

# ***DISCOVERING THE BIBLE & OUR BIBLICAL HERITAGES***

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

2012 • NUMBER 9

## **Abraham, the Land & His Descendants**

*By Jim Myers*

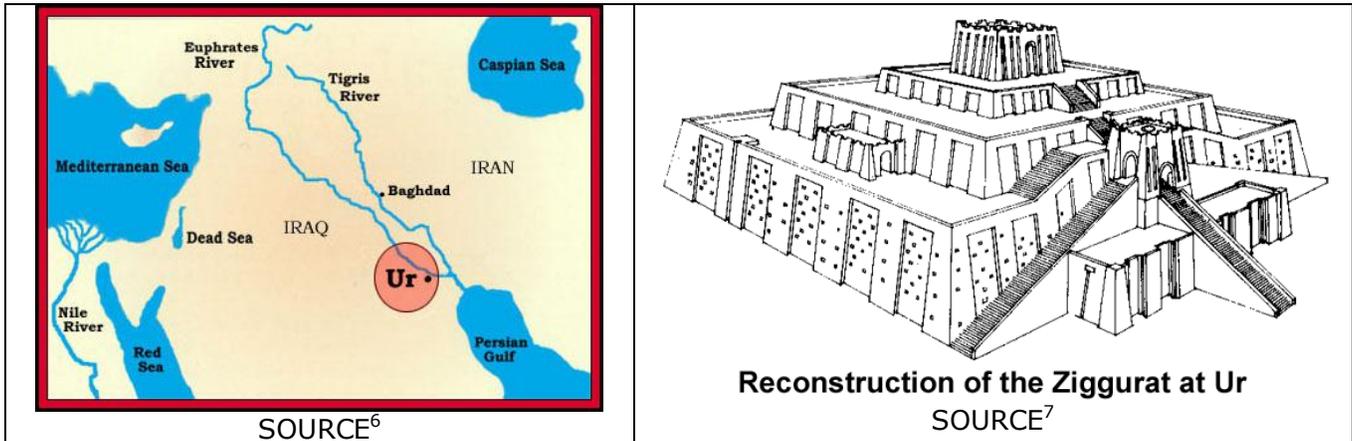
What people believe about Abram/Abraham affects how they read the Bible and view events in the Middle East today. It has been this way for many centuries. It affects not only religious beliefs; it influences political and military decisions, too. What does the Bible say about Abram/Abraham and the land Yahweh gave him?

What one believes about Abram/Abraham is affected by what one believes about (YHVH . Yahweh). YHVH is called the **Tetragrammaton** -- an ancient Israelite name for God. According to actual count, it occurs 5,410 times in the Jewish Bible.<sup>1</sup> There is a debate among scholars as to whether it was pronounced in public or even heard by those who were not priests. Some believe that only the priests in Temple in Jerusalem pronounced it when they recited the Priestly Blessing over the people daily, but since the destruction of Second Temple in 70 CE, it was no longer pronounced. Others indicate that there was an exception for the temple liturgy, where it was only pronounced once a year, by the high priest, on the Day of Atonement. Still others argue that after the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE, speaking it in public ceased.<sup>2</sup>

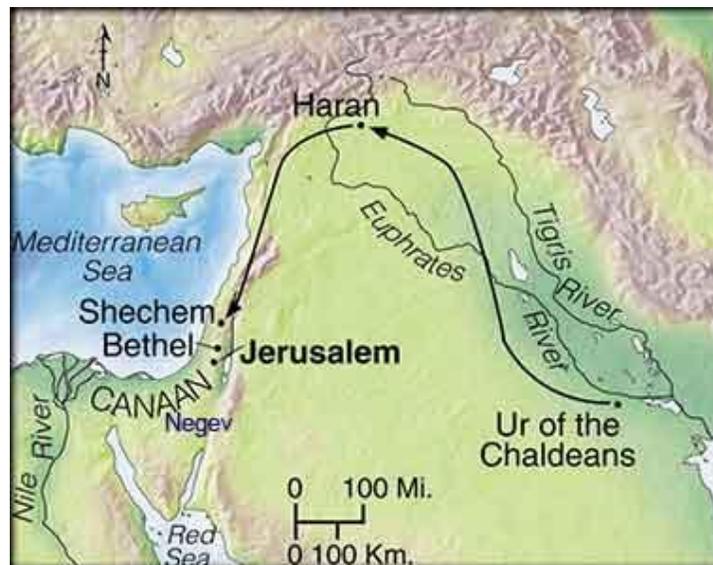
Yahweh is an *elohiym* (the Hebrew word that means "god.") Judaism today is a monotheistic religion, which means "there is only one God." The Hebrew Scriptures, however, contain many references to other *elohiym*s. The important thing to understand is that Yahweh is the *elohiym* that calls, communicates with, and makes a covenant with Abram/Abraham.

This is the account of **Terah's** family line. **Terah became the father of Abram**, Nahor and Haran. . . The name of Abram's wife was **Sarai** . . . Now Sarai was childless because she was not able to conceive. Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together **they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan**. But when they came to Harran, they settled there.<sup>3</sup>

**Terah** is the father of Abram. Abram's wife is **Sarai**. The story of Terah and his clan begins at **Ur** ("of the Chaldeans" was a later insertion<sup>4</sup>) about 2000 BCE. **Ur** was a major city, and later the capital, of the **Sumerian Empire** in southern Mesopotamia. Its location near the Persian Gulf made it a center of commerce and trade routes. Between 2300-1900 BCE **Ur** was the world's largest city, with about 65,000 inhabitants living within its walls. There were many temples and tombs in Ur, along with the **Great Ziggurat**,<sup>5</sup> which Terah and Abram would have seen many times.



Terah's plan was to move his clan to Canaan after he left Ur, but after stopping at Haran, he never continued the journey. Below is the route that Terah would have taken to Canaan.<sup>8</sup> The journey from Ur to Haran is estimated to be about 700 miles and then from Haran to Canaan would be another 800 miles. It would have taken a while to make it at about 20 miles per day.



We do not know why Terah planned to go to Canaan, why he decided to stop or remain in Haran, why he did not continue his journey or how long they were at Haran before the famous event below took place.

Yahweh said to Abram: "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."<sup>9</sup>

Something we must clearly understand is that Abram was not a Jew. Let me say it again, so there will be no mistake. **Abram was not a Jew.** According to the above verse, Yahweh told Abram to go from "your country" and "your people." This would indicate that Haran was Abram's homeland and the people there were his people. The account is about Abram of Haran, who completed the journey planned by his father, who stopped after returning home from Ur.

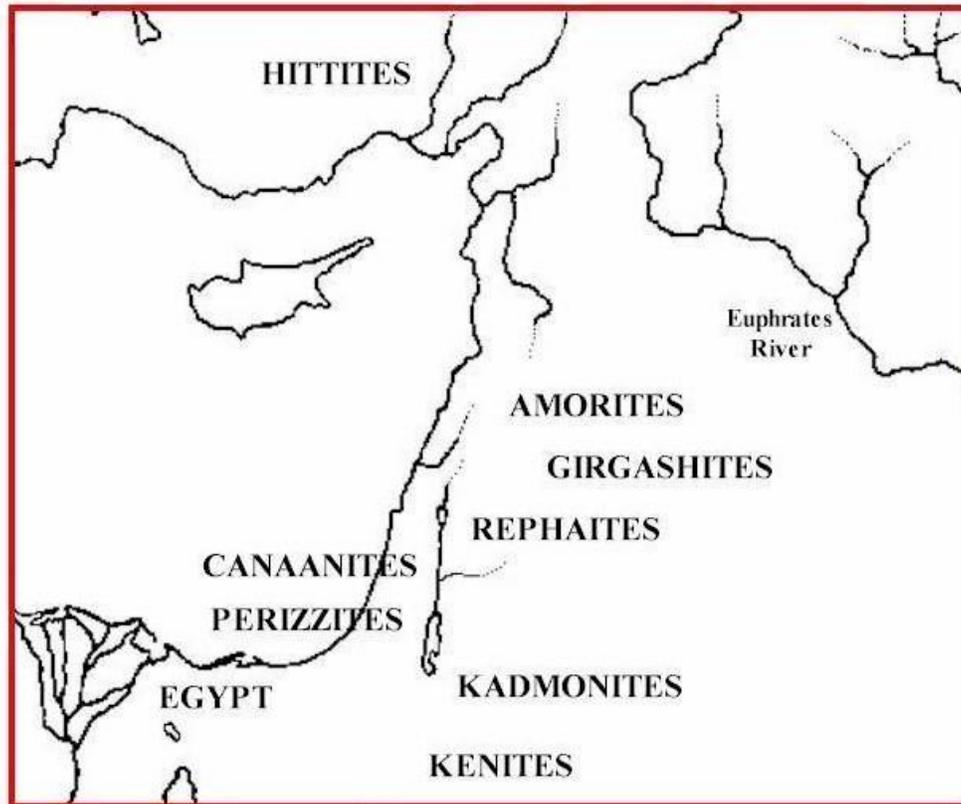
A man who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew.<sup>10</sup>

Abram is called "the Hebrew." Many readers consider the word *Hebrew* and *Jew* to be synonymous. The Hebrew word translated Hebrew means "one who has crossed over."<sup>11</sup> What he had crossed over was the Euphrates River, which is Abram was the one from "Beyond the River." "Beyond the Rivers" was an official satrapy after the Persians conquered the Babylonians. It was an area under the rule of a satrap (governor), which included the area in which Syria and Palestine were in.<sup>12</sup> This would mean that "the Hebrew" was been added by later scribes to help people of their period understand the text, as some scholars argue. In any event, it links Abram to the area around the Euphrates River.

Yahweh spoke to Abram in Haran. The only place we find Yahweh between the time He spoke to Noah and to Abram in Haran was the tower of Babel in Babylon.<sup>13</sup> This area seems to be where Yahweh was active. Yahweh does something with Abram that He also did with Noah -- *He made a covenant.*

On that day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates; the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."<sup>14</sup>

It is interesting that the area Yahweh gave to Abram is very close to the same area that made up the satrapy called "Beyond the River." Look at the map below and think about the size of the area promised to Abram and his descendants. It is clearly much larger than the Land of Israel. Keep in mind as we continue that this is the area that Abram's descendants will occupy. Therefore, it is very important for us to know exactly who Abram's descendants are.

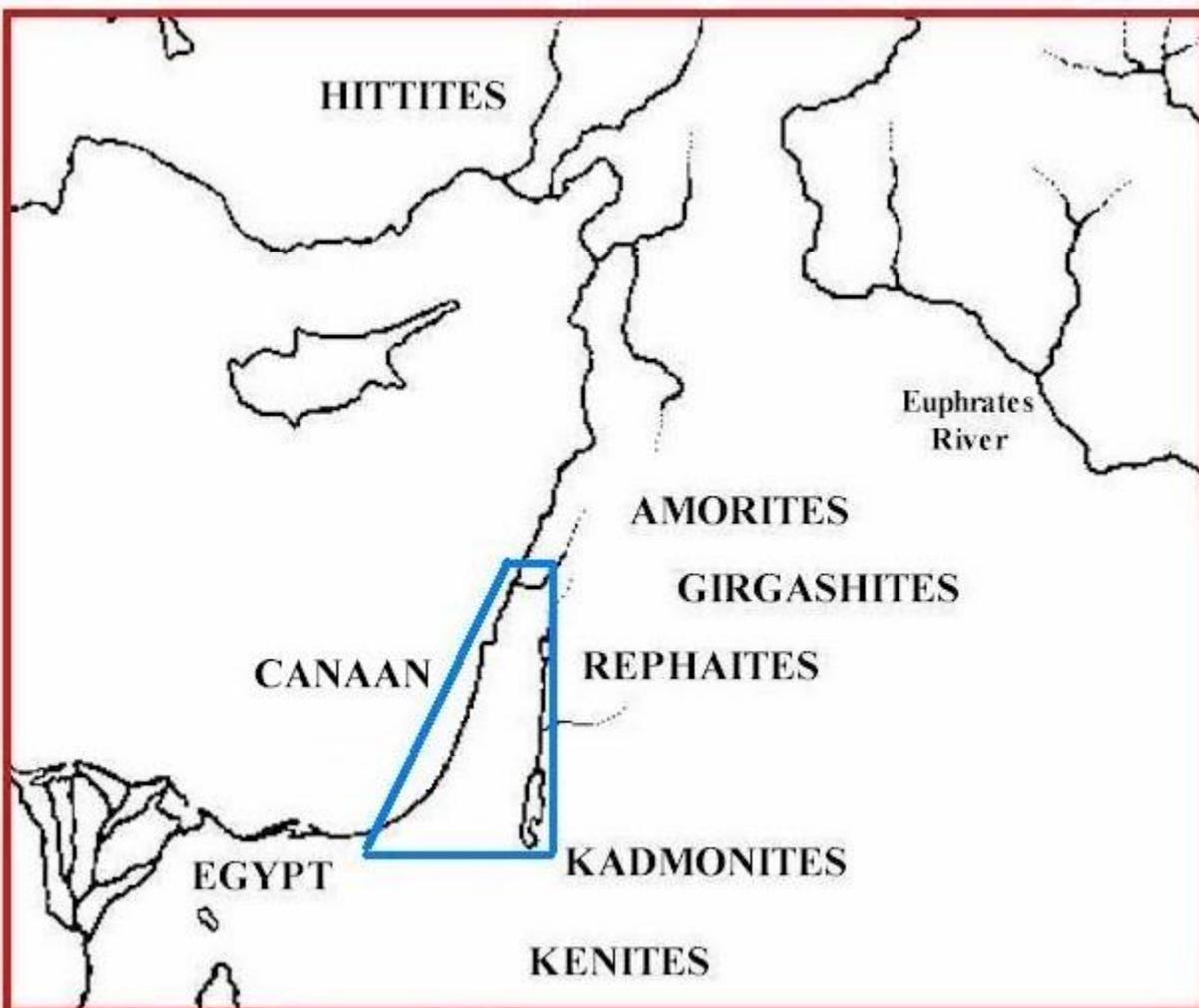


The verse after the covenant above reveals a problem – “Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children.”<sup>15</sup> The land is given to his descendants, but he doesn’t have any! Also notice, that the promise wasn’t made to “their” descendants – *it was to his descendants.*

Sarai decided to help out matters by suggesting that Abram and their Egyptian slave Hagar have sex. Abram and Hagar agreed; Hagar became pregnant. When Abram was 86 years old Hagar gave birth to his first descendant – **Ishmael.**

Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God. . . God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”<sup>16</sup>

This covenant changes the names of Abram and Sarai to **Abraham** and **Sarah**. It gives the whole land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants. It also reveals that Sarah will have a son, and descendants, too.



As you can see, the second covenant gives Abraham and his descendants a smaller portion of the land than the first covenant. This will be the land of Abraham and Sarah's descendants, specifically. This covenant is also the "Covenant of Circumcision." Notice that Abraham immediately complies with Yahweh's new requirement:

On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, and his son Ishmael was thirteen.<sup>17</sup>

Just as Yahweh promised, Sarah became pregnant and bore him a son when he was 100 years old.

Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name **Isaac** to the son Sarah bore him.<sup>18</sup>

Abraham's connection to his homeland was still very important to him, as can be seen when it is time for Isaac to take a wife. Abraham sent his servant to Nahor, a town located close to Haran,<sup>19</sup> to find him a wife from his people.

You will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac. . . Then the servant left, taking with him ten of his master's camels loaded with all kinds of good things from his master. He set out for Aram Naharaim and made his way to the town of Nahor.<sup>20</sup>

He found a wife for Isaac named Rebecca. After Sarah died, Abraham took another wife and had more children.

Abraham had taken another wife, whose name was *Keturah*. She bore him **Zimran**, **Jokshan**, **Medan**, **Midian**, **Ishbak** and **Shuah**. Jokshan was the father of **Sheba** and **Dedan**; the descendants of Dedan were the **Ashurites**, the **Letushites** and the **Leummites**. The sons of Midian were **Ephah**, **Epher**, **Hanok**, **Abida** and **Eldaah**.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, Ishmael also had sons.

These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, listed in the order of their birth: **Nebaioth** the firstborn of Ishmael, **Kedar**, **Adbeel**, **Mibsam**, **Mishma**, **Dumah**, **Massa**, **Hadad**, **Tema**, **Jetur**, **Naphish** and **Kedemah**.<sup>22</sup>

Abraham's descendants increased again when Isaac and Rebecca had two sons.

When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out was . . . **Esau**. After this, his brother came out . . . he was named **Jacob**.<sup>23</sup>

When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beerli the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite.<sup>24</sup> There was a conflict between Esau and Jacob, so Isaac sent Jacob back to Abraham's homeland for protection and to find a wife.

So Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him. Then he commanded him: "Do not marry a Canaanite woman. Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the

house of your mother's father Bethuel. Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother.<sup>25</sup>

Jacob not only found a wife, he found two and produced children by the two wives and each of their slaves while he was at Paddan Aram.

The sons of Leah were **Reuben** the firstborn of **Jacob**, **Simeon**, **Levi**, **Judah**, **Issachar** and **Zebulun**. The sons of Rachel were **Joseph** and **Benjamin**. The sons of Rachel's servant Bilhah were **Dan** and **Naphtali**. The sons of Leah's servant Zilpah were **Gad** and **Asher**.<sup>26</sup>

Esau also had children from his Canaanite wives: **Eliphaz**, **Reuel**, **Jeush**, **Jalam** and **Korah**.<sup>27</sup>

Yahweh made the first covenant, "to your descendants I give this land," and the second, "the whole land of Canaan . . . I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants." Look at who those descendants were: *Ishamel, Isaac, Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, Shuah, Sheba, Dedan, Ashurites, Letushites, Leummites, Ephah, Ephraim, Hanok, Abida, Eldaa, Nebaioth, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, Kedemah, Esau, Jacob, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtal, Gad, Asher, Eliphaz, Reuel, Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.*

Keep these relationships in mind as you read the Jewish Scriptures and recognize the family relationships involved in the events they record. **BHC**

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14346-tetragrammaton>

<sup>2</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tetragrammaton>

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 11:27-31

<sup>4</sup> Not used until around 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE in Babylon)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ancient.eu.com/ur/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://prophetess.lstc.edu/~rklein/images5/ur-map.jpg>

<sup>7</sup> [http://derek4messiah.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/1ur\\_ziggurat.gif](http://derek4messiah.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/1ur_ziggurat.gif)

<sup>8</sup> <http://dailyprayer.us/images/maps/ur.jpg>

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 12:1-3

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 14:13

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Scripture/Parashah/Summaries/Lekh\\_Lekha/Hebrew/hebrew.html](http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Scripture/Parashah/Summaries/Lekh_Lekha/Hebrew/hebrew.html)

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org.uk/pdf/ajba/01-2\\_051.pdf](http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org.uk/pdf/ajba/01-2_051.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 11:1-9

<sup>14</sup> Genesis 15:18-21

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 16:1a

<sup>16</sup> Genesis 17:3-16

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 17:23-25

<sup>18</sup> Genesis 21:2-3

<sup>19</sup> [http://jbg.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/332/332\\_urkeshfin.pdf](http://jbg.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/332/332_urkeshfin.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Genesis 24:3-5, 10

<sup>21</sup> Genesis 25:1

<sup>22</sup> Genesis 25:13-15

- <sup>23</sup> Genesis 25:24-26  
<sup>24</sup> Genesis 25:34  
<sup>25</sup> Genesis 28:1-2  
<sup>26</sup> Genesis 35:21-26  
<sup>27</sup> Genesis 36:2-4

## September Memorials

*In Loving Memory*

**KAREN  
LEYNOR**

**March 31, 1966  
September 9, 2004**

*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.*

*As long as we live, they too will live; for  
they are now a part of us, as we remember  
them. (Yitzhor Reflections – The New  
Mahzor – The Prayer Book Press)*

*In Loving Memory*

**JAMES  
EDGAR  
MYERS, SR.**

**September 13, 1913  
September 19, 1999**

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

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 which are printed in this newsletter. The Memorial Garden is on the website at <http://www.biblicalheritage.org>. Please visit the Memorial Garden the next time you are online and stop by often. If you would like to add a loved one, send their information to us. There is no charge, but donations are accepted. Share your memories about those who mean so much to you with a BHC Memorial.

The Biblical Heritage Center is committed to discovering and providing you with fact-based information that will help you more accurately understand your biblical and spiritual heritages.

BHC provides its information through this newsletter and its other internet resources ó BHC website, BHC Google Group, BHC Blog, BHC Facebook, Twitter & BHC YouTube Videos.

BHC is completely funded by tax-deductible donations from **people who understand the value of having fact-based information and use it to make sure their belief systems agree with the facts.**

***Please help us do our work by making a contribution today.***

***Send your donation to the address below or make it online.***

***Thank you!***

---

**How important is the Bible to you?**

**Do you want to have factual information about its history, messages and the beliefs that are based on it?**

**Does the Bible play an important role in many of the decisions you make in life?**

**Do your biblical beliefs affect your relationships with others, how you spend your time and your money?**

**Does the Bible play a role in what you believe will happen to you after you die?**

• • •

Our goal is to find and share the most accurate factual information possible, so you will be able to make the best decisions about the above & many other things.

**Your support helps us do our work.** Please make a donation online at <http://www.biblicalheritage.org> or mail you contribution to the address below.

**Biblical Heritage Center  
PO Box 79  
Cleburne, TX 76033-0079**

***Thank you for taking action & for supporting BHC!***

-----cut here -----

Enclosed is my donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ ST \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_