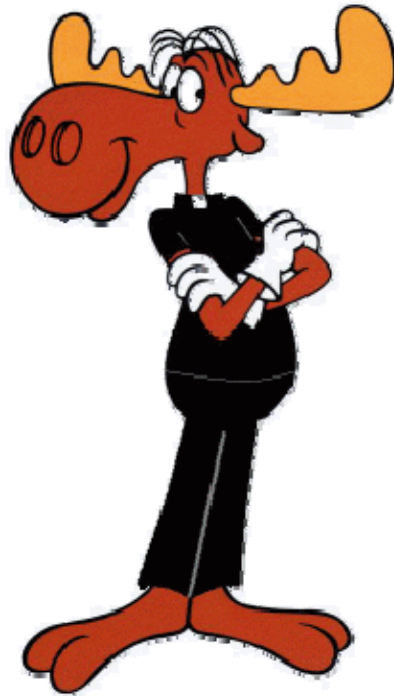


THE REV. KNOW-IT-ALL'S  
GUIDE TO READING  
THE BIBLE,  
THAT BIG BOOK  
ON THE COFFEE TABLE



# The Rev. Know-it-all's Guide to Reading the Bible

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## The Rev. Know-it-all's Guide to Reading the Bible

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Fr. Richard Simon  
Spreading the Faith the Old Fashioned Way

First a note to my dear friends in cyberspace. Until very recently, I was working with goose quill pens and carrier pigeons. Until recently, I didn't even know how to turn on a computer. I write these fulminations for the parish bulletin. I really have nothing to do with my blog spot and not a lot to do with my website. Some very unbalanced people, who actually read what I write, have taken it on themselves to create these spaces, and, though I suspect that their doctors should increase their medications, I am very grateful to them.

Some people have asked why I don't respond to bloggers. I have tried but I can't seem to figure out how to do it. I read the comments and am very grateful for them, most of them. I try to answer all the E-mails I get from the column and the radio show, but sometimes I just get a sinking feeling and start humming "Nearer My God to Thee." By the way, if you are really a glutton for punishment, you can hear my sermons at the [St. Lambert Parish](#), (Skokie) web site and one can hear any "Go Ask Your Father" show at the archives of Relevant Radio. Just Google in [Relevant Radio](#), click on the archives at the home page, and then click on Go Ask Your Father. A calendar will pop up. Then you click on the show you want to hear. You can also hear Fr. Rocky and Monsignor Swetland who are both truly smart people and who, unlike your friend, the Rev. Know it all, don't have to make things up. While you're at the Relevant Radio Web site, you might as well listen to the whole bunch like Sean and Drew and Sheila and Wendy. They are an amazing bunch.

Humor aside, I cannot tell you how grateful I am to those who make these columns so widely available, especially the webmaster, Jim Frommeyer. He's the only one whose name I actually know. May it be for the glory of God, the salvation of souls and the up building of the Church.

You are in my prayers,  
Fr. S.

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*Dear Rev. Know it all,*

*Who did the sons of Adam and Eve marry?*

*Patiently yours,*

*Eve Anne Gellikal*

Dear Eve,

They married their wives.

Sincerely,  
the Rev. Know it all

PS I imagine you would like a more detailed answer than that. This will take some time, and so I have decided to answer your question with a long harangue of which this is the first installment.

THE REV. KNOW IT ALL'S GUIDE TO READING THE BIBLE, THAT BIG BOOK ON THE COFFEE TABLE. Part 1

### **GOD HATES METHOD – HE LOVES PRINCIPLE**

Let me begin by quoting my favorite theologian, the Rev. Billy Bob. "God hates method. He loves principle." Do not misread the preceding. God hates method, not Methodists. God loves Methodists very much. No one can put on a church supper like Methodists.

What is the Rev. Billy Bob trying to say? An example: You go to the Thursday prayer meeting and that Thursday you are in charge of the prayer ministry. You are wearing your favorite bowling shirt, your red feedlot cap and your St. Christopher medal. Before you sit, an afflicted soul who has come for healing prayer with the worst case of athlete's foot in medical history enters the room. You anoint him with holy water, praying in tongues all the while with the laying on of hands and conclude with three Hail Mary's. And much to your shock he is instantly healed!

You now know how to heal the sick. You wear your favorite bowling shirt, your red feedlot cap and your St. Christopher medal. You anoint with holy water, praying in tongues with the laying on of hands and conclude with three Hail Mary's. So you do the same thing next week, now that you have the gift of healing, and nothing happens. The

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minute you think you've got God down to a method He does things a different way. God hates method. He loves principle.

This is the point that St. Paul is trying to make when he talks about works of the law. "...a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ..." Galatians 2:16. There is only one place other than the New Testament in all of ancient literature where the phrase "works of the law" appears. It is in the Dead Sea Scroll 4QMMT: "Miqtsat Ma'asei ha Torah" ("Precepts of the Works of the Law"). It seems to be written by Essenes to Pharisees about ritual purity. In the scroll 4QMMT we read in ruling 16 "Concerning streams of liquid; we have determined that they are not intrinsically pure. Indeed, streams of liquid do not form a barrier between the pure and the impure for the liquid that is in the stream and that in its receptacle become as one liquid." So there! Take that, you loose and liberal Pharisees!

(What the heck is this guy talking about????)Simply this: If a clay bowl is unclean and you pour water from a clay pitcher into the bowl, the uncleanness leaps up the stream of water and pollutes the pitcher and both must be broken! Surely you remember this from your reading of Leviticus? The scroll ends with "Now we have written you some of the works of the law which we determined would be beneficial to you."

When Paul talks about works of the law, he is saying that we are not saved by this ritual nonsense, but by conversion of heart and mind. 500 years ago Luther decided that Paul was saying that we don't have to do anything to go to heaven. Paul would have been a bit surprised at that conclusion (Romans 2:24), as would Jesus (Matt7:23). In fact, St. James says that it is clear we are not saved by faith alone, but by works also (James 2:24)

If Luther had understood that the phrase "works of the law" was about ritual purity and not about kindness and mercy, and that Paul simply wanted to explain that these external rituals of kosher law don't save, he would have spared the world a lot of trouble. It is always intriguing to me that people who talk loudly about dead works and salvation by faith alone constantly try to get people who were baptized as infants by the pouring of water to be re-baptized by a very specific formula as adults and only by immersion. They believe in method, not in principle. Whether they admit it or not they are professing salvation by a work of law.

We want to reduce the Bible to a set of rules. It is a book of principles, the principles of the Kingdom of Heaven. That is not to say that rules are unimportant. On the Contrary! For children, good rules are essential and we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven unless we are like little children. These rules however, depend on love and trust and a

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desire to obey the Father who loves us. They are rules that teach the principles of the Kingdom. They are not rules that we can get around, rules that enable us to do as little as possible. They are instructions in the very character of God.

The prayer of the pagan is "God, give me what I want." the prayer of the Christian is "Lord, teach me your ways." (Psalm 25:4, 86:11,27,11 and the whole rest of the Bible.) The Bible is not a science text, it is not a history text, it is not a rule book. It has all these things in it, but it is primarily a collection of books that deal with the way God has loved us since the beginning of time.

So here is principle #1

THE BIBLE EXISTS TO TEACH US GOD'S WAY OF DOING THINGS, HIS CHARACTER, HIS PRINCIPLES AND HIS PROMISES.

## Part 2:

### YOU SHOULDN'T JUDGE A BIBLE BY ITS COVER!

Many years ago my mother, one of the finest, kindest and wisest people I have ever known, decided to read the Bible cover to cover. Somewhere around the story of Lot and his daughters, she called me and asked, "Have you any idea what's in this book!?!?"

Never try to read the bible cover to cover. If you do, it will make less sense than before you started the project. That's because the Bible isn't a book. It's a library. How often have you heard people say that the Bible isn't true? To say the Bible isn't true is like walking into the lobby of a library and shouting, "This library is wrong!" Which section is wrong? The history section? The science section? The poetry section? The Bible is a library of 73 books - only 66 if you're a Protestant. It contains poetry, ancient history, law, prophecy, and much, much more! If you go into the poetry section of a library and say that this isn't very good science, you would be right, but by the same token if you go into the science section you wouldn't expect much poetry. Therein lies the problem with treating the Bible like a book. If you think it is somehow a continuous narrative whose purpose is primarily historical you are going to be very confused.

In the Books of the Bible, the Holy Spirit tells us the truth about God and the way He has related to humanity over a 2000-year period from about 2000 BC to about 65AD. How can you tell what's poetry and what's history and what's prophecy? Simple. Listen to those that God has made authoritative teachers, namely the apostles. "But the Apostles are dead, aren't they?" Some are, some aren't.

First of all what do we mean by "apostle?" If you think apostles are those twelve guys who followed Jesus around you are only partly right. Luke 6:13 "*When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles*". The noun apostle" is used just short of a hundred times in the new Testament. It has a verb form also that is used almost 200 times. (PAY ATTENTION! GRAMMAR IS IMPORTANT, YOU MIND-NUMBED COUCH POTATO!)

The noun in Greek is "*apostolos*," which means missionary or delegate, someone who is sent out with authority to represent the sender) the verb is "*apostello*" which means "I delegate," "I send out." The phrase "twelve apostles" appears only a few times. More commonly, one sees the phrase "the twelve." Whenever you see the word "twelve" in the Bible you can bet your lunch money that it refers to government. The Bible has lots of numbers that repeat and have a special meaning, 3 (Divinity or heavenly perfection), 7 (covenant), 12 (government), 40 (testing) and so on.

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That Jesus named twelve special disciples (a word which itself means “students”) shows He intended to form a government for His followers. The first Christians insisted that Jesus had commanded His followers to continue the government that He Himself had established. In about 80AD, [Clement of Rome](#) who had most probably known Peter and Paul said, *“Through countryside and city (the apostles) preached, and they appointed their earliest converts, testing them by the Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers.”*

Nor was this a novelty, for bishops and deacons had been written about a long time earlier...

Our apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of bishop. For this reason, therefore, having received perfect foreknowledge, they appointed those who have already been mentioned and afterwards added the further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry” (St. Clement’s Letter to the Corinthians).

A century later, [Irenaeus was the bishop of Lyon](#) in France. He was a Greek who had been taught by Polycarp, who himself had been a disciple of John the Evangelist, one of the twelve. He wrote around 180 AD what he had learned from the students of the first apostles.

It is possible, then, for everyone in every church, who may wish to know the truth, to contemplate the tradition of the apostles which has been made known to us throughout the whole world. And we are in a position to enumerate those who were instituted bishops by the apostles and their successors down to our own times, men who neither knew nor taught anything like what these heretics rave about....Since, however, it would be tedious, in such a volume as this, to reckon up the successions of all the churches, we do put to confusion all those who, in whatever manner, whether by an evil self-pleasing, by vainglory, or by blindness and perverse opinion, assemble in unauthorized meetings; (we do this, I say,) by indicating that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul; as also (by pointing out) the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops. For it is a matter of necessity that every church should agree with this



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Church, on account of its preeminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolical tradition has been preserved continuously by those (faithful men) who exist everywhere.” (Against Heresies)

Okay, this is unpleasant. But it seems that the first Christians believed in what we now call apostolic succession. In other words, when someone comes up and says the end of the world is next Saturday, we have the perfect right, nay, we have the duty, to ask them where they got the authority to say that. They will answer, “From the Bible. I added up all the dates and the genealogies and this is surely the exact day!!!” “Well,” you might counter, “have you read the numbers in the poetic books, or just the historical books or just the prophetic books? Or have you just mixed them up like a stew of leftovers in a cheap restaurant?”

How can one tell what is poetry, or prophesy or history? That is precisely my point! You can't, unless you have an unbroken connection to the people who first chose those books to be part of the library that we call the Bible. Just because you read it and it seems to mean something perfectly clear to you, doesn't mean you've gotten it right. If you take it on yourself to interpret the books, or worse, leave it to some loon with a Swiss bank account and a mail order doctorate to do the interpreting, you are going to end up selling all your stuff, writing a big check to some weirdo who tells you to climb a hill and wait for the Lord who is surely going to show up next Saturday at 6PM. It's certainly going to happen because he read it in the Bible.

We've been reading the Bible very carefully for two thousand years, guided by the delegates (apostles) who received their delegation from those whom the Lord Himself delegated, not some self appointed loon. It's a free country. You can say to the Lord that you don't care if He established legitimate authority in the Church. You're going to read and interpret the Bible the way you want to. Who cares what that old Bavarian in the Vatican says? The first Christians certainly seemed to. I just hope you get a hill with a nice view, because you're probably going to be there for a long time.

So here are principles 2 and 3:

- 2) THE BIBLE IS NOT A BOOK. IT'S A LIBRARY. (I stole that idea from Fr. Bob Barron)
- 3) YOU CANNOT BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF THE BOOKS IN THE LIBRARY WITHOUT A COMPETENT TEACHING AUTHORITY TO HELP YOU.

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### Part 3

#### **COULDN'T ST. MATTHEW ADD? I THOUGHT HE WORKED FOR THE INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE BEFORE JESUS RECRUITED HIM.**

In the Gospel of Matthew 1<sup>st</sup> chapter, 17<sup>th</sup> verse we read: "Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ."

Wait a minute, In verse 6, King David is counted twice! That's cheating, and if you compare the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew to that in Luke, something is screwy. In Luke, Levi is Joseph's great grandfather, Matthat his grandfather and Heli his father. In the Gospel of Matthew it's Eleazar, Matthan and Jacob who comprise the generations preceding Joseph. They can't both be right!

If you are treating the Bible like a high school text book written for 21<sup>st</sup> century illiterates, well, I guess the bible is wrong. If however you understand that the Bible is a collection of books written in the idiom of a middle eastern people over the course of two thousand years, and removed from us by yet another two thousand years, maybe they can both be right after all. As for the three sets of fourteen generations, there is a symbolic meaning involved. Ancient Israel had no numbers. They used letters, a=1, b=2, g=3 and so on. Numbers had word meanings. 14 is a special number. It is twice 7, which is the number that stands for perfection and for covenant oaths. It is written as "y-d" (14). If you read it as four and ten (d and y) it means fulfillment. Jesus is the fulfillment of the three epochs of the history of Israel, the law, the prophets and the writings. The Gospel of Matthew is constantly talking about things done to fulfill a prophecy. That's the point of that Gospel. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise. When you see numbers in the Bible, they have a lot more than numerical value.

Scholars have spilled a lot of ink over the problem of the divergent genealogies of Jesus. Some insist that Luke really gives us the blessed Mother's genealogy. I don't see how this can be since the genealogies themselves both clearly say that they are Joseph's lineage. My personal opinion is that [Sextus Julius Africanus](#) got it right. He was a Christian historian born around 160 AD, probably in the area of Jerusalem. He asked some of the same questions that we ask and living where Jesus had lived a little more than a century before, Africanus was able to ask the answers from the descendants of Jesus' relatives. He tells us that Joseph was descended from a number of Levirate marriages, in which a man married the widow of his relative, if the relative died childless. That way, no family line in Israel would be extinguished.

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The royal family of David probably intermarried regularly and [Eusebius of Caesarea](#), who quotes Africanus regarding the genealogies of Jesus, goes on to say that Mary was a close relative of Joseph as was the custom, and still is in much of the Middle East, so their genealogies are essentially the same. This may be the answer to that particular question. It may not be.



My point is this: THE BIBLE IS NOT A SELF INTERPRETING BOOK. Remember, it isn't a book at all, it is a library. One needs a competent authority if one is going to find their way around it. There are other discrepancies in the Bible and rather than detract from the trustworthiness of the Bible, they add to it.

The Church is always accused of trying to cover things up or smooth things over. No one smoothed out the Gospels. They were kept just as they were received because they contain eye witness accounts. The apparent contradictions only make this more clearly true. For instance, Matthew and Mark seem to say there is only one angel at Jesus' empty tomb. Luke and John seem to mention two. As for where Jesus met the disciples after the resurrection in Matthew, He seems to meet them in Galilee. In Mark, Luke and John, He seems to appear first in Jerusalem. In John, He meets them at different times in both places. I suspect that He met them in both places. The accounts in Matthew and Mark seem to be summaries. I often talk about my grandfather when I really mean great-grandfather, but in telling family stories, the great grandfather-ness would only confuse my hearers and I do that enough already. Unless you are getting a doctorate in history, one may sometimes leave out extraneous detail for the sake of the point, and as for the angels at the tomb, I have never seen an angel, but people who have say the experience is quite overwhelming and you are not counting or taking names and addresses. Again, my point here is not to reconcile the Scriptures but to point out that the Books of the Bible are true to the principle of the Incarnation. They contain historical facts, but are not meant to be histories; their authors used details that they had seen in order to make their point about their faith. The Holy Spirit filled their words with what was necessary for our growth in the knowledge of God's love for us. Nothing more and nothing less.

Most Christians say they believe in the Incarnation, the idea that Jesus is both fully God and fully man, but most of us really have a hard time with the concept. We find it hard to believe that, if Jesus was really God, eternal and equal to the Father, how could he say something like, "the Father is greater than I" (John 14:28), or "the time is known to the Father alone." (Matt 24:36 and Mark 13:32). Read a little further in St. Paul's letter to the

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Philippians 2:5-7 “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the nature of a slave.” It is as if Jesus took off the powers of His divinity and without ceasing to be that perfect love which is God, left the heavenly throne for love of us.

That means that the word of God learned to speak Aramaic and Hebrew and probably some Greek in the carpenter's shop. The hand that shaped the galaxies learned how to make tables and chairs from Joseph. He was a little boy who ran to his mother when frightened or hurt. Because He had submitted Himself to our human limitations, He knew only what His Heavenly Father was pleased to tell Him by means of their Holy Spirit, and the day and the hour were not among these things. In this sense, the Father was greater than Jesus, but Jesus was no less divine, no less eternal and no less perfect in that reality which constitutes divinity: perfect Love.

We who believe He was truly God, have a hard time believing that God could be humble, yet He was. It is perhaps the most amazing thing about our faith that we say the All-powerful became powerless for love of sinners like you and me. It is a very hard thing to believe, and there are principally two ways not to believe. One is [Arianism](#), the other is [Monophysitism](#).



An Alexandrian priest named [Arius \(250–336\)](#) denied that Jesus could be fully God. One, after all, is not three. The Arian concept of Christ is that the Son of God did not always exist, but was created by God the Father and though adopted and divinized, by the Father, He was less than the Father. It seems that the [Emperor Constantine](#) favored Arianism, (Roman emperors liked things tidy and tended to favor Arian Christianity) but when he convened the [Council of Nicea](#), the bishops told him “Nope. We’ve always believed that God is a trinity Father, Son and Holy spirit.

The oneness of God is the unity of Love; solidarity, not solitude.” Constantine, the most powerful man in the world at the time said “Oh well, I guess I’m wrong. I’m just the emperor. You guys are the pope and the bishops.”

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Despite what you may have heard, Constantine believed that the state shouldn't control the Church. Some of his successors thought otherwise and ever since then the Church has struggled to maintain her independence from the state. The Church has struggled with emperors and kings and currently is struggling with the ruler of the United States: King Popular Opinion (as interpreted by the Mediocracy) this is a government of, by and for the people. Shouldn't the people, whose voice is "Entertainment Tonight" and whose art is "Dancing With the Stars", shouldn't the sovereign people run the Church in America? I digress. Governments, whether popular or monarchical, are much more comfortable with a Christ who is slightly less than divine, because after all, the state, whether popular or monarchical, really should be god. Those who humanize Jesus excessively have an odd tendency to divinize the power of the world. Arianism has devolved in our times into the belief among many that Jesus was just a really nice guy.

Monophysitism is the reaction to Arianism. Many Christians, especially in Egypt and Syria, two of the three centers of the Christian world, the other being Rome, reacted to Arius by going to the other extreme, denying that Jesus was one person as did [Nestorius](#), the Archbishop of Constantinople (for whom [Nestorianism](#) is named) or by saying He had no human nature, or at least humanity being so much less than divinity was "dissolved like a drop of honey in the sea" as [Eutyches](#), an Archimandrite in Constantinople insisted. So, Monophysitism is the belief that either there was no human nature in Jesus or it was so inconsequential as to be unimportant. The Bishop of Rome firmly maintained what today is the position of most Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox Christians, the Jesus is 100% human and 100% divine, and as I have said, this a hard thing to get your mind around, but it is the truth. And we call it the Incarnation.

I think the doctrine has further implications. Just as Jesus was God in the flesh, so too we are incarnate spirits, not just spirits trapped in flesh. That is why Jesus promises us resurrection. Going to heaven when we die isn't enough. God

### *First Council of Nicaea*

Date 325

AD Accepted by Roman Catholics, Old Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Anglicans, Oriental Orthodox, Assyrian Church of the East, Lutherans, Calvinists

Previous council None (Council of Jerusalem is not generally considered to be ecumenical)

Next council First Council of Constantinople

Convoked by Emperor Constantine I

Presided by St. Alexander of Alexandria (and also Emperor Constantine)

Attendance 250–318 (only five from Western Church)

Topics of discussion Arianism, celebration of Passover (Easter), validity of baptism by heretics, lapsed Christians

Documents and statements Original Nicene Creed and about 20 decrees

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promises to raise us from the dead because our bodies are really us. I would stretch it even farther to say that just as our Lord was truly God and man, so too, I am really spirit and flesh. Similarly, the Bible is fully human and completely inspired.

Orthodox Jews believe the Torah is not simply the inspired word of God. It is God's verbatim dictation. In the same way Muslims believe that the Qur'an is word for word written by God. We believe that the entire Bible is written by the Holy Spirit of God, using human beings to do it. In other words there's a lot of human-ness in the Bible. The stories and prophecies and visions and poetry and laws of the Bible are "God-breathed" though written as seen by human eyes, heard by human ears and touched by human hands. It speaks in words that humans can hear. Its meaning is made clear by those to whom Jesus gave authority, but it is wonderfully human as well as perfectly divine. It is as hard to believe this as it is to believe that Jesus is fully God and fully man. We want the Bible to be only divine, but it tells the amazing story of the meeting of God and humanity. It is full of sin and sainthood, weakness and strength, all sometimes in the same people.

So here is principle number #4:

THE BIBLE IS NOT A SELF INTERPRETING HISTORY BOOK. IT IS A COLLECTION OF BOOKS WRITTEN BY GOD FOR HUMAN BEINGS TO HELP US TO KNOW, LOVE AND SERVE GOD IN THIS WORLD AND TO BE HAPPY WITH HIM FOREVER.

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### Part 4

#### “NUMBERS DON'T LIE! (THOUGH THEY DO SOMETIMES GET CREATIVE)”

There are some very troubling numbers in the Bible. First of all we have the ages of the patriarchs: Adam 930; Seth 912; Enosh 905; Kenan 910; Mahalalel 895; Jared 962; Enoch did not even die, but, like our Blessed Mother and the Prophet Elijah was assumed into Heaven) Methuselah 969; Lamech 777; Noah 950; Abraham 175; Isaac 180; Jacob 147 ;Moses 120.

James Ussher, the Protestant Archbishop of Ireland in 1625, published a chronology that established the date of the creation as the night preceding Sunday, 23 October 4004 BC, by making creative use of the ages of the patriarchs and the Julian calendar. I suppose October 22nd/23rd is as good a date as any to have a happy birthday party for the planet.

Another problem is that 6,000,000 Jews left Egypt in the Exodus, according to some estimates 2,000,000.) The estimated population of Egypt at the time was between 2 and 5 million. Certainly 6,000,000 people, even 2,000,000 people would not have had to worry about Pharaoh and his chariots. They would have simply walked over them. So what's with all the numbers? Are you expecting me to believe that at a certain point in history, numbers just settled down and behaved? Or before that, did people just do things in a bigger way?

Calm down. Have you ever heard of gematria? Of course not. (Unless you are the pop singer Madonna or are a Jewish Kabbalist.) Gematria is the Hebrew system of assigning numerical value to a word or phrase. This comes from the fact that words can have numerical value in certain languages such as Greek and Hebrew. Those languages didn't have numerals. They used letters instead of numbers, a =1, b=2 c=3, d=4 and so on.

Were we to do this in English, the word “dad” would add up to 9 (4+1+4). So, if I wrote my mother that I had 9 worries, it might be a poetic way to say that I was worried about my father. Or it might just mean I was worried about nine things. A common Jewish example of gematria is the Hebrew word “*Kha*” (life), which is composed of two letters which add up to 18. This has made 18 a special number among Jews, and gifts in multiples of 18 are very common among Jews.

The Greek Language can do the same thing, though I don't know that the Greeks themselves did this sort of thing. We get our tedious scientific attitude from them and I

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suspect that for them a number was just a number. Greek speaking Jews, of whom the early Church was in large part composed, would have been aware of gematria meanings.

The most famous New Testament gematria comes from the book of Revelation, 13:18 "Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six." The Hebrew letters that spell out the Greek name Nero Caesar add up to 666!!! Hollywood has made a fortune with 666 and no one wants that number as part of their address or telephone number or anything else for that matter. It was probably just a coded reference to the emperor Nero. Big deal. So, from all of this we can gather that Bible numbers can have literal or symbolic meanings.

So what do all the old geezers in the beginning of the Bible mean? It would seem that longevity declined the farther away we get from humanity's original state of perfection in the Eden. Things just got worse and worse until God finally smacked us with a flood " Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years." (Genesis 6:3) Moses, Abraham, Sarah and a few others got a longevity pass, because they were good enough to be numbered among the patriarchs, but that was it. My point here is that the ages of the patriarchs may be symbols of their virtue and/or importance in the divine plan. I remember a modern day example of a symbolic number value.

When I was a boy, we did not eat yogurt, unless we came from Greenwich Village in New York and were communists. Mother would have said "Throw that milk out it's spoiled. Just smell it!" There was no market for yogurt in the United States. So some clever entrepreneurs decided to create a market for the stuff and make a fortune.

They aired these wonderful commercials about old people from some place in the Caucasus mountains called Reelibadistan or something like that. These were people claiming to be older than dirt, and they looked the part. They were 150 years old and still climbing trees. And they gave all the credit to the fact they ate yogurt about 12 times a day. Americans who think of themselves as hard bitten realists all ran out and bought yogurt. A much appreciated Christmas gift during those heady times was a home yogurt making kit. I am amazed more people did not poison themselves. Frozen yogurt, low fat yogurt, fruit flavored yogurt, yogurt coated peanuts, yogurt granola bars, yogurt and wood chips. We are still eating yogurt and pretending to like it. Why? Because all those folks in Reelibadistan could climb tree at the age of 150. America -- a nation of clear and objective thinkers.

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Where was I? Oh yes. A few years back, some researchers made the trek back to Reelibadistan to see what had become of those 150 year-old tree climbers. They were all as dead as stones by that time and the locals had no idea what the researchers were talking about. The researchers researched and found that the original yogurt eaters had never been older than a hundred. In fact they most of them were 60 or 70. They looked as old as rocks, because life in Reelibadistan is, in fact, really bad. No one there, back in the late sixties, knew how old anybody was. They didn't bother to keep records.

So why had they claimed to be ancient? Because old age was considered honorable. To say that someone was 150 years old was, in effect, to say that they were old enough to have gained that much wisdom and virtue. This is nonsense to people like us who treasure immaturity and where 50 year old men sometimes wear baseball caps backwards. The Reelibadistanians had no idea what was going on. They just knew that these weirdos from America were taking their picture and paying them to eat yogurt. What's not to like?

So here is Biblical principal #5:

**DON'T WORRY ABOUT SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE NUMBERS. HEAVEN HAS AN ARITHMETIC MORE MEANINGFUL THAN EARTH'S.**

*Maybe Methuselah was just very, very holy or maybe he actually lived to be 969 years old. It doesn't matter to the story. That's one of those questions that I am going to ask when I get to heaven. I am planning to go visit Methuselah a few days after the resurrection. First I am planning to visit the Blessed Mother and ask about the brothers and sisters of Jesus. I am sure she is a really good cook. You are welcome to join me.*

*In the Bible you are reading history from the perspective of 4000 years ago, and they told stories differently than we do. The point is to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying by means of the story. Perhaps you have heard me say that some of us have the souls of poets and others have the souls of appliance repairmen. If you are not satisfied with this answer and you want the Biblical historical perspective to be more scientific, more modern, more American, well just go eat some yogurt and climb a tree. (What a shame that Methuselah didn't make an even thousand. We were all hoping)*

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### Part 5

#### **“KEEPING IT ALL IN THE FAMILY or CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME”**

So now I come to the moment, dear Eve, of actually answering your question. Whom did the children of Adam and Eve marry? There are a number of theories.

(Genesis 5:4) “The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were 800 years; and he had other sons and daughters.” Adam and Eve had bunches of kids, of both genders, so we are presented with the most obvious answer, to which I can hear you responding “Yuuuuuck.....”

The Jewish Sages are very creative about the whole thing. According to the always useful “32 rules of Rabbi Eliezer”: The particles “*et*” (direct object marker that has absolutely no translatable meaning), “*gam*” (literally “also”), and “*af*” (“even” and a hundred other possible things), indicate that something not mentioned is included in a given text. The great commentator Rashi looks at the “*gam*”s, “*et*”s and “*af*”s in the story of Genesis to mean that Cain had a twin sister and Abel had two twin sisters. If that doesn't confuse you nothing will (*Merci bien, mon ami Pierre!*) Isn't this wonderfully obscure?

Let us look at other possible answers. Perhaps God created spouses for the children of Adam and Eve, but no one I know who espouses this theory because Genesis says that Eve was the mother of all the living. There are some commentators who claim that the children of Adam and Eve married other kinds of beings, but again that would be problematic since Eve is the mother of all the living and what kinds of creatures could they have married? That could really increase the yuck factor.

The other and most usual answer is that they married, you guessed it, their siblings!!! But I thought that wasn't allowed. It is forbidden in the book of Leviticus, but it is clear that before the Exodus and the law of Moses there were some interesting incidents of sibling marriages, such as Abraham and Sarah, who were half siblings! In Genesis 20:12 we read that Abraham's wife Sarah is also his half-sister, on his father's side. In the rabbinic literature, Sarah is only considered his niece. (Once again, yuuuuck!)

The whole topic is very disturbing. I will never forget once, when my mother was reading the Bible, and found the story of Lot and his daughters. She called me to ask if I was aware of what was in this book!!! This is my point! The Bible is the great narrative of real people whom God loves. I personally don't find many of them that appealing. They do some really outrageous things. I can hear you say, “If it was alright for

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Abraham or Lot, it must be alright for me.” Not so fast. God is always smiting people in the Bible, and if you read the fine print you realize that they deserved a good smiting now and then. The Bible relates stories of dishonesty and violence and other goings on that we won't mention in a family column. That's because the Bible really is history about real people. And those real people are sometimes their own worst enemies. The bible points out their foibles, not for our imitation, but for our instruction.

It is interesting to look at modern genetic studies of the dispersal of modern humans out of Africa. They seem to indicate that between all humans now living had common ancestors between 100,000 and 45,000 years ago. This in no way corroborates the story as told in Genesis, but it does agree with some of the important points of Genesis. We are all descended from one man and one woman. Geneticists don't say this man and this woman necessarily lived at the same time, though the Bible and the Church say they did. Still, this refutes the pseudo science of the racists of the nineteenth century who claimed that there were inferior races of human beings. We are all one race; the human race. I may look pretty odd to you, but I am still your cousin. The Bible taught this long before scientists caught up with the Church.

Another point on which geneticist and the Bible agree is that we are descended from a remarkably small group of people who live not so very long ago, perhaps as recently as 5000 years ago. “All humans alive today share a surprisingly recent common ancestor, perhaps even within the last 5,000 years, even for people born on different continents.” ([Rohde, DL; Olson, S; Chang, JT, Nature, September 2004, "Modeling the recent common ancestry of all living humans"](#)) I figure I had better footnote that point.

Do not think for a minute that genetic science is corroborating [Bishop Ussher](#), but my point in referring to genetic research is that Genesis and genetics agree that there must have been some really close family ties, if you catch my drift. Abel and Cain and Seth couldn't marry the girl next door, because there was no next door. Which theory is right? Scientists are absolutely sure of something until they change their mind upon receiving new information. And then they are absolutely convinced until a new theory comes along. University comes from a very ancient Latin word meaning, “Fog bound scholars arguing with each other.” It's true. I know because I actually taught in a university for a very long time. The Bible is interested in teaching the principles of the Kingdom of God. Science is mostly interested in getting grant money. (I'm only kidding. Scientists are interested in truth. In order to argue with each other, which is their means for arriving at truth, they need buckets of grant money.)

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So, carefully analyzing the Scriptural texts and the current scientific data, I HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO IDEA WHO THE SONS OF ADAM MARRIED BECAUSE THE HOLY SPIRIT DID NOT DECIDE TO TELL ME EITHER THROUGH THE TEXT OF SCRIPTURE NOR THE TRADITION OF THE FAITH!!!!

Jesus once said to the disciples, “No one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows.” (Matthew 24:36) Jesus, the Son of God, was content to remain ignorant about certain things because His perfection as the Son of god consisted in trusting and loving His Father completely. I however have to know everything right now.

He also said, “I have much to tell you that you cannot bear now.” (John 16:12) [Corrie ten Boom](#) (1892-1983) was a Dutch woman who helped Jews escape the Nazis during World War II and was eventually imprisoned herself. In 1970, she wrote her autobiography, [The Hiding Place](#), a book that believe is a “must read” for every serious Christian. She tells a story from her childhood that relates to our present problem. When she was a little girl, she would accompany her father, Kaspar, on his trips to the big city when he went to buy supplies for his watch repair business. On one of these train rides, she asked her father what “sex” was. She had heard some older girls discussing it on the playground at school. Her father looked at her and then looked out the window and said nothing. When the train stopped, he asked the little girl to pick up his tool bag. Corrie tried and couldn't. She said, “Papa it's too heavy.” Then Kaspar said, “There are some things that are too heavy for you to carry right now. When you are older I will tell you what sex is. Until then you are going to have to trust me.” So it is with our heavenly Father. He wants us to trust Him.

The Holy Spirit also tells us that, “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.” (John 21:25) In other words the Bible doesn't exist to tell us everything we want to know.

So here is Biblical principle #6:

THE BIBLE DOESN'T EXIST TO TELL US THE FUTURE, OR GIVE US STOCK TIPS OR SATISFY OUR SCIENTIFIC CURIOSITY. IT EXISTS TO EQUIP US WITH THOSE THINGS NECESSARY FOR OUR SALVATION AND REDEMPTION.

Whoever Cain and Abel and Seth and the rest of them married, I am sure that they were lovely brides, though they probably came from a disreputable family: the human family.

### Part 6

#### **“TRADITION! (Cue the sound of klezmer music, as in Fiddler on the Roof) TRADITION!”**

So, the question becomes, “If the Bible is not a self interpreting book, but a library full of poetry and history and a host of other literary forms, how do we know what it’s really saying?” The answer: Tradition!

Tradition is a dirty word among some Christians. They quote texts like “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition..... rather than on Christ.” (Col 2:8), or Mark 7:3 “For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, don’t eat unless they wash their hands, holding to the tradition of the elders.” They never seem to quote passages like, 2 Thess. 2:15 “Hold on to the traditions which you have been taught,” and 2Thess 3:6 “Keep away from every brother that behaves in a disorderly way and not after the tradition which he received from us.”

St. Paul seems to differentiate between human tradition and the tradition that he had received in his instruction in the faith. Remember that he had not been an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus, but was in that sense, a second generation Christian. He received a tradition given him by the first disciples of the Lord.

Perhaps you have read that Paul was taught directly by Christ, as Galatians 1:12 would seem to indicate. “For I neither received it of man neither was I taught it but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.” If you look closely at the passage, St. Paul is saying that he received good news, (the Gospel) and this Gospel is very simple: “We have been reconciled to God by the physical death of Jesus the Messiah!” (Colossians 1:22-23) Paul received amazing mystical revelations it seems, but he also got to know Peter. Cf. Galatians 1:18 “Then after three years I (Paul) went up to Jerusalem to see Peter and stayed with him fifteen days.”

The word “see” in the text is an interesting one. In Greek it is “*historesai*” from which our word “history” comes. Its primary meaning is “to inquire.” In other words, he went to learn a few things from Peter. He may have received the good news of redemption on the Damascus road, but he was humble enough to want to know what Peter had to say. What he received from the Lord seems to have included the idea of the Eucharist which he handed on to the Corinthians. (1 Cor 11:23) “For I have received from the Lord that which also I handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus the same night on which he was betrayed took bread.....” The very word “hand on” is the verb form of the noun “*paradosis*” “tradition.”

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Since the first days of the Church we have believed that just as God instructed Moses and the elders of Israel with an oral tradition, (which became the Mishnah), so too, Jesus instructed His disciples in the meaning of what He had said and made them the guardians of the correct meaning of His words. The Catholic concept of sacred tradition simply means that the Church, in particular, the pope and bishops, guarantee that there are no novel interpretations of what Jesus said and did. We don't add to the Scriptures, we just guard the consistent and universal explanation of what these things mean.

Here is an example: The word "*epiousion*" is almost impossible to translate. It appears in the phrase usually accepted as "daily bread" but we aren't quite sure what the word actually means. For almost 2,000 years there has been no other known example of the use of the word other than its one time use in the Our Father. It appears nowhere else in all of ancient Greek literature, only in the Our Father. People get very mystical over it, deciding it must have been a very unique and theologically significant word. I suspect that the opposite is true. Copyists preserve fancy stuff like Cicero or Shakespeare. It may be that it appears nowhere else because it is such a common word, like "ain't it" or "gotcha!"

In the twentieth century, an archaeologist claimed that he had found the word in a 5th century AD shopping list found in ancient Egyptian garbage dump. The word is written next to the names of several grocery items. It had the sense of "enough for today," or "necessary." The shopping list is now at the Yale Beinecke Library, but it seems that the word *epiousion* isn't there, so we are back to the problem of having no other example of the word. (My personal suspicion is that this particular scholar, like many scholars I have known, couldn't walk and chew gum at the same time. He probably put the scrap with *epiousion* in his right coat pocket instead of his left pocket and it ended up on the floor of some Cairo laundry).

Back to "*epiousion*." *Epiousion* derives from *Epi* and *Ousia* which mean "Upon" and "Essence" (sort of? The word doesn't appear in the form *ousion* as far as I can tell) So, how can we possibly understand what we are saying in the "Our Father" if there is no other reference to the word we normally assume to mean "daily"????

Well, you are just going to have to wait for next week to find out!

(To be continued.....)

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### Part 6b

“TRADITION! (*Cue the sound of klezmer music, as in Fiddler on the Roof*) TRADITION!”

(The following will be even more incomprehensible than usual if you have not read last week's action packed installment.)

There seem to be four possible meanings for the word *epiousion*: 1) necessary for existence 2) daily requirement 3) for the next day 4) deriving from *epienai*: for the future, for the coming existence.

In St. Jerome's translation in 405 A.D. we read (Mat 6:11): “Give us this day our supersubstantial bread” which means “over-being,” but in the Our Father the Latin phrase “*panem quotidianum*” means daily bread. It was understood that way from the earliest times. In the very ancient Aramaic version, the Syriac “*Peshitta*” the phrase is translated “give us the bread of which we have need today.” So even if the grocery list was lost or badly translated, the Greek phrase “*ton arton ton epiousion*” means “bread necessary for the day.” The only definitive way we have of knowing that *epiousion* means “daily” is, you guessed it! TRADITION! I could come along with a theory that *epiousion* really means “whole wheat” and if you are in the *sola scriptura* crowd, you have no way of refuting me unless of course you refer to TRADITION!

People regularly ask me for the most accurate translation of the Bible. There is no such thing. I tell them that they should learn Greek. It's easy. Every three-year-old in ancient Athens could speak it. (Actually I learned beginning ancient Greek by teaching it for 25 years at a university, but I'm a little slow.) Even if you learn ancient Greek, you've still got a problem. The world has changed. You can never put yourself back into the context of those times.

For instance, the Scriptures talk about the denarius. It was one day's wage for an average worker at the time of Christ. That should make it a simple equivalent to about, say \$70 to \$90 bucks. If a person is making around the minimum wage these days, he can probably go to a big box store and buy a couple shirts. At the time of Christ, a man may have owned only a few shirts in his whole life. Cloth was not made on machines by slave labor as in our times. It was made inch by inch on homemade looms and was incredibly expensive. The Bible talks about wheat and barley and oil and water, all of which were in short supply. There was no middle class to speak of. It was a different world. Words change meaning in ways deeper than we can fathom.

Let's take love, for instance. It's a fairly important word in the Bible. Ancient Romans believed what we call love was immoral. Yes, you heard me, immoral! They were stoics

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and love made you vulnerable to the control of another, hence it was immoral. Much of what we call love today is, even by our own standards, immoral. The Bible tells us that "God is Love" and "Love one another" "Love endures forever." It would seem to be very important to understand what love is.

I remember back in the groovy sixties, which I can vaguely remember, there was a new religious group on campus at Watsamata U. Called the "Children of God." They were very popular. They stressed the texts of Scripture that taught "God is Love." Their founder, David Berg, who called himself Moses David, was quite fond of discipling charming under-grads of the non-male gender. He taught the "Law of Love." If a person's actions were not intentionally hurtful to others those actions were allowed by the Bible. So, if it was real, unselfish love, it was okay. They practiced what they called "polyamory" which means lots of partners. Same gender "intimate" relationships between women were allowed because they were not specifically forbidden by the Bible, but similar male relationships, clearly prohibited by the Bible, were sinful. It seems that the Rev. Berg had some interesting issues.

You may now pick your jaw up off the floor. I can hear you saying, "How ridiculous! That's absurd. Everybody knows that the Bible doesn't say that!" Why is Rev. Berg wrong? Who's to say that he is misinterpreting the word "love" or "agape"? His interpretation is every bit as good as mine. He can define the word "love," that central word of the New Testament, as well as I can, as well as you can or as well as Billy Graham can. Who's to say? The exact same thing happened during the reformation.

"In 1534, the [Melchiorites](#), a group of Anabaptists, captured the German city of Münster. They immediately burned all books except the Bible, banned the use of money and seized the property of non-believers. They killed Protestants and Catholics and practiced polygamy and sexual excess. Their leader, [John of Leyden](#), had sixteen wives. As to be expected, they proclaimed the Day of Judgment was close at hand." *(Quoted from 'Early Modern History, Lecture 4: The Impact of Luther and the Radical Reformation')* And why not? Luther had declared every man his own pope, and so it remains today.

If you are Catholic, your answer to these questions is very easy. We have a consistent history of teaching which is carefully guarded by the Bishop of Rome, the Pope. As our Lord Jesus intended and still intends, the Pope is the guardian of meaning. The words may change, but the meaning is unchanging and the teaching authority that Christ gave Peter tells us what the meaning is and has always been.

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People are fond of saying “Just the Bible. I only want to believe what the Bible says! No new doctrines!!!” If you adhere to the precise words of Scripture as it was written, you lose meaning as the meaning of words shift. In the Scriptures “*agape*” meant a certain type of love. Christians used the word to mean sacrificial love. In modern Greek, *agape* can mean a lot of things. A young Hellenic swain might use the word in a way that the apostle never intended, “*S’agapo*” can mean “I love you.” If you assume that word meanings remain the same, you are going to have problems.

“I want to know what the word meant at the time of Christ!” Scholars argue endlessly about the topic, but the soft spoken Bavarian in Rome, who is actually a very accomplished scholar, has the right and the duty to tell us what it means. This is what it always meant. This is what it will always mean, though the words may change. I have known people who search for scholars and pastors who will let them marry their eighth wife because that scholar or pastor has found a new meaning for an ancient word. You can choose the scholar or the preacher or the snake oil salesman who agrees with you. I will take the quiet, white-haired Bavarian who sits on the throne of Peter.

Remember, Jesus said “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.” Jn 6:12, and that “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.” Jn 21:25 These words and deeds were entrusted to St. Peter and his successors, and despite their many human weaknesses and even sins, they have passed down the faith unchanged from the very first century of Christianity.

So, Principle #7:

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO INTERPRET SCRIPTURE WITHOUT TRADITION

## Part 7

*It's not meant to confuse you, but it's very confusing....*

### **CAN'T TELL YOUR PLAYERS WITHOUT A SCORE CARD**

In reading the New Testament one might get the impression that Mary and Joseph were just the couple next door with a lot of kids and that Paul was having a feud with James, and the other apostles. For instance, what's 1 Corinthians 9:1 all about? Paul writes "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord!"

Part of the problem is that Jesus, James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (or as they would say: *Yeshua, Yakob, Yose, Shimon, and Yehudah*) were among the ten most popular names among Jews at the time of Christ, and Mary (or as they would say it Mariam or Miriam) was just about the most common name for girls. If you don't understand who's who, it is impossible to tell what's actually going on in the New Testament.

It is important to understand that there were three (or least two) major players named James (Yakob) in the New Testament.

1) James, son of Zebedee (died 44 AD) was one of the Twelve appointed by Jesus. He was a son of Zebedee and Salome, and brother of John the Evangelist, also one of the Twelve. He is also called James the Greater.

2) James, son of Alphaeus, one of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ. He is often called James the Less and commonly known by that name in Church tradition.

3) James the brother of the Lord, first bishop of Jerusalem (died 62 AD) also called James the Just, James the Righteous and even James of Jerusalem. He was known for his piety and was said to have the knees of a camel since he spent so much time kneeling in prayer. (Scholars since the first centuries disputed whether or not James the Less and James the brother of the Lord are the same person. I am of the opinion that there are three James, not two. I may change my mind. Who knows?)

When we read a text such as Galatians 2:12-16 "Before certain men came from James, he (Peter) used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to (the orthodox Jewish party of) the circumcision." Which James is Paul talking about? It certainly is not James the Greater. He was dead by this time, martyred by one of the

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innumerable Herod's (That's another issue. There was Herod the Great, Herod Antipas, Herod Phillip and a host of others, all of whom seem to marry their relatives.) It was James, the brother of the Lord, almost certainly. He was respected for his piety, remember? He led the Jerusalem Church, and seems to have been the leader of a faction in the early Church that thought one had to be an observant Jew before one could become a disciple of the Lord. Peter seems to have gone back and forth between the two factions until he had a vision (Acts 10:13) which showed him clearly that Paul was right and James was wrong.

Let's clear up this issue of the Brothers of the Lord before we go any farther. People are always telling me that the Catholic Church is wrong and that Mary had other children than Jesus. It says so in the Bible! "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" (Matt. 13: 55.56). Look at the fine print. The Bible says that Jesus had brothers and sisters, not that Mary had other children. This gets complicated. Pay attention!

There were three Mary's at the foot of the cross. (John 19:25) "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, His mother (Mary), and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, (or Clopas) and Mary Magdalene." Remember, Mary was as common a name in the Holy Land as it is in an Irish girl's school; Mary Margaret, Mary Catherine, Mary Bridget, etc., etc., etc..... Now read Matthew 27: 56 "Among (those at the cross) were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's children. Now read Mark 15:40 "There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome." It would seem clear that Mary the mother of James and Joses, was Mary the wife of Cleophas, (or Clopas) and not Mary Mother of the Lord.

There are three points of view. Mary and Joseph had other children than Jesus. This is not the traditional opinion, nor is it my opinion. If Mary had other children than Jesus she certainly would not have gone to live with St. John after the crucifixion. (John 19: 26, 27) A mother of small children once told me that Jesus certainly had no younger siblings. If He had, He couldn't have stayed behind in the temple. They would have snatched on Him!

The second opinion was held by Origen, Eusebius, St. Ambrose, St Gregory of Nyssa and St. Epiphanius, the "oracle of Palestine," is that the brothers of the Lord were the children of Joseph by a former marriage. Joseph, after the death of his first wife, married Mary, a close relative, also from the family of David, to protect her vow of

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chastity. (This was in fact an ancient practice, especially among the Essenes.) This theory infuriates many of the pious, who prefer...

The third option: The so called Brothers of the Lord were close relatives. St. Theophylact (725AD, rather late in the game) was of the opinion that they were the children of Joseph by a levirate marriage, with the widow of his brother, Clopas or, as others have held, nephews of Joseph by his brother Clopas. After Clopas died Joseph adopted them, and so they were counted as the children of Joseph and Mary. This is a rather farfetched and late theory, but who knows? That's the point! We can't assume that "the Bible says...." With three James and at least three Marys a bunch of Simons and a busload of Herods, we may come to some perfectly obvious conclusions that are absolutely wrong. By the way, after James the Just was martyred, Simeon the son of Cleophas/Clopas became the bishop of Jerusalem. The bishop of Jerusalem was always a relative of Jesus until sometime in the second century. This will be important in our next exciting installment.

So, Principle #8:

**MAKE SURE YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE READING ABOUT BEFORE YOU DECIDE WHO YOU ARE READING ABOUT**

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## Part 8

### **“GO MAKE WHAT OUT OF WHO?”**

Don't assume you know what a word means in English. English is a very complicated language. Still, English speakers are always telling everyone in the world what things mean, even if we don't know that we don't know what our own language means. Why, you may ask is this at all important in understanding the Bible?

Since around 1600 when all those swashbuckling heroes like Sir Francis Drake, Sir Walter Raleigh, Pocahontas and Errol Flynn sailed throughout the world making the world English, the English language has been the language of evangelization. Wherever an Englishman buckled his swash, it seems he left a copy of the King James Bible in his hotel room. Thus, the assumptions and errors of English speaking people have become the errors and assumptions of much of the Christian world.

The English language belongs to the [Anglo-Frisian](#) sub-group of the West Germanic branch of the Germanic language family. If it were just Anglo-Frisian that would be fine, but it seems that at one time everyone in the neighborhood wanted to invade England. I suppose it had something to do with the lovely climate and the wonderful cuisine. The Celts lived there at the time of Christ, and then came the Romans, then those pesky Anglo-Frisians, after them came the Norwegian and Danish speaking Vikings. Then more Latin came with Christian missionaries and then more Vikings who spoke French and finally a smidgen of Greek during the Renaissance. Finally, in the USA we have such all-American words as taco, pizza, canoe, rodeo, boondocks and schmooze. English never met a language that it didn't want to absorb.

We have grafted words from everywhere onto our Anglo-Frisian grammar, so that everything has five different names, as seen above: cuisine, a fancy-schmantzy French word for food. Because English is so malleable (a fancy-schmantzy Latin word for changeable) the meanings of words change constantly. When I was a boy in a former century, "cool" had to do with the weather and "gay" referred to Paris in the 1890's. Who knows what they will mean in another 20 or 30 years? The mind boggles. This is why I want to fall on the floor howling with laughter when someone asks me for the best translation of the Bible.

The big words in Catholicism are still in Greek: Eucharist, Baptism, Pentecost, Liturgy, Canon, Ecclessial, Bishop, Priest, Deacon, Chrism, Monk, Martyr, Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Apocalypse and almost all the other names of books in the Bible — Bible, too, for that matter. They are all Greek words.

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For instance we all know what the Bible is, right? As mentioned, it's that big book on the coffee table. Nope. It's a Greek word that means "Books." Apocalypse -- We all know what that means. It's the Beast and Armageddon and the rapture and people running around screaming and lots of cheap made for TV movies, right? Nope. "Apocalypse" means "unveiling" and for Greek-speaking Jews it often referred to a wedding. (Certainly, I have known some marriages that were apocalyptic in the modern sense, with the running around and the screaming, but that is not what is meant here.) We assume that we know what words mean and we don't. We know what we use them for now, not what they meant in their historical context. Reading an ancient text as if it were a TV Guide is called "anachronism." You guessed it, a Greek word meaning "up (or out) of proper time."

There are three words that you need to know in Greek in order to even begin to make sense out of the New Testament. One is "apostle" which we have never bothered to translate from Greek; "The Twelve" an Anglo-Frisian phrase (in Greek "*hoi Dodeka*") and the third "disciple," a Latin word. We assume that all three have the same meaning, The Twelve, Apostles, Disciples; it's all the same thing, right? Nope. Three different words, three different meanings, three different groups of people, which overlapped.

By the by, you need to know that Greek did the same thing that English does. It makes verbs (action words) into nouns (persons, places and things). We bus people in a bus to a school where we school them in the English language. Don't pretend to be confused. You actually talk this way if you speak English.

Back to apostle. In Greek, it is both a verb and a noun. It means missionary, or better still delegate, or in Anglo-Frisian, "someone sent out with the right to tell you how to do things." The noun apostle (a delegate, or one sent out) appears about 80 times in the New Testament. As a verb ("to delegate" or to "send out") it appears about 125 times. The word disciple means "student" and it appears about 216 times. The phrase "the twelve" appears around 24 times, but "twelve apostles" appears only four times and "twelve disciples" appears only twice. (BOY, THIS IS SURE BORING AND POINTLESS!!!) Hold on a minute! It's not boring if you really want to understand the Bible.

Disciples, Apostles and The Twelve were not all the same people. The three words denote increasingly exclusive categories. Jesus had lots of disciples. The Bible talks of his appearing to "more than 500 of the brethren at one time." (1Cor:15,6) So Jesus had lots of students. He sent some of them out. (In Greek, He "apostled" them) "And when it

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was day he called His disciples to Himself and chose twelve whom also he named apostles." (Luke 6:13)

There were also a lot more apostles than just twelve. "After these things the Lord appointed seventy others and sent ("apostled" or "delegated" same word in Greek) them in pairs before Him into every city and place where He Himself would come." (Luke 10:1)

So, you have hundreds of disciples, but maybe less than 100 delegated missionaries and among them an inner circle of twelve, appropriately called "The Twelve." By the way, Twelve was an important number in Hebrew, it denoted the governing authority. Twelve tribes, twelve patriarchs, twelve judges etc. So you have a governing nucleus of twelve in the Bible. This is important because it clears up a lot of problems. Everybody talks about the "twelve apostles." The Bible almost never called them the "twelve apostles" it just calls them "The Twelve." There were lots of apostles, but only twelve of The Twelve.

It's clear that Jesus established leadership and structure in the Church. Have you ever wondered how Paul got to be an apostle? He was not one of the original twelve. It's simple. He was an apostle because Jesus delegated him on the Damascus road. He wasn't one of the Twelve, but he was an apostle. If you don't understand this you might end up thinking that Paul and the leadership of the Church didn't get along. He always seems to be at odds with the apostles, especially James. He had no problem with Peter and John and the other members of the Twelve, but he certainly took issue with self appointed delegates, and the James he is at odds with is not the Apostle James who died in 44AD, but James the Brother of the Lord, who seems to have been the leader of the Jerusalem Church and its very kosher conservative adherents.

When you understand who's who you begin to realize that the books and letters of the New Testament were written in a very human context, a struggle about the nature of the Church and her leadership. God did amazing things with a crew of schlubs who are not unlike us.

You also have another group, a much more irritating group, called the "*Desposyne*." You don't hear much about them and with good reason. We'll talk about them later.

So, Principle #9:

AS YOU READ THE BIBLE DON'T ASSUME YOU KNOW WHAT A WORD MEANS UNTIL YOU KNOW WHAT IT MEANS

## Part 9

### **THE HOUSE OF DAVID, or FAMILIES; EVERYBODY'S GOT ONE**

Back in episode 7, I mentioned the brothers of the Lord and who they might have been. Whoever they were, they seem to have been very important in the early Church and rather difficult. Five hundred years before the birth of Christ, the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and took the surviving members of the royal House of David into exile. When the Persians conquered Babylon a few years later, they let the Jews go back to Judea. A few members of the royal family of David returned to Jerusalem. Zerubabel, a prince of the house of David, (Haggai 1:1) who was the grandson of king Jehoiachin of Judah was appointed governor of Judea by the Persians. He led the first group of 42,000 Jews back to Judea from Babylon around 530 BC. He also laid the foundation of the Second Temple in Jerusalem not long after.

It seems that much of the family of David stayed in Babylon, preferring not to return to the dangerous pile of rocks that Jerusalem had become. Some of the family of David who had returned to the Holy Land skedaddled back to Babylon when the Maccabees took over around 160 BC. The Judean community had become settled and prosperous in Babylon, which was in effect, the New York of its time, though I suppose you still couldn't get good "deli" there. Pastrami had not even been invented!

Life was good in Babylon. A descendant of the royal House of David was always formally installed as "exilarch" which means "leader of the exiles." In fact, there was always an exilarch in charge of the sizable Jewish community of Babylon until perhaps 1000 years (yes, one thousand) AFTER Christ!! They knew a good gig when they found one. After 2,550 years in Babylon, (the ruins of which are in modern Iraq) the Jews have finally been driven out and most emigrated to the state of Israel. There are now about 7 or 8 Babylonian Jews still living in Iraq. Thus the Babylonian exile is over, almost.

Things started getting even more interesting around 150BC when groups like the Essenes rejected the Maccabees' claims to the monarchy and the high priesthood. The Essenes and those like them started to fume about the coming of the Messiah, how he would straighten everything out and purify the priesthood and the monarchy and the temple and put those Maccabees and their Roman and Greek friends in their place. This meant something to the Davidic family still in exile in Babylon: job opportunities!

Along with the Messiah, born of the royal House of David, the opportunities for boodle, as they call it in Chicago, would be numerous! It seems that some of the family of David returned to two little towns Little Shoot (Nazareth in Hebrew/Aramaic) and Star-ville

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(Kochaba in Hebrew/Aramaic) the first on the west side of the Jordan and the other on the east. The names seem to refer to Messianic prophecies, “a shoot will spring from Jesse” (Is.11:1) and “a star will rise from Judah” (Numbers 24.17)

Little Shoot wasn't much to write home about. It was a town of about 200 threadbare aristocrats, who lived mostly in caves, (cool in summer warm in winter, really very nice). This is why Nathaniel, when told about Jesus said “What good can come out of Little Shoot (Nazareth)!?” (John, 1:46) Joseph of the House of David and his wife Mary, also of the royal House of David seem to have settled down there after spending time abroad. And there, among his many cousins, aunts, uncles, in-laws etc., they raised their boy, Yeshu, (spelled “Jesus” in Greek) and an amazing child He most certainly was.

He was an odd one. He never married; there were after all certain questions about His suitability, and then at the age of thirty He left home and started hanging around with odd people, like that cousin, Yochanan the Baptist down near the Dead Sea. Soon He was back and had left the family construction business. He was working as a rabbi and had accumulated some followers. There was a buzz in town about him possibly being the Messiah. Why not? He was, after all, a member of the family and most certainly descended from David on both sides. There was even talk of miracles! I imagine his relatives were thinking about government jobs after the revolution. That upstart Herod and his clan! They would have to go! Not descendants of David, not even really Jewish!

There is an interesting document called the Gospel to the Hebrews. It is very ancient, and was respected by many early authors, though it didn't become part of the canon of Scriptures. It talks about the brothers of the Lord, *“Behold, the mother of the Lord and his brothers were saying to him: John the Baptist is baptizing for the remission of sins. Let us also be baptized by him. But he said to them: How have I sinned, that I should go and be baptized by him? Unless perchance this that I have just said is ignorance.”*

Why, pray tell, would Jesus' relatives have wanted Him to go get baptized? There is another interesting verse in the canonical Gospel according to John, the seventh chapter. Jesus' brothers are urging him to go down to the feast of Booths saying, “Show Yourself to the world.” (John 7:4) I suspect they were anxious for the revolution. Jesus had a different revolution in mind.

At first they seemed to be big backers of Jesus and his messiah-ship. But, as it became clear that He is not about to declare their kind of revolution, they seemed less anxious for Him to be traveling about embarrassing them. *“Then He went home and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When His family heard it, they*

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*went out to restrain Him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of His mind.'*" (Mark 3:20-21)

Jesus' kindred seemed a little ambivalent about Him. In St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, the risen Jesus appears first to the Twelve, among whom there was a James, or perhaps two, and then to his kinsman (brother?) James. Seeing cousin Jesus risen from the dead seems to have convinced James and the rest of the family because James eventually became the first bishop of Jerusalem. He was finally stoned to death around 63AD.

After his death, Simeon, son of Cleophas also called the brother of the Lord in Matthew 13:55), succeeded him. He was bishop at the time of the Roman siege but escaped with the rest of the Jewish Christian community to Pella east of the Jordan river, having been warned by the Lord (Luke 21:20) and by people in the Church who had the prophetic gifts. Bishop Simeon was crucified by the Romans around 106AD and was apparently succeeded by relatives of Jesus until Bishop Judah Kyriacos, a name which means "Judah, who belongs to the Lord" was killed during a riot in Jerusalem, in 133. That was toward the beginning of the Bar Kochba revolt which declared Simon Bar Kochba Messiah.

Anyone who claimed Jesus as the Messiah was killed or expelled from the territory held by the rebels. The revolt ended with the expulsion of the Jews from Jerusalem until our own times. With the death of Judah Kyriacos, the line of bishops descended from the House of David ended as did the Jewish Church of Jerusalem. From that point on, it was clear that Christianity was not a movement among the Jews, but a universal Church claiming to be the true and spiritual Jerusalem, led by the spiritual heirs of Peter and the Twelve.

But before then, it seems that there was a role played by those who claimed kinship to the Lord, and there seems perhaps to have been some question about who should be running things, Jesus relatives or His disciples. I suspect that's why St. Paul has issues with "apostles" (1Cor. 9:1) and with those who "came from James" (Gal.:12), but never with Peter and the others of the Twelve. (Gal.2:9) The "Brothers of the Lord" were a very distinct group called the "*Desposyni*" (a Greek word, as I'm sure you guessed, meaning, the family of the master). It seems that they traveled accompanied by their wives and managed to make their presence known. (1Cor.9:5)

What seems to be a dispute between Peter and Paul really is nothing more than Paul urging Peter to be the authority that Jesus had called him to be. It's as if Paul is telling Peter that he, not James had been given charge of the Church throughout the world.

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Jesus had established a universal summons to all humanity, not just a sect to be controlled by the family of the founder.

I really think that this fundamental dispute regarding the nature of the Church is the problem that created the New Testament Canon. Paul's letter for the most part and even the Gospels, were written against the backdrop of a Davidic family feud. Also, wouldn't Zerubabel be a fine name for a new-born?

So here is Bible reading principle # 10:

THE BIBLE IS ABOUT PEOPLE, NOT PLASTER SAINTS.

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### Part 10

#### **BEWARE OF GREEKS BEARING GIFTS (unless of course they remember to include the gift return receipt)**

Once I heard a preacher loudly denouncing party spirit. He was quoting St. Paul's letter to the Galatians, the fifth chapter "*Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing...*"

Due to this particular preacher's former way of life, when he heard "party spirit" in the same sentence as drunkenness and carousing, he immediately thought of good times he had enjoyed on many a long forgotten Saturday night. The words "party spirit" were a translation of the Greek word "*haeresis*" from which comes the English word "heresy." It has to do with choice or taking sides in an argument, hence belonging to one particular party or another. It is about divisions in the body of Christ, and has nothing to do with beer and loud music.

You may hear a word in your own language that has a number of meanings that have nothing to do with what the Bible is saying. It is amazing how many things we think are in the Bible that aren't! This particular preacher went on at length and at volume about the evils of having fun of any kind. He completely missed the point of the text and was in fact guilty of the exact thing against which the text was cautioning. He was pushing the agenda of the faction in his church that was opposed to public smiling.

We think the scriptures are clear in what they say, and they are. We are the ones who are unclear in the way we hear it. Things get muddled when translated into a language that is an ocean away and two thousand years removed from their original context. I can hear you throw up your hands in despair and say: "I don't speak first century Greek. I will never speak first century Greek! How then can I read the Bible?" The answer is simple: **don't read the Bible; study it.**

So many people want to read the Bible so they can say "Been there, done that." They want to know what the Bible says about their favorite vice or least favorite virtue... I cannot count the number of times someone has asked me to tell them exactly what the Bible says about divorce, or wealth or politics or the end times or, or, or, or.....!

They treat the Bible as some sort of law book, or science book, or worse still some kind of fire insurance that will tell them how much they can get away with and still not burn in hell. "Father, does the Bible say it's a sin if..." or this is always good: "The Bible doesn't exactly say that I have to..., or that I can't..." (fill in your favorite sin here) That attitude is

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part of the cancer that is “*sola scriptura*” (Bible alone). Luther was wrong about *sola scriptura*. The Bible never mentions “*sola scriptura*,” but does mention the “church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.” (1Tim.3:15) Truth is not one verse or one line from the Bible. It is the Holy Spirit speaking through the Bible as handed down to us faithfully and clearly for two millennia.



The Bible isn't a book that you read. It's a world in which you are meant to live. It's the story of a family of faith that you can join by means of the Sacraments. There is an easy way to start the life long journey of Bible study. It's called Bible History. The best Bible History course I know at the present time is produced by [Mr. Jeff Cavins](#) of Minnesota. It's called the "[Great Adventure Catholic Bible Study](#)."

Jeff's point is that before you get into the Bible with any kind of depth, you have to know the story that the Holy Spirit tells in the 73 books of the Bible. If you treat the Bible like a book and read it from cover to cover, you will probably stop somewhere in the book of Leviticus "*From the fellowship offering he is to bring a sacrifice made to the Lord by fire. All the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys.*" (Leviticus 3:4-5)

Well, that is certainly is an inspiring text! I'm sure you've heard many sermons preached about those heart-warming lines from Scripture. Even now, I feel a sermon coming on! Where was I? My very well educated and very saintly mother once tried to read the Bible cover to cover. She stopped when she got to the story of Lot and his daughters, picked up the phone and called me saying, "Do you have any idea what's in this book!?!"

Mr. Cavins suggests that we start by reading and really learning the story told in 14 books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Judges, First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah, First Maccabees, Luke and Acts. From these books, one learns the story of the family of Jesus and the history of God's people. Then you can go back and plug in the rest of the books.

For instance, the Book of Jeremiah fits into the very end of the Second Book of Kings about 600 years before Christ. It's a very sad story, the tragic end of a 500 year old dynasty and the destruction of a country. You wouldn't know this if you hadn't first read the Books of the Kings, and you would probably just think that the reading from Jeremiah is another incomprehensible thing we hear at church which can provide time for a quick nap.

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The Bible is an amazing collection of stories and commentaries on those stories. There is a reason it has been popular for a couple thousand years. If you don't know the story, it makes no sense. Have you ever started a book in the middle or come into a movie when it's half over? It makes no sense!

The Bible is not arranged in any chronological order, so most people think it is just a collection of odd tales and inscrutable sayings that mostly make no sense. Let me say it again: THE BIBLE IS NOT ARRANGED IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER. That goes for the New Testament also. We seem to think that the New Testament starts with the story of Jesus and ends with the end of the world, Matthew to Revelation.

Let me share a deep dark secret: the books of the Bible weren't originally in book form. They were written on long rolls of paper called scrolls! Paper was very expensive, so they didn't want to waste it. When there was room at the end of a scroll, they would put another book or story on the scroll, not because it was what happened next in the story, but because there was room for it on the scroll!!!! When you read the Bible you think that like modern books, people started writing at the beginning and finished at the end.

Most people assume that the Gospels, (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) were written first and then we have the Book of Acts and then Paul starts writing and it all ends up neatly with the Apocalypse which comes last because it's about the end of the world. It's not that simple. The oldest books in the New Testament aren't the Gospels, they are some of the Epistles! Paul's first letter to believers in the Greek town of Thessalonika was written around 52 AD! That's about twenty years after the resurrection! In it Paul writes that Jesus had risen from the dead. *"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus."* (1 Thess.4:14) Those words were written well within the lives of those who witnessed the resurrection. Paul wasn't making this stuff up. He really believed it and was writing this to people; some of whom may have seen it.

The Epistles were written in the following order: Thessalonians 52 AD, Corinthians 57 AD, Galatians 55-57 AD, Romans 57-58 AD, Ephesians 62 AD, Philippians 62 AD, Colossians 62 AD, Philemon 63 AD, Titus 64-65 AD and Timothy 64-65 AD. These dates reflect the tradition that Paul was acquitted at his first trial, went on to Spain and then returned to Rome where he was re-arrested by the emperor Nero and was executed perhaps 64, 65 AD.

The Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts seem to be a defense of Paul written before his trial in perhaps 62 AD. If this traditional chronology is true, St' Paul's Epistles contain the faith of the first thirty years of the Church. They have words like Eucharist,

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Bishop, Priest, Deacon, Liturgy, Baptism and so on. They recognize the unique role of St. Peter. They are recognizably the roots of the Church of today in its structure and its faith.

People assume that the Gospels were written as the source text and if they don't find something there, they think it doesn't go back to Jesus, so it doesn't count. The Gospels were probably written from 55 to 70 AD, though scholars argue endlessly. Still, it seems indisputable that, in terms of their antiquity, the Epistles are as much the foundational texts of the Church as the Gospels. Certainly the story about Christ is older than the Epistles.

Dr. Peters of NYU points out that St. Paul had heard the Gospel stories before he wrote his Epistles and that some of the sayings of Jesus were memorized or even written down while Jesus was alive in the world, but it is clear that the writing down of the Gospel story is not far removed in time from either the life of Christ nor the writings of St. Paul. It is mostly the product of the 30 years immediately following Christ's resurrection. All of the Gospels and Epistles were written by witnesses to the resurrection who gave their lives for the truths they had seen with their own eyes.

When you learn the chronology of the events of both Old and New Testaments, the story comes alive. It isn't just a collection of sacred snippets and Bible bullets that can be used to justify your favorite sins or to harass your least favorite in-laws. You may not know the exact tense of the verb, but if you know the story, these wonderful words mean more and more each time you read them. It is an amazing story, a story that you can be part of.

"The Great Adventure" is a very Catholic way to study the Bible. Pope Benedict calls it canonical exegesis. (That's Greek for interpreting the Bible as something written for a coherent purpose) The great Cathedrals of Europe are the same kind of Bible Study. When you visit the Cathedral of Chartres, perhaps the high point of gothic architecture, you can see the story of salvation carved in stone from Adam and Eve at the north door to the last judgment on the south door. You can walk around the Cathedral pointing to the stories of the Bible in a way that the simplest child can understand.

Most people don't want the Bible told in the way that the simplest child can understand. They want to learn or even worse, to teach more sophisticated things. But you have to walk before you can run and crawl before you can walk. I have had great scholars read me the riot act for encouraging people to study the Bible as if it were really true. They find it simplistic, or even worse, fundamentalist! Some teachers delight in explaining to bewildered students that none of these stories are really history. They point out

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apparent inconsistencies that leave their students knowing nothing of the Bible except that it isn't true.

Don't start with an advanced course. Save that for later. I recommend you begin your study of the Bible with the assumption that it is a true story. When you've got the story down you can go back again and look at it more critically. With the help of two thousand years of tradition and real scholarship, you can decipher which stories are told poetically and which stories are told historically. Mr. Cavins is right. The Bible is a wonderful adventure, even if you can't read ancient Greek.

Biblical principle #11:

**KNOW THE STORY BEFORE YOU READ THE BIBLE**

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## Part 11

### THE PERENNIAL QUESTION:

#### WHY DID CATHOLICS ADD 7 BOOKS TO THE BIBLE?

Simple answer: the CATHOLICS added nothing – the truth is that the Protestants took seven books away.

Complicated answer: Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus, whom you might know as [St. Jerome](#) was born in 347 AD in Slovenia (then called Dalmatia, in the future, now former Yugoslavia. Figure that out.) In 378 he was ordained for the diocese of (Greek speaking) Antioch in Syria. In 382 he went to Rome and started working for [Pope Damasus](#). At the pope's urging, he decided to update the old Latin version of the Bible into a "more modern, easy to read version in today's Latin." (Today being 382 AD) It was called the Vulgate or the "Bible for the Common Man."

First he translated the Greek New Testament. Then he updated the version of the psalms contained in the [Septuagint](#). (The Septuagint was the widely read Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, completed in Egypt in 132BC. At the time, all Christians accepted the Septuagint as THE Bible.) Jerome went on to translate the rest of the Old Testament from the Hebrew and Aramaic sources of the Septuagint. It turned out to be a project that took years. It contained all the books in the Bible by the first Christians, but there were always questions, so....

Pope Damasus I, St. Jerome's patron, assembled the first list of books of the Bible at the [Council of Rome](#) (382AD). The process continued in North Africa. A series of Synods (meetings of bishops) were held in North Africa beginning in Hippo in 393, and ending with the [Council of Carthage \(419\)](#). The meetings took up the question of what were the inspired books and what were not. There was a basic agreement on the texts, but even then, 400 years after Christ, there was still a need to make a definitive list. The pope and the North African bishops drew up their list from those books then in use by the Church, particularly those read at Mass. Finally, the list was submitted to [Pope Boniface](#) (Damasus' successor) and the other bishops for confirmation. The list is as follows:

*"It was also decided that, apart from the Canonical Scriptures, nothing else is to be read in the Church, in the name of divine Scriptures. Canonical Scriptures are therefore the following: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, of Kings the four books, of Chronicles the two books, Job, Psalms, of Solomon five books, of the Prophets twelve books, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Tobias, Judith,*

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*Esther, of Ezra two books. Of the New Testament: Gospels four, Acts of the Apostles one book, fourteen epistles by Apostle Paul, two by Apostle Peter, three by Apostle John, one by Apostle Jacob (James), one by Apostle Judas, one Book of Revelations by John.*

These were the 73 books that St. Jerome translated and called the [Latin Vulgate](#). The Vulgate Bible was the definitive text of Scripture in Europe for 1,130 years. As the Roman Empire collapsed, the Catholic Church maintained what was left of the unity and culture of the Roman Christian world. Europe fractured into a bedlam of languages, a sort of tower of babble, but the Church maintained a common language, a common culture, a common law and a common Bible, the Vulgate, that was both source and guide. The Church insisted that the Latin Vulgate be regarded as the official version, not to hide the Bible from the masses, but to make it available to the whole world. Everyone who could read, read Latin. It was the universal language of literate people. Books were as rare as Elvis sightings and people who could read were not much more common. In order to make the Bible available, it had to be in the closest thing to a common language that the western world then had – Latin. Even Constantinople the capital of the Greek speaking East spoke Latin as an official language until 610AD. So the Vulgate and its 73 books were accepted by all Christians as the canon of Scriptures, the big book on the coffee table, the Bible!!! Until.....

Fr. Martin Luther translated the Bible into German. Many assume that the Church hid the Bible in an obscure ancient language and that Luther was the first to translate it into the common language. Nothing could be farther from the truth. There were perhaps 17 translations of the Bible into German before Luther. The question was which German? The little town whence came my ancestors had a version of German that is incomprehensible to anyone who didn't grow up in that particular town. And the rest of us who speak standard German are utterly bewildered by a Bavarian who has had a beer or two. These early German translations were based on the Latin Vulgate, which in turn was based on reliable ancient manuscripts.

Luther may have published in the most standard central German, thereby creating modern high German, and he may have gone to Greek and Hebrew texts, but he went with later, less reliable manuscripts like the [Textus Receptus](#). Jerome was only 300 years after the fact. He had access to the most ancient manuscripts. Luther had no such access.

Still worse, Luther didn't really translate the Bible. He paraphrased and poeticized it. In John 11:35 we read in Greek "*edakrusen ho Iesous*" (in English "Jesus wept.") Luther

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didn't translate it that way. He wrote "Und Jesus gingen die Augen über," "And Jesus' eyes overflowed." Poetic. Lovely. Heartfelt. A Really Bad Translation. Luther claimed he was just expressing things in the way that people really spoke.

Maybe they really spoke that way in 16<sup>th</sup> Century central Germany. We Germans love kitsch and schmaltz. (German words that mean gaudy and greasy.) We like cute art like Hummels. I own one or two myself. And schmaltz? That means we like to lay it on thick. Like butter. Or even goose grease on rye bread. Yum. So Luther gave the folks what he thought they wanted. It was certainly what he wanted.

The most egregious example of his failure to translate is Romans 3:28. Luther translated it "We hold, then, that man is justified without the works of the law but by faith alone." The word "alone" does not appear in the Biblical text, but Luther insisted that the word "alone" was necessary in German and that was what Paul meant anyway. This German doesn't need the word and if Paul had intended it he would have written it. Luther both needed it and intended it if his strange and novel theology were going to claim Biblical inspiration. Luther didn't use the Vulgate in his efforts to translate the Bible; he went straight to the Greek and Hebrew texts then in use. It didn't occur to him that things might have changed in the course of a thousand years.

He looked at the [Masoretic text](#) still used by Jews today and there he found seven books fewer than the Vulgate had. He made the assumption that they weren't in the Hebrew Bible because they weren't authentic. It never occurred to Fr. Luther that perhaps those of the House of Israel who did not accept Jesus as Messiah, might have left out books that were very popular with the first Christians. These books were certainly in common use at the time of Christ. In other words, Luther claimed that 16<sup>th</sup> century Jews were more inspired than 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians. That was just about the last compliment Luther paid the Jews. Luther rejected the Christian Scriptures of 419AD in favor of the Jewish text which was not finalized until around 900AD. Well done Martin! To it he added his own flair for the dramatic and his curious beliefs in faith alone and predestination.

Fr. Luther had a low view of the books of Esther, Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation. He called the Epistle of James "an epistle of straw," "finding little in it that pointed to Christ and His saving work." He also disliked the book of Revelation, saying that he could "in no way detect that the Holy Spirit produced it."

During the Protestant Reformation, Luther and his friends experimented with different lists of Bible books. In the end, the New Testament books stayed the same despite Luther's attempts to downgrade James, Jude, and Revelation. He particularly disliked

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James. I suspect that the only appearance of the phrase "faith alone" appears in James. "A person is made righteous by works and NOT by faith alone." (James 2:24) On this point Luther and St. James had differing opinions.

The Old Testament, however, was fair game. There were certain books included in the Septuagint, and thus in the first list of canonical books and the Vulgate, which were not included in the Jewish Bible. Protestants call them the [Apocrypha](#), or hidden books, well named since Luther hid them from the world. He put them in between the Old and New Testaments saying, "These Books Are Not Held Equal to the Scriptures, but Are Useful and Good to Read."

So there you have it. Luther's translation of both Testaments was finally printed in 1534, turning seven books of the Old Testament into a footnote so unimportant that Protestantism eventually dropped them altogether. He put disclaimers in the New Testament that warned the reader that James and Revelation probably weren't inspired. In the book of Revelation we read "For I testify to every man who hears the words of the prophecy of this book that anyone who adds to these things God will add the plagues that are written in this book on to him. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy God shall take away his part out of the book of life." (Rev. 22:18-19 ) Let's hope for Fr. Luther's sake that God doesn't apply this text to the addition of "alone" to Romans 3:28 or the convenient removal of seven books of the Old Testament.

### Part 12

#### **ROLL OUT THE BIBLE, or THE *SOLA SCRIPTURA* POLKA**

I have been saying for months now that the Bible isn't a book. It's a library. When someone asks me for the best translation of the Bible, the assumption behind the question is that there is an original Bible somewhere that can be translated. There is no such thing. This is a very difficult idea to wrap one's mind around. In this present age, we can go to a text and look at the printed page and look at the author's forward and look at the copyright, the date of printing, which edition our particular copy is and probably, if we were really worried about the whole thing we could ask to see the original author's manuscript just to make sure our copy is the real deal. Then we would be pretty sure that we had the original version of the book.

There is no original Bible sitting on a dusty shelf in the Vatican basement. There are bits and pieces of sheepskin, copper, silver, stone and papyrus found in caves and tombs and ancient garbage dumps in the desert. As far as we know, we have not one piece of paper that was written on by Mark or Luke or Moses or anyone in that crowd. What we have are handwritten scrolls or pieces of scrolls that are copies of copies of copies of handwritten scrolls.

Let your imagination take you back to an age before junk mail or faxes or e-mail or newspapers or those annoying bits of paper stuck in your windshield wipers while in the store buying stuff wrapped in cheap paper. In the western world there were only two sources of flexible writing material. There was sheepskin, but a book might take a few dozen sheep, and that's gonna cost ya. Less expensive, there was papyrus which came only from a weed growing in the swamps of northern Egypt. There were bits of broken pottery which the ancients used like post-it notes and there were tablets in wooden frames that were joined together like little books. They could be scraped clean and reused, but had only two small pages of writing space. There was stone, hard to write on and much harder to carry around in the fold of your toga.

For things that mattered papyrus (from which we get the word paper) was the cheapest, best way to record things. It didn't last forever except in a desert climate, so for really important things, calf or sheepskin vellum was the way to go (expensive, but long lasting). The Jews used vellum for the scrolls on which they wrote their sacred texts and they still do. When the "books" of the Bible were written, no books, such as we know them, even existed. There were only scrolls, usually written on only one side. They were large and clumsy.

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The scroll of Esther of which Luther said "I am such an enemy to the book of Esther that I wish it did not exist" is sometimes called the whole Megillah (reciting) because its whole scroll is read out loud in synagogues on the feast of Purim. I have heard the Torah, the five books of Moses, called the big megillah, because it is, well, big. If the first five books of the Bible were such a big, unwieldy scroll, imagine what it would have been like to put all 73 books of the Bible on one scroll. You would need a fork lift just to get it off the shelf.

Another problem is that the people didn't read. They listened. Sacred books, in fact all books were publicly read. In the early Church there were ordained lectors whose job was to make sure the sacred scrolls were publicly read. Books were too Expensive for just anyone to own. These days, a Torah scroll costs between 25 and 60 thousand dollars. And we have lots of sheep and cows. Only the very richest could own their own personal scrolls.

Let's do the math. At say \$40,000 for five books, we don't want the most expensive, but we don't want the cheapest either, what would the neighbors say? At \$40,000 for five books, a Bible of 73 books would cost almost six hundred thousand dollars!!!! Yes that's \$600,000!!! (A Protestant Bible would only cost \$536,000, so you might want to be a Baptist in this situation.) Do you get my point? When the Bible was written, THERE WAS NO SUCH THING AS A BIBLE!!!!

So, how did we get the Bible as we now have it? Remember the wax tablet in the two wooden frames? Somebody got the bright idea around 50-100AD to put papyrus or animal skin sheets in the frames instead of the wax. You could fit a lot of papyrus or even vellum between two boards and it was easier to *schlepp* around than a scroll and easier to find where you left off, you didn't have to unroll things. And thus the book as we know it was born. It was called a codex, from the Latin word for a block of wood. That's because it looked like a block of wood.

The codex was a big hit, especially with Christians who moved around a lot. Remember apostle means missionary. We read of St. Paul asking for his winter coat and his animal skins. "When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas and my scrolls, especially the parchments." (2 Tim. 4:13) Note that he says "especially the parchments," not just the cheap papyrus scrolls. The codex made things easier and cheaper. You could write on both sides of the pages thus saving paper, and it was small and could be stuffed into the fold of your toga or your traveling bag. Still, the scroll remained the standard until around 300 AD.

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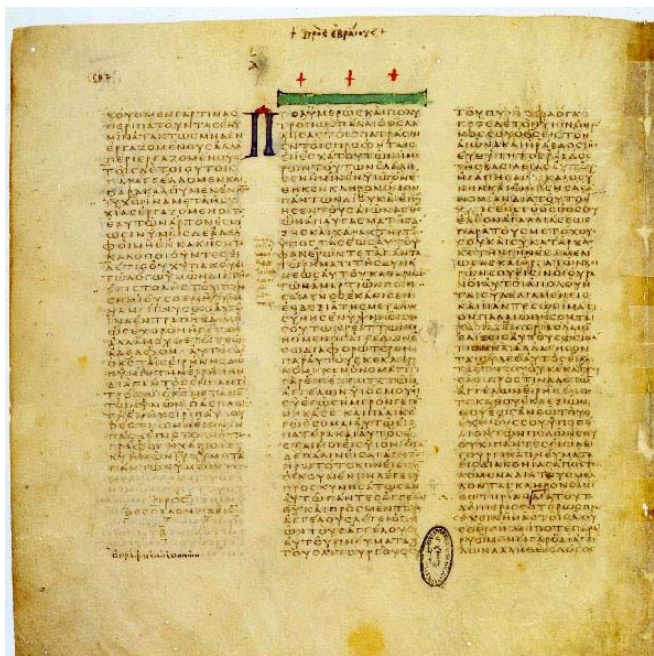
Then a couple of big things happened. Constantine became emperor and a made Christianity legal. He commissioned a giant codex containing all the books of the Bible and had fifty of them made. Remember, this had to be done by hand, by bored drowsy professional scribes from the imperial bureaucracy writing on animal skins. That's fifty large books!! At \$600,000 a pop, that comes to about \$30,000,000 (thirty million dollars)!

Pope Damasus in Rome seems to have done something similar at around the same time, but the idea of the Bible in book form as we know it seems to originate with Constantine in 331. We have two copies of the Bible from that time, one of which may be one of the original Constantinian editions. These are the [Codex Sinaiticus](#) and the [Codex Vaticanus](#).

They don't quite agree. There are different spellings and varying texts between the two most ancient "Bibles" the Sinaiticus has four books of Maccabees, and the Vaticanus has no Maccabees at all. I ask you, is that any way to run a business?

The first two Bibles don't even agree with each other! The Codex Sinaiticus was discovered on a dusty shelf in a monastery in the Sinai desert where the Greek Orthodox monks were using bits of old scrolls as fuel to cook their lunches. The Codex Vaticanus actually was found on dusty old shelf somewhere in the Vatican sometime in the 1500's. No one knows where it came from. Thank heavens, old rectories, convents and religious houses tend not to throw old stuff out.

So what does this all mean? If you are looking for an original copy of the Bible there is no such thing. If you believe in *Sola Scriptura* — Bible alone — I would like you to tell me which *Scriptura* you believe in and why! Thank God I am a Catholic and that I know the Gospel has been personally and faithfully transmitted by the community of the Church and that the minor variations in an ancient text don't change the truth at all. I, unlike the *Sola Scriptura* crowd, don't have to depend on some medieval monk or some imperial Roman bureaucrat falling asleep in the middle of copying a sentence in a dark



Page from Codex Vaticanus B containing Bible Texts 2Thess. 3,11-18, Hebr. 1,1-2,2

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cold scriptorium sometime in the dark ages. I have a living tradition to sustain me and not a dead letter.

Principle #12:

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS THE ORIGINAL BIBLE

PS You'll notice that in the Catholic Church, when we read from the text of Scripture we say "A reading from the Gospel of..." We don't mention chapter and verse. That's because we have been doing this since the days when we used scrolls in church. We have never gotten used to this new-fangled business of chapter and verse. Chapters didn't happen until a few centuries after Christ and verses didn't come into use until 1560. Give me that old time religion!

## WHO'S YOUR DADDY? MORE PROBLEMS WITH SCROLLS

When we read a modern book, we never worry that it's not an exact copy of the original. The original may have typos, but who asks, "Is this an exact copy of the original?"

Not so with books before 1450, when Johannes Gutenberg invented the moveable-type printing press. Before that, books were all hand written in codex form (turnable pages) or on long scrolls of animal skins or papyrus. But, paper and animal skins decay and must be recopied. Put yourself in a time when there were no computers, Xerox machines, cell phones, printing presses, electric lights, central heating, or eye glasses.

Imagine that it is the year 600 and you are an underfed, overworked scribe, a slave, or after the fall of the Roman empire, a monk. Let's call you Brother Cuthbert the Near Sighted. You don't get a lot of sleep, or a lot of food. You're dying for a cup of coffee, but it hasn't been invented yet. Water is usually bad, so the morning pick me up is beer or wine with a crust of stale bread for dunking.



By six in the morning you are slightly mellow. It's cold. Your fingers are numb. His Grace, the Duke of Schmendrick, Lord of the Manor, wants a new copy of the Bible, in the original Greek and Hebrew, not your best subjects in school. There you are, in a cold, dark scriptorium (writing room) trying to read and copy the entire Bible by the light of an oil lamp. I bet you are going to make a mistake or two in the almost one million words in the Bible.

So it happens that you leave out a whole section of the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Book of Armaments. Well, the Lord of the Manor won't notice anyway. He is illiterate. He has just bought a new coffee table anticipating the eventual discovery of coffee and needs something impressive to put on it. A year later, you are finished with what will become the famous Schmendrick Manuscript.

After you fall over dead in the scriptorium at the advanced age of 48, with you your goose quill pen clutched in your ink stained fingers, the Duke decides to give presents to his three lovely daughters, Berta, Gutrun and Brunhilda as they go off to their respective marriages to the royal houses of Lotharingia, Neustria and Franconia.

In their new homes, these fair maids, in their joy at having each bagged a monarch, begin to spend his money by endowing all the local monasteries with a copy of the Bibles with which

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their dear father, Duke Schmendrick had sent them off, never to see them again, much to his personal relief. (The girls were good eaters.)

So the Schmendrick Manuscript (circa 600AD) has made a lot of “baby” manuscripts, all of them missing a large chunk of the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Book of Armaments. The original, 3<sup>rd</sup> century, more accurate Hebrew and Greek manuscript which you, Brother Cuthbert, mistakenly placed on the top shelf of the chapel broom closet where it has lain untouched until after the Second Vatican Council when a few walls were knocked out to make a combination Confessional Room and Yoga Center. And, Lo and Behold! There is an addition to the Hebrew text of the Book of Armaments that no one realized was there.

Most of the handwritten Hebrew texts don't have this missing section, but this one does. Though it is the less common manuscript, it is still the better manuscript. This comes as no surprise to the Catholic Church, because the Latin Text has always had the extra section of the Book of Armaments. The Disputed Verses, as they are called in academic circles, were translated into Latin 300 years before Brother Cuthbert took to napping in the scriptorium, forgetting where he had left off copying.

Non-Catholic Bibles leave out the Disputed Verses because, for almost a thousand years no one knew about the better, older Hebrew manuscript hidden in the chapel broom closet, way back and toward the left, which has the missing lines. (This also explains the wandering ghost of an early medieval monk who walks the cloister at midnight muttering in broken Hebrew, as if looking for something he has misplaced. But I digress.....)

Bad manuscripts sometimes make lots of babies! Just because something is or isn't in most manuscripts doesn't mean it was in the oldest manuscripts. This is exactly the problem with Bibles like the King James Version and the Luther Bible. They depended on later, inferior manuscripts that the budding, over-excited scholars of the Renaissance rushed into print. We have access to better manuscripts now, and the Official Latin Text, called the Vulgate, has always been based on these better manuscripts.

Are you thoroughly confused? I hope so. So are most Biblical scholars. Once again, if you believe that all we have is the Bible, you are in big trouble. You must have tired long ago of my saying this, but without competent authority, it is impossible to determine what is truly Biblical.

God gave us the Bible and at the same time He gave us somebody to take care of the Bible. Someone has to be able to say that the phrase “faith alone” is in the letter of James, but not in the letter to the Romans, because there will always be some wise guy who comes along and tries to convince the world that the truth is otherwise. And, you guessed it, that someone given to us to safeguard the Gospel is none other than the Bishop of Rome, the Successor to St. Peter, known to friend and foe alike as,

THE POPE!

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Biblical principle # 13:

THE FACT THAT THE BIBLE HAS HUMAN ERRORS IN IT ONLY DIMINISHES THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL IF THERE IS NO OTHER SOURCE OF THE GOSPEL THAN THE BIBLE.

PS For the humor impaired: there is no Book of Armaments in the Bible. There is no Schmendrick Manuscript, but there used to be a Lotharingia, Neustria and Franconia.

PPS When I say gospel in this context I am not talking about Matthew, Mark Luke and John. I am talking about the whole wonderful story of God's love for humanity, from Adam all the way to the present time. That love has a name: It is Jesus, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, whom you can get to know here and now, The Bible and the Church are His witnesses, and He is truly really fully present under the form of Bread and Wine in the Holy Eucharist. He wants to give you Life and Life more abundantly. Why not get to know Him and give a chance? It's really very easy to start. Just stop, bow your head, close your eyes and ask Him to take charge of your life. It's a prayer He is always ready and willing to answer.

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I'm done now. Here are all Rev. Know-it-all's principles for reading the Bible:

1. THE BIBLE EXISTS TO TEACH US GOD'S WAY OF DOING THINGS, HIS CHARACTER, HIS PRINCIPLES AND HIS PROMISES.
2. THE BIBLE IS NOT A BOOK. IT'S A LIBRARY.
3. YOU CAN'T BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND THE BOOKS IN THE LIBRARY WITHOUT A COMPETENT TEACHING AUTHORITY TO HELP YOU.
4. THE BIBLE IS NOT A SELF INTERPRETING HISTORY BOOK. IT IS A COLLECTION OF BOOKS WRITTEN BY GOD FOR HUMAN BEINGS TO HELP US TO KNOW, LOVE AND SERVE GOD IN THIS WORLD AND TO BE HAPPY WITH HIM FOREVER.
5. DON'T WORRY ABOUT SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE NUMBERS. HEAVEN HAS AN ARITHMETIC MORE MEANINGFUL THAN EARTH'S.
6. THE BIBLE DOESN'T EXIST TO TELL US THE FUTURE, OR GIVE US STOCK TIPS OR SATISFY OUR SCIENTIFIC CURIOSITY. IT EXISTS TO EQUIP US WITH THE THINGS NECESSARY FOR OUR SALVATION AND REDEMPTION.
7. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO INTERPRET SCRIPTURE WITHOUT TRADITION.
8. MAKE SURE YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE READING ABOUT BEFORE YOU DECIDE WHO YOU ARE READING ABOUT.
9. AS YOU READ THE BIBLE DON'T ASSUME YOU KNOW WHAT A WORD MEANS UNTIL YOU KNOW WHAT IT MEANS.
10. THE BIBLE IS ABOUT PEOPLE, NOT PLASTER SAINTS.
11. KNOW THE STORY BEFORE YOU READ THE BIBLE
12. THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS THE ORIGINAL BIBLE
13. THE FACT THAT THE BIBLE HAS HUMAN ERRORS ONLY DIMINISHES THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL IF THERE IS NO OTHER SOURCE OF THE GOSPEL THAN THE BIBLE