

The truth behind the Da Vinci Code
2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21

Intro: Today we begin a series on the Da Vinci Code. You may ask “is this really necessary? Do we have to listen to a series of messages about some book and movie?” Well, let me give you some of the reasons this is important:

The book and movie makes a direct attack on four fundamental areas of what we, the church stand on.

1. It attacks the reliability and historicity of the Bible.
2. It attacks the true nature of Jesus Christ
3. It attacks the origin and development of our Christian beliefs
4. It calls into question the motives and trustworthiness of all church leaders throughout history.

In other words it strikes at the very heart of Christian faith. The Bible can't be trusted, Jesus was a liar, our beliefs are all false and church leaders since the beginning have all been motivated by something other than pure motives. But is it really a problem we need to take time to talk about?

Listen to some quotes about the movie;[slide #2 & 3]

“Historic fact with a contemporary story line” US Today December 11, 2003

“The most amazing thing about this novel is that it's based on fact.” (Taylor, www.archive.salon.com/books/review/2003/03/27da_vinci)

“A good yarn within a richly factual content.” (“The Da Vinci Code: Book Review,” www.counterculture.co.uk/book-review/the-da-vinci-code.html)

Universities have told students to read the book **“...to understand how corrupt Christianity is.”**

High Schools have told their students to read the book **““...to see how religion lies.”**

Why would any thinking person make these kinds of claims about a novel? Because Dan Brown himself claims in the first page of the book that **[SLIDE # 4 & 5] “...all descriptions of art work, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.”** On page 235 of the book Brown says, **“...almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false.”** Throughout the book Brown makes claims such as **“religious historians”**; **“well-documented history”**; **“art historians”**; **“all academics”**; **“well-documented evidence”**; **“scores of historians”**; and **“historical evidence”** to paint the picture that his novel is based on historical fact.

But is it having an impact on every day people?

[No Slide] On father said this about the book, **“I lost my son to The Da VinciCode.”**

Some one close to our church said this about the book, **“So what if Jesus married, and what if he did have kids, it's not a sin to be married and have kids, we're told in the Bible to do so. And does that make Him less God?”**

[SLIDE #6] What is the impact on our Culture?

A college student made this statement on an internet fan site, **“[T]his book is awesome and confirms many things for me.”**

Another said a, **“huge amount of information in it is accurate”** and that **“pretty much all of the historical facts are real.”**

But is that true?

The book is full of historically inaccurate facts, for example [SLIDE #7 & 8]: On pg 21 it is claimed that the pyramid outside the Louvre in Paris is **“constructed of exactly 666 panes of glass.”** Unfortunately, according to the official web site of the Louvre Museum, the pyramid is **“covered in 673 diamond-shaped panes of glass”**. I only point this out to demonstrate that from the very beginning the main weakness of the book is its lack of accuracy. I will deal with much of the incidental inaccuracies regarding things like the pagan symbols, origin of the Tarot Cards, the churches suppression of paganism, and many others during the course of this series. Today I want to deal with what I believe is the most serious attack the author makes; [SLIDE #9]: **IS THE BIBLE RELIABLE AND HISTORICALLY ACCURATE.**

1. [SLIDE #10 & 11]: PAGAN ORIGIN...

a. The DVC Claim: “The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine...He was a lifelong pagan who was baptized on his deathbed, too weak to protest: (DVC pg 231-232). He was the ‘head priest’ of the official Roman religion of sun worship—‘the cult of Sol Invictus’ (DVC pg 232).

b. The Truth.

i. Constantine (about 274 or 280 to 337) was not a lifelong pagan.

1. According to Kenneth Scott Latourette (1884-1975), Yale professor of Oriental history, Constantine converted to Christianity.

a. This finding is accepted by many non-Christian historians and scholars, including those openly critical of Christianity (Elaine Pagels, Princeton University professor of religion, and Keith Hopkins, ancient history professor at Kings College”

2. After his conversion Constantine remained a tolerant emperor, having seen the persecution of Christians.

a. Persecution was something he was much opposed to since he had seen the persecution of the Christians

b. He established freedom of religion under the **Edict of Milan** in 313.

c. It enabled everyone to [SLIDE #12]: **“choose whatever religion he preferred.”**

3. As for his position as the ‘head priest’ of the cult of *Sol Invictus*, this is only partially true.

a. His title under that cult—*pontifex maximus*—was more political than anything else.

b. Every emperor was considered by the Roman Senate to be the ‘head priest’ of the state’s religion, just as every American president, according to the Constitution, is commander in Chief of the armed forces.

4. No documentation indicates that he was too weak to protest being baptized on his “deathbed.”

a. According to Scott Latourette Constantine waited to be baptized just before his death because [pt 2 of SLIDE #12] **“from the conviction, then general, that it [baptism] washed away all previous sins and, being unrepeatable, had best be postponed until as near death as possible.”**

5. Dan Brown tries to indicate that Constantine collated the Bible and that is simply wrong.

a. The Old Testament had been compiled even before Jesus’ time

b. The New Testament was being formed by the end of the first century (between 90-100 AD)—almost 200 years before Constantine.

c. During the 2nd Century thousands of quotations from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were already being inserted into the writings of church leaders.

d. According to one of our church fathers, Irenaeus (about 180 AD) [SLIDE #13], **“the fourfold character of the Gospel canon had become for orthodox Christians one of the accepted facts of life.”**

e. By about 230, the well-known historian Origen (185-254) had completed a listing of the New Testament books he viewed as authoritative:

- i. **All 4 Gospels, Acts, Paul's epistles, 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation.**
 - ii. He then noted that **Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, James, and Jude** were already under consideration for inclusion with the other authoritative books.
 - f. Many other early church writers were also listing, quoting, and discussing the various texts that would eventually become the New Testament.
 - ii. Constantine had nothing to do with collating the Bible.
 - 1. Deciding which books would make up the Bible was a centuries-long process.
 - a. There were two major branches of Christianity—one in the east (based in Constantinople) and one in the west (based in Rome).
 - b. Documents from this era show a growing consensus about the Bible.
 - c. In the Western Church an official list of the 27 NT books was confirmed about 393 (at the Council of Hippo) and 397 (at the Council of Carthage).
 - d. In the Eastern Church, agreement about the NT began solidifying as early as 367.
 - e. Final confirmation of the books did not occur until later (in the 500s).
 - 2. As we can see all of these dates are after Constantine's death.
 - a. The only thing Constantine had to do with the Bible collation was to request Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, to make 50 copies of the Scriptures.
 - b. Eusebius did so using his own list of widely known texts.
 - c. He reproduced this list in his work *History of the Church* (about 323 or 325), dividing the text into three groups: accepted, disputed, and rejected.
 - d. These groups included all of the works in today's NT and the Greek version of the OT.
2. **Another Claim - NO ABSOLUTE RELIABLE BIBLE**
- a. **[SLIDE #14 & 15] The DVC Claim: "The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven... The Bible is a product of man, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book." (DVC pg 231)**
 - b. **The Truth:**
 - i. We have just looked at how we arrived at a "definitive version" of the Bible.
 - ii. As for the Bible's reliability, both the OT and NT are well supported by copies that have been extensively compared and contrasted.
 - 1. The NT is especially well-established by existing manuscripts.
 - 2. Many copies are dated very close to the composition of the originals (for example, one fragment of John's Gospel dates back to the emperor Hadrian's reign, 117-138).
 - iii. In the academic world one of the tests for determining the reliability of an ancient manuscript is the "Internal Evidence Test" or the "Eye Witness Test".
 - 1. This test answers the question of whether or not the document under evaluation is free from known contradictions within it.
 - 2. Likely the most well qualified person in the world regarding any of the supposed "contradictions" in Scripture is a man by the name of Dr. Gleason Archer.
 - a. He learned over 30 languages; most of them are languages of OT times and the Middle Eastern world.
 - b. He taught for 30 years at the graduate level in the field of biblical criticism.
 - 3. He has this to say regarding these supposed "contradictions" from the internal evidence **[SLIDE #16]**.
"As I have dealt with one apparent discrepancy after another and have studied the alleged contradictions between the biblical record and the evidence of linguistics, archaeology, or science, my confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture has been repeatedly verified and strengthened by the discovery that almost every problem in Scripture that has ever been

discovered by man, from ancient times until now, has been dealt with in a completely satisfactory manner by the biblical text itself—or else by objective archaeological information.”

4. Another part of this “Internal Evidence Test” is to ask, “How close was the writer to the events they are writing about?”--**The writers were eye witnesses to the events they recorded.**
 - iv. Another accepted standard to determine the “reliability” of ancient manuscripts and documents is the **Bibliographical Test**.
 1. The bibliographical test is given to all historical documents in order to determine the number of copies we have and their closeness to the original. For example:
 - a. The book Natural History, written by Pliny Secundus has 7 manuscript copies with a 750 yr. gap between the earliest copy and the original text.
 - b. Annals, written by Tacitus, has 20 copies with a 1,000 yr. gap.
 - c. Gallic Wars, written by Caesar, has 10 copies with a 1,000 yr. gap.
 - d. History, written by Thucydides, has 8 copies with a 1,300 yr. gap.
 - e. The number two book in all of history in manuscript authority is
 - i. **[SLIDE #17a]**The Iliad, written by Homer, which has 643 copies with a 400 yr. gap, as compared to 250 years maximum with the New Testament. (McDowell, NETDV, 38)
 - f. All of these books are taught and accepted as accurate to their originals.
 2. Let's compare the above with the numbers for the New Testament.
 - a. **[SLIDE #17b]**The New Testament has currently 24,633 manuscript copies, completely towering over all other works of antiquity. (McDowell, NETDV, 38)
 - b. In addition, we have one fragment of the New Testament with only a **50 year gap** from the original, **whole books with only a 100 year gap**, and the **whole NT with only a 225-250 year gap**.
 3. **[SLIDE #18]**Dr. John Warwick Montgomery observes that **“...to be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament.” (Montgomery, HC'71, 29)**
 - v. Lets Illustrate all this like this **[SLIDE #19]**
 1. **[SLIDE #20]**F.F. Bruce, noted Bible professor, states, **“If the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt.”**
 - vi. As we have seen there is no historical evidence showing that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were “embellished” by Constantine, Eusebius, or any of Eusebius's scribes.
 1. The historical record is in fact just the opposite as we have already discussed.
 - vii. **[SLIDE #21]**Besides that the Gospels hardly ignore Christ's “human traits” as the book claims.
 1. Christians believe that Jesus was 100% God and 100% human.
 2. Erasing the elements of His humanity would have been contrary to what the church was teaching in Constantine's day.
 3. Aspects of Jesus' humanity recorded in the Gospels include His:
 - a. Amazement (Matt. 8:10)
 - b. Anger (Mark 11:15-16)
 - c. Hunger and fatigue (Luke 4:2; 8:23)
 - d. Sorrow (John 11:33-36)
3. **A Third Claim – INCOMPLETE OR SOMEHOW LACKING.**
 - a. **[SLIDE #22]***The DVC Claim: Some of the gospels Constantine tried to destroy “managed to survive. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the 1950s...And, of course, the Coptic Scrolls in 1945 at Nag Hammadi.” Further, “the Vatican, in keeping with their tradition of misinformation, tried very hard to suppress the release of these scrolls...These are...[t]he earliest Christian records” (DVC pg 234, 245).*
 - b. **[SLIDE #23]***The Truth:*

- i. Regarding destruction of earlier copies.
 1. Constantine did order the writings of Arius to be burned by an edict he issued in 325.
 2. Arius's teachings conflicted with the conclusions of many church leaders about Jesus being co-equal with God, caused a great debate at the Council of Nicaea (325)—a debate that ended with a **Vote—300 to 2**—his views being rejected.
 3. But none of Arius's writings were gospels—least of all Gnostic ones.
 4. There is no historical record of Constantine ordering the destruction of any other writings pagan or otherwise.
- ii. There were no gospel books or fragments found with the **Dead Sea Scrolls** and they were found in 1947.
 1. The Dead Sea Scrolls contained thousands of fragments and from them more than 500 books have been reconstructed.
 2. Most are extra biblical books that deal with daily life in the Qumran community.
 - a. "Rule of the Community,"
 - b. "Manual of Discipline"
 - c. All help us to understand the purpose of daily Qumran life.
 - d. They also found some commentaries on the Scriptures
 3. The most important documents of the Dead Sea Scrolls are copies of the Old Testament text dating from more than a century before the birth of Christ.
 - a. Since the oldest complete Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts we possessed before the Dead Sea Scrolls were from A.D. 900 on, how could we be sure of their accurate transmission since before the time of Christ?
 - b. One of the scrolls in the Dead Sea caves was a complete MS of the Hebrew text of Isaiah. **It is dated by paleographers at around 125 B.C.**
 - c. This MS is more than one thousand years older than any MS we previously possessed.
 4. What was the most significant thing about these scrolls? Listen to what Gleason Archer says:
 - a. Archer states that the Isaiah copies of the Qumran community
 - b. **[SLIDE #24] "...proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling." (Archer, SOT, 19)**
- iii. How about the Nag Hammadi collection?
 1. It does indeed contain several gospels that all are Gnostic in origin.
 2. The claim that **"the Vatican"** tried to suppress their publication is simply uninformed or complete fabrication.
 3. According to James M. Robinson, director of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity and Claremont Graduate School, it took until 1977 to publish the manuscripts in English because **[SLIDE #25] "[s]cholarly rivalries and the situation in Egypt in the years following the library's discovery in 1945 hindered the work on the manuscripts."**
 4. The gospels found at Nag Hammadi, contrary to the DVC, are not the **"earliest Christian records."**
 - a. The physical copies that were found date to about 250 to 350, while the Greek originals **[which do not exist]** on which the copies were based were composed no earlier than the mid 100s to the early 200s.
- iv. So what was Dan Brown referring to when he says **"Some of the gospels Constantine tried to destroy "managed to survive"?** These Gnostic gospels.
 1. These Gnostic gospels are writings by the Gnostics which was a group of people who, by around 70 AD, had begun teaching that knowledge was the source of all truth not God.
 - a. **[SLIDE #26] What Gnosticism believes** among the teachings of Gnostics:
 - 1) Knowledge is superior to virtue;
 - 2) Non-literal sense of Scripture is correct and can be understood only by a select few;
 - 3) Evil in the world

- precludes God's being the only Creator; 4) The Incarnation is incredible because deity cannot unite itself with anything material such as a body; 5) There is no resurrection of the flesh.
2. The question is, "**were these Gnostic gospels written prior to the gospels in the NT?**"
 - a. Most scholars, Christian and non-Christian, would answer no.
 - b. They date the Gnostic gospels (for example, those in the Nag Hammadi collection) to about A.D. 250 to 350.
 - c. Many of these texts are Coptic translations (Coptic is an early Egyptian form of language) of earlier Greek texts (**that no longer exist**); most scholars agree that the material itself does not date previous to the mid 100's to early 200's.
 - d. Bottom line is this—these Gnostic texts were written after the books of the NT Gospels: **[SLIDE #27]**
 - i. Matthew (50's or 60s some liberal scholars as late as 100)
 - ii. Mark (50's or 60s some liberal scholars as late as 75)
 - iii. Luke (60, some liberal scholars as late as 80)
 - iv. John (85-90)
 - e. In other words these Gnostic's were late arrivals, which is one reason why church leaders rejected them.
 - f. Criticism of these works appears as early as the 2nd century (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, about 180).
 - g. These Gnostic gospels not only disagree with the older Gospels but lacked authority since their authors were neither:
 - i. Apostles of Jesus
 - ii. Persons associated with apostles of Jesus
 - h. They were not even written by those persons whose names are attached to them as DVC claims.
 - i. These names—Mary, Philip, Thomas and others—are pseudonyms.
 - ii. No one really knows who wrote the texts.
 3. Remember this earlier slide **[SLIDE #28a]** lets' show where these Gnostics would fall **[SLIDE #28b]**
 - 4.

Conclusion: Why do Dan Brow and other continue to attack the authority of Scripture? Because they don't want to believe it because if they do it condemns them and they can't have that. Are you still in doubt about the reliability of Scripture? If so it is for one of two reasons, either you know if you accept it you are condemned in your sins – Lost or you might have to change the way you live – saved.