

Where Did the Bible Come From? Part I

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Is the Bible the Word of God or a collection of manuscripts orchestrated by a fourth-century Roman emperor to ensure his own political survival? Many are wondering whether they've been told the truth about the Bible after reading a best-selling novel known around the world as *The Da Vinci Code*.

Could the historical backdrop of a page-turning murder mystery, and conspiracy theory be right? Is the Bible little more than the product of power-hungry religious leaders in collusion with a clever politician named Constantine? Where Did the Bible Come From? on this Day of Discovery.

This is the land of the Bible, the historical and geographical homeland of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and the rest of those disciples who meet us in the pages of the New Testament. But can we believe what the Bible says about Jesus and His followers? To answer that question, Mart De Haan and Jimmy De Young have come to an ancient cathedral overlooking Jerusalem. It's a cathedral related not only to some famous words of the Bible, but also to the Roman emperor Constantine who, according to *The Da Vinci Code*, had the Bible rewritten to suit his own interests.

Jimmy De Young [at Pater Noster, Jerusalem]: This is the Church of Pater Noster, located here on the Mount of Olives. That's Latin for "Our Father." And the reason the church is named that is because of the plaques on the walls that have "Our Father which art in heaven," the Lord's Prayer, in the languages of the world. Although this church was built in the nineteenth century, it has a long history that dates all the way back to the times of Christ. Tradition says this was the location from which Christ ascended into the heavens.

Then in the fourth century, Constantine sent his mother here, and she built three churches that depicted the life of Jesus Christ. The church in Bethlehem, the Church of Nativity, for His birth. The

church in Jerusalem, the Holy Sepulchre, for His death, burial, and resurrection. And then here, on the Mount of Olives, the Church of Eleona. Eleona, also [Greek] for olive, thus the church on the Mount of Olives, marking the location from which Jesus ascended into the heavens.

Mart De Haan: As Jimmy indicated, Pater Noster stands on the site of churches dating back to the time of Constantine. But could the same be said for our Bible?

According to an international best seller, the version of the Bible that we have today also tracks back to the time of Constantine, who as a good businessman used the Christian faith to consolidate his empire. As the story goes, Constantine also rewrote the history of the church. Even the phrase, “Our Father,” which here at Pater Noster occurs seventy-eight times in seventy-eight different languages. Even “Our Father” was written into the church by Constantine, who robbed the church, as the story goes, of its worship of the mother goddess, the divine feminine, and instead gave Christianity a patriarchal tradition.

Now, as you know, a lot of people are reading this book today, a novel, fiction, but I’m raising the question: Is this true? Is this historical fiction based on facts? And then if so, what about our faith? What about the Christian faith and the Bible that we hold in our hands? Well, that’s something that we want to take a look at today.

Richard Abanes [author, *The Truth Behind The Da Vinci Code*]: Well, first and foremost, *The Da Vinci Code* is an historical fiction book. It’s primarily for entertainment. “It’s a ripping good story” as one reviewer said, and so people are primarily being entertained by good characters, fast action. But what makes it historical fiction is the story, which is supposedly set against the backdrop of real history, true things that happened. And this is partly why I think again it has become so popular. People believe that what the book is talking about actually took place in space and time.

Mart De Haan: When I first read *The Da Vinci Code*, I could see immediately why it had been on the *New York Times* best-selling fiction list for some time. It’s a gripping suspense-filled murder mystery, and it’s controversial: It claims a basis in facts that, if believed as presented, would contradict the storyline of the Bible and give us a radically different Jesus. One of the main characters, a fictional Harvard professor, lends an upscale air of credibility to

his claims that the real truth about the Bible's origin has been a carefully guarded secret of the church.

The Da Vinci Code:

"The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great....

"He was a lifelong pagan who was baptized on his deathbed, too weak to protest."

Dr. Paul L. Maier [professor of ancient history, Western Michigan University]: I've never seen a greater falsification of a historical figure in my life than what Dan Brown has done to the first Christian emperor, Constantine. He claims that Constantine was the editor who collated the books of the Bible. He is the one at the Council of Nicaea who made Jesus-God, and so on. There are lies from beginning to end.

The canon had been virtually in existence at least a century and a half before Constantine the Great ever climbed the throne. Constantine was not in the business of collating or editing any of the books in the Bible. He did not dismiss those books that referred only to the human life of Jesus as Dan Brown claims, nothing of the sort.

Mart De Haan: The Latin term "canon" came to refer to the collection of sacred writings accepted by the early church, as the measuring rod of faith and practice. This canon is known today as the Bible. [Canon = Latin term meaning "a measuring rod or rule."]

Dr. Paul Maier, professor of ancient history at Western Michigan University, has throughout his teaching career seen innumerable attempts to twist history to fit pet theories, but few have created the indignation he feels over what *The Da Vinci Code* presents as the "true history" of the New Testament.

The Da Vinci Code:

"Until [the Council of Nicaea], Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet...a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless. A mortal." [ellipses and italics in original text]

Dr. Paul L. Maier: The Council of Nicaea didn't debate whether or not Jesus was God. The council debated on whether Jesus was coeternal with the Father or not. That is what was decided.

And as far as the canon is concerned, among the twenty decrees from the Council of Nicaea, not one deals with the canon. That was not the problem at the time. So you see this falsification takes place.

I can remember a line from *The Code*, Constantine remained "a lifelong pagan" and "was baptized on his deathbed" only under protest ["too weak to protest"]. False, false, and one part of it's true. He was baptized on his deathbed, but that was only because they had the strange idea in those days that since baptism wiped your slate clean, what you want to do is get all your sinning done ahead of time so that you can then, if you can time it properly, enter paradise with a clean slate.

No, Constantine wanted baptism on his deathbed. Constantine, after the battle of the Milvian Bridge in A.D. 312, what's the first thing he did 313? He in the Edict of Milan provided religious toleration for Christians. And in fact all religious systems at the time were granted freedom. All his life he then...the rest of his life he stayed interested in church matters.

He paid for the transportation expenses of all the bishops coming from across the Mediterranean to the various council sites, Arles in 314, Nicaea 325. He reimbursed the church for all the damages suffered in the persecutions.

He built basilicas in all the major points in Jesus' life. The Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, another one in the Mount of Olives, another up at Capernaum, the man couldn't stop doing enough for the church. So to say that he was a lifelong pagan is a bald-faced lie.

Mart De Haan: So if the Bible wasn't selectively compiled by Emperor Constantine for his own political purposes, where did the Bible come from? For decades veteran Bible scholar Dr. Charles Ryrie has researched the writing methods and formation of the books of the Bible.

Dr. Charles Ryrie [Ryrie Study Bible]: I suppose there are some people in the world, though I wish this were not so, who think the Bible was dropped out of heaven all bound together in genuine

leather and gilded edges of the pages. Or if they can't afford leather, then it was hardback. Well, of course the Bible wasn't produced that way.

It was over a period of time, a number of authors, it took time to collect the books and then they were put together. And of course as they're printed today, they are bound together as we know them. But that was not always the case.

Mart De Haan: The process by which the New Testament books were copied, circulated, and tested has not been commonly understood even by many who believe it to be God's Word. Dr. Ryrie has studied both the physical aspects regarding the different materials used for recording, preserving, and circulating the books, and the spiritual reasons for accepting certain writings and rejecting others. He is in agreement with the leaders of the early Christian community who came to regard only twenty-seven New Testament books as Scripture inspired by the Holy Spirit and authoritative for the conduct of daily living.

Dr. Charles Ryrie: The tests for canonicity of the New Testament books were first of all that it had some—the book had to have some kind of apostolic authority * behind it. Now that doesn't mean an apostle had to write it, but he had to be authenticating the book.

So Peter authenticated Mark, that's the usual understanding, and Paul would have authenticated Luke, because they were travelers together. So apostolic authority was one test.

The other test was the content of the book. Did it seem to be inspired; ** did it seem to come from God? Is it unique in some ways? And the third test for canonicity, or putting in the Bible, in the New Testament, was what the early church thought about it; *** they didn't all have the same lists all at once, because the books weren't circulated all at once, and therefore they couldn't.

But eventually the twenty-seven books we now call the New Testament were authenticated as being the books of the New Testament.

Authenticated by Apostles * Inspired by the Holy Spirit ** Recognized by the Church ***