

Bible Codes

Back in the mid-1990's the "Bible Code" craze erupted and the 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 (for example, by examining every 5th letter in a passage) the result would occasionally spell out some kind of word or phrase. This became a huge phenomenon. Many people wrote books about it which claimed to reveal 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 wasn't impressed. After all, the name of Jesus is 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 used these codes to predict the future. One book claimed that Bible Codes predicted that Los Angeles would be destroyed by a nuclear weapon in 2008. Now that we're well past that date, I can safely report that the city was *not* destroyed in 2008.

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 was 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 didn't 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 had taught classes in Hebrew. Together they made a team: Dr. Jacobi worked to uncover the codes themselves, and Sherman analyzed them from a statistical point of view.

I was very pleased to see that 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 way he used 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, as one might expect, the length of the Bible codes (or ELS, which stands for “equidistant letter sequence”) determined 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	192,000,000
3	4,000,000
4	132,000
5	4,500
6	165
7	6
8	0.25
9	0.01
10	0.0004
11	0.000016
12	0.00000066

As the number of letters in a 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)

If you are looking for a very short code (such as “Jesus”) you're all but *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's exactly what I suspected: the ability to find very short phrases in a very long document isn't the least bit surprising. The author pointed out that this holds true even for random collections of Hebrew letters.

This means that if you want to find something special you need to look for long phrases. If you're looking for a phrase that's 11 letters long, there's a 99.998% chance that you *won't* find it. Finding something that long would be significant. This creates a problem because most books that talk about Bible Codes look for very *short* phrases – usually words that are 6 letters long or less. 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*.

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

Although the Torah is long, the number of possible words and phrases that you can find in it isn't infinite. In the back of the book the author calculated that there are only 1.2 trillion different possible combinations. (The author explains how he arrived at that number, but in the interest of not putting everyone to sleep I'll skip over that.) This may seem like a huge number but it's nowhere near infinite. The bottom line is that you *cannot* find anything that you want to find if you just keep looking for it. The math says that there are some things you will almost certainly

find, some things that you might find, and some things you're *extremely* unlikely to find.

I was greatly surprised to learn that the author found codes which were much longer than 12 letters. The longest code that he found had *73 letters*. This was part of what he called a “mega-cluster” of Bible codes which was focused on Isaiah 53, a chapter that deals with the crucifixion of the Messiah. By “mega-cluster” he meant that in that one chapter alone he discovered more than *a thousand* Bible codes. For the record, here's Isaiah 53 in its entirety. As you read it, try to imagine what it would take to hide *hundreds* of secret messages in it:

Isaiah 53: “1 Who hath believed our report?
and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?

2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender
plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath
no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see
him, there is no beauty that we should desire
him.

3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of
sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid
as it were our faces from him; he was despised,
and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried
our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken,
smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions,
he was bruised for our iniquities: the
chastisement of our peace was upon him; and
with his stripes we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have
turned every one to his own way; and the LORD
hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he
opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb
to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her

had rigged the system. That, in fact, is the point the author is trying to make: the system *has* been rigged. Bible codes are quite real and God put them there deliberately – but not for the reasons we might expect.

From pages 88 to 90 the author lists some of the codes that were discovered in this passage. What's amazing is that many of them are actually topically relevant, which means the codes are talking about the same thing that the chapter is discussing (namely, the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus). Below I give a sample of some of these codes.

One thing you might notice is that some of the phrases seem a bit odd. There's a reason for this and I'll 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	Number of 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	22

my mighty name, and the clouds rejoiced.	
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* the discovered codes appearing in this one place) is simply

unfathomable. The author calculates the odds of just that one 73-letter phrase appearing as 1 in 71.6 billion x 1 billion. It's simply impossible for this to be an accident. This mega-cluster of codes *had* to have been put there deliberately. It's not a product of random chance.

It is the author's belief that these codes demonstrated that God must have written the Bible. No one else had the expertise necessary to embed these 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 one example is enough to illustrate the point.)

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

And yet there's 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 a bit cryptic. “Does Peter despise the burden of the extra ships”? What on earth does that mean? The phrase is so long that it can't 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 puts the Bible codes into context and explains their nature.

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 real and offer compelling evidence that God wrote the Bible and it hasn't 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 weren't designed to add anything to it*. People who try to use them to predict the future will find themselves in a mess because that's not what the codes were designed to do. They aren't intended to predict the future! Instead they're the fingerprints of God, showing that the Scriptures were written by God and not by men.

If you're 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're interested in a scientific analysis of Bible codes then this is definitely the book to get.