The Bible Code

A Valley Bible Church Position Paper
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What is the Bible Code?

The Bible Code is the theory that God has placed hidden information within the Bible that can only be found through a technique called Equidistant Letter Sequencing (ELS). ELS involves removing all the spaces between the words of the Hebrew Text and checking for words that might appear if the letters were read at certain set intervals. For example, selecting every 12th letter or every 50th letter starting from a given point in the text.

Who are advocates of the Bible Code?

Among Jewish advocates: Michael Drosnin (Author of The Bible Code, 1997), Eliyahu Rips, Doron Witztum, Yoav Rosenberg.

Among Christian advocates: Paul Crouch, Grant Jeffrey, Hal Lindsey.

Is the Bible Code real?

The Bible Code is real in the sense that words may be found by taking letters at set intervals from the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. The significance of this is what is in debate.

Is the Bible Code from God?

This is the big question. Below are several reasons to conclude that the Bible Code is nothing more than a random phenomenon which could be found in any long text.

1. The likelihood of intentionally hidden Bible Codes

At least fifty-three of the top mathematicians in the world, the vast majority with doctorates in mathematics, have drafted the following statement. It may be found at http://math.caltech.edu/code/petition.html.

We are making this statement concerning what have been called 'Bible codes' or 'Torah codes.' We recognize that many sincere people take this phenomenon seriously, which compels us to speak out on the basis of what our mathematical training tells us about the evidence claimed for this alleged phenomenon.

There is a common belief in the general community to the effect that many mathematicians, statisticians, and other scientists consider the claims to be credible. This belief is incorrect. On the contrary, the almost unanimous opinion of those in the scientific world who have studied the question is that the theory is without foundation. The signatories to this letter have themselves examined the evidence and

found it entirely unconvincing.

We refer in particular to the paper Equidistant Letter Sequences in the Book of Genesis, published in Statistical Science in 1994. This experiment suffers from major problems concerning both its execution and the interpretation of its conclusions. Even without these concerns, we would not take such extraordinary claims seriously without a vastly more systematic and thorough investigation. No such investigation has been carried out, nor has the work so far established a prima facie case. In addition, word clusters such as mentioned in Witztum's and Drosnin's books and the so called messianic codes are an uncontrolled phenomenon and similar clusters will be found in any text of similar length. All claims of incredible probabilities for such clusters are bogus, since they are computed contrary to standard rules of probability and statistics.

Among the signatories are some who believe that the Torah was divinely written. We see no conflict between that belief and the opinion we have expressed above.

2. The problem of negative codes

If God has hidden codes in the Bible, then we should not expect to find derogatory phrases associated with Jesus or God.

However, Dr. James Price, Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at Temple Baptist Seminary in Chattanooga, Tennessee, has identified many such 'hidden codes.' Obviously God did not hide blasphemous codes in the Bible and this exercise shows just how easy it is to find what you want through the ELS methodology. Dr. Price's codes can be found at www.direct.ca/trinity/codebreaker.html.

Furthermore, the code is being used by some rabbis to prove that Jesus was a false Messiah since the words 'Jesus,' 'sorcerer' and 'false prophet' are found using ELS in the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament. The very vehicle that some argue proves that the Bible is from God is used to prove the Jesus is a false prophet!

3. The problem of the Hebrew Text

The text being used for the Bible Code is the Masoretic Hebrew Text of the Old Testament, specifically the Textus Receptus of the Koren Publishing Company. This text is not the original Hebrew text, which no longer exists. There are many other Hebrew texts, including texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls. The New Testament usually quotes from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament. Both the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint often differ from Masoretic text.

While there are no significant differences that affect the meaning of the text, differences become very significant when counting letters. In fact, every known manuscript of the Hebrew Bible has a different number of letters. If one letter is missing this throws the entire sequence off.

Because we do not have the original text, because every existing text differs slightly and because the ELS system is greatly affected by the absence of one letter, the reliability of sequencing is destroyed.

4. The limitation of the Bible Code

The Bible Code is limited to the Old Testament. Codes have been much harder in the Greek New Testament. The people who first advocated the use of ELS were Jewish rabbis and their focus was mainly on the Torah. Christians have a hard time duplicating this with the New Testament. This is because, unlike the Greek New Testament, the Hebrew Text does not include vowels. The vowels are assumed based on what the word should be in its context. Since ELS has no context, the freedom to interpret what a word really is without the vowels is great.

If God had really hidden a prophetic code in the Bible, why did he only do so in the Old Testament?

5. The ELS method of the Bible Code produces similar results with other literature.

Brendan McKay has taken up Michael Drosnin's challenge in Newsweek magazine: 'When my critics find a message about the assassination of a prime minister encrypted in Moby Dick, I'll believe them.' McKay has found 13 predicted assassinations of public figures from the text of Moby Dick, including Indira Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King, Leon Trotsky and Princess Diana (including the name of her boyfriend and chauffeur). For more information see www.cs.anu.edu.au/~bdm/dilugim/torah.html. The Hebrew translation of War and Peace has produced more than 50 'Chanukah-related' words encoded in the text. Muslims have used ELS to attempt to prove that Allah is God and Mohammed is his prophet.

6. Comparison with Old Testament prophecy

Unlike most of the Old Testament prophetic statements, the Bible Code is not revealed beforehand. In order to use the Bible Code, you have to know what you are looking for. Even some of it proponents, such as Grant Jeffrey, admit it has no predictive value. This is very different from the real data that God put in the Bible that is to be fulfilled. Indeed there is no biblical evidence whatsoever to support Bible codes.

7. The use of false data and imaginative interpretations

Many of the codes that are claimed are unable to be repeated by those who attempt to validate them. Many of the claims of statistical significance are deceptive in their presentation and contrary to accepted laws of probability. The data itself is of a subjective nature that can have different interpretations read into the code. While much has been written on these problems, see Cal Tech professor Barry Simon's paper at www.wopr.com/biblecodes/TheCase.htm.

What is the problem with using the Bible Code?

While anything that is not true should not be used, there are some additional specific consequences that come from those who advocate a Bible Code.

1. The Bible Code detracts from real and meaningful Christian apologetics, most importantly, the Resurrection of Christ and the Messianic Prophecies.

2. It opens the door for the same methodology to be used to attack Christianity.

3. It is wrong to say something is from God that is not. This diminishes what God really has given us.

Conclusion

Clearly, these reasons should cause us to conclude that God has not encoded any information in the Bible that can be accessed through Equidistant Letter Sequencing or a Bible Code. To make such a claim is more than invalid, it detracts from the Word of God itself.

Completed: August 2000