

## Topic

### ● I THE BIBLE AND TRADITION

- A A minister said to me,
  - 1 **"Everything I need to believe is in the Bible"**
    - a Is it? Can it be?
    - b It seems as if Martin Luther taught that it was
      - (1) His religious motto was **"Sola scriptura" – scripture alone**
      - (2) **Luther was reacting to the Catholic Church offering many teachings not based anywhere in the Bible**
      - (3) Those Church teachings not founded upon the Bible, called "Tradition," seemed to him to be the cause of many of the evils in Christianity
        - (a) And there were evils -- people in his area were being told to buy their way into Heaven
        - (b) The widespread ignorance and superstition of the time made these evils easier to believe
  - 2 **The Catholic Church reacted to Luther's claim**
    - a Not everything needed for salvation is in the Bible
    - b The Church responded calling for faith in the Living Tradition of the Church as well as in the Bible
    - c Tradition is the **"Living Faith of the Church" – Jesus!**
  - 3 **Since Luther's time, Catholics and Protestants have waged a long argument between the two positions**
- B Today: mature Catholic and Lutheran scholars agree there is no argument on this point
  - 1 Recently they offered a document testifying to this agreement
  - 2 The reason for this harmony is easy to understand
    - a **It is impossible for everything needed for our faith to come from the Bible**
    - b **One truth cannot be and is not found in the Bible**
      - (1) And its a crucial fact or truth -- increasing in importance the more one wants to rely solely on the Bible
      - (2) **The truth not in Bible is the list of the Booklets that belong in the Bible!**
      - (3) Nearly no Biblical booklet tells us that it is inspired and belongs in the Bible
  - 3 **The Living Faith of the Church decided which booklets to accept and which to reject**
    - a Many other booklets were written at the same time the Biblical booklets were written
      - (1) They, too, were composed during the period of writing for both Testaments
      - (2) Yet they were not included in the scriptures accepted by any major religion
    - b **The Living Faith of the Church did not accept these as inspired writings, as more than just religious writings**
  - 4 **The Church existed for almost an entire generation before any New Testament booklet was written**
    - a And yet people were being saved
    - b Some Living Tradition helped them know and accept this salvation
  - 5 **The Living Faith of Church produced each booklet**
  - 6 **And this same Living Faith of Church is needed to assure accurate interpretations**
  - 7 The Living Faith of the Church does this, not the feelings of each individual, not individual interpretations of each individual booklet
    - a Individual feelings might be wrong
    - b The Living Faith isn't
      - (1) The Bible helps the Church be sure if its Tradition is true to the Bible
      - (2) **And Tradition helps the Church grasp the significance of the Bible**

### ● II CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

- A We can only read the Bible in a language which we understand
  - 1 Earlier we saw how differently the Hebrew and/or Greek understanding of certain words was from ours

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- 2 A few additional examples can reinforce the point
  - a Psalm 111:10
    - (1) The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.
    - (2) Hebrew has only one word that encompasses both
      - (a) "Fear" -- a negative reaction to the presence of some force stronger, greater, than we are; a reaction that cautions us to withdraw
      - (b) "Awe" -- a positive reaction to the presence of some force stronger, greater, than we are; a reaction that urges us to approach
  - b Mark 6:51
    - (1) Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed. 52 for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.
    - (2) "Heart"
      - (a) The Hebrew word is a synonym for the mind, the symbolic place for thinking --
        - [1] Notice the text says, "for they had not understood about the loaves;"
        - [2] Understanding implies thinking, not feeling
      - (b) The English word is a synonym for the heart, the symbolic place for feeling --
        - [1] We would understand a "hardened" heart as a stubborn heart
        - [2] To the Biblical writer a "hardened heart" meant a "closed mind"
- B In a similar fashion, we can only read the Bible according to the values of our culture
  - 1 Recent studies have focused upon the Mediterranean culture at the time of Jesus
    - a These studies have discovered major differences between this culture and ours
    - b These differences should alter our interpretation of many Biblical stories
  - 2 Matthew 5:13
    - a "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men."
    - b 14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.
    - c 15 "Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."
  - 3 Cultural anthropology has offered a new understanding of these words of Jesus
    - a Before:
      - (1) Salt was seen as something used for ( 1) seasoning or ( 2) preserving food
      - (2) Most people stressed its use for preserving food as underlying the meaning of this text
      - (3) They struggled (whichever of the two uses of salt they selected) to explain how salt "loses its saltiness" -- chemically impossible
    - b Today
      - (1) We have discovered a third, far more common and far more important, usage of salt in the ancient Jewish culture
      - (2) It was used to start fires burning
        - (a) Since wood was very scarce in the Holy Land, it was rarely used for heating
        - (b) Yet there was a daily need for a fire to heat the oven/stove used for baking bread and cooking meals
        - (c) The Jews used dried animal dung for these fires
        - (d) They discovered that if they placed chunks of dung around a block of salt, the dung burned quicker and hotter
        - (e) Sooner or later, whatever there was in the salt block that allowed it to serve as a catalyst for the fire stopped working
        - (f) When the block reached this point, the chunk of salt was broken up and tossed outside the door of the home to help pave the entry

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- 4 Proof that this usage of salt is the one intended by Jesus comes from the parallel image that follows
  - a Matthew 5:14
    - (1) "You are the light of the world"
  - b Both "salt" and "light" refer to a burning flame
  - c Jewish thought very often uses repetitive images to teach
- C **An important new insight into the meaning of Biblical passages comes from our understanding of other significant differences between the Jewish culture and ours**
  - 1 Our culture accents the individual person and a small, "nuclear" family; the Jewish culture spotlighted the extended family, the clan
    - a Each individual was taught early in life to sacrifice himself for the good of his family
      - (1) We find such self sacrifice difficult to picture
      - (2) For this reason, we must strive to read the Bible in the light of the culture in which and for which it was written, not in the light of the values of our culture
    - b This sacrifice came easily since just about every aspect of his/her life depended upon the extended family
      - (1) Education
      - (2) Career -- the family business, trade, or farming plots
      - (3) Recreation
      - (4) Religion
      - (5) And, most important of all in the absence of local "police:" protection
  - 2 **Our culture stresses achievement; their culture stressed honor/shame**
    - a We respect people striving, accomplishing, advancing
      - (1) And we have no respect for people who slack off
      - (2) And we have even less respect for quitters
      - (3) The more a person achieves, advances, the more the person is respected
    - b **The Jewish, Mediterranean culture, had no respect for achievement**
      - (1) Advancing too much made a person stand out from his family
      - (2) Such advancement brought shame to the rest of the family
      - (3) People were to remain in their profession and social category
        - (a) Jesus shamed His family/clan by leaving them and setting out on His own mission
        - (b) Not Mary and Joseph, but His larger clan of relatives were shamed by His actions
    - c The basis of their culture was honor/shame
      - (1) It stressed achieving honor and avoiding shame -- like the culture of Japan during World War II
      - (2) **The culture believed there was a limited amount of honor, like a lump of honor**
        - (a) **If one family/person was honored (got more honor) all the other families or some other family of necessity lost some**
        - (b) **Therefore every encounter outside one's own family was an honor/shame struggle**
          - [1] If you get honor, we lose it
          - [2] If we shame you, (strip you of some or all of your honor,) we gain honor
          - [3] Remember: it's the honor of the clan, the family, that's at stake in such encounters, not that of the individual
      - (c) Every question posed to one outside of his/her family inaugurated an honor/shame challenge
        - [1] A poor answer shamed a person (and his clan)
        - [2] This background explains why the enemies of Jesus constantly confront Him with questions
          - [a] Mark 2:16
            - (1) When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

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- [b] Mark 2:18
  - {1} Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. **Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"**
- (c) Mark 7:5
  - {1} So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?"
- [d] Mark 12:13
  - {1} Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodeans to Jesus to catch him in his words.
  - {2} 14 They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"
  - {3} 15 Should we pay or shouldn't we?"
- (e) Mark 12:18
  - {1} Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question.
  - {2} 19 "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother.
  - {3} 20 Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children.
  - {4} 21 The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third.
  - {5} 22 In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too.
  - {6} 23 At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"
- [f] Mark 12:28
  - {1} One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"
- (3) **Jesus left His family and created a new one with the group that followed Him**
  - (a) Mark 1:16
    - [1] As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.
    - [2] 17 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." 18 At once they left their nets and followed him.
    - [3] 19 When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. 20 Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.
  - (b) Mark 3:31
    - [1] Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."
    - [2] 33 "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.
    - [3] 34 Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."
  - (c) **When Mark wrote the "followers of Jesus" were the Church**
    - [1] **And the Church was engaged in a bitter contest for its existence and for its evangelization with the synagogue**
    - [2] **Mark was inspired to select stories from the life of Jesus that were relevant to support the Church in this struggle**
      - [a] **Both Jesus and His followers, in the selected stories, represent the honor of Mark's Church**

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- [b] **And the Jewish leaders represent the synagogue**
  - {1} **In the actual, historical, life of Jesus, the Pharisees played little, if any, part in opposing and condemning Him**
    - {a} They disappear in all four Gospels during the Passion, from His arrest to His death
    - {b} And they are replaced by the major historical foes: the leading priests and Biblical experts (variously called "lawyers, [of Biblical, not political, law,] scribes, or experts of the law)
  - {2} Early in the life of the Church, the historical enemies (centered around the Temple,) had disappeared and had been replaced by Pharisees (centered around the synagogue)
    - {a} When the Romans destroyed the Temple with its animal sacrifice, the groups based on it lost their position in Jewish society
    - {b} Judaism then focused upon the synagogue, led by the rabbis and Pharisees
  - ((1)) **Each confrontation between Jewish leaders and Jesus was a confrontation between the honor of the synagogue and the honor of the Church**
    - ((a)) **Therefore Mark has Jesus always best His opponents in debate**
    - ((b)) Usually, He responds to their question with one of His own -- now their honor, not His, is directly challenged
  - Mark 2:16
    - *When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?"*
    - *17 On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*
    - Notice that the Pharisees directly challenge "His disciples," (the Church,) not Jesus
    - {d} This argument probably was initiated with a challenge thrown at the Church in the time of Mark
      - {a} The enemies claimed that Christians had demeaned themselves by associating with social outcasts
      - {b} Jesus answers for the Church, turning such association into a badge of honor, not disrespect
  - Mark 2:18
    - *Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"*
    - *19 Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them."*
    - This time Jesus is questioned about a practice of the Church (the opposite situation as above)
    - This argument also was initiated with a challenge thrown at the Church in the time of Mark
      - {a} It accused the followers of Jesus of shaming themselves by ignoring one of the most respected practices of Judaism
      - {b} Jesus answered for His Church,
        - {a} Since He, the "bridegroom," is with the Church, His disciples would dishonor Him (and, thus, themselves,) by fasting, (mourning,) during a time of celebration
        - {b} By celebrating His presence, the Church honors, not shames, both Jesus and itself
        - {c} And Jesus was with the Church after He had risen to heaven, chosen by His Spirit, His life force, present within each of them
  - Mark 12:13

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- Then they sent to Him some of the Pharisees and the Herodeans, to catch Him in His words.
- 14 When they had come, they said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and care about no one; for You do not regard the person of men, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"
- 15 "Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?" But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why do you test Me? Bring Me a denarius that I may see it."
- 16 So they brought it. And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's."
- 17 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at Him.
- {f} The ore of each coin came from the mines of the emperor
  - {a} To show the ore (and, therefore, the coin) belonged to the emperor, he had his image stamped on it
  - {b} Jesus uses the emperor's right to the coin to resolve the argument
- {g} But, He goes on to point out a much more important truth
  - God has stamped His image upon each and every one of us
  - Genesis 1:26
    - Then God said, "Let Us make man [the word used here actually means "humanity."] in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."
    - 27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them
  - Since we are made in God's image, "stamped" in His image, we belong to Him -- entirely!
  - Therefore, we are to offer all of ourselves to God
- d Remembering the importance of honor/shame alters our understanding of how the Passion is narrated
  - (1) We focus upon the pain Jesus experienced, although such pain is never accented in the telling of the Passion
    - (a) **The actual crucifixion is described in the barest of terms**
    - (b) There is no comment, no exaggerated focus upon the pain
      - [1] Mark 15:22
        - [a] They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull).
        - [b] 23 Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.
        - [c] 24 And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.
      - [2] Jesus is offered wine to dull the pain -- and prolong the shame of the crucifixion
      - [3] None of the acts involved with crucifying Him are described
        - [a] The nailing of hands
        - [b] The lifting of the cross piece
        - [c] The nailing of the feet
    - (c) **All the focus is upon shaming Jesus**
      - [1] **He is mocked (shamed) on three separate occasions**
      - [2] Mark 14:64
        - [a] "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as worthy of death.

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- [b] 65 Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him.
- [c] **Jesus is mocked as "prophet"**
- [d] Ironically He is proved to be a prophet
  - {1} He had earlier predicted that Peter would deny Him 3 times
  - {2} Peter is in the midst of these denials at this very moment
- [3] **Mark 15:16**
  - [a] The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorian) and called together the whole company of soldiers.
  - [b] 17 They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. 18 And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!"
  - [c] 19 Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spat on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him.
  - [d] 20 And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.
  - [e] **Jesus is mocked as king**
    - {1} All the details are selected as signs of mockery,
      - {a} The purple robe mockingly recalls a king's robe
      - {b} The crown of thorns mockingly recalls the royal crown
      - {c} The traditional greeting to a king is paid -- discredited by the shameful horror of spitting
      - {d} Striking Jesus with a staff mockingly recalls the royal scepter of a king
    - {2} We read the mockery to exaggerate the infliction of pain
      - {a} Pain was certainly intended
      - {b} But pain was not inflicted for its own sake
      - {c} It was inflicted for a more important purpose: to mete out simultaneous shame
  - [f] Ironically, at this moment, He begins His reign as a king
    - {1} The thorns shape His true crown
    - {2} The cross becomes His throne
- [4] **Mark 15:27**
  - [a] They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left.
  - [b] 28 29 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 come down from the cross and save yourself!"
  - [c] 31 In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself!"
  - [d] 32 Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.
  - [e] **He is mocked as Christ, as Savior**
  - [f] Ironically, at this moment, He accomplishes His own and our salvation
- (2) Now we can understand the way the early Church described the Resurrection
  - (a) **The earliest texts do not say Jesus "rose"**
  - (b) **Rather they tell us He was "raised up" by the Father**
    - [1] **Matthew 16:21**
      - [a] From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.
    - [2] **Matthew 17:9**
      - [a] As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."
    - [3] **Matthew 17:22**

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- [a] *When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.*
  - [b] *23 They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life."* And the disciples were filled with grief.
- [4] Matthew 20:18
  - [a] *"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death*
  - [b] *19 and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!*
- (3) **Jesus was shamed, put down, by the Jewish leaders and Pilate**
  - (a) They inflicted on Him the ultimate act of shame known to His culture: crucifixion
  - (b) He was stripped naked (completely shamed) to die slowly (prolonged pain and shame) before the gaze of all
- (4) By "raising" Jesus up, God reverses the action of the leaders by a counteraction of His own
  - (a) Philippians 2:5
    - [1] *5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,*
    - [2] *7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*
    - [3] *8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*
    - [4] *9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.*
    - [5] *10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*
  - (b) He offers Jesus the ultimate act of honor
  - (c) In doing this, in countering the shame, God rejects all the values of the world
  - (d) God's values are the opposite of the world's values
    - [1] The world rejects service and suffering
    - [2] God pronounces that service and suffering are the only values He honors
- (5) **We are challenged as much today by God's action as was the culture of the world at the time of Mark**
  - (a) We honor glory and acquisition
  - (b) God honors humiliation and service
- III LITERARY INTERPRETATION
  - A Traditionally, the Bible is both preached, read, and studied as a series of separate stories
    - 1 It is read as if it were a collection of separate pictures in a photograph album
    - 2 **In the reading and studying, little, if any attention is given to the context of a story in its Booklet**
  - B Recent Biblical interpretation challenges us to a new approach
    - 1 No booklet of the Bible was written or intended to be heard and/or read as a series of independent snippets
    - 2 Each individual and entire booklet, the work as a whole, offers the writer's unique experience of God and the importance for us (i.e. the truths) of that experience
      - a In a few instances, more than one booklet is to be read as a whole to unlock the booklet's teaching
      - b A single booklet was separated in its written form because of the limitations of the length of a papyrus roll
        - (1) 1 & 2 Samuel
        - (2) 1 & 2 Kings
        - (3) 1 & 2 Chronicles
      - c And in another instance many booklets need to be heard and read as one

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- (1) From Genesis through 2 Kings, the booklets are to be seen as one -- the story of God's People from their call through their fall (to Babylon) and exile
- (2) **The single work cautions all generations in the People of God, the Church, to abjure false idols and remain loyal to God**
  - (a) The work reflects an experience of a God who must be true to Himself
  - (b) **God cannot, did not, and will not defend a people serving other gods, other values**
    - [1] This God broke into history to rescue, mold, guide, and protect a people
    - [2] He offers them the security of their own land
    - [3] And then cautions them to rely on Him alone
      - [a] Not to rely on foreign political alliances
      - [b] Nor to rely on idols
- (3) **The theme of the work is spelled out in a series of sermons in Deuteronomy**
  - (a) This book is a series of sermonettes that Moses offers the people
    - [1] The people are about to cross the Jordan river 40 years after escaping from slavery in Egypt and to begin taking possession of the land God is offering them
    - [2] **Not needing God, they will be lured away from Him**
  - (b) Since Moses dies at the conclusion of the book, the sermons are his "farewell discourse"
  - (c) Deuteronomy 30:15
    - [1] See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction.
    - [2] 16 For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.
    - [3] 17 But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them,
    - [4] 18 I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.
    - (e) 19 This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live
    - [6] 20 and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- (4) **These cautions remain as valid for the Church today as they were for the People of God who first received them**
- (5) The whole collection of booklets explains the tragedy of Israel's and Judah's histories
  - (a) Their defeats by Assyria and Babylon
  - (b) The destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple
  - (c) The dispersion of the ten northern tribes, (the "Lost Tribes,") and the exile of the leadership of the southern tribe of Judah
- (6) **One editor compiled information from many sources**
  - (a) **He offered an interpretation of history to the exiles**
  - (b) **They were not defeated because the gods of the Babylonians were stronger than Yahweh, Judah's God**
  - (c) **On the contrary, they were defeated because they did not rely on Yahweh, relying instead**
    - [1] On foreign allies
    - [2] And on pagan gods and goddesses
  - (d) **Again: the warning is timeless**
    - [1] **Alliances with the "Egypt" of today will not save us**
    - [2] **Nor will sacrificing our children to false values -- like materialism, greed, self-centeredness**

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- (7) **Inside the separate booklets, the stories used were never intended to stand as isolated reports**
  - (a) If they are read isolated from each other, their meaning can be lost
  - (b) Sadly, we just listen to the separate units
    - [1] In the preaching we hear
    - [2] And in our individual interpretations of the Bible
- **C Example: a strange case where Jesus seems to fail on his first attempt to heal blindness**
  - **1 Mark 8:22**
    - a *They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him.*
    - b *23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spat on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?"*
    - c *24 He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."*
    - d *25 Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.*
    - e The story was so embarrassing that neither Matthew nor Luke used it
    - f In the context of Mark, the story was/is very profound: a prologue to a whole section that follows
  - **2 Crucial events, central to our understanding of Jesus, are about to unfold**
    - a Before this point of the Gospel, the disciples have experienced Jesus offering Himself to a people who had a variety of needs
    - b Through the gift of Jesus, the people are made whole
    - c **These healings are impressive and misleading**
      - (1) They allow us to focus upon the power of Jesus
      - (2) And they allow us to conclude, wrongly, from that focus
        - (a) **Jesus is a Christ of power**
        - (b) **He is a Christ who will use His power to defeat all their political enemies**
  - **3 Jesus wishes to protect the disciples from these errors**
    - a **He takes the disciples aside as He starts His journey to Jerusalem to suffer and die**
    - b **Three times He privately teaches them – He takes them aside**
      - (1) He is not a Christ of political power
      - (2) Rather He is the Son of Man who saves us by dying!
      - (3) In order that we may experience glory, He invites us to take up our cross and follow Him!
    - (4) **Mark 8:29**
      - (a) *"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." 30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.*
      - (b) *31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.*
      - (c) *34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it."*
    - (5) **Mark 9: 30**
      - (a) *They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, 31 because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise."*
    - (6) **Mark 10:32**
      - (a) *They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him.*

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- (b) "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles.
- (c) 34 who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."
- c Each scene of teaching is immediately followed by one that shows the disciples still do not understand
  - (1) **They are still seeking**
    - (a) **To talk Jesus out of doing God's will – Peter**
      - [1] Mark 8:32
        - [a] He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.
      - (b) Or to argue about greatness when He goes to serve with humiliation
        - [1] Mark 9:32
          - [a] But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it. 33 They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" 34 But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.
      - (c) Or to seek power and prestige -- sitting at the right and left -- when He is establishing a community of service
        - [1] Mark 10:35
          - [a] Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." 36 "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. 37 They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."
    - (2) In short, despite the attempts of Jesus to remove their spiritual blindness, the disciples still do not see Him clearly
  - 4 **The entire section, the whole journey concludes with a second healing of a blind person**
    - a Mark 10:46
      - (1) Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging.
      - (2) 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"
      - (3) 49 Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." 50 Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.
      - (4) 51 "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."
      - (5) 52 "Go," said Jesus. "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.
    - b **We are to note the similarities within the section**
      - (1) **Three times Jesus attempted to remove physical blindness**
        - (a) Twice with the unnamed man at the start of the journey
        - (b) Once with Bartimaeus at the end
      - (2) Three times Jesus attempted to remove spiritual blindness -- the passion announcements
    - c **There is a Markan technique used often in the Gospel**
      - (1) **One story is placed within another**
      - (2) **And they both interpret each other, shed light upon each other**
      - (3) **This technique is used in this section**
        - (a) The outer healings reveal what Jesus is trying to do all through the journey
        - (b) And the inner stories (including others not cited here) warn all the disciples of Jesus not to be confident regarding their understanding of Jesus

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- [1] Disciples will always want Jesus to reject suffering
- [2] Disciples will always argue regarding who among them is most important
- [3] Disciples will always seek glory and honor
- (c) But Jesus continues to teach us by touching our hearts with His love in order to change our inadequate spiritual vision into true vision, true spiritual sight
- 5 This whole section warns us:
  - a The people Jesus touched received, at times, only partial vision
  - b The disciples Jesus taught received only partial vision
  - c How presumptuous and dangerous for us to think we have good vision!
- D Conclusions
  - 1 We should always be careful about teachings and conclusions based solely on isolated Biblical units
  - 2 We, and preachers and teachers, must always place stories in their context
  - 3 We should not try to read separate stories for individual teachings
  - 4 We should continue to look to see how this unit, in its entire context, enriches our experience of Jesus and/or the Father
- IV AN EXAMPLE APPLYING ALL THIS: THE BOOK OF JONAH
  - A Most take this story as a factually true account
    - 1 And at the same time, these people believe the story about the Good Samaritan is fictional
    - 2 To a neutral observer the story of the Good Samaritan seems more probable, more historical
  - B Scholars today have looked at the Literary Form of the booklet of Jonah
    - 1 It's "Didactic Fiction"
      - a It is a story with a teaching
      - b It is like a parable, but longer -- like a longer form of the Good Samaritan
      - c In this literary form all the details are selected with a view toward the teaching
    - 2 And, like a parable, there is no attempt to teach any of the details as true
    - 3 These details are selected and molded solely for the sake of the intended teaching
  - C Consider Jonah
    - 1 He is the only person who believes in the God of Israel in the whole booklet
      - a And yet he's presented as a stinker all through the story
      - b He never does one good thing willingly!
        - (1) God says "Go west;" he sails east!
        - (2) During the storm, he's the only person who doesn't pray
        - (3) And he's bitter when his "revival" is successful, the people repent, and God spares the town!
    - 2 By contrast every pagan is made to look good
      - a The pagan crew prays during the storm
      - b Learning Jonah is the cause of their grief, they still do all they can to save him
      - c The people of Nineveh fast and repent, -- even their animals fast and repent
  - D Consider also the Big fish
    - 1 Jonah 1:17
      - a But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.
    - 2 "Fish" as written in Hebrew used letters that could also be used to spell Babylon
    - 3 The story echoed God's call and Israel's reaction to this call
      - a Israel was given a mission by God to save the world, to be the light of His love to all
      - b Israel, like Jonah, refused the mission

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- (1) **The nation, after the exile when the story was written, hated foreigners**
- (2) For this reason Jonah disobeyed the mission God gave him
  - (a) He fears Nineveh *will* repent
    - [1] First, he was a prophet who didn't want to speak the words God told him to
    - [2] Next, he was a prophet who didn't want his words to be heard and accepted
  - (b) And, then, he feared that God would spare the repenting town -- as God did
    - [1] He wanted them destroyed, not spared
    - [2] He was bitter when they were spared by God
- (3) Judah, (the remnant of Israelites,) was carried off to Babylon for a 70 year exile - this exile explained the 3 days Jonah spent in the belly of the great fish ("Babylon")
- (4) The exiles were allowed to return after 70 years - this return explained Jonah being burped up by big fish
- (5) **Judah was then challenged to renew its mission - not be bitter like Jonah**
- E There is a message in this extended parable:
  - 1 **The author had experienced**
    - a **A God of universal love, a God whose love must be "catholic"**
    - b **A God of forgiving love**
  - 2 This experience of God is the truth that is shared by the booklet and guaranteed by God
    - a God's love is for all
    - b And He desires, needs, wants, the repentance of all
    - c **The OT God is not, as so many think, a God of vengeance**
      - (1) He's a God of mercy
      - (2) He's a God of love
      - (3) He's a God of universal love
- F **The tale is not intended to be read as historically factual**
  - 1 **No names (not even of the king) or dates or historical events are alluded to or cited**
  - 2 Only the main plot line is pursued
  - 3 Even the Jews did not put it with historical books! -- They listed it with the Prophets
  - 4 **"Never in all of history has a great city like Nineveh been converted by one short sermon given by a missionary who spoke of a foreign God delivered in a foreign language -- and who didn't want to convert his listeners anyway!"**
- G **Conclusion**
  - 1 **Nothing is lost by understanding the literary form of this booklet as Didactic Fiction and reading the tale in this light**
  - 2 The teaching of the booklet is better spot-lighted
  - 3 **And all distracting side issues are eliminated**
    - a Archeological evidence proves that Nineveh was never a fraction as large as described in the booklet
    - b How did Jonah survive three days in the stomach of a fish?
    - c And we have no record of Nineveh ever repenting
  - 4 **Fundamentalists can believe in the reality of the separate details**
    - a God certainly can accomplish them
    - b And, remember, history has found no record of Nineveh's repentance
  - 5 **Both interpretations teach the same facet of our God which must be believed and witnessed**
    - a We must not repeat the error of Jonah and of Israel
    - b The booklet stands as a warning to the Church, the New Israel
    - c We can never be complacent about the gifts we have received

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- V FINAL POINT: THE CLOSING OF THE CANON
  - A There is an important difference between Private and Public revelation
    - 1 **"Public revelation" ended with the closing of the New Testament**
      - a There is a good reason it closed: all of God's love had been revealed to us in and through Jesus
        - (1) Jesus revealed this love by dying
        - (2) God stood naked to us -- symbolically much more than physically -- on the cross
        - (3) The pierced heart of Jesus allowed us to see into the most intimate recesses of our God
          - (a) John 19:33
            - [1] But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.
            - [2] 35 The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.
            - [3] 36 These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken,"
            - [4] 37 and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."
      - b The Church required around a century to sharpen its grasp of this Love and its implications for us
      - c **When the New Testament was completed, this understanding of God was guaranteed**
      - d God had nothing more to offer us, nothing more that we needed for our "salvation"
    - 2 Christians do not need God to inspire
      - a A Book of Mormon
      - b The writings of Mary Baker Eddy
      - c Or the Moslem Koran
    - 3 **But private revelation continues**
      - a God allows individuals to experience His love
      - b He seems to do this, some think, through appearances of Mary as well as of Jesus
  - B **We must never forget the difference between public and private revelation**
    - 1 **No private revelation need ever be believed for us to be saved**
      - a **Private revelations add nothing to our understanding of God's Love in Jesus**
        - (1) They can't since that love is manifested completely on the cross and from the empty grave
        - (2) Believing in the message of a private revelation might help some individuals experience Jesus who alone offers salvation to us
      - b **But nothing offered in such revelation is necessary for this experience of Jesus**
        - (1) Nor can such private revelations add to the mystery and wonder of the cross
        - (2) The cross assures us that God offers all of His Love to each and to all
        - (3) And nothing can be added to the "all" of God's Love for us
    - 2 **Public revelation, however, is necessary for a correct experience of Jesus; private revelation is not**
      - a **We need to come to know the meaning of the cross if our understanding of God's Love is to be complete**
      - b For some, private revelations might assist them in their efforts to understand the cross
      - c But believing in such private revelations is not necessary!
      - d A Christian is not a "second class Catholic" if he/she ignores or rejects as valid
        - (1) Lourdes
        - (2) Fatima
        - (3) And all the other reported appearances of Mary
    - 3 **No Christian, Catholic or other, can know full salvation, if he or she does not come to believe, through the cross, that "Jesus Christ is Lord"**