

No.
202

***"IF YE THEN BE RISEN WITH CHRIST, SEEK THOSE THINGS WHICH
ARE ABOVE, WHERE CHRIST SITTETH ON THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD."***
COL.3.1

SCRIPTURE NUMERATION.
"THREE" AND "FOUR".

An Address (revised)

At Campbell Road, Bow, E.,

23rd April, 1913

by

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SCRIPTURE NUMERATION.

"T H R E E " A N D " F O U R " .

An Address by Mr. P. W. Heward
At Bow, 23rd April, 1913.

Read Ex. 27 and Rev. 21.

Our subject this evening, dear friends, is the number "four"; but as there was some little alteration of our plan as to the number "three", I want to revise briefly that Bible study. Some of us saw last week a number of occurrences of "three" in Scripture. First, direct mention. For example, we are told of two or THREE witnesses; of that which was done three^{times}; of three days journey into the wilderness; the third day. Secondly, indirect mention, - "Holy, Holy, Holy", concerning God. As to men, "Shem, Ham and Japheth" for example, three special men who are mentioned together. We read of God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Before the kingdom was divided, in connection with Israel there were Saul, David and Solomon, whose 120 years remind us that Moses' 120 years were divided into three parts. The Hebrew Scriptures are divided into three parts; the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms, (or the "writings" as the third part is now named). We saw, furthermore, something of the spiritual teaching of the number "three". Like all odd numbers it seems to have special reference to God. "One" brings forward His unity, and "three" His triunity. Again, we noticed that it laid a stress on completeness; completeness in a heavenly sense; not the completeness which seven brings before us, that is rest; not the completeness of the fellowship of ten, nor the completeness of government which the number twelve indicates; but a completeness. This is brought out with regard to the Triune Nature of God Himself. There is ~~no fourth~~ ^{not a fourth} person. Then again, when God would in His infinite mercy pick out three men's names, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, there is a completeness suggested. The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. In the mouth of two or THREE witnesses every word established. Not more than three. Two--the

smallest number of witness. Three - the climax. Peter was warned three times of the way in which he would deny the Lord - three times. The sheet was let down to Peter in Acts 10 three times. The finished nature of Christ's work was demonstrated very manifestly on the third day. The third days of Scripture are very interesting. We find the three days going into the wilderness in Exodus. Then we have mention of the three days as to crossing the Jordan. Three days are found in the time of Rehoboam. Three days in Hosea 6. Three days as to our beloved Lord. Other instances might be noticed, all doubtless with many spiritual lessons, and often suggesting a completeness. Much teaching is clear at once. We readily see in the number three, when speaking of God, an allusion to His Triune Nature. "Holy, Holy, Holy" emphasizes that Triune ~~Nature~~ Nature. The High Priest's blessing introduced by the words "The Lord bless thee and keep thee" (Num. 6:24-27) has three parts, to reveal God as Triune, not three Gods, but three Persons, One God.

And now this evening we come to the number Four. We must first of all collect some occurrences. We will not have the explanation at the outset, but consider what they are. In Exodus 26:32 we read with regard to the veil, that it was hanging upon four pillars. In Exodus 27, the altar is four-square, and has the four horns, a contrast with the four horns of Zech. 1. We can all call to mind some of the expressions with the number four in Scripture. The four living creatures, rendered "beasts" of Rev. 4 and 5. The four contrasted wild beasts of Dan. 7. The four winds of the heaven. The four corners of the earth. In Jer. 15:3 God, speaking of judgment, alludes to four kinds; that is to say, four different forms of judgment which He would send upon men who were sinning against Him. In Jer. 49:36 we read "And upon Elam will I bring the four winds from the four quarters of heaven". Then apart from these occurrences of four, we have numerous passages that give the word "fourth". "The fourth river is Euphrates" in Gen. 2. God's judgments are on the third and fourth generation of those that hate Him. I need hardly say that we have a stress on

the fourth, central day in Gen. 1; and in the high priest's breastplate we go as far as the fourth row. The fourth watch of the night is also mentioned. Here then are just a few occurrences. A Concordance will give many more. But can we go further than a Concordance? ~~will give many more. But can we go further than a Concordance?~~ I think we can and should. Where is the number four brought forward apart from its direct mention? Will you turn to Rev. 5:9. "They sung a new song", and so forth, - "Thou hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (four). Now come to 7:9, - "After this, I ~~was~~ beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues". Beloved friends, let us not, while thinking of the number four, forget the blessed teaching brought before us here, concerning sinners saved by grace standing before the Lord. It is a bright and blessed prospect. In Rev. 11:9 we have a contrast "And they of the people, and kindreds, and tongues, and nations (four) shall see their dead bodies three days and a half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves." Nor are these all the occurrences in Revelation. I reflected those three because they are helpfully remembered, - 5:9; 7:9; 11:9. Here is a memory support, the same verse in each chapter. In chapter 5:13 we read "And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea (four), and all that are in them heard I, saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power (four) be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four living creatures say, Amen". Four is plainly stamped there, though unmentioned verbally, except in regard to the four living ones. Then again we recollect the four coverings of the tabernacle, - "Fine twined linen, the goats hair, the rams' skins dyed red, and the badgers' skins". Furthermore, we call to mind how that God said Israel were to pick out the Pass-over Lamb on the tenth day, and sacrifice it the fourteenth - four days. Then again we recollect the four thousand years between the creation of Adam

and the coming of the Last Adam. Our beloved Lord fed five thousand on one occasion, He also fed four thousand. This number is particularly given to us. In several places where we have the number seven, four is marked off in that number. Our beloved Lord gave seven parables, (parallel with Rev. 2 and 3) in Matt. 13, as well as a climax parable concerning the householder. Four of those were spoken to the people. In the seven letters to the angels of the seven churches in Revelation, four are marked off from three in the way in which they arrange the closing words. Then in Rev. 6 where you have the seven unsealings, the first four are linked with the living creatures, the last three are not. Sufficient has surely been said to show that God has a wonderful structure, a wonderful arrangement in His precious book.

And now dear friends, we have to come to that which is peculiarly helpful if our hearts are in a right condition. What is the teaching that God has wrapped up in this subject for US? I do not think that everyone must know about the number four, and about all the other numbers of Scripture before being saved, or before going into God's presence. It is blessed to know that grace can not only reach to those who are unworthy, - it always reaches to such, for none of us are worthy, but can reach to, and continue with, those who are ignorant. Here is an aged cottager, he has never had any training at all in the Scriptures, he has been defiant against God all His life. He can be saved by grace, however aged, and not able to learn much; and I believe that God can teach that man. But, beloved friends, if God has given to us not only minds, but opportunities to study the deeper things of His book, WE sin if we neglect these opportunities. We are not aged cottagers living far off from opportunities of study. God has given us opportunities, and we are responsible before Him to make the most of our opportunities, and to understand as much as we can of His precious teaching in His precious book. We can never become too much acquainted with the Bible. It is possible to be proud of a misconceived cleverness, but we

cannot be too much acquainted with the book that God has graciously given to us. And it becomes us if we are those who honor Him as the Giver of Scripture, it becomes us to try and find out why He says "four" in some places, and why He puts four words together. He has a reason for everything. There is no chance in nature, there is no chance in Scripture, there is no chance in grace. The Holy Spirit is willing to lead us. May I first of all make a general statement. The number four is, like the other EVEN numbers, connected with that which is earthly - not NECESSARILY in a sinful way: - God's work in the earth is included. Two is the number of earthly witness particularly. Four is the world-wide number. Six is man's number and suggests earthly work. Eight is a resurrection number, and therefore implies that which has been in the grave. Ten is the number of fellowship revealed upon earth. Twelve is the number of earthly government that is well pleasing to God, and so forth. All these EVEN numbers have this underlying thought. The odd numbers, as we have seen, particularly refer to God. Herein seems a general Scriptural principle. Now God has clearly marked out what the number four is to teach. It is not specially a number which speaks of sin as Sin, but of that which is worldwide. Our very English contains the same idea. "The four corners of the earth" has become an English expression. Not that we think there are four corners to the world ~~where~~ on which we live, but the expression signifies that which is worldwide. So we speak of the four winds of heaven, and we always know there are but four points of the compass: - North, south, east and west. This is readily understood. So we agree that four is the world-wide number. Throughout Scripture this important lesson seems marked upon it. Shall we therefore seek, by grace, to apply this principle to some of the passages at which we have already looked, and to others? We take the mention of God's gracious bringing back of Israel in Isa. 11:12, "And He shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth".

What is the thought here? Evidently that our gracious and glorious God will bring His people Israel from ALL parts of the world. That is plainly the thought. "He That scattered Israel will gather". You know how the Jews are to be found everywhere at the present time. But God will gather them from all parts of the earth in that wondrous day. He will do that which will be the opposite of His judgment at Babel. He will gather from among Israel in all parts, and from the nations as well, into Jerusalem, for out of Zion will go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. Turn back to Genesis 2. We are told concerning the garden of Eden in verse 10 "A river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from thence it was parted and became into four heads". "And the fourth river is Euphrates". Thus here we have four, and an emphasis on the fourth. As to the four, we have a beautiful picture of God's wonderful grace going out, not from an earthly Eden, but from the Lord Jesus, with world-wide blessing. HE is the Tree of Life. The river of the water of life comes out from the throne in Rev. 22. In Eden we have four heads. The river divides off from Eden, as if to suggest God's grace from Christ reaches to men of all races, all kinds, all conditions, in all parts of the world. Euphrates is the river on which Babylon was afterwards built, and Babylon was the first great city against God. The city of world-wide power in the past, and world-wide power in the future! The center of men will not be London, but Babylon. Thus the fourth river is Euphrates. Four is a world-wide number. I might mention too, that the fourth day in Genesis is associated with God's arrangement of the lights in the firmament, to divide the day from the night, and God added, Let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years, and He particularly puts them in the firmament to give light upon the earth. Thus the fourth day is associated with that which is world-wide. The sun, moon and stars, as we know, are world-wide in their power. In Psalm 19 we read of the sun going on its course over the whole world. "Their line is gone forth through all the world", and so forth. It is appropriate this should be on the

fourth day. Then as to the world-wide aspect of four, think of the four living creatures in Revelation. I believe they are a picture of God's world-wide salvation and His blessing. Not only salvation to persons, but also deliverance for the animal creation, if I might so put it. You remember how in the ark, animals were there as well as Noah's family, and it may be noticed that the living creatures had faces of animals as well as of a man. The four living creatures possibly suggest what will be brought through the wondrous finished work of Christ, even to the animal creation. World-wide blessing! Of necessity the contrast with the four living creatures is to be found with the four wild beasts of Daniel 7. But what are THOSE four wild beasts? Look at the beginning of that chapter. The four winds strive upon the Great Sea, and out from that sea there came four great beasts, and they are explained to be kingdoms upon earth. World-wide kingdoms! The first one was the Babylonian kingdom, - an empire we call it. A world-empire. We behold world-wide kingdoms AGAINST God. In Revelation there are four living creatures, what a contrast! The latter round about God's throne, not trying to take the throne. While we are speaking of Rev. 4, let us recollect that we saw God saves out of all peoples, nations, languages and tribes. In Rev. 5, in Rev. 7, etc. Why this fourfold description? To tell us that His salvation is world-wide, but not universal. Men out of all races are met by grace. What wondrous mercy is poured out. There is the same aspect in Gen. 10. Where God would describe men in all parts of the world, He uses a fourfold description. Gen. 10, as you know, concerns the families of Shem, Ham and Japheth, who with Noah were the four men in the ark. Concerning the sons of Japheth we read, "By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands, every one after his TONGUE, after their FAMILIES, in their NATIONS". Gentiles, tongues, families, nations. Note, too, verse 20 concerning Ham. "These are the sons of Ham, after their families, tongues, countries, nations" (four). Again verse 31, These are the sons of Shem, after their families, after their tongues, in

their lands, after their nations, (four). Thus we have brought before us a fourfold mark, and it is notable that Nimrod, the first great builder, builds four cities: Babel, Erech, Accad, Calneh; and then goes to Assyria and builds four further cities, Nineveh, Rehoboth, Calah, Resen. He is the first world-wide monarch of wickedness, as Antichrist will be the last, and the number four is stamped upon Nimrod's work.

May I remind you in this connection that we have four Gospel narratives of the Lord Jesus bringing before us beautifully that His salvation is for sinners of all races, of all classes, of all conditions. In accord with this we find that the altar had four horns. Further, in accord therewith, we notice that for the gate of the court was a hanging of 20 cubits, their pillars four, and their sockets four, - a world-wide salvation brought before us, given to sinners of ALL races. Not only will our beloved Lord have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth when He comes back again, but now He saves from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth, - not only shall all nations serve Him then, but men out of all nations are saved by Him now. He can save black men as well as white men. He can save a Gentile as well as a Jew. "Greeks and Barbarians", said one of old, were united in Christ. So is it today. Men of all races who are brought down by infinite grace are brought by the Holy Spirit's to the Lord Jesus, the One Saviour. In this connection it is interesting to notice that the fourth commandment in the ten commandments of Exodus 20 is a commandment which specially brings before us the earth. The earlier commandments particularly have reference to God, but this mentions earth. In the disciples' prayer, "Our Father Which art in heaven, let Thy Name be hallowed, Let Thy kingdom come, Let Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us day by day the bread that comes upon us". The fourth "line", as it were, mentions "EARTH", and the first petition that deals with the needs of men is the fourth. Throughout Scripture we find a similar idea. We have already noticed Jeremiah 15, with four world-wide

judgments. The sheet in Acts 10 that spoke of a world-wide salvation was knit at the four corners, - likewise seen in the four coverings of the tabernacle.

Let us next notice some compounds of four, and the multiples of four. Forty is an interesting number. I will not take it now at any length, it will be ours later on. But you recollect how our beloved Lord was tempted in the wilderness, in connection with the tempting for forty days and forty nights. You remember, furthermore, how God's servant Moses was on the mount forty days and forty nights in connection with the giving of the law. You remember, too, the forty years when Israel desired a king, of Saul and of David and of Solomon. Forty is interesting and solemn in these passages. Then the word "Damascus", it has well been pointed out, has a numerical value of 444 (the four Hebrew letters have a value of 4, 40, 300, 100 and add up to 444), and Damascus stands out as practically the oldest city in the world. Here we have then brought before us multiples of four containing the same teaching. What is twelve? It is three multiplied by four. It is God's work linked with that which is world-wide. A covenant on earth. We have the number twelve coming oft before us in the book of Revelation, (21st chapter). What is there shown? God's covenant as to earth. God's control of earth. Twelve - four multiplied by three. The word "foursquare" which occurs there might just be noticed. We are also told that the altar was foursquare, picturing a world-wide salvation. The length, breadth and height of the Holiest of All were all equal, - suggestive of a finished work. The heavenly Jerusalem is thus appropriately said to be foursquare, and there are gates on all the four sides as if to welcome from all parts, - a world-wide work. The feeding of the four thousand should, I think, be carefully distinguished from the feeding of the five thousand, as to its typical teaching. In the feeding of the five thousand there were twelve baskets full over, as if to suggest that the present dispensation is to be followed by God's gracious work for the twelve tribes of Israel. But look at the feeding of the four thousand. Will you turn with me to the Gospel

of Matthew? We have the feeding of the five thousand in Matt. 14 and the feeding of the four thousand afterwards in Matt. 15. The disciples are called, and the Lord Jesus says, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way. And His disciples say unto Him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness as to fill so great a multitude? And Jesus ~~was~~ saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? and they said, Seven, and a few little fishes. And He took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake and gave to His disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled; and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full. And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children". Here we have seven over, - seven, a complete number, not twelve. I believe the feeding of the five thousand typifies the present dispensation. The feeding of the four thousand would rather suggest the future dispensation, and the seven baskets full remind us of perfection, and eternity beyond. Thus the number "four thousand", even as the number "four", has a world-wide application with reference to that future day. When our beloved Lord comes back, there will indeed be a world-wide work. There shall be something of that world-wide praise which we saw in Rev. 5, where we have the fourfold ascription unto the Lord from all creation. Where there is the ascription unto the Lord from His saved people of the present time, it is a ~~fourfold~~, sevenfold ascription; but if in another place it is fourfold, there is another aspect speaking of a world-wide work on earth. "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power" creation says. The redeemed of the present dispensation give a sevenfold praise, for they are perfect in Christ Jesus. But this is in connection with God's blessing on earth when the Lord Jesus comes back. So we have the four as the world-wide number bringing before us that which is of earth, that which is complete as to earth, whether in judgment

or in blessing. May it be ours in noticing the wonderful structure of Scripture to rejoice in the facts of Scripture, to rejoice in the world-wide blessings of our gracious God, to rejoice in the wondrous completeness of the finished work of the Lord Jesus; but also to realize at the same time the solemnity of world-wide judgments of complete wrath. Beloved friends, God Who had four judgments in Jeremiah will have judgments in the future. You know how we have seen in the seven unsealings that four are particularly brought together to remind of types of further judgment, and the trumpets are divided into four and three. There shall be world-wide wrath, and those who are not accepted in the blessed Lord Jesus Christ, who are not saved by His finished work, must fall under eternal wrath. If we are saved by grace, let us live in the Holy Spirit's power as those who have been saved, - a separated people who feed upon the words of truth, and obey Him Who has so graciously given to us guidance and instruction for all our pilgrim days.
