

Medieval Numerology: A Brief Guide

Numerology is the belief that particular numbers have mystical significance, a concept of key importance in the Jewish tradition of the Hebrew Bible (or, as Christians often call it, the Old Testament). Early Christians continued the tradition in the New Testament and in medieval literature. The following is only a partial list of the meanings associated with important numbers. It is not exhaustive, and it does not give complete account for multiples such as 49 (7x7) or 144 (12x12), which were thought to have elaborate meanings.

- 1 God, Spiritual Unity, Creation, the First Age of the World
- 2 Adam and Eve, the creatures of the Ark, the two-fold nature of Christ (Christ as God and Man), the Flood, the Second Age of the World
- 3 The Trinity, the Heavens, Jonah (in the whale), Christ (in the tomb), three elements in man (body, reason, spirit), three elements of faith (knowledge, assent, confidence), three elements of repentance (contrition, confession, and satisfaction/absolution), the three Theological or Christian virtues (faith, hope, and charity), Abraham, the three Magi, three periods in time before the Law (Adam to Noah, to Abraham, to Moses), the Third Age of the World
- 4 The four corners of the earth with its four winds, the physical elements of alchemy (earth, air, water, fire), the four bodily humors (blood, phlegm, black bile, yellow bile), the Evangelists, the Horsemen of the Apocalypse, the Four Cardinal or Pagan virtues (prudence, temperance, fortitude, justice), the Four Gospels, the four seasons, the four rivers of Paradise, the Four Blessings (Clarity, Impassivity, Knowledge, Delectation), the "Last Things" (death, judgment, Heaven, Hell), King David, the Fourth Age of the World.
- 5 The Flesh, the Physical Senses, sacrifice, the Five Wounds of Christ, the Wise Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), the Old Law (Pentateuch), the five points of a star, the Babylonian Captivity, the number of zones in the world, the Fifth Age of the World
- 6 The Incarnation, earthly imperfection, the sixth age of the world, the six days of labor before God rested
- 7 Completeness, perfection, the Universe (4, the earth, and 3, the heavens), the day of rest after creation, the days of the week, the seven churches, the seven sorrows of Mary, the planets, the Sacraments, the Deadly Sins, the Seven Virtues (3 Theological Virtues + 4 Pagan virtues), the final days and end of the world, the seven trumpets and seven seals of the Apocalypse, the 7th age, seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer, seven journeys of Christ, seven parts of the mass, seven ages of man, seven last words of Christ, seven tones of a scale, the seven types of good works (and much more; seven is the most frequently-occurring of all the symbolic numbers).
- 8 The Resurrection, regeneration (seven days of creation plus following time of grace), eight souls in Noah's ark, the Last Judgment, Baptism, the Beatitudes, the Circumcision of Jesus
- 9 The choirs of angel, the fruits of the Holy Spirit (love, joy, peace, patient endurance, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance), mystery, 3x3: the triple trinity
- 10 Perfection and completion, the Ten Commandments, Order, and the lost tribes of Israel. (3x3+1)
- 11 The disciples between the death of Judas and the choice of Mathias, transition, conflict, martyrdom, excess (10+1), incontinence, sin

- 12** The twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve Prophets, the twelve Apostles, the gates of the New Jerusalem, heaven and earth (3X4), spirit penetrating matter (3x4), twelve parts of man, twelve articles of the Apostle's Creed, the zodiac, cosmic order, the months, the year
- 13** Thirteen attendants at the last supper, thirteen days for three kings' journey to the Christ child
- 24** Twenty-four elders seated around God's throne, Twenty-four hours of natural day, (many other complex interpretations based on 2×12 , 3×8 , 4×6 , $10 + 8 + 6$, $10 \times 2 + 4$, etc.)
- 30** Christ's age when he began to preach.
- 40** Forty days of Lent, Forty days of Moses on Mount Sinai, Forty days of Christ in the wilderness, Forty years to a generation, the years the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, the number of days and nights the flood covered the earth, the Old Testament law perfected with Christian Virtues (4×10)
- 49** (7×7)
- 72** The number of followers Jesus sent out into the world to preach during his ministry.
- 100** Completeness (10×10)
- 168** Hours of the week
- 248** Number of bones in the body.
- 666** Man's number, imperfection tripled. The number of the Beast in Revelations
- 1,000** Perfection, 1000 acts of the Devil
- 7,000** Universal perfection (perfection, $1000 \times$ universality)
- 144,000** Number of the virgins in heaven. All of God's created people receiving spiritual blessing ($12 \times 12 \times 1000$) = (Trinity \times parts of the earth \times apostles or tribes \times perfection).