

ZOOM STUDY: IMPORTANT BIBLICAL SYMBOLS

SEVEN

INTRODUCTION

In the next two lessons we will be looking at the use of the numbers seven and twelve in Scripture. One needs to be very careful when it comes to numerology in the Bible, lest one make connections or find “secret meanings” where there are none.¹

In appropriate contexts certain numbers should be understood as allusions or associations rather than any kind of substitution. For example:

- The number 3 or triplets often occurs around the Trinity.
 - “Holy, holy, holy...” (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8)
 - “The Lord, our God, the Lord is one” (Deut. 6:4)
 - “The LORD bless you.... the LORD make his face shine... the LORD turn his face...” (Num. 6:24-26)
- The number 4 often has to do with things regarding man and God’s creation.
 - The four cardinal directions. “Come from the four winds, O breath...” (Ezek. 37:9 also Jer. 49:36; Zechariah 2:6; Mark 13:24).
 - The four corners of the earth. (Rev. 7:1)
- The number 10 can reference completeness or fullness.
 - 10 fingers
- Multiples then create combinations and allusions to interaction:
 - $3 \times 4 = 12$ (the number of the church) (cf. next lesson)
 - $10 \times 10 \times 10 = 1000$ the number of divine/perfect fullness

Tonight, our discussion is focused on the number seven. In the Hebrew language the number seven and the word for covenant both come from the same root - שבע. This is not to say that these words are interchangeable, but rather a native speaker would hear these similarities. With how often the number seven is used in covenant contexts, this is clearly more than coincidence. God’s things (3) together with man’s things (4) = the covenant agreement.

1.) Let’s start from the beginning. What did God do on the seventh day? How is this a continual comfort for us each day of our lives?

Genesis 2:2-3 By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

2.) How were the Israelites to honor God by showing him they were dependent on him and his promises for everything they needed?

Exodus 20:8-11 “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien

¹ For example, in Hebrew numbers can sometimes be abbreviated with letters (i.e. they do not have separate numerals from letters—Aleph = 1, Beth = 2, etc.). Some have gone so far as to convert portions of the Old Testament text into numbers and look for “hidden dates,” etc., which is a corruption of Scripture.

within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

3.) How was this emphasized even more emphatically in the seventh year and in the year following the seventh 7-year period?

Leviticus 25:4-6 “In the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. Whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you.”

Leviticus 25:8-10 “Count off seven sabbaths of years—seven times seven years—so that the seven sabbaths of years amount to a period of forty-nine years. Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan. The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines. For it is a jubilee and is to be holy for you; eat only what is taken directly from the fields.”

4.) How do we rest in God today?

Colossians 2:16-17 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

Matthew 11:28-30 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Hebrews 4:3, 9-11 Now we who have believed enter that rest... There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

5.) Since the number seven is connected to God’s covenant with humanity and the world, what would be a viable understanding of the following passages?

Revelation 11:1-3 I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, “Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.”

Revelation 12:6, 14 The woman [the church] fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. ...The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent’s reach.

6.) Sometimes groups of seven in Scripture are pictured as times of great difficulty that God will bring on the world. The Book of Revelation has seven letters, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven visions, and seven bowls of God's wrath. How does this use of the number seven also reflect God's covenant with humankind?

7.) The Holy Spirit is described in sevenfold terms. Why is that appropriate considering the work he does for us?

Revelation 1:4-5 Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the sevenfold Spirit before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Revelation 5:6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the sevenfold Spirit of God sent out into all the earth.

Isaiah 11:2-3 The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

Closing Prayer: Sevenfold Spirit of God, bestow on us wisdom and understanding by way of your Holy Word. Enable us to treasure our covenant relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ his Son. Empower us to serve our Lord with complete peace and quietness, knowing that God's promises in Christ are sure and certain. Amen.