THE BIBLE CODE:
"TEACHING THEM [*WRONG*] THINGS"

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I. INTRODUCTION

Michael Drosnin, author of the 1997 *New York Times* best-selling book entitled *The Bible Code*, tells of flying to Israel on 1 September 1994 in order to convey to then Israeli prime minister Rabin an urgent and sober warning. Drosnin had learned that the only time the name Yitzhak Rabin appeared in the Bible code it intersected the words "assassin that will assassinate." Drosnin had therefore concluded that the life of the Prime Minister was in grave danger. But he also thought that if immediate action were taken this imminent catastrophe could perhaps be avoided. When he arrived in Israel, Drosnin met with Israeli poet Chaim Guri, a close friend of the prime minister, who in turn conveyed Drosnin's message to Rabin. Drosnin urged that the Bible code message concerning Rabin be taken seriously, especially in light of the fact that the same Bible code had also accurately announced the prior assassinations of Anwar Sadat, John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Abraham Lincoln, and Mahatma Gandi. Drosnin's mission, however, did not meet with success. Less than a year later, on 4 November 1995, Yitzhak Rabin was unexpectedly killed by a Jewish assassin.[1]

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Editor's Note: The theme of the fiftieth-anniversary conference of the Evangelical Theological Society where this paper was first presented was "teaching them *all* things" (Matt 28:20).

[1] Michael Drosnin, *The Bible Code* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997) 13. Drosnin's book has attracted a lot of popular fanfare, not all of it positive. On 9 October 1997, in company with the work of Witztum, Rips, and Rosenberg, Drosnin's book won the 1997 prize for literature at the IgNoble prize ceremonies presented at Harvard University's Sanders Theater. The tongue-in-cheek purpose of the ceremonies was to honor individuals whose accomplishments "cannot or should not be reproduced." Sternberg has referred to Drosnin's claims as a "scam" and a "patently ridiculous idea." See Shlomo Sternberg, "Snake Oil for Sale," *Bible Review* 13/4 (August 1997) 24. Most of those who consider themselves serious code researchers (including Doron Witztum, Eliyahu Rips, Yoav Rosenberg, and Harold Gans) have now publicly distanced themselves from Drosnin and other "amateurs." One of the major reasons for this rejection of Drosnin's work concerns his use of Bible codes to predict future events. Most code researchers maintain that the codes can be rightly interpreted only *after* the events to which they point have taken place. There are also complaints that Drosnin has not been completely aboveboard in fulfilling commitments to those who assisted with his research. The Israeli firm that produced the software that Drosnin used in finding his codes has sued both Drosnin and his publisher for some eighteen million dollars due to alleged breach of agreement for not disclosing the identity of the software that was used. See "Israeli Firm Suing 'Bible Code,'" *The Jerusalem Post International Edition* (October 10, 1998) 32. For helpful evaluations of Drosnin's book see the following reviews: George C. Hammond, in *WTJ* 59 (1997) 329–331; Michael Weitzman,

In the last five years or so there has been a rapidly growing interest in the cryptic messages alleged to be encoded in the Hebrew text of the Torah and perhaps in the rest of the Tanak as well.[2] An attempt to carry this approach over to the Greek NT is now in its early stages.[3] A steady stream of articles and books has appeared,[4] in some cases generating huge profits for publisher and author alike. As Jeffrey says, "The whole world is talking about the remarkable phenomenon known as the Bible Codes."[5] Some of the more sensational messages thought by many to be found in the Bible code concern the following events: World War II, the Watergate affair, the Holocaust, the bombing of Hiroshima, the United States moon landing, the 1994 collision of a comet with the planet Jupiter, the Gulf War, the fall of communism, the Oklahoma City bombing, etc. Historical details connected with the names of Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin, Hitler, Princess Diana, and many others are also said to appear in the Bible code, in some cases along with formidable messages of warning. The Bible codes also allegedly contain messages concerning Germany, England, France, Russia, Japan, the United States, etc.

Is there a mysterious code in the Hebrew Scriptures, "a Bible beneath the Bible" as it were,[6] containing foreboding but accurate warnings for contem-

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in *The Jewish Chronicle* (July 25, 1997); H. Van Dyke Parunak, in *JETS* 41 (1998) 323–325. Largely due to the notoriety of Drosnin's book, Bible code research has received considerable attention in the general press. Articles have appeared in *Time* (9 June 1997) 56; *Newsweek* (9 June 1997) 66–67; *USA Today* (4 June 1997); and newspapers such as *The Dallas Morning News*, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Jerusalem Post*, *The Jerusalem Report*, etc. A two-hour television documentary entitled "Secrets of the Bible Code Revealed," featuring Drosnin and other advocates of the Bible code, is also scheduled to air.

[2] Numerous web-sites provide information on the Bible code phenomenon, as well as facilitating discussion both pro and con. Due to the fact that materials available at these sites are often in a state of flux, and some of the sites themselves are somewhat ephemeral, I have decided not to attempt a listing of them here. But a search on the web using the key words "Bible code" will turn up current information.

[3] See the chapter entitled "The Discovery of Bible Codes in the Greek New Testament" in Grant R. Jeffrey, *The Mysterious Bible Codes* (Nashville: Word, 1998) 169–179. Apart from the patent unlikelihood of such an idea, the choice of a Greek text for this purpose could not be poorer—the *textus receptus*.

[4] In a few instances recently published volumes that actually have nothing to do with the Bible code have inadvertently stumbled into a potentially misleading choice of words in their titles. For example, consider the following titles: Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); D. Brent Sandy and Ronald L. Giese Jr., eds., *Cracking Old Testament Codes: A Guide to Interpreting the Literary Genres of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995); Jonathan M. Watt, *Code-Switching in Luke and Acts* (Berkeley Insights in Linguistics and Semiotics 31; ed. Irmengard Rauch; New York: Peter Lang, 1997); Wolfgang Roth, *Hebrew Gospel: Cracking the Code of Mark* (Yorktown Heights, NY: Meyer-Stone Books, 1988); Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982); Hal Lindsey, *Apocalypse Code* (Palos Verdes, CA: Western Front, 1997).

[5] Jeffrey, *Mysterious Bible Codes* 1; cf. p. 60. Jeffrey's enthusiastic use of hyperbole in this citation may be excused, since he himself is an ardent advocate of the Bible codes. Cf. Jeffrey Satinover, *Cracking the Bible Code* (New York: William Morrow, 1997) 10, who thinks that the Bible codes ". . . might well prove to be the most momentous discovery of the twentieth century."

[6] The phrase is Drosnin's. See Drosnin, *Bible Code* 25.

porary society? And if there is, would not the existence of the Bible code be of inestimable apologetic value in demonstrating the divine origin of the OT?[7] After all, there is obviously no way apart from divine assistance that the ancient human authors could have encoded such messages about the future in their writings. If there is a valid Bible code, it would seem to provide irrefutable proof of the involvement of a supra-human intelligence in the writing of the ancient Biblical text.[8]

II. THE BIBLE CODE THEORY

The basic concept behind the Bible code theory is relatively simple. If one takes the Hebrew text of the Torah, as found for example in the Koren edition, and deletes all spaces and punctuation between words and verses, this creates a continuous strand of text consisting of 304,805 letters.[9] One can then search that text for encoded messages found by skipping a certain equal number of letters in the Biblical text in order to isolate the letters of a particular word being sought. Ideally, this is done with the help of a computer that can be programmed to look for certain combinations of letters that together form a word. For example, if I instruct the Bible code program[10] to look for my surname (in Hebrew, טיילור), the program will search for that sequence of letters by skipping the same number of intervening letters until it locates the entire sequence. The skip pattern can be a relatively small number of letters, or it can be so large as to number in the tens of thousands. The procedure is known as an "equidistant letter sequence," or

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[7] Such is the conclusion of, for example, Satinover. He thinks that the results of Bible code research eventually ". . . may demolish the claims of the 'higher' critics, and support, rather, the Orthodox Jewish contention as to the nature of the Torah." See Jeffrey B. Satinover, "Divine Authorship? Computer Reveals Startling Word Patterns," *Bible Review* 11/5 (October 1995) 28. Likewise, Jeffrey repeatedly avers that the value of the Bible codes lies in the fact that they prove that the Bible is inspired by God. See Jeffrey, *Mysterious Bible Codes* 1, 2, 14, 16, 54, 59, 65, 68, 149, 152, 165, 166, 181, 184. But such tables can be easily turned. A reader of Satinover's article mischievously created a grid of the first few sentences in the article and then proceeded to find an encoded message that read "No, no, no, a lie!" See Marvin F. Cain in "Readers Reply," *Bible Review* 12/1 (February 1996) 10.

[8] For most investigators the presence of the Bible code is proof of God's involvement in the writing of the Bible. Gans's comment is fairly typical: "The phenomenon of hidden codes in the Bible is real, and its implication should not be minimized. . . . serious scientific evidence supports this contention and points to a divine author of the Bible" (Harold Gans, "Bible Codes," a paper available at the Aish HaTorah web site). But Drosnin, who describes himself as a skeptic who does not believe in God, goes only so far as to suggest that the codes are the result of supra-human intelligence. See Drosnin, *Bible Code* 181; cf. pp. 14, 50–51, 57, 61, 79, 91, 97–98, 103, 133, 174.

[9] The number applies only to the Torah. Weldon mistakenly thinks of this number as a total of letters for the entire Hebrew OT. See John Weldon, with Clifford and Barbara Wilson, *Decoding the Bible Code* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1998) 10. Drosnin makes the same mistake. See Drosnin, *Bible Code* 25, 27, 44; but cf. p. 126.

[10] I have used two electronic Bible code programs for this study. The first is the 1997 release of *Bible Codes* distributed by Computronic Corporation (mailing address: Computronic Corporation, P.O. Box 102, Savyon 56530, Israel; e-mail address: hebrsoft@netvision.net.il). The second is the 1998 release of *Bible Decoder* (address: Graphonet Ltd., 61 Disraeli Street, P.O. Box 7234, Haifa 31071, Israel; e-mail address: am@shani.net). A number of other programs are also available.

ELS. It does not matter whether the sequence is found in a right-to-left combination of letters, or a left-to-right combination, or one that is vertical or diagonal. Once the desired word is found and the text is arranged in lines whose width is determined by the ELS, the surrounding text can then be searched to see what message emerges.

So far I have had the humbling experience of being unable to detect anything of clear significance in the Torah in connection with my own name. I did find certain "messages," but they seem to conflict in terms of content. Using an ELS of 97 I found my surname encoded with an intersecting message that said "Yahweh is my God." My elation over finding this favorable message did not last long, however. There was another intersecting message a little lower that said, presumably in reference to me, "the evil one." Which message should I prefer, and on what basis?

When Drosnin looked for the name Yitzhak Rabin, he claimed to have found an encoded message (with an ELS of 4,772) indicating "assassin will assassinate,"[11] and on this basis he concluded that Rabin was in grave danger. And the Israeli scholars Witztum, Rips, and Rosenberg claim to have found embedded in the Hebrew text of Genesis the names of thirty-two prominent Jewish personalities described in the *Encyclopedia of Great Men in Israel*,[12] along with the dates of their birth or death. On the basis of statistical probability their conclusion was that ". . . the proximity of ELSs with related meanings in the Book of Genesis is not due to chance."[13]

In approaching Bible study this way, Scripture becomes an amorphous collection of letters with an almost infinite number of combinations based on ELSs that run sometimes forward, sometimes backward, sometimes vertically, and sometimes diagonally. Bible study is thus reduced to discovering what one sets out to find rather than listening patiently to what the divine author has to say in and through the text. Is there a code to be found in the Bible? Is it through mathematical computations or mystical combinations of letters separated sometimes by vast distances that God has chosen to reveal himself and his plan for the universe? I think not. The combinations of letters and so-called messages discovered by Bible code researchers

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[11] In actuality, the Biblical text is here referring to involuntary manslaughter rather than to assassination. But Bible code advocates do not seem to hold themselves to the meanings of words as found in the Biblical text when looking for encoded messages. In this case, since רצַח in modern Hebrew can refer to an assassin, and since that meaning is more suitable for describing the circumstances of Rabin's death, it is the preferred meaning. In other words, in this way the text takes on a new life, and meanings of words in the alleged codes need not necessarily be the same as in the Biblical usage. Some critics of Bible code methodology have failed to acknowledge this assumption, with the result that their criticisms are not viewed as entirely valid by those who are engaged in code research.

[12] M. Margalioth, ed., *Encyclopedia of Great Men in Israel: A Bibliographical Dictionary of Jewish Sages and Scholars from the 9th to the End of the 18th Century* [Hebrew] (4 vols.; Tel Aviv: Joshua Chachik, 1961).

[13] Doron Witztum, Eliyahu Rips, and Yoav Rosenberg, "Equidistant Letter Sequences in the Book of Genesis," *Statistical Science* 9/3 (August 1994) 434.

appear to be contrived and/or coincidental.[14] I do not believe that there is a code to be found in the Bible.

III. DELIMITATIONS

In this paper I would like to examine the claims of those who advocate the existence of the Bible code from the standpoint of what we know about the history of transmission of the Biblical text. Space constraints permit me to discuss the Bible code mainly from this single perspective alone. I will not seek to address other more peripheral issues such as the defective knowledge of the Hebrew language reflected in the writings of many Christian advocates of the theory, or examples of glaring inconsistencies in method, or the ever-present tendency toward eisegesis.

More specifically, I will not seek to answer the argument for the Bible code that is based on statistical probability as set forth by the Israeli team of Witztum, Rips, and Rosenberg.[15] There are several reasons for this decision.

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[14] Sussman is more direct: "The point is that almost any alleged decoding system, if applied to a lucky spot (and a modern computer can keep trying until it does get lucky), will yield almost any . . . message." See Bernard J. Sussman, "A reader-response to Jeffrey Satinover's 'Divine Authorship? Computer Reveals Startling Word Patterns,'" *Bible Review* 12 (February 1996) 8. Even without the aid of computers, students of the KJV long ago called attention to an interesting feature of that translation. The *forty-sixth* word from the beginning of Psalm *46* is "shake," and the *forty-sixth* word from the end of that psalm is "spear." To make matters even more interesting, in 1611, when the KJV was published, Shakespeare was *forty-six* years of age. See Solomon W. Golomb, "Did Shakespeare or Wycliffe Translate the King James Version?" *Bible Review* 13/6 (December 1997) 8–9. Such coincidental messages may of course be found in non-Biblical texts as well. Mark Perakh, a physics professor emeritus at California State University Fullerton, teasingly discovered the following encoded message in a 1979 volume written in modern Hebrew: "Amir will kill Prime Minister hero Rabin." See Mark Perakh, "Some Bible Code Related Experiments and Discussions," previously available at the following web-site: http://www.jps.net/perakh/fcodes.htm. Bar-Natan and McKay, critics of the Bible codes, have identified various encoded messages in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and in Melville's *Moby Dick*. See Dror Bar-Natan and Brendan McKay, "Equidistant Letter Sequences in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*," and Brendan McKay, "Assassinations Foretold in *Moby Dick!*" Both of these essays were made available at the following web-site: http://cs.anu.edu.au/~bdm/dilugim/torah.html. Responses by Witztum and others were made available at the following web-site: http://www.torahcodes.co.il (e.g. Doron Witztum, "A Refutation Refuted: How the List of Famous Rabbis Failed in *War and Peace*"; Doron Witztum and Yosef Beremez, "The 'Famous Rabbis' Sample: A New Measurement"; Doron Witztum, "Did They Really Find Codes in *War and Peace*?"; idem, "Does Tolstoy Really Love Brendan McKay?").

[15] Witztum, Rips, and Rosenberg, "Equidistant Letter Sequences" 429–438. This article is reprinted as an appendix (using the pagination of the original article) in Drosnin, *Bible Code* 429–438. Perhaps more than any other single publication, this article has provided a scientific basis for Bible code research and has contributed immensely to the widespread notoriety of the theory. Hasofer is no doubt correct in suggesting that due to the popularity of Drosnin's book, this paper has been more widely disseminated than any previous paper on mathematical statistics in history (A. M. Hasofer, "A Statistical Critique of the Witztum *et al.* Paper," published on the internet). With regard to the division of labor in this triumvir, apparently it is Witztum who is the main code researcher in this group; in fact, he is thought by many to be the preeminent code researcher in the world. Rips, a professor of mathematics at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, was primarily responsible for the system of statistical analysis used to validate the findings. Rosenberg developed the necessary computer program for the project. See "Statement by Doron Witztum" (June 4, 1997) at

First, I am not qualified to do so. I am a Biblical scholar and not a mathematician. I confess to being quickly overcome by the ethereal air of the sophisticated mathematical computations that are a necessary part of any discussion of statistical probability. My expertise does not lie in that area. Second, there are qualified mathematicians who have responded to that part of the Bible code discussion, and I am content simply to refer the interested reader to those discussions.[16] In the opinion of a number of mathematicians who have investigated the matter, there are serious flaws in the formulaic expressions of probability as presented by Rips and other code researchers.[17] Third and most important, I do not believe that the real issues in this discussion actually lie in the discipline of mathematical probability. Bible code advocates have based much of their theory upon arguments from statistical probability. However, the Bible code phenomenon is ultimately an issue of OT textual criticism, and no amount of statistical probability or mathematical speculation can alter that fact. Any Bible code theory that plays loose with known facts concerning the transmission of the Biblical text is working with an inherent flaw that is actually fatal to its claims and conclusions. In such a case sophisticated mathematical computations may be nothing more than distracting and misleading subterfuge.

IV. HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS TO MODERN VIEWS

Few theories burst on the scene without prior antecedents, and this is certainly true of the Bible code theory. It has certain historical roots, if not in terms of specific methods and procedures at least in terms of general desires and expectations. The idea that the Hebrew Bible contains encoded messages that lie beneath the surface is not a new idea. Certain Biblical scholars of previous generations also maintained such a belief. However, they lacked the means to follow through on their hunches as completely as they might have wished. In fact, it is only the advent of modern computer technology that has made it possible to search the Biblical text with sufficient speed as to make recovery of an alleged code practical. Because we are now able to do in seconds or minutes what previously would have taken a lifetime if in fact it were possible at all, the prospects for discovering codes

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the Aish HaTorah web-site. A related article may also be mentioned here: D. J. Bartholomew, "Probability, Statistics and Theology," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, Series A, vol. 151, part 1 (1988) 137–159. This article is followed by "Discussion of the Paper by Professor Bartholomew" (pp. 160–178), in which Witztum, Rips, and Rosenberg (among others) provide some commentary on and interaction with Bartholomew's essay.

[16] A list of more than fifty individuals who hold doctoral degrees in mathematics and/or are faculty members in various college or university departments of mathematics or statistics and who have gone on record as rejecting the validity of the Bible code theory from the standpoint of its mathematical probabilities is available at the following web-site: http://www.math.caltech.edu/code/petition.html.

[17] Bar-Hillel, McKay (of the Australian National University), and Bar-Natan (of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem) have pointed out certain methodological flaws in the research of Witztum, Rips, and Rosenberg. See the following article: Maya Bar-Hillel, Dror Bar-Natan, and Brendan McKay, "The Torah Codes: Puzzle and Solution," *Chance* 11/2 (1998) 13–19.

in the Bible are feasible like never before. As a backdrop for understanding modern views on the Bible code I will first briefly describe a few of the earlier views.

1. *The tetragrammaton in Esther*. The canonical questions that surround the Book of Esther have largely to do with the absence of any mention of the name of God in the book. This apparent absence of God's name in a canonical book of Scripture was particularly troubling for many ancient scholars. However, in some medieval manuscripts of Esther the initial letters of four successive Hebrew words found in Esth 5:4 are presented in such a way that together they spell out YHWH.[18] Is this a divinely encoded expression of the tetragrammaton in the Book of Esther, as certain medieval scholars supposed? I doubt it. The combination of letters, though unexpected and interesting, is merely coincidental. It probably would never have been noticed were it not for an ancient rabbinic interest in overcoming the canonical questions concerning the Book of Esther.[19]

2. *The Kabbalah*. In the Middle Ages the circulation of the *Zohar*[20] contributed to the spread of an esoteric form of Jewish mysticism known as the Kabbalah.[21] Many of its exegetical methods were eventually adapted and adopted by Christian scholars of the Renaissance period and afterward. Kabbalistic reasoning in general and the *Zohar* in particular seem to have contributed to interest in the Bible codes. Jeffrey goes so far as to suggest that the *Zohar* may even have prophesied of the rediscovery of the Bible codes in the present generation.[22] The use of *gematria*, by which Scriptural messages were encoded numerically, also became increasingly popular among both Jewish and Christian scholars alike who utilized Kabbalistic techniques.[23] Although many Bible code researchers do not employ

[18] See the discussion in Carey A. Moore, *Esther: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 7B; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971) 56. The words in question are as follows: יָבוֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהָמָן הַיּוֹם.

[19] More recently, Jeffrey claims to have found three instances of the tetragrammaton encoded in the Book of Esther with ELS intervals of 3, -37, and -31. See Jeffrey, *Mysterious Bible Codes* 83. For a similar approach to the Book of Esther see Yacov A. Rambsel, *His Name Is Jesus* (Toronto: Frontier Research Publications, 1997) 233–239.

[20] Scholem labels the *Zohar* "the central work in the literature of the Kabbalah." See Gershom Scholem, "Zohar," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 16 (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972) col. 1193.

[21] In the judgment of Scholem the Kabbalah was ". . . one of the most powerful forces ever to affect the inner development of Judaism. . . ." See Gershom Scholem, "Kabbalah," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 10 (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972) col. 489.

[22] Jeffrey, *Mysterious Bible Codes* 36–38. He refers to *Zohar* 1:117b–118a: "Rabbi Shim'on said to them: 'It is not the will of the Holy One, blessed be He, that too much be revealed to the world. But when the days of the Messiah approach, even the children of the world will be able to discover secrets of wisdom, and to know through them the Ends and the Calculations, and in that time it will be revealed to all.'" The discovery of "secrets of wisdom" that provide information about "the Ends and the Calculations," Jeffrey suggests, is a reference to the present-day phenomenon of the Bible code. But how could the authors of the *Zohar* been able to predict such a thing as the Bible code phenomenon? According to Jeffrey, it was already suggested by Dan 12:4.

[23] Consider, for example, the surprising words of the fifteenth-century Christian writer Pico della Mirandola: "No science can better convince us of the divinity of Jesus Christ than magic and the Kabbalah." See Scholem, "Kabbalah" col. 644.

numerology and in fact distance themselves from such, there does seem to be an aspect of their approach that is indebted to the Kabbalistic reasoning of the medieval period.[24]

3. *Rabbi Weissmandel*. In the first half of the twentieth-century R. Michael Weissmandel, inspired by references to Bible codes in the writings of the thirteenth-century R. Bachya, sought to illumine these codes. He is said to have written out by hand the Hebrew text of Torah in grid-patterns so as more easily to recognize the codes. But his searches were very primitive by today's standards, since he carried on his study without the aid of computers. Not much of Weissmandel's work actually survives,[25] but he is credited with being a pathfinder in this type of Bible study.[26]

V. ALLEGED THEOLOGICAL MESSAGES

In addition to finding various messages of historical significance, some Bible code researchers have also claimed to find messages of theological relevance. However, a problem presents itself in that these alleged messages do not always agree in their content. In fact, messages of conflicting theological value have been claimed by various Jewish[27] and Christian writers. Yacov Rambsel, for example, claims to find numerous encoded messages in Tanak that reveal Jesus as the Messiah.[28] The promise of such an approach, however, quickly evaporates. Countering Rambsel's claim that he found the message ישוע שמי ("Jesus is my name") in Isaiah 53, Rabbi Me-

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[24] Satinover, himself an advocate of the Bible codes, says as much: ". . . the Bible Code as a cryptologic phenomenon is rooted deeply in kabbalah . . ." (Satinover, *Cracking the Bible Code* 247). On utilization of numerology by Christians see the recent discussion in William Varner, "The Christian Use of Numerology," *MSJ* 8 (1997) 47–59. Christian interest in numerology of the Bible has continued to the present time. While the following works have nothing directly in common with the Bible code approach and would probably not in fact be looked upon with favor by most Bible code practitioners, there does seem to be a shared philosophical basis with regard to the alleged presence of encrypted information to be recovered from the Biblical text. See Jerry Lucas and Del Washburn, *Theomatics: God's Best Kept Secret Revealed* (New York: Stein and Day, 1977); Ethelbert W. Bullinger, *Number in Scripture: Its Supernatural Design and Spiritual Significance* (1894; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1967); Ivan Panin, *The New Testament from the Greek Text as Established by Bible Numerics* (New Haven: Bible Numerics, 1914).

[25] See H. M. D. Weissmandel, תורת חמד [= *Torah of Delight*] (Mount Kisco, NY: Yeshiva Press, 1958).

[26] The seminal paper by Witztum, Rips, and Rosenberg, for example, begins with an expression of indebtedness to Weissmandel. See Witztum, Rips, and Rosenberg, "Equidistant Letter Sequences" 429.

[27] The Bible code theory is apparently a significant part of the Discovery Seminar, a wide-spread presentation sponsored by Jerusalem-based Aish HaTorah and intended to bolster faith in Judaism. In addition to the Aish HaTorah web-site, see Calmetta Y. Coleman, "Seminar Tries Science to Revive Faith," *The Wall Street Journal* (11 November 1996). The director of research for Aish HaTorah is Harold Gans, who is said to have previously served as a senior cryptologic mathematician with the National Security Agency, United States Department of Defense.

[28] See Yacov Rambsel, *Yeshua—The Name of Jesus Revealed in the Old Testament* (Toronto: Frontier Research Publications, 1996). This book was previously published under the title *Yeshua: The Hebrew Factor*. It has now been reissued as *Yeshua—The Name of Jesus Revealed in the Old Testament* (Nashville: Word, 1996).

chanic utilized similar methods to find messages such as "Mohammed is my name," "Koresh is my name," "Buddha is my name," etc.[29] Furthermore, certain messages that specifically discredit Jesus' identity as the Messiah have also been alleged. One example, taken from Isa 7:1–17, supposedly encodes the words שקר משיח ישוע ("Jesus is a false messiah"); other examples yield messages such as שקר נביא ישוע ("Jesus is a false prophet"), or שקרן ישוע ("Jesus is a liar").[30] One investigator even discovered, somewhat playfully, an encoded message announcing that "Drosnin is the Messiah."[31] Such contradictory results suggest that these methods lack any adequate system of controls. With sufficient patience one can find whatever he is looking for. The code turns out to be a mirage.

VI. A PRESUPPOSITIONAL FALLACY

The biggest single fallacy to be found in the Bible code theory has to do with its perception of the condition of existing manuscripts and printed editions of the Hebrew Bible. Without exception as far as I can tell, Bible code advocates have a view of the textual transmission of Biblical materials that is unrealistically optimistic. The Bible code theory necessarily presupposes an extremely stable transmission process for the OT text. The discovery of encoded messages is *ex hypothesi* determined by mathematically precise skips of letters (i.e. ELSs) in a text that must be assumed to have little or no disturbance as a result of scribal error. However, if the precise wording of the text is at places questionable due to the vicissitudes of the copying process, the hope of finding encoded messages by such a method is so seriously compromised as to be rendered impossible.

Some Bible code advocates seem oblivious to the realities of textual criticism in this matter. Drosnin, for example, with incredible naiveté claims that "[a]ll Bibles in the original Hebrew language that now exist are the same letter for letter."[32] This simply is not true. Other Bible code advocates in theory concede the damaging effect of textual variation, although in practice they proceed as though it were not applicable. For example, Grant R. Jeffrey, who espouses the value of the Bible code for validating the divine origin of

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[29] R. Daniel Mechanic, "Jesus Codes: Uses and Abuses," previously available at the following web-site: http://www.jewsforjudaism.org/codes/jesuslb.htm.

[30] Rambsel and Jeffrey have responded to these claims, but not convincingly in my judgment, in the following works: Grant R. Jeffrey, *The Handwriting of God: Sacred Mysteries of the Bible* (Toronto: Frontier Research Publications, 1997) 127; and Jeffrey, *Mysterious Bible Codes* 146–149.

[31] Harold Gans, *USA Today* (June 4, 1997) 8d.

[32] Drosnin, *Bible Code* 194. Elsewhere in the same work Drosnin says, "The Old Testament has been a settled text for at least a thousand years. The Torah has not changed in that time, and no scholar would question that . . . every Hebrew Bible that now exists is the same letter for letter" (p. 38). According to Drosnin, "All Bibles in the original Hebrew language that now exist are the same letter for letter" (p. 194). He goes on to say, "Therefore, there is no question that information about today's world is encoded in a book that existed at least 1000 years ago, and almost certainly 2000 years ago, in exactly the same form it exists today" (p. 195). Such comments betray a curious lack of understanding both with regard to the history of the transmission of the Biblical text and with regard to the modern consensus of scholarly opinion about the text.

Scripture, admits that ". . . even a minor change of spelling or choice of words would totally destroy the precise sequence of Hebrew letters that reveals these hidden words coded at evenly spaced distances throughout the text of the Torah."[33] In a similar vein Jeffrey Satinover, another Bible code advocate, says, "Change 'color' to 'colour,' and everything that follows is shifted one letter out of sequence."[34] Satinover, however, goes on to argue that the Bible code can withstand a limited amount of textual variance since "the method has a certain degree of 'fault tolerance' built in,"[35] thus providing the code with a "graceful degradation."[36] It is difficult to see how this is anything other than special pleading.

These writers seem willing in theory to grant the impact that addition or subtraction of letters in the source text would have on the feasibility of a Bible code. Their problem is that they either deny or unduly minimize the existence of such variation in the Biblical text. However, there are not only minor changes in the Hebrew manuscripts that must be taken into account but major ones as well. The level of stability for the text of the Hebrew Bible that is required by the Bible code theory simply does not exist. It is not found in our extant manuscripts, nor is it found in the various printed editions of the Hebrew Bible. In order to bring home the implications of this idea I wish to call attention to certain historical facts pertaining to the transmission of the Hebrew Bible.

1. *Variations within the Masoretic manuscripts*. While the degree of textual uniformity found in that group of medieval Hebrew manuscripts known as the Masoretic text is perhaps sufficient to justify speaking of *the* Masoretic text, that general uniformity should not be allowed to obscure the fact that within the MT there is also considerable variation. Kennicott and de Rossi have published much of this variant evidence, based upon extensive collations of Masoretic manuscripts available to them in the eighteenth-century.[37] In hundreds, perhaps thousands, of places these Masoretic manuscripts differ among themselves with regard to minor details.

These differences are rather vaguely referenced in the critical apparatus of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* by the following hierarchy of groupings: *pc* (i.e. *pauci*) refers to what is found in a few medieval Hebrew manuscripts (i.e. three to ten); *nonn* (i.e. *nunnulli*) refers to what is found in several manuscripts (i.e. eleven to twenty); *mlt* (i.e. *multi*) refers to the reading found

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[33] Grant R. Jeffrey, *The Signature of God: Astonishing Biblical Discoveries* (Toronto: Frontier Research Publications, 1996) 215. Elsewhere Jeffrey says, "The removal or addition of a single letter from the Hebrew text of the Scriptures would eliminate the codes found hidden within that particular section of text." See Jeffrey, *Mysterious Bible Codes* 35; cf. pp. 23–24.

[34] Satinover, *Cracking the Bible Code* 45.

[35] Ibid. 143.

[36] Ibid. 211.

[37] See Benjamin Kennicott, *Vetus Testamentum hebraicum cum variis lectionibus* (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1776–1780), and Joh. Bern. de Rossi, *Variae lectiones Veteris Testamenti librorum* (4 vols.; Parma: ex regio typographeo, 1784–1788; reprint, Amsterdam: Philo, 1969). According to Gordis, Kennicott considered 615 manuscripts and 52 printed editions; de Rossi considered 731 manuscripts and 300 printed editions (Gordis, *Biblical Text in the Making* xliii, n. 2).

in many manuscripts (i.e. more than twenty). In the case of the books of Samuel a fourth category is found: *permlt* (i.e. *permulti*), which is used to refer to the reading of more than sixty manuscripts. The need for such a hierarchy in the apparatus of our Hebrew Bible implicitly calls attention to a very important fact: Masoretic manuscripts, while showing general agreement among themselves, nonetheless disagree in a multitude of details.

This disagreement is present to such an extent that to refer to this body of evidence as *the* Masoretic text is actually somewhat misleading. As the Jewish scholar Harry Orlinsky used to point out, we actually should speak of Masoretic text*s* (in the plural) rather than *the* Masoretic text (as though it were a monolithic entity).[38] In reality there is considerable variation among Masoretic manuscripts with regard to various minor details. But my point here is this: If there is a code to be found in the Torah or in the Tanak, in what manuscript are we to discover it? Is it in the Leningrad manuscript that forms the textual basis of *BHS*? Or is it in the Aleppo Codex that is the basis of the Hebrew University Bible Project? Or is it in one of the other Masoretic manuscripts? The particulars of the Hebrew text will vary, depending upon the choice made. The notion that the Biblical text has been transmitted without variation is simply not true. Bible code advocates have not sufficiently wrestled with this problem of textual disturbance. In fact, it absolutely demolishes their theory.

The problem of basing a Bible code theory on the MT may be further seen by considering certain difficulties that confront the user of that text. In these matters we will need to know exactly what is the correct reading of the text, since the evidence indicates that the received Hebrew text has certain problems that on occasion affect the number of letters (or sometimes, words) that were part of the original text. If ELSs are calculated in a way that does not take into account these textual blemishes, any alleged code that is based on mathematical distances between letters will obviously be skewed. In what follows I will call attention to seven types of such problems in the MT.

a. Ancient Hebrew spelling practices.[39] The use of certain consonants (e.g. *yôd*, *waw*, *he'*) as markers for vowels (i.e. *matres lectionis*) was introduced gradually in Hebrew spelling from sometime after the Davidic period and onward. The Hebrew Bible is actually somewhat inconsistent in its use of such *matres*, and Hebrew manuscripts vary in their spelling conventions in

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[38] See Harry M. Orlinsky, "The Masoretic Text: A Critical Evaluation," in Christian D. Ginsburg, *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible* (1897; reprint, New York: Ktav, 1966), especially xviii–xxxvii. A few representative comments: "There never was, and there never can be, a single fixed masoretic text of the Bible! It is utter futility and pursuit of a mirage to go seeking to recover what never was" (p. xviii). "There never was and there never can be '*the* masoretic text' or '*the* text of the Masoretes.' All that, at best, we might hope to achieve, in theory, is '*a* masoretic text,' or '*a* text of the Masoretes,' . . ." (p. xxiii). "For there never was any such thing as 'the masoretic text' in existence" (p. xxii). ". . . it is impossible *a priori* to achieve '*the* masoretic text' when none ever obtained, . . ." (p. xxxv).

[39] This point is also taken up briefly by Hendel. See Ronald S. Hendel, "The Secret Code Hoax," *Bible Review* 13/4 (August 1997) 23–24.

this regard. The Qumran period is generally characterized by a much more frequent use of *matres* than is the case in the MT. Such variations in spelling pose a problem for Bible code advocates in that the spelling of words in the MT is no doubt different in numerous instances from that of the autographa. But if letters that were introduced secondarily into the text are counted in an attempt to discover patterns of ELSs, the results will obviously be different from what would be achieved if an earlier form of text without those letters were used. From a theological perspective it would seem that if God did mathematically encode messages in the Hebrew Bible, it is with the original manuscripts that that activity took place. The question to be answered here is this: How then can later manuscripts, which adopted a *plene* (i.e. "full") spelling requiring the use of more letters than was the case with the original text, be a safe guide to the recovery of such a code? The presence of these extraneous letters would have the effect of completely garbling the alleged code.

b. The Tiqqûnê Sopherim and the Ittûrê Sopherim. According to Jewish tradition,[40] in a small number of instances the ancient scribes acknowledged changing for certain reverential reasons the Hebrew text that had come to them. These changes are known as *Tiqqûnê Sopherim* (i.e. "emendations of the scribes"); a separate but similar group of changes is known as *Ittûrê Sopherim* (i.e. "omissions of the scribes").[41] The scribes probably did not deliberately make such changes often. In fact, there is only a small handful of places where this is actually alleged to have occurred. The specific number of these changes varies in the ancient literature, depending upon the particular source.[42] But the lists are probably not meant to be exhaustive; the practice may also have included other examples not specified.[43]

Some of these changes were merely matters of word order. For example, the Sopherim are said to have changed Gen 18:22 from "Yahweh stood before Abraham" to "Abraham stood before Yahweh" so as to avoid any implication that Yahweh's appearance before Abraham in any way detracted from the

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[40] *Mekhilta Sirata*, Exod 15:5; *Tanhuma Besallah*, Exod 15:7; *Sifre*, Num 10:35; Masorah on Num 1:2 and Ps 106:12.

[41] The eighteen occurrences of the *Tiqqûnê Sopherim* most commonly referred to are as follows: Gen 18:22; Num 11:15; 12:12; 1 Sam 3:13; 2 Sam 16:12; 20:1 (cf. 1 Kgs 12:16; 2 Chr 10:16); Jer 2:11; Ezek 8:17; Hos 4:7; Hab 1:12; Zech 2:12; Mal 1:13; Ps 106:20; Job 7:20; 32:3; Lam 3:20. The *Ittûrê Sopherim* mainly involve the deletion of the conjunction *waw* in passages such as the following: Gen 31:36; 47:11; Exod 17:2, 10; 22:29; 23:13, 28; 24:20; Lev 20:18; Num 8:4; Deut 14:16; etc.

[42] For example, some ancient lists claim seven instances of the *Tiqqûnê Sopherim*, others eleven or thirteen or fifteen or eighteen or twenty-three. On the *Tiqqûnê Sopherim* see especially the following discussions: Robert Gordis, *The Biblical Text in the Making: A Study of the Kethib-Qere* (1937; augmented ed., New York: Ktav, 1971) xxi; Carmel McCarthy, *The Tiqqune Sopherim and Other Theological Corrections in the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament* (OBO 36; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981); Israel Yeivin, מבוא למסורה הטברנית: *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah* (trans. E. J. Revell; SBLMasS 5, ed. Harry M. Orlinsky; n.p.: Scholars Press, 1980) 49–51; D. Barthélemy, "Les Tiqquné Sopherim et la critique textuelle de l'Ancien Testament," *VT* 9 (1963) 285–304; Ginsburg, *Introduction* 347–363; and W. McKane, "Observations on the Tikkûnê Sôpᵉrîm," in *On Language, Culture, and Religion: In Honor of Eugene A. Nida* (ed. Matthew Black and William A. Smalley; Paris: Moulton, 1974) 53–77. McCarthy, who accepts only three of these readings as authentic (*viz.*, Zech 2:12, 1 Sam 3:13, Job 7:20), represents a somewhat minimalist position. The more commonly accepted number is eighteen.

dignity of the divine person. While this change affects word order and exegesis, it does not affect the number of letters involved. But certain other examples do affect the total number of letters in a verse. For example, in 1 Sam 3:13 the Sopherim admit to changing the charge that Eli's sons "cursed God" to "they brought a curse upon themselves," a change effected by dropping the *aleph* and *yôd* from the word אלהים. The reading with "God" as the object of the cursing is also supported by LXX, which has θεόν here. According to R. Hiyya b. Abba, who cited R. Johanan, "It is better that a letter be uprooted from the Torah than that the Name of names be publicly profaned."[44] Accordingly, it is the altered text that we have in the MT.

But if we take the claim of a *Tiqqûn* seriously here,[45] the original text in this instance is the one that the scribes changed. That means that two letters absent from the MT at this point are original to the verse. Any ELS approach that does not take this into account will therefore be off by so many letters, and any resultant "message" will in fact be imaginary and contrived. The same is also true of whichever of the other *Tiqqûnê Sopherim* that we accept as authentic.

3. *The kethib/qere*.   There are many places in the MT where one thing appears in the text (*kethib*, "what is written"), but something different appears in the margin (*qere*, "what is read"). Apart from the *qere perpetuum*, which themselves number in the thousands, Gordis estimates the number of these marginal readings to be 1350.[46] In many cases they are merely matters of vocalization, and in such cases the proper number of Hebrew consonants is unaffected by whether one reads the *kethib* or the *qere*. But quite often the *qere* changes the number of consonants. A common example involves the insertion of a *yôd*, which requires taking the given word as plural (*qere*) rather than singular (*kethib*). In such cases, and there are many of them, the number of letters involved in a particular case changes depending upon which reading is accepted as original. In such cases are Bible code theorists going to read the *kethib*, or will they read the *qere*? The decision one makes here will affect the number of letters involved and thereby the alleged message that is encoded on the basis of ELSs.

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[43] This at least is the opinion of authorities such as Ginsburg and Würthwein. Ginsburg says, "These passages, however, are simply quoted as typical instances and are by no means intended to be exhaustive." See Ginsburg, *Introduction* 362. In a similar way Würthwein remarks, "We can scarcely err in regarding the evidence of these traditions as merely a small fragment of a far more extensive process. . . ." See Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Biblia Hebraica* (trans. Erroll F. Rhodes; 2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 18. I see no reason to disagree with these statements.

[44] *b. Yebamoth* 79a.

[45] Not all scholars accept the tradition of the *Tiqqûnê Sopherim* at face value. Some think that the alleged correction was in fact the reading of the original text rather than a change due to scribal decision. However, this conclusion seems to be based at least in part on an overly protective attitude toward the ancient scribes.

[46] Gordis, *Biblical Text in the Making* xv. Tov gives a figure of between 848 and 1566, depending upon which tradition is followed. See Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress; Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1992) 58.

d. The suspended letters. In a small number of instances the Masoretes indicate that they added a letter to the consonantal Hebrew text.[47] Such letters are suspended higher than normal in order to set them off from the text as it had come to them. These additional letters are due to pious concerns that the Masoretes had. For example, should Judg 18:30 read "Moses" or "Manasseh"? The text that had come to the Masoretes read "Moses," but out of respect for the great lawgiver the Masoretes preferred to read "Manasseh" here.[48] Do Bible code advocates accept such Masoretic conventions even though they are late and probably non-original? Or do they delete these letters in order to restore the earlier text? Such differences obviously affect the total number of letters that rightfully belong in the text. To proceed as though such problems do not exist is clearly reckless.

e. The extraordinary points. There are ten places in the Torah,[49] and another five elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible,[50] that are marked by special points that call attention to questionable readings. In these places ancient scribes believed there was reason for thinking that certain letters in their text were not original. For example, in Num 3:39 the letters for "and Aaron" each have a dot above them, indicating exclusion of Aaron from those who were numbered in this passage. The deletion is also supported by the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Syriac Peshitta. These letters are present in the MT and are therefore included in the Hebrew text that Bible code advocates utilize in performing their ELS searches. But if these letters do not really belong in the text, all determinations of ELSs that include them must of necessity be erroneous.

f. Those things "written but not read." In a number of places there are words present in the text that the Masoretes inherited, but which in their judgment were not part of the original text. They indicated their disavowal of these words by leaving them unpointed in their Hebrew text.[51] In that way they instructed the reader to ignore the words. For example, in Ezek 48:16 the number five is repeated due to dittography. The second occurrence of this word is unpointed by the Masoretes, with the marginal instruction not to read the word even though it is written. The ancient versions also attest to just one occurrence of the numeral here. But since these words are present in the Masoretic consonantal text, presumably Bible code advocates include them in the Hebrew text that they are working with to discover encoded messages. However, since the words have no real

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[47] The occurrences are as follows: Judg 18:30; Ps 80:14; Job 38:13, 15.

[48] Note Rashi's explanation of the suspended letter here: "Because of the honor of Moses was the *nun* written so as to alter the name. The *nun*, however, is suspended to tell you that it is not Manasseh, but Moses."

[49] The occurrences are as follows: Gen 16:5; 18:9; 19:33, 35; 33:4; 37:12; Num 3:39; 9:10; 21:30; 29:15; Deut 29:28.

[50] The occurrences are as follows: 2 Sam 19:20; Isa 44:9; Ezek 41:20; 46:22; Ps 27:13.

[51] The occurrences are as follows: 2 Kgs 5:18; Jer 32:11; 51:3; Ezek 48:16; Ruth 3:12. 2 Sam 13:33; 15:21, and Jer 38:16 probably also belong here; they are cited in a note at Jer 39:12 and Ezek 48:16 in the St. Petersburg Codex (according to Ginsburg, *Introduction* 318).

claim to originality, their presence confuses the pattern of ELSs that include them in the counting. The resulting message is thus not really based on an accurate counting of only those letters that were in the original text.[52] How then can the alleged message possibly be genuine?

g. Those things "read but not written." This phenomenon is more or less the opposite of the one mentioned above. There are a number of places in the MT where vowels appear without the appropriate consonants written above them.[53] In these places the Masoretes record in the margin the consonants that they want to read with the vowels that are found in the text. For example, in 2 Sam 8:3 the *masorah parva* instructs the reader to add the word "Euphrates" (Heb. פרת) at the end of the verse. The vowels of this word appear in the text but without the consonants, which are to be supplied from the margin. In places such as these Bible code advocates are working with a consonantal text that is shorter than the original text. Any perceived ELS pattern is as a result falsified by the absence of letters that presumably belong in the text but are found there neither in Masoretic manuscripts nor in printed editions that are based upon such manuscripts. The consequences for any attempt to recover an encoded message based on ELSs should be obvious.

2. *The printed text.* If Bible code advocates choose to dismiss the manuscript problems referred to above and to base their theory on a particular printed Hebrew text, another similar problem still exists. This problem presents itself in the form of certain choices that must be made. First, which printed text is to be preferred? And second, what is the manuscript base of that particular edition? The choice between printed editions is actually quite limited. From a scholarly perspective, there are at present only two viable candidates: *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, which is a diplomatic (not eclectic) edition based on the early eleventh-century manuscript B19A, and the *Hebrew University Bible Project*, which is based on the early tenth-century Aleppo Codex but is far from being complete. In either case, apart from the variant evidence found in the critical apparatus, we are really dealing with a single medieval Hebrew manuscript. To think that either of those manuscripts, excellent representatives of the medieval Masoretic tradition though they be, is sufficiently accurate as to sustain a theory of divinely encoded messages based upon ELSs, is simply untenable. These manuscripts exhibit all of the problems discussed above. The Koren

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[52] Since this category of variant and the one discussed in the following paragraph are outside of the Torah, it is only fair to point out that if one restricts the Bible code to the Torah these features would be inconsequential. However, though the earliest code researchers focused only on the Torah, many more recent advocates have extended the investigation to other parts of the Hebrew Bible as well. The Bible code software that I have worked with in fact provides for both approaches. The variants discussed above do, of course, seriously affect the number of letters in these non-Torah portions of the Hebrew Bible.

[53] The occurrences are as follows: 2 Sam 8:3; 16:23; Jer 31:38; 50:29; Judg 20:13; 2 Sam 18:20; 2 Kgs 19:31, 37. Ruth 2:11 probably also belongs here, although it is not cited in the rabbinic list.

edition[54] published in Israel has the same limitation, differing from *BHS* in only a limited number of places.[55]

The reality is that there is no single manuscript or printed edition of the Hebrew Bible that has been so well transmitted as to have no need for extensive text-critical adjustment. Let me make my point as clear as possible: If there are significant textual problems in the Hebrew Bible—whether in the form of pluses, or minuses, or substitutions, etc.—such a problem causes a fatal disaster for any theory of ELS, even if it were theoretically possible to allow for such a phenomenon in the non-extant original text.

3. *Other text-critical problems in the Torah.* I now wish to shift the discussion from acknowledged problems in our manuscript tradition for the Hebrew Bible to less easily detected problems that are frequently encountered in the exegetical process. In order to illustrate the type of problem that I have in mind I will restrict myself here to the issue of correct text for just two verses of the Torah—Gen 1:9 and Deut 32:8. My purpose here is merely illustrative; similar examples could be multiplied many times over. In Gen 1:9 the LXX has the following reading (absent in the MT): "and the water(s) that were under heaven were gathered to their gathering places, and the dry land appeared."[56] This Greek reading is now at least partially supported by 4QGen^k, which has the final two Hebrew words of this plus. The shorter MT reading is most likely due to haplography, as Davila suggests.[57] The scribe's eye apparently jumped from יקוו in v. 9 to ויקרא in v. 10,[58] and it is this parablepsis that caused omission of the intervening material. But if this analysis is correct, it means that Bible code advocates are working with a Hebrew text of Genesis that lacks some thirty-five letters that were originally present in this verse. The effect that this omission has on any theory based on ELSs hardly needs elaboration.

A second example comes from toward the end of the Torah. According to Deut 32:8 in the MT, God set the boundaries of the peoples "according to the number of the *sons of Israel*." However, much of the Greek tradition understands here a reference to angels, although the concept is expressed in two different ways. The original Greek rendering was in all probability "*sons of God*" (υἱῶν θεοῦ).[59] But in some Septuagint manuscripts this allotment is

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[54] תורה נביאים כתובים (Jerusalem: Koren, 1966).

[55] The Koren edition is said to differ from *BHS* in about 130 instances in the Torah.

[56] LXX: καὶ συνήχθη τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ ὑποκάτω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ εἰς τὰς συναγωγὰς αὐτῶν καὶ ὤφθη ἡ ξηρά; Hebrew retroversion: וַיִּקָּווּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל־מְקוֵיהֶם וַתֵּרָא הַיַּבָּשָׁה.

[57] James R. Davila, "New Qumran Readings for Genesis One," in *Of Scribes and Scrolls: Studies on the Hebrew Bible, Intertestamental Judaism, and Christian Origins* [Fs John Strugnell] (ed. Harold W. Attridge, John J. Collins, and Thomas H. Tobin; College Theology Society Resources in Religion 5; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990) 11. For the Qumran Genesis fragments see Eugene Ulrich, Frank Moore Cross et al., eds., *Qumran Cave 4*, vol. 7, *Genesis to Numbers* (DJD 12; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994) 7–78.

[58] Another possibility is that the scribe's eye jumped from the first occurrence of היבשה in v. 9 to the later occurrence of היבשה at the end of v. 9.

[59] The Göttingen edition reads υἱῶν θεοῦ, whereas Rahlfs's edition and the Cambridge edition both have ἀγγέλλων θεοῦ. The relevant manuscript evidence is cited in the critical apparatus for

said to take place "according to the number of the *angels of God*" (ἀγγέλλων θεοῦ). Similar readings are also found, not surprisingly, in the Old Latin (*filiorum Dei*), the Syrohexapla[60] (ܕܒܢ̈ܝ ܐܠܗܐ), and more importantly in a Hebrew fragment of Deuteronomy from Qumran.[61] It is very likely that the MT here reflects the result of a theological toning down of an earlier reading that had בני אל ("sons of God"), or perhaps בני אלים ("sons of gods"), correctly interpreted by some ancient translators as a reference to angels. But if this analysis is correct, the original text of Deut 32:8 was several letters shorter than it is in the MT. Any theory of ELSs is damaged by this fact, in that the distances between letters are being calculated by Bible code advocates on the basis of a text that has undergone change. All of the numerical calculations are thereby thrown off. When this is multiplied many times over due to numerous text-critical issues affecting particular Hebrew manuscripts and/or printed editions not only for the Torah but for the rest of the Hebrew Bible as well, it seems obvious that the necessary stability of text required for such an enterprise is simply not present—not in our current printed editions of the Hebrew Bible nor in our extant Hebrew manuscripts.[62] This is a fatal flaw for any Bible code theory that bases its conclusions on an uncritical use of such tools.[63]

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I wish briefly to reflect on reasons for the favorable reception afforded the Bible code theory. Why do such approaches to the Bible

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each of these editions. See John William Wevers, ed., *Deuteronomium*, vol. 3:2, *Septuaginta, Vetus Testamentum graecum auctoritate academiae scientiarium gottingensis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977); Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta, id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes* (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1935); Alan England Brooke and Norman McLean, eds., *The Old Testament in Greek*, vol. 1, *The Octateuch*, no. 3, *Numbers and Deuteronomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911).

[60] For the Syriac text see Arthur Vööbus, ed., *The Pentateuch in the Version of the Syro-Hexapla: A Facsimile Edition of a Midyat MS. Discovered 1964* (Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium 369, Subsidia 45; Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1975) fol. 190.

[61] For text and discussion see Patrick W. Skehan, "A Fragment of the 'Song of Moses' (Deut. 32) from Qumran," *BASOR* 136 (1954) 12–15.

[62] For a recent discussion of the textual complexities in just one part of the Torah, namely the first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis, see the following excellent contribution: Ronald S. Hendel, *The Text of Genesis 1–11: Textual Studies and Critical Edition* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Hendel finds numerous problems with the extant Hebrew text for these chapters, many of which in his view can be corrected with help from the ancient versions, especially the Septuagint. Such a realistic view of the textual complexities found in this part of the Torah (and elsewhere as well) is of course completely incompatible with the textual assumptions of Bible code advocates.

[63] After completing the writing of this paper I came across a critical discussion of the Bible code theory that emphasizes some of the same textual data that I have stressed in this paper. It appears that Jeffrey Tigay of the University of Pennsylvania and I independently have reached similar conclusions on this matter. Tigay's paper was originally presented as a lecture at the math department of Princeton University on 28 April 1998. His labeling of Bible code research as "bibliomancy" is, I think, particularly apt. See Jeffrey H. Tigay, "The Bible 'Codes': A Textual Perspective," available at the following web-site: http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~jtigay/codetext.html.

have seemingly perennial appeal to theologically conservative audiences? It seems to me that our bibliology, stressing as it does the unique quality of Scripture, easily plays into an artificial and in fact inaccurate view of the inspired text. Many sincere Christians seem ready to seize upon whatever appears to accent and emphasize the divine nature of the Bible, apparently hoping to gain an apologetic tool that will both defy refutation on the part of unbelievers and strengthen the faith of believers. In such thinking factual accuracy can easily give way to religious pragmatism. Whether it comes in the form of a contemporary eschatology that borders on such non-Scriptural notions as date-setting with regard to the second coming of Christ or, in the matter at hand, in the form of espousing divinely encoded messages in the Bible that are recognizable only by the initiated, many people in our constituencies are drawn to the faddish and even the bizarre in Biblical interpretation. In this they are often encouraged by leaders who should know better and who should do differently.

The Bible code phenomenon is just the latest example of many such distortions of the Bible. What is needed in the contemporary Church is a fresh emphasis on the perspicuity and adequacy of Scripture. There is neither need nor justification for seeking a mysterious code in Scripture that depicts events in advance of their historical occurrence. On the contrary, God has spoken in his revealed Word, and he has spoken clearly. It is this clear message of Scripture that reveals all that we must know about God, about ourselves, and about the world in which we live. The search for a hidden code is little more than a distraction from what is really important in the study of the Bible. There is in fact no code in the Torah, nor is there one in Tanak. Furthermore, even if there were a *bona fide* code in the autographa, we would have no practical way of recovering it due to the textual factors discussed in this paper. Unfortunately, what we have with the Bible code theory is yet another example of "teaching them [*wrong*] things."