

NUMBER SYMBOLISM IN THE SCRIPTURES

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In 1894 E.W. Bullinger published his book, “Number in Scripture” (reprinted by Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids MI, 1981), based on his study of the use of numbers in the Bible. We have used his work as a springboard in searching for number usage in the modern scriptures. A remarkable consistency has emerged.

The primary use of numbers is manifested in the number of elements in lists of similar or related items. Much more often than not the number of elements is related to the subject of the list, and sometimes provides deeper understanding. Some examples are given below. Most of the definitions are Bullinger’s, with some modifications prompted by number usage in the modern scriptures and the temple.

1. Unity, primacy, marks the beginning - all things begin with God; the number of God the Father.
 - a. John 17:11, 20-21 - “that they may be **one**”
 - b. Gen. 2:24, Eph. 5:31 - “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be **one** flesh.”

2. Division or difference; the number of the Son - second in the Godhead.
 - a. Gen. 1:6-7 - “And God made the firmament, and **divided** the waters...And the evening and the morning were the **second** day.”
 - b. Matt. 25:32 - “...and he shall **separate** them one from another, as a shepherd **divideth** his sheep from the goats...” (both bolded words are from Greek *aphorizō*)

3. Complete, real; Divine perfection; the Godhead; the number of the Holy Ghost; the covenantal number.
 - a. 2 Nephi 31:21 - “...doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end.”
 - b. 2 Nephi 26:33 - “...black and white, bond and free, male and female...” Note that any one of the three pairs includes all people, but three categories are given to emphasize completeness.
 - c. Genesis 15:9-21. Here Abraham is told to cut three animals in two, each being three years old, and to lay out the pieces as a token of the covenant God was making with him.
 - d. DC 1:2 - “...no eye...neither ear...neither heart...”
 - e. There are many instances of threes in the scriptures, and also in the temple. They usually mean completeness, but sometimes refer to covenant as well.

4. Creation, all that was created; man in his relation to the world as created; the number of the world; geographic fullness (four winds, four corners of the earth, four points of the compass)
 - a. Mosiah 4:30 - “...if ye do not watch...” four “your” things.

- b. Alma 5:24 - "...with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and also all the holy prophets..."
 - c. DC 3:13 - "...set at naught...broken the most sacred promises...depended upon his own judgment...boasted in his own wisdom."
 - d. DC 4:2 - "...heart, might, mind and strength..."
 - e. DC 89:18-20 - "...shall receive...shall find...shall run...shall walk..."
5. Redemption, mercy, grace; the number of the atonement; the number of the temple.
- a. John 5:1-2 - Bethesda, with five porches (Bethesda means house of mercy or house of grace; see Bible Dictionary).
 - b. Mosiah 3:7 - "...he shall suffer temptations, pain, hunger, thirst, and fatigue."
 - c. Alma 7:11-12 - "And he shall go forth, suffering pains...afflictions...temptations... death...their infirmities..."
 - d. 1 Sam. 17:40-50 - David put five stones in his bag, but used only one to overpower Goliath.
 - e. DC 93:1 - "...forsaketh...cometh...callesh...obeyeth...keepeth."
 - f. DC 109:16 - "And that this house may be a house of prayer, fasting, faith, glory, of God."
 - g. 2 Chron. 3-4 - All of the dimensions of Solomon's temple are five cubits or multiples of five cubits "after the first measure" (an archaic value of the cubit).
 - h. Where in the temple do you see five things?
6. Evil; man in opposition to God; the number of imperfection; man without God and Christ.
- a. 2 Nephi 27:2 (Isa. 29:6) six "with" statements.
 - b. DC 76:26-28 - six names and appellations of Satan.
 - c. Rev. 13:18 - 666; three sixes.
7. Spiritual perfection and completeness.
- a. Gen. 2:1-3 - the seventh day sanctified.
 - b. Ex. 20:10 - seven types of persons and animals not to labor on the Sabbath day.
 - c. Seven rooms in the Salt Lake (and a few others) temple experience for the living (three or four are consolidated into one in most modern temples).
 - d. Where else in the temple can you find seven?
8. New beginning; resurrection.
- a. Eight persons saved on the ark, from which came all nations.
 - b. Gen. 17:12 - Circumcision to be on the eighth day.
 - c. John 20 - Christ was resurrected on the day after the seventh day of the week; the new Sabbath was on this day. "After eight days again his disciples were within..." (verse 26).
 - d. DC 88:119 - Establish a house, even a house of (eight things) (call to build the Kirtland temple, truly a new order of things).
9. Finality, conclusion of the whole matter, Divine judgment of man and his works.
- a. Hag. 1:11 - Drought upon nine things.

- b. 2 Nephi 9:30-38 - Nine “wo” statements.
 - c. Where in the temple can you see nine things?
10. Ordinal (first, second, third, etc.) perfection, perfection of Divine order, everything in proper order; completeness of order, marking the entire round of anything; implies nothing is wanting; the whole cycle is complete. As a multiplier it adds emphasis.
 - a. Ex. 20:2-17 - the Ten Commandments.
 11. Disorder, imperfection, confusion, disintegration.
 - a. Upon... (2 Nephi 12:13-16; Isaiah 2:13-16)
 12. Priesthood; perfection of government.
 - a. Twelve Apostles
 - b. Twelve High Councilors
 - c. Priesthood quorums from Deacon through Elder are numbered in multiples of twelve.
 - d. DC 76:54-70 - twelve “they are they” or “these are they” statements for those exalted in the celestial kingdom.
 13. Rebellion, apostasy, defection, corruption, disintegration, revolution
 - a. Things taken away (2 Nephi 13:1-3; Isaiah 3:1-3)
 14. The Messiah.
 15. “Acts wrought by the energy of Divine grace.” (Bullinger)
 - a. Gen. 7:20 - “Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail.”
 - b. DC 122 - Fifteen “If” statements. “...all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.”
 17. “Perfection of spiritual order.” (7 + 10) (Bullinger)
 - a. Romans 8:35-39, where a list of 7 is followed by a list of 10, all of the same set.
 - b. Hebrews 12:18-24, where a list of 7 is followed by a list of 10, all related.
 40. Associated with a period of preparation, probation, trial and chastisement (not judgment).
 - a. It rained forty days and nights (Gen. 7:12)
 - b. Israel wandered for forty years (Ex. 16:35)
 - c. Christ fasted forty days and nights (Matt. 4:2, Mark 1:13, Luke 4:2)
 - d. Moses fasted forty days and nights (Ex. 24:18, 34:28)
 - e. Elijah in Horeb on the strength of one meal (1 Kings 19:8)
 - f. Christ’s post-resurrection ministry (Acts 1:3)
 50. (5x10) Jubilee, deliverance; grace intensified. (Lev. 25:11-13)
 70. (7x10) Spiritual perfection and order, both emphasized.

100. (10x10) The Millennium? Exaltation in the celestial kingdom?

Now, notice the number pattern in the following verses from 4 Nephi. It appears to be deliberate. Does this pattern tell us anything?

[6] And thus did the thirty and eighth year pass away, and also the thirty and ninth, and forty and first, and the forty and second, yea, even until forty and nine years had passed away, and also the fifty and first, and the fifty and second; yea, and even until fifty and nine years had passed away.

[14] And it came to pass that the seventy and first year passed away, and also the seventy and second year, yea, and in fine, till the seventy and ninth year had passed away; yea, even an hundred years had passed away, and the disciples of Jesus, whom he had chosen, had all gone to the paradise of God, save it were the three who should tarry; and there were other disciples ordained in their stead; and also many of that generation had passed away.

40 and 1	50 and 1	70 and 1
40 and 2	50 and 2	70 and 2
40 and 9	50 and 9	70 and 9