



"When religion grows weak superstition grows strong."  
—William Barclay

26-May-06

## Dan Brown's Thirty Pieces of Silver

By now, everyone in the Western world has heard of Jesus Christ's betrayal in exchange for some coinage. Depending on which version of the story one may have heard, though, the betrayer was named Judas and received thirty pieces of silver, or he was named Dan and raked in the royalties from 40 million book sales and box office receipts of \$150 million and counting. Two thousand years of inflation makes a big difference in what men are willing to shell out for treachery, but the treacherous prefer to forget that the wages of such [sin](#) remains unchanged throughout time ([Romans 6:23](#)).

Of course, there are those Gnostics who disagree that Judas betrayed Jesus - according to the recently promoted *Gospel of Judas* (written centuries after the fact), Judas and Jesus conspired together, and Judas was actually a hero for the part he played in Christ's arrest. This, of course, overlooks Jesus' own statement that "It would have been good for that man if he had never been born" ([Mark 14:21](#)). Likewise, the new Gnostics assure us that Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* is not betrayal, but "opens our minds" to a "deeper understanding" of Jesus' "humanity" - that He sired children with Mary Magdalene, and survived that unfortunate business about the scourging, the stake, the sins of mankind, etc. In betraying [Jesus Christ](#), Dan Brown may not kiss Jesus like Judas did, but his allegations about Mary Magdalene's

kisses produces the same result: *The innocent Man* has been slandered, and truth has been sacrificed on the altar of mammon.

As if the basic premise of the book were not heretical enough, the cast of the movie version of *The Da Vinci Code* have their own stones to throw. In an interview on NBC's *The Today Show*, one of the film's stars, British actor Ian McKellen, shocked even his liberal cohorts with his statements. *Today's* Matt Lauer observed that "people wanted this [movie] to say 'fiction, fiction, fiction,'" and then he asked, "How would you all have felt if there was a disclaimer at the beginning of the movie? Would it have been okay with you?"

Sir Ian's response: "Well, I've often thought the Bible should have a disclaimer in the front saying, 'This is fiction.' I mean, walking on water - it takes an act of [faith](#)." Yes, that is true. But why does he discount the Bible? Perhaps we can find a clue hidden in the fact that McKellen, an unabashed homosexual, readily admits to tearing the book of Leviticus - which condemns homosexuality - out of Gideon Bibles in hotel rooms. This is the standard approach when "progressives" encounter something that contradicts them: rip it up, call it fiction, and replace it with something more to their liking.

Dan Brown may be the latest to cash in on producing an alternative life and times of Jesus the Messiah, but he is by no means the first. The 1903 novel, *When It Was Dark*, proposes that archaeologists discover a "confession" of [Joseph of Arimathea](#) that he faked the resurrection of Jesus. This profound revelation causes a worldwide meltdown as belief in Christian morality crumbles. In 1940, a similar plot was used in *The Mystery of Mar Saba*, but this time it is the Nazis who seek to discredit the resurrection in order to demoralize the Allies.

The 1916 novel, *The Brook Kerith*, has Jesus surviving [the crucifixion](#) and continuing on in His character growth. This "Jesus" arrives at the "ultimate truth": the non-religious philosophical view now chanted by mall rats and Zen skateboarders everywhere that "there is but one thing . . . to learn to live for ourselves, and to suffer our fellows to do likewise." D. H. Lawrence's *The Man Who Died* likewise sees Jesus surviving the crucifixion. This time, though, "Jesus" abandons His religious mission, and has a sexual

relationship with a pagan priestess of Isis. (For more examples of "gospel fictions" like these, see *Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way* by Philip Jenkins.) Dan Brown may be the current celebrity in the camp of disbelievers, but his proposals are not all that novel.

Various Gnostic texts - some "gospel" accounts, some not - from the second, third, and fourth centuries seem to suggest that in fact "multiple Christianities" arose after the time of Jesus, and that the version we are familiar with now is simply the one that "won." Thus, these esoteric texts, and the stories they spawn, are held up by those who are convinced that we do not have the whole story. They believe that somewhere in the desert or in a forgotten private library, a scrap of parchment will reveal "the real Jesus" - that is, the Jesus who agrees with them, or at least *disagrees with orthodoxy*. There is truly nothing new under the sun.

There is obviously nothing false in the Word of [God](#), but a problem does arise from it. The problem is not with its source, authenticity, or authority, but rather that it - as Sir Ian's hostility demonstrates - calls us into account. It requires that we stop peering lazily through our own self-centered lens, and begin to see things as our Creator sees them. In this, the Word of God requires more than most people are willing to give up. It is easier to find a new (convenient) way of looking at things than to simply recognize them for what they are.

Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* will undoubtedly not be the last piece of work to malign the record of the Bible. Further discoveries of papyrus in the desert may indeed be heralded as "changing everything." Do not be dissuaded by the rumors of scholarship, or the gripping stories - they can only deceive. We have been called to put our trust in the inspired Word of God. Though it may be difficult and sometimes painful, it serves mankind far better than the fanciful and spurious:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. ([II Timothy 3:16-17](#))

- David C. Grabbe

## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[Does Doctrine Really Matter? \(Part Thirteen\)](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Deception abounds in the Information Age. The elect are not immune to antinomian deception, including the doctrine of eternal security, the total depravity of man, unconditional love, irresistible grace, and the "once saved always saved" mentality. These pernicious, surreptitious teachings are designed to remove personal guilt and the necessity for personal responsibility or works (anathema to antinomian, "rule-hating," evangelical teaching), casting aside the law of God and substituting personal standards. Without a demonstration of works, it will be impossible for God to judge whether we will actively adhere to His standards, steadfastly walking in the footsteps of Christ. Finally, the amazing history of the rejection of the Sabbath and the embracing of Sunday is explained.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Let No One Deceive You](#)**

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

We live in a day of increasing knowledge—to the point that we are increasingly overloaded with information. Richard Ritenbaugh argues that these and other modern factors lend themselves to deception, yet this is one of the primary end-time trends that Jesus warns us against!

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