

In the history of the Jews and in the Bible certain numbers have symbolical meaning.

### **The number 1. The symbol of unity and exclusiveness**

The number 1 is a symbol of unity and exclusion of others of its kind.

#### **a. The symbol for the God of the Bible with the exclusion of all other so-called 'gods'**

There exists only one God (Deuteronomy 4:35,39; 6:4; Mark 12:29). He is the LORD who has revealed himself in the Bible. Before him no god was formed, nor will there be one after him (Isaiah 43:10). Apart from him there is no Saviour (Isaiah 43:11). Without letting go of his divine nature he took on the human nature and entered his creation and human history through Jesus Christ (John 1:1,14; Colossians 1:15). God has one divine nature (John 10:30; 1 Corinthians 8:4) with three distinguishable persons: God the Father from whom all things come and for whom we live (1 Corinthians 8:6a; Ephesians 4:6), one Lord Jesus Christ through whom all things came and through whom we live (1 Corinthians 8:6b; Ephesians 4:5), the one Mediator of creation, salvation and judgement (1 Timothy 2:5) and one Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ or Christ in us (Romans 8:9-10; Ephesians 4:4) by whom all Christians are baptised into the one Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13) and through whom all Christians have access to God the Father (Ephesians 2:18). During the Old Testament period God spoke to our ancestors through the Old Testament prophets and during the New Testament period he spoke to us through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2; cf. 1 Peter 1:9-12). Only the God of the Bible is good (Matthew 19:17). All other so-called 'gods' of the other religions do not possess the divine nature. Believing that God is one or professing that God is one is not enough, because also the demons believe that God is one and shudder (James 2:19).

#### **b. The symbol for the people of the God of the Bible**

All God's people are united in one Body, the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 2:14-15; 4:4). They constitute the one flock of Jesus Christ with Jesus Christ as the only Shepherd (John 10:16). Besides this there is no other people of God.

### **The number 2. The symbol of supplementing or complementing and witnessing**

The number 2 is a symbol for supplementing or complementing one another (Genesis 2:24); thus a symbol for witnessing (Mark 6:7); and thus a symbol for establishing the truth that is testified (Matthew 18:16).

#### **a. The symbol in the Bible**

*The two partners* in a Christian marriage complement one another to be a unity (Genesis 2:24; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Matthew 19:5-6).

*The two greatest commandments.* *The two tablets* of the Testimony were inscribed on two stone tablets and contained the Ten Commandments. They contain God's testimony concerning how his covenant people should relate to him and to their neighbour. They are summarised by the command to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and the command to love your neighbour as yourself. The whole biblical revelation (the Law and the Prophets) hang on these two truths (Exodus 31:18; 32:15-16; Matthew 22:37-39; Mark 12:30-31; cf. Revelation 9:20-21).

*Two witnesses* in a dispute are needed to establish the truth of any matter (Deuteronomy 17:6; Matthew 18:16; 1 Timothy 5:19).

*Two Christian workers.* Jesus sent out his twelve and seventy-two disciples two by two to preach repentance (to testify to the truth) and to heal the sick (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1).

## **b. The symbol in Revelation**

Jesus gives power to his *two witnesses* and they will prophesy for 1260 days clothed in sackcloth. *The two olive trees* symbolise that they are anointed with the Spirit. *The two lampstands* symbolise that they are witnesses. Like God's witnesses in the Old Testament they have great authority (Revelation 11:3-4).

Like 'the temple of God', 'the outer court' and 'the holy city' (Revelation 11:8), 'the two witnesses' have figurative or symbolic meaning. The specific article '*the two witnesses of mine*' (Revelation 11:3) point to a specific group already known in the Bible, as also their description in Revelation 11:4 proves.

Because these two witnesses witness during the whole New Testament period (symbolic 1260 days), they must represent the Church as a witnessing institute that proclaims the gospel during that period. Because no single individual on earth has witnessed for such a long period, the two witnesses cannot refer to any specific two historic individuals.

Just as Jesus sent out his missionaries two by two (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1), in order to complement one another, so throughout the whole New Testament period the Church as an organisation has a missionary task to fulfil and has sent out servants (the offices as ministers and missionaries and the ordinary believers) to complement one another in fulfilling that task.

Thus, the two witnesses of Christ represent the Church as a witnessing institute that proclaims the gospel during the whole New Testament period. It is a picture of the Church as a mighty organisation and missionary movement, functioning through its gifted and faithful servants. They do not minister as individuals, but complement one another. They need one another's strengths and contribution (cf. John 4:36-38; 1 Corinthians 3:5-10)!

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## **The number 3. The symbol of the Triune God**

*The Triune God.* Although the nature of God is unfathomable, God has revealed himself to man as one God with three inner distinctions within the unity of his divine nature. Christians are baptised in the one name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Christians are greeted by God "who is, and who was, and who is to come", and the seven fold Spirit and "Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth" (Revelation 1:4-5). God the Father sits on the throne in heaven, the Lamb stands at the centre of the throne and the seven fold Spirit is before the throne (Revelation 4:5; 5:6).

*Three woes* are God's final warning of imminent judgement and the final call to repentance (Revelation 8:3).

*The three evil spirits* coming out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet symbolise a kind of evil trinity that concocts and introduces satanic, hellish, evil ideas, plans, designs, projects, methods and enterprises into the sphere of thought and action.

*A third* is a great number, yet sovereignly limited by God. Such a number of people would be affected by God's trumpets of judgement (Revelation 8:7-12; 9:15,18). And such a number of angels would be dragged by Satan into the fall in heaven (Revelation 12:4).

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## **The number 4. The symbol of the earth or the world**

See the number 40 at the end.

### **a. The symbol in the Old Testament**

*The four quarters* of the earth represent the four directions: north, south, east and west and symbolise everywhere on earth. God would gather the scattered exiles from the four quarters of the earth (Isaiah 11:12).

*The four winds* stand for the four compass directions from which the wind blows and symbolise instruments of God's wrath and judgement (Jeremiah 49:35-36).

*The four universal calamities* (sword, famine, beasts, plague) symbolise the different means to destroy unbelievers and believers alike on earth (Ezekiel 14:21).

*The four beasts* coming out of the sea symbolise four kings or kingdoms that will appear on the earth (Daniel 7:3,17). They represent all the kingdoms that come and go throughout the history of the world.

#### **b. The symbol in Revelation**

*The four living creatures* (Revelation 4:6-8) are heavenly beings that represent God's whole creation before God's throne and that worship God who reigns over all history, especially the history of salvation.

*The four universal calamities* (sword, famine, plague, beasts) symbolise the means and power of Death and Hades to cause suffering and death to both unbelievers and believers on earth (Revelation 6:8).

*The four winds* stand for the four compass directions from which the wind blows and symbolise God's instruments of wrath and judgement on earth (Revelation 7:1; cf. Jeremiah 49:35-36). They are a picture of destruction (Job 1:19; Psalm 83:15; Isaiah 41:16; Jeremiah 4:11-12). They surround the whole earth on which people live and can strike everywhere and at all times as God determines! They do not represent distinct judgements, but symbolise God's terrible judgements, which threaten the earth and its inhabitants. They are not mentioned again in the book of Revelation and therefore probably summarize all God's destructive judgements that occur under the seals, the trumpets and the bowls. The fact that God's angels are holding the four winds back symbolises that God's destructive judgements are also under God's sovereign control! God's destructive angels can do nothing unless God permits them to act. God sovereign authority 'gives' them their power to harm.

*The four corners of the earth* (Revelation 7:1) (the four compass directions)(Jeremiah 49:35-36; Matthew 24:31) symbolise everywhere on earth! God's good angels are thus present everywhere on earth!

*The four (good) angels* (Revelation 7:1) standing at the four corners of the earth represent God's power to harm the land and the sea by means of the four winds (his instruments of judgement). They hold back the four winds of the earth until the servants of God have been sealed on their foreheads. They should not be equated with the four evil angels.

*The four (evil) angels* (Revelation 9:14-15) bound (thus restricted) at the great river Euphrates and kept ready for the right moment to kill a third of mankind, represent Satan's power to cause war and destruction on earth.

*The four words for time* (hour, day, month and year) (Revelation 9:15) symbolise God's absolute sovereignty over time on earth, whether short or long. Nothing happens that he has not decided or permitted and all things happen at the precise time he determines.

*The four cardinal sins against fellowmen* (murder, magic arts, sexual immorality and thefts) (Revelation 9:21) represent the impenitent humanity in the world.

*The four sides* of the New Jerusalem (God's community) on the new earth symbolises that people from every nation on earth may enter the Church (Revelation 21:13).

*A quarter* is the number symbolising a great number with respect to those who dwell on the earth. Such a number of people on earth would be affected by the universal calamities throughout history (Revelation 6:8).

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#### **The number 5. The symbol of a divinely limited period of time shorter than the life-span of man**

*Five months* is the divinely limited time during which the demonic powers would make painful attacks on unbelievers and torment them (Revelation 9:5,10). Although the five month period is about the life-span of locusts, the number 5 rather symbolises a divinely limited period of time shorter than the life-span of a man, because the number 6 is the number of man (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13 for believers).

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## **The number 6 The symbol of man**

### **a. The symbol in the Old Testament**

On *the sixth creation day* (Genesis 1:26-27) God created the man and the woman. The number symbolises that man is a created being.

The *six creation days* in which God worked (in the sense that he created) (Exodus 20:9,11) represent the command that man must do all his work *in six weekdays*. Man should rest the seventh day, that is, one out of every seven workdays.

Every seventh year after *six years of production* man must let the land have a sabbath of rest (Leviticus 25:3). It symbolises that man must set a limit to his ambitions on earth.

### **b. The symbol in Revelation**

The number 6 is *the number of man* (Revelation 13:18). This number never reaches the number 7!

*The sixth seal* introduces the final judgement day of impenitent mankind and affects six objects of creation as well as six classes of wicked people (Revelation 6:12-17).

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## **The number 666. The symbol of divinely determined imperfection and failure of the beast**

The mark of the beast is his name or his number. It is a man's number and is 666 (Revelation 13:16-18). While the number 7 is the number of divine perfection, the number 6 always falls short and can never become the number 7. It symbolises missing the mark and failure. It symbolises the absolute highest development of man and creation without attaining to fellowship with God. *The number 666 is a symbol of divinely determined (the number 3) imperfection and failure (the number 6) of the beast.*

The number of the beast does not represent a particular identifiable historical person, but all the beasts throughout the whole New Testament period. It refers to the arrogantly claimed perfections of all the beasts (governments and their leaders), which always falls short of the genuine perfections of God. It symbolizes the absolute failure of all Satan's antichristian politics, religions, ideologies, philosophies and sciences to attain the goals and perfections of God *throughout the New Testament period*.<sup>1</sup>

The *number 666* symbolises divinely determined imperfection, the absolute highest development and accomplishments the beast and his allies can attain during their reign throughout the whole New Testament period. The beast and his allies attempt to simulate Christ, but always fail to reach 777, which represents God's perfection.

The *number 666* symbolises divinely determined failure, the absolute and continual failure (failure upon failure upon failure) of the goals and accomplishments of the beast and his allies (including natural man) during their reign! The plots and attacks of the beast and his antichristian allies will ultimately fail! Because the beast and his followers seek their glory in man (Jeremiah 17:5-8; cf. Psalm 108:12-13; 146:3; Isaiah 2:22; 30:1-5), they are doomed to fail! Because the beasts throughout history have always tried to be like God, they have always failed miserably! Compare the kings and kingdoms of Assyria and Babylon in the book of Isaiah and the kings and kingdoms in the book of Daniel. It is Christ and his followers that will conquer (Revelation 17:14).

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<sup>1</sup> Hendriksen pp. 181-182

## **The number 7. The symbol of divine perfection and completion, always attaining God's purpose in heaven and on earth**

See the numbers 70 and '70 sevens' at the end.

### **a. The symbol in the Old Testament.**

The *seventh creation day* symbolises God's perfection in creation. In six creation days God had completed the creation of the universe and earth in all its vast array (details)! God rested, that is, he did no more creation (Genesis 2:1-3). Because the seventh creation day has no closing formula like the other creation days (Genesis 1:31b) there always remains a perfect divine sabbathrest for the believers: the perfect eternity together with a perfect God (Hebrews 4:9-10).

The *seventh day of every week* symbolises God's perfection in resting. He set that day aside and dedicated it as a day of rest for man (Genesis 2:2-3). He made that day for the benefit of man (Mark 2:27-28). It should be set aside and dedicated to rest, that is, to refrain from one's usual work during the week (Exodus 20:8-11) in order to get refreshed (Exodus 23:12), to meet with other believers in a holy assembly (Leviticus 23:3) and to do good works and save lives (Mark 3:4). This is a part of God's moral law and is a weekly reminder that the believer's ultimate destiny is to share in God's perfect and eternal rest.

*Sprinkling blood seven times* before the curtain in the temple was a part of the ceremonial law and symbolises the perfect atonement for sin which God requires and the perfect forgiveness of sins which God gives (Leviticus 4:17,20; cf. Hebrews 9:12-14; 10:1-4).

### **b. The symbol in Revelation**

*The seven spirits* symbolise the perfect fulness of the Spirit of God present at the throne in heaven (Revelation 1:4; 4:5) and sent out into all the earth (Revelation 5:6) to work in all the congregations of the world (Revelation 2:7).

*The seven lampstands* (Revelation 1:12,20) symbolise the seven historical congregations which represent the perfect fulness of God's community on earth. They represent all the congregations in the world throughout salvation history. They have Christ present and active in their midst (Revelation 2:7).

*The seven stars* (Revelation 1:16,20) in the right hand of Christ symbolise the seven angels, messengers or representatives of the seven historical congregations and represent the perfect fulness of God's representative leadership on earth. They represent all the leadership of the congregations in the world throughout salvation history (Revelation 1:20).

*The seven letters* of Christ to the seven historical congregations represent Christ's perfect personal messages to every congregation in the world and in history, which at different times in their history may experience the same conditions that are written in these letters (Revelation chapter 2 and 3). Most of the letters have seven parts: the addressed, the self-designation of Christ, his recommendation, his rebuke, his command to change, his exhortation to listen or obey and his promise to those who overcome.

*The scroll sealed with seven seals* (Revelation 5:1) symbolise God's complete, perfect and eternal plan with regard to salvation and judgement, his all-embracing purpose with regard to everything that must take place in the history of this world between Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming (Revelation 1:19; 4:1; 16:17; 21:6). Because the scroll was sealed, its contents was still not yet revealed or executed. If it had remained sealed, there would have been no proclamation of the gospel of salvation, there would have been no judgements on the world that persecutes the Christians, there would have been no protection of Christians or victories for Christians and there would have been no new heaven and new earth! The breaking of a seal symbolises that Christ not only reveals God's plan with respect to salvation and judgement, but also executes that plan! When all seven seals have been broken *God's plan with respect to salvation and judgement will have been carried out completely and perfectly!* Christ rules the world in the interest of the Church (cf. Ephesians 1:9-11,20-23)!



*The seven horns and the seven eyes* symbolise Christ's omnipotence and omniscience (Revelation 5:6).

*The seven seals* (Revelation 6:1), *the seven trumpets* (Revelation 8:6), *the seven thunders* (Revelation 10:3-4) and *the seven bowls containing the seven last plagues* (Revelation 15:1) all symbolise God's (Christ's) different and yet divinely complete and perfect works that are being carried out in the history of the world.

*The seven heads and seven crowns* of the dragon (Revelation 12:3) and *the seven heads* of the beast (Revelation 13:1; 17:3) symbolise their arrogant claim to complete and perfect rule over this present world. Every head is symbolically a new manifestation of their reign over the wicked and persecuting world (cf. 1 John 5:19). Their arrogant claim is a lie (cf. John 8:44), because the only Ruler of the universe from eternity to eternity is the Triune God (Psalm 9:7; 145:13; 146:10; 2 Peter 1:11)!

The outward structure of the book of Revelation is governed by the number seven and the book is divided into *seven parallel sections*, each describing principles operating in human history from a different point of view.

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**The number 3½. The symbol of a divinely limited period of affliction that will not extend endlessly, but will unexpectedly be broken off**

**a. The symbol in 1 Kings** (1 Kings 17:1; 18:1; Luke 4:25; James 5:17-18; Revelation 11:6).

The book of 1 Kings was written before 586 B.C. During the Old Testament there was a period of 3½ years, which God's people never forgot! The prophet Elijah prayed that it would not rain except at his word. And it did not rain on the land for 3½ years (most probably from April 860 to November 859 B.C.) and there was a severe drought and famine in the land. Jesus also refers to this period of affliction in the book of Revelation when he said: "It will not rain during that time" (cf. Revelation 11:6)! Yet at the same time this 3½ year period was a period during which the power of God's Word was exhibited through the prophet Elijah. Although God's true Old Testament people (the believers) were persecuted by Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 18:10), they were not destroyed, but were nourished by God in a miraculous way (1 Kings 17:2-6; 18:4; 19:18)!

*This literal 3½ year period* became a symbol for other divinely limited periods of affliction in God's history of salvation during which God's kingdom and the proclamation of his Word were carried forward in spite of opposition and persecution!

**b. The symbol in Daniel** (Daniel 7:25; 9:27; 12:7).

Daniel's theology of the kingdoms of the world.

Daniel gives a theology of the kingdoms of the world: God's perspective on the kingdoms of the world in their relationship to his everlasting kingdom. The periods of affliction in history under the governments of the world *all have a divinely limited time!*

In Daniel 2:31-44 the large statue represents the mighty Babylonian kingdom under Nebuchadnezzar that eventually crumbled and was eclipsed by the kingship of God that endures forever (Daniel 2:44)!

In Daniel 7:2-14 the beasts represent any historical kingdom or empire that culminates in one of the many historical antichristian political governments in the history of the world with one of the many historical antichrists as its leader (cf. 1 John 2:18). This tyrant king in history was judged in the heavenly court, slain and destroyed in hell. But the other governments in the world (beasts) were stripped of their authority (to harm the saints of God) and were allowed to live on for a period of time (Daniel 7:12). The kingship of the one like a son of man together with the saints (the believers) continued unabated (Daniel 7:14,17-18)!

In Daniel 7:19-27 the final beast with its tyrant king, the small horn, is an allusion to king Antiochus IV who waged war against the saints (the believers in the LORD in Jerusalem) and oppressed them. He tried to extend his evil rule during the period of affliction, but was judged in the heavenly court and his evil rule was

abruptly cut off. But the kingship of God through his saints (the believers) remained an everlasting kingship (Daniel 7:22,25-27)!

The small horn (Antiochus IV, one of the antichrists) “tried to change the set times and the laws” (Daniel 7:25), which God sovereignly ordained with respect to how human history develops and in particular how one government (kingdom) follows another. But he failed and other antichrists (1 John 2:18) after him will also certainly fail, because it is not any human king or ruler on earth that determines the set times and laws, but the God of the Bible (cf. Psalm 31:15; Isaiah 33:6)!

In Daniel 8:3-25 the beasts are the Medo-Persian Empire and the Greek Empire under Alexander the Great that split into four kingdoms at Alexander’s death (Daniel 8:8,20-21). The tyrant king is again an allusion to Antiochus IV that desecrated the temple in 167 B.C. (Daniel 8:11-12), but eventually was destroyed not by human power (Daniel 8:25).

In Daniel 9:16-17,24-27 the ruler who came to destroy the city and the sanctuary (Daniel 9:26) is again an allusion to Antiochus IV. In 171 B.C. he made a covenant with the Reformist Jews, who adopted the heathen Greek culture and enforced it on Jerusalem. Three and a half years later, in 167 B.C., he desecrated the temple. But the end of the time of his evil rule was decreed by God (Daniel 9:27). The temple was re-dedicated in 164 B.C. and Antiochus died in 163 B.C.

Daniel 11:1-4 refers to the wars during the Medo-Persian Empire and the Greek Empire (11:2), especially between the southern king (the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt) and the northern king (the Seleucid dynasty of Syria) from 312 B.C. to the time of king Antiochus IV (175-163 B.C.). These wars are symbolically represented by the “four kings or kingdoms schema” (Daniel 11:1-4; cf. 7:17) found in Daniel 2:36-40 and Daniel 7:4-8,17.

In Daniel 11:21-45 the king who will do what he pleases (Daniel 11:36) is also an allusion to Antiochus IV. He took action against the believers in the Lord and showed favour to the unbelievers (Daniel 11:30). He desecrated the temple (Daniel 11:31), but the believers resisted him (Daniel 11:32b-33). He magnified himself against every ‘god’ and blasphemed the God of gods (Daniel 11:36a). But the time of the end of his evil rule has been determined (by God) and it must take place (Daniel 11:36b). He will come to his end, and no one will help him (Daniel 11:45)!

#### Summary of Daniel’s theology of the kingdoms of the world.

Throughout history, kings and kingdoms of the world follow one another. Among them are kings that arrogantly set themselves above every god, do what they please and persecute and oppress God’s people (Daniel 2:12-13; 3:15; 7:8,21,25; 8:11-13,23-25; 9:26-27; 11:31,32,36). But at God’s appointed time, a definite end will come to each king in human history (Daniel 5:25-28; 11:27b). It is God who “changes times and seasons and who sets up kings and deposes them” (Daniel 2:21; 4:17,25,32; 5:21,23; 7:11-12,26; 8:25b; 10:20), it is God who saves his people (Daniel 3:17-18,28-29; 6:20,27) and in the end it is always God’s kingdom that prevails (Daniel 2:44; 4:3,34-35; 6:26; 7:14,18,27)! God is “the God of all man-made gods in the religions of the world and the Lord of all kings in human history” (Daniel 2:47). That is the dominant message of the book of Daniel.

This has happened during the time of the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, (Daniel chapters 2 to 4) and the Median king, Darius, (Daniel chapter 6) and will again happen during the oppressive reign of the Greek Seleucid king, Antiochus IV, (Daniel chapter 8, 9 and 11). In the midst of extreme oppression and persecution by this earthly king, the people of God know for certain what the final outcome will be. “Though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered, ... those who are wise will instruct many” (Daniel 11:33-35). “There will be a time of distress, .... but at that time your people will be delivered” (Daniel 12:1). “None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand” (Daniel 12:10b).

The Apocryphical books, 1 and 2 Maccabees, describe this last historical event in the period of affliction and its outcome in greater detail (1 Maccabees chapter 1 to 4, 6:1-17; 2 Maccabees chapter 3 to 10. Read them!). The book of Daniel is an apocalyptic book that *reveals*, not one definite period in history, but conditions that are constantly repeated in history! It reveals what constantly happens in human history, but also that in all human history God is in control and will have the ultimate victory!

## The symbolic “time, times and half a time” in the book of Daniel.<sup>2</sup>

The book of Daniel chapters 7 to 12 was written in about 160 B.C. In the book of Daniel the number 3½ is presented as “a time, times and half a time” (Daniel 7:25; 12:7), as “in the middle of the seven” (Daniel 9:27) and as numbers that approximate 3½ years (Daniel 8:14; 12:11-12). The number symbolises a period of oppression, persecution or affliction that threatens to extend itself, but is divine limited and is suddenly and unexpectedly broken off in the middle. The number 3½ suggests ‘one time’ that threatens to extend itself to ‘two times’, but before it can double itself again it is suddenly and unexpectedly stopped! The tyrant (for example: Antiochus IV) expected to rule for ‘seven times’, which is symbolic for ‘eternity’, but he is cut off in the middle! The period of tyranny is suddenly and unexpectedly halved! This sudden and unexpected end means that the tyrant that causes the affliction will certainly suffer defeat; and it means that the believers who suffer affliction will certainly receive the kingdom (Daniel 7:27). Thus, in a sovereign way God allots a limited time to every tyrant and every period of affliction in the history of this world. They are all under the sovereign rule of God and God will suddenly and unexpectedly terminate them all! This is a great encouragement for Christians!

Antiochus IV tried to change ‘the set times and the laws’ (Daniel 7:25). This does not refer to an attempt to change the calendar, but to an attempt to change the course of history. Only God “changes times and seasons, sets up kings and deposes them” (Daniel 2:21). Antiochus, like all dictators and tyrants in the history of this world, made decisions regarding how human history unfolds and in particular how one regime follows another. However, these decisions are fixed by decree - God’s decree and not a human being’s decree! By forcing his way to the throne and by bulldozing his way through history, Antiochus defied the shaping of history otherwise laid out by God. The question implicitly asked at the end of Daniel 7:25a is, “How long will this be allowed to go on?” The explicit answer to that question comes in Daniel 7:25b: Antiochus will be allowed to control events for ‘a period, periods, and half a period’.

But this way of speaking carries no implication whatsoever for the chronological length of time that will correspond to these ‘periods’. If Daniel 7:25a alludes to the reign of Antiochus IV more generally (the changing of times and laws) rather than to events after 168 B.C. in particular (the oppression of the saints), then the “period, periods and half a period” referred to here as likely began with Antiochus’ appropriation of the throne, his appointment of Jason as high priest and his encouragement of the Hellenistic reforms of Jason, all in 175 B.C. (2 Maccabees 4:1-17), or it began with his first desecration of the temple (the looting the temple treasury) in 169 B.C. (1 Maccabees 1:20-24; 2 Maccabees 5:11-23). The erection of the abomination in the temple took place in 167 B.C. (1 Maccabees 1:29-64; 2 Maccabees 6:1-11). Both the rededication of the temple in 164 B.C. (1 Maccabees 4:36-61) and Antiochus’s death a few months later in 163 B.C. (1 Maccabees 6:1-17) would be seen as partial fulfilments of what is promised at the end of this “period, periods and half a period” (Daniel 7:26-27). Thus the actual period of time symbolised by the symbolical “period, periods and half a period” was much more than 3½ actual years! The number 3½ in the book of Daniel was not intended to be numerically or chronologically calculated.

The phrase ‘time, times and half a time’ was commonly taken as a cryptic way of saying 3½ years. But the literal time from the desecration of the temple on 15 Kislev in 167 B.C. (1 Maccabees 1:54), to its rededication on 25 Kislev in 164 B.C. (1 Maccabees 4:52-54), was only 3 years and 10 days. The time of oppression was closer to 3½ years if it is reckoned to begin with events earlier in 167 B.C. (cf. 1 Maccabees 1:20,29-53) or if its end is reckoned to involve Antiochus’ death, which took place in 163 B.C. (cf. 1 Maccabees 6:16). Thus, the interpretation of a literal 3½ years period rests on a mistaken premise.

‘A time, times, and half a time’<sup>3</sup> is not a cryptic way of saying ‘3½ chronologically measured years’. Whatever the significance of later time references in Daniel 8:14; 9:27; 12:7,11,12, the word ‘time’ or ‘period’<sup>4</sup> is not simply a substitute for the word ‘year’<sup>5</sup>. ‘A time or period’ could be a year long, but need not be. After the slaying of the beast with the little horn “the other beasts were allowed to live for a time or a period.”<sup>6</sup> Nebuchadnezzar is “given the mind of an animal till seven times<sup>7</sup> pass by for him”. This does not

<sup>2</sup> John E. Goldingay, Daniel, Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 30, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Hebrew: idan, idanin, uflag idan

<sup>4</sup> Hebrew: ‘idan, Greek: καιρος

<sup>5</sup> Hebrew: shenah, Greek: ετος

<sup>6</sup> Hebrew: ‘idan, Greek: καιρος



imply seven literal years, but simply the complete time determined by God! Therefore the expression ‘time, times and half a time’ is not a complex way of saying ‘3½ times’. This way of speaking carries no implication whatsoever for the chronological length of time that will correspond to these periods. Just as the numbers 70 years (Daniel 9:2) and 70 sevens (Daniel 9:24-27) are not intended to be literally exact numbers of years, so the number 3½ times is not intended to be a literally exact number of years.

The number 3½ suggests a period of affliction that threatens to extend itself longer: one period, then a double period, then a quadruple period ... but the anticipated sequence suddenly breaks off, so that ‘the seven periods’ (in effect an eternity, an endless lengthening of periods) that were threatened are suddenly and unexpectedly halved! The king symbolised by the small horn has his time allotted by God and that allotted time is not without end! The arrogant king himself is under God’s control. The period he rules is a long one, but it is brought to a sudden termination.

### c. The symbol in Revelation

The book of Revelation was written about 97 A.D.

The symbolic “time, times and half a time” in the book of Revelation.

The Author of the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation is God. He uses the number 3½ in both books. By comparing Revelation 11:3 (1260 days) with Revelation 11:6 (“it will not rain during the time they are prophesying”)(cf. Luke 4:25) we know that Jesus was referring to a divinely limited period of affliction that will not extend endlessly, but will unexpectedly be broken off.

The number *42 months* (Revelation 11:2; 13:5), or *1260 days* (Revelation 11:3; 12:6) or ‘*a time, times and half a time*’ (Revelation 12:14) as in the book of Daniel symbolises a period of oppression, persecution or affliction that threatens to extend itself (to seven times, symbolically to eternity), but is divinely limited and suddenly and unexpectedly broken off in the middle. Also this way of speaking carries no implication whatsoever for the chronological length of time that will correspond to these periods.

But unlike in the book of Daniel, the book of Revelation clearly reveals the beginning and end of this period referred to! This period *begins* with the first coming of Christ and ends with the second coming of Christ. This period begins with the birth, (death), resurrection, ascension and enthronement of Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:5-6) when Satan suffered a decisive defeat (Revelation 12:7-9). Christ’s enthronement resulted in Satan and his power being bound (curbed, curtailed, restricted, limited). And this period *ends* when the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Revelation 11:2-3; cf. Luke 21:24; Romans 11:25), the Church’s witnessing task is completed and the great tribulation, the physical resurrection from the dead, the final judgement and the establishment of the final phase of God’s kingdom takes place (Revelation 11:3,11-18). This sudden and unexpected end means certain failure for the one that causes the affliction, but receiving the kingdom of God in its final phase for the ones that suffer (Revelation 11:15).

Thus in the book of Revelation the numbers ‘42 months’, ‘1260 days’ and ‘time, times and half a time’ symbolise the whole New Testament period between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming. This period of time signifies the the apocalyptic period of time during which Satan and his helpers persecute the Church while the Church proclaims the gospel (Revelation 11:7; Matthew 24:14). Like in the book of Daniel, also this period of time is not determined by Satan and his helpers, but is sovereignly determined by God (Matthew 24:36,42)! This main long period of 3½ years is followed immediately by a very short period of 3½ days, during which the witnesses are killed and the voice of the gospel is silenced (Revelation 11:7-11; 13:7).

The whole New Testament period is also called ‘the end of the ages’ (Matthew 24:3) or ‘the fulfilment of the ages’ (1 Corinthians 10:11; Ephesians 1:10), which *begins* with the testimony of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1), his death (Hebrews 9:26) and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:17) at his first coming and *ends* with the physical resurrection (John 6:39-40), the final harvest (Matthew 13:39) and the final judgement (John 12:48) at his second coming.

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<sup>7</sup> Hebrew: shib’ah ‘idanin. Greek: επτα καιροι

The whole New Testament period is expressed in terms of days (Revelation 11:3; 12:6) instead of months (Revelation 11:3) because testifying (Revelation 11:3) and feeding (Revelation 12:6) are daily activities. Also taking care of the Church is a daily activity (Matthew 6:11)! It is the duty of the Militant Church to witness every day and God promises to care for the Church every day! But the New Testament period is also expressed in terms of 3½ times (Revelation 12:14), a seemingly endless time (symbolically 7 times), which nevertheless will come abruptly and unexpectedly to an end. The number in the book of Revelation is therefore not intended to be numerically or chronologically calculated. It is symbolic of the whole New Testament period.

During the whole New Testament period the Church is protected (Revelation 11:1-2; 12:6,14), the gospel is proclaimed (Revelation 11:3) and the many antichrists exercise their arrogated authority (Revelation 13:5; cf. 1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7). But the New Testament period of affliction will not continue endlessly! It may seem to believers that the period threatens to extend itself longer and longer (cf. 2 Peter 3:3-4). But it will suddenly and unexpectedly break off (cf. 2 Peter 3:10) and end in utter failure for Christ's enemies and complete triumph for Christ's people!

The number 3½ *days* (Revelation 11:9,11) symbolises a very short period of severe oppression, persecution or affliction for Christians that also threatens to extend itself, but is divinely limited and suddenly and unexpectedly broken off in the middle. Jesus calls it 'the great tribulation' and says that those days will be cut short for the sake of the elect (Matthew 24:21-29). It is Satan's little season in which Satan will be released and his army and followers will destroy the Church as an institute of proclaiming the gospel (Revelation 16:13-16; 19:19; 20:7-10). Also the duration of this short period cannot be calculated.

#### The long period and the short period before the final judgement day in the book of Revelation.

Notice the parallel sections in the book of Revelation. All three following sections refer to the long period of proclaiming the gospel and the short period of the great persecution between Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming.

Revelation chapter 11. The temple and the people worshipping there (the Church) are measured or set aside for a symbolic period of 42 months (3½ years)(Revelation 11:2) and the two witnesses (the Church) proclaim the gospel for a symbolic period of 1260 days (3½ years)(Revelation 11:3). Then they are conquered in the final battle by the beast out of the Abyss (Revelation 11:7) and lie slain for a symbolic period of 3½ days (Revelation 11:9,11), followed by the resurrection from the dead and the final judgement day (Revelation 11:11-19).

Revelation chapter 12 to 14. The woman (including her offspring, the saints) (the Church) is kept safe from destruction for a symbolic period of 1260 days (3½ years) (Revelation 12:6,14). Then she is conquered in the final battle by the beast out of the sea (Revelation 13:7), followed by the final judgement day (Revelation 14:14-20).

Revelation chapter 20. The dragon or ancient serpent is bound (his influence is curbed, curtailed, restrained, limited) for a symbolic period of 1000 years to keep him away from deceiving the nations while the Church is proclaiming the gospel (Revelation 20:1-6). Then the dragon is released for the final battle (Revelation 20:7-10), followed by the final judgement day (Revelation 20:11-15).

Thus, the long period is the New Testament period between Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming during which the gospel is proclaimed. The short period is the antichristian world in its final phase, the silencing of the gospel and the battle of Armageddon that is abruptly and unexpectedly terminated by the final judgement at Christ's second coming (Revelation 16:14,16; 19:19; 20:8).

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## **The number 10. The symbol of completeness on earth**

### **a. The number in the Old Testament**

*The ten commandments* is a complete summary of God's moral law (Exodus 20:1-17; 34:28; cf. Matthew 22:36-40). This is how God commands his people to live as his saved people.

### **b. The symbol in the New Testament**

*The ten virgins* symbolise complete humanity consisting of wise and foolish people (Matthew 25:1; cf. Matthew 13:38).

*The ten talents* symbolise completeness with respect to the opportunities and property God entrusts to his faithful servants which they must put to work (Matthew 25:28).

*The ten silver coins* symbolise completeness with respect to sinners that come to repentance (Luke 15:8).

*The ten lepers* symbolise completeness with respect to humanity in need of salvation and healing (Luke 17:12).

*The ten servants with the ten minas* symbolise complete fairness with respect to God's rewards (Luke 19:13).

### **c. The symbol in Revelation**

*The 10 days* of persecution for the congregation of Smyrna (Revelation 2:10) symbolises that persecution will last only as long as God has decided – no longer! This is a great encouragement for Christians.

*The ten horns* (Revelation 12:3), *the ten crowns* (Revelation 13:1-2) and *the ten kings* (Revelation 17:3,12) symbolise the arrogant claims of Satan to complete power to destroy and to complete authority to reign on earth, mainly through his smaller powers, that is, through men in positions of authority in every human aspect of life (political, judicial, economic, industrial, business, financial, etc). However, their claims are lies (John 8:44), because all authority and power in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18).

*The number 1600* is the product of  $4 \times 4 \times 10 \times 10$  and could symbolise God's thorough and complete judgement (the number 10) of the godless world (the number 4) at his second coming (Revelation 14:20).

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### **The number 1000. The symbol of divinely determined completeness on earth**

The number 1000 is formed by  $10 \times 10 \times 10$  (three times). In the symbolism of numbers in the Bible the number 3 is a symbol for the Triune God (Matthew 28:19) and the number 10 is the number of completeness on earth (Exodus 20:1-17). The number 1000 is the number of divinely determined completeness on earth.

#### **a. The symbol in the Old Testament**

*The 7000* who had not bowed their knees to worship idols symbolise the absolute full number of God's elect in the time of the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 19:18; Romans 11:4-5). The number 7 symbolises divine perfection and  $10 \times 10 \times 10$  symbolises divinely determined completeness on earth. The exact number of genuine believers in Israel at that time is not specified.

While God punishes the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate him he promises to show love to *a 1000 generations* of those who love him and obey him (Exodus 20:5-6). *The 1000 generations* symbolise the absolute complete period of time determined by God to ultimately complete what he has promised to his own people and what he has threatened to the (enemical) nations of the world on earth. The exact number of generations is not specified.

*The 1000 generations* in which God remembers his covenant people (the covenant he made with Abraham) even while he executes his judgements on earth symbolise the absolute complete period of time for history on earth that is determined by God, in this case, right to the end, forever (1 Chronicles 16:14-17; Psalm 105:7-10). God will continue to act until the ultimate end of all human generations, that is, until he has ultimately completed what he has promised and what he has threatened for both his own people as well as the other nations of the world. While God executes his judgements in all the earth, he does not forget his covenant with his covenant children for one moment! The literal number of generations is not specified.

*The 1000 years* of man on earth that are like one day with God (Psalm 90:1-5; 2 Peter 3:8) symbolises the temporality of man in comparison with the eternity of God. The lifespan of the oldest man is less than 1000 human years (Genesis 5:27); it is as short as a nightwatch, during which a person sleeps and remembers nothing. And yet the lifespan of man is divinely determined (Psalm 90:1-5). It may be much shorter than a literal 1000 years, but it will be exactly what God has allotted to each (Psalm 90:10).

### **b. The symbol in the New Testament**

As the lifespan of man is divinely determined (Psalm 90:1-5), so the timespan of human history to the very last day, that is, to Christ's second coming (cf. 2 Peter 3:3-4) is divinely determined (2 Peter 3:8). In man's time-frame Christ's second coming, the final judgement day and the renewal of all things at the end of this present world history seem to be very far away or even to stay out (2 Peter 3:4). However, in God's time-frame a 1000 human years passes as fast as a day. When God's time is ultimately completed, the second coming, the final judgement day and the renewal of all things will arrive! The exact number of years before Christ's second coming is not specified!

### **c. The symbol in Revelation**

Some Christians regard the book of Revelation as a history book and consequently interpret the symbols and numbers literally. However, the book of Revelation is an apocalypse. An apocalypse reveals the truth through visions by means of symbols and numbers that represent literal realities that surpass the literal reality of the symbols and numbers themselves (Revelation 1:20). Consequently the symbols and numbers must be interpreted, not literalistically, but figuratively or symbolically!

*The 7000 names of people* (Revelation 11:13), that is, the people with important names, symbolise the number of people God will kill during the final great earthquake at Christ's second coming. Absolutely everyone God intends to kill will be killed.

*The number 1000* (Revelation 20:1-7) is not intended to be a literal number. Like the other numbers in the book of Revelation it also has figurative or apocalyptic and symbolic meaning that represents a literal reality! The number 10 symbolises "completeness" and the number 1000 (10x10x10) (3 times) symbolises "divinely determined completeness".

*The 1000 years* symbolise the absolute complete period of time determined (decreed) by God in order to unfold or execute and complete his plan of salvation and judgement within the history of the world. In this case it represents the demarcated New Testament period, the long period between Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming. It is a long period, but nevertheless limited by God.

As in Revelation chapter 11 to 13, the beginning and the end of the New Testament period is clearly indicated. The period of 1000 years *begins* with the binding of Satan at Christ's first coming (Revelation 20:1-3) and *ends* with the final battle, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgement and the renewal of all things at Christ's second coming (Revelation 20:7-15). According to the teachings of the rest of the New Testament Satan was bound at Christ's first coming (Matthew 12:28-29; Luke 10:17-20; John 12:31-32; Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8 and Revelation 12:5-10). Thus the 1000 years is symbolic for the whole period between Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming. It is symbolic for the whole New Testament period.

During the Old Testament period, the people of God were called to be God's witnesses (Isaiah 43:9-13), but failed to proclaim the good news to the nations in the world, because Satan was not bound (Daniel 10:13,20-21). But since Christ's first coming, Satan's influence and power *on earth* is curbed (curtailed, restrained, limited)(this is the meaning of the word 'bound'). He is bound, not in the sense that he cannot do anything, but in the sense that he can no longer hinder the gospel from going out to all the nations on earth and thus deceive the nations (Matthew 24:14; Revelation 20:1-3). During the whole New Testament period, the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed as a testimony to all the nations in the world (Matthew 24:14).

Also during the whole New Testament period the souls of all Christians that die on earth are translated to Christ *in heaven* (this is the meaning of 'they lived' and 'the first resurrection') in order to reign together with Christ. The 1000 years therefore does not refer to a golden age or paradise on earth, but rather to paradise in heaven!

The expression: “and those who had not worshipped the beast ...etc.” (Revelation 20:4) does not necessarily mean that the 1000 year period *must follow* the final days of the period of the great tribulation. Throughout the messianic age or the gospel age or the New Testament age there have been many antichrists (beasts) (1 John 2:18) and throughout this period believers have come out of the tribulation (John 16:33; Revelation 7:14). Also these facts point to the symbolic 1000 year period as the messianic or gospel age or the whole New Testament period. In the section Revelation chapters 20 to 22, ‘the great tribulation’ of Matthew 24:21-25 is described in Revelation 20:7-10!

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## **The number 10 000. The symbol of a great multitude**

### **a. The number in the Old Testament**

In many places in the Old Testament, the number 10 000 does not intend to be an exact, literal number, but rather symbolises a great multitude of people (Judges 1:4; 3:29; 4:6, etc). Only with the help of God can a believer put 1000, even 10 000 (that is a great multitude), enemies to flight (Deuteronomy 32:30). Only by dwelling in the presence of God, can a believer escape from the persecution by evil people. Even when 1000 or 10 000 evil people fall at his side, he will remain unharmed (Psalm 91:7).

The person who loves (the lover) is outstanding among *10 000* other good men (Song of Songs 5:10).

*Ten thousand times ten thousand* angels stand around God’s heavenly throne and sing the praises of the Lamb (Daniel 7:10; Revelation 5:11).

### **b. The symbol in the New Testament**

A king forgave a debt of *10 000 talents* (Matthew 18:24). A denarii was the wages for one day of labour. One talent consisted of 6000 denarii, thus equalling an amount of 20 years of wages! The 10 000 talents represent a debt that was impossible to pay off! It symbolises the almost unthinkable and certainly undeserved compassion and mercy that God shows when he forgives sins.

A king with his army of *10 000 soldiers* is forced to consider whether he could defeat another king with an army of 20 000 soldiers (Luke 14:31).

Even though a Christian has *10 000 guardians* (educators), he does not have many fathers in Christ (1 Corinthians 4:15). It is clear that the number 10 000 here is not a literal number!

In order to instruct people in the congregation, Paul would rather speak five intelligible words than *10 000 words* in a strange tongue (1 Corinthians 14:19). Also here it is clear that the number 10 000 is not intended to be literal.

### **c. The symbol in Revelation**

*Ten thousand times ten thousand* angels stand around God’s heavenly throne and sing the praises of the Lamb (Revelation 5:11; Daniel 7:10).

By the end of the New Testament period, the number of people involved in wars throughout that period will be *two hundred million*. The number 2 x 10 000 x 10 000 symbolises an incalculable number (Revelation 9:16). In his vision John could not oversee the vast armies involved – he only heard their number mentioned.

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## **The number 12. The symbol of God’s people**

Twelve is the product of 3x4. The number 12 symbolises the work of salvation of the Triune God (the number 3) everywhere in the world (the number 4) that results in God’s people (the number 12).



### **a. God's people in the Old Testament**

*The 12 tribes.* God's work of salvation during the Old Testament period resulted in his people, *Israel* (that is called 'the ekklesia' or Church in Judges 20:2; Psalm 22:22 and 2 Chronicles 29:28), which is represented by the twelve patriarchs or twelve tribes of Israel.

The patriarch Jacob had *12 sons* (Genesis 35:22), called the *12 patriarchs* (Acts 7:8) or *the 12 heads of the 12 tribes* of Israel (Genesis 49:28). These 12 tribes were represented by the *12 precious stones* in the breastpiece of the high priest (Exodus 28:15-21), by the *12 spies* into the land of Canaan (Numbers 13:2), by *the 12 stones of the memorial* in the middle of the Jordan (Joshua 4:7-8), by *the 12 stones of the altar* of Elijah (1 Kings 18:31), by *the 12 bulls sacrificed* at the return from exile (Ezra 8:35) and finally by *the 12 disciples of Jesus* whom Jesus chose to be the foundation of his new people, the people of his new covenant (Matthew 10:1-7; cf. Ephesians 2:20)! The woman with *a crown of 12 stars* on her head symbolises God's Old Testament people that would bring forth the promised Messiah (Revelation 12:1).

### **b. God's people in the New Testament**

*The 12 apostles.* God's work of salvation during the New Testament period results in his people, *the Church* (the word 'ekklesia' means: 'the assembly of those called out from the world'), which is represented by the twelve apostles whom Jesus chose, called, equipped and sent out (Mark 3:14; Ephesians 2:20).

*The 12 tribes scattered in the diaspora* (James 1:1; cf. the sojourners of the diaspora, 1 Peter 1:1) symbolise God's people in the New Testament. Jesus did not stop or abandon the old Israel, represented by the 12 tribes. He did not replace the old Israel by the Church. He also did not put the Church alongside the old Israel so that they form two separate 'peoples of God'. Jesus continued the old Israel on a higher level (Hebrews 8:6-13) and extended it to include the believers from all the other nations in the world (John 10:16). He led his people of the old covenant (Leviticus 26:12) to the full and intended reality of his people of the new covenant (2 Corinthians 6:16; Hebrews 8:6-13; cf. Genesis 22:17-18). Israel was called 'the Church' in the Old Testament and the Church of the New Testament is called "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:15-16). The former distinction between Jew and Gentile is no longer valid (Romans 10:12-13; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:2-6; Colossians 3:11). That is why Christians from all nations are called "children of Abraham" (Galatians 3:7,29) and Abraham is called "the father of all the circumcised (believers in Israel) and uncircumcised (believers in the other nations)" (Romans 4:11-12).

### **c. God's people on the new earth**

At the renewal of all things, the *12 apostles* will be sitting on *12 thrones* in Christ's eternal kingdom and judge (or rule over) the *12 tribes* of Israel (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:28-30). The twelve tribes of Israel could refer to the restored new Israel consisting of the total number of Jewish believers in history (Romans 11:26), but more likely refers to the new Israel consisting of the total number of believers from both Israel and the Gentiles in history (Galatians 6:16). The 12 apostles had stood by Jesus in his trials. Those who were the closest to Jesus here on earth, will also be the closest to Jesus on the new earth. They will receive the greatest reward and honour (Matthew 25:19-21; 2 Timothy 2:11-12; Revelation 3:21; 20:4).

The new Jerusalem and the Bride of the Lamb are symbolic pictures of God's literal people in their present ideal and in their future final, perfect and eternal state. The city has *12 gates* that represent the Old Testament part of God's people. The gates are made out of *12 pearls*, *12 angels* stand at the gates and *the names of the 12 tribes* of Israel are written on the gates. (Revelation 21:12,21). The city also has *12 foundations* that represent the New Testament part of God's people. The 12 foundations are decorated with *12 precious stones* (9 are the same as those in Exodus 28:15-21) and *the names of the 12 apostles* are written on the foundations (Revelation 21:14,19-20).

The tree of life bears *12 crops of fruit* every year (Revelation 22:2). It *symbolises* the wholesome influence and never-ending superabundance of God's work of salvation, which brings deep satisfaction and joy and heals all the scars of sin and misery.



## **The number 24. The symbol of the heavenly representatives of God's chosen people in the Old Testament and the New Testament periods**

### **a. The number in the Old Testament**

*The 24 divisions of priests* (1 Chronicles 24:1-19) and *the 24 divisions of Levites* (1 Chronicles 25:10-31) served in the temple on earth and thanked and praised God every day (1 Chronicles 23:30-31).

### **b. The symbol in Revelation**

*The 24 elders* (Revelation 4:9-11) are probably heavenly beings (cf. Hebrews 1:14) that represent the full number of God's chosen people throughout the history of the world, that is, they represent the Church of the Old and the New Testaments directly before God's throne in heaven throughout the history of the Bible. God gathers his Church throughout the history of salvation in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Church is lifted out above the creation and history and is directly represented in heaven with God.

The name 'elders' (presbyters) points to them as being the *representatives* of the people of God and not as the people of God themselves. They are clearly distinguished from the people from every nation that have been purchased with the blood of Christ (Revelation 5:8-10) and from the uncountable multitude of God's people (Revelation 7:9,14). Therefore the 24 elders sitting on 24 thrones that surround God's throne (Revelation 4:4) are not symbolic of the chosen people of God themselves elevated to this high position, but rather the representatives of these chosen people before God's throne in heaven.

The message of the twenty-four elders is that the whole Church (the result of God's history of salvation) worships God as the God of creation and nature, "who created all things by his will" and keeps them in existence (4:11). Their function is not to be mediators between God's people and God, but to enhance the glory of God's throne and his work as Creator (Revelation 4:8-11) and Redeemer (Revelation 5:9-10).

*The 24 names*, that is, the twelve names of the twelve tribes of Israel on the twelve gates (Revelation 21:12) and the twelve names of the twelve apostles on the twelve foundations (Revelation 21:14) of the New Jerusalem are symbols of the full number of God's chosen people during the Old Testament period and the New Testament period. Together they are the symbol of the full number of God's chosen people throughout the history of the world, that is, they symbolise the Church of the Old and the New Testaments, both as the ideal reality of God's people on this present earth before Christ's second coming and also as the perfect reality of God's people on the new earth after Christ's second coming.

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## **The number 12 000. The symbol of the New Jerusalem**

*The large cube 12 000 by 12 000 by 12 000 stadia* (Revelation 21:16) is a symbol of the New Jerusalem as God's people among whom God himself dwells (Revelation 21:3). Because 12 000 stadia is about 2200 kilometres, it is not likely that a literal city of those dimensions is intended. The New Jerusalem has the form of the inner sanctuary or the Most Holy Place of the Old Testament temple where the ark of the covenant was stationed (1 Kings 6:20) and which was a symbol of the place where God dwelt on earth during the Old Testament period (Hebrews 9:8) and still dwells in heaven during the New Testament period (Hebrews 9:12,24; cf. 4:16; 6:19-20).

The New Jerusalem is depicted as the place where the Triune God (the number 3) dwells on the new earth (the number 4) among his own people (the number 12) and in absolute completeness and harmony (the number 10x10x10) for ever and ever (three times). It is depicted as the perfect result of the work of salvation of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in the period between the creation and the new creation, that is, in the whole history of this world. When the eternal plan of God to save his people and to judge his enemies has reached its fulfilment, then the absolute full number of the saved from the Old Testament period and the New Testament period will have entered as part of the New Jerusalem (Romans 11:25-26; 8:29-30; 2 Timothy 2:19). Then together they will symbolically be the New Jerusalem, that is, the bride of the Lamb! The ideal reality of God's people before Christ's second coming is described in terms of the perfect final reality of God's people after Christ's second coming (Revelation 21:1 to 22:5).

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## **The number 144 000. The symbol of the absolute full number of God's people**

*The large crowd of 144 000 people* is a symbol of the Militant Church *on earth before* Christ's second coming (see the explanation in Revelation 7:4) and a symbol of the Triumphant Church *in heaven after* Christ's second coming (see the explanation in Revelation 14:1). It is obvious that the number is symbolic, because the actual literal number of the Church has been growing throughout the Old Testament period and is growing throughout the New Testament period to an uncountable great multitude at Christ's second coming (Revelation 7:9)!

Like the other numbers in the book of Revelation the number 144 000 also has figurative or apocalyptic and symbolic meaning that represents a literal reality! The number 3 is a symbol of the Triune God. The number 4 is a symbol of the earth. The number 12 is a symbol of God's work of salvation everywhere in the world that results in God's people in the Old Testament period and in God's people in the New Testament period. It represents on the one hand the 12 tribes of Israel, which in turn represents God's people during the Old Testament period, and on the other hand the 12 apostles, which in turn represents God's people during the New Testament period (Revelation 21:12,14). The number 10 is a symbol of completeness on earth and the number 1000 (10x10x10) is a symbol of divinely determined completeness on earth. Thus, the number 144 000 (12x12) x (10x10x10) is a symbol of the absolute full number of God's people throughout the Old Testament period and the New Testament period, that is, throughout the history of the world (cf. Romans 11:25-26). At Christ's second coming not one genuine believer will be missing (Jeremiah 23:4; John 6:39; 10:28; 17:12; 18:9).

The symbol also expresses that in God's eyes there is complete equality between the believers during the Old Testament period (majority Jews) and believers during the New Testament period (majority Gentiles) and that every reason for rivalry between them has fallen away (cf. Romans 1:16; 10:12-13; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:2-6; Colossians 3:11).

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### **The number 70. The symbol for the rest of the land enjoying its sabbathrests**

Daniel 9:2 says, "I noted in the Scriptures the number of years – the word of Yahweh which came to the prophet Jeremiah – to be completed for the ruins of Jerusalem, 70 years".

This number is interpreted in two ways:

#### **a. The chronological interpretation**

The chronological interpretation is a literal interpretation. Jeremiah prophesied from 627-586 B.C. Jeremiah's 70 year period of Babylonian rule (Jeremiah 25:8-14; 29:10) might be reckoned to begin with: Judah's submission to Babylon in (605 B.C.), the initial fall of Jerusalem (597 B.C.) or the final fall of Jerusalem (587 B.C.). And it might be reckoned to end with: the fall of Babylon (539 B.C.)(Daniel 5:31), the initiation of a Jewish return (538 B.C.)(Ezra 1:1,11) or the completion of the rebuilding of the temple (516 B.C.)(Ezra 6:15). Some say that Zechariah seems to interpret Jeremiah's figure chronologically, because in Zechariah 1:12 the angel of the Lord said, "Lord Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these 70 years?" Seventy actual years could thus be reckoned to have passed by the time Zechariah wrote (520 B.C.). Thus, it is possible to argue that Jeremiah was literally or chronologically right. And this fact might encourage people to take the number 70 years as a precise calculation.

However, it is unlikely that Jeremiah intended the 70 years to have a precise chronological reference (cf. 2 Chronicles 36:21). Likewise, there is no reason to infer that Daniel necessarily understood the 70 years to have a precise chronological reference!

#### **b. The chronographical interpretation**

The chronographical interpretation is a symbolical or theological interpretation. In the Old Testament 70 years first suggests a human lifetime (Isaiah 23:15; Psalm 91:10), secondly the period of desolation and ruin of the land of Israel and of subservience to a foreign power (Jeremiah 25:11) and thirdly the period of rest for the land which enjoyed its sabbathrests (2 Chronicles 36:20-23). The passage 2 Chronicles 36 understands Jeremiah's 70 years in the light of Leviticus 25 and 26.

The passage Leviticus 25:1-7 teaches that every 7 years the land is to have a sabbath of rest during which normal agriculture should not be practised. Leviticus 26:33-35,43 says that disobedience would be punished as follows, "Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins. Then the land will enjoy its

sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. All the time it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it.”

The passage 2 Chronicles 36 depicts the period beginning with the exile to Babylon (605 B.C. or 597 B.C. or 587 B.C.?) and ending with the kingdom of Persia coming to power and Cyrus’s edict in 539 B.C. to build the temple in Jerusalem as follows: “The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the 70 years were completed in fulfilment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah.”

Thus, “the period of ruin and desolation of the land” comprises a period of approximately 70 years during which the land is uncultivated, to make up for the approximately 490 sabbathless years of the monarchic period (about 1050-586 B.C.)!

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### **The number 70 sevens. The symbol for the period of desolation and foreign domination**

Seventy sevens presumably denotes seventy times seven years, because the original seventy of Jeremiah was explicitly a period of years (Daniel 9:2). The period of seventy sevens suggests that the seventy years of punishment due according to Jeremiah 25:11 and Jeremiah 29:10 is being exacted sevenfold in accordance with Leviticus 26: 31-35,43 and 2 Chronicles 36:20-23. The number is interpreted in two ways:

#### **a. The chronological interpretation**

The chronological interpretation is a literal interpretation. Ancient and modern interpreters have commonly taken Daniel 9:24-27 as designed to convey firm chronological information, which as such can be tested by chronological facts available to us.

Behrmann. The period from Jeremiah’s prophecy (605 B.C.) to that of Cyrus’s accession (556 B.C., note: instead of 559 B.C.) was 49 years and the period from Jeremiah’s prophecy (605 B.C.) to the death of the high priest Onias III (171 B.C.) was 434 years, so that the sum of these periods is 483 years, the final 7 years taking events to the rededication of the temple in 164 B.C. This understanding of the 70 sevens may be faulted on the grounds of its arbitrariness. It is not obvious why two partly concurrent figures should be added together.

Julius Africanus, an African church father writing about world history in Greek (about 160-240 A.D.). He argued that the period from Nehemiah (445/444 B.C.) to Jesus’ death at Passover (A.D. 32/33) was exactly 483 years, the 70<sup>th</sup> seven being postponed. Many interpreters follow Julius Africanus, who was reported in Eusebius. This understanding of the 70 sevens may be faulted on the grounds of its arbitrariness. It is not obvious why “the word about building a restored Jerusalem” should be connected with Artaxerxes’ commission of Nehemiah to rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:3; 2:8,13,17); nor why we should accept the basis of the computation that is based on a 360-day year; nor why we should separate off the 70<sup>th</sup> seven forming a so-called ‘prophetic gap’ between the 69<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> seven, as the theory requires; nor why we should date Nehemiah’s commission in 444 B.C. or Jesus’ crucifixion in A.D. 32, which the computation requires, while the usually preferred dates are 445 B.C. and A.D. 30.<sup>8</sup>

Porteous. The critical view has usually been that the 70 sevens (490 years) extend as one sequence from some point in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to the period of Antiochus IV in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., that Daniel chapter 9 is an overestimate and that Daniel is faulted for its “wrongheaded arithmetical calculations”.

#### **b. The chronographical interpretation**

The chronographical interpretation is a symbolical or theological interpretation. The 70 sevens is not chronology, but chronography, a stylised scheme of history used to interpret historical data rather than arising from historical data, comparable to cosmology, arithmology and genealogy as these appear in Old Testament writings. For example, Matthew 1:1-17 uses a scheme of history consisting of 3 times 14 generations between Abraham and Christ. However, by comparing Matthew 1:1-17 with 1 Chronicles

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<sup>8</sup> J. Finegan, Handbook of Biblical Chronology, Princeton, 1964, 285-301

chapter 1 to 3, the kings Ahaziah, Athaliah, Joash and Amaziah are literally not counted, and either David or Jeconiah is literally counted twice or at least one or two of the last four kings are literally not counted. While the book of Kings offers precise indications regarding how long kings reigned and clearly seeks to convey chronological information, the book of Judges frequently speaks of periods of forty years of oppression or peace, which do not look as if they are chronological markers of time (Judges 3:11; 5:31; 8:28; 13:1; 1 Samuel 4:18).

The term 70 sevens is likewise a stylised scheme of history used to denote the period of desolation and foreign domination. It is a combination of 70 times 7.

The term 'seventy' denotes the period of desolation and ruin (Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10) during which the land rests and enjoys its formerly neglected sabbathyears (Leviticus 25:1-7; 26:31-35,43; 2 Chronicles 36:20-23) and the period of subservience to a foreign power (Jeremiah 25:11). It also denotes a period such as a human lifetime that extends beyond the years that the hearers will see (Isaiah 23:15; Psalm 91:10).

The term 'seven' is the number of divine perfection (Genesis 2:2) and denotes a sevenfold divine punishment (Leviticus 26:18,21,24,28). God warns that, if Israel does not listen to him, he will punish them for their sins seven times over; he will multiply their afflictions seven times over, as their sins deserve.

The term '70 sevens' therefore denotes (symbolically and theologically) that the seventy years of desolation (sabbathyears or sabbath rests) that were due (during the almost 490 sabbathless years of the monarchy) have been exacted by God sevenfold! None of this background suggests that either the total period of 490 years or its subdivisions are to be expected necessarily to correspond numerically (literally) to chronological periods.

The *70 sevens* is a period equal to the 490 sabbathless years. Daniel 9:1 dates itself in the period both Zechariah 1 and 2 Chronicles 36 refer to (539 B.C., the first year of Darius, that is, Cyrus). Daniel presupposes a time of "desolation" (national subservience to foreign powers coming to a climax with the oppression of Antiochus)(586 B.C. minus approximately 160 B.C. = 426 years) that has lasted a comparable period to that of the monarchy (1050 B.C. minus 586 B.C. = 464 year, during which the sabbathyears were neglected).

This way of using numbers in structuring history appears elsewhere in writings of the Persian and Greek periods. From the Flood to the End is 70 generations (1 Enoch 10:12) or 70 weeks (Qumran cave 4, 180 doc. 1.9). From the Exodus to the building of the temple was 480 years or 12 generations (12x40 years)(1 Kings 6:1). There are hints that the patriarchal period, the monarchic period and the postexilic period could each be reckoned at 480 years. Cf. the 430 year period in Egypt (Exodus 12:40-41; Galatians 3:17; cf. traditional 10 generations in Egypt, Exodus 12:40; Acts 7:6; 13:20).

Another understanding of biblical history as involving 490-year sequence: Qumran cave 11, Melchizedek document envisages a period of 10 jubilees (10x49), thus 490 years, up to the final judgement. These documents represent a way of thinking that Daniel takes up rather than one he initiates.

The message. Jeremiah had spoken of the desolation for Jerusalem, that it would last 70 years, but it was actually to last centuries longer than that! The people of God, the city and the temple continued to experience desolation after the exile right up to the Antiochene crisis (167 B.C.). God is free to exact whatever chastisement he chooses. He chose a chronographical period of chastisement lasting 70 sevens. But the message's good news is that it is not chastisement without end! It is a divinely limited period of chastisement!

The number 70 sevens is not an arithmetical calculation to be pressed to yield chronological information. It is a symbolic figure that puts together two other symbolic figures: the 70 years (a lifetime) of desolation and ruin of Jeremiah 25:11 and 29:10 and the sevenfold chastisement of Leviticus 26:28. The result is a double symbolic figure extending from the beginning of chastisement in the exile to whenever the chastisement is seen as ending. The description of the end in Daniel 9:24-27 is allusive.

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### **The number 40. The symbol for an important period of time on earth**

The numbers used in the historical books like Judges and Kings usually have no symbolic meaning, but have a literal or exact numerical value. The number 40 usually designated a specific period of time. Nevertheless, it refers to an important period of time. The number is connected to the number 4 symbolising the earth or

world and the number 10 symbolising completion. Certain important historical events on earth were completed during those periods of 40 days or 40 years.

**a. The symbol in the Old Testament**

During the flood, it rained 40 days and nights long (Genesis 6:4,17). Isaac and Esau were 40 years old when they got married (Genesis 25:20; 26:34). The journey of Israel through the desert lasted 40 years (Exodus 16:35; Numbers 14:33-34; Psalm 95:10; Hebrews 3:89). The twelve spies exploring the land of Canaan returned after 40 days (Numbers 13:25). Moses remained 40 days and nights on Mount Sinai when he received the Ten Commandments (Exodus 24:18). The age of 40 was an important turningpoint for Caleb (Joshua 14:7). After a particular judge began to rule in Israel, there was a period of peace that lasted 40 years (Judges 3:11; 5:31; 8:28). The Philistines oppressed the Israelites for 40 years (Judges 13:1). The judge Eli ruled for 40 years (1 Samuel 4:18). King David ruled for 40 years (2 Samuel 5:4). King Solomon ruled for 40 years (1 Kings 11:42). King Joash ruled for 40 years (2 Chronicles 24:1). The land of Egypt would be made desolate and the Egyptians would be dispersed among the nations for 40 years (Ezekiel 29:12-13). After 40 days, Nineveh would be overturned (Jonah 3:4).

**b. The symbol in the New Testament**

Jesus was tempted by the devil for 40 days and nights (Matthew 4:2). The period between the resurrection and ascension of Jesus was 40 days (Acts 1:3). The age of 40 years was an important turningpoint for Moses (Acts 7:23) and after another 40 years, he reached another turningpoint in his life (Acts 7:30).

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