

What's the Significance of the Number Seventy?

By Malkie Janowski



The number seventy appears several times in the Torah: seventy elders of the Jewish nation, seventy languages and nations of the world, and seventy members of Jacob's family that came to Egypt. The last two examples will give us an insight as to the nature of this number.

Seventy is a double-sided coin, representing on one hand the ultimate unity, and on the other hand, the epitome of disunity. When Jacob and his household traveled down to Egypt to be with his son, Joseph, the Bible tells us, "All the offspring of Jacob, seventy soul." Not souls, in the plural form, but the singular word—soul. The commentaries explain that the degree of unity among the family members was such that they were as one man, one soul, one drive.

Yet earlier in history, a generation after the great flood in Noah's time, a group had arisen to build a structure that would reach the heavens. They would ascend it and fight G-d. This became known as the Tower of Babel. As punishment for their rebellion, G-d planted strife and disagreement among them by causing each to speak a different language and not understand his fellow workers. From the unfinished Tower of Babel, the different languages separated from each other, and formed seventy nations.

When disunity came to the world, it took the form of seventy. When we see a true example of togetherness in the Bible, it takes the form of seventy. It's a number than can be pulled either way,

all depending on you.

Let me know if this helps,

Malkie Janowski for Chabad.org

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