

Jesus is a lunatic.

Jesus is Lord.

The writers are qualified as witnesses by virtue of time and geography.

They claimed to be eyewitnesses or related the witness of eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1-3; 1 John 1:1-3; 2 Peter 1:16; John 19:35).

They contain none of the characteristics of legendary literature.

3. *The Conformity and Agreement Among the Witnesses*

There is agreement among the four witnesses regarding the essentials of Jesus' life.

There is agreement with the known historical and geographical evidence from the 1st Century.

Secular writers and historians provide corroborating evidence.

Flavius Josephus (37-100 AD), Jewish historian

Tacitus (55-120 AD), Roman historian

Seutonius (69-140 AD), Roman historian

There are more than 20 non-Christian sources, dating from 30-130 AD that refer to the historicity of Jesus.

The crucifixion of Jesus is the most widely reported fact about Jesus in non-biblical literature (12 references).

4. *The Dynamic Evidence of the Lives of the Apostles and Other Early Christians*

Many of them had to be convinced of Jesus' claims themselves.

Their willingness to suffer persecution to the point of martyrdom testifies to the credibility of their witness.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Statistical Evidence of Jesus' Life

The statistical probability of one man fulfilling only 8 of the Old Testament Messianic prophecies is 1 in 10⁷.

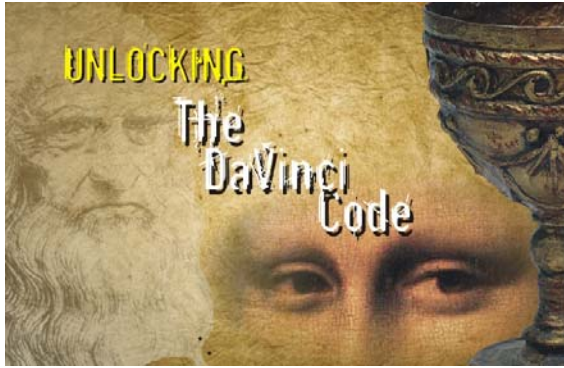
*The statistical probability of one man fulfilling all of the Old Testament Messianic prophecies is 1 in 10¹⁵⁷. (Peter Stoner, **Science Speaks**)*

The Conversion of Former Skeptics (C. S. Lewis, Malcolm Muggeridge, Sir William Ramsey, Lee Strobel)

The four options each person must consider in regard to Jesus:

Jesus is a legend.

Jesus is a liar.



Session Six

Jesus Christ – Legend or Lord?

INTRODUCTION

Here are three quotes from skeptics and critics of Christianity...

The Gospels were written in the late 2nd Century and are the results of myths and legends that developed about Jesus. (F. C. Baur, German academic in historical criticism)

There is no history written at the time Christ is said to have lived that speaks of the evidence of such a person. (Thomas Paine, author of **Common Sense** and **The Age of Reason**)

Historically, it is quite doubtful whether Jesus ever existed at all, and if he did, we know nothing about him. (*Bertrand Russell, noted atheist and author of **Why I Am Not a Christian***)

The credibility of the Christian faith depends entirely on the truth and truthfulness of Jesus Christ. If he is a fraud or a mere legendary figure, the New Testament documents are false and our faith is in vain.

Proving the historicity of Jesus depends on three fundamental propositions: (1) The New Testament documents are historically reliable; (2) There is other historical evidence of Jesus; (3) There is other corroborating evidence.

THE RELIABILITY OF THE GOSPELS ARE HISTORICAL RECORDS

To discredit Jesus, you must first discredit the reliability of the Four Gospels.

Four Crucial Evidences for the Reliability of the Gospels:

1. *The Reliability of the Manuscript Transmission*

We have over 24,000 ancient manuscripts and versions of the New Testament in existence, with the earliest dating to 125 – 155 AD.

We have more evidence for the reliability of the New Testament than any other 100 ancient documents combined.

2. *The Internal Witness*

gospel of Luke and ten of Paul's letters cleansed of Old Testament influences. While he acknowledged the other books he rejected or modified were written by the original apostles, he believed they were theologically wrong. Marcion was a Gnostic [discussed in Session Two of this series].

What is significant is the way the early church fathers dealt with Marcion and their defense of the books already accepted as canonical by the middle of the second century. Through this debate, we know that a New Testament set of books, very close to our New Testament was circulating in the latter part of the second century and that determinations of New Testament canon were confirmed as a response to the canon of Marcion.

Justin Martyr (2nd Century)

About the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr, stated that on Sundays in the Christian worship, the assemblies read the "memoirs of the apostles" together with the "writings of the prophets" [Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, chp. 67 as printed in Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, p. 185-86].

Origen (3rd Century)

By the third century, Origen (one of the first commentary writers) names all 27 books of the New Testament but states that Hebrews, James, 2 John and 3 John and Jude were questioned by some. Origen is quoted by Eusebius to describe the four gospels as "the only indisputable ones in the Church of God under heaven . . ." [Eusebius, *Church History*, 25:4 as printed in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, p. 273].

What this means is that the New Testament canon was determined long before Constantine was born and certainly before the Council of Nicea. It also means that followers of Christ recognized early on which books were authentic and authoritative. In fact, most scholars believe that the 27 books we know as the New Testament were written before 90 CE and were accepted and circulated to the existing fellowships. That the list of books was settled in the second century, completely negates the concepts in the *Da Vinci Code* that the New Testament was determined at Nicea for political purposes of Constantine.

summoned you without delay. I shall, however, feel my desire fulfilled only when I see the minds of all united in that peaceful harmony which, as the anointed of God, you must preach to others. [see Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. III, p. 626].

The central question at the Council was whether Christ and God were one, or whether instead Christ was the first created being, inferior to the Father, but still superior to all other beings. Known as the Arian controversy, Arius was a bishop who held that Jesus Christ was created by God and therefore was not divine.

The result of the Council deliberations was the original Nicene Creed which declares Jesus Christ as deity. **No evidence of any discussion of books accepted into the New Testament canon occurred with the exception that the writings of Arius were to be destroyed.** Arius was banished but later restored. The Council of Nicea was not about determining the New Testament Canon contrary to the suggestion of the *Da Vinci Code*.

DETERMINATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

When did the 27 books that we know in the New Testament become recognized as canonical? It is clear that this was a discussion more than two centuries before Constantine and involved some of the Gnostic literature that the *Da Vinci Code* cites.

Muratorian Fragment (Late 1st Century – Early 2nd Century)

The Muratorian Fragment is a piece of parchment is dated 170-210 CE and is likely the oldest known list of books in the New Testament. The author of the fragment is unknown. The unidentified author accepts the four Gospels, (the names of the first two are lost in the lacking beginning) the "Acts of all Apostles" and 17 letters of the Apostle Paul (but not Hebrews). The author considers spurious the letters supposedly written by Paul to the Laodiceans and to the Alexandrians.

The author accepts the Epistle of Jude and says that two epistles bearing the name of John are accepted by the Church. The two epistles of John however are not identified further by the author. The *Apocalypse of Peter* is mentioned as a book which "some of us will not allow to be read in church."

Marcion and the Gnostic Canon (2nd Century)

In 144 CE, Marcion went to Rome and set up an alternative religious community and created his own bible. His bible consisted of the



Session Five

The New Testament – Complete or Contrived

INTRODUCTION

According to chapter 55 of *The Da Vinci Code*, prior to 325 CE, Jesus Christ was considered no more than a "mortal prophet" by his followers. Jesus' elevation to divine status, according to the book, was only a consequence of Emperor Constantine's political strategy and a close vote at the First Council of Nicea. The book suggests that the selection of the New Testament books were also settled at that time in an effort to eliminate those books that did not highlight the divinity of Christ.

What really happened at that Council in 325 CE? How was the New Testament brought together?

CONSTANTINE AND THE COUNCIL OF NICEA

In 312 CE, Constantine was proclaimed emperor of the West and he credited the Christian God (viewing the symbol of the cross to have magical powers after a vision) with helping him win the military battles that led to that proclamation.

In 313 CE, he issued the "toleration edict," declaring tolerance toward all religions, especially Christianity. Constantine's reign brought an end to the persecution of the Christian church but, as the *Da Vinci Code* correctly asserts, he also mixed political, military and syncretistic religions with Christianity to its detriment.

After Constantine conquered the East and executed his brother-in-law, Licinius and his son in 324 CE, he issued a general exhortation to his subjects to embrace the Christian religion. In 325 CE, he summoned the Council of Nicea and he himself attended it. Though ignorant of their deep significance, Constantine demonstrated great zeal for the settlement of all theological disputes. He opened the Council greeting the bishops and stated:

Discord in the church I consider more fearful and painful than any other war. . . . But when I heard of your division, I was convinced that it is a matter that should by no means be neglected, and in the desire to assist by my service, I have

'My brother Peter, what do you think? Do you think that I thought this up myself in my heart or that I am lying concerning the Savior?'

THE HIDDEN CODES OF LEONARDO DIVINCI

The Mona Lisa

The Last Supper

THE CASE AGAINST JESUS BEING MARRIED

1. There is no evidence anywhere that explicitly states that Jesus was married.
2. One of the few things on which the vast majority of liberal and conservative Jesus scholars agree is that Jesus was single.
3. If Jesus were married, there would be no reason to keep it secret. It would not have a devastating effect on his claim to divinity.
4. While Jewish culture of the First Century made marriage the norm, it was not unusual for men to remain single.
5. A church leader's right to marry was cited by Paul without referencing Jesus (1 Corinthians 9:4-6).
6. Jesus showed no special concern for Mary Magdalene at the cross.
7. Jesus' family members—his mother, brothers and sisters—were mentioned more than once in the Gospels, but never a wife.

WHAT WE CAN SAY FOR CERTAIN ABOUT MARY MAGDALENE

She was a faithful disciple of Jesus.

She was a witness to the cross, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

She was not a prostitute.

She was not married to Jesus nor the mother of his children.

Catholic Church...The three authors, coupled with factual information, the photocopied documents labeled secret, myths, folklore, and a critique of the gospels, lay a whopper of a conspiracy theory on us in a sensationalistic style compatible to that of a Hollywood movie. The clear intention is to use shaking information, lots and lots of supposition, and shock value to sell a few books...They get you interested in the first few pages and then you realize what you're reading is about as factual as the Weekly World News in the checkout line of the super market...If you're looking for a history of Jesus or something concrete this is fortune cookie history told by Bazooka Joe.

THE RECORD OF MARY MAGDALENE IN THE FOUR GOSPELS

There are four "Marys" in the Gospels.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus

Mary, the mother of James and Joses, wife of Clopas (Matthew 27:56, 61; Mark 15:40, 47; Mark 16:8; Luke 24:10; John 19:25)

Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 10:42; 11:1-21; John 12:3-8)

Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene

She was one of the women who were frequently among the company of Jesus and his disciples.

She was delivered of seven demonic spirits by Jesus. (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2)

She was at Jesus' crucifixion. (John 19:25)

She followed the body of Jesus to his tomb. (Matthew 27:61)

She is the first to see Jesus after his resurrection. (Matthew 28:1-8; Mark 16:9; Luke 24:1-10)

She tells the other disciples about the resurrection. (John 20:18)

Was Mary Magdalene the prostitute of Luke 7:36-50?

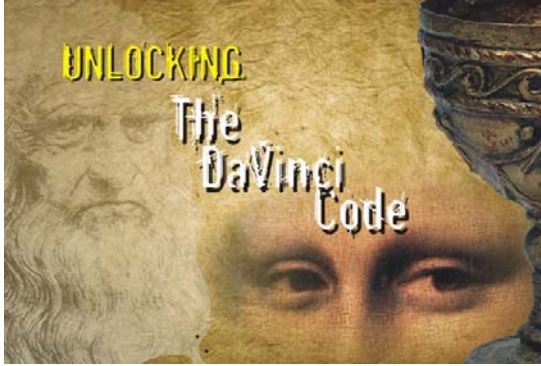
MARY IN THE Gnostic GOSPELS

From the Gospel of Phillip

The companion is Mary of Magdala. Jesus loved her more than his other disciples. He kissed her _____ on _____. They said, "Why do you love her more than all of us?"

From the Gospel of Mary

When Mary had said this, she was silent, since the Savior had spoken thus far with her. But Andrew answered and said to the brethren, 'Say what you think concerning what she said. For I do not believe that the Savior said this. For certainly these teachings are of other ideas.' Peter also opposed her in regard to these matters and asked them about the Savior. 'Did he then speak secretly with a woman, in preference to us, and not openly? Are we to turn back and all listen to her? Did he prefer her to us?' Then Mary grieved and said to Peter,



Session Four

Mary Magdalene – Disciple or Wife?

INTRODUCTION

Dan Brown suggests the Jesus' love for Mary Magdalene was a "dark secret" that the church wanted to suppress. This is especially true since he insinuates that Jesus and Mary were married, that he had a child by her, and that the descendants of Mary and Jesus live on, under the protection of a secret society, until this present day.

Here are some quotes from the book on this topic:

Teabing: regarding the church's claim that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute, "That unfortunate misconception is the legacy of a smear campaign launched by the early Church. The Church needed to defame Mary Magdalene in order to cover up her dangerous secret, her role as the Holy Grail." (p. 244)

Teabing: "Mary Magdalene was recast as a whore in order to erase the evidence of her powerful family ties." (p. 249)

Teabing: "The church...perpetuated her image as a whore and buried evidence of Christ's marriage to her..." (p. 254)

Teabing flipped throughout the book and pointed out several other passages that to Sophie's surprise, clearly suggested Magdalene and Jesus had a romantic relationship. (p. 242)

Teabing, "It is not I who claim she is the Grail. Christ himself made that claim." (p. 242)

The marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is a part of the historical record. (p. 245)

Langdon, "The iconographic evidence I'm finding to support the theory is, well, staggeringly persuasive." (p. 163)

Brown borrows extensively for a previous book, **Holy Blood, Holy Grail**, written in 1982 by Michael Baigent, Henry Lincoln, and Richard Leigh. An editorial in the *New York Times Book Review* wrote, "It's one of the all-time classic examples of pop pseudo history. It got its ideas largely from French legend and folklore." One book reviewer wrote...

This book in essence is a conspiracy theory/book report. The story is based on photocopied documents (written by unknown persons) found in the Paris library. The authors connect these documents with a group known as the Priory of Scion...This group claims lineage with Jesus Christ himself. Their documents are a story of his family's struggles through the years after the crucifixion against oppression from the

John (1 John 1:1-5; 2:18-27; 4:1-3; 5:5-6; 2 John 7; John 1:1, 14

Next Week: Mary Magdalene: Disciple or Wife?

The Mandaen communities in southern Iraq and Iran are today the sole surviving remnant of ancient Gnosticism.

BASIC TENENTS OF GNOSTICSM

Gnosticism drew heavily from the writings of Plato, mixed with eastern mysticism and some elements of Christianity.

1. Cosmological dualism

All that is part of the material world is evil. That which is spiritual is good. These two worlds are in opposition to each other.

2. Cosmic Anti-Semitism

The rejected the entire historical basis for the Hebrew people and the involvement of the God of Israel in history.

3. A Two-God reality

Pleroma—The pure, heavenly, immaterial fullness that is truly divine.

Demiurge—A fallen creature in opposition to Pleroma, the creator of the physical world, the God of the Old Testament

4. There is a succession of emanations (aeons) proceeding from Pleroma.

5. Sparks of divinity have been encapsulated in the bodies of certain *pneumatic* people.

They are ignorant of their celestial origin.

6. Christ was an aeon who took possession of the body of the human Jesus to free them from their prison of materiality.

5. Salvation is not a matter of faith or works, but based on the knowledge of one's true nature

THE CLASH OF CHRISTIANITY AND GNOSTICISM

New Testament Writers

Paul (Colossians 1:15-19; 2:9; 1 Timothy 6:20-12; et. al)



Session Three

The Gnostics— Christians or Mystics

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, most people had never heard of the Gnostics. Their words were of little interest except perhaps for the students of early church history. Today, thanks to the work of people like Elaine Pagels (**The Gnostic Gospels**) and novels like **The Da Vinci Code**, this ancient sect is receiving a renewed interest.

In this session, we will look at the roots of Gnosticism, some of its core teachings and the clash that existed between Gnosticism and Christianity in the early centuries of Christianity.

THE ORIGINS AND ROOTS OF ANCIENT GNOSTICISM

The name, *Gnostic*, comes from the Greek work *gnosis* which means "knowledge."

It was a religion based on mystery, revelation, and hidden knowledge resulting in special insight.

Epiphanius (310-403 AD) an early Christian writer gave us the name "Gnostics" when he wrote against their heresy.

Early Gnostic Teachers/Leaders

The original Gnostic – Simon Magus of Samaria (Acts 8)

Cerinthius of Asia Minor

Marcion of Pontus

Valentinus

4. The dynamic evidence of the lives of the Apostles

They were willing to die for their testimony!

WHY THESE BOOKS WERE REJECTED AS HOLY SCRIPTURE

1. Spurious Authorship

The Early Church rejected outright any book written under a pseudonym.

These books are considered *pseudopigrapha*—"false writings."

There is not one scholar—conservative or liberal—who attributes any of these books to the authorship of the name on the book.

2. The Late Date of the Books

None of these Gnostic writings are eyewitnesses of the events of Jesus' life.

The Gospel of Thomas may have been written in the late 1st Century but many scholars place it in the mid 2nd Century. The Gospel of Phillip is attributed to the 3rd Century and The Gospel of Mary to the 2nd Century

3. The Content of the Books

The Gospels are non-historical, even ant-historical.

Ideas, not events, are what mattered.

Many of the sayings are nonsensical.

THE SUPERIORITY OF MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE AND JOHN

1. The Early date of writing

Dr. William Albright of John Hopkins University, "There is no solid evidence for dating any New Testament book after the First Century, most from 50-75 AD."

They writers were eyewitnesses or related the accounts of eyewitnesses.

2. Conformity and agreement of the witnesses

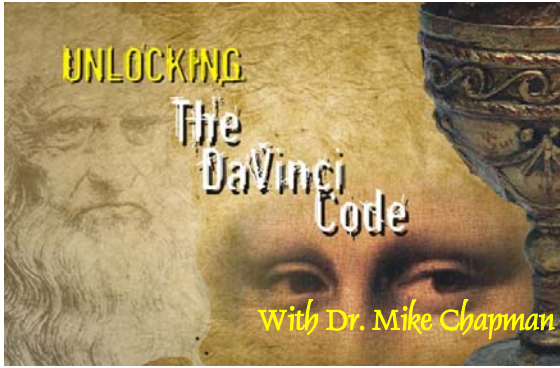
There is internal agreement among their testimony.

There is much historical information that has been verified as accurate.

3. The acceptance of the early church

The entire New Testament can be reconstructed from quotes of the Early Church Fathers.

The earliest canon of the New Testament (Muratorian Canon, c. 170 AD) list only four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.



Session Two

The Other Gospels – Fact or Fiction

INTRODUCTION

Teabing paused to sip his tea and then placed the cup back on the mantel. “More than eighty gospels *were* considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion –Matthew, Mark, Luke and John among them.” (**The Da Vinci Code** p. 231)

“Fortunately for historians, some of the gospels that Constantine attempted to eradicate managed to survive.” (**The Da Vinci Code**, p, 234)

To what “gospels” was Teabing referring? Is there another “bible” containing these “secret books” or “lost books of the Bible?”

We the answer is “sort of.” You can go to your local bookstore and buy **The Lost Books of the Bible** and **The Gnostic Bible**. What are we to make of these books?

WHAT ARE THESE “OTHER GOSPELS?”

There are about five of these books like...

The Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Phillip, The Gospel of Mary, The Gospel of Truth, The Gospel of Peter, The Gospel of Nicodemus, The Gospel of Barnabas, etc.

They are mostly the work of a pseudo-Christian sect known as the Gnostics.

Their name comes from the Greek word, *gnosis*, which means “knowledge.”

More precisely, the word was used by the Gnostics of “hidden knowledge” that was available only to the enlightened—*them*.

The dates of these books are from the late 1st Century (Gospel of Thomas) to the late 4th Century or even 5th Century.

Most of these manuscripts were found in Nag Hammadi, Egypt in 1945.

Langdon, "The iconographic evidence I'm finding to support the theory is, well, staggeringly persuasive." (p. 163)

Regarding Constantine...

Teabing: "Nothing in Christianity is original . . . Originally Christianity honored the Jewish Sabbath of Saturday, but Constantine shifted it to coincide with the pagan's veneration day of the sun . . . To this day, most churchgoers attend services on Sunday morning with no idea that they are there on account of the pagan sun god's weekly tribute—Sunday." (p. 232-233)

Jesus' establishment as 'the Son of God' was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicea. . . . By officially endorsing Jesus as the Son of God, Constantine turned Jesus into a deity who existed beyond the scope of the human world . . . the early Church literally stole Jesus from His original followers, hijacking His human message, shrouding it in an impenetrable cloak of divinity, and using it to expand their own power." (p. 233)

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." (p. 234)

Teabing, responding to Sophie, who thought Constantine was a Christian: "Hardly. He was a lifelong pagan who was baptized on his deathbed, too weak to protest." (p. 232)

"In 325 [Constantine] decided to unify Rome under a single religion. Christianity."

Sophie: "Why would a pagan emperor choose Christianity as the official religion?"

Teabing: "Constantine was a very good businessman. He could see Christianity was on the rise, and he simply backed the winning horse." (p. 232)

Fortunately, for historians, some of the gospels that Constantine attempted to eradicate managed to survive. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the 1950s hidden in a cave near Qumran in the Judean desert. And, of course, the Coptic Scrolls, in 1945 at Nag Hammadi. (p. 234)

Almost everything our church fathers taught us about Christianity is false. (p. 235)

Langdon considers the implications of presenting to the world thousands of scientific evidences that the New Testament is false testimony. (p.341)

Regarding Jesus...

Nobody is saying Christ is a fraud, or denying that he walked the earth and inspired millions to better their lives. All we are saying is that Constantine took advantage of Christ's substantial influence and importance. And in so doing, he shaped the fact of Christianity...Constantine upgraded Jesus' status almost four centuries after Jesus' death. (p. 234)

Langdon smiled, "Sophie, every faith in the world is based on fabrication. That is the definition of faith—acceptance of that which we imagine to be true, that which we cannot prove." (p. 341)

Those who truly understand their faiths understand the stories are metaphorical...Religious allegory has become a part of the fabric of reality. And living in that reality helps millions of people cope and be better people. (p. 342)

Regarding Mary Magdalene...

Teabing, that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute: "That unfortunate misconception is the legacy of a smear campaign launched by the early Church. The Church needed to defame Mary Magdalene in order to cover up her dangerous secret—her role as the Holy Grail." (p. 244)

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The marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is a part of the historical record. (p. 245)

ASSERTIONS OF THE BOOK

1. Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene.
2. She was pregnant with his child (Sarah) when he died and with the help of Joseph of Arimathea fled eventually to France.
3. All of this has been known for centuries. This secret has been kept and guarded by a secret society called the "Priory of Sion." If their documents were made public it would destroy Christianity.
4. There are a group of "other gospels" that were kept out of the Bible because they told another story of Jesus.
5. Constantine invented the deity of Jesus Christ.

There is an alternative history of Christianity and of Jesus himself that the church has suppressed and sought to destroy for nearly 2000 years.

The history we have inherited is not the real history.

QUOTES FROM BOOK

Regarding the Bible...

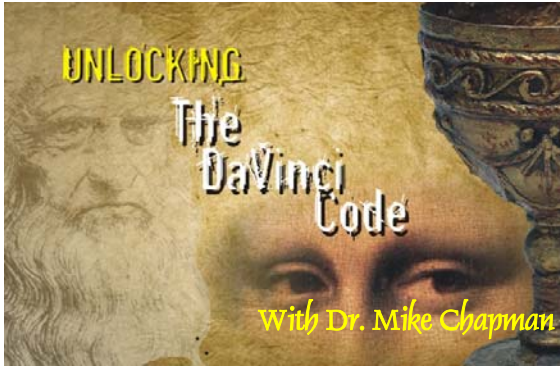
Teabing cleared his throat and declared, "The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven."

"I beg your pardon?"

"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."

"Okay."

"Jesus Christ was a historical figure of staggering influence, perhaps the most enigmatic and inspirational leader the world has ever seen. As the prophesied Messiah, Jesus toppled kings, inspired millions, and founded new philosophies. As a descendant of the lines of King Solomon and King David, Jesus possessed a rightful claim to the throne of the King of the Jews. Understandably, His life was recorded by thousands of followers across the land." Teabing paused to sip his tea and then placed the cup back on the mantel. "More than eighty gospels *were* considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion –Matthew, Mark, Luke and John among them." (p. 231)



Session One

An Overview of Dan Brown's Claims

INTRODUCTION

The Da Vinci Code, hate it or love it, has achieved the status of a phenomenon. It has sold over 25 million copies, been translated into over 40 languages, and has been through at least 54 printings. It was the #1 bestseller on the New York Times book list for over 14 weeks when it first came out and has not been off the bestseller list since then.

Sony pictures supposedly has paid over \$6 million to purchase the rights to make it into a movie starring Tom Hanks and directed by Ron Howard. It is scheduled to be in theaters in 2006. It has prompted an hour-long ABC primetime special and garnered a cover of Newsweek.

Many reading the book have reconfirmed their suspicions that the Bible is not a trustworthy and reliable document. Some Christians have been led to doubt the reliability of the Bible.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE PLOT

MAIN CHARACTERS

Robert Langdon – Professor of Religious Symbology at Harvard University

Jacques Sauniere – Murdered curator at the Louvre, Grand Master of the Priory of Sion, sworn protectors of the Holy Grail.

Sophie Neveu – agent of the Department of Cryptology, a branch of the French State Police

Sir Leigh Teabing – Wealthy Grail researcher, British Royal Historian, affiliated with Oxford University