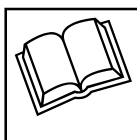


which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches" (2 Cor. 11:28)? Truly, we have not, cannot have, the widespread anxiety felt by the apostle, in a personal sense, but we most certainly should have this feeling for those with whom we are in constant contact. The problems, the joys and the sorrows of each one should be those of us all, even as it is written: "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Rom. 12:15). Yet again we read: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Another scripture commends the faithful servant who gives "meat in due season" (Lk. 12:42) to his brethren. None of these scriptures is addressed to a particular group or class, but to *all*, to the young as well as to the old, to sisters as well as brethren. Indeed, it is only as we truly manifest this care and concern for one another's wellbeing in all things, both material

and spiritual, that we can be knit together in the bond of love.

The living reality

As week by week we partake together of the bread and the wine, this is an outward expression of the communion, the fellowship, which we should have one with another. We eat the same bread and drink from the same cup to display that we are indeed one family, all brethren and sisters together. Let us strive, if but feebly and weakly (but God is our strength), to translate this outward token into an abiding, living reality, even as he did. Thus we read: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren . . . My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 Jno. 3:16,18).



Exposition

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Accounting for Abraham (2)

John Adey

IN [PART 1](#) of this study I referred to the incident recorded in Genesis 15:5 where God drew Abraham's attention to the innumerable stars of heaven, saying, "So shall thy seed be". I would now like to extend my consideration of this.

Counting stars

It is important to note that Abraham's inability to count the stars was not a negative experience for him. The reason for this lay in what the host of stars represented to him personally. This positive moment of revelation would increase, not diminish, his interest in numbers, or reckoning, after that. Indeed, as shown in the [table](#), he put numbers to much use. In this instance in Genesis 15, however, God had done the calculation. Abraham counts with his knowledge and belief about his Creator, and God responds with His spiritual reckoning of Abraham.

Reckoning on this same basis, that nothing was too hard for God (18:14), both Sarah and he, though aged, were rewarded with the (begin-

ning of the) promised seed, in Isaac. God resurrected ('quicken'd') Sarah's womb, showing that overcoming death is the ultimate hope in the promise of the seed:¹ "Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, *so many* as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable" (Heb. 11:12). Or, as Abraham is presented in Romans 4 (I give a literal rendering in **bold** type): "(as it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations.) before Him Whom he believed, even God, Who quickeneth the dead, and **calls the not being, as being.**"² Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many

1. All this preceded Mount Moriah, and thus fortified, or focused, his thinking on that occasion.
2. I have adjusted the translation to conform more closely to the Greek. It also helps to focus on the aspect of 'beings' yet to be, by resurrection, those who died in faith, for whom the gospel effects renewed life (Mt. 22:32).

Numbers in the life of Abraham		
Abraham counts, or is associated with number, in a variety of circumstances in his life, as shown below.		
No.	Genesis	Numerological features in the text
1	12:4	"Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran".
2	13:16	"And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered".
3	14:14	"And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan". (In context, the scene is set with Elamite Chedorlaomer's reign of twelve years, mention of a rebellion against him in the thirteenth by five kings in Abraham's region, and in the fourteenth a war of four kings including Chedorlaomer against the five. The four take Lot captive with others from Sodom.)
4	14:20	"And blessed be the most high God, Which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes [tenths] of all". See Hebrews 7:2: "to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all".
5	15:5	"And He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be".
6	15:6	"And he believed in the LORD [Yahweh]; and He counted it to him for righteousness".
7	15:9	"And He said unto him, Take Me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon".
8	15:13	"And He said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years".
9	15:16	"But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again".
10	16:3	"Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan".
11	16:10	"And the angel of the LORD [Yahweh] said unto her [Hagar], I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude".
12	16:16	"And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram".
13	17:1	"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD [Yahweh] appeared to Abram, and said . . .".
14	17:12	"And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations".
15	17:17	"Abraham . . . said. . . Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?".
16	17:20	"And as for Ishmael . . . twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation".
17	17:24	"And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin".

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18	17:25	"And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin".
19	18:2	"And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him".
20	18:6	"Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal".
21	18:24 -32	"Peradventure there be fifty [forty and five . . . forty . . . thirty . . . twenty . . . ten] righteous within the city: wilt Thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?".
22	21:4	"And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him".
23	21:5	"And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him".
24	21:28	"And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves". 'Seven' is also the Hebrew for 'oath' or 'sware'. The name Beer-sheba is 'the well of the seven/oath'. See the section, 'A well numbered seven'.
25	22:4	"Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off". See Hebrews 11:13 regarding 'afar off' and 11:19 regarding 'accounting'.
26	22:17	"I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore".
27	23:1	"And Sarah was an hundred and seven and twenty years old: these were the years of the life of Sarah".
28	23:2	"And Sarah died in Kirjath-arba; the same is Hebron". Hebron was also where Abraham buried her (v. 19). 'Kirjath' is Hebrew for 'city' and 'arba' is Hebrew for the number four. ³
29	23:15	"My lord, hearken unto me: the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver; what is that betwixt me and thee? bury therefore thy dead".

nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be" (vv. 17,18). Abraham's human counting limitations were resolved in terms of his absolute reliance on God's infinite capacities. The Cosmos *tells* such a story. It did for Abraham, and it also does in the Sarah allegory of the heavenly Jerusalem (Gal. 4:24-26; Heb. 12:22,23; Rev. 3:12; 21:2).

For Abraham, then, the starry heavens told him about "the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth" (Gen. 14:22). For at any time His creation, manifold and marvellous, offers an evidential measure of "His eternal power and Godhead" (Rom. 1:20). Ur, a city of Mesopotamia from whence he had been called out, was given over to worship of the heavens. Yet Abraham saw in the stars his hoped-for seed, and, beyond the stars, their Creator Who should be

worshipped. In his gaze heavenward, Abraham would appreciate that his God "tellethe the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names . . . His understanding is infinite [without number]" (Ps. 147:4,5). 'Without number' (or 'there is no number') is the basic sense of the two Hebrew words '*yn mspr*', translated aptly by the AV as 'infinite'.

Counting stars in Genesis 15 led Abraham to see that "The heavens *declare* the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1). The Hebrew for 'tell' in "tell the stars, if thou be able . . ." in Genesis 15:5 is a cognate of 'declare' (or 'number', in the plural form *msprym*)

3. Scripture also makes a point of telling us that there is a 'seven' relation between Hebron and an Egyptian city: "Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt" (Num. 13:22).

in Psalm 19:1. These terms connect with the Hebrew for 'number', *mspr*, used in Psalm 147:5. So the sense of the original in Psalm 19:1 is that the heavens 'number' (or 'number-out') the glory of God. The future manifestation of the glory of God, in sons brought to glory in Christ (Heb. 2:10), is *computed* by the uncountable stars that shine in the brightness of the firmament (Dan. 12:3).

A significant contrast impacts on the narrative in Genesis 15, through the common element of 'counting'. God's 'counting' of Abraham transposes the issue from one in which finite objects, like stars, are to be numbered. The Hebrew word for 'number', 'tell' or 'declare', based on the stem *s-p-r*, is used of the act that Abraham was asked to engage in. But 'counted' (Heb. *hšb*), used of God's act, transforms numbering into 'reckoning', not of quantities, but of a quality: *belief in Yahweh*.

In sum, this extraterrestrial allegory, experienced by Abraham as written aforetime, declares for all time that, "as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts [reckonings] than your thoughts [reckonings]" (Isa. 55:9). (Both instances of 'thoughts' are from the Hebrew *hšb*, used of God's 'reckoning' of Abraham in Genesis 15:6.) For us, as for Abraham, God's friend, there is infinite value in God's thoughts revealed in the Scriptures. As the psalmist aptly puts it: "Many, O LORD [Yahweh] my God, are Thy wonderful works which Thou hast done, and Thy thoughts [reckonings, *hšb*] which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up [ranked or ordered] unto Thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered [*mspr*]" (Ps. 40:5).

To have the mind of Christ, *the seed of Abraham*, is to be the beneficiary of a wonderful work, a work of calling through revelation. God's reckonings are higher than our reckonings or He is not God. To counter our lower thoughts, or to transpose them God-ward, are the infinite and effectual resources of the Holy Scriptures. Without God's condescending thoughts in His Word to effect righteousness in us, we could not be saved.

A well numbered seven

The life of Abraham has encouraged interpreters to work on the numerical values of the Hebrew alphabet. This interest connects with the insertion of the fifth letter of the alphabet, 'h' (Heb. *hē*), into his former name 'Abram' to create the

name 'Abraham'. Also, Abram's selection of a band of 318 trained servants to secure the rescue of Lot, and not "some round figure like 300 or 350",⁴ has provoked much speculation.⁵ However, this article now turns to look, finally, at Abraham's deliberate use of the number seven, a highly significant number in Scripture. The [table](#), listing instances of number in his life, can be a starting point for other investigations.

In Genesis 21:22-34 Abimelech and Abraham make a covenant, which was Abimelech's way—perceiving God to be with Abraham (v. 22)—of his being sure that Abraham would not "deal falsely" with him (v. 23). Abraham reproves Abimelech because his servants had violently seized a well from Abraham. However, Abimelech requests an oath for confirmation of the end of this strife (*cf.* Heb. 6:16). In Abraham's act of covenant he makes a deliberate play on the linguistic relation between 'oath' ('swearing') and 'seven' in Hebrew. The evident pun is encoded in his naming of the place Beer-sheba. This place, meaningfully named, witnessed to the pact between them.

'Beer-sheba' is composed of two Hebrew words. The word 'beer' transliterates into English letters the Hebrew for a well. However, the word 'sheba' [Heb. *šba*] is used by Abraham

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4. MacQueen, J., *Numerology: Symbolism of Numbers in Literature*, (Edinburgh University Press, 1985), p. 6.
 5. See Roberts, C. H., *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt*, The Schweich Lectures (1977), pp. 35,36,78. In the context of a palaeographical examination of Nomina Sacra, and their abbreviations, Roberts mentions the Epistle of Barnabas's symbolic interpretation of the number 318 (Gen. 14:14). This represents the Greek letters *tau* for 300, and *iota ēta* for 18, as signifying the cross and Jesus respectively. However, it is not obvious that the Hebrew components of the number '318', *šmnh 'sr wšlš m'wt*, are open to the speculative reading found in this Greek post-Biblical source. The numeral 318, "written not in words but in symbols, contrary to the practice of Graeco-Jewish manuscripts" (Roberts, p. 78), has also been found in the Yale Genesis Codex. See also *The Hastings Bible Dictionary*, Vol. iii (T. & T. Clark, 1900), pp. 566-7: "the number 318 is the equivalent of 'Eliezer' [Heb. 'ly'zr], if the numerical values of the different letters of this name are added together: 1 + 30 + 10 + 70 + 7 + 200 = 318. It would be a strange coincidence if the number of Abraham's trained servants stood in such a relation to 'Eliezer', the only name known of a trained servant of Abraham. Hence Rashi said long ago . . . 'Our fathers said, Eliezer it was, alone, and this (318) is the Gematrical number of his name'".

with two senses in mind. Both senses relate to what is taking place. One sense is 'seven', the other is 'swear' (*cp.* 'oath'). When, in verse 24, Abraham proceeds to formalise the pact, pronouncing an oath as Abimelech requested, he says, "I will swear". In the Hebrew this is an 'imperfect' form related to 'sheba'. So this word is about oath-making.

Abraham now gives Abimelech an unspecified number of sheep and oxen for the purpose of making a covenant (v. 27), which they then enact. Next, Abraham sets aside seven ewe lambs by themselves, prompting Abimelech to enquire what this signifies. If we were following the Hebrew text we would observe at this point that (a form of) 'sheba' (as in Beer-*sheba*) is actually 'seven' for the number of ewe lambs.

Abraham explains: "For *these* seven [*sheba*] ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, in order that it shall be to me for a witness that I have digged this well [*beer*]" (v. 30, my translation). The narrative records: "Wherefore he called that place Beer-sheba; because there they sware both of them" (v. 31). In short, whereas 'seven' and 'well' were put together (in 'Beer-sheba'), now the place, duly named, links 'well' with 'oath' (*sheba*). Textually, as it has been shown, the term 'well' (*beer*) has 'seven' and 'oath' in a before-and-after relation, marking the literal *number* sense first, then the transposition into the figurative 'seven', that is, 'oath', last. The choice of 'seven' for the collective number of ewe lambs intends a physical representation of the oath; they are 'oath' ewe lambs.

'Seven', therefore, and 'oath', equally name the place Beer-sheba; it is 'well of (the) seven'; or, 'well of (the) oath'. The name Beer-sheba marks an instance of numbering with a pointed significance. Numbering is linked to naming; the name embodies 'number' in its subtly contrived

meaning. So this record of Abraham's judgement, how he exercised his spiritual mind, provides a relevant perspective on faith, number and meaning in the Bible. This incident, with many others, depicts in a prophet of Yahweh a consciousness of the significance of number.

So the representation within the Bible of Abraham's faith and works (for example in Hebrews 11:17 and James 2:21,22), and the relation of covenant 'oaths' to inheritance perspectives (Ex. 6:8; Heb. 6:13-20; 7:1-4,21,22,28), serve as a basis for this circumstantial deployment of the number seven.

'Seven', as in "seventh day" (Gen. 2:2,3) is also associated with 'rest', as in the 'sabbath-rest' (Gk. *sabbatismos*) that lies ahead (Heb. 4:1-11). In this context, and apocalyptic ones, 'seven' symbolises the end of a sequence (of events, or a process). So, although it connects to the numbers that precede it, it represents a state of affairs discontinuous with them. In other words, the symbolic and ordering roles of 'seven' show that it marks a transition from one phase to another different and final one. Such a view of this number is consistent with Abraham resolving the dispute with Abimelech.

The number seven is quite dominant in the composition of the Apocalypse. Also, in this last Biblical book it is regarded as wisdom to have the understanding to "*count the number of the beast*" (Rev. 13:18). Abraham, in the first Biblical book, engaged in counting and used number symbolism, including the use of the number seven, with advanced spiritual understanding.

His *numerological* behaviour can be seen as (true) Christian faith in action. Abraham's reckoning approach is typical of the mind of Christ, a necessity for the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16,29).

(Concluded)

Jordan's warning

Jordan's King Abdullah recently said that any US attack against Iraq would have catastrophic repercussions on the oil-rich country and the whole Middle East. The monarch held talks with a senior envoy of Saddam Hussein, Iraq's president, on the eve of a regional tour by Dick Cheney, US vice president. "His majesty . . . stressed Jordan's rejection of using force against Iraq", Jordan's state news agency quoted the king as saying during his meeting with Izzat Ibrahim, vice-chairman of Iraq's Revolutionary Command Council.—*Joan Brooks*

We regret that the e-mail address for obtaining the book *The Second Exodus* was given incorrectly on page 91 of the March issue. It should be geoffandray@tesco.net.