

Bible Codes

Back in the mid-1990's the "Bible Code" craze erupted, and the entire world was told that "hidden messages" had been discovered in the Bible. Israeli researchers used computers to analyze the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament and found that if you searched for letter sequences (say, examining every 5th letter in a passage) the result would occasionally spell out some kind of word or phrase. This became a huge phenomenon and many people wrote books about it that revealed all the "hidden things" they found in the Bible.

I remember watching TV one day while someone showed how they had found the name "Jesus" embedded in a verse in Psalms. I was not impressed. After all, the word "Jesus" was very short and the Psalms were *really* long. People looked for codes forwards and backwards, skipping anywhere from just a few letters to thousands of letters. It seemed to me that if you looked hard enough you could find just about anything you wanted.

Even worse were the people who were using these codes to predict the future. One book said that Bible Codes predicted that Los Angeles would be destroyed by a nuclear weapon in 2008. Now that it is 2013 I can safely report that the city has *not* been destroyed.

To me it looked like the codes were just a lot of nonsense: people were finding things that had no statistical significance and were just as likely to be discovered in *War and Peace*. On top of that, they were trying to use these "hidden messages" to predict the future, and they failed pretty miserably. So I lost interest and moved on.

One day, however, I came across a fascinating book entitled *Bible Code Bombshell* by R. Edwin Sherman. The reason this book caught my attention is because it was written by a mathematician who analyzed the Bible codes from a statistical point of view. Like myself, he was deeply skeptical of the whole phenomenon and wanted to see just how probable the codes actually were. Was there anything to this or were the codes statistically meaningless?

The author of the book had a master's degree in Mathematics and was a member of the American Academy of Actuaries. (An actuary is someone who uses statistical analysis to manage things like insurance programs.) For seven years he was a Principal of PricewaterhouseCoopers, a very large accounting firm. Since he did not know ancient Hebrew (which is a pretty important skill to have if you're looking for messages in ancient Hebrew manuscripts!) he worked with Dr. Nathan Jacobi. Dr. Jacobi was a Holocaust survivor with a Ph.D. in physics; he lived in Israel for a number of years and has taught classes in Hebrew. Together they made up a team: Dr. Jacobi worked to uncover the codes themselves, and the author analyzed them from a statistical point of view.

I was very pleased to see that the author shared more than just his conclusions; he also provided the mathematics he used to arrive at those conclusions. The book included his equations and the approach he took in using them, so if you have an understanding of statistics you can see exactly what he did. The author clearly wanted to be as open as possible with his work, and I appreciated that tremendously.

So what did he find? Well, first of all, as one might expect, the length of the Bible codes (or ELS, which stands for "equidistant letter sequence") determines its likelihood of appearing. Shorter words are far more likely to appear than longer ones. On page 33 the author provided a table that explained how likely it was that words of various lengths would appear in the Torah (the first five books of the Bible):

Number of Letters	Expected Number of Appearances in the Torah
2	192000000
3	4000000
4	132000
5	4500
6	165
7	6
8	0.25
9	0.01
10	“0.0004”
11	“0.000016”
12	“0.00000066”

As you can see, as the number of letters in the phrase grows, your chance of finding it drops off dramatically. This is how the author explained it:

“If a code has six letters or less, it is nearly certain that you could find it somewhere in the Torah, and probably find it in many places. If it has eight or more letters, it is very likely that you won't find it anywhere in the Torah by chance. The probability that you will not be able to find a word you selected as a code in the Torah is 78.5% if it has 8 letters, 99.0% if it has 9 letters, 99.96% if it has 10 letters and 99.998% if it has 11 letters.” (*Bible Code Bombshell*, p. 34)

In other words, if you are looking for a very short code (like “Jesus”) then you are *guaranteed* to find it a great many times in a book the size of the Torah – in fact, you would expect to find it *thousands* of times. (The author puts a number on this: he said that because the Hebrew name for Jesus has only four letters, you would expect to find it *600,000 times* in the Torah just by *random chance* alone.) That is exactly what I suspected: the ability to find very short phrases in a very long document is not the least bit surprising. The author pointed out that this holds true even for random collections of Hebrew letters.

Therefore, if you want to find something special you need to look for long phrases. If you are looking for a phrase that is 11 letters long, there is a 99.998% chance that you will *not* find it. Finding something that long *would* be significant. This creates a problem, however, because most books that talk about Bible Codes look for very *short* phrases – usually words that are 6 letters long or shorter. Then when they find something they get all excited about it, when in reality they would have had just as much luck searching for it in *War and Peace*.

The bottom line is that Bible codes are only meaningful *if they are longer than just a few letters*. Finding something a dozen letters long would be special; a phrase that long is unlikely to appear just by chance. Finding something even longer than that would be very special indeed.

As it turns out, the number of possible words and phrases that you can find in the Torah is *not*

[illegible]

From pages 88 to 90 the author lists some of the codes that were discovered in this passage. What is amazing is that many of them are actually topically relevant – in other words, the codes are talking about the same thing that the chapter is (namely, the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus). Below I give a sample of some of these codes; the letters to the right represent the phrase's length in Hebrew.

One thing you might notice is that some of the phrases seem a bit “odd.” There is a reason for this, and I will explain it a bit later. The key to remember is that the longest codes are *far* too long to have appeared by chance, which means they must have been put there deliberately – even if they do seem a bit bizarre and cryptic.

Some of the codes are:

Isaiah 53 codes – English translation	Hebrew letters
If the friend of evil will thirst for the end of righteous purity, his home is an urn. Let Judas have his day. To me, the elevated one, they fasted. Where are you? Its content will be written from my mouth. Father, indeed you will raise the dead over there.	73
If indeed all the detail of this one is a string, does Peter despise the burden of the extra ships, and does my throne rest? So spoke God's poor.	47
Gushing from above, Jesus is my mighty name, and the clouds rejoiced.	22
There God will raise everything to the lion, God's witness being Matthew.	22
Obedience to God, even if for a day only, Peter.	19
The ascension of Jesus: for the sleeping one will shout. Listen!	19
And in his name, as he commanded, Jesus is the way.	16
My shepherds are among the disciples.	14
Jesus is salvation	8
Mary is the mother of God	8
Son of Elohim	8
Dreadful day for Mary	7
It is finished	7
Jesus reigns	7

She weeps much	7
Shiloh is a guilt offering	7
True messiah	7
Second Adam	6
Thirty	6

These are just a few of the codes that were found in Isaiah 53; there are many more. The point I want to emphasize is that the odds of the longest code appearing by chance (let alone the odds of *all* of the discovered codes appearing clustered in this one place) is simply unfathomable. The author calculates the odds of just that one 73-letter phrase appearing are 1 in 71.6 billion x 1 billion. It is simply impossible for this to be an accident: this mega-cluster of codes *had* to have been put there deliberately. It is not a product of simple random chance.

It is the author's belief that the codes demonstrate that God must have written the Bible. No one else had the expertise necessary to embed the codes into the passage. Even with modern technology it would be difficult to fit *1600 codes* into a passage as short as Isaiah 53, even if you weren't concerned about producing something that made sense! For a passage as short as that chapter to have that much hidden in it, and for the messages to tie so neatly to what the chapter is talking about, is nothing short of a miracle – it has to be the handiwork of God. Bible codes are strong evidence that *God wrote the Bible*. Only a divine, all-powerful Being could have hidden that much material inside such a short passage. (There are actually other “mega-clusters” besides Isaiah 53, but I think this one example is enough to illustrate the point.)

The codes are also evidence that the Bible has not been tampered with. If the original text had been extensively modified then the codes would have been “broken” and it would be impossible to find these messages. The fact that they are still intact indicates that God has preserved His Word throughout the millennia, exactly as He promised.

And yet there is something odd about these codes, isn't there? The short phrases are easy enough to understand (“thirty”, for example, may be a reference to the 30 pieces of silver that were used to betray Jesus), but the longer ones are cryptic, at best. “Does Peter despise the burden of the extra ships”? What on earth does that mean? The phrase is so long that it cannot be an accident; it must have been put there deliberately. But why? (Some of the Bible codes that have been found in Isaiah 53 are even more bizarre than that.)

On page 165 the author lays out a number of principles that put the Bible codes in context and explains why they are the way they are. For the purposes of this discussion I think it's important to quote this in its entirety. He said:

1. Codes by definition are hidden, but this would not be inconsistent with the nature of God. “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter...” (Proverbs 25:2)
2. Divine codes would probably relate generally to the subject matter of the surface text. The Bible clearly sets forth the principle of confirmation – that is, a matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. This principle is clearly stated twice in the Hebrew Old Testament (Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:5), and three times in the New Testament (Matthew 18:16, 2 Corinthians 13:1, and 1 Timothy 5:19). So codes that served as another witness to the message of the literal text would seem quite natural.
3. Divine codes would often relate to future events. God claims that one of His unique

abilities is His full knowledge of the future. “To whom will you compare me or count me equal? ... I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please” (Isaiah 46:5, 9-10). About 25% of all Bible verses are prophecies of future events.

4. The reliability of Divine codes should be clearly inferior to that of the literal text. If Bible codes were truly reliable, the content of the literal text would be open to challenge on the basis of newly discovered codes. Such discoveries, or the proclamation of prophecies based on codes, would give glory to the researchers who discovered them, rather than giving glory to God. Yet we know that God will not share His glory with others (Isaiah 42:8, 11).
5. Divine codes should be inherently unreliable as the basis for accurately predicting the future. Otherwise, God would be openly tempting us to do evil. Yet God does not tempt anyone (James 1:13). Using Bible codes to attempt to predict the future is akin to practicing divination, sorcery, and/or the reading of omens. Such practices are strongly condemned in the Bible (e.g, Leviticus 19:26, Deuteronomy 18:10-13).
6. Divine codes may well be foolish, lowly, and despised, and yet they would still confound the wise. God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise...He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him” (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

... Why would God intentionally encode unreliable messages within a sacred text? This would make sense if God wanted to provide implicit evidence within the text that He composed it, while at the same time discouraging attempts to derive new truths or predictions from such messages. It appears that the only real purpose of Bible codes is like that of the embedded strip in \$20 bills. The strip adds nothing except proof that the bill is the real thing. (*Bible Code Bombshell*, page 165-6).

I think the last paragraph is key. Bible codes are very real and offer compelling evidence that God wrote the Bible and that the Bible has not been corrupted over the centuries. However, the codes are *not* intended to provide a way to predict the future. They are something like a watermark: they demonstrate the authorship of the text *but they were not designed to add anything to it*. People who try to use them to predict the future will find themselves in a mess, because that is not what the codes were designed to do. They are not a magic 8 ball that predicts the future: they are the fingerprints of God, showing that the Scriptures were written by God and not by men.

If you are interested in this subject I'd highly recommend reading the book. The author goes into a tremendous amount of detail and offers a lot of valuable insights. If you are interested in a scientific analysis of Bible codes then this is definitely the book for you.