

Christians and “Coincidences”

or

Is There a Hex in the Patternicity?

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It happened just the other day: I had been thinking about James Bond, and later when I pulled out a form of identification for the bank teller, I noticed that my ID number began with 007! Was I a secret agent? Perhaps one suffering from amnesia?

Or, let’s say a man “has a system” for beating the Vegas roulette table. He has noticed that black has come up eight times in a row. So he bets everything on black, because “there’s clearly a pattern to the wheel tonight.” Meanwhile, a man across from him is thinking to himself, “I’d better put everything on *red*, since it looks like it’s due to come up.”

A child and her companion lie on their backs, looking up at the clouds. “That one looks like a giraffe!” she says. “And that one a camel!” “No, not a camel, look at it upside-down, it looks just like an octopus.” One child says, “An angel!”; another says, “Actually, it looks quite like Charles Darwin!”



We have all played this game without realizing that we were doing *pattern recognition*. As Paul Simon wrote many years back, in the song “Patterns”:

The night sets softly
With the hush of falling leaves,
Casting shivering shadows
On the houses through the trees,
And the light from a street lamp
Paints a pattern on my wall,
Like the pieces of a puzzle
Or a child's uneven scrawl.

Leaves, shadows, trees, indecipherable scrawling – these can all seem like messages because of our human tendency for *patternicity*. So can tortillas and numbers and corporate logos, as we shall see.

This is why astronomers speak of the Horsehead Nebula, which was not modeled after a terrestrial animal, but just sort of looks like a horse!



From ages past, people have imagined patterns in the stars and constructed “constellations” of animals, gods, heroes. And we can get a cross-check on patternicity by seeing how different cultures “read” the same stars – it’s Orion in European legend, but the same stars are a hunter and his dogs chasing a deer in India. Mr. Rorschach invented his famous ink blots on the basis of human pattern recognition (“Ummm...is it, maybe, two ducks kissing?” “Okay, Mr. Anderson, we’d better make it three sessions per week!”)



We are wired to quickly detect patterns in the data we see and hear. This is a huge help to get us through the day: when our alarm clock goes off, we don’t have to puzzle over, “Now, what could that buzzer possibly mean?”

But for some people, that recognition faculty goes beyond what is useful and becomes a nuisance or even a hazard; what made John Nash (“A Brilliant Mind”) a genius in math also made it hard for him to navigate through daily life.

I am no psychologist; most of what I know comes from people-watching. It’s that, ironically, I kept running into patternicity and it intrigued me. We will start with some general examples, and then move to the topic that really interests me – how Christian believers use patternicity to develop strange teachings.

PSEUDOSCIENCE in Everyday Life

Time Travel - Youtube is a veritable *Library of Alexandria of Bizarre Theories and Goofy Notions*. For example, did you know that time travel is – will be? – a possibility, because of the 1938 film of a woman using a cell phone?¹



This is an easy call for *patternicity*, because our brains are telling us that that is what she is doing. But remember, (1) we think “cell phone” because whenever we see this gesture (but only since around the year 2000), that’s what the person is doing. But (2) it would be very odd indeed if a “time traveler” from the distant future would use a cell that we in 2017 would be able to recognize. Presumably, a being who can travel to the past doesn’t have a phone that looks like my Motorola.

Ancient Astronauts and Other Alternative History. I love the History Channel. Or, I *loved* the History Channel, when it was all about WWII videos and Civil War battle recreation. That was before it broke my heart: sadly, the money seems to be in following around the same tired ghost hunters and ancient astronaut theorists and Yeti chasers. Patternicity comes into play here, too. For example, did you know that there is a picture of an extraterrestrial carved in a Mayan sarcophagus?ⁱⁱ



Well, I wouldn’t have thought so either, but this brings up another issue on the patternicity front – a hundred people can look at a thing and see no pattern, no “message,” but as soon as one person points it out, we all see it! So, does the pattern really exist? Besides, the Mayan spaceman is problematic for the same reasons the cellphone time traveler is – if the being is sitting in a rocket ship, this was one low-tech extraterrestrial; to me it looks like a Mercury capsule from the 1960s. What self-respecting ET would tool around ancient Mexico in such a jalopy?ⁱⁱⁱ



Astronaut Gordon Cooper, one of the "Mercury Seven"

Ghost hunters are also big news; here's a specter of Robin Hood with his sword drawn (but didn't he, in fact, use a bow rather than a sword?).^{iv} Well, I wouldn't have seen Robin Hood unless someone had cued me in that that is what I was looking at; it just looks like cigarette smoke to me.



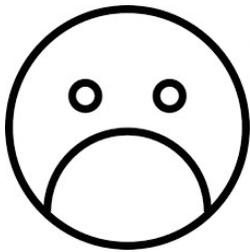
Heaven in Orion? Fans of sf may remember the wonderful tale by Niven and Pournelle, *The Mote in God's Eye*, where people identified a black nebula as God and a red gas giant as his eye. This recent Orion story is based on a dubious interpretation of the Old Testament, some have identified the Orion Nebula as God's abode or perhaps the portal to heaven.^v Patternicity once again: if it looks like a portal, it must be a portal! I remember someone saying that a nebula that looked like organ pipes must be heaven's pipe organ.

Man on Mars. I think I remember seeing the supermarket tabloid that first announced that extraterrestrials had been on Mars, because there was a human face on its surface. Remember the Mars Man?

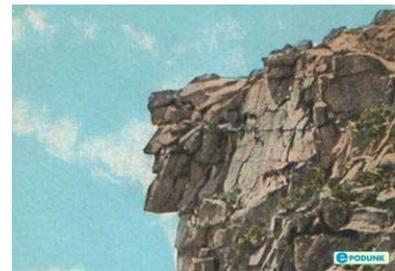


Patternicity is especially pronounced in human beings when it comes to human faces, since as it turns out, a nice chunk of our brain is dedicated to recognizing people. That's why someone can

take a circle and a few lines, and most people are going to identify it as a frowny face, even though it isn't.



As it turns out, unless you think NASA is trying to dupe you, the Mars Man is an optical illusion, which dissipated when pictures are taken with better light and other angles in 1998 and 2001.^{vi} It's like the Old Man on the Mountain that used to stand in New Hampshire – it too looked like a face from certain angles, but was merely a natural outcropping.



Here's a better set of photos of the Mars Man:



Likewise, people see “animals” in photos from the Mars Rover, but remember, our brains are correlating Martian shapes with animals we already know from Earth, such as a snake.^{vii} When we try to determine if there is, or has been, life on Mars, we will first need to filter out the patternicity effect. The same goes for supposed ruined cities on Mars or the Moon, which have much to do with the imagination and little with real data.^{viii} If you watch some of the “Ruins found on the Moon!” videos, they usually show you the undoctored picture, and then draw lines showing what they think it is. Because we are used to Earth buildings, we will “see” similar structures on other planets. Fun and entertaining, but it's a typical example of someone playing with our sense of patternicity, since, until someone tells me what I am supposed to be seeing, I don't see it. These are not Highlight Magazine with its “Find 10 common objects we have hidden in this picture!” puzzles; they are usually a whole lot of nothing. As they used to say about impressionist art: “Don't stand so close up! It helps to stand back!”



Need to kill some time waiting for the dentist? There's always Highlights!

CHRISTIANS WHO LIVE BY PATTERNICITY, FALL BY PATTERNICITY

Secret Messages from God!

Does the Lord send us messages by repeatedly showing us a thing? Of course. Just this past week, I read John 4:34 – “Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.’” Then I saw the same verse three times more within the week! I know that these things just happen sometimes. There is the James Bond effect, above. And we have all experienced: you buy a Snickers bar; then you see an ad for it; then someone mentions Snickers; the thing even has a name: the Baader-Meinhof Phenomenon. Still, even with those caveats, the verse from John 4 seemed particularly relevant to me, so I copied it out to look over.

On the other hand, I once knew two guys. One week they independently happened to run across Revelation 11:3, “And I will grant my two witnesses authority to prophesy for one thousand two hundred sixty days, wearing sackcloth.” So they decided that perhaps God wanted them to do some ministry together. I wasn’t impressed that way, but heaven knows.



What I am talking about here is the type of “patternicity” where someone sees messages by looking too closely at random shadows or wood paneling or spilled soup or the linoleum floor.

Then there are those tortillas with faces on them. Because of the way they are cooked, it is natural that patterns of light and darkness form on their surfaces, to form natural Rorschachs.



But whose face it is depends on the observer, since “patternicity” differs from person to person. And so, a Catholic sees the Virgin. A man in Texas saw Jesus, but some wag countered that she saw in it the face of singer Barry Gibb.^{ix} A Hindu might see Krishna. I do not say this to mock someone’s sincere faith. But if our brains are wired to quickly see patterns where they don’t exist, and each observer interprets the pattern differently, then perhaps we should accept most of these “appearances” as interesting coincidences and nothing more.

Add this, divide by this, and it comes out to 666! You can find the number of the beast, 666, all over the place. But remember, that any figure that has three digits has about a one in a thousand chance of showing up. It is as probable as 665 turning up, or 999, or 492. So, here are a couple of recent “messages” from the devil.



Do you know that Walt Disney was a minion of the antichrist? Neither did I. Maybe you think Disney movies communicate bad ideas – I’m not at all happy about “Pocahontas,” for a start – but it’s a stretch from there to the Mark of the Beast.

Here is a candidate for a Satanic message that has been around since 2014: the energy drink “Monster” has as its logo three claw marks. But some have “deciphered” as three of the Hebrew letter “vav” which in fact symbolizes 6 in Hebrew.

Yod (Y) 10	Tet (T) 9	Chet (Ch) 8	Zayin (Z) 7	Vav (V/W) 6	He (H) 5	Dalet (D) 4	Gimel (G) 3	Bet (B/V) 2	Alef (silent) 1
Mem (M) 40	Lamed (L) 30	Khaf (Kh) 20	Kaf (K/Kh) 20	Mem (M) 40	Lamed (L) 30	Khaf (Kh) 20	Kaf (K/Kh) 20	Mem (M) 40	Lamed (L) 30
Tav (T) 400	Shin (Sh/S) 300	Resh (R) 200	Qof (Q) 100	Tsadeh (Ts) 90	Tsadeh (Ts) 90	Feh (F) 80	Peh (P/F) 80	Tav (T) 400	Shin (Sh/S) 300

There are a number of problems here, beyond the fact that they market this as a healthful drink. First, the company says that they are *claw marks*; while they could be doing a cover-up, it’s important to start there. Second, the letter does not resemble *vav* but the letter to the left (Hebrew goes from right to left), *zayin*, which could symbolize 7. No Hebrew scribe would read the Monster can and see three *vavs*. Third, and most importantly, the number of the beast in Rev 13:18 is *not* 6-6-6 (i. e., three sixes), but six hundred-sixty-six (as the NRSV; similarly the KJV’s

“Six hundred threescore and six”). In Hebrew the number six hundred sixty-six is made up of one *vav* and several other letters.

Another misuse of 666 is the idea that the Hebrew *vav-vav-vav* (able to be rendered in English either as *vvv* or *www*) means that the World Wide Web is the antichrist! Same problem with the Hebrew alphabet, same issue of patternicity.

Here is “proof” that Bitcoin is the End Times currency, because one day, for a few seconds, its exchange rate was 666.6 Bitcoins to the US Dollar. (Not 666, by the way.)



Actually, here is a graph that shows how Bitcoin’s exchange rate has wandered back and forth over the 600s; I have added a red line to show where 666 would fall. So, naturally, has hit 666 at some point, probably various points, and all kinds of numbers.



The following patternicity person has really done her homework and found the mark of the beast in the logos for Google Chrome, Nickelodeon TV, Coca-Cola, and – inevitably, I suppose – Starbucks and Proctor and Gamble.^x Meanwhile, this other guy hit the jackpot!^{xi} Of him we might say that it’s possible to find three sixes or three fours or three tens anywhere you look, but do they really mean anything? As one commentator on the mark of the beast concluded: “We cannot infer much from the fact that a key fits the lock if it is a lock in which almost any key will turn.”^{xii}

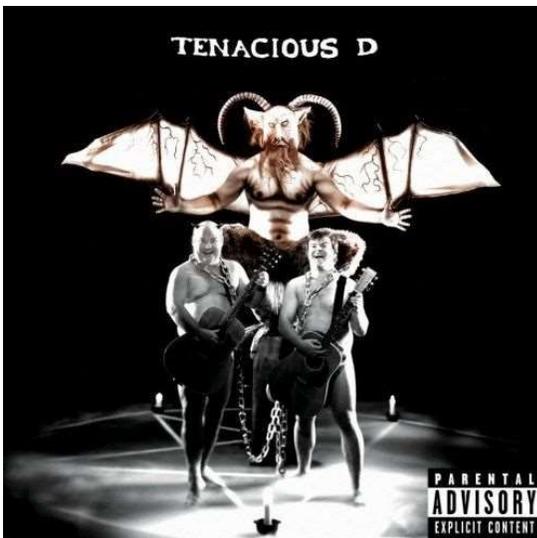
Just for fun, I will toss in a 666 that I ran into and snapped a picture of. If you had seen this, wouldn’t you have concluded that it was the Dark Powers sending you a message?



Don't worry! In fact, it's the lock on my briefcase. Nor are the numbers 666 – they are 999. And they happen to show up because I never changed my combination from 000 to anything more secure! Here is the truth revealed:



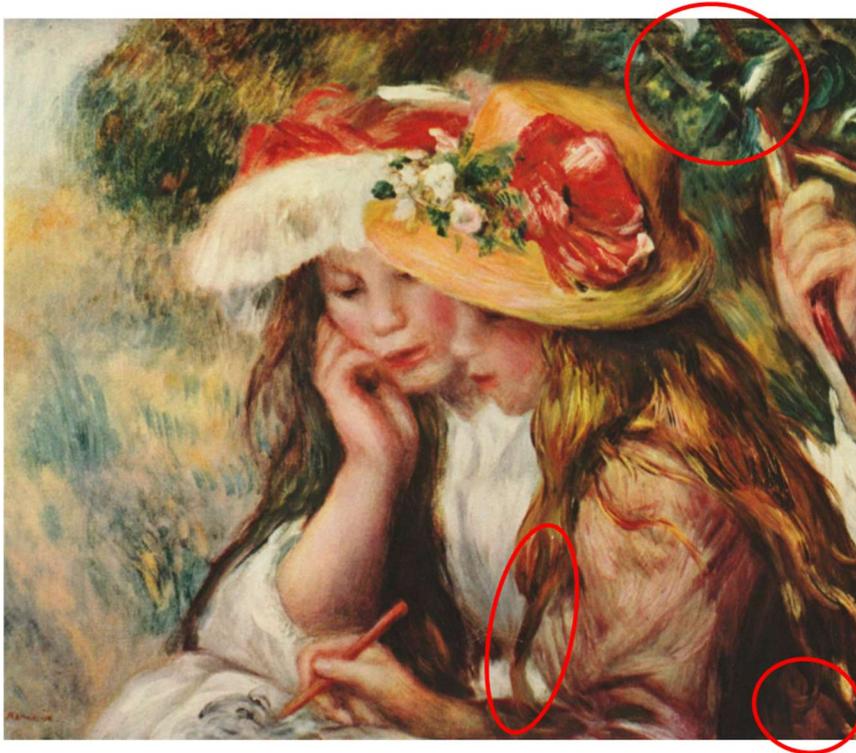
Of course, there are Satanic symbols around – you don't have to be an adept at patterns find the hidden clue in this album cover:



But what would happen if we were to choose an image at random – let's see, how about Renoir's "Zwei lesende Mädchen in einem Garten" (Two Girls Reading in a Garden). Here's the original:



Now: with just three minutes I was able to “decode” secret symbols.



Bottom left: a coiled serpent, about to strike; on the top, clearly a hovering (and dark!) angel; bottom right, clearly a man with a bishop's miter. So, I guess if you are Catholic, the message has to do with the devil sending a false bishop; or if you are Protestant, the pope is the devil's agent. Either way.

This is the same thing that Dan Brown promotes in his goofy interpretation of The Last Supper, that there is a V-shape between John and Jesus, that the V is a symbol for "female," and John looks a bit girly, and that *therefore* Da Vinci is sending us the code that John is not John after all, but is really a woman, Mary Magdalene, who therefore must have been Jesus's wife. Did you get all that? To paraphrase Freud, sometimes a V is just a V.



But between the two extremes (“*Nothing* contains symbolism!”; “No, *everything* does!”) perhaps we can find the middle ground where we see things as they are without losing our common sense.

Satanic Messages in Super Bowl Halftime Shows. Yes, it’s a thing, that the Super Bowl Halftime is supposed to be an annual transmission from the Satanic forces that rule the world, and that they put in little clues just to taunt the alert Christian. Just Google “Super Bowl Halftime Show Satanic” and you’ll see what I mean. The power outage in Super Bowl XLVII, the night that Beyoncé sang, just confirmed the theory: in the second half of the game, the power went out for 33 minutes and 55 seconds; some people find hidden meaning in those numbers. Maybe you regard those halftime shows to be morally objectionable, but communications from the Evil One seems to escape most of the people who look at the same data; and perhaps, this time, the majority has it right.

Satanic Messages and Backward Masking. Backward masking is a whole issue in itself; the examples I have listened to – over and over again – once more, showed the problem of patternicity, that people “hear” different things, or hear nothing, until someone tells them what they are supposed to hear.^{xiii}

Hidden Messages in the Dewey Decimal System. Did you know that “Dewey Decimal system number for ‘Numerology’ is 133.335 which reversed is 533.331, add them up to get 666.666.”^{xiv} Whatever that means! I notice that 666 is the Dewey number for Clay and Ceramics; does that link it to the prophecy of Daniel 2? It’s doubtful!

Superficial Historical Investigation. I am going to mention here the research published by Alexander Hislop in *The Two Babylons* (1853), about which I have written elsewhere.^{xv} He made the mistake of “finding” parallels of Mary and the Christ Child in ancient Babylonian mythology

and drawing from them the conclusion that the Catholic Church is really Babylon. His proofs are very sketchy and some are greatly exaggerated to make them match.

Bible Codes. People find hidden messages codified in the Hebrew Bible. It's almost always the Hebrew, because it was originally written without vowels. This makes it stunningly easy to count every fifteen or twenty or eighteen letters or so and have it come out to mean "Obama is a Muslim."^{xvi}

Let's have some fun and "decipher" the Paul Simon lyrics that I quoted at the beginning of this article:

"The night sets softly with the hush of falling leaves, casting shivering shadows on the houses through the trees, And the light from a street lamp paints a pattern on my wall, like the pieces of a puzzle or a child's uneven scrawl."

Now, remove all the vowels and we have the following:

THNGHTSTSSFTLYWTHTHHSHFFLLNGLVSCSTNGSHVRNGSHDWSNTHHSSTHRGH
THTRSNDTHLGHFTFRMSTRITLMPNTSPTTRNNMYWLLKTHPCSPZZLRCHLDSNVN
SCRWL

And we'll pick the number 5 at random, and count out every 5 letters:

THNGHTSTSSFTLYWTHTHHSHFFLLNGLVSCSTNGSHVRNGSHDWSNTHHSSTHRGH
THTRSNDTHLGHFTFRMSTRITLMPNTSPTTRNNMYWLLKTHPCSPZZLRCHLDSNVN
SCRWL, etc.

This leaves us with:

HSWHLVNRDHHHDHMSMSNLHPCNR

And of course we can add vowels back in, at our discretion. With a bit of creativity, I can come up with a couple of "meanings."

HouSe WH LeaViNg ReD HHH [HHH is a known code for Habitat for Humanity House!] Do HiS MSN [MSN = Microsoft Network!]. I will choose to interpret this jibber-jabber – and that's what Bible codes yield, folks, as a prediction that *when he leaves the White House, Jimmy Carter will erect Habitat houses, some of them red, and do something with Microsoft.* Habitat we already know about, but after looking online I found this headline from August, 2016 – "Jimmy Carter appeals to Bill Gates [of Microsoft!] to stop the massive dumping of toxic coal ash." And so, let's say that I will go ahead and publish an article that demonstrates beyond a doubt that my Bible Code is 100% secure and that Carter was *destined* to work with Habitat *and* to scold Bill Gates! Of course, I have done what in Latin is called *Vaticinium ex eventu* – a prediction only *after* the event takes place; no way I could have seen this coming or foreseen anything in the future!

The same “code,” by the way, may be forced to predict a publication by Old Testament scholar **Von Rad** or some sort of pronouncement about **HHH** and **DHS** – obviously, references to 1968 presidential candidate HHH [as Hubert H. Humphrey was called] or the US Department of Homeland Security [the DHS]!

Don’t let them kid you when they claim to be “Hebrew experts” – what we have done above is all they are doing, no more and no less!

Back to the real “experts”: so, one rabbi predicted that Donald Trump would win the election in 2016 (“Rabbi Sees Donald Trump Ascendancy in Bible Codes”^{xvii}) another, that Clinton would win (“Recently Discovered Bible Code Predicts [Clinton] Presidential Win”).^{xviii} Just put these two headlines next to each other and we can say, with Samuel Johnson, “I refute it thus!” Others have dealt with this mumbo-jumbo in detail.^{xix}

CONCLUSIONS

Any of these of course, in theory, *could* be authentic messages from the beyond. But given what we know about the ease with which the mind carries out pattern recognition, we should be very cautious, even skeptical. There *are* coincidences in life, which we sometimes recognize because of God designed us. Five green lights in a row might be a string of good fortune, but not necessarily a message from beyond.

Some Christians who have heightened patternicity. The danger they face is that they might make a false deduction from their seeming “revelations”: *I see things that others do not; or others do not see these things until I point them out. Thus, I must be specially anointed or smarter or more intelligent, because God has shown me these mysteries.*

For people who are mentally disturbed and cannot function properly, the solution may be treatment. But for the vast majority of us, the solution is to “stand back from the picture” and add a good dose of common sense and plain old Christian humility into the mix.

ⁱ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLU3F9glcgg>

ⁱⁱ <https://annoyzview.wordpress.com/2012/02/27/palenque-image-space-traveller-in-ancient-maya/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Just to mention another example that keeps showing up on History or History 2 – the so-called ancient astronaut that was carved into the walls of the medieval Cathedral Ieronimus in Salamanca, Spain. What further proof could you need to prove that ETs visited Spain centuries ago? Well, a lot more proof as it turns out, since it is well-known that this was carved into the chapel in the year 1992, when the artist thought it would be appropriate to add in a 20th-century image; he chose an astronaut. The man in the carving is a 20th-century earthling, not a medieval ET. See <http://www.hoax-slayer.com/cathedral-spaceman-carving.shtml>

^{iv} <https://www.thesun.co.uk/uncategorized/2683341/ufo-expert-claims-spooky-image-shows-robin-hoods-ghost-brandishing-a-sword/>

^v <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CwXjr-euOf4>

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- ^{vi} <http://www.space.com/17191-face-on-mars.html>
- ^{vii} <http://www.techtimes.com/articles/178421/20160920/alien-snake-spotted-in-nasa-mars-photo-by-alien-conspiracy-theorists-alien-life-on-mars-coverup-by-nasa.htm>
- ^{viii} <http://www.express.co.uk/news/weird/683353/NASA-COVER-UP-Space-agency-found-city-on-Mars-but-tried-to-stop-YOU-seeing-it>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tURyKxAfEtg>
- ^{ix} <http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/religion/article/Man-claims-burn-mark-on-tortilla-resembles-Jesus-5950739.php>
- ^x <https://terrific-top10.com/2013/10/08/top-10-satanic-symbols-hidden-in-logos/>
- ^{xi} <http://goyimgazette.com/issue-666/>
- ^{xii} G. Salmon, *An Historical Introduction to the Study of the Books of the New Testament*. London: Murray, 1904), 230-31.
- ^{xiii} Here is a good summary of the issues: <http://www.equip.org/article/rock-music/>
- ^{xiv} See <http://goyimgazette.com/issue-666/>
- ^{xv} <https://openoureyeslord.com/2015/11/11/the-emperor-constantine-the-great-a-villain-or-a-hero-or-something-in-between/>. If we were to take
- ^{xvi} <https://www.breakingisraelnews.com/68330/biblical-numerology-confirms-obamas-roots-in-ishmael-and-islam-05-16/>
- ^{xvii} <http://www.wnd.com/2016/11/rabbi-sees-donald-trump-ascendancy-in-bible-codes/>
- ^{xviii} <https://www.breakingisraelnews.com/67210/bible-code-predicts-clinton-win/>
- ^{xix} <http://www.equip.org/article/the-bible-code/>