

## UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God*

**IN KING JESUS.**

(Philippians 3:13-14)

#13-1914

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September 3, 2019

### **Number 21**

Numbers can be used in a variety of ways that most people are familiar with, one of which is to designate and define a specific period of time. Numbers can also be associated with specific meanings. For instance, in the Hebrew language (an alpha-numeric language), the letters used to form numbers can take on special meaning.

With this in mind, let us consider the number 21. For those following my writings, you know that recently I have placed much emphasis on a 21-year cycle that I propose began in the year 2000 that will be completed in September, 2021. What I have not made mention of in these writings is that the number 21 has both a negative and a positive meaning.

On the negative side, there are two meanings associated with 21: ***exceeding sinfulness of sin*** and ***distress*** (or, according to various translations, it's also called *trouble, adversity, calamity, tribulation*).

**Exceeding sinfulness of sin:** In reference to ancient Israel while in the wilderness, scripture records 21 sins committed by the sons of Israel from their time of coming out of Egypt to the crossing of the Jordan, entering into the land of promise. These sins ranged from fear to whoredom (Exodus 14:10-12; 15:23-24; 16:1-3, 19-20, 27-28; 17:1-4; 32:1-10; Leviticus 10:1-2; 24:10-14; Numbers 11:1-3, 4-35; 12:1-15; 14:1-11, 40-45; 15:32-36; 16:1-35, 41-50; 20:1-6, 7-12; 21:4-9; 25:1-9). In Matthew 23, Jesus identified 21 characteristics of the elite religious hypocrites in His day, ranging from demanding respect as teachers and not practicing what they taught to pretending to be more righteous than their forefathers. Finally, in 2 Timothy 3:4, Paul gives us a comparable list of 21 sins found in the church: lovers of self, lovers of money (covetous), boastful, proud (arrogant), blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection (unloving), breakers of truces (irreconcilable), false accusers (malicious gossipers), without self-control, fierce (brutal), despisers of good, traitors, heady (reckless) conceited, lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, denying the power of godliness.

**Distress:** The idea of distress starts with Jacob, who called his years of experience with Esau and, especially, Laban. After leaving Laban's house, Jacob was given the name *Israel* by the Lord and directed to go to Bethel, which he did: *Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone* (Genesis 35:3). This became known as Jacob's distress that extended beyond Jacob to his descendants: *'Alas! for that day is great, there is none like it; and it is the time of Jacob's distress, but he will be saved from it* (Jeremiah 30:7).

This is where the number 21 comes into view. Studying the history of Jacob and his descendants reveals that their distress is based on 21 years: Jacob had two 21-year cycles of distress and his descendants had two 210-year cycles of distress. God's time cycles can apply to individuals, which obviously restricts them to short periods of time. However, when these same cycles apply to nations, which obviously can last for centuries, the cycle can be extended. In this case, the extension is based on 21 factored by 10, which signifies *completeness of order*, meaning it marks the entire round of anything.

Jacob's first time of distress was the period he spent working for Laban; the first 14 years were for Laban's two daughters, and the next 6 years were for his flock (Genesis 31:41-42). Jacob was in Laban's house for 20 years, but adding his travel time once leaving the house brings the time to 21 years. By Jacob's own admission, this was a time of affliction and toiling of his hands. Jacob was a schemer or supplanter (a sinner) and the Lord, through the scheming of Laban, dealt with him in like fashion.

Jacob-Israel's second 21-year cycle of distress commenced when his favorite son Joseph was sold into Egyptian slavery through the sin of his brothers who deceived their father into believing Joseph was dead. Fortunately for all, the Lord turned the deception into a blessing as Joseph became the second in command of Egypt (Genesis 41). For Jacob, however, it had been 21 years of a greatly intensified affliction (over the first one) as he mourned the loss of his son, weeping and refusing to be comforted: *Surely, I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son* (Genesis 37:35). As we know, Israel's mourning turned into great joy as he was reunited with his beloved Joseph and his entire family was saved from the famine.

Now, Jeremiah applied the term *Jacob's distress* to both Israel and Judah. Keep in mind that once Solomon's kingdom was split into two nations, with Israel occupying Samaria and Judah occupying Judea/Jerusalem, the prophets also kept them divided in their prophecies. Many today fail to do so, creating unnecessary confusion. Without going into all the dates and math associated with them, there are two 210-year cycles of distress associated with these two nations. The first began when Jacob-Israel and his sons entered Egypt when Joseph was the second-in-command and ended when Moses delivered them out of Egyptian slavery. The sons of Israel spent 210-years in bondage. The second cycle began when Solomon died in 931 BC and, due to Rehoboam's unwise decision to over-tax the people, Israel and Judah went their separate ways. For 210 years the two nations were separated until, due to their sin, Israel completely fell when Samaria was taken by the Assyrians in 721 BC, becoming the lost tribes of the house of Israel, thus losing their national identity. Starting in 604 BC Judah was taken by the Babylonians until Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in 586 BC. This is the bad news, now for the good.

**Release:** The good news is that the number 21 also signifies a release from sin and coming into the light (the number 22 signifies *light*). And so, it was for Jacob who became *Israel* after wrestling with the angel of the Lord all night. **Israel means God rules** (Genesis 32:24-31). Also, the Hebrew letters for 21 signify *giving strength*, meaning that, in times of distress, there is always the grace of God to cover sin and bring God's people through to the end of it. Of course, this applies even more so to us today as we wait for our Savior to come from heaven to rescue us. The 21<sup>st</sup> time the name *Abram* is mentioned in scripture is found in Genesis 13:3, where the patriarch returned from Bethel after being in distress in Egypt. It is here that Abram called *on the name of the Lord*. This is how we are saved during times of distress. **For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved** (Romans 10:13). But there is more, for times of distress can be a mixture of bad and good. The 21<sup>st</sup> time Israel is mentioned in Genesis, it is said that while in Egypt (Goshen) they acquired property and were fruitful and became very numerous (47:27). Of course, later, even this fruitfulness turned against them; nevertheless, there was blessing in their bondage.

**Perfection:** Now, this leads to the heart of the matter for us who are the Lord's today. If I am correct in believing the USA and the world are currently in a 21-year cycle, which by all accounts is a time of distress, there is a light at the end of the tunnel, so to speak. In the meantime, there is grace for us during this cycle, which leads to a final point, which truly is good news. The number 21 is a positive number in its own right, for it is a factor of 7 x 3. **Seven** signifies *completion* or *spiritual perfection*, and **three** signifies *divine fullness* or *perfection*. I submit that this is what our heavenly Father is driving toward in His people during this time in history. Spiritual perfection is the light at the end of the tunnel. Let us fix our eyes on our beloved Lord Jesus while so much around us seems to be in distress. Be encouraged; it won't be long!