

Sand on the Seashore

by Patch Blakey

While science is the human examination of God's created order, mathematics might be described as the quantifying of what is observed in creation. However, mathematics actually goes far beyond measuring the observed realities of creation to developing conceptual aspects of human imagination. Mathematics, speaking in general terms, is not only a quantifying process, but also a creative process. I will only address a small portion of the quantifying nature of mathematics.

After Abraham was willing to offer his only son Isaac to God as a sacrifice, the Lord told Abraham, ". . . By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice" (Genesis 22:16b-18). I've never looked on the internet to see if anyone has ever estimated what this number might be, assuming that both the number of the stars and the number of the sand on the seashore are equivalent. I would be curious to know if anyone has ever even estimated the number of grains of sand in one child's beach bucket.

I am always amazed when I hear that new galaxies have been discovered, which means that however many stars that we thought there were, there are now many more that we need

to identify and quantify. The number is immense, probably imponderable. What are we to do with a number with tens—much less hundreds—of zeros after it?

Yet as large as the number of stars or grains of sand may be, it is fascinating to note that the people from the tribes of Canaan who camped together to fight against Joshua and the people of Israel were described like this: "And they went out, they and all their hosts with them, much people, even as the sand that is upon the seashore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many" (Joshua 11:4). In other words, it appears that it was a very large number, and the term "as the sand upon the seashore" is metaphorical to some degree.

Then again, in the days of King Solomon's reign, his people are quantified as follows; "Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry" (1 Kings 4:20). This seems to be a fulfillment, in part, of God's promise to Abraham. Yet, again, in the New Testament, we learn that the actual number is larger yet because the Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians, "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29). And that was nearly two thousand years ago. We now have two millennia more of those who are Christ's, and who knows how many millennia more?

We have yet to speak of counting the number of fingers and toes on the giant Goliath, or the size of the bedstead of Og, king of Bashan. The Lord has quantified

much for us in the Bible that is fascinating! And yet there is so much more of His creation that yet defies quantifying. And even in the quantifying, this is not the explanation of what we see, but only a numeric place holder that helps our finite understanding.

In this issue of *Classis*, a number of knowledgeable and thought-provoking math and sciences instructors have authored several stimulating articles. I hope that you will find them of benefit as you read and consider their comments, and that they will stimulate you to further love and good works in your classrooms.

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