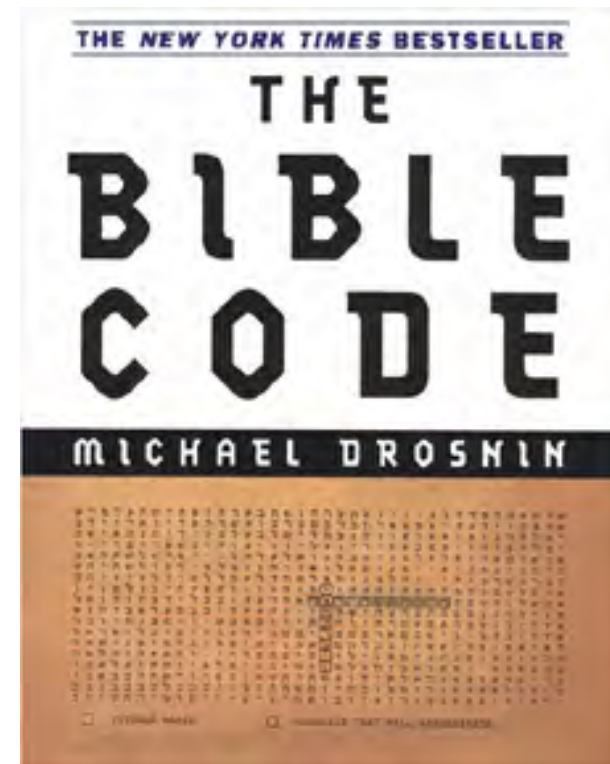# Cracking 'The Bible Code'

Robert C. Newman

The Bible Code

- In recent years, several Israeli rabbis & mathematicians have been investigating the idea that the Bible in Hebrew contains 'code words' hidden in its text.

- These coded words are claimed to:
  - Validate the Bible's divine authorship,
  - Confirm the rabbinic understanding of it,
  - Give us information about the future, especially about Israel & the end of the age.

The Bible Code

Recently some of this material has been published for lay readers by Michael Drosnin in his book *The Bible Code.*

What is the 'Code'?

- Using computers to search the Hebrew text, the investigators look for hidden words that are spelled by letters spaced at equal distances in the text.
  - □ In some cases, the letters are adjacent.
  - □ In others, they are many letters apart.
  - □ In some, they are thousands of letters apart

An Example

- **Drosnin finds the name of former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin:**
  - ☐ In close proximity is the phrase "assassin will assassinate"!
  - ☐ Also the year Rabin was killed & the assassin's name!
- **In spite of this impressive success, some of Drosnin's 'finds' are predictions that have failed.**
  - ☐ …particularly those that he announces before they happen!
  - ☐ … like the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

What are we to make of it?

- The proposed 'Bible Code,' like the claim that the Gospel message is displayed in the stars, is attractive to many Bible believers.

- Obviously, God is capable of doing something of this sort should He choose to.

- The question is, do we have any good evidence that God has chosen to do so?

- That's what we wish to examine here.

Biblical Problems for the Bible Code

Biblical Problems

- There are good biblical reasons for thinking this is *not* God's work.
  - ☐ Failed predictions
  - ☐ Only short words or phrases
- Let's have a look at these.

Failed Predictions

The Bible does not make much provision for true prophecy that doesn't come true.

- Deut 18 indicates failed prophecy is a mark of false prophets.

- This is characteristic of biblical teaching elsewhere: 1 Kings 22, Isaiah 42-46, Jeremiah 28.

- The book of Jonah does allow that a disaster prophecy might be postponed if the people repent.

- Presumably the same might happen with a prophecy of blessing if the recipients became arrogant.

Failed Predictions

- I would not want to make any large use of this sort of qualification given the Bible's emphasis on:
    - ☐ God's foreknowledge
    - ☐ God's control of history
    - ☐ Fulfilled prophecy as evidence of God at work
- In any case, the *Bible Code* failed in its prediction of the assassination of Benjamin Netanyahu, and there is no evidence of his repentance.

Only Short Words or Phrases

- **The hidden messages of *The Bible Code* are virtually single words or short phrases.**
  - ☐ These are naturally rather ambiguous.
  - ☐ There is no context to help us understand what they are about.
  - ☐ This is not typical of biblical prophecies, which are rarely short, and generally given in both a literary & historical context.

Short Words or Phrases

- A serious problem: How do we know we've found all the words necessary to understand the prophecy?

- When some of *The Bible Code* prophecies did not come true, Drosnin found the word 'delayed' in the vicinity of some of them!

- What good is prophecy for warning or guidance if we later find the word 'not' nearby?

- This resembles the work of astrologers & modern-day occult prophets, rather than the God of the Bible.

An Alternative Explanation

- But if this is not God's work, whose is it?

- Neither humans nor angels (good or bad) can tell the future with consistent accuracy.

- There is no reason to think the biblical text has been modified since first written.

- I suggest that the *Bible Code* phenomena are just a combination of chance & human manipulation.

Chance & Human Manipulation?

Human Manipulation?

- I am not claiming that Drosnin *et al* have changed the biblical text to make it work.

- Rather they found the primary code-word (usually displayed vertically on their diagrams) and the secondary prophetic code-words by searching the text using various fixed spacings between letters.

Human Manipulation?

- With a long enough text and not too long a search word, one is bound to find nearly any code-word suggested (or some suitable abbreviation or synonym).

- Around the prime code-word a 'context' is displayed, some 700-1500 characters.
    - ☐ This is not always the real context, though.
    - ☐ Each line may be 100s or 1000s of letters away from the line above or below.

Human Manipulation?

- So the question is: Can we find some word or words hidden in this array of 700-1500 characters which seem to relate to the prime word in some predictive way, even without supernatural intervention?

- I believe we can, by a combination of chance and manipulation.

- Let's look at the chances first.

Chance?

Chance?

The chance of finding these code-words is enormously increased by several techniques employed in *The Bible Code*.

- Remove spacing between words.

- Remove the vowels supplied in the Hebrew text.

- Recall that ancient Hebrew used all of its letters in its number system.

For us Hebrew-challenged types

- Not being fluent in ancient or modern Hebrew puts us at a serious disadvantage.
  - ☐ We have no idea what else the letters may spell.
- So let's try to do the same thing with a text in English:
  - ☐ Declaration of Independence
  - ☐ US Constitution
  - ☐ Gettysburg Address
  - ☐ Something from Shakespeare

Our Test

- We chose Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*.

- We removed all spaces, punctuation, and vowels, and made all letters caps.

- The resultant text has:
  - An alphabet of 21 letters
  - A length of almost exactly 700 characters

Program DECODE

- After a few hours searching the text visually, I wrote a program to do the hard work automatically.
- The program reads in whatever text we are asking it to search, then it asks us to supply a search word.
- The program searches the whole text for all occurrences of the search word at all possible spacings, and reports the results.
- To search for the word spelled backwards, the search word is entered in reverse.

Gettysburg Address

```
FRSCRNDSVNYRSGRFTHRSBRGHTFRTHNTHSCNTNNTNWNTNCNCVDNLBRTYNDDDCTDTTHP
RPSTNTHTLLMNRCRTDQLNWWRNGGDNGRTCVLWRTSTNGWHTHRTHTNTNRNYNTNSCNCVDND
SDDCTDCNLNGNDRWRMTNGRTBTTLFLDFTHTWRWHVCMTDDCTPRTNFTHTFLDSFNLRSTNGP
LCFRTHSWHHRGVTHRLVSTHTTHTNTNMGHTLVTSLTGTHRFTTNGNDPRERTHTWSHLDDTHSB
TNLRGRSNSWCNNTDDCTWCNNTCNSCRTWCNNTHLLWTHSGRNDTHBRVMNLVNGNDDDWHSTRG
GLDHRHVCNSCRTDTFRBVRPRPWRTDDRDTRCTTHWRLDWLLLTTLNTNRLNGRMMBRWHTWSYH
RBTTCNNVRFRGTWHTTHYDDHRTSFRSTHLVNGRTHRTBDDCTDHRTTHNFNSRDWRKWHCHTHY
WHFGHTHRHVTHSFRSNBLYDVNCDTSRTHRFRSTBHRDDCTDTTHGRTTSKRMNNGBFRSTHTFR
MTHSHNRDDDWTKNCRSDDVTNTTHTCSFRWHCHTHYGVTHLSTFLLMSRFDVTNTHTWHRHGHLY
RSLVTHTTHSDDSHLLNTHVDDNVNTHTTHSNTNNDRGDSHLLHVNWBRTHFFRDMNDTHTGVRNM
NTFTHPPLBYTHPPLFRTHPPLSHLLNTPRSHFRMTHRTH
```

Line length of 66 letters

Lincoln spelled phonetically

Above *Lincoln* are *Civil War* and *Battlefield*

Both to L & R of Lincoln is *Gen R Lee*

Below the *R Lee* is Gen *G Meade*

Lower Right *Abraham*

Gettysburg Address

- Naturally, all are spelled without vowels!
  - LNCN, CVLWR, BTTLFLD, GNRL, GMD, BRHM
- The two longest words CVLWR (5 letters) and BTTLFLD (7 letters) are actually a part of Lincoln's speech, not code, so their appearance is not particularly surprising.
- The same can be said for Drosnin's "assassin that will assassinate" in Deut 4:42, part of a regulation for fleeing to a city of refuge by a "killer that has killed."

Gettysburg Address

- I was disappointed not to be able to find the exact spelling of "Lincoln " (LNCLN) in our text, but this was due to the shortness of the text.

- *The Bible Code* faces no such problem, having the whole text of the Hebrew Bible (i.e., Old Testament) to search.

Probabilities

- It is important we think through the probabilities or expectations involved in what we have found in our search of the Gettysburg Address.

- With a 21-letter alphabet and a 700-letter text, then (ignoring the fact that the letters occur with different frequencies), the chance a particular letter will occur is 700/21 = 33

- We should expect about 33 occurrences of a given letter in our text, on average.

Probabilities

- For a 2-letter search word, either letter can occur in either order at any spacing, so the probability is about 33 x 33 = 1089.

- For search words of 3 letters or more, the rule that the code-words appear with equidistant spacing makes matches much rarer. The 3rd letter must be exactly the same distance from the 2nd as the 2nd from the 1st. N = 1089/21 = 52.

Probabilities

- For a 4-letter search word, the result is divided by 21 again = ~2.5

- In general, the probability (or expected number) N of occurrences of a search word of length n in a text T using an alphabet of A letters is:

- $N_n = T^2 / A^n$, where n = 2 or more.

Probabilities for Hebrew Bible

- Now let's apply the same reasoning to the Hebrew alphabet of 22 letters:

- Word-Length   Number in 700 letter text
  - 1   32
  - 2   1010
  - 3   46
  - 4   2
  - 5   .095
  - 6 4.3×10^{-3}
  - 7 2.0×10^{-4}
  - 8 8.9×10^{-6}

Probabilities for Hebrew Bible

- Our English text of the Gettysburg Address had 700 letters.

- It turns out that is a good estimate for the number of letters per page in a Hebrew Bible I have which has virtually no footnotes.

- In this Bible, Genesis takes up 84 pages, the Pentateuch 335 pages, and the whole Old Testament 1360 pages.

Probabilities for Hebrew Bible

- Since the number of expected matches of 2-letter and longer combinations increases with the square of the text length, a calculation of the number of pages squared will also be helpful.

Section	Pages	Letters	Pages Squared
Genesis	84	58,800	7056
Pentateuch	335	234,500	$1.12 \times 10^{+5}$
Old Test	1360	952,000	$1.85 \times 10^{+6}$

Probabilities for Hebrew Bible

- From a previous panel, we saw that the expected matches for a 7-letter word (per 700-letter page) was 2 x 10-4.

- The squared length of Genesis is about 7 x 10^{+3}.

- So the chance of finding a given 7-letter word in Genesis is the two multiplied together, or 1.4.

- Thus we should typically find 7-letter matches in Genesis.

Probabilities for Hebrew Bible

- For 8-letter matches, we would probably need the Pentateuch to search, or even the whole Old Testament.

- Indeed, Drosnin notes that the 8-letter combination for Yitzhaq Rabin occurs only once in the whole Hebrew Bible, about what we would expect.

Probabilities for Context

- Once we have found our long "prime code word" (of say 6 to 8 letters) to be displayed, what size code words can we expect to find in its vicinity?
  - ☐ If we have a context of 700 letters, then our typical cluster words will have 4 letters or less.
  - ☐ If our context is 1400 letters, then the chance of any particular combination appearing will be four times larger.
- In general, we can find the minimum text length in which to expect to commonly find words of length n by solving our equation for T with N=1, A=22 .

Text Needed for Search Word

- ■ Word-Length   Text Length
  - □ 3   103
  - □ 4   484
  - □ 5   2270
  - □ 6   10,678
  - □ 7   49,943
  - □ 8   234,256
  - □ 9   1,098,758

Gettysburg Address

- Notice, in our example, most of the code words we displayed were four letters in length (LNCN, GNRL, BRHM), the largest sorts of words one would find in a text of length 700.

- We could have shown many more 3-letter words, but we only chose to display GMD.

- We will come back to this later when we discuss human manipulation.

Gettysburg Address

- We did, however, find two even longer words (CVLWR and BTTLFLD).

- In general, one can expect to find some longer words; perhaps for 5-letter search words, one in 8 will be successful.

- But both our longer words came from the regular (uncoded) text.

Gettysburg Address

- This is how Drosnin gets "assassin who will assassinate" (11 letters) from the text of Deut 4:2.

- Of course we can expect to get long, meaningful phrases from the regular text!

- We could have expanded our BTTLFLD to GRTBTTLFLDFTHTWR (16 letters)!

Drosnin's Results

- If we go through the examples found by Drosnin in his *Bible Code*, we can tabulate his best results by word or phrase length.

- We find that he locates nine 8-letter combinations, six 9-letter, and one each of 10, 11, 12, and 13 letters.

Drosnin's Results

- **8-letter**
  - ☐ Atomic Artilleryman
  - ☐ Communism
  - ☐ Economic Collapse
  - ☐ Libyan Artillery
  - ☐ Oklahoma
  - ☐ Shoemaker-Levy
  - ☐ 25 July 1996
  - ☐ World War
  - ☐ Yitzaq Rabin

- **9-letter**
  - ☐ Einstein
  - ☐ His Name is Timothy
  - ☐ Holocaust of Israel
  - ☐ Murrah Building
  - ☐ The Next War
  - ☐ Prime Minister Netanyahu

Drosnin's Results

- ## 10-letter
  - ☐ Atomic Holocaust

- ## 11-letter
  - ☐ President Kennedy to Die

- ## 12-letter
  - ☐ Captivity of Toledano

- ## 13-letter
  - ☐ Armageddon Asad Holocaust

Drosnin's Results

- We would expect, given the length of the Old Testament, that one could find virtually any 8-letter word desired, or at least some synonym.

- Is should also contain lots of 9-letter words
  - The text of the OT is 952,000 letters
  - This is over 90% of the length needed for 9-letter words to be very common.

- 10-letter and longer words or phrases would be much rarer, but there are also many more such word combinations. With enough searching, some are bound to turn up.

A Problem

- At this point, it is possible to see a real problem with the idea that this "Bible Code" is the work of God or even a very clever human author.

- Such an author constructing a text from scratch ought to be able to insert a meaningful coded text of nearly any length.

- Try it yourself!

My Attempt at Code

Here's my text:

Many that cover a story with the media will admit that they like spin. Good tales at times lend a real wallop to making a moral. About this same time it seems a fearful shame easier events can never just work that way. As we show what the tale is about, we'll bend details to set the story in that world we want to.

This conceals the first two lines of *Mary had a little lamb*… (41 letters) at a spacing of 6 in a plain text of 246 letters, with only about two hours work.

A Problem

- Yet in *The Bible Code* the longest coded words or phrases (not counting regular text or the same with the words redivided) are "Captivity of Toledano" (12 letters) and "Armageddon Asad Holocaust" (13).

- Getting long words in the regular text is child's play. Drosnin's longest examples are:
  - "to shut up the words & seal the book till the end" (24 letters straight out of Daniel 12)
  - "the writing of God engraved on the tablets" (21 letters right out of Exodus 32).

Conclusion on Chance

- It seems like a text the length of the Bible will supply virtually any 8-letter word you wish in the form of code, many 9-letter combinations, long stretches of regular text, and a few longer coded words.

- Thus the phenomena of *The Bible Code* do not appear to be out of the range of chance.

Human Manipulation?

Manipulation?

- The presentations by Drosnin and company, however, are not fully explained by chance.

- They are also excellent illustrations of intelligent design at work, namely the designing intelligences of these men!

Manipulation

- Comparing two of the tables above, we see that for the OT (952,000 letters) or even the Pentateuch (234,500 letters), finding code words of 8 letters will not be difficult.

- Shorter words will be more common:
  - □ 7-letter words or phrases 22x more common
  - □ 6-letter $(22)^2 = 484x$
  - □ 5-letter $(22)^3 = 10,648x$

Manipulation

- It should not be surprising that, by astute selection of data, an investigator should be able to assemble a constellation of these phrases that are striking "fulfillments" regarding persons or events in the past.

- For persons or events in the future, though, the results will be no better than any other human prognosticator, since the manipulator doesn't know the future.

Drosnin's Dilemma

- God Almighty would be necessary to get all the stuff right Drosnin finds… if it was put there centuries ago!

- God would not make all the mistakes that turn up when Drosnin decodes the future!

"Prediction" in the Gettysburg Address

- In our previous examination of Lincoln's speech, we displayed no prophecy.

- But suppose we do a search on Booth (BTH) and Grant (GRNT).

- Using 1 of the 10 matches for GRNT, 3 of the 63 for BTH, and another of the 4 matches found for LNCN (and NCNL), we get the following picture.

Gettysburg Address
& Civil War Prophecy

FRSCRNDSVNYRSGRFTHRSBRGHTFRTHNTHSCNTNNTNWNTNCNCVDNLBRTYNDDDCTDTTHP
RPSTNTHTLLMNRCRTDQLNWWRNGGDNGRTCVLWRTSTNGWHTHRTHTNTNRNYNTNSCNCVDND
SDDCTDCNLNGNDRWRMTNGRTBTTLFLDFTHTWRWHVCMTDDCTPRTNFTHTFLDSFNLRSTNGP
LCFRTHSWHHRGVTHRLVSTHTTHTNTNMGHTLVTSLTGTHRFTTNGNDPRPRTHTWSHLDDTHSB
TNLRGRSNSWCNNTDDCTWCNTCNSCRTWCNNTHILWTHSGRNDTHBRVMNLVNGNDDDWHSTRG
GIDHRHVCNSCRTDTFRBVRPRPWRTDDRDTRCTTHWRLDWLLLTTLNTNRLNGRMMBRWHTWSYH
RBTTCNNVRFRGTWHTTHYDDHRTSFRSTHLVNGRTHRTBDDCTDHRTTHNFNSHDWRKWHCHTHY
WHFGHTHRHVTHSFRSNBLYDVNCDTSRTHRFRSTBHRDDCTDTTHGRTTSKRMNNGBFRSTHTFR
MTHSHLRDDDWTKNCRSDDVTNTTHTCSFRWHCHTHYGVTHLSTFLLMSRFDVTNTHTWHRHGHLY
RSLVTHTTHSDDSHLLNTHVDDNVNTHTTHSNTNNDRGDSHLLHVNWBRTHFFRDMNDTHTGVRNM
NTFTHPPLBYTHPPLFRTHPPLSHLLNTPRSHFRMTHRTH

Booth's name appears above & behind Lincoln, just as he did in Ford's Theatre that fateful night. Lincoln is shot and falls prone. Booth, jumping from the box, falls awkwardly to the stage. Booth escapes the scene.

The outcome of the war is predicted. Grant & Lee are crossed, with Lee & his forces declining and Grant remaining on the level.

Gettysburg Address
& Civil War Prophecy

- Is this all in the Gettysburg Address?

- Yes, in the sense that all the letters are there in the locations shown.

- But all of Shakespeare is in Webster's Dictionary!

- The locating of the words, their assembly and presentation is my work – human manipulation!

Conclusions

Conclusions

- We have provided a brief tour of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and the statistics for word matching both here & in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.

- It appears that nothing particularly unusual has been found in the alleged "Bible Code" that cannot be explained by common probability & human manipulation.
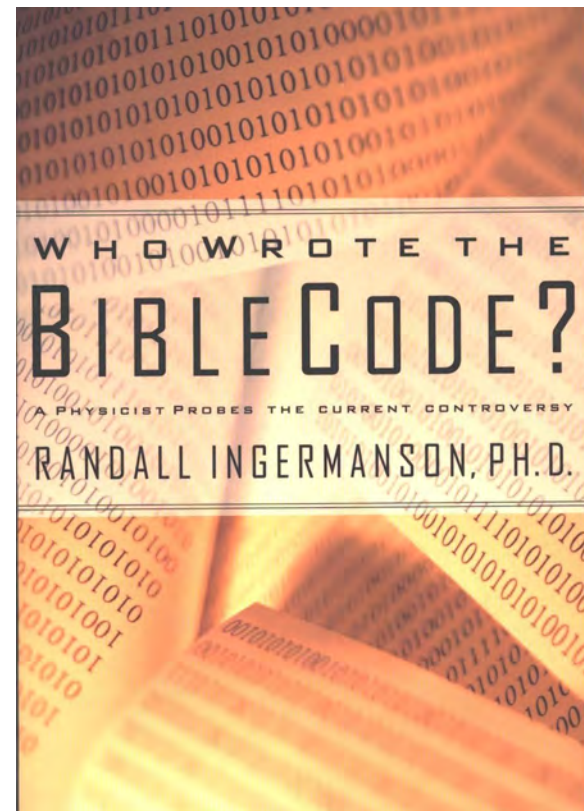
Conclusions

- Certainly, the level of prediction in the *Bible Code* would be impressive if it were the work of an ancient human.

- It would be about right for a modern interpreter…

- And rather lousy for the God who knows the end from the beginning & who will do all his purposes.

- I conclude there is no reason to believe that God has hidden such material in the Bible.

Conclusions

- It appears to me that if we put a great deal of trust in this sort of material, we will be led away from the details & standards of biblical prophecy into the very divergent details & standards of occult prophecy.

- That would be a fearful thing, an example of rejecting God's living water to dig for ourselves cisterns that will hold no water.

- May God protect us from this error.

For further reading…

Randall Ingermanson has produced an excellent book that examines this whole phenomenon from a different perspective, looking at how the distinctive patterns in Hebrew syntax evaporate when looking for spaced code words & phrases.

The End