

Numbers of the Bible

A plain meaning

Revelation is one of the most difficult books of the Bible for us to understand. Because it deals in strange visions, dramatic images and mysterious numbers, people have tried to explain it in many different ways.

But it does have a plain meaning. It is a book written for Christians who are suffering for their faith. It encourages them with the message that Jesus Christ is the Lord of all things, and that their time of trial will end in eternal glory. Although Revelation describes some of the terrible things that will happen to the world, it isn't supposed to be a forecast of current affairs. Jesus told his disciples that there would be times of stress, disaster and persecution in the 'last days', but specifically warned them not to try to predict the time of the end of the world (Mark 13:32).

We can't read Revelation for very long before we start noticing the numbers—seven, four, twenty-four and 144,000 in particular!

Seven is obviously a number with a special meaning. There are seven lampstands representing seven churches. There are seven stars which stand for the angels of the churches. And, later on, there are seven seals on a scroll, seven trumpets sounding warnings and seven bowls pouring wrath.

Seven seems to stand for the completeness of God's work in the world. God rested on the seventh day when he had completed his creation. We have a seven-day week.

God's number is three. He is three-times holy (Isaiah 6:3). He is a Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit.

The world's number is four. The Bible talks of the four corners of the world—and the four winds. We have four main points of the compass and observe the year in four seasons.

The 'three' of God and the 'four' of the world make 'seven'.

The number four also applies to the four 'living creatures' who worship around the throne of God (4:6–7). These are angles.

Knowles, Andrew. The Bible Guide. 1st Augsburg books ed. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001. (adapted for this paper and emphasis added)

Like the seraphs in Isaiah's vision, they have six wings.

Like the creatures which attend the chariot-throne of God in Ezekiel's vision, they have the faces of lion, ox, human being and eagle—the leading species of wild and domesticated animals, humans and birds.

The number twenty-four is easier to understand.

There are twenty-four elders. They are made up of twelve for the tribes of Israel (the first 'people of God' in the Old Testament) and twelve for the apostles of Christ (the founders of the Christian church in the New Testament).

By now we realize that the numbers in Revelation are symbolic. They are an important aspect of each vision.

3 (God) \times 4 (the world) = 12 (God's work in the world).

12 (Israel) \times 12 (apostles) = 144 (All of God's people (Christians), old and new, Gentile and Jew).

Ten is a number of completeness or perfection—so $1,000$ ($10 \times 10 \times 10$) is the ultimate full and satisfying number.

The multitude of the faithful in heaven is numbered at $144,000$. That's (12×12) \times ($10 \times 10 \times 10$)—the perfect number for a perfect people.

Colors and Animals

The following are the meaning of Colors and animals which will be helpful in your study of the book of Revelation.

Red - for bloodshed and war

Purple - for imperial luxury and pomp

Emerald Green - for patient winning grace.

Black - for calamity and distress

White - stands for victory. More often than not it references the victories of Jesus and therefore His Saints.

Lamb - a symbol of Jesus' Christ as He once suffered, and is now enthroned

Eagle - indicating swift movements in the region of thought and opinion

Horses - representing movements on earth.

Wild Beast - cruel troubling power

Frogs - unclean spirits

Locusts - all things that devastate and torment