

# The Bible, *The Da Vinci Code*, and the Truth

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M.W. Bassford  
5-21-06

## Introduction.

- A. These days, it's hard to watch anything or read anything current without stumbling across some reference to a book called *The Da Vinci Code*. It's been on the *New York Times* bestseller list for something like three years, it has provided the subject matter for newspaper articles, magazine articles, and documentaries, and last but not least, it has inspired a summer blockbuster movie, starring Tom Hanks, that came out two days ago.
- B. So. . . what's all the fuss about? On some levels, it's hard to understand. I've read the book myself, and although it's an OK book, it's nothing special. It tells the story of a symbology expert from Harvard named Robert Langdon, who gets falsely accused of murder and ends up in a race to figure out a number of symbolic clues to a hugely important mystery before he gets arrested. Not a bad read, but hardly brilliant.
- C. The thing that makes *The Da Vinci Code* stand out from hundreds of other summer novels is its subject matter. The mystery that the hero is trying to figure out doesn't have to do with gold or jewels or anything like that. Instead, he is trying to locate a cache of historical documents that proves that Jesus Christ was just a normal human being who was married to Mary Magdalene, who even had children with her. All of the very smart and well educated main characters of the book take this for granted. They condescendingly dismiss the traditional view of Jesus and the Bible as something that only the uneducated and ignorant believe in.
- D. The narrative of *The Da Vinci Code* is peppered with assertions that the truth about Jesus and the Bible is shockingly different from what the Bible itself claims. At various points in the story, the main characters claim that the Jewish religion originally involved ritual prostitution in God's temple in Jerusalem, that the early Christians believed Jesus was just a mortal man, and that the Bible we have now is the product of a massive cover-up three centuries after He died. None of this is presented as speculation. In the preface to the book, Brown claims that everything he says about documents, rituals, and so forth is true.
- E. This story has caught the national imagination for a number of reasons. First, most people in the United States are not Biblical experts, and when they're told that real experts believe that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, they accept it. Also, in a day when people don't like the traditional answers about God and morality, anything that attacks those traditional answers has a lot of appeal. Where should we stand? Should *The Da Vinci Code* cause us to re-examine our beliefs about Jesus, or is the book all style and no substance? We need to know, so let's spend this morning looking at the Bible, *The Da Vinci Code*, and the truth.

## I. The Old Testament.

- A. Let's begin by looking at what *The Da Vinci Code* has to say to us about the Old Testament. Its claims regarding Judaism are found on Page 336\*, where Brown lets us in on the "truth." He says that originally, Jewish religious practice involved ritual sex in the temple of Jerusalem, and that this was done to honor the sacred union of Jehovah and His female counterpart, Shekinah.
- B. There are a number of things wrong with this assertion.
  1. Brown's notion that Judaism originally had two gods, one male and one female, is unfounded. As a religion, Judaism was founded about 1500 BC by Moses, who recorded God's laws for His people in the first five books of the Bible. The last of these five books is Deuteronomy. The most central passage in all of Judaism, also known as the Shema, is found in Deuteronomy 6:4. It describes God as one, not two.
  2. Brown's name for his female God, Shekinah, is not even found in the Bible. It only came into use about 300 BC, 1200 years after the time of Moses. Even then, it had nothing to do with female deities. It was merely a term that rabbis used to describe the glory of God. Similarly, Brown's word for priestess, *hierodoulos*, is a red flag. *Hierodoulos* is Koine Greek, a language that arose a millennium after Judaism.
  3. Finally, Judaism itself wasn't at all the free-loving religion that Brown presents it as. To say that the Mosaic Law frowns on promiscuity is to put it lightly. We're all familiar with the Seventh Commandment, in which God warns His people not to commit adultery. Leviticus 20:10 spells out the penalty for adulterers. That leaves us with two alternatives: either the guys who came to visit the priestesses were stoned as they left the temple, or Judaism didn't have anything to do with ritual sex at all.

## II. Jesus and the Early Church.

- A. A similar lack of reliability marks everything that *The Da Vinci Code* has to say about Jesus and the early church. Let's take its assertions one at a time. First, on p. 253, Brown claims that early Christians thought Jesus was only a mortal man. This is hardly the case, and to disprove what Brown says, we need only look at the writings of the early Christians themselves. The most noteworthy first-century Christian writer was the

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\* All quotations from *The Da Vinci Code* are taken from the 2006 Anchor Books mass-market edition.

apostle Paul. He wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament, more than any other man. Paul's first epistle, the book of Galatians, was written about 49 AD, less than 20 years after the crucifixion of Jesus. This date means that it is most likely the very earliest Christian writing still in existence today. The very first two verses of this earliest book of the New Testament, Galatians 1:1-2, assert that Jesus is God. Paul, in fact, bases his authority as an apostle on that fact that he was sent by Jesus, not by men.

- B. Brown also asserts on p. 254 that the mortality of Jesus is certified by many early Christian documents. Brown cites two collections, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gnostic Gospels, as describing Him "in very human terms."
- C. In reality, though, neither the Dead Sea Scrolls nor the Gnostic Gospels say anything of the sort.
  - 1. The Dead Sea Scrolls are a group of documents found in a number of caves on the shores of the Dead Sea beginning in 1947. They were produced by the Essenes, who were basically a group of Jewish monks who lived in the area around the time of Jesus. These documents, however, are not Christian in any sense of the word. They don't even mention Jesus, much less provide a chronicle of His life.
  - 2. The second group of documents, the Gnostic Gospels, also fail to support Brown's position.
    - a. First of all, these gospels were written by a heretical sect of Christians, called the Gnostics, sometime between 150 and 200 AD. That is 100 years at least after the time when Paul and the other Christian writers wrote. The Gnostic Gospels are hardly "early" Christian documents.
    - b. Second, even if the Gnostic Gospels were much earlier, the Gnostics would never have described Jesus as human. They believed that everything in the material world was completely evil. This presented them with a problem when it came to Jesus: how could God become part of evil? Most Gnostics responded by arguing that Jesus never came in the flesh, that He was a phantom with no earthly existence. The Gnostics did not affirm the humanity of Christ. They denied it.
- D. Finally, Brown claims on pp. 264, 266 that these early gospels portray Jesus as having married Mary Magdalene. In particular, he says that the Gospel of Philip calls Mary Magdalene the "companion" of Jesus, which he says meant "spouse" in Aramaic. There are a number of problems with this claim.
  - 1. To begin with, none of the Gnostic Gospels, not even the recently discovered Gospel of Judas, ever describe Jesus as having been married. It's simply not there, in the Bible or outside of it.
  - 2. Second, the Gospel of Philip does not support Brown's claim. To begin with, the only surviving copy of the Gospel of Philip is not in Aramaic. It's written in Coptic, which is a completely different language, used hundreds of years after the Crucifixion. In Coptic, "companion" does not mean "spouse." It means "friend." Even if the Gospel of Philip were written in Aramaic, it wouldn't prove very much. Its manuscript has so many missing words that interpreting it is more like playing Mad Libs than anything else.

### III. Later Church History.

- A. Brown's revisionism, however, doesn't stop with the New Testament. He rewrites later church history as well. Returning to his theme of the non-divinity of Jesus, he claims on p. 253 that Jesus was finally decreed the Son of God by the Council of Nicaea, which met in 325 AD, nearly 300 years after His life on earth. Although the Council of Nicaea is a historical event, it had nothing to do with declaring the divinity of Jesus. Instead, it was called to resolve a dispute about the exact theological relationship between the Son and the Father. Both sides, however, explicitly affirmed the divine status of Jesus. Indeed, Paul, back in the first century, stated in Romans 1:4 that Jesus was not declared the Son of God by any earthly authority, but by His resurrection.
- B. Brown also argues on p. 251 that the emperor Constantine, who called the Council of Nicaea, was also the one who was responsible for creating the authoritative version of Jesus' life. Brown claims that Constantine examined more than 80 gospels to select the four we have today. Brown also says that after Constantine found the ones he liked, he destroyed the others. Once again, nothing like this ever happened. As early as 150 AD, almost 200 years before Constantine, we have records of church leaders quoting the four gospels we use today—and ONLY to those four gospels—and treating them as divinely inspired. Constantine had nothing to do with determining which gospels, or anything else for that matter, belonged in the New Testament.
- C. Finally, Brown asserts that Constantine was actually the one who came up with many of the practices we associate with the early church today. Specifically, he claims on p. 252 that Constantine moved the Christian day of worship from Saturday to Sunday. This is also not true. We see an example of first-century Christian worship recorded in Acts 20:7, and when the disciples came together to break bread, they did so not on the last day of the week, but on the first. Christians have always worshiped on Sunday.

**Conclusion.** As we look at all of the wild claims that Brown makes, it becomes obvious that they are all untrue; indeed, almost laughably so. So . . . why do we spend a whole half hour looking at what he says? The problem is that Brown isn't alone. He speaks for an entire segment of our culture that wants to call us away from the word of God. Brown sums up his philosophy on p. 369, where he once again dismisses a literal belief in the Bible as ignorant and misguided. Instead, it is Brown who is ignorant of the truth and misguided in his approach to spirituality. The Bible is not just a fairy tale meant to make us feel better. The more we learn about it, the more we recognize that it is a genuine record of the miraculous life of Jesus Christ. According to John 20:30-31, that is why it was written: so that we can believe in Jesus and believing, have life in His name.