



DISCOVERING THE BIBLE & OUR BIBLICAL HERITAGES

Providing factual information about the Bibles, beliefs, movements, institutions, events and people of historical Christianity & Judaism.

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Bible 101: Letting Our Bibles Tell Their Own Stories

By Jim Myers

The Bible is the most famous book in history and the bestselling book in America. There is an average of three Bibles in every home. It is the Holy Scriptures of Christianity and Judaism. It is not surprising that many hold strong beliefs about it. Interestingly, even many atheists have very strong beliefs about the Bible too.

At one end of the belief spectrum are those who believe "the Bible is the inerrant infallible Word of God and its words are literally true." At the other end are those who believe "the Bible is a book of myths and fiction." Between those two extremes are the majority with a wide range of beliefs. Regardless of whether one is a fundamentalist (Christian or Jew) or a "non-believer," their beliefs about the Bible affect the way they read and understand its words.

For those who believe it is the "inerrant infallible Word of God" every word in every book is in complete agreement. There are no differences, contradictions, disagreements or errors. God is perfect; therefore His Bible must be perfect too. Those at the other end of the spectrum obviously disagree. Things can get pretty exciting when the two meet and the discussion turns to the Bible. A friendly conversation may degenerate into a heated argument quickly.

It is easy to understand why a lot of people avoid conversations about politics and religion. But, since we are the Biblical Heritage Center, the Bible plays a major role in our work, classes and meetings, and people with a wide variety of beliefs are involved. Many years ago, it was not uncommon for some of those meeting to "get out of hand" when someone's beliefs were challenged or questioned. I knew many of the people personally and they

were very good people. Many were even friends, until the Bible or religion entered the conversation.

It became clear that we needed a way that would bring participants together instead of polarizing them. There had to be a way that would allow us to address the obvious questions raised when we critically studied the Bible without dividing those involved. This is the solution I found:

"My Belief System will be large enough to include all of the facts; I will be open enough to allow my Belief System to be tested; and I will be flexible enough to change my Belief System when I become aware of errors or new facts."

We have been using it for over twenty years now and it has changed many participants from being dogmatic defenders of their beliefs to team members engaged in a search for facts. Before we used the guideline, most of our discussions were about finding the truth. We all had the same goal – **truth**. One day I asked this question -- **What does "truth" mean?** The answer led to the creation of the guideline.

A truth is a judgment, proposition, or idea that is in accordance with a standard.

What standards are used to determine the truth? I discovered that there are two different standards.

- (1) *Truth measured by a standard based on **beliefs**.*
- (2) *Truth measured by a standard based on **facts**.*

Before we continue, I need to introduce a term that I did not know when I first began my search – *memes*. The study of memes was in its infancy back then, but now a tremendous amount of information is known. It helps us better understand more about beliefs.

A meme is a unit of information that is in a mind and is transmitted to and copied in other minds.¹

A meme is information that exists solely in a mind. Memes are like software on our computers, while our brains are like a hard drive. The software affects the output, but before that can be known it must be displayed on a screen or printed out on paper. The only way to know what memes people have in their minds is for them to communicate. The point I want to make is that **all beliefs are memes and they exist solely in minds.** Now back to our discussion on the two kinds of truth.

(1) A ***belief-based truth*** is a meme in which trust or confidence is placed, but it exist solely in one or more minds.

(2) A ***fact-based truth*** is something that is sensory perceived; something that actually exist or an actual occurrence.

Our minds scoop up beliefs and facts continually and process them as if they were the same. We have to train ourselves to consciously distinguish between them when we encounter a truth claim -- especially when we hear that claim coming out of our own mouths. We must ask this question:

Is this truth a belief-based truth or a fact-based truth?

When it is a fact-based truth, anyone will be able to "see it for themselves." For example, if someone says, "It is true that the moon exist." Any person that is physically able to see is able to judge that truth claim for themselves. Now let's discuss "the Bible." As pointed out above, the following truth claims are made about it.

(1) *The Bible is the inerrant infallible Word of God; its words are to be taken literally, and there are no errors or contradictions in it.*

(2) *The Bible is a book of myths and fiction.*

A person holding the first belief views its words as a direct communication from God (who does not lie). From their perspective, anyone disagreeing with what is in the Bible is to disagree with God. It is easy to understand why they would react so strongly. Many take on the role of defending God in these arguments, which can lead to viewing others as an enemy of God.

Many people holding the second belief probably won't care what others believe the Bible -- unless someone tries to force their beliefs about it on them. It is hard for some in that camp to believe that anyone would consider the words of the Bible very important.

Now I am going to ask you to do something that you really can't do, but just trying will work wonders. Turn off your belief system about what you believe about the Bible for the rest of this article --- *or as my young granddaughter says, "pause it!"* We are going to focus on some fact-based truths.

The first fact is "the Bible" is a name that is used to describe many books, no one book. Any reference to "the Bible" is misleading because it gives the impression that all Bibles are identical. The fact is that there are many books called "the Bible" and they are not identical.

"The" is a definite article -- *an article that classes as identified or definite the noun it modifies.*² Therefore, the statement "**the** Bible is . . ." denies those differences. One difference is that Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant Bibles do not contain the same books. The Jewish Bible does not have the books found in the New Testament. The Old Testament of the Catholic Bible has additional books not found in the Jewish Bible or Protestant Old Testament.

Another fact is that even when the same book is found in all three Bibles they do not all have the identical words. One reason is that there are multiple ancient manuscripts for each book exists and they are not identical. Ancient manuscripts of the same book have differences. Another fact is that someone had to select which manuscript(s) to use to each translation.

Another reason there are differences is that translators translated the same Greek or Hebrew word by different English words. For example the Greek word σωζω (SOZO) appears many times in the New Testament and it was translated by the following English words -- *heal, make whole, preserve and save.* I don't think many modern readers view *heal* and *save* as identical meanings. Do you think "*believe on Jesus and you will be saved*" means the same things as "*believe on Jesus and you will be healed, made whole or preserved?*"

Another fact is that the meanings of the English words selected by translators change as time passes. The word "fellowship" chosen by the King James translators in 1611 meant "*to lay down money or goods for a common cause.*" They selected the word *gay* as a translation for a word in a verse in James. Clearly the meanings of the English words *fellowship* and *gay* have very different meanings for readers today than they did in 1611.

Another fact is that different accounts of the same event differ in the same book. An example is found in the story of Noah. **How many of each kind animal did Noah take on the ark?** In Genesis 6:9 we find: "You are to bring into the ark **two** of all living creatures, **male** and **female**, to keep them alive with you." But in Genesis 7:2 we read: "Take with **you seven pairs** of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and **one pair** of every kind of unclean animal." Obviously they are different.

Another fact is that different books disagree about the same event; for example, when Jesus became the "Son of God." In Romans, Jesus became the "Son of God" at his resurrection from the dead, but in the Gospels he became the "Son of God" at his baptism. Paul's claim of apostolic authority rests on the answer to that question. Another example is found in the nativity accounts. In one, an angel appears to shepherds and they go to visit

baby Jesus. But in another, there are no shepherds or angels; instead we find a group of “wise men” guided by a star that visit baby Jesus.

In Matthew and Luke, we find the famous “virgin birth accounts.” John, on the other hand, contains no virgin birth account; instead there is an account of Jesus being the “Logos,” who was created by God before the heavens and earth existed. In the Gospel of Mark and Paul’s books, nothing is said about the “virgin birth” or “cosmic Jesus.” It appears they thought Jesus was created by the normal method that we were all created by – *a human mother and father*.

There are many differences in the books of our Bibles and some are very significant, as pointed out above. The point that I want to make is that when we recognize the differences in the biblical texts they help us more accurately understand the ancient messages of their authors which were recorded many centuries ago. They give us a glimpse into the minds of the ancient authors, and their communities and beliefs. They help us understand how beliefs, views and understandings changed from book to book, and from back then until now.

Our Bibles contain accounts with valuable wisdom and time-tested values that have endured for over a two-thousand years. The wisdom and values do not depend on any theology for their value to be important. For example, “you shall not murder or steal” and “you are your brother’s keeper” are essential to creating a foundation of core and shared values that make it possible for a healthy and safe civilization to exist. Neither Moses nor Jesus would recognize the religions that claim their words as their proof of authority today, but they would recognize their wisdom and values taught by those religions.

The next time someone asks – “*what do you believe about **the** Bible*” – or says – “***the** Bible says*” – be sure to ask that person – “***which** Bible*” – and – “*does it say anything else about that same subject.*” I don’t think that Moses or Jesus would have a problem with this. If God is truth, then He wouldn’t either. The only one that might have a problem with it are those whose belief blinders do not allow them to see facts that are literally right before their eyes or people whose power and wealth rely on them not being seen. *An amazing thing happens when we let our Bibles tell their own stories. **BHC***

¹ Virus of the Mind: The New Science of the Meme by Richard Brodie © 1996; Hays House, Inc., New York, NY; p. 11.

² <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/definite+article>

February Memorials

In Loving Memory

**PHYLLIS
WYRE**

d. February 8, 1998

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**ALBERTA
HARLESS
MYERS**

b. August 18, 1887
d. February 5, 1979

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**GLORY ANN
HODGES
ROSS**

b. January 25, 1978
d. February 19, 2008

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Their Remembrance

*May their memories inspire us to
seek those qualities of mind and
heart which they shared when we
walked life's journey together.*

*May we help to bring closer to
fulfillment their highest ideals and
noblest strivings.*

*May their memories deepen our
loyalty to those things which we
valued and shared --
faith, love, peace and devotion and
our biblical heritage.*

*As long as we live, they too will
live; for they are now a part of us,
as we remember them.*

(Inspired from prayers found in
Yitzhor Reflections - The New
Mahzor - The Prayer Book Press)

Remembering those who came before us is a very important part of the Biblical Heritage Center's mission. It is our privilege to honor them by the BHC Memorial Garden and Memorials. Please visit our website the next time you are on the Internet. If you would like to add your loved one to this section, send their information to us. There is no charge, but donations are accepted. Remember those who have meant so much to you in the BHC Memorial Garden.

In Loving Memory

**MARIA
ESTELLA
RUIZ**

February 22, 1996

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**JAMES
HENRY
MYERS**

b. September 6, 1881
d. February 13, 1953

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

SHALOM

*Totality, Wholeness
&
Peace.*

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