

Biblical Numerology

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Introduction

Less than two years ago I published my first book on Numerology: *Genesis' Numerology*; the time has now come for that book to be supplemented by a second volume, dealing with the subject of numerology in the Bible as a whole: *Biblical Numerology*. Both books are based on analyzing in a new way the numbers that appear throughout the Bible. This method is unrelated to Gematria or the Bible Codes, but has some points of similarity to Pythagoreanism.

While occupation with Biblical numbers is not new in the least, the method that is presented here is entirely new and innovative. The gist of the method is that in many cases numbers serve not only as a quantitative symbol, but they also have a qualitative significance as well. The entity of numbers itself is a language of its own, and thus a very easy language to be ignored by most readers and considered meaningless. However, in many cases numbers do indeed store a meta-textual meaning, which serves as a hidden aspect of the narrative, as God Himself is hidden in the world. The method discussed in this book is characterized by the theory that God rules the world through numbers and therefore analyzing the Biblical text from the numerical perspective yields a new theological dimension, hitherto unnoticed.

Numbers are unconditional and do not admit to the texturing or nuance of subjective idiom, therefore in whatever language the Bible is read the results of numerical interpretation will be the same. Moreover, the connections between different texts may be emphasized not only by the names of God or the literary style but by the appearance of plain numerals, or rather the usage of the numbers contained therein. Numbers are used as a kind of a finger-print of the Narrator, and a method that begins with very low pretensions, such as giving new explanations to number-words, in the manner of lexicography, becomes a significant apparatus in the description of the literary style.

The book deals also with astrology, though on a smaller scale. Astrology is required to explain why Balaam had seven altars constructed, or in understanding some of the issues in the Scroll of Esther; otherwise, at present there is no intention of delving into astrology. Taking a close look into numerological commentaries of the Bible in my

former book and presently, in the excursus of the new book's first chapter, there are analyses of traditional commentaries that employ astrology and exegesis upon several aspects of the Bible, especially in the book of Ecclesiastes. The seventh chapter deals with names and numerology in the Bible, such as the place-name Be'er-Sheba, and adds as well a few notes on earlier numerologists. The book ends with an interview with the author, a sort of *post scriptum*, with his talking freely on several aspects of the new method and its prospects. An index of numbers and authors discussed accompanies the book as well as a bibliography of numerology.

It is always a pleasure to thank all those who made this book possible: first and foremost the supporters of the association I founded, The Association for Jewish Astrology and Numerology. Additionally, special thanks are due to the librarians at Bar-Ilan University who were very generous in supporting me with the necessary books and papers.

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Chapter 1

The Numbers of the Tabernacle:

Sacred Architecture, Numerology and Divine Harmony

This study will discuss the numbers in the instructions for building the Tabernacle, showing that many of the numbers are symbolic, and that the spirit of the Numerologist and divine Architect is hovering over them. First the theoretical background of this problem is discussed: In what way do the numbers have symbolic meaning according to which any given structure is built? This question is discussed with the aid of a comparative study of temples and holy places known in other cultures.

It is argued that several numbers that represent the dimensions of the Tabernacle and its artifacts contain numbers of symbolic meanings. That is, not only are the edifice of the Tabernacle as well as its vessels symbol, as is well known, but apparently the numbers of the various components of the Tabernacle are symbolic, and these numbers are the meeting point between reality and the abstract.

Clearly the Tabernacle is the creation of a Numerologist, and in His eyes this edifice bears a significant resemblance to the creation of the world, not only through the numerological character of the writing but in the time-dimension as one was supposed to complete the other. More than that, the numbers of the Tabernacle create a broad web of several kinds of symbols, and the symbols are part of the symbolic structure of the Tabernacle.

In an excursus some precedents to this kind of numeric commentary are discussed, including the words of R. Nehemia, the Aramaic translation attributed to Jonathan ben Uziel, the commentary of Rav Saadia Gaon, the commentary by R. Shemaia (maybe the disciple of R. Shlomo Ishaki), and the Midrash HaGadol.

Numbers that are dealt with or mentioned here are:

1, 1.5, 1.618, 1.666, 2, 2.5, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 18, 20, 22, 28, 29, 30,
36, 40, 48, 50, 60, 70, 72, 100, 120, 150, 230, 280, 300, 360, 365, 368, 480, 496, 500,
1000, 5000, 8128, 22,000, 127,000, 250,000

The Calendrical numbers explained or mentioned in this chapter are:

1/1, 1/7

Chapter 2

Seven Altars of Balaam

In Numbers 22-24 we find the well-known account of how Balaam was hired by Balak to curse the Children of Israel, but he blessed them instead. The aim of this study is to show that Balaam acted and worshiped his god(s) according to astrological principles. The Sages and R. Abraham ibn Ezra indeed dealt with this manner of commentary, although only partially.

The major issue at hand is to explicate the reason why Balaam built seven altars three separate times. Though traditional commentaries explain that Balaam worshiped the Lord of Israel, it is argued that in fact Balaam worshiped seven different deities, each of which was associated with a different star. Just as King Menashe built several altars to all sorts of deities, the stars of heaven included, so too Balaam worshiped the stars by building for each God a different altar. This argument is strengthened by taking into consideration the names of the places where the worship took place: *Bamot-Baal* (=Sun), *Rosh HaPeor*, and *Sede Sofim* (literally: Field of Observers = Observatory [of Stars]). This worship was dependent on the days of the week, much like Sunday being the day of the Sun, Monday the day of the Moon etc.

It is argued that the *qesamim* (=magic) mentioned in the Balaam story is none other than astrological in nature (=gnomon).

Numbers which are dealt with or mentioned here are:

1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 14, 70, 5888, 8888, 56,888, 58,848, 58,888

Chapter 3

Seventy Bulls in the Seven Day Feast of the Seventh Month

In Num 29:12-34 there are commandments to sacrifice bulls in the Temple in a very special way: on the first day of the feast there are supposed to be 13 bulls, on the second day 12 bulls and so on in a mathematical regression. The sum total of all the bulls from all the days is 70 (though this number is not explicitly indicated in the Bible). The aim of the study is to analyze the “rationale” behind this strange command.

First there is a short discussion of progressions in Jewish tradition. Later the claim of Maimonides (Guide 3:26) is discussed that while commandments do have a meaning behind them, the numbers spoken of in the command have no meaning whatsoever. Maimonides’ idea is discussed and refuted. Later the Sages’ idea is discussed, since they thought that the 70 bulls symbolize the 70 nations of the world. It is argued that this explanation lacks: a) support that there are 70 nations exactly; and b) an understanding of the regression as a significant system.

It is argued that 70 bulls are sacrificed to denote atonement, as the number 70 serve to denote the totality of sins (as do 22 sins in modern Jewish prayer). The decrease in the number of bulls denotes the expected decrease in the number of sins.

Numbers which are dealt or mentioned here:

1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 20, 22, 36, 40, 44, 49, 50, 60, 70, 74, 77, 80, 96, 98, 100, 120, 200, 300, 365, 600, 777, 1000, 1005, 1830, 3000, 5000, 9150, 10,000, 12,000, 22,000, 25,000, 27,000, 30,000, 40,000, 70,000, 80,000, 100,000, 120,000, 127,000, 180,000, 185,000, 200,000, 1,000,000

The Calendrical numbers explained or mentioned in this chapter are:

15/7

Chapter 4

Eleven Days from Horeb

In the beginning of the book of Deuteronomy it says that there is an 11 day walk from Mt. Horeb to Qadesh-Barnea. The number 11 looks very natural, as if meant to be a standard geographic measure between two places. Commentators have not attributed anything of particular importance to this number, treating it the same as any statement that from one's hometown to another town there is a distance of X miles – it just happened to be like that.

However, it is argued that the denoted number of days discloses a specific idea, being that the Children of Israel, if they had not sinned, might have entered the Land of Israel after exactly one year in the Sinai Desert. The calculation is not too complicated: 1) In Ex. 19:1 it is stated that in the third month since leaving Egypt the Children of Israel entered the Sinai Desert. Since the exact day in the month is not mentioned it is assumed to be the first day of the month, or 1/3 of the first year of their wandering. 2) In Num. 10:11 it is stated that on the 20th of the second month of the second year since leaving Egypt the Children of Israel left the Sinai desert. Starting on the 20/2, and walking 11 days, it is clear that they arrived at Qadesh-Barne'a on the first of the third month, which is 1/3 of year two; this leads one to assume that the Children of Israel spent exactly one year in the Sinai Desert (similar to the one round year of the Flood in Gen. 7:11 – 8:14).

This notion of one round year of profound change is explicitly stated by the sages of the Mishnah (m. Eduyot 2:10), and it is assumed that the Narrator wanted to tell His audience that the “natural” way to Israel, without the intrusion of sin, of course, would have taken one year of days only. Furthermore, the 11 day “gap” between the lunar and the solar calendars was well known in Antiquity, and it is assumed that the presentation of the 11 day distance between places is none other than a disclosure of awareness of the gap between two different calendars, the lunar and the solar.

In an excursus there is a discussion of a particular Baraita (b. Nida 72b; j. Ber. 5:1, 8d) wherein it is stated that the gap of 11 days from “one Nida to the other” was

already revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai. The traditional interpretation of this saying was that it refers to the 11 days between a woman's menstrual periods, but it is argued that nevertheless, the original meaning denoted the gap between the period of the sun (solar year) and the period of the moon (lunar year).

Numbers which are dealt or mentioned here:

$1/4$, $1/2$, 1, 3, 7, 10, 11, 12, 15, 30, 38, 120, 354, 364, 365, 365.2422

The Calendrical numbers explained or mentioned in this chapter are:

$15/1$, $17/2$, $20/2$, $27/2$, $1/3$, $29/3$, $6/4$, $1/5$, $9/5$, $7/12$

Chapter 5

Numerology and Astrology in the Scroll of Esther

This chapter deals with the numbers in the Scroll of Esther from both numerological and astrological points of view. First, all the numbers appearing in the Scroll are considered in a brief attempt to understand their significance. The goal of this treatment is to show that, in contrast to the prevailing opinion that disregards the numbers and considers them merely accidental, for the author of the Scroll the numbers were literary accessories, and they are in fact of special significance for the understanding of the plot.

This numerological treatment leads to the astrological treatment. First, the “sages learned in the times” (Est. 1:13) are understood to be astrologers – this being consistent with the opinion of R. Jose (a Tanna of the second century) that Haman was an astrologer. In light of this approach, we examine the term “cast lots,” and it becomes clear that the meaning is not a search for a random number but the processing of a predetermined number, a kind of preparation of a horoscope. The attribution of an astrological basis to the Scroll helps in the understanding of various laws of the kingdom, especially those otherwise unknown in ancient literature and which thus appear foolish. It becomes clear that these laws are established consistent with the laws of the heavens; the laws of King Ahasuerus reflect the “natural religion” aspiring to harmony or sympathy between man and nature.

A brief excursus deals with the numbers of the Scroll of Esther as they are presented in the Peshitta, the Syriac translation. The numerological theory is thus tested against an external source containing different numbers from those known in the traditional version.

Numbers which are dealt with or mentioned here are:

1/2, 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, 13, 23, 30, 50, 100, 120, 127, 180, 300, 500, 1000, 12,000, 75,000

The Calendrical numbers explained or mentioned in this chapter are:

7/x, 17/x, 23/x, 27/x, 1/1, 13/1, 23/3, 10/4, 10/7, 12/12, 14-15/12

Chapter 6

Astrological Interpretation of Scripture

The aim of this study is to analyze traditional Biblical commentaries that make use of astrology in evaluating the Biblical text.

The discussion begins with R. Abraham ibn Ezra, who more than any other commentator sought affinities between the Biblical text and astrology. Notice is made of R. Levi ben Gershom, who was an astrologer himself, but employed astrology in his commentary in only a few cases. R. Shlomo Yishaki also drew attention to astrology, following the Talmudic sages.

The Aramaic translator who translated the book of Ecclesiastes, known as Targum Sheni, infused astrology into his translation in at least 14 cases. Though one may claim that the original author of Ecclesiastes was also partially affiliated with astrology (see especially Ecclesiastes 3), it seems more likely that it was the translator who depicted the author through the lens of astrology, thus reflecting himself and his own specialization in the translation (written probably in Tiberias). It thus is apparent that the first commentator to contend that astrology is systematically behind the Biblical text is none other than the author of Targum Sheni.

Numbers which are dealt with or mentioned here are:

1/3, 1/2, 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 12

Chapter 7

Names and Numerology

The aim of this study is to serve as a preliminary review of some Hebrew names containing a numerological meaning, that is, names bearing a relation to the symbolic meaning of numbers, from Biblical Hebrew down to modern times. The study is divided into three parts: A) the relationships between place-names and numerology; B) the relationships between personal-names and numerology; C) the connection between numerologist and names.

A. In the Land of Israel there are several place-names that contain numbers, from Biblical times until this very day, such as *Be'er-Sheba*, *Qiryat-Arb'a*, among others. It is argued that these names must be understood numerologically, according to the symbolic meanings people saw in numbers such as four and seven. Modern place-names in Israel, like *Qiryat-Shemona*, exemplify numbers in names bearing no numerological meaning, but rather convey the memory of a specific tangible figure or something else (in this case the number of people).

B. There are a few personal-names in the Bible that are made up of numbers, such as *Sheba* and *Bat-Sheba*. These names should be interpreted according to the numerological significance of the number 7. However, a name like *Sheshai* might be derived from a foreign language so there is no need to connect it to numerology. Military units, from ancient times (such as the Xth Legion) until this very day (like 101, 202, 707) bear numbers, but it does not appear likely that modern name-givers gave a thought to numerology.

C. Numerologists claim there to be a connection between the numerological value of one's name and his fate. A short history of this science is presented, from Petosiris (2-1 century BCE) to Hippolytus (3rd century CE) to Martianus Capella (5th century CE) and the *Secreta Secretorum* (extant in the Hebrew), attributed to Aristotle. A special study devoted to the *Book of Asaph the Physician*, assumed to have been written in the 6th century, points to this book's debt to Byzantine (probably Syriac) numerology,

though there is room to posit that the text in question is actually a later addendum to the original text.

Numbers which are dealt with or mentioned here are:

3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 24, 100, 101, 116, 202, 707