

THREE - FIVE - SEVEN

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The symbolism which is derived from numbers was common to all mystical associations. Of all superstitions it is the oldest and most generally diffused. Allusions are to be found to it in all religions; the Jewish scriptures abound in it and the Christian shows a share of its influence. The respect paid by Freemasons to certain numbers, all of which are odd, is founded not on the belief of any magical virtue, but because they are assumed to be the representatives of certain ideas. That is to say, a number is in Masonry a symbol and nothing more. It is venerated, not because it has any supernatural power, but because it has concealed within it some allusion to a sacred object or holy thought, which it symbolizes. The number three for instance, like the triangle, is a symbol of God. The most important symbolic or sacred numbers in Masonry are three, five and seven.

Three is the most sacred of all numbers. Plato used it as the image of the Supreme Being, because it includes in itself the properties of the first two numbers. Aristotle says it contains a beginning, a middle and an end. In Freemasonry, three is the most sacred of all the mystical numbers. Three rule a lodge, there are three degrees, anything else is superimposed; there are three principal officers, three supports, three greater and three lesser lights, three movable and three immovable jewels, three principal tenets, three working tools in each degree, three principal orders of architecture, and three ancient grand masters. But the greatest Masonic significance of the number three is in its reference to the Deity.

Five is a mystical number formed from the union of the first even and the first odd number, rejecting unity. It symbolizes the mixed condition of order and disorder; happiness and misfortune; life and death. The union of odd and even or male and female made it a symbol of marriage. In Masonry, five is a sacred number, inferior in importance to three and seven. It is specially significant in the Fellow Craft degree, where five hold a lodge and where in the winding stairs the five steps are referred to the orders of architecture and the five senses. We also have the five points of fellowship, and geometry is called the fifth sense.

Seven is the perfect number because it was made up of three and four, the triangle and the square, which are the two perfect figures. The Sabbath was the seventh day; Noah received seven days' notice of the flood and was commanded to select beasts and fowl by seven; seven persons went into the ark; the ark found land in the seventh month; the intervals between sending out the dove were seven days; the walls of Jericho were encompassed seven days by seven priests bearing seven horns; Solomon was seven years building the temple, which was dedicated in the seventh month and the festival lasted seven days; the candlestick in the tabernacle had seven branches. Seven is a sacred number in Masonic symbolism. Seven make a lodge perfect; there are seven steps in the winding stairs, seven stars and seven liberal arts and sciences.