

Symbolism of Numbers

Roald E. Peterson, Jr.

Introduction

Numbers have meaning far beyond the simple quantities they represent, especially for God. He uses them to teach, to bear witness, and to reveal and conceal mysteries. His use of numbers is not arbitrary, but extends out of, and even underlies, what we call natural law. If numbers were not important to God, we would have the Quorum of the Apostles, the Tribes of Israel, baptism at any age, a creation of nine days or five, and no week at all.

Understanding the symbolism behind numbers will open up the scriptures and God's actions in ways we would never know otherwise. This symbolism is a major bridge between various events and doctrines, helping to bring them together into one great whole. This essay is an introduction into the meaning behind numbers. It is not complete but should enable you to see beyond previous limits you may have had.

One

One is the number of unity, togetherness, and dedication or singleness of purpose. It is used in various scriptures to refer to unity between the Godhead (2 Ne 31:21), husband and wife (Gen 2:24,) Christ and his true followers (John 17:21,) and those who are Zion people (Moses 7:18.) Complete dedication to the Lord is often indicated by having an eye single to his glory (Matt 6:22; D&C 4:5.)

Two

Two is the minimum number of witnesses necessary to establish truth. Hence, the Father and the Son bear record of each other, any two members of the Godhead bear witness of the third (3 Ne 11: 32.) Joseph and Oliver were both witnesses of the visits of John the Baptist, Peter, James, and John, and the messengers delivering keys at the Kirtland temple (D&C 13, 27, 110.) Although there was no second mortal witness of the First Vision, the two witness rule still applies: people must seek a witness from God himself, through the Holy Ghost. This is essential to the building of faith and a testimony leading to salvation. It proves to the seeker that revelation is a fact, not only for Joseph Smith, but for everyone.

Geometrically, two points establish a line, dividing things on one side from the other. Similarly, the story told by two witnesses establishes truth from falsehood and divides people into believers and nonbelievers. The law of two witnesses is used throughout the Gospel and its ordinances: missionaries, witnesses for baptism, witnesses for sealings and other temple ordinances. Children are given two parents to teach them the truth of life.

Even the Urim and Thummim were two stones, called by separate names, bearing witness of hidden truths. Just as two eyes are better than one, the Urim and Thummim were fastened together and placed over the heart of the High Priest to enable righteous judgment (Ex 20:30; JS-H 35.) There were also two lighted stones in each of the Jaredite barges (Ether 3.)

Another use of the number two is to show superiority. Hebrew does not have this built into the language like English does. In English when there is more of something we usually add an "er" to the end: sadder, happier, faster, greener, and lovelier. Some words even have special forms to show superiority: better, worse, and more. In Hebrew, and thus the scriptures, superiority is often shown by using a word twice, such as in "wo wo". In this case it would indicate not just woe, but greater woe than would normally be meted out.

Three

Three is the number of God. It stands for the divine and represents the Trinity and the characteristics or missions each member has. There were three special witnesses to the gold plates, hearing the word of God declare that they were true, demonstrating that the witness came from God. When God warns a person it seems he does so three times and no more. When Moroni came to Joseph to tell him about the plates, he came three times that night to be consistent with a message from God. There are three kingdoms of Glory in Father's creations. A chief attribute of God is that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever – three again. There were three days of darkness at the time of Christ's death – a sign that God had died. When the voice of God came to the Nephites and Lamanites after the destruction following Christ's death, it came three times (3 Ne 11.) Alma the younger suffered God's

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punishment for three days in hell before he received forgiveness of his sins (Alma 38:8, D&C 19:4-18.) Many people of old testament times were commanded to go three days into the wilderness to make sacrifices to God (Ex 3:18; 5:3; 8:27.) Even Lehi did this when he left Jerusalem (1 Ne 2:6-7.) Three days of darkness, a plague from God, came upon Egypt (Ex 10:22.)

Geometrically, three points describe a circle, the perfect or divine shape, even one eternal round (now we're adding geometric symbolism into the mix – but after all, all truth can be *circumscribed* into one great whole.) A chair or table with three legs is also the most stable. It will always find equilibrium, whereas four or more legs often leave a wobble in the system.

Presidencies composed of three members are symbolic of God. But it goes beyond the Church. Atoms are composed of three basic particles: protons, electrons, and neutrons. At an even more fundamental scale, both protons and neutrons are composed of three quarks each, suggesting that the presidency rule might be universal (no pun intended.)

As there is no superior in Hebrew (see Two), neither is there a superlative form to indicate the maximum. Instead, using a word three times in succession indicates the most or greatest. Following this line of logic, “holy holy” should be translated as “holier” (two times something means more of it,) and “holy holy holy” should be translated as “holiest.” Likewise, “wo wo wo” would indicate the most woe possible, or woe poured out without restraint.

Four

Four is the number of mortality or mortal man. It represents the mortal earth with its four corners or four cardinal directions. That four is associated with mortality is taught in Genesis 2. There was a river in the Garden of Eden that flowed out of the garden and split into four other rivers. While Adam and Ever were in the garden they were one with God. After the Fall, they were driven out of the garden and entered mortality. Why does four signify mortality? We all come into mortality from a single source, in innocence. However, after we come of age we all choose to follow one of four paths. Three lead to the three kingdoms of glory, and one leads to perdition. Another consideration is that the mortal experience takes place in four-dimensional space-time: height, width, depth, and time.

When referring to everybody, the scriptures often use “every nation, kindred, tongue, and people,” or similar list of four. This is indicative of everyone, from the

four corners of the world. The cross has four extensions or branches, showing that people may come from the four corners of the earth (all men) to Christ. It also shows how men will be judged: the honorable people on the right hand of Christ, the wicked on the left, the valiant and righteous as a crown on the head, and perdition beneath his feet (D&C 29: 27, 13; 76: 106.)

Five

Five is indicative of choice or opposites. It took me a long time to figure this one out because it is never given by itself. There are five fingers on a hand, but there are two hands. On one hand you can choose this, but on the other hand you can choose that. The parable of the 10 virgins is a good example. There were five wise and five foolish virgins. In the endowment there are five sets of opposites mentioned. Not nearly as obvious is the choice Lehi makes when he goes into the wilderness to follow the Lord's command (1 Ne 2:4; 3:1-4; 7:1-2.) He chooses to leave behind five things: house, land of his inheritance, gold, silver, precious things. He takes with him three things and sends his sons back for two more: family, provisions, tents, the brass plates (scriptures), other people who would go. (This in itself is a great lesson for what we should be putting our emphasis on.)

Another point that should be considered here are the five laws of heaven we covenant to follow in the temple (obedience, sacrifice, gospel, chastity, consecration.) When David took five smooth stones from the brook to fight Goliath (1 Sam 17:40.) they could represent these same five laws, implemented to perfection as suggested by the smoothness. They could also represent the preparation (smoothness) of making righteous choices (5). I use the word could – not to show uncertainty – but to indicate the possibilities. Both interpretations are valid. This is duality, and it is used throughout the scriptures.

A final consideration is that five can represent division, a consequence of choice. When people are judged, some will find themselves on the right hand of God, others on the left.

Six

Six is the number of preparation. It is followed by seven, and is not complete without seven. In God's work six is always followed by seven. The days of creation show an example of this. So do the six thousand years of the Earth's preparation to receive the Christ as King. The establishment of the week as six days to labor, followed by a restful Sabbath is also an

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example (Ex 20:9; 31:15).

An example of preparation that is somewhat hidden and often overlooked can be found in Mosiah 18:30. This verse mentions Mormon six times, talking about the things the people did in the land of Mormon that prepared them to know their Redeemer, which is mentioned toward the end of the verse as the seventh item.

When we are admonished to put on the whole (7) armor of God (Eph. 6:10-18; D&C 27:15-18), six items are listed as preparation (truth, righteousness, gospel of peace, faith, salvation, spirit.)

Six is often wrongly referred to as representing Satan because of the reference to 666 in the book of Revelation (Rev. 13:18). Satan went through all the preparations for the final test of the mortal probation but refused to accept the Father's anointed one as the Christ. Because of this his progression was damned and he will receive no physical body (Abraham 3:24-28). Satan has also boasted that he would be as God (Isa 14:12-14). Because he only made the preparations (6) to come to mortality, but didn't complete the process, and because he claims to be God (3), these two numbers are combined into 666, the number of the beast. Six could be ascribed to Satan in the case where he offers a person great things but only takes him part way there, leaving him incomplete and miserable.

Seven

Seven represents wholeness, completeness, or perfection. It usually follows six (the number of preparation) in things like the creation and the millennia of the earth's temporal existence. It is also used to denote completeness in other things like bathing in the river seven times to remove leprosy, (2 Kings 5) becoming completely or wholly clean. It is also used in the Book of Revelation in reference to the seven crowns on the seven heads of beasts, signifying the universal corruption of all the governments of the earth, not just part of them. Joseph Smith also received the plates in the seventh year after the first vision, after he had prepared. Note that God and Man are together perfect ($3 + 4 = 7$.) God has no reason for Godhood without his children, and Man cannot progress without God.

In the Holy Place of Solomon's temple, there stood the Menorah, the seven branched lamp. Each of the seven branches ended in a cup of burning oil, indicating a fulness of spiritual light or the fulness of the Holy Ghost. Count the number of times the witness couple goes forward in the temple.

Eight

Eight follows seven and is the beginning of a new round, or a new beginning. The eighth day is the first day of a new week. For example, Jesus was resurrected on the first day of the new week, or the "eighth day" of the old, symbolizing a new beginning or a new era. Boys were circumcised (ouch!) on the eighth day for a new beginning in the covenant (Gen 17:12.) Children are baptized when they are eight years old, symbolizing the beginning of a new life in a new covenant with Christ. There were eight witnesses specially chosen to view and bear witness of the gold plates, to indicate that this was a new dispensation. There were eight people who survived the great flood on Noah's ark. These began the human race again. Lehi's family traveled through the wilderness eight years, indicating a new beginning when they arrived at Bountiful. The Jaredites made a new start by traveling to the promised land in eight barges. In the eighth thousand years the earth will be resurrected. Jesus gave eight beatitudes at the Sermon on the Mount, part of a new way of life.

Nine

I don't know of any special significance for nine.

Ten

Ten represents the Lord's portion or a complete portion. Tithing is the Lord's portion, being one tenth, a whole portion but not the whole. The ten commandments are a complete portion of the commandments but do not comprise all the commandments of God. When there were ten lepers healed, one – or one tenth of the original number – returned to give thanks. The ten virgins represent the Lord's people, although only five choose to be righteous. The lost ten tribes are a complete portion.

The beast's seven heads in Revelation also had ten horns. Since horns represent power, the beast could have complete power over a portion of the earth or a complete portion of power over all the earth.

Ten is also used as a multiplier to amplify other numbers, as is 100 and 1000 (See multipliers below.)

Eleven

11 means someone got into the donuts.

Twelve

12 is the number of the priesthood. It also represents special witnesses. There were 12 witnesses to the gold plates (3+8+Joseph Smith). There are 12 apostles or

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special priesthood witnesses of Christ. The 12 tribes of Israel are supposed to be nations of High Priests and special witnesses of Christ to the world of God (Ex 19:6; 1 Pet 2:9.)

The reasoning behind 12 can be seen in the symbolism of the baptismal font in the temple. It sits on the backs of 12 oxen that represent the tribes of Israel. The oxen are not facing out in every direction, but are facing four directions in groups of three – just as the tribes of Israel surrounded the tabernacle in the wilderness. The oxen carry the waters of salvation (the gospel of Christ) to the four corners of the world (to everyone) in groups of three, representing God. Another way of looking at 12 is man's actions using God's power or authority ($4 \times 3 = 12$.)

Multipliers

All other numbers appear to be multiples of the first numbers. In these cases multipliers are used to increase meaning of the original number. The following numbers are often used as multipliers: 7, 10, 12, 100, and 1000.

$10 \times 7 = 70$ is a great fulness. $7 \times 7 = 49$ is a fulness of fulness. 70×7 is a great fulness of fulness, or in other words, absolutely and completely. If 4 has to do with mortality, $10 \times 4 = 40$ is an extreme mortal situation, such as 40 days of rain during the flood, 40 days of fasting or trial, 40 years wandering the wilderness, or 40 years building the Salt Lake Temple.

In the last days an army of 144,000 High Priests will cover the earth in a final attempt to call the nations of the earth to repentance. There will be 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes, or a total of 144,000 special priesthood witnesses. Why not just 12,000? Throughout the history of the earth, the 12 tribes of Israel have not been willing to serve Christ in complete righteousness. In the last days however, that will change. When the time of the Gentiles is complete, the 12 tribes of Israel will be gathered into the Church of Jesus Christ, joining with the 12 Apostles for the first time in history. This is the source of the two twelves. They will form the army of $12 \times 12 \times 1000 = 144,000$.

Conclusion

This is only an introduction. There is much more which you will begin to see as you actually look for this symbolism in the scriptures, in the temple, and in the world around us. Numbers can reveal many great and wonderful things. Be warned that there are systems of numbers, usually known as numerology, which incorporate unrighteous principles in their application.

They have been established like many other things to hide or obscure a true form of knowledge. That doesn't mean they cannot teach us anything. But to follow these forms of numerology is akin to following Astrology. It removes our focus from the true worship of Christ and supplants true principles with false.

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Number Symbolism

Number	Meaning	Examples
1	Unity, dedication, singleness of purpose	Oneness of Godhead, husband & wife, Christ and his followers, Zion people
2	Witnesses, superiority	Missionaries, Joseph and Oliver, the Godhead, Urim and Thummim, Wo wo, holy holy
3	Of God or Deity, superlative, equilibrium	Trinity, 3 witnesses to Book of Mormon, 3 kingdoms of glory, circle, 3 days of darkness, wo wo wo, holy holy holy
4	Mortality, mortal man, mortal earth	4 possible outcomes of mortality, rivers of Eden, 4 directions of earth, the cross, 4-dimensional space-time, every nation kindred tongue and people
5	Choice, opposites, division	Lehi's choices, 10 virgins, 5 opposites in endowment, 5 laws of heaven, right and left hand of God
6	Preparation, incomplete	6 days of creation, 6 days to prepare for Sabbath, Satan is incomplete , 666 Satan passing himself off as God
7	Wholeness, completeness, perfection	Follows preparation, whole creation, week, God + Man, Menorah, washing in river 7 times for leprosy
8	New beginning	Baptism at 8, Circumcision at 8, 8 Jaradite barges, 8 on Ark, 8 witnesses for plates, Lehi 8 years in wilderness
10	Lord's portion, complete portion	Tithing, 10 virgins, 10 lepers, horns of beast in Revelation, 10 commandments, a multiplier
12	Priesthood, special witnesses of God	12 tribes of Israel, 12 Apostles, 12 oxen of baptismal font, total witnesses for gold plates, God x Man
Multipliers	7, 12, 10, 100, 1000,	7x7 70 144,000 40 - Increases meaning