

CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE
Can We Trust The Gospels?
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The DaVinci Code

2003 novel by Dan Brown

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1. Do we have a reliable Bible?

“The Bible is a product of man, my dear. Not of God . . . it has evolved through countless translations, additions and revisions.” (The DaVinci Code 231)

This is far from the truth.

We have massive early manuscript confirmation.

- Though we no longer have the original manuscripts, we can be sure that the copies we have are faithful representatives of those original writings.
- ◆ We have more than 5000 Greek manuscripts, some dating back to as early as 125 A.D.
- ◇ We have as many as 20,000 more translations in such languages as Latin, Coptic, and Syriac.
- ◇ Checking our NT with these early manuscripts shows that our NT has remain virtually unaltered.

2. Did Constantine embellish and change the four gospels?

Leigh Teabing -“Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ’s human traits and embellished those gospels that make Him godlike.” (The DaVinci Code 234)

Is this really true? Were Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John intentionally altered and embellished in the fourth century at the command of Emperor Constantine?

- a. Constantine did write a letter to Eusebius ordering preparation of 50 copies of the sacred scriptures.**
- But nowhere in the letter does he command that any of the gospels be embellished in order to make Jesus appear more godlike.
- b. It is difficult to believe that the same church fathers who had withstood terrible persecution would have suddenly jettisoned their cherished gospels and embrace embellished accounts of Jesus' life.**
- It is completely unrealistic to believe that the fourth century church fathers would have joined Constantine in a grand conspiracy of this kind.
 - It is quite certain that if Constantine tried such a thing, we would have plenty of evidence in the writings of the church fathers. There is none.
- c. We have copies of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John that are significantly earlier than Constantine and the Council of Nicea.**
- Though we do not have the original writings, we have portions of copies of NT manuscripts that date back to as early as 125 A.D.
 - Although none of the copies are complete, we do have nearly complete copies of Luke and John dating from around 200 A.D.
- ◆ When we compare these early manuscripts with those that followed the Council of Nicea to see if any embellishment occurred. None did.
 - ◆ The pre-Nicene version's of John's gospels include the same strong declarations of Christ's deity that that we find in the later manuscripts.
 - ◆ These strong statements of Christ's deity pre-date Constantine by more than a hundred years!

- In addition we have literally thousands of quotes of NT texts from the church fathers who lived 100 years and more before Constantine and the Council of Nicea.
 - ◆ Ignateus (70-110)- quotes 13 NT books
 - ◆ Polycarp (115)- a disciple of John- calls NT quotes “scripture”
 - ◆ Iraneus (180)- quotes 20 NT books
 - ◆ Clement of Alexandria (150-212)- 2400 quotes- all but 3 NT books
 - ◆ Tertullian (160-220)- 7000 NT quotes
 - ◆ Origin (185-253)- 18,000 NT quotes
 - ◇ They lived between 100 and 200 years before Constantine and the Council of Nicea.

d. Historical works on the Council of Nicea give no evidence that Constantine and the delegates even discussed the Gnostic Gospels or anything that pertained to the canon.

- Twenty rulings were issued at Nicea, and the contents of all of them are still in existence.
 - ◆ Not one of them refers to issues regarding the canon.

3. Can we trust the Gospels?

Teabing- “Almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false.” The DaVinci Code 235

Is this correct? The answer largely depends on the reliability of our earliest biographies of Jesus. (The gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John)

- Each was written in the first century A.D.
- Although they are technically anonymous, we have fairly strong evidence from early church fathers such as

Papias (c. 125 A.D.) and Iranaeus (c. 180 A.D.) for ascribing each gospel to its traditional author.

◆ They tell us that:

- ◇ Mark wrote down the substance of Peter's preaching and that Luke, the traveling companion of Paul, carefully researched and wrote the biography that bears his name.
 - ◇ Matthew and John were two of the twelve disciples and wrote the books ascribed to them.
- ◆ If they are correct, then the events recorded in these gospels are based on either direct or indirect eyewitness testimony.
- ◇ Luke 1:1-3
 - ◇ 1 John 1:1
 - ◇ 2 Peter 1:16

But did the gospel writers intend to reliably record the life and ministry of Jesus? Were they interested in history, or did their theological agendas overshadow any desire they may have had to tell us what really happened?

- Craig Blomberg, NT scholar at Denver Seminary, the prologue to Luke's gospel "reads very much like prefaces to other generally trusted historical and biographical works of antiquity."
 - John tells us that he wrote his gospel so that people might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing they might have life in His name. (20:31)
- ◆ This statement admittedly reveals a clear theological agenda.
- ◇ But if you are going to be convinced enough to believe, the theology has to flow from accurate history.

Interestingly, both history and archeology are a great help in corroborating the general reliability of the gospel writers.

- Where the gospel writers mention people, places, and events that can be checked against other ancient sources, they are consistently shown to be reliable.

But what about those gospels that didn't make it into the NT?

4. What are the Gnostic gospels? Are they reliable history?

Teabing tells us that the Nag Hammadi texts represent “the earliest Christian records.” (The DaVinci Code 245) These “unaltered gospels,” he claims, tell us the real story about Jesus and early Christianity (248). The New Testament gospels are allegedly a later, corrupt version of these events.

a. What are the Nag Hammadi texts?

- The Nag Hammadi texts were discovered in Egypt in 1945.
 - ♦ They are written in Coptic, not Greek or Hebrew.
 - ♦ They portray a Gnostic, not Christian, worldview.
- They contain 52 texts not found in our Bibles.
 - ♦ **GARLOW AND JONES 166-167**
- Five of them are called gospels.
 - ♦ Gospel of Phillip Gospel of the Egyptians
 - Gospel of Thomas Gospel of Mary
 - Gospel of Truth

b. Spurious Authorship

- Not even the most radical liberal scholar seriously believes that those they are named for wrote these.
- The dates and location of the documents demonstrated that they were attributed to significant NT people in order to give them credibility.

- ◆ The early church rejected outright any book written under a pseudonym.

c. Late Date

- They are not the “earliest Christian record.”
- Even most of the scholars who want to give these documents credibility say that the very earliest date is about 150 A.D. and probably later.
 - ◆ At least 120 years after Christ’s crucifixion.
 - ◆ Some of the Gnostic documents date from the 5th and even 6th centuries.
- Contrast this with the Biblical Gospels, written by eyewitnesses and completed before 70 A.D. except for John (95).
 - ◆ Darrell Bock, “The bulk of this material is a few generations removed from the foundations of the Christian faith, a vital point to remember when assessing the contents.”
 - ◇ If you had a choice, whose description of Abraham Lincoln would you believe? His contemporaries, or people today who were speculating about his private life and political philosophy- especially if these speculators were determined to put their own political theories into Lincoln’s mouth.

d. Questionable content

- For the most part the Gnostic Gospels make no pretense of being an actual record of events.
 - ◆ They are simply the musings of various teachers.
- There is a striking contrast to their NT counterparts.
 - ◆ Salvation comes through secret esoteric knowledge.

- ◆ They place almost no value on the death and resurrection of Jesus.
 - ◇ They viewed the death of Jesus as irrelevant for attaining salvation.
 - ◇ What was truly important was not the death of the man Jesus, but the secret knowledge brought by the Divine Christ.
 - ◇ Salvation came through a correct understanding of this secret knowledge.
- ◆ They separated the human Jesus from the Divine Christ, seeing them as two distinct beings.
- ◆ It is not the Divine Christ who suffered and died, it was merely the human Jesus --or perhaps Simon of Cyrene.
- ◆ In the Infancy Story of Thomas, Jesus strikes dead a boy who bumps him. When the deceased boy's parents complain to Joseph, Jesus strikes them blind. When another observer complains because Jesus made clay sparrows on the Sabbath, Jesus claps his hands and the birds fly off.
- These teaching are incompatible with the NT teaching about Christ and salvation.
 - ◆ Romans 3:21-26; 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 15:3-11; Titus 2:11-14.
- Ironically, the teaching of these Gnostic Gospels are incompatible with Teabing's view that the Nag Hammadi texts "speak of Christ in very human terms."
 - ◆ The Nag Hammadi texts actually present Christ as being divine, though quite differently from the NT perspective.

Thus, the Nag Hammadi texts 1. have a spurious authorship, 2. are written later than the NT writings and 3. are characterized by an entirely alien theology.

- The church fathers were wise to reject them from the NT canon.
- ♦ But how did they decide what books to include?
- ♦ When were these decisions made? And who made them?
- ♦ We will look at these next week.

Preservation passages 24 For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF,

Matthew 24:35 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

1 Peter 1:23-25 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God. 24 For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, 25 BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER." And this is the word which was preached to you.