

## *The Da Vinci Code: What Does Christianity Really Teach?*

### **Can the Bible Be Trusted?**

#### **Introduction**

Can this Bible consisting of 39 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament books be trusted? According to Dan Brown and *The Da Vinci Code*, not on your life!

Listen to these quotes taken from his popular book:

The Dead Sea Scrolls “highlight glaring discrepancies and fabrications, clearly confirming that the modern bible was compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda...” (*The Da Vinci Code*, 234).

“The Bible is a product of man...Not of God...Man created it (the Bible) 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” (*The Da Vinci Code*, 231).

As I mentioned last week, the real problem with Dan Brown’s book is not its popularity. That is understandable. It is rather its claims.

So what are we to believe? Is the Bible full of “glaring discrepancies and fabrications” as is claimed? If so, then what it says about God, life, death and eternity cannot really be trusted and our faith is in vain.

So this morning, I would like to begin (and I say “begin” for time does not allow us to look at all the evidence available) to answer that question, “Can the Bible be trusted?” And I would like to approach the answer to that question from five specific angles:

- The *uniqueness* of the Bible.
- The *manuscripts* of the Bible.
- The *archeology* supporting the Bible.
- The *scientific dependability* of the Bible.
- The *prophecy* of the Bible.

#### **The Uniqueness of the Bible**

Men and women, the Bible is unique. And its uniqueness is seen first of all in what it *claims*. Throughout the Bible there are multitudes of explicit and implicit claims in the Bible related to its own divine inspiration. One of the most clear passages is found in 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

Notice what Paul writes to Timothy in verse 16: “*All Scripture* is inspired by God.”

What is “scripture?” Paul has already used this word in verse 15. Notice again what he tells Timothy: “You have been taught the *holy Scripture* from childhood.” Since the New Testament wasn’t complete at the time Paul wrote this, he obviously refers in verse 15 to the Old Testament.

But we believe the word “scripture” of verse 16 refers to more than the Old Testament. Paul says “*All Scripture is inspired of God.*” Here he would also include the New Testament books that were already in circulation among the churches as well as those yet to be written.

But Paul goes on to say that “All Scripture is *inspired of God.*” What does this mean? In Paul’s language those four words “is inspired of God” is only one word, meaning “God-breathed.” It is not simply that all Scripture is *inspiring*, like reading your favorite poetry, or Shakespeare or the Gettysburg address. But all Scripture is *inspired*, literally God-breathed or “breathed out by God.” Nor does it mean that God breathed into the Bible, but rather that the Bible is the product of the out-breathing of God.

Dan Brown in *The Da Vinci Code* betrays his own lack of understanding of what the Church has historically taught about inspiration. His key character Leigh Teabing says, “The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven...Man created it...” (Da Vinci, 231).

But the early Apostles nor the Church have ever taught that the Bible was dictated or “arrived by fax from heaven.” Inspiration means simply this: God led the human authors of the Bible (each one with his unique personality) in such a way that what they wrote was God’s Word to mankind.

When we say the Bible is the inspired Word of God, we mean that it was truly co-authored by both God and man. The Bible writers wrote, each using his unique gifting and personality, but what was written was divinely kept from error and was exactly what God wanted written.

Not only is the Bible unique in its claims, but also in its *continuity*. Notice this: the Bible was ...

- Written over about a 1500 year time span.
- Written by more than forty different authors from all many walks of life.
- Written in different places.
- Written at different times.
- Written in different moods.
- Written on three continents.
- Written in three languages.
- Written in a wide variety of literary styles.
- Written to present a single, unfolding story.

The Bible is also unique in its *content*. The Bible is characterized by an unprecedented literary and spiritual quality. I’ve gone back this past week and read some of the Gnostic texts that Dan Brown favors in his *Da Vinci Code*. I’ll have to say, I had a few laughs as I compared the inferior quality of these writings to the depth and insight of our Bibles. Let me just give you a few examples:

<b>Matthew 5:6</b> Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”	<b>Gospel of Thomas, Verse 7:</b> Jesus said, “Lucky is the lion that the human will eat, so that the lion becomes human. And foul is the human that the lion will eat, and the lion still will become human.”
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<p><b>Luke 9:25</b> And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose or forfeit your own soul in the process?</p>	<p><b>The Gospel of Thomas, Verse 56:</b> “Whoever has come to know the world has discovered a carcass. And whoever has discovered a carcass, of that person the world is not worthy.”</p>
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<p><b>Ephesians 6:18</b> Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit.</p>	<p><b>Gospel of Philip (paragraph 4):</b> “Winter is the world; summer the other realm. It is wrong to pray in winter.”</p>
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So can the Bible be trusted? Well, it’s unique in its claims, continuity and content. But I would also like to look at the manuscript evidence for the Bible.

### The Manuscripts of the Bible

Before we can say with confidence that the New Testament writers faithfully testified to what they saw and heard, we have to be sure that what they wrote hasn’t been changed over the years. Of course, we’ve already seen Dan Brown’s take on this. He believes the Bible is marked by “glaring discrepancies and fabrications” and “has evolved through countless additions and revisions.”

In order to verify the authenticity and accuracy of a historical document, we have to look at two factors:

1. The number of manuscripts available today
2. The time period between the original documents and the earliest manuscripts still available today

In other words, the more manuscripts we have and the earlier they are to the originals, the better we can determine which copies reflect the originals.

Here’s a sampling of well-known writings over the past 3 thousand years. Notice for each the number of manuscripts available and the number of years between the copies and the original writing.

Writing	Author	# of Manuscripts	Number of Years between the copies and the original
<i>Natural History</i>	Pliny, 50 AD	7	750
<i>Annals</i>	Tacitus, 100 AD	20	1,000
<i>Gallic Wars</i>	Caesar, 55 BC	10	1,000
<i>History</i>	Thucydides, 420 BC	8	1,300
<i>The Iliad</i>	Homer, 900 BC	643	400
<b>New Testament</b>		<b>24, 970</b>	<50 (1 fragment) <100 (entire books) 225-250 (entire NT)

For example, Homer’s *Iliad* was composed in about 900 BC. The earliest copy of the book available to us dates to 400 BC. That’s a 500 year gap! But do people doubt the historicity of the

Iliad? There are only 643 manuscripts still in existence from antiquity. And yet his writing is the most supported document in antiquity.<sup>i</sup>

But let's take the Bible, Old and New Testaments. As for the Old Testament, it used to take a lot of heat from the scholars. They said that the oldest known copy of the Old Testament came from 900 AD. But in March of 1947 an Arab shepherd was looking for a lost lamb on the West side of the Dead Sea about 8 miles south of Jericho. To his surprise, he heard the shattering of pottery when he threw a rock into a cave. He discovered the Dead Sea Scrolls that had been written around 125 BC. They were hidden in the cave just before Titus the Roman General marched into Jerusalem in 70 AD and destroyed the city. There were several jars with leather scrolls that had not been opened for over 1900 years!

When they looked at the scrolls, one thing they found was a full scroll of over 24 feet long and 10 inches high of the book of Isaiah. When they translated it from the Hebrew, they found that in Isaiah 53 of the 166 words, there were only 17 letters in question, 10 of them were simply a matter of spelling and the others were stylistic changes that did not alter the meaning. Two of the Isaiah scrolls when translated proved to be word for word identical to our Hebrew Bible for over 95% of the text.<sup>ii</sup> And of the 5% in question, it pertains to slips of the pen and variations in spelling.

Either Dan Brown is not aware of the facts or intentionally distorts the facts when he writes: "The scrolls highlight glaring discrepancies and fabrications, clearly confirming that the modern Bible was compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda ..." (234)

But what about the New Testament? The New Testament has nearly 25,000 manuscripts with the earliest one dating to 125 AD, within only 25 years of the completion of the New Testament. We also have over 5,000 partial or full Greek manuscripts dating from 125 AD to 325 AD. When you put them all together, there is less than one half of a hand-written page (of over 500 pages in the Greek) of the New Testament that comes into question. None of these variants affect any doctrinal teaching.<sup>iii</sup>

The fact of the matter is, if you discredit the Bible's historicity and reliability, then you have to throw out the nearly all ancient literature as being unreliable.

## **The Archeology Supporting the Bible**

Not only is the Bible unique and supported by the vast number of manuscripts available to us. Our Bible is also supported by *archeology*. Our Bible is verifiable. In contrast to the popular Gnostic texts, our Bibles make references to places, towns, rivers, lakes and seas which place the events in a specific historical context. Because of this, archeologists can go digging and verify that what the Bible talks about is true on a historical level. Not so with the Gnostic texts that Dan Brown depends upon. These esoteric musings do not lend themselves to historical, archeological investigation. But the Bible does.

Here are two examples from the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament mentions nearly 50 times a people known as the Hittites. For centuries, scholars questioned the Bible because there was no archeological evidence of such a people. In 1906 that all changed, however, when the Hittite capital was uncovered about 90 miles east of the capital of Turkey.

Luke calls Iconium a city of Phrygia in Acts 14. This was thought to be an error by many historians because Cicero said otherwise. But monuments and inscriptions found in the last century have confirmed that Luke was right all along. The archeologist William Ramsay said that this is a “striking instance of local accuracy.”

Dr. Gleason Archer, who has learned over 30 languages – most of them languages of the Old Testament world – and is also a specialist in Eighteenth Dynasty historical records says this:

“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 at least by objective archaeological information.”<sup>iv</sup>

Nelson Glueck, a renowned Jewish archeologist has said: “It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.”<sup>v</sup>

## The Scientific Dependability of the Bible

Not only can we look to archeology to show just how reliable this Book is. We can also look to science. Just a few examples:

- **The earth hangs in space.** Job 26:7 “He suspends the earth over nothing.” This was written about 1500 B.C. But until modern times “experts” believed ideas such as the earth sat on four elephants, who stood on a giant turtle, who swam in the ocean. Man could not imagine how the earth could hang in space on nothing. And yet due to the gravitational attraction between the earth and the sun, this is what happens.
- **Fountains under the Sea.** Proverbs 8:27-28 “I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep.” There are at least 10,000 known underwater volcanoes which add about 430 million tons of water each year to the ocean. How did Solomon know what took place on the ocean floor?
- **Sea Currents.** Psalm 8:8 “All that swim the paths of the seas.” Matthew Maury is the father of oceanography. A statue of him exists in Virginia. In one hand he’s holding charts of the seas and in the other a Bible. Until his discoveries, there were no charts of sailing lanes. One day, while he was sick, his son read from Psalm 8:8. Maury stopped him and asked him to read it again. He said, “If the Bible says there are paths, there must be and I’m going to find them.” Within a few years he had charted the sea lanes and the ocean currents.<sup>vi</sup>
- **Sanitation.** Deuteronomy 23:12-14 “Mark off an area outside the camp for a latrine. Each of you must have a spade as part of your equipment. Whenever you relieve yourself, you must dig a hole with the spade and cover the excrement.” Up until about 1800 AD, human excrement was dumped onto unpaved streets. Powerful stenches gripped cities and intestinal diseases killed millions of people. Moses certainly didn’t learn this from Egypt, even though he had been raised there. Much of the information found in the Egyptian medical texts was

medically hazardous. They contained quack cures like “lizard blood, pigs teeth and ear wax.” They would often take donkey excrement and use it for the treatment of splinters, increasing the incidence of tetanus. In contrast, the Bible urged people to wash their hands in running water with time allowed for drying and exposure to the sun to kill the bacteria.

## The Prophecy of the Bible

The final area that I want to mention that supports the claims of the Bible to be the Word of God is *prophecy*. The Apostles constantly appealed to two things in support of Jesus being the long-awaited Messiah: his resurrection from the dead and the fact that he fulfilled so many OT prophecies. Amazingly, the Old Testament contains over 300 references to the coming of Christ. It’s been said that, by the law of chance, it would require 200 billion earths, populated with four billion people each, to come up with just one person who could achieve 100 accurate prophecies without any errors in sequence. But the Bible records not 100, but over 300 fulfilled prophecies of Christ’s first coming.

One of those prophecies is found in Isaiah 53, that prophetic Old Testament book of which the accuracy of copies has been so well demonstrated by the Dead Sea Scrolls. Here we have a detailed account of what Jesus Christ would suffer for you and me. But the amazing thing is that this record was written nearly 750 years before Jesus Christ was even born!

<sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with bitterest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way when he went by. He was despised, and we did not care.

<sup>4</sup> Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God for his own sins! <sup>5</sup> But he was wounded and crushed for our sins. He was beaten that we might have peace. He was whipped, and we were healed! <sup>6</sup> All of us have strayed away like sheep. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the guilt and sins of us all.

<sup>10</sup> Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have a multitude of children, many heirs. Isaiah 53:3-6, 10 NLT

Not only is this Bible dependable. But so is the person of whom it speaks – Jesus Christ. Dan Brown talks in *The Da Vinci Code* of the descendants of Jesus Christ who are alive today. The *Code* would have us believe that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and had a child named Sarah. Having moved to Gaul (modern day France), their descendants are still alive today.

But according to Isaiah the prophet, the true descendants of Jesus Christ are not the offspring of some fictitious marriage with physical progeny, but rather those who receive forgiveness through His offering on the cross. Upon Him – Jesus Christ – our guilt and sins have been laid. Because He was “made an offering for sin, he will have a multitude of children, many heirs” (Isaiah 53:6).

We can depend upon Him for forgiveness of sins and the healing of our souls. Will you accept that offer of grace today?

## NOTES

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<sup>i</sup> No one doubts the accuracy of Caesars Gallic Wars, written between 58-50 BC. But there are only 10 good copies of this and the oldest one dates to 900 AD, nearly 1000 years from the time the original was penned! Aristotle's writings are considered accurate. But there is a gap of over 1400 years between when he wrote and the oldest copies of manuscripts that we have. And there are only 49 copies of his writings.

<sup>ii</sup> Fragments of every OT book were found in the Dead Sea Scrolls except for the book of Esther. These scrolls are composed of some 40,000 fragments. Scholars have been able to reconstruct more than 500 books from these fragments. Some of these are portions of the OT dating to about 125 BC or commentaries on the OT.

<sup>iii</sup> A.T. Robertson said, "The real concern is only with a thousandth part of the entire text. This would make the New Testament 99.9% free of significant variants." And yet, ironically, the very documents that Dan Brown basis his theories on are extremely unreliable. Take for instance the *Gospel of Mary* in the Nag Hammadi texts. The document is so damaged that most of the content is lost. Four complete pages are missing leaving only the beginning and the end of the document. And yet Brown asserts that these writings are more genuine than the New Testament manuscripts and are unaltered. He gives the impression that these are the "earliest Christian records" even though they were written 100 to 250 years after the completed New Testament. Sir Frederick G. Kenyon states: "...besides number, the manuscripts of the New Testament differ from those of the classical authors...In on other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest extant manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament." *HTCNT*, 4. McDowell, NOTES, 44.

<sup>iv</sup> Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, 12.

<sup>v</sup> Cited by Josh McDowell, *The Da Vinci Code: Personal Unedited Research* (2006), 56.

<sup>vi</sup> <http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v11/i13/maury.asp>