

NUMERICAL SYMBOLISM IN THE DEDICATION OF THE ALTAR

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With the trials and tribulations of Egypt behind him, and having received the Ten Commandments, Moses faced a daunting challenge; how to forge the 12 tribes of the children of Israel into a nation. Despite the fact that they derived from common ancestors, shared the same experiences, and witnessed the same miracles, they had yet to be thoroughly enough united to enter into the Promised Land. It was Moses who had to achieve this unity, and as a first step toward that end he chose the dedication of the altar.

After the census of the Israelites, he set up the Tabernacle. *He anointed and consecrated it and all its furnishings, as well as the altar and its utensils* (Num. 7:1). Each tribal chieftain was assigned his own particular day on which to make the offering for his tribe. There would be both material offerings and animal sacrifices as part of the dedication ceremony.

For 12 consecutive days, offerings were presented by each tribe according to the order of their encampment in the wilderness: Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, Dan, Asher, and Naphtali. The offerings are described only by weights and not by measurements, and it is not known whether the various bowls, basins, and ladles were identical or different in form and design.

Despite the differences in their size by numbers of population, all the tribes made the same contribution, and contributed the same number of sacrificial animals. This allowed each tribe to make an equal contribution to the accomplishment of a national mission.

While there is much we do not know about the dedication of the altar, there is one thing we do know; the mathematical relationships concerning the offerings. The following accountings are based on well-established number theory. However, the concept and use of the zero was unknown in the biblical world; therefore, all calculations in this article use number theory as known in biblical times. Weights are given by the shekel, that in this period

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was not a minted coin but a measurement of weight equivalent to about two-fifths of an ounce.

Analysis of Torah-inspired numbers repeatedly resolve into two numbers that coordinate with Torah themes: The number 3 represents the 3 patriarchs and the number 12 represents the 12 tribes. These two numbers may have symbolic significance.

SILVER AND GOLD

With each tribe presenting a silver bowl that weighed 130 shekels, a silver basin that weighed 70 shekels, and a gold ladle that weighed 10 shekels, the total offering from a tribe came to gold weighing 210 shekels. The sum of the digits of 210 is $2 + 1 = 3$; a reminder that the 12 tribes were the direct descendants of the 3 patriarchs.

The combined weight of the 12 silver bowls came to 1,560 shekels. The sum of the digits of 1,560 is $1 + 5 + 6 = 12$, and the sum of $1 + 2 = 3$; another reminder, that the 12 tribes are the direct descendants of the 3 patriarchs.

The combined weight of the 12 silver basins came to a total of 840 shekels. The sum of the digits of 840 is: $8 + 4 = 12$, and the sum of $1 + 2 = 3$; a third reminder, that the 12 tribes are the direct descendants of the 3 patriarchs.

The combined weight of the 12 gold ladles came to 120 shekels. The sum of the digits of 120 is: $1 + 2 = 3$; a final reminder, that the 12 tribes are the direct descendants of the 3 patriarchs.

ANIMALS

In addition to the material offerings, each tribe brought the same number of animals. For a burnt offering, there was *one bull of the herd, one ram and one sheep in its first year* (Num. 7:15). These three animals are reminders of the three patriarchs. Additionally, there was *one goat for a sin offering; and for his sacrifice of well being two oxen, five rams, five he-goats and, five yearling sheep* (7:16-17). The total figure of 18 can be represented phonetically as the word *hai* [life].

SUMMARY

The story of the dedication of the altar contains the essence of the Torah. The number 120 represents the integer 12 multiplied by the integer 10. This is a reminder that the number 12 represents the tribes, while the 10 represents the dramatic events in recent memory: The Ten Plagues that the Israelites witnessed in Egypt and the Ten Commandments that Moses received on Mt. Sinai. The descendants of the three patriarchs were enslaved in Egypt, and recently were freed by the unity of the God of Israel. Despite the hardships and tragedies they endured, they were commanded to survive – and they have to this very day.



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