

Numerology and the Hebrew Mind

Wil Clarke, November 19, 1998

1998

Take this year, the year of our Lord, 1998. (For those who insist on being politically correct take the year of the current era, 1998. Now divide it by three.

I tell my students at a local community college in California to do this. It's interesting to watch the reactions on their faces. Some have no reaction whatsoever. However you can watch cold fear grip the hearts of some of them. Others gasp. Others chuckle.

What is it about the number 666 that strikes so many Americans with fear? Simply the fact that it is connected with a source of evil in the Bible.

Roy Alan Anderson in *Unfolding the Revelation*¹ notices that to the Hebrew:

6	represented	unrest
7	“	perfection
8	“	victory

When the number is repeated then it signifies an eternal quality. For example 666 would signify eternal unrest.

We mathematicians take ourselves too seriously

As mathematicians we take our occupation extremely seriously. For over three hundred years mathematicians struggled with Fermat's Last Theorem. Ultrafast computers tested every triple of numbers within their power. Why? Even though a mathematician of the stature of Peirre Fermat had claimed the theorem to be true, we still did not accept its truth until it is proved by strict logical argument. In fact I still find myself doubting its veracity, because there is no way that I'll ever understand Andrew Wiles' seven year proof.

Why? We've been misled too many times! Probably everyone of us has met a belligerent angle trisector.

However, mathematicians have not always been taken seriously. In St. Augustine's time a mathematician was what we would call today an astrologer! You'll remember that in *Gulliver's Travels* Gulliver came to a flying island where the mathematicians spent all their time staring at the stars and wearing ill-fitting clothes. There is the Latin apothegm or maxim: *purus mathematicus*, *purus azinus* (pure mathematician = pure donkey). In terms of the old cigarette add, "You've come a long way, baby!"

666

Most Adventists are aware of the numerological application to the Latin appellation of the pope: Add them up for yourself.

V	I	C	A	R	I	U	S	F	I	L	I	I	D	E	I
5	1	100			1	5		1	50	1	1		500		1

Remember that U and V were the same letter up until the last three hundred years or so ago. Early Adventism published this far and wide. Uriah Smith first published his account of the number in 1866. Note the date and how it has 666 buried in it.

Most Adventists are unaware that our founding prophet's name can be summed in exactly the same fashion. Here *w* is really "double *u*" (or "double *v*"). Again add them up for yourself.

E	L	L	E	N	G	O	U	L	D	W	H	I	T	E
	50	50				5	50	500		10			1	

This same algorithm can be applied to any name. I told my prospective elementary education students to go home and apply it to all their family. One student came back aghast. She had named her son a name with 666 in it. You can even apply it to Barney:

C	U	T	E	P	U	R	P	L	E	D	I	N	O	S	A	U	R
100	5			5				50		500	1					5	

My own name, Wilton Edward Clarke, has two *d*'s in it, that makes it more than 1000 in value. Whew! Big sigh of relief! Hey but wait a minute. Each name has exactly 6 letters in it. So my three names give me the value of 666. Nothing in the original text said we had to use Roman numerals, did it? Try out the names of some people you know and see if you can find 666 lurking somewhere.

Some ancient priests of the sun god used to wear a 6x6 magic square as an amulet. You'll notice that each row, column and diagonal adds up to 111 and so the sum of the rows adds up to 666.

1	32	3	34	35	6
12	29	9	10	26	25
13	14	22	21	23	18
24	20	16	15	17	19
30	11	28	27	8	7
31	5	33	4	2	36

Numerology

Webster's dictionary defines numerology as the "study of the occult significance of numbers."ⁱⁱ Occult means hidden and is often used of a Satanic cult. So Webster is probably a bit too sinister in its definition. Numerology as we shall use it here refers to the attaching of non-numerical properties to numbers.

Many Americans today are triskaidekaphobic, they fear the number thirteen. They believe that 13 means bad luck. Most skyscrapers have no floor numbered 13. Of course their thirteenth floor is numbered 14 to placate the people who would not want to stay on the thirteenth floor. The superstitious regard Friday the thirteenth of any month as an especially dangerous day.

This attachment of a sinister significance to the number 13 is an example of numerology. Is 13 indeed unlucky?

Martin Gardner's Dr. Matrix (allegedly the son of an Adventist missionary to Japan around the turn of the century) says: "Consider the case of Richard Wagner and the number 13. There are 13 letters in his name. He was born in 1813. Add the digits of this year and they sum to 13. He composed 13 great works of music. *Tannhäuser*, his greatest work, was completed on April 13, 1845, and first performed on March 13, 1861. He finished *Parsifal* on January 13, 1882. *Die Walküre* was first performed in 1870 on June 26, and 26 is twice 13. *Lohengrin* was composed in 1848, but Wagner did not hear it played until 1861, exactly 13 years later. He died in February 1883. Note the first and last digits of this year also form 13. These are only a few of the many important 13's in Wagner's life."ⁱⁱⁱ The number thirteen seemed to be an integral part of Wagner's very successful life.

We can quickly remind ourselves of other thirteens we encounter. Thirteen colonies founded this great land of freedom. Our flag has 13 stripes. Look at the green side of a dollar bill. The pyramid has 13 steps. The motto *annuit coeptis* has 13 letters. The eagle on the seal holds 13 arrows in one talon and an olive branch with 13 leaves in the other. Thirteen stars illuminate its head. The motto in its beak reads *e pluribus unum*, thirteen letters. The shield on its breast has 13 vertical stripes.

If you believe that 13 is unlucky, you should dispense with all dollar bills. (I have a unique way of disposing of them safely. So feel free to bring all you have to me.)

Any system of writing where letters also have numerical values invites numerology. I found that hospitals in Taiwan have no fourth floor. Because the word for 4 sounds like the word for death. Each of the letters in both Hebrew and Greek also stood for numbers. So there was a lot of numerology that

went on all the time. The term mathematician represented a person who was a numerologist in ancient Greek times, and thus automatically came to represent an astrologer in medieval times. I don't believe there was any distinction between astrology and numerology in ancient times.

Hebrew Numerals

The Hebrews used the following symbols^{iv} (which are their letters) for numbers as well. Like the Greek numeration system, these numerals are much harder to use than even Roman Numerals.

א	1	aleph	י	10	yod	ק	100	qof
ב	2	beth	כ	20	kaf	ר	200	resh
ג	3	gimel	ל	30	lamed	ש	300	shin
ד	4	daleth	מ	40	mem	ת	400	tau
ה	5	he	נ	50	nun	ך	500	final kaf
ו	6	waw	ס	60	samech	ם	600	final mem
ז	7	zajin	ע	70	ayin	ף	700	final nun
ח	8	heth	פ	80	pe		800	final pe
ט	9	teth	צ	90	sade		900	final sade

Numbers bigger than 999 were written using the notation above and adding a dot over the character to indicate that it was a thousand times bigger. Some letters look a lot like other letters. For example the symbol for 6 looks like the symbol of 700 except that the tail of the 700 is slightly longer than that for 6. The character for 2 looks almost like the character for 50 except the two horizontal bars are longer. When scribes copied the scrolls on occasion a number would be changed by a simple change like shortening or lengthening a stroke of the brush.

In 1 Samuel 6: 19, God destroyed 50,070 men from the village of Bethshemesh for looking into the ark of the covenant. In those days, the population of Jerusalem was less than 50,000. Undoubtedly, the small village of Bethshemesh had much fewer than a thousand souls living in it. Why then does the Bible say that God destroyed so many people? One answer might be the following. The author wrote עב for 72 (they read from right to left). A later scribe shortened the bars on the כ to make נ. An even later copyist either splattered a little drop of ink above the נ or decided that 50 and 70 in the same number didn't make sense, so added the spot above the נ. This turned the 50 into 50,000. Today almost all major manuscripts have perpetuated the error. It seems much more reasonable that 72 men died rather than 50,070.

This numeration system meant that every word had a numerical value as well. For example Daniel's name was written as דנאל and so his name had the numerical value of 30+1+10+50+4 or 95. Over time, people assigned mystic qualities to various numbers. A false science grew up called numerology, that has about as much credibility as astrology. It became natural for John the Revelator to assign the number 666 to the man of sin, because of the widespread use of numerology.

Greek Numerals

The Greek numeration system was based on the same concept as that of the Hebrew system. Again arithmetic was almost impossible. Furthermore large numbers had no representation, and so quantities beyond representation were simply regarded as infinite.

α	1	alpha	ι	10	iota	ρ	100	rho
β	2	beta	κ	20	kappa	σ	200	sigma
γ	3	gamma	λ	30	lambda	τ	300	tau
δ	4	delta	μ	40	mu	υ	400	upsilon
ε	5	epsilon	ν	50	nu	φ	500	phi
ς	6	vau	ξ	60	xi	χ	600	chi
ζ	7	zeta	ο	70	omicron	ψ	700	psi
η	8	eta	π	80	pi	ω	800	omega
θ	9	theta	Ϟ	90	koppa	Ϸ	900	sampi*

*actually sampi looked like lambda with two legs on the left.

In the Greek numeration system;^v thousands were represented by a comma preceding a letter in the first column. Thus 2,000 would be written as ,β. Tens of thousands were written with two dots over a letter from the first column., thus 30,000 would be written as γ̄. There were no symbols or words for numbers bigger than 99,999. The Greeks made numerology a national pastime.

12 tribes

It all started with Jacob, his two conniving wives and two concubines. Altogether he sired 12 sons, who became the founding fathers of the Israelites. Actually this is not entirely true. Kingdom numbers started earlier with another son of Abraham, Ishmael. His twelve sons became the princes and original founders of the Arab nation.^{vi}

Jacob had 12 sons. The descendants of these sons remained separate through out their history. They were united under the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon, otherwise there were serious disagreements between them perpetually. At one stage one tribe, Benjamin, was almost annihilated by the other tribes for the gross sins they embraced.^{vii} Interestingly, the Bible authors consistently list twelve tribes of Israel. They are almost never (if ever) listed in the same order. With Joseph's two sons being counted as Jacob's there are really 13 tribes. However, never are 13 tribes listed. Below is a table listing some of the occurrences in Scripture of the twelve tribes. You may wish to look up a few other places.

In 1 Chronicles 12: 24-37 the tribe of Manasseh is split, making fourteen tribes. However again they are listed as twelve tribes. The two and a half tribes on the eastern bank of the Jordan are lumped together as one tribe, in order to maintain the number twelve.

The important thing to notice is that the number 12 is maintained at all costs. To the Jewish mind, the number 12 is the important fact. When it is used it normally encompasses all the descendants of Jacob. Order of listing is evidently unimportant, as is exactly which names are used to represent these descendants.

Tribes of Israel

Text	Gen 35:23-26	Ex 1:2-6	Num 1:5-15	Num 7:12-78	Deut 27:12-13	1 Chr 2:1-2	1 Chr 12:24-37	Ezek. 48:31-35	Rev 7:5-8
1	Reuben	Reuben	Reuben	Judah	Simeon	Reuben,	Judah	Reuben	Juda
2	Simeon	Simeon	Simeon	Issachar	Levi	Simeon	Simeon	Judah	Reuben
3	Levi	Levi	Judah	Zebulun	Judah	Levi	Levi	Levi	Gad
4	Judah	Judah	Issachar	Reuben	Issachar	Judah	Benjamin	Joseph	Aser
5	Issachar	Issachar	Zebulun	Simeon	Joseph	Issachar	Ephraim	Benjamin	Nephthalim
6	Zebulun	Zebulun	Ephraim	Gad	Benjamin	Zebulun	half Manasseh	Dan	Manasses
7	Joseph	Benjamin	Manasseh	Ephraim	Reuben	Dan	Issachar	Simeon	Simeon
8	Benjamin	Dan	Benjamin	Manasseh	Gad	Joseph	Zebulun	Issachar	Levi
9	Dan	Naphtali	Dan	Benjamin	Asher	Benjamin	Naphtali	Zebulun	Issachar
10	Naphtali	Gad	Asher	Dan	Zebulun	Naphtali	Dan	Gad	Zabulon
11	Gad	Asher	Gad	Asher	Dan	Gad	Asher	Asher	Joseph
12	Asher	Joseph	Naphtali	Naphtali	Naphtali	Asher	Reuben, Gad, half Manasseh	Naphtali	Benjamin
Omitted	Ephraim Manasseh	Ephraim Manasseh	Levi, Joseph	Levi, Joseph	Ephraim Manasseh	Ephraim Manasseh	Joseph	Ephraim Manasseh	Dan, Ephraim

Numerology in the New Testament

14 generations

One of Matthew’s goals in the New Testament is to establish Christ as a direct descendant from the royal line of David. His genealogy of Christ follows the line of the kings of Judah from the historical books of the Old Testament. Interestingly, this is not enough for Matthew. He inserts an obvious numerological device using David’s Hebrew name, **דָּוִד**. In Hebrew, as we have seen before, dalet (ד) = 4, and waw (ו) = 6 so the numerological value of David’s name is 4+6+4 = 14.

Matthew noticed that using inclusive reckoning there are 14 generations between Abraham and David. Then by omitting 4 kings (Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah, and Jehoiakim) from the list he gets 14 generations from David to Jechonias and the fall of Jerusalem, using exclusive reckoning. Finally he lists 12 more ancestors of Christ and calls it fourteen generations (actually if you count Jechonias twice and use inclusive reckoning you have 14 generations).

It appears from the contortions that Matthew had to go through to get 14-14-14 that the number fourteen was more important to him than the actually historical record.

Luke lists 43 generations for the 1000 years between David and Jesus. That gives an average generation of 24 years. Matthew’s list between David and Jechonias yields an average generation of 29 years. If you add in the four omitted kings this reduces the average generation to 22 years which is close to that of Luke’s. For the 600 years between Jechonias and Jesus, Matthew’s list stretches the generation length to 46 years, almost twice Luke’s generations.

This inconsistency between Matthew and Luke has led Moslems to cavil at Christianity for centuries. Students who have grown up with very strict inerrancy ideas about scripture sometimes find facts like this very disturbing. It would almost appear that Matthew is deliberately misrepresenting the genealogical facts.

Comparisons of the Genealogies of Christ

Luke's Genealogy of Christ		Matthew's Genealogy of Christ		
1	God			
2	Adam			
3	Seth			
4	Enos			
5	Cainan			
6	Maleleel			
7	Jared			
8	Enoch			
9	Mathusala			
10	Lamech			
11	Noe			
12	Sem	דוד	ד=4, ו=6	
13	Arphaxad	DAVID	D=4,V=6	
14	Cainan			
15	Sala			
16	Heber			
17	Phalec			
18	Ragau			
19	Saruch			
20	Nachor			
21	Thara			
22	Abraham	1	Abraham	Chronology
23	Isaac	2	Isaac	2091 BC
24	Jacob	3	Jacob	Call of Abram
25	Judah	4	Judas	
26	Phares	5	Phares	
27	Esrom	6	Esrom	
28	Aram	7	Aram	
29	Aminadab	8	Aminadab	
30	Naasson	9	Naasson	
31	Salmon	10	Salmon	
32	Booz	11	Booz	
33	Obed	12	Obed	
34	Jesse	13	Jesse	
35	David	14	David	1004 BC
36	Nathan	1	Solomon	David becomes king
37	Mattatha	2	Roboam	
38	Menan	3	Abia	

39	Melea	4	Asa	
40	Eliakim	5	Josaphat	
41	Jonan	6	Joram	
42	Joseph			Ahaziah
43	Judah			Joash
44	Simeon			Amaziah
45	Levi	7	Ozias	
46	Matthat	8	Joatham	
47	Jorim	9	Achaz	
48	Eliezer	10	Ezekias	
49	Joseph	11	Manasses	
50	Er	12	Amon	
51	Elmodam	13	Josias	
52	Cosam			Jehoiakim
53	Addi	14 and 1	Jechonias	604 BC
54	Melchi			Exile to Babylon
55	Neri			
56	Salathiel	2	Salathiel	
57	Zorobabel	3	Zorobabel	
58	Rhesa	4	Abiud	
59	Joanna			
60	Judah	5	Eliakim	
61	Joseph			
62	Semei	6	Azor	
63	Mattathias			
64	Maath	7	Sadoc	
65	Nagge			
66	Esli	8	Achim	
67	Naum			
68	Amos	9	Eliud	
69	Mattathias			
70	Joseph	10	Eleazar	
71	Janna			
72	Melchi	11	Matthan	
73	Levi			
74	Matthat	12	Jacob	
75	Heli			
76	Joseph	13	Joseph	
77	Jesus	14	Jesus	4 BC Christ born

All names are taken from the KJV, Dates from *The Daily Bible in Chronological Order*(NIV)

12 disciples

We have seen that the quantity twelve took on greater significance to the Hebrew mind than the actual composition of nation of Israel. We have seen how important Matthew found the David number as an argument for Christ's royalty.

When Christ chose to found his kingdom on the earth it was only natural that he choose 12 men to be his disciples. It was absolutely imperative that he use exactly twelve disciples. This was counted as an important criterion for the kingdom. Again there are several lists of disciples.

The Twelve Disciples

Text	Mark 3:16-19	Luke 6:14-16	*Acts 1:13 & 26	*1 Cor. 15:9
1	Simon Peter	Simon	Peter	Peter
2	James the son of Zebedee	Andrew	James	Paul
3	John the brother of James	James	John	John
4	Andrew	John	Andrew	Andrew
5	Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
6	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Thomas	Thomas
7	Matthew	Matthew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew
8	Thomas	Thomas	Matthew	Matthew
9	James the son of Alphaeus	James the son of Alphaeus	James the son of Alphaeus	James the son of Alphaeus
10	Thaddaeus	Simon called Zelotes	Simon Zelotes	Simon Zelotes
11	Simon the Canaanite	Judas the brother of James	Judas the brother of James	Judas the brother of James
12	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Matthias	Matthias
Notes			Matthias replaced Judas	Paul replaced James

*Possible list using Luke's list plus the added disciple.

In comparing Mark's and Luke's lists, it seems very reasonable that Simon the Canaanite and Simon called Zelotes are the same person. It is not at all obvious to me that Thaddeus and Judas the brother of James are the same person. Again, the important point to the authors is that there were 12 chosen disciples. In actual fact there must have been considerably more, because the first act of the fledgling church in Acts 1 was to elect a replacement for the traitor, Judas Iscariot.

You may well have heard in sermons how the disciples acted ahead of the Holy Spirit in selecting Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot. Precher's I have heard have made a big issue that God wanted Paul to replace Judas as the 12th disciple. The preacher is well intentioned and should not be faulted. But in making this claim, the she or he simply reveals her or his ignorance of the importance to the Hebrew mind of there being twelve disciples or apostles. In the new Jerusalem there are twelve gates of pearl. Each is named after one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.^{viii} Written when all, but John, of the original twelve apostles were long dead, the Revelator still stresses the importance of the number twelve as representing a complete kingdom.

Those preachers who would oust Matthais would replace him with the apostle Paul. But they need to read the book of Acts more carefully. Paul's selection came after the beheading of James. So Paul indeed took his place amongst the twelve.^{ix} But it was not in Matthais place!

The Mormons have understood the importance of the number twelve as a symbol of the Kingdom of Heaven and still have twelve apostles who lead the church.

Shakespeare a translator?

Did you know that we have "proof" that Shakespeare helped translate the King James Version of the Bible? The proof is found in Psalm 46. If you count the words from the beginning of the psalm, the 46th word is *shake*. If you count the words from the end of the psalm (omit *selah*) the 46th word is *spear*. Furthermore Shakespeare was 46 years old when the KJV translation was finished in 1610. If that isn't enough, Shakespeare was born and died on Good Friday, April 23; $23 + 23 = 46$. This practice of leaving one's name imbedded in a document was a common practice amongst scribes in earlier times.

Michael Drosnin has entered a related field. In his book, *The Bible Code*^x he uses a computer to print out the book of Genesis in Hebrew in tabular form and then reads letters periodically across or down or other directions to find words that have import to twentieth century events.

Conclusion

Naturally we have just had a chance to scratch the surface of the importance of numbers to the ancient Hebrews. Some people burrow deeply into the numerology of the Bible. I must admit that I give as much credence to some of their work as I do to *The Bible Code* or the mystic numbers of the Great Pyramid.

A danger of concentrating on the numerology of the Bible is that you actually start to take yourself seriously. Irenaeus of the second century speculated on the meaning of 666. Then ended by pointing out that the prophecy had not as yet been fulfilled and that the best thing was to sit back and let unfolding events indicate the prophet's meaning.

It may appear that I have exposed inaccuracies in the Bible that tend to question its authenticity. That is certainly not my intention. If some of these things we've considered today troubles you, maybe you should re-examine your concept of inspiration.

ⁱ Anderson, Roy Allan *Unfolding the Revelation* (1974) Pacific Press Mountain View CA

ⁱⁱ *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (1989) Springfield MA, Merriam-Webster.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gardner, Martin (1976) *The Incredible Dr. Matrix* New York, Charles Scribner's Sons; p10.

^{iv} Menninger, Karl (1969) *Number Words and Number Symbols: A Cultural History of Numbers* Cambridge MA, MIT Press, p265.

^v Fisher, Leonard E. 1982. *Number Art: Thirteen 123s from around the world*. New York. Four Winds Press. p37ff.

^{vi} Genesis 17: 20; and 25: 16.

^{vii} Judges 20 and 21.

^{viii} Revelation 21: 14.

^{ix} 1Cor. 15:7-9 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

^x Michael Drosnin (1997), *The Bible Code* Simon and Schuster, New York.