

Reasons to Believe Your Bible - Providential Reasons

Sign Title: Providential Reasons to Believe Your Bible

February 13, 2011

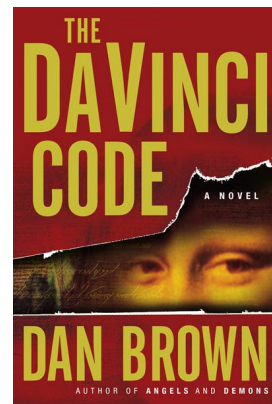
If you are new, I would like to welcome you in the name of Christ. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. This morning, we are in the sixth week of an eight week series titled *Reasons to Believe Your Bible*. In this series, we are learning reasons we can trust the Bible we hold in our hands. This morning, we are looking at *Providential* reasons to trust this book. Specifically, we will learn how the 66 books of our Bible were collected together into our Bible. Some of you may think this is a very academic question that doesn't connect with real people. I beg to differ. You may not realize it, but how the books of our Bible came to be part of our Bible is one of the pressing questions in our day.

Last week, I told you about my trip to Florida for a pastors conference. While on the trip, I met a number of people on the plane and in airports. The most common author people were reading was Dan Brown. Dan wrote what is, to date, the bestselling novel of the twenty-first century, The Da Vinci Code.

The book is a fictional novel, but on the first page of the story, he writes that his novel is based on facts.

All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals in the novel are accurate.

What is the novel about? It is about Mary Magdalene, who supposedly was the wife of Jesus. She bore his child. Dan claims there was a *Gospel of Mary*, just like *the Gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John*, and that Mary was a leader among the apostles; but the apostle Peter



was threatened by her and was determined to silence her and her gospel. In fact, Dan claims there were up to eighty alternate accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus that the church chose to suppress. They arbitrarily chose the four we have today.

According to The Da Vinci Code, it is only recently that we are rediscovering these lost gospels so we can finally set our understanding of Jesus and the Bible straight.

What do you think? Is there a Gospel of Mary? Did church councils suppress other gospels of Jesus? This morning, we will discover the answer. We will learn how the books of our Bible came to be collected together. Along the way, we will learn one of the major differences between Catholics and Protestants when it comes to the Bible. We have a lot of ground to cover so let's jump right in.

How were the books of our Bible selected?

How were the books of the Old Testament selected?

When God authorized the writing of a book of the Old Testament, the people of God recognized it as God's Word and it was preserved. For example.

Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord... Exodus 24:4

As the number of books God gave increased, they were eventually collected and placed by the ark of the covenant.

"Take this Book of the Law and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against you. Deuteronomy 31:26 (ESV)

And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God... that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. Joshua 24:26 (ESV)

Then Samuel told the people the rights and duties of the kingship, and he wrote them in a book and laid it up before the Lord. 1 Samuel 10:25 (ESV)

As we learned in the first week of this series, these books were treated as the very Words of God, because that is what they claimed to be and they proved themselves to be true.

Does that mean that everything written by the Jewish people in the ancient world was considered God's Word and became part of the Bible? No, of course not! There were many other Godly books that did not claim to be God's Word that were in existence. For instance...

...Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stopped in the midst of heaven and did not hurry to set for about a whole day. Joshua 10:13 (ESV)

Therefore it is said in the Book of the Wars of the Lord,... Numbers 21:14 (ESV)

Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the Book of the Acts of Solomon? 1 Kings 11:41 (ESV)

As the Old Testament grew in size, it came to be described in a three-fold division called, *the law, the prophets and the writings*; because those were the three types of books God gave.

There was almost no disagreement among the Jewish scholars in the ancient world about which books were God's Word. The Jews universally recognized the words God gave them. To be fair, a very small minority of Jewish scholars did question the authenticity of some Old Testament books, some questioned the Song of Solomon, because it was too sexy; some questioned Ecclesiastes, because it sounded too pessimistic; others questioned Esther, because it sounded too unspiritual and didn't mention God directly. In spite of these objections, we need to understand that a vast overwhelming majority of

Jews recognized the same Old Testament books we have in our Bible today as the Word of God. The Old Testament we have in our Bible is the same one accepted by and used by the Jews and Jesus.

I do need to warn you. Just in case you happen to get your hands on a Hebrew copy of the Old Testament, you will notice the table of contents does not match the Old Testament table of contents in our Bible. That is because of two reasons. 1) In the Hebrew Bible, some books of the Bible are combined. Such as 1 + 2 Samuel is combined to Samuel and some of the smaller books are tacked onto the end of large books. 2) The order the books in the Hebrew Bible is different. The last book in the Old Testament in our Bible is Malachi, the last prophet; but the Hebrew Bible organizes the books in historical order so the last book is Chronicles. Never-the-less, the contents are identical.

THE OLD TESTAMENT	
Genesis	1
Exodus	45
Leviticus	81
Numbers	108
Deuteronomy	145
Joshua	178
Judges	200
Ruth	222
1 Samuel	225
2 Samuel	254
1 Kings	279
2 Kings	307
1 Chronicles	334
2 Chronicles	359
Ezra	389
Nehemiah	398
Esther	410
Job	417
Psalms	448
Proverbs	527
Ecclesiastes	553
Song of Solomon	560
Isaiah	566
Jeremiah	627
Lamentations	685
Ezekiel	692
Daniel	737
Hosea	751
Joel	760
Amos	764
Obadiah	772
Jonah	774
Micah	776
Nahum	782
Habakkuk	785
Zephaniah	788
Haggai	791
Zechariah	793
Malachi	801

INDEX LIBRORUM BIBLICORUM					
GENESIS	בראשית	1	NAHUM	נחום	1044
EXODUS	שמות	86	HABAKUK	חבקוק	1049
LEVITICUS	ויקרא	158	ZEPHANIA	צפניה	1054
NUMERI	במדבר	209	HAGGAI	חגי	1060
DEUTERONOMIUM	דברים	283	SACHARIA	זכריה	1063
JOSUA	יהושע	354	MALEACHI	מלאכי	1081
JUDICES	שופטים	399	PSALMI	תהלים	1087
SAMUEL	שמואל	443	IOB	איוב	1227
REGES	מלכים	557	PROVERBIA	משלי	1275
JESAIA	ישעיה	675	RUTH	רות	1320
JEREMIA	ירמיה	780	CANTICUM	שיר השירים	1325
EZECHIEL	יהוקאל	896	ECCLESIASTES	קהלת	1336
HOSEA	הושע	991	THRENI	איכה	1354
JOEL	יואל	1009	ESTHER	אסתר	1367
AMOS	עמוס	1015	DANIEL	דניאל	1381
OBADIA	עבדיה	1028	ESRA	עזרא	1411
JONA	יונה	1031	NEHEMIA	נחמיה	1430
MICHA	מיכה	1034	CHRONICA	דברי הימים	1459

Let me show you an incidental proof that Christ's Bible was the same Old Testament we hold in our hands today. There is a peculiar verse in Luke.

so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation. Luke 11:50–51 (ESV)

We read this and immediately recognize Abel as the first murder in the Bible, but have no clue how Zechariah fits this. If you follow the Hebrew ordering of the books, Zechariah is the last murder in the Bible. Jesus uses the first murder and the last murder in the Old Testament as the bookends to describe what are the beginning and end of the Bible in his day.

So the Jews in Jesus' day, and Jesus, agreed there were no more authoritative books given by God to add to the Scriptures after the prophet Malachi, or if you want to look at it historically, the book of Chronicles. In fact, the four-hundred years after Malachi, until the time of Jesus, are often referred to as the four-hundred silent years.

What do we need to remember? There wasn't a council that debated what books would be in the Old Testament, barring some out and keeping others in, as *The Da Vinci Code* claims. *God brought the books together by God's people recognizing and affirming the books of God's Word.*

Just as the Holy Spirit guided fallible people to write infallible books in the Bible, the Holy Spirit used a fallible church to infallibly recognize the books of the Bible.

How were the books of the New Testament selected?

Earlier in this series, we learned the same authority that was given to the Old Testament books, as God's Word, was also given to the New Testament books. How were those books included? While the central place of authority for

Christians started in Jerusalem with the apostles, within 50 years of Christ's death, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.. Christians were persecuted and scattered around the world. While the authority of the place in Jerusalem was broken, the people of authority, the apostles, were not.

The letters and writing of the apostles, or those associated with them, became the source of authority. Many of their writings are the books of our New Testament. All of the books in our New Testament were written during the last half of the first century, when the apostles were alive to verify and affirm them. Most of them were written to churches (Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians). Some were addressed to individuals (such as Philemon). Others were intended for a broader audience. For instance, 1 Peter was written to Christians in Eastern Asia. Revelation was written to Christians in Western Asia. Romans was written to Christians in the city of Rome.

Even though these books were intended for different corners of the globe, they had a round-robin nature to them. Many of them were written to be circulated to others.

I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. 1 Thessalonians 5:27 (ESV)

And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. Colossians 4:16 (ESV)

Just like the Old Testament, these books were not the only Christian writings in the day. But the criteria for authority in the churches was that a letter or book needed to be written or verified by an apostle as authoritative. For instance, in 1 John, John tells us he was an eyewitness of Christ, that was the

source of his authority to write. In 1 Peter, Peter tells us he was an eyewitness of the transfiguration and he was writing from first-hand evidence. That was the source of his authority. Luke, who wrote the gospel of Luke, was not an apostle, but he was a traveling companion of the apostle Paul, who could vouch that what he wrote was true.

The apostle Peter had a copy of Paul's letters. He vouched for them as Scripture.

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. 2 Peter 3:15–16 (ESV)

Just like the Old Testament, there were a small number of people who had some questions about the authority of some of the books. For example, Hebrews was initially questioned because it was written anonymously. 2 Peter was questioned by a few because they weren't sure Peter wrote it. Revelation was missing from some early lists probably because it was unknown in some places.

Let me summarize the key points for us to remember.

- The books in our New Testament were either written by an apostle or verified by an apostle.
- They were intended to be circulated among the churches so Christians could know the eyewitness truth.
- By the end of the first century, all 27 books of our New Testament were written and accepted as authoritative by the churches scattered throughout the ancient

world. Were there some churches that didn't have all 27 books? Yes! But that was not because they rejected some of the books but because they simply didn't yet have them. We forget. There were no cell-phones, no photocopiers, no internet, no email or web pages. Everything had to be written by hand and delivered by hand. That takes time. None of the 27 books were ever removed from the list of authoritative Scriptures in any churches once they had them.

- One generation after the apostles, every book of our New Testament was quoted as authoritative by the leaders of the early church. The people of God universally recognized the 27 books of our New Testament as the Word of God to the people of God without having a meeting to vote on it. (Imagine that! A church decision without a meeting!)
- There were church councils and official lists of the recognized New Testament books, but that came hundreds of years later. In 367 A.D., Athanasius, references the accepted books of the New Testament in an Easter letter he wrote. The Council of Hippo in 393 A.D. and the Council of Carthage in 397 A.D. affirmed the 27 New Testament books accepted by the church as authoritative. Neither of these councils created a list of authoritative books for the New Testament, they only affirmed the list of authoritative books that were already accepted by the church for hundreds of years. Hold the phone for a bit and you will learn why they needed to make these lists.

So who decided which books would be in the New Testament? It happened the same way as the Old Testament. *God's people recognizing and affirming the books of God's Word. Just as God was able to use fallible people*

to write infallible books of the Bible, God used the fallible church to infallibly recognize the books of the Bible.

The Protestant and Catholic Difference

Now that you have this background, we are in a much better position to discuss the differences between Protestants and Catholics on this issue. The Catholic church believes the church creates the Bible and gives it authority. In short, the Bible wouldn't have any authority unless the church gave it authority. Protestants say just the opposite. The church doesn't have any authority over the Bible. The authority is God's word and the church submits to it. So the question is one of authority? Does the church bow to the authority of the Bible, as Protestants believe, or does the Bible submit to the authority of the church, as Catholics believe. In case you think I am stretching the truth on this, let me quote from Vatican II written in 1967.

It is clear therefore, that sacred tradition, sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the church are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others.

The Catholic church says its traditions and its authority as a church are on par with the Word of God. And as we will see, in practice, they can supersede the authority of the Word of God. This explains why Catholics pray to Mary, have a purgatory, pray for the dead and the priests must be celibate. These, and a host of other Catholic traditions, are not found in the Bible. But in the Catholic church, their traditions carry the same level of authority as the Word of God.

To take it a step deeper, the Catholic church believes they *convey authority to Scripture*, the Protestant church believes we can only *recognize the*

authority of Scripture. This was one of the major arguments between Martin Luther and John Eck during the reformation. John Eck said *nothing was Scripture until a church council voted to make it Scripture.* Martin Luther said nobody made a book God's Word, *we could only recognize and submit to the words God gave.*

Let me explain this in a simpler way. Here I have a slip of paper with writing on it. Imagine I told you this was a letter written by Abraham Lincoln. What would you do? You would examine the letter. Does the handwriting look like Abraham Lincoln's? Does the paper date to his era? Does the ink date to his time? Soon you would discredit this paper as a letter from Abraham Lincoln and you would recognize it as the grocery list I pulled off the side of the refrigerator on the way to church this morning. That is the protestant way of recognizing the books of the Bible. Scripture can only be in our Bible because we recognize it as having the earmarks of coming from God. We aren't giving Scripture authority, we are only recognizing the authority the Scripture already has. The Roman Catholic way of handling this is just the opposite. If we were to meet as a group and decide this grocery list is a letter from Abraham Lincoln, then we make it one, because we conveyed authority to it. In other words, according to the Catholic Church, there is no Scripture from God until they make it Scripture from God and add it to the Bible.

The Apocrypha

This will explain why the Catholic Bible has books in it that are not in the Protestant Bible. They are called the Apocryphal books. They were written

between 400 B.C. and the coming of Jesus. What you need to know about the the Apocryphal books is they were never considered part of God's inerrant word. They were never considered Scripture. They were like books in a church library. Nice to read, some good history, some good fantasy, but definitely not directly from God. Let me bolster my point.

- Although the Apocryphal books were readily available in Jesus' day, the Jews never considered them part of God's Word.
- By Jesus' bookending of the two murders in the Hebrews Old Testament, it shows us Jesus also did not consider the apocryphal books part of God's Word.
- Jesus, and the other New Testament authors, cite 295 quotations from the Old Testaments for authority in the New. Yet none of their quotes are from the apocryphal books.
- The apocryphal books contain inaccuracies and teachings contrary to Scripture, for example, some of these books say we are saved by works, not by faith.
- The Roman Catholic church didn't accept them as Scripture for over 1400 years.

How did this change? In 1517, when Luther posted his 95 thesis on the Wittenberg door, many of his concerns centered around how the church of his day had developed practices, that were not found in Scripture, such as praying for the dead. Some of these practices were rooted in the apocryphal books. Luther was concerned that while these books were not part of Scripture, for many priests, these books were taught as if they were Scripture.

In response to Luther, the Roman Catholic Church convened the council of Trent in 1546 where they exercised the authority they believed they possessed over Scripture and they voted to make the apocryphal books part of the Bible. So after 400 years of not being accepted as Scripture by the Jews, after not being accepted as Scripture by Jesus, after over 1400 years of not being accepted as part of the Bible by the early church, the Council of Trent decided to make these books part of the Catholic Bible.

Remember, according to the Roman Catholic Church, they can do this, because they make the Bible, the Bible doesn't make them. This is how the Catholic Bible ended up with books in their Bible we do not have and the reason why we don't have them.

What about the claims of The Da Vinci Code?

Let's go back to where we started with *The Da Vinci Code* and the claims of Dan Brown. First of all, was there an alternate gospel in the ancient world called *The Gospel of Mary*? Yes, but be careful about stopping the story there. The gospel of Mary was written sometime during the second century. Far removed from the actual life and ministry of Christ, the apostles, and the formation of the church. The *Gospel of Mary*, and other alternate gospels, are not eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus. Their authority is suspect right from the beginning because it is written by someone who was not with Jesus.

A heresy arose in the ancient world called gnosticism. Gnosticism was a movement during the early Christian centuries that claimed secret knowledge about Jesus, the world and salvation that wasn't available to everyone.

Gnosticism was rejected outright by the early church, and for good reason. It went against everything the early church knew to be true and the eyewitness accounts of Jesus.

The *Gospel of Mary* is a gnostic document. It goes completely against the eyewitness accounts. It says there is no resurrection, it says there is no second coming of Christ, and there is no such thing as sin. The early church rejected outright the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Gospel of Thomas* and other false gospels for obvious reasons. They were written over a hundred years after Jesus and they completely contradicted the eyewitness accounts of the apostles.

Several hundreds of years later, why were church councils like Carthage and Hippo making official New Testament book lists? To help young Christians avoid being confused on what were the true New Testament books and what were the pseudo gnostic gospels that were circulating to deceive people.

So just because somebody discovers a Gospel of Mary in a library does not mean there was a conspiracy in a church council to suppress the truth, as Dan Brown claims. Rather, early church councils listed the books the early church recognized because they wanted to make sure Christians in the generations that followed, like you and me today, wouldn't be duped into believing Dan Brown's lie. They wanted to make sure we knew the books they recognized as Scripture from God so just like them, we could stick to the truth.

How did we end up with the books in our Bible? Just as God was able to use fallible people to write infallible books in the Bible, God used the fallible church to infallibly recognize the books of the Bible.

Were there church councils? Yes, but church councils didn't create the Bible, they just formally stated the New Testament that was already accepted by the church so Christians wouldn't be duped into believing and trusting the false gospels.

Conclusion

If you are interested in learning more about the Da Vinci Code and how to answer other questions it raises about the Bible, I encourage you to read the *Digging Deeper* section in this weeks *Small Group Work Sheet*.

Next week, we look at our final message in the series before Dr. Tribelhorn comes to speak. It is called, *Personal Reasons to Believe Your Bible*. We will learn about this books unique ability to transform lives.

See you then.



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