



# Hope Unfolding



“The unfolding of Your word gives light”

*Psalm 119:130*

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Today’s bestseller has a surprising plot.

## **The Bible in Stone**

While modern-day graffiti is considered ugly and destructive, it is said that time sanctifies graffiti, and impromptu ancient inscriptions can be illuminating. Imagine the surprise of archaeologist Joe Zias when, in June of last year, he found an inscription on a 60-foot-high funerary monument at the foot of the Mount of Olives that read, “This is the tomb of Zachariah, martyr, very pious priest, father of John” (Luke 1:5-6). The inscription dated to the Byzantine era, several hundred years after Zachariah’s death. In the fourth and fifth

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## **Who Killed Jesus?**

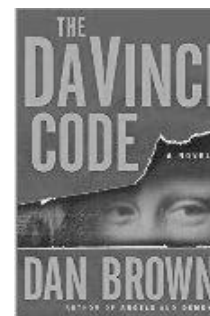
Mel Gibson’s upcoming film, *The Passion of Christ*, has caused heated controversy between Jews and Christians. The center of the debate is the role of Jews in Jesus’ Crucifixion as described in the four New Testament Gospels. Gibson’s \$25 million biblical epic, yet unreleased, has triggered a new squabble

among Jewish scholars. The texts in question are not the New Testament, but rather passages about Jesus in the Talmud, the writings on Jewish law and tradition considered sacred by traditional Jews.

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## ***The Da Vinci Code* Revealed**

*The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown has been on the bestseller list nearly forty weeks with more than 4.5 million copies in print, but most people who have not read the book are unaware of its contents. Brown’s previous novel, *Angels & Demons*, was an enjoyable fast-paced mystery/thriller about the Vatican vs. the Illuminati, the Catholic Church against a fictional secret society, with enough grounding in fact to make the story compelling. But the mixture of fact and fiction blurs the line between them, leading the reader to believe that the whole of the story is a factual account of buried truth.



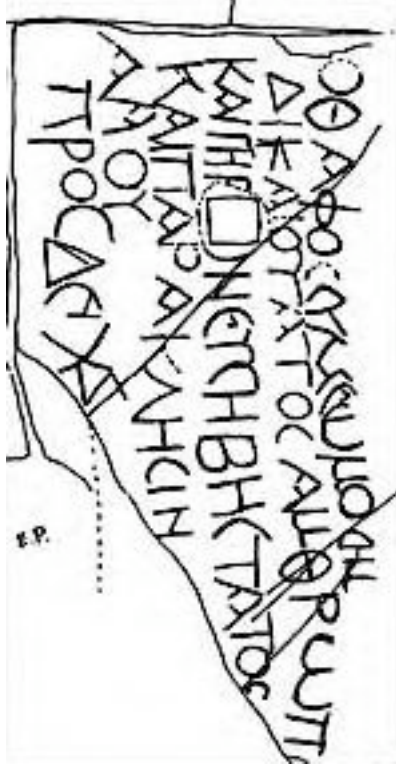
The plot of both *Angels & Demons* and *The Da Vinci Code* are similar in that they involve groups with their own secret agenda (the Catholic Church is a common element), with conspiracies rooted in ancient times, and certain of their members are willing to do anything to fulfill their particular cause – even as far as committing murder. Both novels

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### The Bible in Stone (continued from p. 1)

centuries, the Byzantines scoured the Holy Land for holy sites, drawing on local tradition as a means of identifying them, then marking them. The inscription is carved into the facade of what is traditionally known as “Absalom's Tomb,” one of three large funerary monuments in the Kidron Valley.

Though the monument was built around the time of Jesus, hundreds of years after the death of Absalom, son of King David, medieval Jewish tradition held that it was his tomb, and as a result, it was stoned for centuries to curse Absalom for his deeds. The once smooth facade became badly pockmarked, and any inscription was made nearly illegible.



**The Simon inscription**

The Zachariah inscription is carved above the entrance arch, about 30 feet from the ground. According to Jerome and other early historians, Simon, Zachariah, and James, the brother of Jesus, shared the same tomb. Zias, a member of the Science and Archaeology Group of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, discovered it by chance when the summer light shone at the right angle to highlight the carved letters, which are in two lines, each about four feet long, and up to four inches tall. He also noticed the name of “Simon,” a later form of the name Simeon.

By mid-November, Zias was able to discern more of the Simon text. It said that the monument was the tomb of “Simon who was a very just man and a very devoted old (person) and waiting for the consolation of the people.” The inscription is the same as Luke 2:25 of the fourth-century *Codex Sinaiticus*. The text is in six vertical lines and the letters run together and are of different heights, a little crooked, and relatively shallow. Jim Strange, a New Testament scholar from the University of South Florida, said: “These were folks who knew their Greek and their Luke, but didn't know how to be masons.”

The widespread use of Bible verses on shrines began only around 1,000 AD, in Europe. The Zachariah and Simon inscriptions are much older. Such second hand references are important, scholars say, because they confirm the traditions among early Christians and because there are so few artifacts directly relating to biblical narrative. They corroborate early Christian writings and represent direct archaeological proof. Zias said, “Not only do we know that these people existed but here we see that in the Fourth Century that the Christians believed that this was the tomb. And perhaps it was of two or maybe three of these men.”

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### Who Killed Jesus? (continued from p. 1)

Steven Bayme, the American Jewish Committee's national director of Contemporary Jewish Life, wrote an article (posted October 2003 on the AJCommittee's Web site at [www.ajc.org](http://www.ajc.org) and later removed) affirming that Jews must face up to the fact that the Talmudic narrative “does clearly demonstrate ... fourth century rabbinic willingness to take responsibility for the execution of Jesus.” He cites a passage from the Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a, that concerns a man called Jesus who was hanged on the eve of Passover. His crime was practicing sorcery and leading the people of Israel

astray. Following a 40-day reprieve, a period granted for defenders to come forward, Jewish authorities put the accused sorcerer to death, despite his “connections with the government.” The passage is significant, wrote Bayme, because the Talmudic text “indicates rabbinic willingness to acknowledge, at least in principle, that in a Jewish court and in a Jewish land, a real-life Jesus would indeed have been executed. No effort is made to pin his death upon the Romans. Pointedly, Jews did not argue that crucifixion was a Roman punishment and therefore, no Jewish court could have advocated it.”

The Biblical account of the crucifixion of Christ is often blamed for anti-Semitic sentiments that are expressed, unfortunately, by many Christians. What most people seem to have forgotten in these debates is that it was according to God’s redemptive plan that His beloved Son died on the cross (Matt. 16:21, 17:22). Who killed Jesus? Luke 18:32-33 says “He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him.” Mat. 20:18 says “The Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death.” And Luke 24:7 says “The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified.” According to the Bible, each one of us killed Jesus through our sin: He “was delivered over because of our transgressions” (Rom. 4:25). To blame any group, Romans or Jews, for the death of Christ is to miss the very heart of the Gospel message. If we are to blame anyone, we are to blame ourselves.

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## Graham on Gibson

Speaking of Mel Gibson’s film, *The Passion of the Christ*, it is set to be released on Ash Wednesday (Feb. 25) 2004. Billy Graham has screened it and said the movie moved him "to tears." He said in a statement released by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, “I have often wondered what it must have been like to be a bystander during those last hours before Jesus’ death. After watching ‘The Passion of the Christ,’ I feel as if I have actually been there. I was moved to tears. I doubt if there has ever been a more graphic and moving presentation of Jesus’ death and resurrection – which Christians believe are the most important events in human history. The film is faithful to the Bible’s teaching that we are all responsible for Jesus’ death, because we have all sinned. It is our sins that caused His death, not any particular group. No one who views this film’s compelling imagery will ever be the same.”

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## “The Gospel of John”

The makers of *Matthew* and *Acts of the Apostles*, Bible Visual International Inc., have come up with another movie, *The Gospel of John*. Like the other two before it, the dialogue follows the scriptural text to the letter (this time using the *Good News Translation*). The film initially opened in ten theaters in Colorado Springs, the Dallas-Fort Worth area, Charlotte, and Fayetteville, Ark. Its backers want to introduce it gradually through the Southern states. With a budget of \$15 million, the backers decided to release it theatrically instead of straight-to-video. If the film doesn’t do well, no one can fault the script.

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***The Da Vinci Code Revealed*** (continued from p. 1)

climax in modern-day Rome, and they share the same protagonist: Robert Langdon, a “religious symbologist” who teaches at Harvard University. Langdon himself is not religious by any means, pursuing his interest with studied but detached passion. In *The Da Vinci Code*, Langdon unwillingly becomes involved with two conflicting factions, the Priory of Sion and Opus Dei. The former is a secret society whose members have included Isaac Newton, Botticelli, Victor Hugo, and ... Leonardo da Vinci. The latter is a sect of the Catholic Church.

In the book, the one remaining member of the Priory of Sion who holds the secret to the whereabouts of the Holy Grail is murdered, leaving a series of arcane clues that Langdon is called upon to solve. Sinister murderous monks from Opus Dei vie for the prize. Why is the Holy Grail so important to the Catholic Church? The Grail, it turns out, is a person – a woman, and accompanying her are several chests of documents. The woman is Mary Magdalene (that is, her earthly remains) and the boxes contain a “truth” that will shatter the Catholic Church. All through the book, Dan Brown writes of places, organizations, people, and documents that are all real, and the contents of these boxes are described and explained as if they were equally genuine, lending a rather convincing air to the whole story, fictional as it may be.

The boxes contain, among other things, gospels – more than eighty, we are told – that were intentionally suppressed from the Bible. “The Bible, as we know it today,” Brown writes, “was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great” in AD 325 (*The Da Vinci Code*, page 232). Far from being a Christian, Constantine is described as the head priest of a sun cult (*Sol Invictus*) who, in the interests of better business, alters the basic tenets of Christianity to conform to his pagan beliefs. This would include the 25 December birthdate of Christ, Sunday as “Lord's Day,” a “god-eating” ritual (communion), etc.

So far, the book seems bad enough, but it becomes worse. Brown's book is not simply un-Christian; it is *anti*-Christian. 1 John 4:3 warns us that “This is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.” Brown's deceit continues. At the Council of Nicaea, the reader is informed, “the *divinity* of Jesus” is invented. “Until *that* moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet ... a great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless” (Ellipsis and emphasis are in the original, p. 233). This move was to insure that Christianity would be the property of the Catholic Church alone. Brown has his character explain:

“Because Constantine upgraded Jesus' status almost four centuries *after* Jesus' death, thousands of documents already existed chronicling His life as a *mortal* man. To rewrite the history books, Constantine knew he would need a bold stroke. From this sprang the most profound moment in Christian history... 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)

However, despite Constantine's efforts, some survived (in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Nag Hammadi Codex, and elsewhere). “The scrolls highlight glaring historical discrepancies and fabrications, clearly confirming that the modern Bible was compiled and edited by men with a political agenda – to promote the divinity of the man Jesus Christ and use His influence to solidify their own power base” (p. 234). Jesus, these documents reveal, in actuality married Mary Magdalene. The “Gospel of Philip” is cited as the proof text: “And the companion of the Savior is Mary Magdalene.” We are told that “As any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word *companion*, in those days, literally meant *spouse*” (p. 246).

To digress momentarily, readers of the book will likely *not* research this gospel, as they will likely *not* research the true origins of the Bible as we today know it. The Gospel of Philip is part of the Nag Hammadi Codex, a collection of Gnostic scriptures discovered in Upper Egypt in 1945, and represents the sole copy of this “gospel,” a Coptic version on a damaged papyrus. It is assumed, with scholarly reasoning, that the Coptic is a translation from the original Greek. Whether or not the Aramaic word for *companion* means *spouse* is beside the point. The work has been demonstrated to be a Valentinian text compiled by a Valentinian for Valentinians. The Valentinians were second century Gnostic followers of Valentinus, who studied philosophy at Alexandria. The Valentinian system was a prototype of Pelagianism. Pelagius taught that the law as well as the gospel can lead one to heaven and that man is able to enter heaven by virtue of his moral actions. A translation of the “Gospel of Philip” can be found in *New Testament Apocrypha, Volume One: Gospels and Related Writings* by Wilhelm Schneemelcher, pp. 179-208. There is good reason why this work is apocryphal and not canonical. God was *not* the author. Constantine did not suppress it – the Truth did.

But back to Brown's book. Jesus, the man, the book explains, married Mary Magdalene, who was pregnant at the crucifixion. She fled to France where she raised her daughter, Sarah, who carried down Christ's bloodline to this day. *The Da Vinci Code* is so popular that it has brought Brown's earlier book, *Angels & Demons* to the bestseller list along side it. A film is planned (who could pass up such a lucrative property?). The book was the basis for an hour-long special, called "Jesus, Mary and Da Vinci," that aired recently on ABC television. The New York Times (November 23, 2003) called the show “an unholy mishmash -- part ‘Unsolved Mysteries,’ part PBS documentary.” Because of the serious tone of the program “the Brown hypothesis was elevated into news.”

The book plainly and blatantly denies Christ, repudiates the Bible, and has been widely embraced with accolades. While we cannot expect the *world* to revere the Lord or the Bible, the cavalier manner in which they are regarded in the popular media is still shocking. Dan Brown *is* an antichrist.

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## What *Not* To Name the Baby

Biblical names can usually be found on the “most popular” lists of baby names. In 2003, the top ten names for boys included Caleb (Num. 13:6), Jacob (Gen. 25:25), Alexander (Acts 4:6), and Andrew (Matt. 4:18). Names for girls included Hannah (1 Sam. 1:2), Abigail (1 Sam. 25:3), and Elizabeth (Lk. 1:5). Following is the “top ten” list of names *not* to give to the baby:

10. Shephuphan (1 Chr. 8:5)
9. Zelophehad (Num. 26:33)
8. Ishbibenob (2 Sam. 21:16)
7. Jushabhesed (1 Chr. 3:20)
6. Berodachbaladan (2 Kin. 20:12)
5. Tilgathpilneser (1 Chr. 5:6)
4. Merodachbaladan (Isa. 39:1)
3. Zaphnathpaaneah (Gen. 41:45)
2. Chushanrishathaim (Jud. 3:8)
1. Mahershalalhashbaz (Isa. 8:3)