



First Lutheran Church

Gospel of Matthew

Summer 2026 Reading Challenge



Deep Dive: Matthew's numerology

Week 6: Matthew chapters 13 and 14

Talking to the Kids

Today's Kids may not have the catchy Sesame Street pinball song counting 1 to 12 stuck in their head, but that doesn't mean they don't have a connection to numbers beyond counting fingers and toes.

Talk with your kids about numbers that they find important. What is their favorite number? Why do they like that number? They may not have a full answer, but it is always interesting to ask them and let them answer.

The gospel writer of Matthew had some important numbers he liked: 5 and 12 are the big examples.

We use numbers for many reasons today, most are not spiritual, but very practical. What are some important numbers our kids should know by heart (address, phone, 911, others)?

- Matthew likes his numbers, but often these numbers are hidden. We have to be able to see the whole gospel, its structure and composition to find these numbers. For instance, Jesus has 5 great speeches through the Gospel of Matthew. These correspond to the 5 books of Moses, the Torah. Matthew makes many connections between Jesus and Moses, his flight to and from Egypt being one of the most famous ones. Hiding the number 5 in plain sight is just another way Matthew makes that connection clear.
- Matthew also has 12 fulfillment prophecies in the gospel. These are the times Matthew writes something along the lines of "this happened to fulfill the prophet ...". These twelve are found in 1:22-23; 2:5-6, 15, 17-18, 23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:14-15, 35; 21:4-5; and 27:9-10. The number 12 is related to the ancient number of tribes of Israel, the sons of Jacob. The number 12 is also connected to the number of disciples.
- One of the more obvious uses of numbers for Matthew is found in the genealogy of Jesus. Here we have 3 sets of 14. Ancient Hebrew peoples used a form of numerology called gematria. This is where the letters of the alphabet have a numeric value based on their order in the alphabet. Think of our own alphabet - a - 1; b - 2; c - 3, etc. The name David when the numeric value of the consonants are added up equals 14. And since the messiah was said to be in the line of David, 14 was a numeric value often associated with the Messiah. So we see the 14 generations from Abraham to David, the 14 generations from David to the Babylonian exile, and the 14 generations from the Babylonian exile to Jesus.
- Because we tend to read, or hear read to us, small sections of scripture at a time it can be easy to not see these numbers as Matthew intended for us to see them. For instance, we might read one passage a week that has a prophecy fulfilled, and then not read another one for weeks later. And when we read the next passage, we have long forgotten the previous one we read, thereby negating the fascinating tidbit and purpose Matthew is including these specific prophecies.
- Today, the numbers 3, 7, 12, and 14 -- all familiar numbers with Biblical importance -- have less meaning for us. Though if you asked someone what the meaning of the universe is, and if they gave you the answer "42" you at least know they have read the Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy. But this is our connection to numbers today - they are fictional answers to questions, they occasionally hold sentimental value to us because of a date or a phone number or address. But they don't really hold any key to unlocking the mysteries of faith.
- But for Matthew, these numbers are a key, if not to understanding all about God's Kingdom, at least to understanding his gospel.

Gathered by God, we live our faith with: Compassion, Grace, Gratitude, and Joy

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