

Here I resume my interrupted thread on the use of letters as numbers in ancient languages. As I had indicated earlier, Greek and Hebrew did not use a different system for their alphabets and their numerals, but the letters of the alphabet played double duty, so that each letter had a numerical value. One pay-off of that system was that every word had a numerical value, discovered simply by adding up the letters. In Greek, for example, the six letters in the name Jesus, Ἰησοῦς, add up to 888.

Or another example: in Hebrew, the three letters in the name "David" (ancient Hebrew did not have vowels, only consonants), D-V-D were worth 4-6-4, so that the name added up to 14. That may have been significant for the genealogy of Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 1:1-17), since, as Matthew presents it, Jesus, the "son of David" had a genealogical tree that can be organized around the number 14: between the father of the Jews, Abraham, and the greatest king of the Jews, David, was 14 generations (Matthew tells us); between the greatest king of the Jews and the most significant disaster of the Jews - the Babylonian exile - was 14 generations; and between the most significant disaster of the Jews and the messiah of the Jews, Jesus, was 14 generations. 14-14-14. This may seem like a miracle. And for Matthew it probably was. \*Possibly\* (this is one theory) he latched on to 14 because it is twice the perfect number, 7 (so doubly perfect). Or possibly it is because this is the genealogy of the son of David, whose number is 14. (In either case, the reality is that to get to 14-14-14 Matthew had to drop several names out between Abraham and David; moreover, unfortunately, in the last set of 14 there are in fact only 13 generations named!)

An even more clever use of numerology is in the ....

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