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curse them. The value for the book lies more sharply in the ability of the narrator to paint a portrait of Israel struggling with Balaam, a product that captures by its aesthetic quality a significant witness to Israel's identity. Its aesthetic quality, its ability to depict identity not only for the Israelites in the wilderness under Moses' leadership but for all future disciples of Moses, gives the story value. Indeed, that very quality confirms the claim of the story as true. The book of Numbers is historically significant not because it recounts who Moses was and what he did for the children of Israel in the wilderness but rather because it tells the descendants of Israel, or any other disciples of Moses, who they are.

That historical significance merges in the book of Numbers, as it does in the larger Pentateuchal/Hexateuchal context, with distinctive theological significance. Both story and law tell the disciples of Moses that they belong not simply to Moses, but also to God. The overall structure for the narrative derives from an itinerary that shows the movement of Israel from Egypt to the Jordan. But the itinerary documents not only the movement of Israel along the way in the wilderness but also the leadership of God in that movement (see 10.11-13).

The emphasis falls, however, not only on the presence and leadership of God but also on the obedience of the people to that divine leadership. One facet of the tradition remembers Israel in the wilderness as faithful, obedient to God and to Moses (see Jer 2.2; Hos. 2.14-15). The focus of the legends on obedience to God's word (Num. 12.22-24) highlights this facet of the tradition. But in contrast, the narrative in Numbers reports that the people in the wilderness were rebels, rejecting Moses and the God whom he served. The double picture of Israelite response to God and Moses in the wilderness reflects Israel's struggles to understand its identity.

The story does not end with the end of the book of Numbers. The itinerary structure puts the Israelites on the plains of *Moab by the Jordan, opposite *Jericho. The conclusion combines that ending of the narrative structure for Numbers with the legal dimension: "These are the commandments and ordinances that the Lord commanded through Moses to the Israelites in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho" (36.13). At the end of Numbers, the reader must ask: "Where do the people go from here? What will they do with the commandments and ordinances?" The book of Numbers necessarily depends not only on the narrative in Deuteronomy

but also on the narrative in Joshua to complete the story. The ending calls for recognition of the major literary and theological context as the Hexateuch.

GEORGE W. COATS

Number Symbolism. In common with most people in the ancient world, the Israelites attached symbolic significance to numbers. So whenever the biblical writers mention a number, it is likely that they had a symbolic meaning in mind; in many cases the numbers must not be taken in their literal sense at all.

One signifies uniqueness or undivided wholeness or both. "Hear, O Israel: YHWH is our God. YHWH is one" (Deut. 6.4; see Shema), means not only that the God of Israel is unique, but also that there is no contradiction within him. The oneness of God therefore calls for the trust and love of his people (Deut. 6.5). As God is one, so, some New Testament writers insist, Christ is one with the Father (John 10.30; 17.21); therefore his people must be one (John 17.11; Eph. 4.4-6).

Two, the smallest number larger than one, was the minimum number of witnesses required to establish the truth (Deut. 19.15; cf. Exod. 31.18; Mark 6.7; John 8.17-18; 2 Cor. 13.1; Rev. 11.3-4).

Three is widely regarded as a divine number. Many religions have triads of gods. Biblical faith has no room for a triad, and the number three is rarely connected directly with God. But in some cases this number hints that God is involved. When *Abraham was visited by three men, this meant that God was calling on him (Gen. 18). The *Temple was divided into three parts (1 Kings 6). Three days were the proper time for a work of God, which meant, by the ancient reckoning of time, that it was completed on the third day (Exod. 19.11; Josh. 1.11; 1 Kings 12.5; 2 Kings 20.5; Jonah 1.17; Luke 2.46; John 2.1; etc.). This is also true of the *resurrection of Christ (Mark 8.31; 1 Cor. 15.4). Time is divided into three parts, past, present and future, and God is he who is, who was, and who is to come (Rev. 1.8). According to Paul there are three chief gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 13.13). The expression "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" is not found in the Bible (1 John 5.7b is found only in very late manuscripts); the closest is Rev. 1.4. Neither is the doctrine of the *Trinity expressed there in so many words.

Three and a half years is a strictly limited period, half the full seven of God's plan. It was

regarded as significant that there were three and a half years between the desecration of the Temple and its rededication (Dan. 7.25; 1 Macc. 1.45; 4.52; see also Rev. 11.2-3). The drought under *Ahab was believed to have lasted three and a half years (Luke 4.25; cf. 1 Kings 18.1).

Four is the number of the created world. There are four corners of the earth, four wind-directions, four seasons, and four kinds of living creatures: humans, domestic animals, wild animals, and creatures of sky and sea (Gen. 1.20-27; cf. Ezek. 1.10; Rev. 4.6-7). The four horsemen of the Apocalypse (Rev. 6.1-8) were derived from the four winds, but have a different function. The four Gospels were later regarded as signifying the universality of the gospel, and the evangelists were identified with the living creatures of Revelation 4, but this was long after biblical times.

Five is the number of fingers on one hand, and could stand for a handful, that is, a few.

Six is seven minus one. It is the number of incompleteness. The six days of the *creation were not complete until the seventh day of rest had come. In the book of *Revelation six seals, trumpets, etc. represent the course of the world before God's final seventh act brings about the eternal *Sabbath. And in spite of its seven heads, the number of the beast is only *six hundred sixty-six.

Seven, the sum of three plus four, of heaven and earth, signifies completeness and perfection. There were seven chief heavenly bodies (sun, moon, and the five planets known to the ancients), seven days of the week, seven *archangels. The great festivals lasted seven days, and there were seven weeks between the *Passover and the feast of weeks (*Pentecost). Every seventh year was a sabbath year, when the land would rest and lie fallow, and *Hebrew slaves were allowed to go free; and every fiftieth year was a jubilee, when alienated property had to be returned ("jubilee" from Hebr. *yōbēl*, the ramshorn that heralded its beginning). The seventh day represented God's completed work (Gen. 2.2-3), and in the book of *Revelation the seventh seal, trumpet, bowl, etc., represent the completion of God's plan. The seven spirits of God (Rev. 1.4) represent either the seven archangels, or "all spirits," or the Holy Spirit. *Seven churches represent the universal church (Rev. 1.20). It is necessary to forgive, not just seven times, but seventy times seven times (Matt. 18.21-22; cf. Gen. 4.24), that is to say, always.

Outside Israel seven was also known as a sig-

nificant number, and the monster *Leviathan had seven heads. Later interpreters noted that the Hebrew Bible refers to God by seven different *names: *YHWH* ("the LORD"); *'ādōnāy* (Lord); *'ēl* and *'ēlōhîm* (God); *'ehyeh 'āšer 'ehyeh* ("I am who I am"); *šadday* ("the Almighty"); and *šēbā'ōt* ("[Lord God of] Hosts"). Later Christian tradition noted that the Gospels report seven last words of Jesus in all.

Eight was later used for God's new creation, the day of the Resurrection being regarded as the eighth day rather than the first, but this plays no role in the Bible.

Ten is simply a round number, the number of fingers on both hands. Some interpreters have found a special significance in the fact that the *Ten Commandments correspond with a ten-times repeated "and God said" in the creation story (Gen. 1.1-2.4): ten words to create the world were matched by ten measures to keep it in order. Generally, however, ten, a thousand, and ten thousand simply signify small or large numbers, or are used by multiplication to enhance the significance of other numbers.

Twelve, like seven, is a number of completeness and perfection. This number in particular must not always be taken literally. Israel always comprised more *tribes than the twelve that were actually counted, and the counting of the twelve was not always uniform (Gen. 49; Josh. 13-19; Rev. 7.7-8), but the twelve meant "all Israel." It was regarded as important that there were twelve *apostles and that their number should be complete, but the lists do not quite tally (see Twelve, The). The twenty-four elders (Rev. 4.4) clearly represent all Israel and the whole church. The twelve cornerstones and gates of the new *Jerusalem not only link the city with the tribes of Israel and the apostles, but also signify its divine perfection, as do its measurements of 12,000 stadia square and its walls of 144 cubits. The 144,000 of Revelation 7 and 14 in each case mean that the number is complete and not one of the elect is lost; in Revelation 7 John hears the 144,000 from Israel (all Israel) being counted, but sees "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (the redeemed gentiles).

Thirty was the age at which one was believed to reach full maturity (Gen. 41.46; Num. 4.3; 2 Sam. 5.4; Luke 3.23).

Forty days was a strictly limited period of time (for six, not seven, weeks?; Gen. 7.4; Exod. 24.18; 1 Sam. 17.16; Jon. 3.4; Matt. 4.2; Mark 1.13; Luke 4.2; Acts 1.3). Forty years was the length

of one generation (Exod. 16.35; Num. 14.33; 32.13; Ezek. 4.6; 29.11). It was regarded as significant if a king reigned for this number of years (2 Sam. 5.4; 1 Kings 11.42).

Seventy meant a comprehensive number, and should not normally be taken literally. Seventy descendants of *Jacob moved to Egypt (Gen. 46.8-27; an overliteral scribe added some absurd names to make up the number); seventy *elders led the Israelites in the wilderness (Exod. 24.1); the Temple lay in ruins for seventy years (Jer. 25.11; Zech. 1.12); the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible was believed to have been translated by seventy (or seventy-two) men, hence its name, the *Septuagint, and its abbreviation, LXX; there were believed to be seventy nations (see Judg. 1.7; Luke 10.1); and the *Sanhedrin had seventy members.

In spite of the significance attached by its writers to numbers, the Bible contains no speculation about numbers of the kind found among the Pythagoreans, or later in the Qabbalah.

DAVID H. VAN DAALEN

Nuzi Tablets. Dating to the second half of the fifteenth century BCE, the Nuzi tablets are some thousands of texts recovered from the Hurrian levels of Yorghān Tepe, situated about 10 mi southwest of modern Kirkuk in Iraq. During this period the site bore the Hurrian name Nuzi, and the entire area was a province of Mitanni. Other sites in the area, such as Kirkuk (ancient Arrapha) and Tell al-Fahhār (ancient Kurruhanni), have also yielded texts of the Nuzi type, all written in the same Akkadian patois, reflecting the native Hurrian background of the scribes. Some of the Nuzi tablets comprised part of the official archives of the palace and include ad-

ministrative inventories and letters. Others stemmed from private archives of wealthy Nuzi families and include business contracts involving real estate, loans, and servitude; family records of marriage, adoption, and property settlement; and transcripts of litigations and court proceedings.

It is the Hurrian setting of the Nuzi tablets that has attracted the attention of biblical scholars, for the texts, replete with Hurrian personal names and terminology, show certain affinities with biblical customs. The providing of a slave girl to one's husband by a sterile wife, the ranking of heirs and the preferential treatment of the designated eldest, the association of household gods with the disposition of family property, the conditional sale into slavery of freeborn daughters, and the institution of *hābiru*-servitude (see Hebrews) were some of the Nuzi customs attributed to Hurrian practice. Growing evidence from *Ugarit, *Mari, and Alalakh of a substantial Hurrian presence in the ancestral homeland of Aram-naharaim in the Middle Euphrates region further revealed strong signs of Hurrian influence. On the basis of the Nuzi data, some scholars have dated the ancestral period to the middle of the second millennium BCE.

Reexamination of the Nuzi material in the last twenty-five years has seriously challenged the validity of some proposed parallels between the Nuzi texts and the Bible and their relevance for dating the period of the *ancestors. Furthermore, the uniquely Hurrian character of Nuzi legal traditions can no longer be accepted. Nevertheless, the Nuzi tablets remain a major primary source for the study of Mesopotamian socioeconomic legal practices and thus help to illuminate biblical *law, institutions, and customs.

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