

## ***Can I Trust the New Testament or Should Other Books Be In It? Luke 1:1-4***

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**Intro:** The DaVinci Code has made a real impact since its release. The book itself has sold over 40 million copies. One measure of its effect on our society was shown in a recent poll. 17% of Canadians and 13% of Americans think its claims are true.

I am sure this pleases Dan Brown. He has admitted that he considers this to be more than a book of fiction. In an *ABC Primetime* interview, he said, *"I began as a skeptic. As I started researching the DaVinci Code, I really thought I would disprove this theory about Mary Magdalene and holy blood and all that. I became a believer."* He was asked by *Matt Lauer* in another interview about how much of his story is based on things that actually occurred. Brown said, *"Absolutely all of it. Obviously, Robert Langdon is fictional, but all of the art, architecture, secret rituals, secret societies, all of that is historical fact."*

Is it based on historical fact? Dr. Paul Maier, Professor of Ancient History at Western Michigan U. and former Professor of the Year from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education said, "If a student of mine had written something like this I would have flunked him!"

I believe that God is going to use these easily disprovable assertions in the book to help Christians strengthen their faith by seeking the reasons why we believe that the Bible is true and Jesus is divine.

### **Today's issue as raised in the DaVinci Code** (Quotes from pages 231-232):

Leigh Teabing, the expert on the Grail in the book, is speaking to Sophie:

- "The Bible is a product of man, my dear. Not of God. ...
- "More than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion
- "The Bible as we know it today was collated by the pagan Roman Emperor Constantine the Great...
- "Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible which omitted those Gospels that spoke of Christ's human traits and embellished those Gospels that made Him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up and burned."

### **What we will cover today?**

- What is the real story about how we got our New Testament, especially our Gospels?
- Why were the so called lost Gospels, like the Gospel of Thomas and Gospel of Judas not in the Bible?
- Why do we Christians believe that the Bible is the Word of God?

**I. What is the real story about how we got our New Testament, especially our Gospels?**

Let me first define what our New Testament is:

**The New Testament is God inspired eye witness testimony about Jesus from those who knew Him and were called to be Apostles by Him.**

The test about whether a book became a part of the NT was whether or not it had a connection to an apostle. *(You may be blessed by Rick Warren or Charles Stanley, but their books will not be added to NT because they are not eye witnesses of Jesus.)*

**Acts 2:42** tells us that the first Christians were **devoted to the Apostle's teaching**. They had the privilege of listening and learning from those who walked with Jesus. We can, too! When I open my NT, I am sitting at the feet of John and Peter and Matthew and Paul.

Matthew and John are in the NT because they were written by 2 of the 12. Luke is in there because the church knew he interviewed and wrote down the memories of eyewitnesses such as Mary the Mother of Jesus. Mark is in the Gospel because the early Christians knew he wrote down Peter's memories as Peter's main assistant.

**Critics of the NT have tried to say that these books were written long after the apostles were gone and were forgeries using their names.**

Almost no true scholar would hold to that today because of the great evidence found through archeology.

**1. The evidence for the trustworthiness of what we read in NT is greater than any other ancient document:**

We have only 7 ancient copies of Plato and the earliest one was copied 900 years after his death. We have 20 copies of the Roman historian Tacitus and the earliest copy is 1000 yrs after his death.

We have over 5400 ancient copies of the NT with over 300 portions dating to within 140 years of the original. We have one manuscript called the John Rylands manuscript which is a portion of the Gospel of John written less than 30 years after he wrote it!

Added to that, we have the quotes from NT books found in the writings of early Christian leaders. Clement, the pastor of the church at Rome was martyred in 95 AD. We have letters of his where he quotes from Matthew Mark and Luke. Ignatius who was martyred in 110 AD quoted from 15 of the 27 books of the NT.

If we did not have a single ancient manuscript of the NT, we could reconstruct all of it except 11 verses from the quotes in the writings of the early Christians.

**2. IF you read the Gospels for yourself, you will find that they have the characteristics of eye witness testimony, not made up tales after the fact.**

I saw this as I taught the Gospels for 7 years at a small Baptist College. Eye witness testimony includes unnecessary details that are there only because they are fresh in the writer's memory.

In **John 12:5**, after Mary poured out the expensive perfume on Jesus' feet, John adds "the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume."

In **Mark 5:41**, (Remember Mark is Peter's memories) Mark adds an unnecessary detail about the raising of Jairus' daughter. He says that Jesus spoke these words in Aramaic: "Talitha Koum", which mean "Little girl, arise." The reason why those words were burned in Peter's memories is obvious: If you saw a little girl come back to life, you would remember the exact words that were said when it happened.

**II. Why were the so called "lost Gospels" like the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Judas not placed in the NT?**

1. Dan Brown makes it seem as if there was a conspiracy to keep these truer and older Gospels out of the Bible. He is wrong historically in saying that there were over 80 Gospels that could have been considered for the NT. We only know of 8 so called Gnostic Gospels. There is a big error in fact right there!
2. The Gnostic Gospels were left out because the early Christians knew they were forgeries, not true eye witness accounts from the apostles. They were created by a heretical group that was competing with true Christianity called the "Gnostics." The early Christians with ties to the original apostles knew that Thomas did not write the Gospel of Thomas and Judas did not write the Gospel of Judas.
3. Who were the Gnostics? They were people who tried to combine Greek philosophy of that time with Christianity. Greek philosophy said that all the physical in the world is evil. Therefore Jesus could not have been a real man. This is what John is attacking in **1 John 4:1-3**
4. Dan Brown gave the wrong impression about these Gnostic Gospels. He said that they were the ones that stressed Jesus humanity and denied his deity. The exact opposite is the truth. They stressed Jesus' deity and rejected his humanity.

**III. Who decided that the 27 books we have in the Bible are the only true witnesses from the Apostles and are our only authority as Christians?**

Dan Brown claims that Constantine decided which books would be in the NT at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. What books would be in the NT was not even discussed at this council!

*Three factors helped the early Christians decide which books would be our NT Scriptures.*

- 1. The longing to be anchored to the original apostles caused them to cherish and copy the letters and Gospels written by them.**
- 2. The rise of heretics and their false Gospels caused Christians as early as in the 100's AD to list which books are true Gospels and letters from the Apostles and which ones were forgeries from heretics.**

In the recent publicity about the copy of the Gospel of Judas that dated from the 300s, newspapers were pointing to the fact that Irenaeus condemned it as a false Gospel around 180 AD. Irenaeus is significant because he was discipled by Polycarp who was personally discipled by John the apostle. He had close to the source information on which were true Gospels and which were forgeries. Irenaeus made it clear that only the four Gospels we have were true Gospels.

- 3. A third factor drove Christians to determine which books were Bible and which were not: the persecution by Diocletian that ended in 303 AD.**

He ordered that every Christian holy book had to be turned in and burned and if you were caught with a holy book, you would be put to death. Christians had to decide which books were worth dying for to hide them and keep them.

#### **IV. Why do we believe that the Bible is divinely inspired?**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:16** "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."

When you read the Bible, you are reading more than eyewitness testimony. You can tell these words have the breath of God on them!

- 1. The Resurrected Lord Jesus believed the Bible was true and so should we.**

This brought me through a period of doubting the Bible when I was in college. I became convinced by the evidence that Jesus was risen, so I needed to listen to what he said. Jesus believed the Bible was the word of God. He said Jonah was in the belly of the big fish and that Moses wrote the books he said he did. Since Jesus held the Bible to be true, I needed to as well.

- 2. The historical accuracy of the Bible points to its divine inspiration.**

Archeology has never disproved one fact found in the Bible. It always backs it up.

\*I spoke recently about the ruins of Jericho. The walls were found to have fallen outward, just as the Bible said and the ancient city had been burned to the ground just as the Bible said.

\***Sir William Ramsey** tried to disprove the truthfulness of the NT by trying to prove that Luke was a fairy tale full of errors. As a historian he became convinced that Luke was an incredible historian and became a Christian himself.

### **3. Fulfilled prophecy in the Bible points to its divine inspiration.**

*Just two examples here:*

- a. *The predictions about Jesus death on the cross in Ps. 22.*

*Psalms 22 was written more than 900 years before Christ and hundreds of years before the invention of crucifixion. Yet in this Psalm, the Messiah is shown one day to have his hands and feet pierced, to have his bones pulled out of joint the way the cross would have done. The Messiah says that they would gamble for his clothing, just as the soldiers did at the foot of the cross. It even predicts things said during the crucifixion. Jesus cried out "My God My God why have you forsaken me?" and his enemies taunted him exactly as the Psalm predicted.*

- b. *Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem in remarkable detail forty years in advance.*

**Luke 21: Jesus predicted that Jerusalem would be destroyed, with not one stone of the Temple left on top of another. He warned the Christians of that time to flee to the mountains when they see armies surrounding Jerusalem.**

The early Christians knew this prophecy so well that when Rome surrounded the city on AD 68, every Christian left and not one Christian lost his life in the siege of Jerusalem. We even know the city they fled to in the mountains, a city called Pella.

### **4. The indestructibility of the Bible proves its Divine inspiration.**

**Matthew 24:35- Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.**

No book has had more attempts to destroy it than this book and it is still the world's best seller.

\*Diocletian raised a monument in 303 that declared "Here lies the ashes of the last Christian book." Ten years later Constantine converted to Christianity and became the first Christian emperor.

Voltaire, the famous atheist philosopher, predicted that within fifty years the Bible would pass from existence in his age of enlightenment. After his death, his home was purchased by the European Bible society and was used to print Bibles.

Thomas Paine predicted that within fifty years his book, "The Age of Reason" would replace the Bible. Did you bring your copy of the Age of Reason to church today?

**5. The Bible has proven itself true in life over and over again.**

You don't break God's laws, you get broken by them. Life doesn't get better by going against the Bible but by living by it.

\*Pizza Parlor discussion in London with 2 young men. They saw my Bible and asked if I believed every word of it? I said yes and I believe it makes sense. I shared with them that fifty years ago their country and ours basically lived by Bible principles. We have now rejected them. I asked, "Are people happier and healthier now than then? Are marriages stronger now than then?"

**6. The Bible is laced with divine power! Romans 1:16 "dunamis"**

\*John Wesley was robbed on one of his travels. The robber was disappointed by how little he got from this poor preacher. As he was about to ride away, Wesley cried out to him, "Wait a minute. I have something valuable to give you. One day you will feel sorry about the life you have chosen. Remember the Bible says "the blood of Jesus can cleanse you from all sin." Years later John Wesley was preaching in a village when a man said, "Do you remember me? I am the robber you quoted the verse from 1 John to. I could not get away from those words and became a Christian."

This is one reason why the Bible has been so attacked. Communists knew they could not keep people enslaved who had access to the freeing words of Jesus.

\*While attending VSC, I was walking alone one night in a public park when I was approached by a drug dealer. He asked if I wanted what he had. I told him, "Man, I have something in my pocket that is banned in over half the nations of the world. This could get you killed if it was found on you. People are never the same after they try it. I'll give it to you for free." I gave him a NT.

My challenge to you is to read the Gospels for yourself and see if you don't sense the very Breath of God and Ring of Truth behind every word!