Spelling the End of Grant Jeffrey's "Jesus Codes"
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How the Text of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 in the
Oldest Hebrew Manuscripts from the Dead Sea Scrolls
Proves that the Letter Sequences of the Hebrew Bible Have Changed

In my book *The Bible Code Myth*, which approaches the claims of a code from the perspective of scribal transmission of the manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible, I make reference to the demonstrable fact that the spelling of Hebrew words changes quite a bit during the Hebrew Bible's long transmission history. This is easily demonstrated because (a) we know where the Hebrew alphabet comes form; (b) we know when the formation of the letters changed; (c) we know when the scribes began using certain consonants for vowel sounds (*matres lectiones*); (d) we know how the adoption of the practice of using consonants as vowels was observed *in varying degrees* by scribes; and (e) we know for certain that the more ancient texts (Qumran) reflect the use of consonant letters for vowels far more than the Masoretic scribes did—the scribes who produced the Hebrew Bible used today ("Masoretic Text"), which is the text used for Bible code letter sequencing. Simply put, there have been *tens of thousands of letter deletions* due to the change in spelling practices since the earliest time when the text of the Hebrew Bible was actually composed up until now. This is deadly to claims of a divinely-inspired every-letter sequence upon which the idea of a Bible code depends. This paper illustrates this fact by comparing the Masoretic text's spelling with the spelling of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

My choice of text is Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Grant Jeffrey, a well-known Bible code proponent, claims to have found dozens of words encoded in the Hebrew letters of this passage that correspond to names and places in the life of Jesus, thereby "proving" this passage, which describes God's suffering servant, cryptically pointed to Jesus of Nazareth as that suffering servant. The Hebrew text does nothing of the sort. The claim of a code, which depends on the letter sequences of today's Masoretic text, is destroyed by the Hebrew text closest (400 years) to Isaiah's own lifetime—the Dead Sea Scrolls. This is because the spelling of scribes of the earlier time differed dramatically from the scribes who produced the Masoretic text.

I should say at this point that this is not a religious argument. If the reader considers the Bible a reliable document in any regard, whether of history or prophecy), those claims are independent of the existence of a code. In this article I am only discussing *letters*. In most cases, changes in spelling does not affect meaning or accuracy. For example, meaning is not altered if a personal name or familiar word is spelled one way in the MT and another in different Hebrew text. We spell a man's name today "Jon" or "John," "Steven" or "Stephen." We may spell the word "color" as "colour" or "endeavor" as "endeavour." Meaning is not affected, *but the letters used—and so the sequences—vary*.

Letter Differences in Isaiah 52:13-53:12

In order for the reader to understand what I am arguing and illustrating here, a few words of explanation will be helpful.

What You Are Looking At

Line 1 = The actual Dead Sea Scroll script

The photos of the script come from *The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsaa): A New Edition*, ed. by Donald W. Parry and Elisha Qimron (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

Line 2 = The Dead Sea scroll script of Line 1 put into modern type-face for readability

Scribes weren't terribly neat in many cases, so this will help you to see the letters. Once the reader compares line 1 with line 2, it will again be apparent how easily a scribe could have confused certain letters. One can also note how the letter styles have changed. At times the manuscript is damaged, so readability varies. A few notes of interest about scribal techniques are interspersed for the reader as well.

Line 3 = The Masoretic Text used by Bible Code Proponents (from "BHS" – *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*)
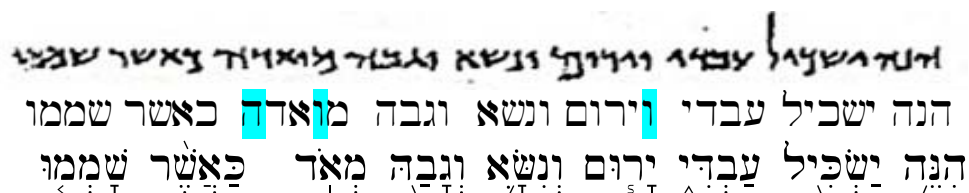
This line is the consonantal text of *BHS* with added vowel marks, which look like tiny dots and dashes over and under letters. The vowel marks do not alter the sequence of consonants used by the Bible code proponents, who simply remove the markings for their letter string.

The Point Being Made By the Graphic Illustrations

To discern the point being made here about spelling differences, **the reader needs to visually compare the spelling (the letters) of LINE 2 and LINE 3**. The differences are shaded for the reader's convenience. You will find that there are many letters in the words in the Dead Sea Isaiah scroll that are missing from the text used by Bible code practitioners (LINE 3). In other words, there are undeniably many spelling differences between the text used by Bible Code proponents and the Dead Sea Scrolls, the scrolls closest to the biblical period (roughly 200 BC) – *far more* than Jeffrey presumes. In fact, there are an astonishing 115 letter differences in this small portion of text! Extrapolated out to the near 24,000 verses of the Hebrew Bible, and one would easily be in the tens of thousands of letter variances— just due to spelling conventions. As a result, the scrolls that most likely preserve the spelling of the biblical Old Testament text when put in its final composed form *disagrees* with the letter sequences used by Bible code practitioners.

NOTE: The line/verse breaks are set up to match the line length in the scroll.

Isa 52:13-14a

הנה ישכיל עבדי **ו**ירום ונשא וגבה מ**ו**אד**ה** כאשר שממו

הִנֵּה יַשְׂכִּיל עַבְדִּי יָרוּם וְנִשָּׂא וְגָבַהּ מְאֹד כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמְמוּ

עליכה רבים כן משחתי מאיש מראהו ותוארו מבני האדם
עָלֶ֙יךָ֙ רַבִּ֔ים כֵּ֧ן מִשְׁחַ֛ת מֵאִ֖ישׁ מַרְאֵ֑הוּ וְתֹאֲר֖וֹ מִבְּנֵ֥י אָדָֽם:

כן יזה גואים רבים עליו וקפצו מלכים פיהמה כיא את אשר
כֵּ֤ן יַזֶּה֙ גּוֹיִ֣ם רַבִּ֔ים עָלָ֛יו יִקְפְּצ֥וּ מְלָכִ֖ים פִּיהֶ֑ם כִּ֚י אֲשֶׁ֙ר

לוא סופר להמה ראו ואת אשר לוא שמעו התבוננו
לֹ֤א סֻפַּ֤ר לָהֶם֙ רָא֔וּ וַאֲשֶׁ֥ר לֹֽא־שָׁמְע֖וּ הִתְבּוֹנָֽנוּ:

מי האמין לשמועתנו וזרוע יהוה אל מי נגלתה ויעל כיונק לפניו
מִ֥י הֶאֱמִ֖ין לִשְׁמֻעָתֵ֑נוּ וּזְר֥וֹעַ יְהוָ֖ה עַל־מִ֣י נִגְלָ֑תָה וַיַּ֙עַל֙ כַּיּוֹנֵ֣ק לְפָנָ֔יו

וכשורש מארץ ציאה לוא תאור לו ולוא הדר לו ונראנו ולוא מראה
וְכַשֹּׁ֙רֶשׁ֙ מֵאֶ֣רֶץ צִיָּ֔ה לֹא־תֹ֥אַר ל֖וֹ וְלֹ֣א הָדָ֑ר וְנִרְאֵ֥הוּ וְלֹֽא־מַרְאֶ֖ה
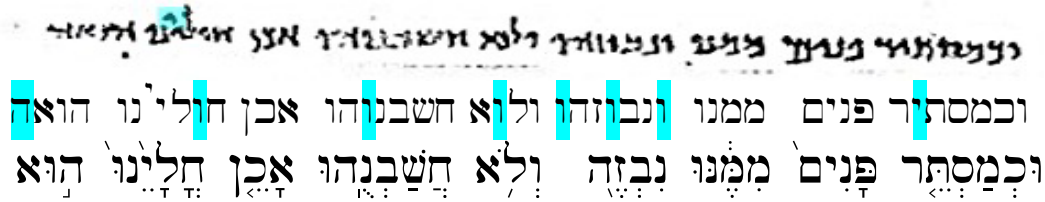
ונחמדנו נבזה וחדל אישים ואיש מכאבות וידע חולי
וְנֶחְמְדֵ֙הוּ֙ נִבְזֶה֙ וַחֲדַ֣ל אִישִׁ֔ים אִ֥ישׁ מַכְאֹב֖וֹת וִיד֥וּעַ חֹֽלִי

Isa 53:3b-4a

וכמסתיר פנים   ממנו   ונבזהו ולוא חשבנהו   אכן חליינו הואה
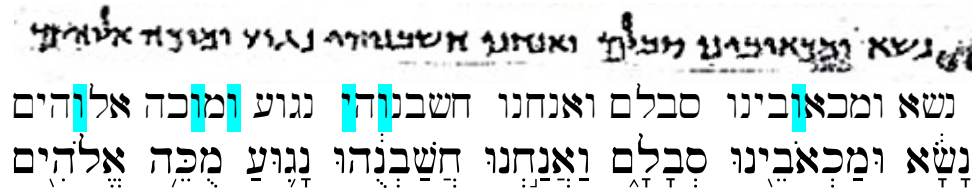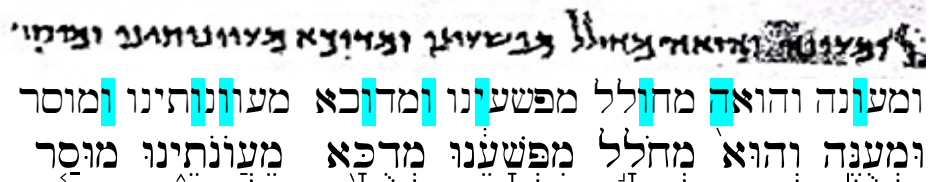
וּכְמַסְתֵּר פָּנִים֙ מִמֶּ֔נּוּ נִבְזֶ֖ה   וְלֹ֥א חֲשַׁבְנֻֽהוּ׃ אָכֵ֤ן חֳלָיֵ֙נוּ֙ ה֣וּא

Note the tiny raised yodh (ֹ) above the second last word (from left) in the DSS – it's a scribal correction in the original scroll.
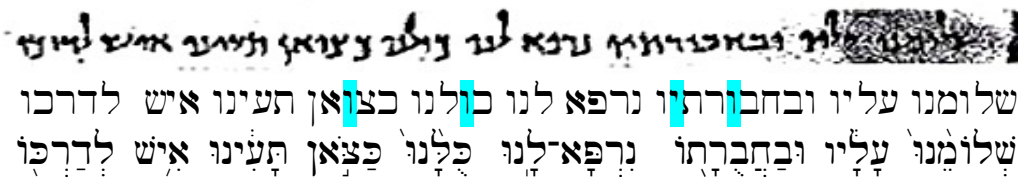
Isa 53:4b

נשא ומכאובינו   סבלם ואנחנו   חשבנוהו   נגוע ומוכה אלוהים

נָשָׂ֔א וּמַכְאֹבֵ֖ינוּ סְבָלָ֑ם וַאֲנַ֣חְנוּ חֲשַׁבְנֻ֗הוּ נָג֛וּעַ מֻכֵּ֥ה אֱלֹהִ֖ים
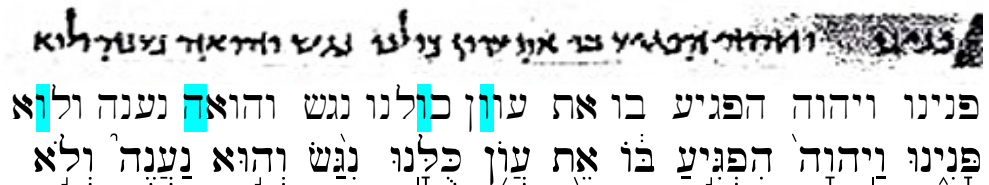
Isa 53:4c-5a

ומעונה והואה מחולל מפשעינו ומדוכא   מעוונותינו ומוסר

וּמְעֻנֶּ֑ה וְהוּא֙ מְחֹלָ֣ל מִפְּשָׁעֵ֔נוּ מְדֻכָּ֖א   מֵעֲוֹנֹתֵ֑ינוּ מוּסַ֤ר

Isa 53:5b-6a

שלומנו עליו ובחבורתיו נרפא לנו כולנו כצואן תעינו איש   לדרכו

שְׁלוֹמֵ֙נוּ֙ עָלָ֔יו וּבַחֲבֻרָת֖וֹ   נִרְפָּא־לָֽנוּ׃ כֻּלָּ֙נוּ֙ כַּצֹּ֣אן תָּעִ֔ינוּ אִ֥ישׁ לְדַרְכּ֖וֹ

Isa 53:6b-7a

פנינו ויהוה הפגיע   בו את   עוון כולנו נגש   והואה נענה ולוא

פָּנִ֑ינוּ וַֽיהוָה֙ הִפְגִּ֣יעַ בּ֔וֹ אֵ֖ת עֲוֹ֥ן כֻּלָּֽנוּ׃ נִגַּ֙שׂ וְה֣וּא נַעֲנֶה֮ וְלֹ֣א

Isa 53:7b

יפתח פי**ה**ו כשה לטב**ו**ח יובל כרחל לפני ג**ו**זזיה נאלמה ול**ו**א פתח
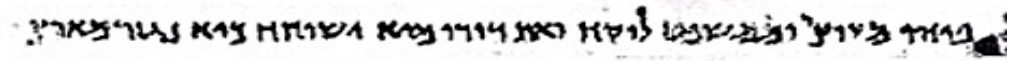
יִפְתַּח פִּיו כַּשֶּׂה לַטֶּבַח יוּבָל **וּכְרָחֵל** לִפְנֵי גֹזְזֶיהָ נֶאֱלָמָה וְלֹא **יִפְתַּח**

The last word in the line (reading right to left) is a different verb form in the DSS
than in MT, where we see פתח instead of יפתח. In the MT and our English Bibles the
verb reads, "and he would not / will not open his mouth." Thus it sounds prophetic.
In the DSS, though, the scribe has, "he opened not his mouth" – it apparently made
more sense to him that the action would already be PAST. He apparently did not
take this phrase to be a prophecy. *This is an example of a content disagreement in*
a manuscript. The scribe is not speculating on any "fulfillment" since he sees no
prophetic content here. The DSS text is odd since the other imperfect verb forms
and prophetic context are the same as MT. It's a good contextual argument for
seeing MT in this case as the better reading in text-critical terms. The Bible code
proponent nevertheless has another letter disruption.
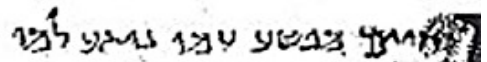
Isa 53:7c-8a

פי**ה**ו מע**ו**צר וממשפט ל**ו**קח ואת דורו מ**יא** ישוחח כי**א** נגזר מארץ

פִּיו מֵעֹצֶר וּמִמִּשְׁפָּט לֻקָּח וְאֶת־דּוֹרוֹ מִי יְשׂוֹחֵחַ כִּי נִגְזַר מֵאֶרֶץ

Note again the raised letter (scribal correction) in the second word from the right in
the DSS to correct the text (and MT had it right).
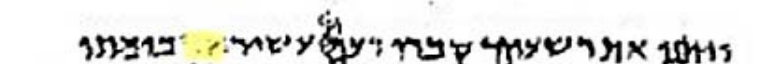
Isa 53:8b

חיים **[**מפשע עמי נוגע למו**]**

חַיִּים מִפֶּשַׁע עַמִּי נֶגַע לָמוֹ

The last four words in this phrase are bracketed because in the Dead Sea manuscript
these words are lighter in color. They were most likely added by a second or
subsequent scribe who thought they belonged in the text, probably on the basis of
another copy he was referencing. At any rate, this is only for interest – except for
the shaded letter, the MT and DSS match.

Isa 53:9a

[b]ויתנ**ו** עת רשעים קברו [a]וע**ת** עשיר (ים) **בומתו**

וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־רְשָׁעִים קִבְרוֹ וְאֶת עָשִׁיר בְּמֹתָיו

The (ים) in parentheses in the transcribed version reflect an erasure made by the scribe in his scroll (one that would show up in magnification or infrared). In regard to the raised letter for footnote "a" in LINE 2, there is a raised dot above the footnoted word (ועת - MT has ואת). This is a dot written by the scholars who transcribed this text in book from which I photocopied the Dead Sea script. The Dead Sea text had ועם originally, and a scribe put the correct letter over the wrong one. See the actual script for a raised letter above the rest; it's a scribal correction.

In regard to footnote "b," there are also two dots over two of these letters, again placed there by modern scholars to tell us there was great difficulty determining the lettering of the script, as it could be several things grammatically.

Isa 53:9b-10a

על לוא חמס עשה ולוא מרמה בפיהו ויהוה חפצ דכאו ויחללהו

עַל לֹא חָמָס עָשָׂה וְלֹא מִרְמָה בְּפִיו וַיהוָֹה חָפֵץ דַּכְּאוֹ הֶחֱלִי

The last word in this line is different in the Dead Sea scroll. The word there means, "he (God) profaned him (the sufferer in the chapter)." In MT it means, "he (God) made him sick/weak".   A slight difference, but not terribly significant – unless you are counting letters – here there would be six variations in a single word.

Isa 53:10b

אם תשים אשם נפשו וראה זרע ויארך ימים וחפצ יהוה

אִם תָּשִׂים אָשָׁם נַפְשׁוֹ יִרְאֶה זֶרַע יַאֲרִיךְ יָמִים וְחֵפֶץ יְהוָה
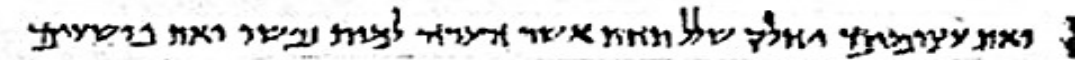
Isa 53:10c-11a

בידו יצלח מעמל נפשוה יראה אור וישבע ובדעתו יצדיק

בְּיָדוֹ יִצְלָח מֵעֲמַל נַפְשׁוֹ יִרְאֶה יִשְׂבָּע בְּדַעְתּוֹ יַצְדִּיק

Isa 53:11b-12a

צדיק עבדו לרבים ועוונתם הואה יסבול לכן אחלק לו ברבים

צַדִּיק עַבְדִּי לָרַבִּים וַעֲוֹנֹתָם הוּא יִסְבֹּל לָכֵן אֲחַלֶּק־לוֹ בָרַבִּים

Isa 53:12b

נאן עמימעתעי יַחלק שלל תחת אשר הערה למות עפשו ואת בשעתי
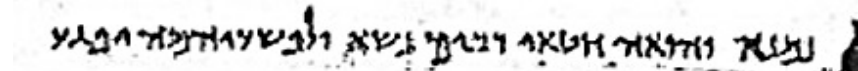
ואת עצומים יחלק שלל תחת אשר הערה למות נפשו ואת פשעים

וְאֶת־עֲצוּמִים֙ יְחַלֵּ֣ק שָׁלָ֔ל תַּ֗חַת אֲשֶׁ֨ר הֶעֱרָ֤ה לַמָּ֙וֶת֙ נַפְשֹׁ֔ו וְאֶת־פֹּשְׁעִ֖ים

Isa 53:12c

נשא והואה חטאי רבים נשא ולפשעיהמה יפגע

נמנה והואה חטאי רבים נשא לפשע יהמה יפגע

נִמְנָ֑ה וְהוּא֙ חֵטְא־רַבִּ֣ים נָשָׂ֔א וְלַפֹּשְׁעִ֖ים יַפְגִּֽיעַ׃

Incredibly, when faced with this evidence from the Dead Sea scrolls, Grant Jeffrey would have those who believe in the codes simply respond by saying we should just go with the *later* BHS text as the text God wanted us to have – and so use it authoritatively for Bible code research. This is not only illogical but also reflects an ignorance of the history of BHS. It demands that his own Christian community of faith embrace a text about which several noteworthy comments can be made:

(1) The early church predominantly used the Greek Septuagint for their Old Testament, not the MT (upon which BHS is based). MT was later "standardized" to allow Jews to better debate Christians and their Septuagint in certain matters. If Jeffrey is even aware of this, his decision for the codes to just go with MT is at best self-serving.

(2) The letter sequence of BHS was produced by removing consonants from the Dead Sea Isaiah scroll and replacing them with vowel point-markings. If one wanted to detect a code placed within the Hebrew letters by God, wouldn't one want to use the text closest to the time of prophetic inspiration, rather than a later text that had tens of thousands of letters removed to "modernize" spelling and pronunciation? In short, shouldn't Bible code researchers argue the *opposite* of what Jeffrey suggests and go with the Dead Sea material?

(3) If one argues as Jeffrey does that we should just "go with BHS / MT" we are still left with the problem of manuscript disagreements between BHS and other MT manuscripts.

(4) Are we to believe that the very Jewish scholars who revised the spelling of the Dead Sea material, and who rejected the messianic claims of Jesus, then cryptically inserted hints to Jesus' messiah-ship? If God used these "Jewish unbelievers" to hide His code in the Masoretic text, why didn't He do that with the earlier Dead Sea texts, which are much closer to the biblical prophets themselves?