was kept. When Christ died the vail was torn in two showing that the path to heaven was open. The bread, twelve cakes set in order, was symbolic and physical, reminding Israel of their relationship with God and the eventual fulfillment that would bless all mankind.

At Mount Carmel, when the prophet Elijah challenged 450 prophets of Baal to determine whose god was real, he built an altar using twelve stones, one for each of the tribes of Israel. Elijah then had the sacrifice, the altar and trenches around it filled with water. When the prophet called on God to send fire, the Lord did so, leaving no doubt that he was God (**1 Kng 18.31-39**).

The foundation of the nation of Israel on the twelve tribes is mirrored by the twelve apostles who carried on the Lord's work after he returned to the Father. As Christ began his earthly ministry he chose twelve disciples who would be with him and later carry on the work of spreading the Gospel (**Matt 10.1-2**). In this sense we see that God used the number twelve to represent the spiritual completion of the promises that were made. The twelve tribes were the foundation of the physical nation that brought God's spiritual plan to its final stage. The twelve apostles are the foundation of the New Testament that has been recorded. In these elements we see the physical aspects shadowing the spiritual reality of God's desire to save mankind. The twelve tribes brought the Messiah into the world and the twelve apostles will help guide us to Heaven.

There are other images involving the number twelve that speak of the spiritual kingdom and reflect this foundation. In the book of Revelation the spiritual city has twelve gates (**Rev 21.12**) built on twelve foundations (**Rev 21.14**) representing the apostles. The description of the twelve gates is a reflection of the twelve stones on the breastplate worn by the high priest. In the spiritual city was the tree of life that bore twelve manner of fruit (**Rev 22.2**). Interestingly the final book of the New Testament draws on images and figures from the entire text and figuratively shows the power, beauty and promises of God as they unfold revealing the final blessing of being with God.

The number twelve carries the idea of solidity. It brings to mind the idea of a foundation that has been built by God and will therefore survive anything that comes along. We can see the promises made to Abraham fulfilled step by step in his family and finally the life of Christ, establishment of the church and a home that exists beyond this life. God's power, judgment, providence, wisdom and care are all represented in this one aspect.

### 7. The numbers 1 & 3

The numbers one and three are used in the scriptures in ways that point to God's identity,

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work and judgment. The opening verses of Genesis tell us that God created the heavens and the earth (**Gen 1.1-2**). The word for God is rendered in the singular in most English versions but if we examine the original language we find the word indicates plurality. This refers to not just God the Father but the divine presence of the Holy Spirit and the word of God, who is not clearly identified (**Gen 1.1-4**). Comparing the scriptures we find detail that clarifies the relationship between God, Christ, or the word, and the Holy Spirit.

Paul, writing to the Colossians talks about this relationship and bears out the role that Christ played in creation. He states that Christ is, *“the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.”* (**Col 1.15-17**). The writer of Hebrews also bears this out when he states, *“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds...”* (**Heb 1.1-2**).

In the previous series I covered the scheme of redemption - God’s plan to save mankind. It was God’s design that Christ, his son, would be the only acceptable sacrifice to take away sin. Paul speaks about this plan in his letters to the Ephesians and Titus (**Eph 1.3-4, Titus 1.2**). Throughout the scriptures we see the development of this plan. Christ, the Messiah is hidden in symbols, figures, types and prophecy until the time came for God to reveal his message (**Gal 4.4**). The work of God was so hidden due to the fact that had the powers of the world known they would not have crucified Christ (**1 Cor 2.6-8**). Reading the scriptures we understand that the godhead is made up of three entities, God the father, Christ and the Holy Spirit. There are some who deny this but as the lesson and series progresses we’ll have more to say in support of what the Bible teaches.

The number three is also a symbol of judgment as we can see in the events surrounding the work of Moses in Egypt to secure the freedom of the Hebrews. God demonstrated his judgment against the oppression of Egyptian bondage by bringing on the Egyptians three days of darkness (**Ex 10.21-29**). In this instance, God created a separation between his people who had light and their oppressors. As each of the plagues fell on the stubborn power of Egypt the gods of the land were shown to be powerless against the one true God.

A familiar story in the Bible shows how the number three is used as a sign of God’s power and judgment but also serves as a powerful prophetic element as well. Told to go to Nineveh and preach, Jonah, a prophet from the Northern kingdom of Israel, balked. Instead of going to the Assyrian capital and doing as instructed, Jonah took passage on a ship bound for Tarshish, traveling in the opposite direction. The scriptures tell us that God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah and then sent a storm against the ship he was in. After telling the crew they should throw him overboard the fish swallowed the reluctant prophet and the storm ended.

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Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and nights (**Jonah 1.17**). While there Jonah prayed to the Lord who finally had the fish vomit Jonah onto shore at the end of three days. Some might think that this story is a myth and dismiss it as a work of someone's imagination. Carefully examining the elements of the event we can make some important observations. Note that we have God directly involved with the prophet, he's punished for three days and at the end Jonah completes the task God gave him to begin with. Turning to the New Testament we find that this story and the three days have significant meaning as a type.

The scribes and Pharisees challenged Christ to prove to them who he was. On one occasion their demand was answered in a way that brings several elements together. Christ told them, "***An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.***" (**Matt 12.38-40**).

Christ, first of all, gives an assessment of the character of the individuals being addressed. He refers to them as an "***evil and adulterous generation***" (**Matt 12.39**). Christ stated they would be given no sign but that of the prophet Jonah in the same verse. In saying this Christ points out two things. First, the works performed by Jesus while on earth, and the deeds performed by His Father, were not for the entertainment of those who doubted. Secondly, Christ points out the provisions made by God for all those present at that time when he states that a sign had been provided through Jonah. How is this so?

Jonah had long passed from this life. He wouldn't be returning to the earth to act as a sign, and yet, he served as a representation, as Christ alluded to. Since Jonah wasn't there, the sign Christ refers to isn't the physical presence of the prophet. The sign is the scriptural record of the events surrounding Jonah's stay in the belly of the great fish or whale (**Matthew 12.40, Jonah 1.17-2.10**). Through Christ's spoken words, He refers to the written word preserved by inspiration. The significance and power of the word of God was clearly emphasized by Christ as he answered teachers of the Law who should have known better.

By using the figure of Jonah, Christ points to the fact that the way in which God dealt with the erring prophet had a specific purpose. The purpose wasn't only to correct Jonah but would also supply the very sign Christ spoke of. Christ presents this story from the scriptures as factual. He then links future events with the past figure which would serve as the sign they've requested. Christ's reference to Jonah's time in the belly of the whale of three days and nights serves as a type showing that Jesus would be in the heart of the earth for three days and nights. Christ's identity would be confirmed when the resurrection occurred giving validation to the sign of Jonah and Jesus identity as the Messiah.

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By His spoken word, Christ makes his stand on the written word of God. After the resurrection, both the word of Christ and the written word would stand as one, being fulfilled by the reality of the resurrection. Christ thus speaks to the people in this instance in such a way as to imply that events are so sure that he refers to things in the future as though they're already in the past. The figure of Jonah, representing the past, combined with the prophecy of Christ, representing the future, places Christ at the very center of the event spanning both past and future by speaking about them in the present. This single statement by Christ sums up His identity as an eternal part of the godhead through the way in which this is constructed. It also shows the depth of wisdom and engineering God is capable of.

Looking at this conversation in more detail, it seems as though Christ denies the request for a sign and yet the fact is he reminds these people that one had already been provided. Christ, Himself, becomes a living sign that God had sent the Messiah. Notice the way in which Christ deals with the word of God in this case. He treats it as factual and therefore true. He makes statements that if untrue could easily be disproven after the crucifixion. Finally, he displays such trust in the word that he presents an argument to a group of individuals who could have had him taken away at that time. In other words, Christ dealt with the word of God as though it was tangible, stable and reliable. He treated it as a solid background for His very existence.

The story of Jonah shows how the three members of the godhead work together as I mentioned at the beginning of this section. In the case of Jonah we have the command and judgment of God, the punishment of the prophet, the preservation of the story through inspiration of the Holy spirit and Christ's reliance on the scriptures to reveal his identity. We see the interplay of God, Christ and the Holy Spirit just as I noted in the discussion of creation. As we turn to the New Testament we can understand this relationship better. John provides an excellent starting point to help us make this clearer.

John states, "***For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.***" (1 John 5.7). He indicates that there are three entities in the godhead. Some reject this idea and also avoid the use of the word trinity since the term isn't in the scriptures, but the idea is not only scriptural but makes sense of statements going back to the beginning. Note the wording of the creation of man in Genesis. "***And God said, Let us make man in our image...***" (Gen 1.26). Later after Adam and Eve have sinned and are driven from the garden of Eden we see a similar statement. "***And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever***" (Gen 3.22). The plurality of the godhead is confirmed in these statements that appear in Genesis and descriptions we find in the New Testament.

John notes that the three that comprise the godhead are in agreement and have a single purpose - to save mankind. The desire for unity is reflected in Christ's prayer for his disciples (John 17.11). Unity is to be a characteristic of believers as they work together. The unity and

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singularity of purpose is brought out in passages that talk about the church, faith and the work of God. Paul told the Ephesians, ***“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”*** (Eph 4.4-6).

The idea that there are multiple entities that make up what we refer to as the godhead is refuted by some but there are multiple passages that show this rejection to be incorrect. The relationship between God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and the work of redemption are brought together in statements that talk about God’s concealment and revelation. This singularity of purpose, will and revelation is brought together in the sacrifice of Christ and the doctrine of the New Testament. Paul states that God has , ***“...made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.”*** (Eph 1.9-10). The numbers one and three are powerful in the scriptures representing the presence and work of God. They identify the Lord and show that all things are gathered together in Christ who is the sum total of all that he has done.

#### 8. The dreaded 666

The last number we’ll look at in this lesson is one that just about everyone’s well acquainted with. That of course is the dreaded 666, a number which is usually associated with Satan, darkness and evil. Over the years I’ve met some people who are astounded that I don’t show any real concern or fear when a sales receipt or my change comes out to \$6.66. The fact is there isn’t any reason to fear the number itself. There are some who’ll disagree with that but the fact is there isn’t any power in it. But it does contain a warning that I believe is good to review and be aware of.

As most people are aware, the idea of 666 being a mark of evil is related to an interpretation of the Bible that projects what will happen before Christ returns. Premillennialists teach that a leader will rise and unite all world governments. There will be a persecution of Christians and in order to identify those who are loyal to the beast, as the leader is called, individuals will be given a mark in their hand or forehead. According to this belief God will take the faithful from the Earth in an event referred to as the rapture. This may take place before or after a seven year period of tribulation that will end with Christ’s return. When Christ returns according to this view he will lead an army that defeats the beast. Just about everyone understands this as the battle of Armageddon. Following Christ’s victory he will establish his throne in Jerusalem where he’ll reign for a thousand years. This belief has been the subject of sermons, comic books, movies and video games and makes for a good story. We’ll have to deal with all of that in another video but for now we’ll focus on the number and its use in the Bible.

We won’t have enough time to discuss the book of Revelation in depth in this lesson but

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we'll be able to cover enough detail to clarify the point under consideration. The book of Revelation was written to the seven churches of Asia, or Asia Minor. Some churches had a mixture of good, some had serious problems and one was faithful but encouraged by Christ to remain strong (**Rev 2-3**). The message to all of the churches was that persecution was going to try them. Through the remainder of the book symbolic forms and figurative language are used to let these servants of God know what would happen. The most significant part of the message was that those who were faithful and persevered would be given the crown of life promised by God as we read in **Revelation 2.10**.

Throughout the book we can see the numbers that we've discussed used. As it progresses we see the evil power of the world under the influence of Satan persecute the saints of God only to be judged in the process. This power is wounded and from it grows another threat that has the power of its predecessor and is able to deceive. That's a really quick and simple synopsis but I want to focus on the nature of the number 666 in relation to those that represent God.

One of the most important things to remember is that the book is a warning. There were things that would come upon the church from the outside but the biggest danger was from within. Christ told his disciples, *"there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."* (**Matt 24.24**). As Paul was traveling to Jerusalem on his final preaching trip he called for the elders from Ephesus, one of the seven churches addressed by Christ in Revelation, and gave them a warning. Paul told them, *"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."* (**Acts 20.29-30**). Later Paul spoke of a time when the doctrine from God would no longer be taught correctly.

We see elements of similar warnings in other writings by Paul. The Thessalonians were troubled by false teaching about the second coming of Christ and Paul addressed this in his letters to them. *"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. (2 Thess 2.3-10).*

Paul also provides a description of the errors that would be taught in the future in his letters

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to Timothy. *“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.”* (1 Tim 4.1-4). From the passage in second Thessalonians we see that this process had already begun. From reading the passage in Acts twenty we know that the Ephesians were a vulnerable group to these errors and then we have Paul’s statements to Timothy as well as those of Christ. So what does all that have to do with 666 and the book of Revelation.

The number follows a description of the beast to which its associated. But we have more information about the identity of the beast. John writes, *“Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.”* (Rev 13.18). Now let’s back up a little and read more of the description of this man or work of the beast. *“And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.”* (Rev 13.13-14). Ok, so let’s summarize this so we can understand it.

A great power, represented by a beast, was persecuting the church and was brought down but revived in the image of a second beast. This second beast was strengthened by the power of the first. This beast was able to deceive *“them that dwell on the earth”*. Then, we have the beast identified as a *“man”*. This is where confusion comes in and we need to deal with a common misconception first. Many believe that this represents an individual who will rise to world power. He’ll command all people to receive a physical mark in the forehead and hand and persecute the church. This individual is identified as the antichrist. This is what we need to clear up.

First of all the book of Revelation is written in signs or highly figurative language. The book is filled with things that draw on images that parallel the entire Bible and so we need to keep that in mind. There’s a tendency to take some things in Revelation very literally while others are assigned symbolic value. From the opening chapters we need to remember that the book was written in signs that were to *“shortly come to pass”* (Rev 1.1). With that in mind we can focus on elements in the book and understand them within the context of Revelation but with the understanding that Revelation is part of the revealed word and must therefore be consistent. Interpretations of Revelation that incorporate the antichrist, the battle of Armageddon and a few other things create problems with other scriptures. But, if we keep in mind that we’re reading the most non-literal book in the Bible we’ll start to see things a bit differently.

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So, the first thing we'll find is that while many interpret the man of chapter thirteen as the antichrist, John never uses that term to refer to him. As a matter of fact the term antichrist doesn't appear in the book at all. Well, where does that come from? The antichrist is described in John's earlier writing and reviewing it will shed some light on the question.

For one thing the "*antichrist*" isn't an individual. Its an attitude or practice of rejecting truth. John details this clearly. He writes, "***Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.***" (1 John 2.18). So, what exactly is the nature of these antichrists? John provides that information as well. "***Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.***" (1 John 4.1-3).

From these passages we learn that there were many antichrists. They were already in the world. They're further defined as those who denied Christ. There are a lot of ways that we can deny Christ. If we look at what John says and place that in the context of warnings from Christ and Paul we can see a picture emerge. We know that the devil seeks to deceive the world. The book of Revelation and other places in the New Testament reveal that Satan was an influence in the persecutions against the Lord's people. When God defeated the work of Satan in the physical persecution, the devil changed tactics and unfortunately had human weakness to help him. That fact leads us to an understanding of the number.

Remember, John talked about the beast being able to deceive through the wonders he performed. When we take a look at deception we find that the most powerful lie is one that contains a lot of truth. When we take a look at 666 we see the number three in the repetition of the number six. Secondly we see that the number six is only one less than seven, the representation of God's fullness and his revelation. What better way to deceive than to teach things that are close to the revealed truth but not close enough to lead one to salvation. The "*man*" of Revelation 13 may indeed be symbolic of an individual who was succeeded by others like him who perpetuate the deception and distortion of God's truth so that souls will be lost. Paul stated that this is possible because those deceived wouldn't receive the love of the truth and accepted a lie (2 Thess 2.10-12). The real meaning of 666 may very well be to watch out for things being taught that are nearly true and sound convincing but fall short of leading one to complete obedience to the Gospel and therefore salvation. This is consistent with Christ's statement about finding the path leading to heaven. Jesus stated, "***strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.***" (Matt 7.14). The fear that should be acknowledged in the symbol of 666 is that someone might fool us and cost us our eternal soul.

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How do we avoid being fooled? The answer to this lies in a desire to know the truth and be right in the sight of God. The world is filled with mistaken doctrines that have some degree of scriptural truth but lack the true power of God to save. This happens when teachers and preachers rely on partial statements eliminating essential elements of Biblical doctrine, or add ideas that don't come from the Bible. The best way to keep from being deceived is to search the scriptures, think about them and never take anyone's word simply because it sounds good. As John stated, there are many antichrists in the world today who teach doctrines that in many respects are perfectly aligned with the scriptures, in most areas, but they fail in the end. We can't let ourselves be deceived. God has given us a book that will prevent that but we have to trust him and his word.

#### 9. Summary

As we've seen in this lesson, numbers in themselves have no power. There are some however that God has seen fit to use in certain ways in the Bible. These numbers are consistent, follow prescribed patterns and represent limited ideas or realities determined by the context in which they appear. This is God's way of signing his work and showing his wisdom and engineering as he accomplishes his will from Genesis to Revelation. No other document or text exists in the world rivaling this aspect of the Bible. When we make note of all the symbolic and figurative elements in the scriptures and see them working together to point to the same things we have a system that tells us that the scriptures are from God.

#### 10. Next

In the next lesson we'll take a look at a representative form that has physical and spiritual significance. Join me for a discussion of the **Sanctity Of Blood**.