

A Review of Ivan Panin's Biblical Numerics

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Recently someone gave me two tracts on the biblical numerics of Ivan Panin: "The Inspiration of the Scriptures Scientifically Demonstrated," by Panin himself, and "The Bible - a Mathematical Challenge," by Winkie Pratney. Panin, according to Pratney, was a Harvard Mathematician turned biblical researcher, when he found an intricate pattern of sevens, the "perfect number of God", emerging out of the Greek and Hebrew texts. In Greek and Hebrew, the letters also represent numbers. The sum of the numbers in a word is called its "gematria". By using gematria and other numerical patterns Panin attempts to show that the Bible is an intricately designed book that no man could have written on his own, and hence, must have been written by God. Intrigued, I decided to test the system myself.

At first I tried some of Panin's numerics in Matthew 1.1-11. Being satisfied that Panin wasn't making up these numbers, I decided to try it out on another text, 3 John, since it was small enough to work with and no one could claim that I wasn't testing a genuine unit of Scripture. What I found shed light on the whole system. I made four discoveries concerning his numerics system which I want to share in this essay.

The first discovery I made in my investigation is that Panin's biblical numerics don't work everywhere. Pratney claims:

In a given passage or book, the following patterns of seven can be seen to occur, ALL BY DESIGN - (1) The number of words in the vocabulary will divide by 7; (2) The number of words that begin with a vowel will divide by 7, likewise the number of words that begin with a consonant; . . .

3 John, on the other hand, has a vocabulary of 108¹ which is not divisible by seven. The words which start with a vowel are 56 and those with a consonant 52. Only the vowel number is divisible by seven. Thus, the first two patterns don't fit 3 John. Pratney also lists a third pattern, "The number of nouns is divisible by 7." The number of nouns is 22 or 23

¹I used the UBS³/NA²⁶ for my work, which only has minor variations from the Majority Text. The vocabular difference would merely be to drop the word $\tau\iota$ from verse 9, making the count 107, which also is not divisible by 7. Panin, on the other hand, used the Wescott and Hort text. Also, I did not count second aorist forms $\xi\lambda\theta\omega$ and $\iota\delta\epsilon\iota\nu$ as they cannot count as separate vocabulary.

(depending on whether φίλοι counts as a noun or an adjective), which also is not divisible by seven. Clearly, Panin's numerics do not consistently work throughout Scripture.

A second discovery I made concerning Panin's numerics is that he demonstrates no consistent methodology. He has, for example, three numbers for each letter, its place value, its numeric value (gematria) and its value (the sum of the place and numeric values). These numbers become important in his investigation of the 49 vocabulary words in Matthew 1.1-11:

Moreover, these 49 words are distributed alphabetically thus: Words under α - ϵ are 21 in number, or 3 sevens; ζ - κ 14, or 2 sevens; μ - χ also 14. No other groups of sevens stopping at the end of a letter are made by these 49 words, the groups of sevens stop with these letters and not others. But the letters, α , ϵ , ζ , κ , μ , χ , are letters 1, 5, 6, 10, 12, 22, of the Greek alphabet, and the sum of these numbers (called their Place Values) is 56, or 8 sevens (Feature 14).

The lack of a consistent methodology becomes clear since he could just as easily have used the numeric value (gematria) of α , ϵ , ζ , κ , μ , χ , which is 673, or their value, 729, neither of which is divisible by seven. Later, he does something similar, but here uses the vocabulary of Matthew 1.1-17:

Now the vocabulary to the entire genealogy has 72 words. If we write its numeric value over each of these 72 words, and add them, we get for their sum, 42,364, or 6052 sevens, distributed into the following alphabetical groups only: α - β have 9,821, or 1403 sevens; γ - δ , 1904, or 272 sevens; ϵ - ζ , 3703, or 529 sevens; θ - ρ , 19,264, or 2752 sevens; σ - χ , 7,672, or 1096 sevens. But the numeric value of the 10 letters used for making these groups is 931, or $7 \times 7 \times 19$, a multiple not only of seven but of seven sevens.

Now my question is why not use the place value (as in the earlier example) or the value of the letters? He has set out no consistent methodology in the tract and therefore his conclusions are much less than miraculous.

A second example of how Panin's methodology is inconsistent comes later, when he refers to the hapaxlegomena in Matthew 1.1-17:

In his very first section, the genealogy discussed above, the words found *nowhere else in the New Testament*, occur 42 times, 7×6 ; and have 126 letters, $7 \times 6 \times 3$, each number a multiple not only of seven, but of 6 sevens, to name only two of the many numeric features of these words [italics his].

Later Panin writes concerning this feature of the hapaxlegomenon in Mark 16.9-20:

It has just one word found nowhere else in the New Testament, θανάσιμος, deadly. This fact is signalled by no less than seven features of sevens, thus: Its numeric value is 581, or 83 sevens, with the sum of its figures 14, or 2 sevens, of which the letters 3, 5, 7, 9 *from the BEGINNING of the word* have 490, or 7 x 7 x 5 x 2: a multiple of seven sevens, with the sum of its factors 21, or 3 sevens. . . .²

When I applied the same test to 3 John, I found two hapaxlegomena, φιλοπρωτεύων and φλωαρῶν. In fact the sum of the numerical values of the two was 5026, 7 x 718. But the methodology is inconsistent because Panin uses the dictionary form of θανάσιμος instead of the form which appears in the text of Mark, θανάσιμον, which has none of the features of seven in its numerical value (431). Apply the test more consistently to 3 John and the dictionary forms of the hapaxlegomena equals 4931, which is not divisible by seven. Thus, Panin's methodology does not commend itself as consistent. Manipulation of data occurs which makes his results questionable.

A third discovery I made concerning Panin's numerics is that he makes conclusions which do not necessarily follow from his data. For example, verbal plenary inspiration doesn't necessarily follow from his findings of patterns of seven. Coincidence or mere manipulation of data could also account for the patterns. Secondly, Panin's discovery of the pattern in Mark 16.9-20 causes him to assume Markan authorship for this passage, which is highly questionable both from the external and internal evidence.³ But this conclusion

²Note that the proof of no consistent methodology becomes clear in that Panin also fails to apply the test of "3, 5, 7, 9" on any other word in his letter. It is merely an arbitrary choice of which letters to use which coincidentally fall in an every odd number pattern except the odd number "1" which would bring the total gematria to 499 which is not by divisible by 7. Panin's patterns of sevens seem to come very often from his hours and hours of searching for them. A more self-evident pattern of sevens would have to appear from the text in order for Panin's numerics to be a proof of miraculous inspiration. Furthermore, although the gematria of θανάσιμος, 581, is divisible by seven, the sum of the place values is not (95). Thus, Panin picks and chooses only the data which fits his theory. The chances that one of these two numbers would be divisible by seven is two to seven, or 28.5%, not the best odds, but they are certainly less than miraculous. Consider also the sum of the two, the "value" as defined above (676), and now the odds that one of the three numbers will be divisible by seven is 42.9%.

³For those unfamiliar with the critical issue involving Mark 16:9-20, it is simply this: The external evidence is that Mark 16:9-20 does not appear in the earliest and best manuscripts of Mark. This would suggest that it is a later addition by a scribe, since scribes had a tendency to add to rather than subtract from the New Testament. Since the literary style of Mark 16:9-20 differs from the Mark's style, the internal evidence, also, suggests that someone other than Mark wrote it.

doesn't follow, since numbers say nothing about who was the writer. Authorship is an historical and textual matter, not mathematical or scientific. Even if the patterns could prove inspiration of this passage, it cannot prove Markan authorship, for some who reject Markan authorship of 16.9-20, consider it a very early Christian tradition which may be apostolic in origin.

The fourth discovery I made in my investigation is that although both Pratney and Panin believe that they have contributed to the cause of Christianity, they have made no significant contribution -- neither to show the inspiration of the Bible scientifically nor to encourage believers in their faith in the Bible. Since the numerics system clearly does not work in 3 John, it is not at all a proof for or against inspiration (since in my mind, 3 John is inspired). On the other hand, I spent several hours mulling over numerical and vocabular data. Yet my understanding of the text of 3 John and of Matthew 1.1-11 did not improve at all. Therefore, many Christians could waste hours of precious time working with numerics, and yet their knowledge of the content of Scripture would not significantly improve. Christians, however, have traditionally argued for inspiration based on the content of Scripture, a much more convincing argument. It is easy to imagine how the numerics could be extremely intricate to a document, and yet such a document could still fall short of inspiration in its very content. Therefore, Panin's numerics endangers the believer's focus on Scripture. In a day when so many fall short of an adequate understanding of the content, can we Christians afford to spend time focussing on numerics?

Another significant problem with Panin's numerics which is counter-productive to the Christian faith is the logical conclusions which could follow from the theory. Since Panin believed numerics proved inspiration, what if one of the works he has left untested commends itself to this system? A person could argue that such a document, whether apocryphal, pseudepigraphic, or even of modern origin, should also belong to the canon of Scripture. Furthermore, the place of any section of Scripture which did not fit the pattern would also be in jeopardy. 3 John, for example, clearly doesn't fit the pattern. Should we then expel it

from the New Testament canon? God forbid! Finally, could numerics also be the crucial criterion for deciding a textual matter? While discarding the external and internal evidence, Panin uses numerics as textual evidence for the authenticity of Mark 16.9-20. Does this mean that Christians must reject the historical understanding of the transmission of the text for this view of a numerical inspiration? Such a view would hardly convince skeptical non-Christians. Therefore, rather than commending the inspiration of the Bible to a skeptical unbeliever, Panin's numerics discredits Christianity as a religion rooted in history. Hence, it is best to leave textual criticism in the realm of literary and historical investigation.

It seems to me that Panin's numerics fail to work and thus, fail to prove the inspiration of Scripture. Unfortunately most Christians have not the tools with which to evaluate Panin's hypothesis, while few if any biblical scholars have taken Panin seriously and so, have failed to make a proper review of his claims. Here finally is a brief critique by one who is sufficiently skilled in biblical languages. And quite frankly, after attempting to apply Panin's technique and evaluating his logic and methodology, this critic remains skeptical and unconvinced. On the other hand, he is convinced that Panin's numerics can be detrimental to the cause of Christianity.