

Behind the Bible Code

I've been remotely aware of Michael Dronin's book *The Bible Code* (first published in 1997) for several years but I paid no mind to it since I've seen the sort of thing that Dronin is attempting to show in the past. I first encountered something similar to Dronin's type of analysis in the 1980s book entitled *Theomatics* (authored in part, I believe, by former professional basketball star Jerry Lucas). The basic thesis of both books (and others similar to it) is the God has written a secret code (often very mathematical in terms of the numerical patterns "discovered") in the Hebrew/Greek letters of the Old and New Testaments. The basis for this analysis lies in the fact that both the Hebrew and Greek letters also stand for numbers (in the same manner that Roman numerals I, V, X, L, C, D, and M are letters that stand for numbers). This equality of letters with numbers is *isopsephia* (literal meaning is "numerical equality") in the Greek and *gimatriya* (literal meaning is "mathematical") in the Hebrew.

There is only one example of this type of cryptogramic analysis in the Bible (Revelation 13:18) where we are told: "Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666." In the apographs (New Testament manuscript copies), 666 is represented by three Greek letters, chi (stands for 600), xi (stands for 60), and digamma accented which is similar to sigma (stands for 6). God commands the readers of this book to calculate this number; i.e., to explain it (or decipher it) by computing (implying that you can aggregate the numerical equivalency of the letters of a certain person to 666). Unfortunately, this passage has been butchered by many well-meaning but misinformed and exegetically challenged Christians. For example, the late United States President Ronald Wilson Reagan was identified by some in the lunatic fringe as the "beast" of Revelation 13 because there are six letters in each of his names; hence, 666. Presto! If the Apostle John could render judgment, I'm sure that he would cry, "That's not what I meant!"

Returning to Dronin's book, by his analysis he apparently "discovers" a host of secret codes and messages. Once deciphered, they "appear" to be predictions of future events. Dronin is by no means an orthodox Christian, but many self-proclaimed Bible experts (especially "last days" prophecy pundits) are attempting to use his methodology as a basis for "proving" among other things that the Bible is a divinely authored book.

Recently, several young people in my church have approached me and asked me for my candid opinion on the Bible Code. My initial response was brief and to the point - don't waste your time and efforts with this stuff; it is Gnostic gobbledegook. What follows is a justification of this response.

The roots of Dronin's conjectures can be traced far back into the corridors of history. In the 12th century, a group of Jewish rabbis introduced in print a method of interpreting Scripture that had hitherto been known or handed down by oral traditions. This method sought to decipher hidden, esoteric meanings in the text (primarily the Torah) through some form of numerical (*gimatriya*) analysis. *They also propoorted that only by this method could initiates penetrate the divine mysteries.* This "secrecy" code became known as Cabala (also spelled Kabala, Kabbalah, Cabala, Cabbala, or Cabbala) meaning "something received or handed down." Cabala can also refer to any occult or secret doctrine or science.

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The earliest roots of Cabala can be traced to merkava (means "chariot") mysticism. It flourished in first century Palestine and had as its main focus ecstatic and mystical contemplation of the divine throne (or chariot) as seen in vision by the prophet Ezekiel (refer to Ezekiel 1). Combined with the basic tenet of Judaism that a man is justified before God through the observance of the Law of Moses, Cabala provided a means of approaching God directly (without any *mediation*). The devotees of Cabala also embraced a form of pantheism (a belief that creation is ultimate) called emanationism (i.e., all creation is an emanation of the Deity); a basic belief common to ancient Greek philosophy, a world view often couched in pantheistic overtones and dualism (the spirit is good and the body is evil). Cabalism gave first century Judaism a religious dynamism and these mystical approaches to God were condemned by the Apostle Paul (see Colossians) and the Apostle John (see I, II, and III John) as *heretical*. Church theologians have called this heresy Gnosticism, a system of belief where "secret" esoteric knowledge guarantees initiates direct access to divine and spiritual mysteries and thereby escape from the evils of the realm of the physical. As a correction to the error of Gnosticism, the Bible teaches that creation and the body are good, not evil (sin is generated in the heart of man). This truth is demonstrated by the Incarnation of Christ where God is manifested in the flesh; i.e., a human body. This Christ suffered a physical death and rose again in a glorified and physical body. It is only in and through this Christ that man can have access to God. The Lord Jesus Christ is the one and only *mediator* between God and man.

Cabalism often finds connections with magic and science. The earliest known Jewish text on magic and cosmology, *Sefer Yetzira* ("Book of Creation"), appeared sometime between the 3rd and the 6th century. It explained creation as a process involving the 10 divine numbers (*sephira* means "number" in Hebrew) of God the Creator (in the form of emanations or powers) and the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Taken together, they were said to constitute the "32 paths of secret wisdom."

A major text of early Cabala was the 12th-century *Sefer ha-bahir* ("Book of Brightness"), whose influence on the development of Jewish esoteric mysticism and on Judaism in general has been profound and lasting. This book not only interpreted the *sefirot* (Hebrew for "numbers") as instrumental in creating and sustaining the universe (contra to the person of Christ - see Hebrews 1:1-3 and Colossians 1:15-17) but also introduced into Judaism such notions as the transmigration of souls (in Hebrew, *gilgul*) and strengthened the foundations of Cabala by providing it with an extensive mystical symbolism. Giordano Bruno (ca. 1548-1600), erroneously honored as a "martyr" of science, introduced a view of the cosmos steeped in Gnostic ideology, pantheism, obscurantist mysticism, magic, and with some of the aspects of Cabala thrown in for good measure. In my book, *Mathematics: Is God Silent?* I make the following observations about other famous scientific pantheists (pp. 201-202):

That Einstein, a Jew, would freely embrace pantheism is explainable only when one recognizes the difference between Christian monotheism and Jewish (also Muslim) monotheism. In Christian monotheism, Christ is the only-begotten (the *monogenes*) of the Father (see John 1:14). In Judaism (as in Islam) there is no place for the *monogenes* to reside in a person (i.e., Jesus Christ). Hence, it is natural and logical for a scientist believing in one God (but not in His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ), whether personal or impersonal (as in the case of Einstein), to slip

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into pantheism when faced with explaining the order of the universe (called monogenes by the Greeks and which the Greeks attributed to an impersonal *logos*). Another prominent Jewish example of this "slip into pantheism" is Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677). As for the Muslims, it is enough to think of Averroës (1126-1198) and his followers.

Such are the roots of Dronin's book. This is why this book should come with a warning (at least to Christians): *Reader, Beware!* Why some Christians fall for such purely human conjectures is easy to explain. Before I do, let me briefly summarize Dronin's Cabalistic approach. He identifies the secret to unveiling the Bible's secret code as the "equal letter skip" (ELS) method. You take a text of Scripture, say Genesis, and write it out 78,064 Hebrew letters long. You then start with some letter and then skip ahead by some fixed number n of letters to spell out or unfold the "mystery" or "hidden messages." Every once in a while, by the laws of statistics, you may spell out a name or what may appear to be a "message" of sorts. What Dronin does is to use a computer to do the searches and then he unveils all the "messages" he finds. Only his successful choices of the starting letter and n are reported in his book; concerning his failures (just as statistically certain), well, no one needs to know about that! In essence, Dronin is playing on the naive and mathematically challenged. Any professional mathematician (or statistician) would immediately write him off as a huckster (for a good read on the misuse of statistics, get Darrell Huff's book *How to Lie with Statistics*). The design that Dronin finds in the Bible "code" its not of divine origin; it is of human origin (i.e., *his*).

Why do some Christians swallow this sort of hucksterism? Unfortunately, the Christian world has not been known of late for its ability to discern the true from the false. Many Christians have the uncanny knack of following whatever fad that comes along. It seems that to some the Bible is boring and "out of date" with today's world. When someone like Dronin comes along and tells them that the Bible can predict the future (like the assassination of Yitzak Rabin) or that Bible "codes" unveil all sorts of mystical meanings and truths, then *that* is exciting! "Why, this proves that the Bible is divinely inspired!" they gasp in wondering excitement. By doing so, they have turned biblical Christianity on its head. The biblical Christian starts from the presupposition that God has given His sure and certain word to man by means of verbal propositions (i.e., the Bible). The God that the Bible reveals requires this type of communication (in His goodness, He reveals His nature and purpose clearly to man, not via secret codes or numerical mysteries revealed only to an elite few). The final communication (or word) from God is in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1). In Christ is the full and complete revelation of the nature and character of God. Being finite and sinful, we can only know this revelation in part (I Corinthians 13:12), yet *we can know truly*. To seek to use the Bible as a "code generator" or "divining rod" to predict the details of the future is condemned by the Apostle Paul as a futile work of the flesh (see Galatians 5:19 where sorcery in the Greek means a curious desire to know the future by means that are not God ordained). All Christians should live by a faith toward a future in which the knowledge of the glory of God shall flood that earth as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9, Habakkuk 2:14).

Deuteronomy 29:29 states, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." There are many wonderful "messages" in Scripture, but these messages are plainly revealed not through the study

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of grammatical and historical contexts, *but by our obedience to God's clearly revealed commands* (John 7:17). God requires our efforts through careful Bible Study (II Timothy 2:15) in conjunction with the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 6:45) to "uncover" *and* obey these grand truths - the knowledge of truth can never be isolated from living the truth.

In the light of the revelation of God's word in Christ, it is therefore a pity that so many Christians give heed to the nonsense peddled in *The Bible Code*.