**In religion**

The number 40 is found in many traditions without any universal explanation for its use. In [Jewish](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish), [Christian](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity), [Islamic](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam), and other [Middle Eastern](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Eastern) traditions it is taken to represent a [large, approximate number](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indefinite_and_fictitious_numbers), similar to "[umpteen](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umpteen)".

**Judaism**

* In the [Hebrew Bible](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_Bible), forty is often used for time periods, forty days or forty years, which separate "two distinct epochs".[[8]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/40_%28number%29#cite_note-coogan-8)
* Rain fell for "forty days and forty nights" during the Flood (Genesis 7:4).
* Noah waited for forty days after the tops of mountains were seen after the flood, before releasing a raven (Genesis 8:5-7).
* Spies were sent by Moses to explore the land of Canaan (promised to the children of Israel) for "forty days" (Numbers 13:2, 25).
* The Hebrew people lived in the lands outside of the promised land for "forty years". This period of years represents the time it takes for a new generation to arise (Numbers 32:13).
* Several Jewish leaders and kings are said to have ruled for "forty years", that is, a generation. Examples include Eli (1 Samuel 4:18), Saul (Acts 13:21), David (2 Samuel 5:4), and Solomon (1 Kings 11:42).
* [Goliath](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goliath) challenged the Israelites twice a day for forty days before [David](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/David) defeated him (1 Samuel 17:16).
* [Moses](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moses) spent three consecutive periods of "forty days and forty nights" on [Mount Sinai](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_Mount_Sinai):
1. He went up on the seventh day of [Sivan](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sivan), after [God](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/God) gave the Torah to the Jewish people, in order to learn the Torah from God, and came down on the [seventeenth day of Tammuz](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seventeenth_of_Tammuz), when he saw the Jews worshiping the [Golden Calf](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Calf) and broke the tablets (Deuteronomy 9:11).
2. He went up on the eighteenth day of [Tammuz](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tammuz_%28Hebrew_month%29) to beg forgiveness for the people's sin and came down without God's atonement on the twenty-ninth day of [Av](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Av) (Deuteronomy 9:25).
3. He went up on the first day of [Elul](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elul) and came down on the tenth day of [Tishrei](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tishrei%22%20%5Co%20%22Tishrei), the first [Yom Kippur](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yom_Kippur), with God's atonement (Deuteronomy 10:10).
* A [mikvah](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikvah) consists of 40 *[se'ah](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Se%27ah%22%20%5Co%20%22Se%27ah)* (approximately 200 [U.S. gallons](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/US_gallon) or 760 [liters](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Litre)) of water
* The prophet [Elijah](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elijah) had to walk 40 days and 40 nights before arriving at mount [Horeb](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Horeb) (1 Kings 19:8).
* 40 lashes is one of the punishments meted out by the [Sanhedrin](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanhedrin) (Deuteronomy 25:3), though in actual practice only 39 lashes were administered.[[9]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/40_%28number%29#cite_note-9)

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* (Numbers 14:33–34) alludes to the same[[*clarification needed*](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3APlease_clarify)] with ties to the prophecy in The Book of Daniel. "For forty years—one year for each of the forty days you explored the land—you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you."
* One of the prerequisites for a man to study Kabbalah is that he is forty years old.
* "The registering of these men was carried on cruelly, zealously, assiduously, from the rising of the sun to its going down, and was not brought to an end in forty days" (3 Maccabees 4:15).

**Christianity**

Christianity similarly uses forty to designate important time periods.[[8]](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/40_%28number%29#cite_note-coogan-8)

* Before his [temptation](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temptation_of_Christ), Jesus fasted "forty days and forty nights" in the [Judean desert](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judean_desert) (Matthew 4:2, Mark 1:13, Luke 4:2).
* Forty days was the period from the [resurrection of Jesus](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resurrection_of_Jesus) to the [ascension of Jesus](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ascension_of_Jesus) (Acts 1:3).
* According to Stephen, Moses' life is divided into three 40-year segments, separated by his growing to adulthood, fleeing from Egypt, and his return to lead his people out (Acts 7:23,30,36).
* In modern Christian practice, [Lent](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lent) consists of the 40 days preceding [Easter](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter). In much of Western Christianity, Sundays are excluded from the count; in Eastern Christianity, Sundays are included.
* The [Forty Martyrs of Sebaste](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forty_Martyrs_of_Sebaste)
* [Kirk Kilisse](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kirk_Kilisse), "Forty Churches" (Σαράντα Εκκλησιές) in Eastern Thrace
* Rain fell for "forty days and forty nights" during the Flood (Genesis 7:4).

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