

Pebble Counting

The earth is round, not flat. Light objects can fall to earth just as quickly as heavy objects. Time is relative. These are some of humanity's discoveries that have changed, not the essence of the created realm, but the way we understand it and live in it.

This study presents a rather humble hypothesis that, if confirmed, may offer a shift in understanding the literary nature of the Hebrew *Tanakh* and the New Testament Scriptures. The hypothesis is that all Scripture may have been written using a literary numbering system; that this system may be inherent and discernible in the text; and that such a system may provide a literary basis for understanding the use of numbers in these passages. This system is not to be confused with our modern chapter and verse numbering system, which was added many centuries after the original writing.

Joseph, while imprisoned in Egypt, listened as the chief cupbearer and chief baker "counted" their dreams to him. Later, Pharaoh "counted" his dream to his counselors, in vain. Joseph, however, was able to hear and understand the counted dreams and provide a clear interpretation.

John, author of the Book of Revelation, advised a method of counting that may have been all too accessible and familiar to his context in exile on the rocky island of Patmos. He urged his listeners to "pebble." The Greek verb, which more fully means *to count using pebbles*, is based upon a root noun meaning *a pebble*. Whether literally or figuratively, John may have used many such "pebbles" to track literary elements in his composition of the Book of Revelation. This study and its hypothesis are named in honor of John's painstaking care for precision with the literary design of his work.

This study arises out of a desire to understand the Book of Revelation. In the twenty-five years of my adulthood, I have enjoyed reading and meditating on English translations, looking at creative and artistic timelines and video presentations, reading from a variety of leading commentaries of differing perspectives, and writing some about Revelation during seminary. The Lord brought my family into a difficult season of ministry transition, and I found great comfort in echoing/quoting aloud while listening to an English recording of the Book of Revelation, many times over. It was during that season that I became curious about literary devices in Revelation. More recently, as I expanded my study to include Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts, I observed literary patterns that seemed consistent across the languages, genres, and times-of-writing of Scripture.

In honor of my father, Tim, who loves God's Word.

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I am introducing a hypothesis that may provoke a variety of reactions. It is my hope that the people of God will wisely evaluate what is presented here. I will repeatedly use words such as “may” and “appears” in order to maintain the posture of a hypothesis in my observations. What I can confidently affirm is the inerrancy of God’s Word and a commitment not to add to it, take from it, or tamper with it.

It is also my hope that, whatever evaluations may arise, God’s people will be moved to greater understanding of His Word, greater worship, greater nearness to Him, and greater awareness of their place in God’s story.

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I am not a mountain climber. I enjoy hiking trails in the Appalachian Mountains, including modest rock scrambles. My wife, who is from Colorado, calls these mountains “hills.” She has hiked mountains of far greater size and elevation. Neither of us are technical climbers. We have friends who are technical climbers. We have watched some mountain climber movies.

The grandeur of a sheer rock cliff gives me awe when I gaze from nearby. If I were to try climbing the very bottom of the cliff or standing near the cliff’s top edge, my fear of heights would mightily overwhelm me. For a technical climber, the same cliff might be an opportunity get close to the rock’s surface, to explore the best pathways and most promising grips, and to enjoy the unique features of the climb. At least, this is how I have imagined technical climbing while traversing the beginner walls at a local climbing gym.

With God’s Word, experienced observation and understanding are not things that arise from a distance. Some commentaries include authors’ translations from the original languages, followed by many pages of observations and explanations. Other commentaries do not include the text of the passage. It is possible to pick up a commentary and dive in for a specific answer without really encountering the surface of God’s Word itself.

This study includes original translations of God’s Word with observations placed alongside. The format is intended to give you the best opportunity for an up-close engagement with the text itself while considering the study’s observations. In fact, the translation itself reflects the most fundamental observation of this study. This translation is not a reader’s edition and is not meant to replace your devotional copy of God’s Word. Rather, it is intended to give you a feel for the original language and literary devices. I hope you will enjoy a close, technical encounter with God’s Word. I hope you will see it more clearly and perceptively than I have.

What exactly are these literary devices? If you like grammar and Sudoku puzzles, read on. If you’d prefer to see these literary devices in action, feel free to skip this section. Here is a basic primer for literary counting.

- Moses and the other writers of Scripture may have used tenfold literary sets in crafting their Scriptures. These sets may be broken out by subject. In this study, the subjects are shown in columns for easier visualization. Each tenfold set ends with [10] in red font. Here is an example from Genesis 1:

God	Heavens & Earth & their Host
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[1-2] in (the) beginning, (there) **created**, God, the **heavens** and the **earth**
 [3-4] and the earth **was chaos** and **emptiness**
 [5] and darkness (**was**) over (the) faces of the deep
 [6-7]* and (the) Spirit of God **was fluttering** over faces of the waters
 [8] and (there) **said**, God
 [1] **let** (there) **be** light
 [2] and (there) **was** light
 [9] and (there) **saw**, God, the light,
 [3] that good (it **was**)
 [10] and (there) **separated**, God:
 [4-5] between the **light** and between the **darkness**
 [1] and (there) **called**, God, to **light**,
 [6] “**day**”
 [2] and to **darkness**, He **called**,
 [7] “**night**”
 [8-9] and it **was** evening, and it **was** morning:
 [10] day, one

- A fivefold literary half-set may indicate something being given over, as by a hand being extended. In some cases, the subject is given over to death, deception, or change. In other cases, the subject may be giving or receiving a gift. For these half-sets, the fifth literary element is numbered with gray font: [5]. At the beginning of Genesis 2, God gives Himself over to rest:

[1] and (there) **blessed**, God, (the) day of the seventh
 [2] and He **consecrated** it
 [3] because in it He **rested** from all His work
 [4] which (there) **created**, God
 [5] **to make**

- Tenfold and fivefold literary sets, whether individually or in groups, flow with the passage. They do not serve to disjoint the passage. This is an important rule in discerning the beginning and ending elements of each literary set.
- Literary sets may be composed from literary elements. A single literary element may consist as one of the following:
 - A sentence or phrase having a single verb form, including infinitives, participles, and even gerunds. These verb forms are indicated with **blue font**. A being verb + participle may be counted as a single literary element. From Genesis 1, the sixth element in a literary set:

[6] and it **was** so
 - Series of nouns, typically separated by “and,” for which each noun is a single literary element. These nouns are indicated with **green font**. Series of nouns may be divided between literary sets. They may be nominative or predicate. They may be bounded by verb forms:

[1-2] these **(are)** (the) generations of the **heavens** and the **earth**
 - A modifying adjective, demonstrative, or appositive placed *after* the noun being modified, whether definite or indefinite. These modifiers each increase the literary count and are indicated with **green font**. If adjectives are in series, each separated by “and,” the literary count increases accordingly. Adjectives “other” and “another” appear to be exceptions that do not increase the literary count. Two examples:

[1-2] and (the) gold of the **land**, the **that**, **(is)** good

[4-5] and he **was dwelling** in (the) oaks of **Mamre**, the **Amorite**
 - Adverbs of degree, placed *after* the verb, adjective, or adverb they modify. These are also indicated with **green font**. From Genesis 1:

[2-3] and behold, (it **was**) **good**, **very**
- Prepositional phrases (including, in Hebrew, the construct form) do not increase the literary count unless multiple objects (nouns) are given to the preposition. From Genesis 4, the fifth element in a literary half-set:

[5] (the) voice of (the) blood of your brother **is crying out** toward Me from the ground
- The literary count is affected by context. If two things are in view, the literary count may be two. This is especially the case with Hebrew and Aramaic nouns having a dual ending, meaning two of that thing:

[2-3] and (there) **will be opened**, your **eyes** (**two**)
- The use of redundant words in a sentence, whether prepositions or otherwise, increases the literary count. The preposition “of” (Hebrew construct form) is an exception. From Genesis 1:

[3-4] and birds, **flying** upon the **earth**, upon **faces** of (the) expanse of the heavens
- In some sentences, two verb forms closely relate to a noun + modifier combination and are counted together as two verbs with twofold noun + modifiers = two literary elements. These combinations are best judged in context of their literary sets, by completeness of the literary count. An example from Genesis 1:

[8-9] and to every (thing) **creeping** upon the earth, which, in it **(is)** **soul**, **alive**
- Ordinal numbers (first, fifth, etc.) are one of a series. They are counted as single literary elements along with their verb phrase or sentence. If the ordinal number is placed after a noun and is modified by the definite article, the literary count is increased by one. Examples from Genesis 1:

[10] day, second

[6-7] day, the **sixth**
- Cardinal numbers one to nine are counted in full value within their phrase or sentence. The unit of measure does not itself increase the literary count.

[5-9] and (there) **lived**, Seth, **five years**
- Cardinal number ten may be counted as a complete literary set if its sentence or phrase is the first element in the set. Otherwise, cardinals ten, hundred, and thousand are counted as single literary elements, and their full values are separately added to the literary count. An example from Genesis 6:

[5] and (there) **will be**, his days, **hundred** 100

[6-7] and **tens** [*twenty*] **year** 20
- In Hebrew and Aramaic, cardinals “tens” (twenty) to “nines” (ninety) are counted as two literary elements each, with full values added separately to the literary count. As an exception, cardinal “threes” (thirty) is uniquely counted as three elements, and its full value is added separately.

[2-3] and Lamech, **sevens** [*seventy*] 70

- Numbers that exceed ten are typically presented in Hebrew/Aramaic in component form: for example, “forty and two.” An example from Daniel 12:

[3] blessed (is) the (one) **waiting**
 [4] and (who) **reaches** to days, **thousand** 1,000
 [5-7] **three** of hundreds 300
 [8-10] **threes** [thirty] 30
 [1-5] and **five**

- As an important feature for forcing the literary count one way and another, individual cardinal numbers are never divided across literary sets. This device is especially evident in genealogical, dream, and eschatological passages:

[7-9] and (there) **lived**, Peleg, **threes** [thirty] **year** 30
 [10] and he **fathered** Reu

[1] and (there) **lived**, Peleg

[2-10] after his, **to father** Reu, **nine years**

[1-2] and **hundreds** (two) **year** 200

[3-4] and he **fathered sons** and **daughters**

--- minor paragraph break³⁹ ---

[5-6] and (there) **lived**, Reu, **two**

[7-9] and **threes** [thirty] **year** 30

[10] and he **fathered** Serug

[1] and (there) **lived**, Reu

[2-8] after his, **to father** Serug, **seven years**

[9-10] and **hundreds** (two) **year** 200

[1-2] and he **fathered sons** and **daughters**

- Tenfold literary sets may establish tenfold identities which, when aligned in their work, may be multiplied together to form factors for composite numbers: 10x, 100x, 1,000x. Composite numbers may reflect tenfold identities, acting alone or in alignment, performing a certain number of things. For example, “forty” may indicate one tenfold literary identity performing four things, or four tenfold identities each performing one thing, from the immediate context. These instances are described in detail alongside the translation. For example, from Daniel 12:

[3] and from **time**, (there) **is turned aside**, the continually [daily burnt offering]

[4-5] and **to set up** (the) abomination, **desolating**:

[6] **days**, **thousand** 1,000

[7-8] **hundreds** (two) 200

[9-10] and **nines** [ninety] 90

Here, base number *thousand* may reflect the alignment of three adversarial identities, each having a tenfold literary set in the near context: (10) x (10) x (10) = 1000. The two hundreds may reflect two sets of dual tenfold identities working against one another: (10) x (10) + (10) x (10) = 200. The ninety may reflect the (9x) tenfold literary sets, = 90, attributable to the despicable person. See Daniel 12 for a more detailed discussion.

Large, composite numbers may not be added to the literary count. These large numbers, in some cases, have a correlation with literary elements that have already been counted and which do not need to be counted again.

- A literary section may be identifiable by the converging completion of tenfold (and, in some cases, fivefold) literary sets for each subject in the section. Some exceptional cases may exist where one or more literary elements float to a future section. Sections are especially apparent in Daniel and Revelation. Notice the convergence of literary sets at the end of Revelation 22:

Apocalyp. Saints John 2nd Death

[1-2] and the **Spirit** and the **Bride say**

[3] “**come!**”

[4-5] and (let) he, **hearing**, **say**

[6] “**come!**”

[7-8] and (let) he, **thirsting**, **come**

[9] he, **wanting**

[10] **let take** water of life, freely

[9-10] **I testify** – I – to everyone –

[1-2] to the, (those) **hearing** the words of the prophecy of the **book, this** –

[3] if anyone **should add** upon them

[1] (there) **will add**, God, upon him the plagues

[2-3] the, **having been inscribed** in the **book, this**

[4-5] and if anyone **should cut away** from the words of the book of the **prophecy, this**

[4] (there) **will cut away**, God his share from the **tree** of life

[5-6] and from the **city**, the **holy** –

[7-8] the, **having been inscribed** in the **book, this**

[9-10] (there) **says**, He **testifying** these (things):

[1-2] yes, I **come, quickly!**

[3-4] amen, (You) **come, Lord Jesus!**

[5] the grace of the Lord Jesus (**be**) with all

- Fractions may indicate things being placed into the literary denominator, for destruction or change. For example, “half” may indicate two things from the immediate context that are slated for destruction or for some kind of change. For example, from Daniel 7, the “half of a time” may literarily pertain to two things from context that are being changed: “appointed times and law.” (See Daniel 7 for a detailed discussion.)

[9-10] and it will intend, to change appointed times and law

[5-7] and they will be given into its hand until a time, and times, and half of a time

- In Genesis, Daniel, and Revelation, significant literary macrostructures may exist that are based upon literary counts. All three of these books have places where literary counts reach one thousand at precisely the location where a subject’s thousandfold literary stature is presented. The number 430 is also prominently featured in these three books as a number of adversity and testing. Large, composite numbers (e.g. 2300, 1290, 1335, 1600) also appear to correspond with literary counts in their respective contexts. In fact, significant macrostructure connections appear to exist between one book and another. It appears Revelation was structured around the flood narrative, judging by thousandfold intervals of the total literary count. Revelation and Daniel also share similarities in total literary count. The literary counts of many of the books of Scripture are presented via tables at the end of the study, for visualization of macrostructural devices.
- Words used exactly ten times within a literary section may be intended for forming relevant titles for sections and for groups of sections. This device appears to be used where literary sections are clearly distinguishable, such as in Genesis 1, in the Book of Jonah (a single literary section), and throughout Daniel and Revelation. These tenfold word instances are not added to the literary count.

In addition to literary counting, other potential literary devices are evaluated. These include the use of letters in deliberate misspelling and letter counting (not gematria); the use of repeated words for countable value; and the use of (unit | quantity) versus (quantity | unit) formats to introduce mystery and then explain it.

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The *PebbleCounting* hypothesis would seem quite contrived if it were based upon a minimal selection of God’s Word. The learning process has been inductive and iterative, including multiple passes through the Scriptures being presented. The literary counting method has seen a variety of revisions, and the literary sets have been sharpened from one iteration to the next. Further sharpening will be appropriate as more eyes engage this topic. The work began with translations of the books of Genesis, Jonah, Daniel, Revelation, and Psalm 90. The remaining Scriptures beckon!

The translations are based upon the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (Hebrew and Aramaic Old Testament), and the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament, used by permission of the German Bible Society. Tenfold word counts and the word counts for Psalm 90 are based upon the word counting capabilities of Accordance Bible Software, version 14, presented with the permission of OakTree Software, Inc. Other words counts are my own. These conceptual translations are intended to give a close feel for the linguistic and grammatical flow of the original languages, not for the beauty of the English language. If the hypothesis of this study proves of interest to the community of translators and linguists, many improvements can be made to the quality of these translations.

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Is it even possible that a literary counting method was employed in crafting the Scriptures, such as the grammatical-numerical method hypothesized in this study? If so, is it appropriate to find meaning in literary counts? These questions must be reconciled with one’s convictions about the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. The Scriptures are replete with numbers. The method hypothesized in this study attempts to consistently model the grammar and numbers inherent in Scripture, not extract these features into an external mould. The method appears to be self-authenticating to the degree that the literary sets have flow and convergence; reflect meaning in the placement of fivefold literary half-sets; are aligned with thousandfold and composite numbers; reflect parallels in literary counts from one book to another; and are used in Greek, not merely in Hebrew and Aramaic.

What about chiasm, alliteration, and other local literary structures that have been established in the literature and cherished throughout the age? Would a literary counting system undermine the beauty and grandeur of Scripture as a work of divine literary art, of language and auralty, of rhetoric and rhythm, of poetry and prose, and of diverse genres?

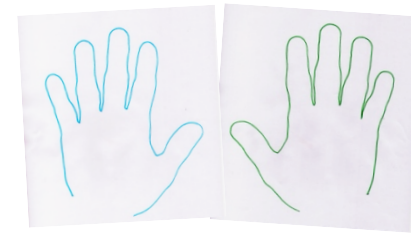
A painting masterfully captures the image of humanity. All the aspects of motion and emotion, of light and darkness, of mystery and of beauty, may be replete. The painting is pure art, one might assert. The brush strokes are permanently preserved. The picture doesn't actually move. However, a hidden fabric of order and motion undergirds this work of art. Paint molecules are alive with the motion of sub-atomic particles whizzing around atomic nuclei. The powerful forces holding these particles in orbit are, as of yet, unexplained by modern science. Paint molecules reflect the organization of the periodic table of elements: atoms binding together according to orderly patterns and reliable relationships. The science behind the painting is crucial to the pure, artistic expression of the painting. In fact, the science behind the painting is more phenomenal than the artistic skill imbued in the masterpiece.

Perhaps a (hidden) literary counting device may be in play in Scripture alongside the established literary and aural devices. These devices need not be regarded as mutually exclusive. Though this study does not attempt to harmonize the literary counting method with other valuable literary devices, the method is certainly not meant to replace those devices. Likewise, this study does not argue against the use of the modern chapter and verse numbering system.

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This study often uses the words "literary" and "literarily." These words are not to be confused with "literal" or "literally." When Belshazzar invited a thousand of his lords to his feast, this was the *literal* number of lords who were invited. This study discusses, not the practicalities of a thousand lords gathering for the feast, but the *literary* significance of the stature of Babylon at this very moment: the composite meaning of $(10) \times (10) \times (10) = 1000$ on Babylon's last watch. This study also discusses the *literary* significance of Belshazzar's thousandfold in relation to Babylon's thousandfold literary stature, realized in the total applicable literary count of the Book of Daniel (not including Nebuchadnezzar's image stature) reaching thousandfold in the exact same spot. This study does not argue against there being *literal* fulfillments of any of the time values and other measures reflected in Scripture. Likewise, this study attempts to avoid arguing for one eschatological view versus another. God will fulfill all His words according to His purpose, by His power, in His timing and way.

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A tenfold set

The hypothesis presented in this study is that all Scripture may have been written using a literary numbering system; that this system may be inherent and discernible in the text; and that such a system may provide a literary basis for understanding the use of numbers in these passages. This study has also explored other literary devices that may be present in these passages. Specific findings include:

- Defines paragraph breaks
- Defines transition points where changes, give-and-take, plot-twists, and destruction take place
- Defines points of literary mirroring, particularly at thousandfold intervals.
- Provides internal cross-references within a given book
- Provides a means for modeling a given book about a section of a larger book
- Sharpens the process of textual criticism, where the inclusion of a word, phrase, or group of sentences is otherwise questioned due to differences among the available manuscripts
- Interacts directly with all the numbers in the text of Scripture
- Interacts in direct mathematical relation to tenfold literary identities
- Establishes a literary basis for the formation of all composite numbers in eschatological passages (e.g. 2300, 1290, 1335, 1260, 666) and elsewhere; and for understanding the total literary counts of individual books or Psalms.
- Interacts in direct mathematical relation to measures of time: hour, day, month, year, "a time," etc.
- Provides measures of the duration of the age.
- Includes forward-reaching and backwards-reaching literary devices and directionalities.

The remaining books and chapters of God's Word should be examined for similar literary patterns and devices. Such work may shed further light on the passages considered in this study. This is a work that may deserve the expertise of linguists and translators, of theologians and commentators, and the engagement of shepherds, teachers, and listeners.

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The following selective works have been formative in my thinking about God's Word as a whole and about some of the specific passages and content being presented. I make no pretense of having read every word of these works, nor of agreeing with them entirely or in part. Because this study has been original in nature, these works have not been quoted or cited.

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