

Lestovka is a special type of prayer rope made of leather, once in general use in old Russia, and still used by Russian Old Believers today, such as the Russian Orthodox Oldritualist Church, Pomorian Old-Orthodox Church and Edinoverians.



The Lestovka is traditionally made of leather with "steps" made by looping leather around small twig sections. It has a total of 109 steps, i.e. small loops or knots, unevenly grouped. Most Lestovki are joined to form a large loop, but the older variant, which is a simple rope

enjoined at the ends, may still occasionally be found.

At the bottom of the Lestovka hang four Lapostki, which are flaps, usually triangular, but such variations as bell or oak-leaf shapes are also used. These represent the four Gospels and sometimes have icons, crosses, religious symbols or scripture verses printed or stitched on them. The stitching around these leaves symbolize the teaching of the Gospels. Simpler Lestovki will have the Lapostki covered with silk brocade or velvet. This is a traditional way of reusing church fabrics, either of vestments that have become too worn for clergy to wear or of altar-coverings and similar fabrics.

Between these Lapostki are seven small movable pieces, representing the seven Mysteries (Sacraments) of the Church, their location between the leaves of the Lapostki indicating their origin in and central relation to the Gospels.

The main loop will have three large steps on either side where it joins the Lapostki and on the Lestovka itself are three more large steps, giving a total of nine, representing the nine months, during which time Christ had been in the womb of the Theotokos, but also representing the the nine choirs of angels. After the three large steps on either side is a space representing heaven and the earth.

On the main set of counters, there are twelve small Babochki (rungs, steps) signifying the twelve apostles. Then are thirty-eight small counters representing the thirty-six weeks and two days during which the Theotokos carried Christ in her womb. Next, thirty-three small counters for the number of years Christ lived on earth, followed by seventeen small counters for the seventeen Old Testament prophets, including St John the Baptist who prophesied the coming of Christ.

If one is unable to attend Services in church for whatever reasons, it is considered commendable to pray on the Lestovka, using a number of repetitions of the Jesus prayer combined with specific bows and prostrations.

When using the Lestovka as part of a prayer rule, the three counters at either end are used for the following prayers (accompanied by bows) at the end and beginning of the prayer session:

**God be merciful to me a sinner. (bow)
Thou hast created me; Lord, have mercy on me. (bow)
I have sinned immeasurably; Lord, forgive me. (bow)**

The remaining one hundred small counters are used for the repetition of the Jesus Prayer, with bows and prostrations.

Other uses of the Lestovka include counting the twelve or forty repetitions of “Lord, have mercy” used as responses at the Divine Liturgy and Canonical hours. The seventeen counters are also used to count the number of bows during the *Prayer of Saint Ephraim*.

Some Old Rite bishops are accustomed to using Lestovki in place of a chain for wearing the pectoral crosses and Panagia.