

Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

# Orcutt Christian Church

A Grace Driven Church for Grace Needing People!

## *Rambling Round Revelation #6* Seven: The Numerology of Revelation

### Revelation 1:4-7

### February 10, 2019

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Saturday 2/9: Clean Up: Carol Hill

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**Revelation 1:4-7 (NASB)**

<sup>4</sup> John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, <sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood — <sup>6</sup> and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. <sup>7</sup> **BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS**, and every eye will see Him, even

**those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.**

I suspect you never think about digits!

What is a digit anyway?

Mother's and father's of a newly born infant are concerned about digits.

They are concerned about the anatomical digit.

## **I. Anatomical Digit**

One of several most distal parts of a limb, i.e. fingers, thumbs, and toes on hands and feet.

The parents want to be sure their baby has two hands, two feet, five toes on each foot, and five fingers on each hand.

The digit or finger is an ancient and obsolete measurement of length.

It was originally based on the breadth of a human finger.

It was a fundamental unit of length in the Ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Hebrew, Ancient Greek and Roman systems of measurement.

The use of the fingers, hands, arms, etc. was often dependent on the size of the current King.

This could mean at times it differ.

{Demonstrate using my finger, hand, and arm.}

## **II. Numerical digit**

Today there is a global standard, the International System of Units (SI).

When the kid goes to school, he or she becomes acquainted with the numerical digit, which is used in mathematics.

## **III. Amazing Usage of the Anatomical Digit**

Using some simple processes, the ancients performed some amazing feats.

### **Hezekiah's Tunnel**

According to the Bible, King Hezekiah prepared Jerusalem for an impending siege by the Assyrians, by "blocking the source of the waters of the upper Gihon, and leading them straight down on the west to the City of David."

### **2 Chronicles 32:1-4 (NASB)**

**<sup>1</sup> After these acts of faithfulness Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah and besieged the fortified cities, and thought to break into them for himself. <sup>2</sup> Now when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come and that he intended to make war on Jerusalem, <sup>3</sup> he decided with his officers and his warriors to cut off the *supply of* water from the springs which *were* outside the city, and they helped him. <sup>4</sup> So many people assembled and stopped up all the springs and the stream which flowed through the region, saying, "Why should the kings of Assyria come and find abundant water?"**

### **2 Kings 20:20 (NASB)**

**<sup>20</sup> Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah and all his might, and how he made the pool and the conduit and brought water into the city, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah?**

The parallel is in

### **2 Chronicles 32:30 (NASB)**

**<sup>30</sup> It was Hezekiah who stopped the upper outlet of the waters of Gihon and directed them to the west side of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all that he did.**

It was an amazing feat of engineering.

A 1750-foot tunnel carved during the reign of Hezekiah to bring water from one side of the city to the other.

It is considered one of two of the greatest works of water engineering technology in the pre-Classical period.

The builder's carved an inscription in the tunnel which says:

“[...when] (the tunnel) was driven through. And this was the way in which it was cut through: While [...] (were) still [...] axe(s), each

man toward his fellow, and while there were still three cubits to be cut through, [there was heard] the voice of a man calling to his fellows, for there was an overlap in the rock on the right [and on the left]. And when the tunnel was driven through, the quarrymen hewed (the rock), each man toward his fellow, axe against axe; and the water flowed from the spring toward the reservoir for 1200 cubits, and the height of the rock above the head(s) of the quarrymen was 100 cubits.”

Hezekiah’s Tunnel was cut through bedrock in 701 BC under the City of David, curving and weaving for 1750 feet, as measured by modern engineering technology.

The builders of the tunnel said it was 1200 cubits.

And from those measurements, we learn at that time a cubit was from the tip of the index finger to the elbow, and about 18” in length.

#### **IV. The Symbolic Use of Digits**

You don't read very far into Revelation before you run into an ancient symbolic use of digits.

Seven churches, Seven spirits, Seven stars, Seven lampstands

When Abraham made a covenant with Abimelech and Phicol over the use of a well,

**Genesis 21:27-32 (NASB)**

**27** Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant. **28** Then Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. **29** Abimelech said to Abraham, "What do these seven ewe lambs mean, which you have set by themselves?" **30** He said, "You shall take these seven ewe lambs from my hand so that it may be a witness to me, that I dug this well." **31** Therefore he called that place Beersheba, because there the two of them took an oath. **32** So they made a covenant at Beersheba...

**Beersheba means "Well of Seven" or "Well of the Oath."**

The ancient Jews developed the **Gematria**, which is a numerological system by which Hebrew letters correspond to numbers.

In gematria, each Hebrew letter is represented by a number (for example, aleph = 1, bet = 2, etc.).

One can then calculate the numerical value of a word by adding together the values of each letter in it.

In the realm of biblical interpretation, commentators base an argument on numerological equivalence of words.

While gematria was used periodically in the Talmud and Midrash, it was not central to rabbinic literature. The rabbis occasionally employed gematria to help support biblical exegesis, but did not rely on it heavily. They were much more invested in the use of logical reasoning and argumentation to support their positions.

If a word's numerical value equals that of another word, a commentator might draw a connection between these two words and the verses in which they appear and use this to prove larger conceptual conclusions.

The early Church Fathers repeatedly condemned the magical use of numbers which had descended from Babylonian sources to the pagans of their times.

They denounced any system of philosophy which rested upon an exclusively numerical basis.

Even so, they almost unanimously regarded the numbers in the Bible as full of mystical meaning, and they considered the interpretation of these mystical meanings as an important branch of exegesis.

There was reluctance in the Christian teachers of the early centuries to push this recognition of the significance of numbers to extremes.

In his book, **No One Left Behind**, Vaughn Elliott, gives an example of early Christian gematria:

“As early as the second century, Irenaeus (A.D. 130 to 202) searched seriously for Greek names with the numerical value of 666. Although Irenaeus knew that many Greek names had that value, he did not consider it useless to seek the one name that fulfilled all aspects of the prophecy. On the contrary, he stressed the need to

learn the name in order to be forewarned. He realized that the name must harmonize with the rest of the prophecy. He said the prophecies could not be fulfilled until the Roman Empire was broken into ten parts: ...

The number of the name of the beast, [if reckoned] according to the Greek mode of calculation by the [value of] the letters contained in it, will amount to six hundred and sixty and six . . . Then also *Lateinos* (LATEINOS) has the number six hundred and sixty-six; and it is a very probable [solution], this being the name of the last kingdom [of the four seen by Daniel]. For the Latins are they who at present bear rule: I will not, however, make any boast over this [coincidence] . . . he [John] indicates the number of the name now, that when this man comes we may avoid him.

Irenaeus understood that he himself lived during the fourth kingdom predicted by Daniel. ... He also understood an enemy of God would come sometime following the ten-fold division, and he saw that the number of this wicked one's name would equal 666.

Irenaeus lived during a part of the fulfillment of Revelation 13 but before the fulfillment of other parts. Situated in that historical context, he found it significant that the name of the kingdom then in power had the value of 666 in Greek. ... [Lateinos.]

Irenaeus did not claim that *Lateinos* was the definite solution to 666, but only a possibility. It was too early in time for him to be definitive. ... From our historical perspective, many of us believe that there never has been a better solution to 666 than this one that Irenaeus suggested a mere one hundred years after John wrote Revelation.

Since Irenaeus wrote in the Greek language, he took it for granted that his readers could check out his calculations with utmost ease; thus, he does not even mention the value of the individual letters.”

Irenaeus does not hesitate to explain the number of the beast 666 (Revelation 13:18) by the word "Lateinos" since the numerical value of its constituent Greek letters yields the same total (30+1+330+5+10+50+70+200=666).

Latinus was the reputed founder of the Latins.

The Latins were the majority of the population of Rome from its foundation. Latin became the official language of the Roman Empire and later the official language of the Roman Catholic Church.

Century after century, the Catholic Church worldwide was the Latin Church. As of the twenty-first century, Latin continues to be the official language of the Catholic Church, although in decline. Priests must still study Latin in preparation for the priesthood. Official documents of the Catholic Church continue to be published in Latin. The Catholic Church considers Latin to be an instrument for the unity of the church worldwide, tying all churches to Rome.

“**Curia**” is a Latin word that in ancient times referred to Roman councils, the Senate, and the various government offices in the Roman Empire.

The Catholic Church has retained both the name and the form of government of Imperial Rome.

Even the special garments that today’s Catholic priests wear during mass are copies of various types of clothing that were by Senators in the Roman Empire in the second century.

Vaughn makes the observation that:

“The Greek name *Lateinos* has a numerical value of 666. The empire that ruled when the church started was the Latin Empire. The church that gradually turned from the truth and became powerful upon the ashes of that empire was the Latin Church. Latin was the only language of worship until very recent times, and Latin remains the official language of the Catholic Church. The Latin Curia, under the (usually) Italian pope and in the ancient Latin capital remains the center of power of the church. It is the Roman Church; it is the Latin Church.”

Vaughn concludes:

The Roman Catholic Church is being referred to by John's 666.

Although the Fathers repeatedly condemned the magical use of numbers which had descended from Babylonian sources to the pagans of their times, and although they denounced any system of their philosophy which rested upon an exclusively numerical basis, still they almost unanimously regarded the numbers of the Bible as full of symbolic meaning, and they considered the interpretation of these mystical meanings as an important branch of exegesis.

That they were very cautious to apply gematria, is seen from several of the Church Fathers:

**Irenaeus** discusses at length the Gnostic numerical interpretation of the holy name *Jesus* as the equivalent of 888, and he claims that by writing the name in Hebrew characters an entirely different interpretation is necessitated.

**Ambrose** commenting upon the days of creation and the Sabbath remarks,  
"The number seven is good, but we do not explain it after the doctrine of Pythagoras and the other philosophers, but rather according to the manifestation and division of the grace of the Spirit; for the prophet Isaias has enumerated the principal gifts of the Holy Spirit as seven."

There can be no doubt that influenced mainly by Biblical precepts, but also in part by the prevalence of this philosophy of numbers all around them, the Fathers down to the 7<sup>th</sup> century gave much attention to the sacredness and mystical significance not only of certain numerals in themselves but also of the numerical totals given by the constituent letters with which words were written.

## **V. How shall We Understand The Numerology of Revelation?**

With symbolic language, words visualize something other than what their literal definition is to people familiar with the imagery.

Words with symbolic meanings are used to paint a picture on the imaginations or convey a meaning shrouded in obscurity.



By using this form of communication, God was able to express what He wanted the first Christians to know while keeping the meaning of his message hidden from those who would condemn the Christians because of it.

There is symbolic language throughout the scriptures both Old Testament and New.

By familiarizing oneself with the symbolism in other parts of the Bible and applying the meaning of that imagery to its corresponding use in Revelation, one can begin to unravel the cryptic meaning and gain an understanding of what God was communicating to His people.

People who were not Christians would have little to no understanding of what the symbolic language meant while Christians who were familiar with and had access to the scriptures and studied them had the key to solving the mysteries of the Revelation right within their hands all the time.

Today, we have the same scriptures to draw upon so we can understand what God was communicating to them.

We need to understand what the symbolic language meant to the first readers of the letter while keeping in mind that God wrote them a letter he meant for them to understand and whatever that message meant to them is what it must mean today.

It is important to keep in mind that even though Revelation is "signified" or "symbolized" (Revelation 1:1) that does not mean that every single usage of a number or an object which has a symbolic meaning attached to it necessarily demands that it must carry the symbolic meaning.

In a few minutes, I'll share some basic ways of understanding the symbolic teaching of Revelation.

Now look at the numbering system and what meanings the 1st century Christians associated with certain numbers.

Revelation is full of numbers so a study of the symbolic meanings these numbers had for the first century readers will help us to correctly understand what the message to them was all about.

The number **1** in a symbolic sense represented the idea of **unity or oneness**.  
. The use of the number **one** here represented in the minds of the first reader the idea of unity.

The scriptures are full of references to the "**oneness**" or "unity" of the Godhead.

Jesus quoted, "I and my Father are **one**" (John 10:30).

See also John 17:11, John 17:21, Romans 15:6, 1 John 5:7.

In Revelation the number **2** is used twelve times in the King James version.

In other scripture as well as Revelation The number **two** symbolically represents **strength and confirmation**.

**Revelation 11:3-4 (NASB)**

<sup>3</sup> "And I will grant *authority* to my **two** witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." <sup>4</sup>

These are the **two** olive trees and the **two** lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

Looking in other scripture we see that

**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NASB)**

<sup>9</sup> **Two** are better than **one** because they have a good return for their labor. <sup>10</sup> For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion.

But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. <sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, if **two** lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm *alone*? <sup>12</sup> And if one can overpower him who is alone, **two** can resist him. A cord of **three strands** is not quickly torn apart.

The Mosaic law required the testimony of **two** or more witnesses before one could be convicted of a crime (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; 2 Corinthians 13:1).

Jesus sent out His disciples "**two and two**" (Luke 10:1).

In Revelation the number **3** is used eleven times.

This number carried the symbolic meaning of God or **the perfect divine**.

There are **three** persons in the Godhead - God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19, Mark 1:9-11).

**Three** angels were sent by God to pronounce "woe" to the earth (Revelation 8:13).

God used **three** plagues against some of mankind (Revelation 9:18).

When the great city was destroyed it was broken into **three** parts, which symbolized to the minds of the first readers that God was behind these events.

The number **3 1/2** appears in Revelation in a variety of forms.

It is half of **7** which symbolizes **the perfection of God**.

We will discuss the symbolic meaning of the number **7** in a minute.

The number **3 1/2** symbolizes that which is **incomplete**.

Since **seven** is complete, then **3 1/2** is incomplete and represents something indefinite.

In Revelation 11:2 it is represented as **forty two** months, which is **3 1/2** years.

In Revelation 12:6 it appears as **1260** days which is also **3 1/2** years.

In Revelation 12:14 it appears as "**time and times and half a time**".

This is undoubtedly an indefinite period of time.

**1 time** plus **2 times**, plus **half** a time is **3 1/2** times.

When Daniel is prophesying about the Roman Empire, we see almost the exact same words:

**Daniel 7:25 (NASB)**

**25 'He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.**

All of these forms of **3 1/2** are symbolic of an indefinite period of time and a **time of uncertainty and unrest** such as we find in Revelation 11:11

and context when, from the perspective of God's enemies, it looked like the forces of evil had won and Christianity had been utterly stamped out. But as we will see when reading further, this was only for an indefinite period of time.

In Revelation the number **4**, used thirty times, was **symbolic of the world in which we live**.

In the Isaiah 11:12, **four** was used to depict the "**four** corners of the earth" which contextually meant the whole earth.

The words "**four** winds" are found in Jeremiah 49:36, Ezekiel 37:9, Daniel 7:2; 8:8; 11:4, Zechariah 2:6.

Jesus used these words in Matthew 24:31 to refer to the entire earth.

In Jeremiah 49:36 the words "**four** quarters" are used to describe what was going to happen to the nation of Elam when it was prophesied they would be scattered across the earth.

So it is apparent that to the readers of the Revelation, when they saw the number **four** used, they would then associate it with all life on this earth.

In Revelation 4:6, all of created life is represented by **four** living creatures.

In Revelation 7:1, **four** angels stand "at the **four** corners of the earth, holding the **four** winds of the earth."

In Revelation 20:8, all of the people on earth are represented by the nations "in the **four** corners of the earth."

The number **5** is half of **10** and represented human incompleteness or **limited power**.

Where **ten** represented **human completeness or complete power**, **5** fell **short of that perfection**.

The number **6** came to represent **something that fell short of the perfection of seven**.

The **definition of sin** is to miss the mark, or to fall short.

## Proverbs 6:16 (NASB)

<sup>16</sup> There are **six** things which the LORD hates, Yes, **seven** which are an abomination to Him:

Solomon goes on to list seven things that God hates.

What is important to keep in mind is that God purposefully associated the number **six** with the sins He hated the most regardless of how many of them there actually were.

The number **six** was used to indicate something evil, as this number fell short of the perfect number **seven**.

The saints of the first century considered this number to be evil and to represent that which is evil and when they encountered this number it would cause them to associate evil with whatever the number was represented with. Therefore when a man is identified by the number **666** as in Revelation 13:18, he is understood in the minds of the first century readers as being an exceedingly evil individual.

Especially when one notices that the number for the evil man is used **three** times which means the divine.

This would seem to suggest a person of an exceedingly evil nature, who being in a position of great power and authority, considered himself to be divine but fell short.

The number **7** came to symbolize the meaning of **totality or completeness associated with God's authority** on the earth.

It is believed by many that the number **7** is a product of adding the number **3** which represented the complete divine, to the number **4** which symbolized the whole earth.

Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 30:18-29** that there were **three** things which were good and wonderful and go well, but then there are **four** things upon the earth that are set in contrast to the things described by the number **three**.

Solomon repeated this imagery **four** times in these verses of scripture. In the first two chapters of Amos we read of God's prophecy of wrath on Damascus, Tyrus, Edom, Moab and Judah.

In every instance He used the words "for **three** transgression and for **four**".

It is obvious from a reading of the book of Amos that the transgression of these nations were far more than **seven**.

This is an obvious symbolic use of the number **seven** arrived at by adding **three** and **four**.

The **sins of these nations were complete**, being against the divine and on earth.

Naaman dipped in the Jordan river **seven** times before anything happened (2 Kings 5:14).

The Israelites marched around Jericho **seven** times before the walls fell (Joshua 6:20).

The Israelite tabernacle worship was replete with repetitive rituals done **seven** times, for example, blood was sprinkled on the alters **seven** times (Leviticus 8:11).

In the NASB the word seven appears 390 times in all.

It is very obvious that this number held a very significant meaning in the minds of the Israelites.

David wrote "The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified **seven** times." (Psalms 12:6).

Revelation was addressed to "the **seven** churches of Asia." (Revelation 1:4).

God most certainly had more than **seven** churches in a land mass the size of Asia at that time but He used the number **seven** to represent them all including the rest of the churches throughout the earth.

When Revelation 5:1 speaks of a scroll with **seven** seals, the first readers immediately thought it was **perfectly and totally sealed** by the authority of God.

The number **10** represented **human completeness, or fullness or power**.

In the ancient times, life was difficult and making a living for one's family was a constant struggle not to mention all the wars that ensued along the way. It is that way in many places on earth today.

It was not at all uncommon to see people who were missing fingers or entire limbs from their bodies.

Someone who had all their fingers and toes, **ten** each, were considered to be complete and the number **ten** came to represent human completeness.

Jesus told the church in Smyrna that she would be persecuted for **ten** days (Revelation 2:10).

This period of time symbolically means for a complete period of time but they were not told exactly how long that period of time would be.

The number is not be understood as a literal period of **ten** days.

In Revelation 12 we see the dragon appearing with **ten** horns.

The horn is a symbol of power and with the number **ten**, this dragon which represents Satan, had complete power over the people of the earth.

The number **12** came to represent organized religion or religious completeness.

There were **twelve** Patriarchs (Genesis 35:23-26).

Each patriarch fathered one of **twelve** tribes.

There were **twelve** original apostles (Luke 6:14-16).

Judas who betrayed Jesus, fell by transgression and was replaced by Matthias (Acts 1:26).

These **twelve** apostles were responsible for the beginning the preaching of the kingdom.

Whenever the first century Christians heard the number **twelve** they would instantly associate it with the patriarchs or the apostles who were both highly significant in both Judaism and Christianity.

In Revelation 12:1 we see a woman with "a crown of **twelve** stars on her head" which symbolically represented all of God's people.

The number **24** is puzzling, and it's symbolism is only found in the book of Revelation.

**Revelation 4:4 (NASB)**

<sup>4</sup> **Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones**

*I saw **twenty-four** elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.*

The suggestion of Victorinus in his commentary written about 260 A.D, makes a lot of sense.

He maintained the the number **24** represented the **12** patriarchs and the **12** apostles, thus having a representation of those from the Old Covenant and from the New.

Deuteronomy 33:6–25 lists the 12 patriarchs which gave name to the twelve tribes: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Joseph (including Ephraim and Manasseh), and Benjamin.

The number **1000** is prominent in the Revelation, especially in chapter 20:2, 3, 4

Symbolic numbers were multiplied by themselves or by other symbolic numbers in order to add emphasis or give the allusion of larger numbers than would be evident.

For instance a **thousand**, being a multiple of **10** would carry the significance of the number **10** but would obviously **represent a larger sum** than just the number **ten**.

The number **1000** is **ten** multiplied by itself **three** times, which means God is behind it.  $10^3$

So when the 1st century Christians saw the **thousand** years in the Revelation, they would realize that it meant **a large span of time sufficient to complete the divine will of God.**

We also see the number **12,000** in the Revelation.

This is the number **1000** which represents **ultimate divine completeness** multiplied by the number **12** which was **symbolic for organized religion** on earth.

Each tribe of the Israelites were represented by **12,000** individuals.

This would be the complete number of **all the saved members** of each tribe which surely meant more than a literal **12,000** in number.



The **144,000** is mentioned in Revelation 7:4 is **twelve** multiplied by itself **for emphasis** and then multiplied **by the number for ultimate completeness through God.  $12^2 \times 1000$**

This number is clearly symbolic and not in any way literal but simply represents the total number of the saved in the kingdom of God.

Mentioned again in

We see that this number of people represented those who had been redeemed:

**Revelation 14:1-4 (NASB)**

**<sup>1</sup> Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb *was* standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. <sup>2</sup> And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard *was* like *the sound* of harpists playing on their harps. <sup>3</sup> And they \*sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth. <sup>4</sup> ... These *are* the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb.**

Obviously being the **first fruits in the first century**, means there were going to be more to come in the future, making a literal interpretation of this number impossible.

This is where it gets interesting and there is no perfect system I know of for deciding whether or not something is to be taken literally or symbolically. There are some guidelines I use to help me along and while they are applicable in most instances, they cannot be considered an infallible system for interpretation.

The basic guidelines I use are:

1. Does it **force** something into a literal reality something that could not possibly be?

2. There are no animals in existence that have 7 crowned heads and ten horns (Revelation 12:3)

2. Does a literal understanding cause a **direct conflict** with God's word? There can not be a literal 1000 year reign of Christ on earth when scripture plainly tells us that the earth will be destroyed the next time Jesus comes (2 Peter 3:10-12, Hebrews 12:25-27).

3. Are we literalizing **one element** amidst a whole host of obviously figurative objects or numbers?

An angel with a figurative set of keys and a figurative chain is going to come down and bind Satan, represented by a figurative dragon and imprison him for a literal thousand years?

Picking one element out of a figurative scene and literalizing it is not going to be the most logical form of interpretation.

However...

4. The language is **not always** exclusively literal or symbolic.

Sometimes it bears elements of both.

**Revelation 17:12 (NASB)**

**12 "The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour.**

The Roman Empire was a provincial government and at the time of the writing of Revelation it really did have ten imperial provinces each one with its own ruler.

So one must keep in mind that there are occasions of literal and symbolic language in the same context.

5. The symbolic animals and some objects are for the most part consistent. For instance, the dragon always represents Satan no matter where he is mentioned in Revelation.

The four beasts around the throne of God introduced in Revelation 4:6 are the same as the four beasts spoken of again in Revelation 5:6; 5:14; 6:6; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; and 19:4.

So when one determines what the 4 beasts are, they can be reasonably assured that this will apply consistently throughout the rest of the book. This can be also be applied to the 24 elders around the throne of God.

There are exceptions, for instance candlesticks, which are introduced in Revelation 1:12, explained in Revelation 1:20 and meaning something different in Revelation 11:4.

The radiant woman in Revelation 12 is certainly not the same thing as the scarlet woman in Revelation 17.

#### 6. Sometimes Revelation is **its own best interpreter**.

It is important not to get lost in the imagery and overlook something significant in the text.

For instance in Revelation 17 we are introduced to a woman who is described as the "mother of harlots".

John reveals a whole lot of her undesirable characteristics and qualities and then at the end of the chapter in verse 18 identifies her as the "great city that reigns over the kings of the earth."

There are several other instances where the imagery is explained to John as in (Revelation 1:20).

Attention to the text is key.

#### 7. Don't get caught up in the symbolism and let it obscure the meaning of the **overall message**.

Often times symbolism is used to make a tremendous impression of the things being discussed.

#### 8. And finally, we must have a clear understanding of precisely who the villains of Revelation are.

Once we have determined who the enemies of God and His children are, we can match the characteristics of the symbolic villains in the Revelation to their counterparts in history.

So with these basic guidelines established we make a study of what the symbolic terms in Revelation meant to the first readers.

This sermon will be posted to our website should you desire to download it and study it in detail.

In humility, we will all have to agree that there is no definitive system in place for the interpretation of the symbolic language and we need to bear in mind that it was purposefully written this way in order to mask its true message from the oppressors of the first and second century readers.

The language is chosen to appeal largely to the imagination of the reader. There will be times when we are going to be faced with things like gold crowned locusts, shaped like horses with men's faces, women's hair, lion's teeth, wings and scorpion's tails (Revelation 9:3-10), and we'll just have to step back, look at the big picture and remember that the basic message of the Revelation is: God is running the show, Jesus is our champion, the good guys win everything and the bad guys lose it all.

## **Prayer and Invitation**

## OUR LOVING GOD

**DEVOTIONAL READING:** Psalm 93

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 48:1–3, 9–14

### PSALM 48:1–3, 9–14

<sup>1</sup> Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise,  
in the city of our God, his holy mountain.

<sup>2</sup> Beautiful in its loftiness,  
the joy of the whole earth,  
like the heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion,  
the city of the Great King.

<sup>3</sup> God is in her citadels;  
he has shown himself to be her fortress.

<sup>9</sup> Within your temple, O God,  
we meditate on your unfailing love.

<sup>10</sup> Like your name, O God,  
your praise reaches to the ends of the earth;  
your right hand is filled with righteousness.

<sup>11</sup> Mount Zion rejoices,  
the villages of Judah are glad  
because of your judgments.

<sup>12</sup> Walk about Zion, go around her,  
count her towers,

<sup>13</sup> consider well her ramparts,  
view her citadels,  
that you may tell of them  
to the next generation.

<sup>14</sup> For this God is our God for ever and ever;  
he will be our guide even to the end.

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### KEY VERSE

*This God is our God for ever and ever.—Psalm 48:14*

## OUR LOVE FOR GOD

Unit 3: Songs That Glorify the God of Love

## LESSONS 11–13

### LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the concept of God’s covenantal love.
2. Explain the dangers of putting confidence in the methods God uses to protect us instead of trusting directly in him.
3. Write a prayer thanking God for his love and protection.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. “Do You Love Me?”
- B. Lesson Context
  - I. God Glorifies Zion (PSALM 48:1–3)
    - A. With His Greatness (v. 1)
    - B. With His Presence (v. 2)
    - C. With His Protection (v. 3)
  - II. Celebrate God’s Leadership (PSALM 48:9–11)
    - A. Because of His Loyalty (v. 9)  
*Love Letters*
    - B. Because of His Righteousness (v. 10)
    - C. Because of His Judgments (v. 11)
  - III. Teach Future Generations (PSALM 48:12–14)
    - A. Based on God’s Protection (vv. 12, 13)  
*Home Church Memories*
    - B. Based on God’s Presence (v. 14)

#### Conclusion

- A. Our Loving God Leads and Protects Us
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

### HOW TO SAY IT

Bab-ih-*low*-nee-un.

Babylonian

Jebusite *Jeb*-yuh-site.

Nebuchadnezzar *Neb*-yuh-kud-*nez*-er.

patriarch *pay*-tree-ark.

Sinai *Sigh-nye* or *Sigh-nay-eye*.

Tevye *Tev-yuh*.

Yahweh (*Hebrew*) *Yah-weh*.

Zaphon *Za-fon*.

Zion *Zi-un*.

## Introduction

### A. “Do You Love Me?”

In the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, we encounter a poor dairy farmer, Tevye, who values highly the traditions of his people. But the rapidly changing times in which he lives finds him stretched when each of his three daughters defies tradition. Tevye’s role as family patriarch is to find a suitable match for each daughter. His tradition values finding a financially stable partner from within the ancient faith.

A hired matchmaker arranges for the oldest daughter to be wed to an elderly, widowed butcher. But she is secretly in love with a poor tailor. Those two beg Tevye to call off the arranged marriage so they can marry. Tevye is conflicted, but he sees how deeply his daughter cares for the tailor, so he relents out of love for her.

Tevye’s middle daughter reveals disregard for tradition by marrying a university student with a head full of revolutionary ideas. Tevye feels he has no choice but to accept the marriage. Then his third daughter does the unthinkable by marrying a Christian. Tevye reaches his breaking point and disowns her. No more!

In the middle of his turmoil, he finds himself insecure. Each of his daughters married for love, a choice not afforded Tevye and his wife when their marriage was arranged 25 years earlier. So Tevye turns to his wife and asks her if she loves him. They have never spoken of their feelings for each other, so she gives an indirect answer by offering evidence of her love: she has washed his clothes, cooked meals, cleaned house, and starved with him. Her loyalty is all the proof needed of her love for him.

Does God love us? The author of today’s psalm would reply, “Just look at the evidence!”

### B. Lesson Context

Psalms 48 is often categorized as one of the Zion Songs. This category also includes Psalms 46; 76; 84; 87, and 122 (some students also include 126; 129, and 137). These celebrate the glory of Mount Zion, the hill on which the temple in Jerusalem stood. They are concerned with the theme of God’s kingship, having been written against a backdrop of competing gods and warring nations. Nationalism and religion were inseparable in biblical times, and each nation was thought to have a dominant deity

who was responsible for the protection of its people. When nations warred, their gods warred as well. We see this in Exodus 12:12, where God, preparing Israel for the tenth and most devastating plague, says,

On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD.

Thematically, these songs celebrate God as Israel's king, who chose to rest his presence in Jerusalem and, in it, the temple (Psalm 46:5; 76:2; 84:1; 87:1–3; 122:1–3; plus today's text). From a perspective of comparative religion, a deity choosing to rest his presence on a strong mountain was not unique. For example, the pagan deity El was said to reside on Mount Zaphon (see more on Psalm 48:2, below). What is exceptional is the theme that God's reign doesn't stop at Israel's borders. He is "the great King over all the earth" (Psalm 47:2, plus today's text; compare 1 Kings 20:23, 28).

## I. God Glorifies Zion (PSALM 48:1–3)

### A. With His Greatness (v. 1)

#### 1. Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain.

When King David set out to unify the tribes of Israel, he strategically chose Jerusalem to be his capital. Jerusalem was centrally located between the upper and lower tribes; and as a Jebusite stronghold, it wasn't associated with either region. A walled city set on a *mountain* or hill was the perfect spot from which to reign.

However, the song doesn't open with a description of the height of the walls or the strength and numbers of the army stationed inside. Instead, attention is given to God's greatness and his being *worthy of praise*.

Interestingly, Jerusalem is referred to as "the city of David" more than three dozen times in the Old Testament, but never that way in any psalm. Instead, the Psalms refer to Jerusalem (or Zion; see 1 Kings 8:1) as, among other designations, "city of God" or "*city of our God*" four times. All Old Testament instances of those are in the Zion Songs (here and in Psalms 46:4; 48:8; and 87:3).

God's *holy mountain* is Mount Zion (Psalm 48:2, next). This is not the first time that God is associated with a mountain in his developing relationship with his people. Moses had stated that God would bring his people to live on "the mountain of your inheritance" (Exodus 15:17). Chapters later, God has the nation camp at the base of Mount Sinai, where he revealed his power and gave the Ten Commandments (20:1–17).

Now, here on Mount Zion, the people are reminded of the greatness of Yahweh (God's name in Hebrew, rendered *LORD* in translation). This greatness must result in praise.

### B. With His Presence (v. 2)

#### 2. Beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth, like the heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King.

Having established the emphasis on Yahweh, the psalmist briefly diverts his attention to the renown and setting of *Mount Zion*. With the designation *like the heights of Zaphon*, the translators have made a difficult choice. The word *Zaphon* also means "north" in the Hebrew language, and that is how it is translated in Psalm 89:12 and 107:3, context requiring it.

Regarding the verse at hand, the major Bible translations NET and CSB join NIV in rendering "Zaphon," while KJV, NKJV, NASB, NRSV, and ESV opt for "north." If a specific place is intended, then the psalmist is making a reference to a location where a pagan deity is imagined to dwell (see the



Lesson Context). In that case, the psalmist leaves no doubt that the God of Mount Zion is superior. On the other hand, if the psalmist intends a geographical direction, then this is further commentary on Jerusalem's geography (compare the text of and footnote to Isaiah 14:13 in the NIV).

Either way, the exuberant conviction of the psalmist is obvious: Mount Zion, *the city of the Great King*—designated this way only here and in Matthew 5:35—is (or should be) *the joy of the whole earth* and not of Israel alone. The close connection between God and Mount Zion is further seen in the Zion Songs at Psalms 76:2; 84:7; 87:2, 5.

***What Do You Think?***

How can we recast God as the joy of the whole earth when religion is viewed as a source of conflict and intolerance in many areas?

***Digging Deeper***

How does your evaluation of that obstacle in your locality influence how you will proclaim God as the joy of the whole world there?

### **C. With His Protection (v. 3)**

#### **3. God is in her citadels; he has shown himself to be her fortress.**

The psalmist turns his attention from Mount Zion back to *God*. The designation of God as Israel's *fortress* continues a similar thought from an earlier Zion Song (Psalm 46:11). By calling God their fortress, the psalmist reminds the people that God is their ultimate source of protection. The word translated *citadels* is rendered "fortresses" in other passages (example: Isaiah 23:13), thus establishing parallel thoughts here.

Strong walls are important for cities (see Nehemiah 1:1–6:15). Government, religion, and life itself are protected by such stone and mortar barriers. But the God who brought down the walls of Jericho (Joshua 6) can also bring down the walls of Jerusalem. The people must never lose sight of the fact that God, not walls of stone, is their ultimate protection. He will be their fortress as long as they do not forget him (compare Psalm 94:22).

In Psalm 48:4–8, not in today's text, we see the consequences for those who dare threaten Zion's security: God rightfully receives credit for destroying the enemy's military strength.

***What Do You Think?***

What will you do the next time you find yourself putting your trust in resources you can see to the exclusion of trusting in the unseen God?

***Digging Deeper***

How do 2 Kings 6:15–17; 2 Corinthians 4:18; 5:7; Romans 8:24; and/or Hebrews 11:1 inform your answer?

## **II. Celebrate God's Leadership**

### **(PSALM 48:9–11)**

#### **A. Because of His Loyalty (v. 9)**

#### **9. Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love.**

This is the only occurrence of the word *temple* in the Zion Songs (see the Lesson Context), although the alternative designation "house" occurs several times (Psalm 84:4, 10; 122:1, 9). Up until now, the reader's imagination has been directed to the geography and defenses of Jerusalem. As the

psalmist shifts attention to the temple, he again reminds the people that the true strength of Israel is to be found in God's presence among them.

When King Solomon prayed his prayer of dedication for the newly built temple, he was aware that even though God chose to make the temple his meeting place with Israel, God was in no way constrained by the structure. Solomon marveled at the fact that the vast heavens couldn't contain God, let alone the temple (2 Chronicles 6:18). Even so, God revealed that he had chosen the temple as his dwelling place as he sent his glory to fill it (7:1–3) and communicated to Solomon at night (7:12–22).

The temple is the ideal place to contemplate God's *unfailing love*. The Hebrew behind the translation *love* is very common in the Old Testament, occurring over 130 times, but in the Zion Songs it occurs only here. Elsewhere it is translated "kindness" (examples: Psalm 109:12, 16; Isaiah 54:8).

The disposition of unfailing love assumes a hierarchy in which one in a higher position is merciful to one in a lower. In biblical times, kings would enter into treaties with their subjects. These treaties outline the relationship between the two parties. The loyalty that is expected between the two parties may be expressed in terms of love. The king would love his people by protecting them and by ruling them with just laws. The people, in turn, would express their love for the king through their loyal obedience.

So *unfailing love* in this context refers primarily to King Yahweh's fierce and unwavering loyalty to his people. As the people meditate on God's track record as their king, they will find him to be nothing less than a perfect ruler. He has never failed them. He has provided for the Israelites throughout their history.

### *LOVE LETTERS*

Valentine's Day is nearly here. It is love-letter time.

How long has it been since you received a love letter or sent one? I have an old Whitman's chocolates box that my father gave to my mother in the late 1940s. Though the chocolates are long gone, the box is full of memories of their love. It contains 30 letters my dad sent to my mom while he was stationed away in the Army. They were newlyweds at the time.

Even though those letters have been in my possession for more than 25 years, I haven't read any of them. Why? I am fearful of invading my mother's privacy. I realize that there might be something intimate in those letters. My homesick father could have written something meant for my mother's eyes only. I don't want to intrude on that, so those letters will never be read by me.

I have no hesitation when it comes to reading the love letters of my heavenly Father, though. He wrote those letters specifically for me. He wants to maintain a deep relationship with me. He loves me and doesn't care who knows it.

Our heavenly Father knows we need to hear from him. His love compelled him to send us valuable letters. Are you meditating as deeply on the Psalms as you should?

—C. T.

### **B. Because of His Righteousness (v. 10)**

#### **10a. Like your name, O God, your praise reaches to the ends of the earth;**

The psalmist returns to a predominant theme of the Zion Songs. Yahweh's rule knows no limits. God's praises don't end at Israel's borders. When his people consider his faithfulness to them, their worshipful response should be so great that it extends to *the ends of the earth*. (In other Zion Songs, compare "to the ends of the earth" in Psalm 46:9; plus "praise" and "praising" in Psalms 76:10; 84:4, respectively.) The half-verse before us therefore scoffs at the notion that any of the countless deities of the ancient Near East can challenge God's reign.

#### **10b. your right hand is filled with righteousness.**

Interestingly, God's might is not mentioned as proof of his singular existence. Instead, the proof of his superiority over any so-called gods is depicted here in terms of his *righteousness*. This is a straightforward concept: it means that God always does the right thing.

This is the only place in the psalms known as Zion Songs where this word occurs (see the Lesson Context). But other psalms speak to God's righteousness, with contexts often pointing to God's righteous acts rather than only to God's righteous nature per se (compare Psalm 5:8; 9:8; 65:5; 103:6). So important is the concept of righteousness that in Psalm 89:14 it is paired with "justice" as "the foundation" of God's throne.

***What Do You Think?***

How will you answer someone who asks, "If God is righteous, then why is there so much injustice in the world?"

***Digging Deeper***

Consider how Paul interacted with audiences that accepted the authority of Scripture (example: Acts 13:13–43) and those that did not (examples: Acts 17:16–34; 24:24, 25).

### **C. Because of His Judgments (v. 11)**

#### **11. Mount Zion rejoices, the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments.**

Here we have another rarity: as "righteousness" in Psalm 48:10, above, occurs only there in the Zion Songs, the paired concepts of *rejoices* and *are glad* also occur only this one time in these psalms, although found frequently elsewhere (examples: Psalms 31:7; 32:11; 40:16). Indeed, the two concepts are found to be interchangeable as an author uses the typical Hebrew style of parallelism in poetic writing. Parallelism is where one line of text says virtually the same thing as the line that follows by use of synonyms or near synonyms.

An example of such parallelism involving joy and gladness is Psalm 53:6: "Let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!" Jacob was the name of the patriarch who had his name changed to Israel (Genesis 32:28), thus the two terms describe the same people group that are named after that man. The parallelism extends to what this people group is predicted to do: rejoice/be glad. Although not precise synonyms, they are very close in meaning.

And so it is in the verse at hand. *Mount Zion* refers to the city of Jerusalem and *the villages of Judah* are the rural hamlets nearby. Thus they both describe locations of people. God's protective *judgments* cover both (compare Psalm 97:8).

### **III. Teach Future Generations**

#### **(PSALM 48:12–14)**

#### **A. Based on God's Protection (vv. 12, 13)**

#### **12. Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers,**

After being explicit that the source of Jerusalem's security doesn't lie in her defense systems, the psalmist startles us with his encouragement that the people take stock in their man-made *towers*! The fall of Jericho affirmed that God's power is greater than brick and mortar protection (Joshua 6:1–25). That said, the psalmist seems to acknowledge that God uses walls (and armies) as methods of fulfilling his covenant loyalty toward his people. (Deuteronomy 28:52 indicates the exact opposite should the people fail to honor their part of the covenant.)

**13. consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation.**

The inspection of structures continues, with a purpose now revealed: to *tell of them to the next generation* (compare Psalms 34:11; 78:4–6). The worshippers are to become so familiar with the defenses of Jerusalem that they will be able to tell their children about the city's might. At first blush that may seem like an exercise in putting stock in human strength. But in this case, Jerusalem's strength is a figurative representation of God's protection and care.

***What Do You Think?***

How can we ensure that our support for, say, an antimissile defense system is not a failure to trust God for protection? What, if anything, does Deuteronomy 28:15, 52 add to the discussion?

***Digging Deeper***

Conversely, how can we ensure that our opposition to that same system is not out of line with the attitude expressed in Psalm 48:12, 13?

Ultimately, Israel fails to communicate to the next generation the importance of keeping its side of the covenant. Kings lead the people into idolatry, with injustice marring the nation. This results in a period of captivity, when God allowed foreign armies to conquer the land of the 12 tribes. The army of King Nebuchadnezzar will besiege Jerusalem, destroy its walls, and carry its people into exile (2 Chronicles 36:15–20).

***What Do You Think?***

What creative ways can you imagine for telling the generation that follows yours about how God has provided for and sustained you?

***Digging Deeper***

Consider the relative values of direct, personal testimony and indirect (social media, etc.) testimony.

### ***HOME CHURCH MEMORIES***

I get a little misty-eyed when I walk through the door of my boyhood church. Going home causes you to remember. I think back to my Sunday school classroom—filled with active, inquisitive children. Oh, how our hearts thrilled at the character-building stories of the Bible! We memorized our Bible verses, and we still can quote them after these many years. We made craft projects that brightened the day of a parent or grandparent.

Small things? Mere entertainment? Not on your life! Through such methods we were taught God's Word. I can still see the faces of those who came up out of the water, grinning from ear to ear, after being baptized into Christ. God showed himself to us, alive and active, in every gathering. He still does today, and he tends to do so through human vessels. What should be your role in this?

—C. T.

### **B. Based on God's Presence (v. 14)**

**14. For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.**

The psalm resolves on a final note of confidence regarding *our God* (compare Psalms 48:1, 8; and 122:9). In verse 13, the readers are instructed to pass their knowledge of God and his ways to their offspring. But the knowledge of God is not the only thing moving in the future. God, himself, goes with his people. The one who *will be our guide* is the one who leads or brings (same Hebrew word in Psalms 78:26, 52; 80:1). Our source of protection and safety will lead us throughout our entire lives, if we let him. We have the assurance that when we reach the end of our days (*to the end*), God will be right there.

## Conclusion

### A. Our Loving God Leads and Protects Us

A song celebrating the city walls might seem out of place to the modern reader. For the Israelites, however, the structure was a tangible indication of God's rule and presence. He was their king, the one who promised to lead and protect them. This psalm would have presented a challenge to the worshipper during the time of the Babylonian exile. The reality of Jerusalem's destruction in 586 BC starkly contrasted with the message of Psalm 48.

The tension is relieved as we consider again King Solomon's prayer of dedication of the newly built temple. He anticipated the possibility that Israel would rebel against God and be cast into exile as a result. Solomon implored God that if his people would deeply repent of their sins and turn their hearts back to him, then he would hear them, forgive them, and restore them (2 Chronicles 6:36–39). The irony is palpable, since wise Solomon himself ended up much less than wise as he allowed foreign wives to lead him into idolatry within Jerusalem's walls (see 1 Kings 11:7–10).

Visual for Lessons 11 & 12. *During discussion of the question for Psalm 48:13b, ask how music can be part of the "telling" process.*

God continued to be their king and their fortress, even after the city walls were demolished by a foreign army. The subsequent exile challenged Israel's confidence in God, but he proved his loyalty to them time and again—even as their disloyalty resulted in their own demise.

Today, we serve our Lord Jesus, who expressed his loyalty to us through his death and resurrection. We can be confident in his good rule and love for us. Our task is to pass that love and message to others (Matthew 28:19, 20). That's the greatest show of loyalty to him we can offer!

### B. Prayer

Lord God, you are our mighty king. We thank you for the ways you've protected us throughout the years. We thank you for governing us with holiness and righteousness. May everything we do, think, and say be an expression of our love for you. We pray in the name of King Jesus. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

God's protection is an expression of his love.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Terrill, C., Shallenberger, L., & Lueders, B. (2018). [Our Loving God](#). In R. L. Nickelson (Ed.), *The NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, 2018–2019* (Vol. 25, pp. 201–207). Colorado Springs, CO: Standard Publishing.

