NUMBERS AND THE BIBLE

People who know the music of J S Bach may be aware of his frequent use of the number 14 in his music (B=2, A-1, C=3, H=8). A famous picture of Bach, apparently the only one of him in existence, has a piece of music on his knee, which can be played upside down as well. In it the number 14 in the musical notation is the clue to his puzzle.

In a letter to the editor in the *Chronicle* on 2 March a correspondent was endeavouring to defend the Bible against unbelieving attack, and wrote: "*But the proof which is least known about is the numerical structure of the Bible. Hebrew and Greek writings can also be put down in number form. This means every word has a numerical value. Ever wondered where the unlucky number 13 came from? Well it is the devil's number. Every name given to Satan in the Bible has a numerical value divisible by 13. Likewise every name of God and Jesus Christ has a value divisible by seven.*"

Can we check out some of these claims? In Greek for example, very few words can also be numerals in their own right. Three characters were used for numerals, but were not part of the regular alphabet, Vau (6), Koppa (90) and San (900). Besides, only eight of the regular letters could appear in the second-last column for the tens, and only eight of the regular letters could occur in the third-last column, for the hundreds. Besides, the five case endings would cause values to change in Greek nouns. In Hebrew, numbers were complicated by the fact that Hebrews did not use Yodh (10) alongside He (5) for fifteen, because those two letters on their own were a short form of the name for the LORD, and they did not use Yodh (10) and Waw (6) for 16, because they were also a short form for the LORD. They used the letters for 9+6 and 9+7 instead for 15 and 16.

What about the letters on their own in whatever order taken for their own value in an addition, as in the example BACH for 14 earlier? In this way, the Hebrew name for "God", "'Elohim", has a numerical value of 86. The Hebrew name for "LORD", "YHWH", has a numerical value of 26. The Hebrew equivalent for "Jesus" "Yeshua", has a numerical equivalent of 386. The Greek name for "God", "theos", has a numerical value of 284. The Greek word for "Lord", "kyrios", has a numerical value of 800. The Greek name for "Jesus", "Yesous", has a numerical value of 888. The Hebrew for "Messiah" has a numerical value of 358, and the Greek word for "Christ":1480. None of these is divisible by seven!

What about the claim about Satan and 13? By simply adding the characters together, the Hebrew name "Satan" has a numerical value of 359. The Greek word "Satanas" has a numerical value of 753. The Greek word for "devil", diabolos, has a numerical value of 387. None of these is divisible by 13!

The lesson from this is that, when people try to defend the Bible, they should stick to the explicit words and meanings of the Scriptures. They can defend themselves. Arguments such as these only bring discredit on those who use them, and, when enemies of the truth examine these claims, they are likely to be hardened more in their unbelief. When people cannot check such things out for themselves, they should leave them well alone, particularly in sacred matters.

A few years ago a book was published claiming to find hidden codes in the Hebrew scriptures, foretelling events in our current era. It printed out the Hebrew characters, and used computers to run diagonally and backwards through the characters. What went diagonally depended, of course, on the arbitrarily determined length of the lines! The Scriptures were not given for that kind of purpose. People should stick to the clear, literal meaning of the words, and take them to heart. We should always beware of anything elitist in connection with religious faith. God has given His word for all people, not a small number who have access to some hidden codes!

This does not mean that the Scriptures do not give messages through the explicit and symbolical use of numbers, particularly in the Revelation of St John. Anyone who reads Revelation cannot fail to notice the recurrence of numbers like seven, twelve, and multiples of ten. There is an explicit, but symbolic use of numbers.

The vision of John in Revelation came "by way of symbols" (1:1) and Revelation expresses poetic, symbolic meaning through numbers. In Revelation there are the two witnesses (11:3); there are seven visions (the letters to seven churches, the seven seals broken, the seven trumpets blown, the woman and the dragon, seven bowls of wrath poured out, God's final triumph, and God's new world). A doxology to Jesus in Rev 5:12 contains seven nouns (power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing), and so does a doxology to God in 7:12. The Holy Spirit is referred to as "Seven Spirits" in 1:4, 3:1, 4:5, and 5:6. There are seven statements beginning with the word "Blessed". Daniel chapter 9 had also made a good deal of use of the number seven. Besides, there are seven golden lampstands, seven stars, seven horns, seven eyes, seven thunders, seven signs, seven crowns, seven plagues, seven golden bowls, seven hills, and seven kings. Ten is the number of perfection or completion. 1,000 is ten cubed. In the Old Testament there were twelve tribes, and in the New Testament twelve apostles. Revelation speaks about 12 stars, 12 gates, 12 angels, 12 foundation stones, 12 stones, 12 pearls, and 12 kinds of fruit. The 24 elders represent the people of God of Old and New Testaments. Twelve (and its multiples 24, 144, 12,000 and 144,000) is the number of the church. Therefore 144,000 represents symbolically the total number of believers who will be saved. That number was not intended to be read literally. This is apocalyptic literature. The number 666 (Rev. 13:18) may be a grouping that three times over fails to reach God's number (7). We should beware the proof for Antichrist made in some quarters, which takes the numerical value for the Latin letters in "vicarivs filii dei" and arrives at 666. It is dubious because such counting uses only the letters that have numerical value in Latin.

In Revelation months are counted as having 3x10 days. 3½ is half of seven and regularly associated with evil spiritual forces that oppose the church during the time of the New Testament. Time and times and half a time = 42 months, or 1260 days.

The translation *God's Word to the Nations* set out various statements in Revelation on separate lines, so that series joined by "and", for example, stand out clearly for the modern reader. Sometimes there are seven. Whether to translate all of the "ands" is problematic, as English does not often begin sentences with "and". and, in lists, uses a comma instead.

Readers of Revelation will be aware of references to time: in particular 3½ years, 3½ days, and 1,000 years.

Time of the New Testament in Matthew, Mark, and Luke	Short season of severe trouble	Christ's return, and the end
In Revelation: 3½ years = 42 months = 1260 days	3½ days	Christ's return, and the end
In Revelation chapter 20: 1000 years	a little while	

[3½ years occurs in: Revelation 11:2-3, Daniel 9:27, Rev 12:6,14, Daniel 7:25; and Daniel 12:7. 3½ days occurs in Revelation 11:9,11 and 20:3.] The symbolical use of numbers in Revelation should stop those who hold the idea of a future millennium (a thousand years) from trying to understand it literally. The measurement of the heavenly Jerusalem is a cube of 12,000 furlongs. Who can imagine a city 2,500 kilometres high? However, here it would be mistaken for a translator to convert this to 1,500 miles or 2,500 kilometres, because the symbolism of 12 x 10 x 10 x 10 would be lost.

Revelation is addressed to the seven churches, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Some interpreters have tried to take each of these churches as representative of periods of the history of the church, for example, Ephesus, the church of the apostolic age, Smyrna, the persecuted church, Philadelphia the church of the time of the Reformation, and Laodicea the present ecumenical, doctrinally indifferent church. The great difficulty with this dispensational view is that all seven churches existed in the apostolic age! Our Lord Jesus Christ holds every church firmly in His hand, and has words of commendation and warning for it in His Word.

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