



## THE DA VINCI CODE: FACT OR FICTION?

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(II Timothy 1:7)

**Central Truth:** Jesus knows that the devil's design is to get Him to stop trusting what God has said. So, instead of arguing with the devil about His own powers, Jesus replies to the devil in such a way that shows that He is trusting what God has said.

Luke 3:21-22 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

When Jesus Christ began His public ministry, He was declared by His heavenly Father to be His "beloved Son." This announcement did not escape the notice of the powers of darkness. Almost immediately, after the Father announced His good pleasure in His Son, Jesus "was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil" (Luke 4:1-2).

How did the devil begin his temptation? He wanted Jesus to give him proof that He was the Son of God. He tempted Him with three different offers. Two of the three are a demand for proof.

Luke 4:3 "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread;" Luke 4:9 And he took Him to Jerusalem and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here..." (The other temptation is a request by the devil that Jesus fall down and worship him.

Dan Brown, in The Da Vinci Code is not the first one to challenge the divinity of Christ. The devil himself receives that honor. Neither will Brown's challenge of Christ's divinity be the

last one; others are bound to come. So how should we think about this challenge?

One way to think about it is to ask: "How did Jesus respond to the devil's requests?" Surely if Jesus is God He could have easily turned stones into bread. He could have thrown Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple without harm. But He didn't.

Instead, Jesus turned the devil's attention, not to Himself, but to God, and to what He had said. In response to the challenge to turn stones into bread, Jesus said, "It is written, `Man shall not live by bread alone`" ( Luke 4:4). Why did Jesus respond this way? The devil wasn't asking about how we are to live, or about whether one can live by bread alone. The devil wanted Jesus to do something that no mere mortal could do. Did Jesus just dodge the challenge He was given? No, He didn't.

Jesus responds this way because He knows that the devil's challenge will not be answered if Jesus performs some powerful act; the devil's problem is not that he has failed to see God act in miraculous ways. The devil's problem is that he will not believe what God has said.

As a matter of fact, there was a similar temptation given many years before this one. It was a temptation given, not in the midst of a wilderness, but in a plush and plenteous garden.

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, `You shall not eat of any tree in the garden`?"

The devil comes to Eve, not to tell her to disobey, at least not at first. He comes to Eve so that he might get her to question the word of God. And he tempts her by asking a question, a question that is close to the truth, but which is, as a matter of fact, a denial of it. God had not said that Adam and Eve could not eat from any tree; He had said that there was one particular tree from which they were not to eat. The devil knew that. His question was not out of curiosity. His question was designed to get Eve, and Adam after her, to disobey. And he succeeded.

Jesus knows that the devil's design is to get Him to stop

trusting what God has said. So, instead of arguing with the devil about His own powers, Jesus replies to the devil in such a way that shows that He trusts what God has said. Even though He has been in the wilderness for 40 days, and even though He is hungry, He knows, because God has said, that His life is not defined by what He eats alone. It is defined by the "spiritual" food of God's word. God had already said, "This is My beloved Son." No more proof was needed.

The Da Vinci Code would like for us to believe that Jesus is not divine, that He is not the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity. It wants us to see Jesus as "a mortal prophet," and "a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless. A mortal" (The Da Vinci Code, p. 233).

Despite the fact that the author Dan Brown's facts are wrong (for example, Jesus was not declared divine by way of a vote as Brown says on p. 233), the question we must ask ourselves is, "Whom do you trust?" Do you trust The Da Vinci Code to guide you into all truth, or at least to destroy what has been foundational to Western civilization? Or do you trust "every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4)? This does not mean that there are no evidences or supportive documents on both sides of the discussion, there are. These can be easily perused by any interested party. But evidences and documents are always discussed in the context of that fundamental question, "Whom do you trust?" Answering that question goes a long way toward determining how you will look at evidences and supporting documents.

Do you want to put your faith in The Da Vinci Code? Or would you rather put your faith in one in whom millions, for over two thousand years, have trusted, not only for their "spiritual food" in this life, but in the life to come as well.

If Dan Brown is right, then there is no hope for anyone. If Dan Brown is right, it is not simply a Western religion that dies, all of humanity - past, present and future - dies; and death is the bitter end.

It means that there is no hope. It means that no baby was born in a manger in Bethlehem. It means that there were no tidings of great joy brought by angels. It means that the angels never sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased" (Luke 2:14)! It means that the

message of the entirety of history, since Adam gave in to the devil's temptation, the message that God would save a people for himself, that message is not true. It means that no people are saved, that God has not come down to us, and that sin and evil will have their way. It means Satan wins.

If you choose to believe Dan Brown, you have chosen not to believe every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. That is a choice with consequences that are terrible now and will be even worse in eternity.

If, however, you choose to believe what the Father has said - that Jesus Christ is the Son of God - then there are tidings of great joy for you. If you believe what God has said about His Son, then Christmas is a reality for you, not just on December 25th, but every day of this life, and into the next. Revelation 11:15 "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever."

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### **Three Major Problems Plus**

**Problem 1:** Was Jesus Married? Basic to the story line is the claim that Jesus Christ was married to Mary Magdalene and that many in the church knew (as did people like Leonardo Da Vinci later on in history). The evidence for this claim comes from two extra biblical gospels, the Gospel of Mary Magdalene 17:10–18:21 and The Gospel of Philip 63:33-36. Both contain remarks that Jesus had a special relationship to Mary or that He loved her more than any of the twelve disciples. One text uses the term "companion" to describe her. In addition, there is an appeal in the Phillip text where Jesus is said to kiss Mary on the lips. So the inference is that if He kissed her in public He must have been her husband.

Now the facts are these. First, almost all scholars question whether these extra biblical gospels contain anything of value in terms of the historical Jesus. However, even if they did, the texts noted do not actually affirm that Jesus was married. In fact, the famous kiss on the lips text actually has a blank in the original manuscript right at the point where it describes where Mary was kissed. So it could be the lips or the cheek, which would simply refer to a kiss of fellowship. The term companion is debated as to its force. Most interpret the term as pointing to

a spiritual relationship Jesus had with Mary because of the mystic character of the gospel in which it appears. So it does not allude to actual marriage at all, but to a fellowship that Jesus and Mary shared as believers.

More than this, we have volumes of texts about Jesus from the first five centuries. In all of these materials not a single text describes Jesus as married and most assume He was not, as that was a basis for some arguing that priests should be single.

In I Corinthians 9, the argument appears that spouse of those married should be supported. Had Jesus been married Paul could have clinched his argument by noting this fact. All of this leads to the conclusion that Jesus was single.

Now some reply that I Corinthians 7 mentions believers being single and yet does not mention Jesus. However, here Paul only advises being single. Had he mentioned Jesus' example that might have said more than Paul intended, by giving an impression this is what to do. So this is the likely reason Jesus being single was not mentioned.

But one final point needs to be made. The novel claims that that a married Jesus would need to be covered up by the church because it would expose the fact that Jesus was not divine. However, it is not a given that had Jesus been married, this would have resulted in a question about His divinity, because the church has always confessed the full humanity of Jesus and the status of marriage would fit in nicely with such a claim. Thus, even the premise of the theological problem the novel sees for a married Jesus is false.

**Problem 2** The Emergence of the Gospels. The novel also claims that the four gospels were chosen late from about eighty gospels to be a part of the Bible because the four gospels had a divine Jesus as opposed to other gospels that had a human Jesus. Once again we are at a place where liberal and conservative scholars agree. The study of what is called the **canon** (or the recognition of the books that comprise the New Testament) is a complex area when it comes to the compilation of the entire New Testament. Athanasius in AD 367 is the first figure we have who lists the 27 books of the New Testament as we have them today. It may be that Dan Brown rested his view on this fact, although he never mentions it. However, what this late date does not take into account is that the books under

discussion in the third and fourth centuries were some epistles and Revelation, books like II Peter, Jude, II and III John, not any of the four gospels.

**Scholars of the canon agree that by the end of the second century the four-fold gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) was recognized as authoritative.** This is a full 125 years before Constantine and the Nicean Council came on the scene to do the alleged defining work for orthodoxy according to the novel. The evidence for this includes (1) Irenaeus's majestic description of the gospel needing to have four gospels as the world has four zones and four winds. This text appears in his *Against Heresies* 3.11.8, a famous and often cited text from the end of the second century. (2) The attempt of Tatian to combine the gospels into one running account in AD 170 in his *Diatessaron* largely failed. This effort to tell Jesus' story in one running account on the surface made sense, but it failed because the four gospels were already too well established in the late second century church to be replaced, even by a seemingly more efficient way to present the gospels. (3) We also have a citation from Origen in the early third century from his *First Homily to Luke* on Luke 1:1 that gospels like Thomas are not read in the churches because they are not seen as having authority. (4) Justin Martyr's description of the gospels in his *First Apology* 66:3 in the middle of the second century explains why the gospels were so highly valued. He calls them the "memoirs" of the apostles, a description that notes they are rooted in testimony that goes back to the apostles. It is the apostolic roots of the four gospels, the fact they go back to the apostles and those who followed, them that gives these gospels their historical roots and that led to the recognition of their unique status as sources about Jesus.

By the way, what about those claims of eighty gospels? That number is a gross exaggeration. We have about two dozen works called gospels from these early centuries. If we throw in works not called gospels that supposedly discuss events in Jesus' life, then the number goes up about another dozen. That is far short of eighty. In addition, many of those works have a Jesus who is too divine. Jesus cannot be a human, because the spirit cannot mix with this flesh. This is seen in a works like *Apocalypse of Peter* 81:4–24 and *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* 56:6–19, two works of Gnostic Christians, the group of Christians Dan Brown appeals to for his claims. He does not mention such texts in detail, however. **What they teach is that**

Jesus was in heaven laughing as the crucifixion took place because people mistakenly thought they were crucifying Jesus. This is a Jesus who is too divine and cannot be human, a view known as **docetism**. The works that were not recognized fail to attain an important status because their theology was so different on issues like the creation by God, the person of Jesus, the work of Jesus, and salvation. They are documented in detail in a new book called *The Missing Gospels*.

Thus, the idea that the gospels emerged as a reflection of orthodoxy about the time of the fourth century around the time of Constantine and the Nicean Council is just bad history. In addition, the claim that eighty gospels were out there and that a human Jesus was present in such works is wrong. Nothing shows this more clearly than the Gospel of Thomas 77. This saying from the most significant of the extra-biblical gospels has Jesus confess that He is the All. Jesus goes on to say that if you look under a stone Jesus is there and if you split a piece of wood He is there. This is an omnipresent Jesus, a reflection of high christology in a work that The Da Vinci claims teaches about a human Jesus. **I do not cite this passage to say Thomas' view of Jesus is an actual saying of Jesus but simply to note that in this earliest of extra-biblical works, the portrait of Jesus is also one that says He is more than human. This leads to the next problem.**

**Problem 3: Did A Belief in Jesus' Divinity Receive its Decisive Sanction through a "close vote" at Nicea in AD 325?** This claim by The Da Vinci Code is probably the worst of the three problems. What we know about Nicea is this. It gathered not to determine the divinity of Jesus but to discuss the Arian view of Jesus, who saw Jesus as Son of God, but appointed to that role versus the view that the council adopted that Jesus possessed Sonship from eternity. **So the debate was the type of Son of God Jesus was, not whether Jesus was divine.** Arius believed that Jesus was Son as the first **created** being with a special, unique relationship to God. What Nicea ended up affirming is that Jesus was eternally the Son and was not created.

Constantine did call this council together because he wanted peace and unity in the church. The council had from 216 to 316 bishops from around most of Christendom in attendance, but the vast majority were from the East. There was no close vote. What the bishops did was sign a creedal statement known as the Nicene Creed. Only two out of the entire group refused, so

the “vote” was hardly close. Most politicians today would view a 214-2 to 314-2 vote as a landslide (a ninety-nine percent plus majority!). There were no “hanging chads” at this signing.

Now there was pressure to accept this confession at the council, as originally seventeen opposed it. When Constantine threatened exile, that number reduced to 2. However, even if we take seventeen as the number originally opposed, this is still a significant minority of less than ten percent of the total in attendance. Dan Brown’s claim, then, is false here as well.

This claim of a late developing view of deity also ignores the fact that the acceptance of the divinity of Jesus is something fundamental to the earliest documents we have from Christianity. This appeal is a matter of historical record about our earliest available sources. One can look at the writing of Paul (I Cor 8:5-6; Phil 2:9-11), the unknown author of Hebrews (Heb 1:3), the author of Revelation (Rev 1:1-7 and chapters 4-5), the gospel of John (John 1:1-18), or even Jesus’ own testimony at His Jewish examination (Mark 14:62-65 and parallels) to see that the claim was that **Jesus was at the side of God in a position of status equal to His, receiving worship as He does**. These works all date anywhere from the sixties to the nineties of the first century. One can add to this the testimony of Pliny the Younger, writing as a Roman Governor of Bythnia, far away from Jerusalem. He writes to the Roman Emperor Trajan in around AD 117 speaking of Christians singing hymns to Jesus as a god. **So even non-Christian texts corroborate the views we see in the earliest Christian texts that Jesus was worshipped long before Nicea. The belief in Jesus as divine was a core belief of the earliest church.** Paul’s testimony and conversion tells us that this was believed in the thirties of the first century as letter to the Galatians indicates. Jesus’ divinity was not the result of a close decision in the fourth century. Its roots go back to Jesus Himself, which is what explains why the church, originally made up of Jews, held to this new view on the doctrine of God.

Other Problems. There are a host of other problems with the “historical backdrop” of the novel.

(1) The idea that Mary was an apostle to the apostles misquotes Hippolytus’ commentary on Song of Songs. He was a church father of the later second century. When he made this remark he was not describing an office that Mary held. Rather

Hippolytus used the phrase to describe all the women who saw the resurrected Jesus and reported His resurrection and not just Mary. In this sense, all these women were apostles in a generic sense, namely commissioned messengers sent on behalf of another, rather than being members of a church office. In fact, the exact phrase in the singular "apostle of the apostles" comes from the ninth century at the earliest.

(2) Leonardo Da Vinci would never have painted a Last Supper scene and replace one of the Twelve with a woman. An art historian whose work is included in the latest editions of *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* made this point. He notes that when Mary is present at the Last Supper scene she is placed at Jesus' feet. This scene is so stereotyped in the period of this painting that there had to be twelve apostles present because the scene's content reflects the biblical account. In a lecture given by three art historians at the Georgia Museum of Art at the University of Georgia in January, 2004, the experts on the period present said simply that Dan Brown got his art history wrong.

In Part III will discuss the issues that are correct in the *Da Vinci Code*.

### **Scriptural References:**

**"For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." (II Timothy 1:7)**