

The Biblical Heritage Center's

DISCOVERING THE BIBLE

Understanding the ancient words of our Bibles in their cultural & historical context and how they became our modern biblical heritages.

2010 • NUMBER 11

Religious Beliefs Systems Change & That is a Fact!

By Jim Myers

Religious people seem to believe that their religious beliefs were passed down to them as a complete body of absolute truths directly from God. Interestingly, those same beliefs define who they believe God is and what He requires of His people. They believe their beliefs are "divine truths" and that they should serve and worship God. How they should serve and worship God is defined by their belief systems. As I said above, a central factor in this process is the belief that their religious beliefs were passed down as a complete body that originated with God and their beliefs were the same as those of the founding members of their religion.

A religion's institutional belief system, which are found in its **statement of faith** and **creeds**, defines what is to be believed about God, as well as who are His followers, too. In addition, and very importantly, it contains the requirements for what is required to obtain eternal life. Life after death is clearly an important subject for most people.

What most institutional creeds and statements of faith do not reveal is the histories of its beliefs, including how they were transmitted over time to its members today. Something that I think we can all agree upon is that *no group's God makes public appearances at their churches, synagogues, or mosques and publically explain who He is, what He wants, and then take questions from the audience.* If God would do this it would really resolve a lot of issues. Who then speaks for God? The answer is "people." When people are persuaded that a particular person or group of people have been ordained by God to speak for Him, they bestow them with a tremendous amount of power and expect them to be trustworthy.

Death is one reason that religious beliefs are so important to so many. People know they have a date with death at some point in time. The moment a person is born the countdown to the day of death begins. Many options are available for people to choose from up until that moment. But then death takes control and our most advanced technological options can only verify it. The

medical profession can only declare you dead, and morticians can only make sure your body will be disposed of in a fitting way. The government will issue an official certificate stating that you are dead.

We all know how rich people use their wealth to avoid many of the difficulties that the rest of us face. Their children receive the miracle drugs that cost hundreds of thousands of dollars per dose, while many other children suffer and die because their parents can't afford it. Do you believe that poor people receive the same justice as the rich in the United States? Everyone knows that the rich can buy the best lawyers and do not receive the same treatment by the justice system as the poor. But, death levels the playing field, because not even the wealthiest of the rich can purchase an extension for their lives. The obituaries of the rich and poor will be published in alphabetical order, not by the value of their net worth. Nothing provides an alternative to the finality of dead, except for religious beliefs, but you must make your decision about them before you die.

Religions tell people what will happen after they die. They religion I grew up in told us that its members will live forever. The lure of life without end is very powerful. How would your life be different if you knew you would never die? But most religions do not simply promise life after death for its members, many also include a constant state of happiness, no pain, a mansion in the heaven, no work, all of your needs will be met, no need for money, and personal access to the presence of God. The poorest person before death will be able to live better than the richest person alive today. ***Every day will be a great day forever!***

Of course, religion also has another option for non-members and it is not so desirable. They too will live forever, but their days will be filled with pain and torment. Some may even burn in the fires of Hell forever. A few religions even tell their members that if they are disobedient to church authority they too will suffer punishment after death too. But, unlike with the unbelievers, at some point in time they will be transferred from the bad place to heaven and then experience the good things forever.

The belief that God is able to reach beyond the grave and punish people is very powerful. Not even the most powerful government institution, including the IRS, can do that. Life depends on our ability to overcome or escape from the challenges and dangers we face. But, according to most religious belief systems, divine punishment presents the worst case scenario – no way to escape. Religious belief systems offer two options – **submit to our authority and experience pleasure forever or reject our authority and be in pain forever.** In either case, you will be around forever according to many religions. The fact that beliefs about afterlife play an important role in attracting and keeping billions of people actively connected to their religions is unquestionable, including Christianity and Islam. The scriptural references presented to support beliefs about eternal life are well known and regularly proclaimed by Christian and Muslim religious leaders.

In this newsletter we will continue to focus on Christian belief system, as a continuation of the previous three editions. **The origin of Christianity begins with Jesus**. But, just as with God, the Christian understanding of who Jesus was and what he wanted comes from religious belief systems. Christian groups throughout history, however, have held very different beliefs about who Jesus was and what he wanted his followers to do, including what he taught that is required to obtain eternal life.

If you have been reading our newsletters for very long you know that our research has focused on **the Jewish Jesus** for many years. **He was the historical Jesus that lived in Galilee and Judea from about 6 BCE to 27 CE**. He is the Jesus that the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark & Luke) tell us about. The teachings of the Jewish Jesus fit well within the cultural beliefs of the Jewish people at that period of time. The Christian teaching developed by Gentile leaders centuries later would have been just as foreign to the Jewish Jesus and his followers as his would have been to them.

The religion of the Jewish Jesus was monotheistic, as it still is in Judaism today. This was ingrained in every Jewish mind of that period from birth. **There was no need for Jesus to teach things that his Jewish audience inherited from their common culture had known all of their lives**. Gentile converts, however, came from very different cultures in which there were many gods. For the Gentiles, the promises of eternal life rested solely on Jesus. Therefore, **understanding who Jesus was and what he required of his followers was the primary concern of Gentile Christians**.

What was required to obtain eternal life, according to the Jewish Jesus? The words you are about to read are probably universally known by Christians, who never consider their link to eternal life. I don't think he could have been any more clear about what he intended.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

Then **the righteous** will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, **into the eternal fire** prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

Then they will go away to **eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.** (Matthew 25:31-46 NIV)

What determined the eternal destinies of the people? Was it what they did or what they believed? It was what they did or didn't do. *Today, most Christians would disagree without realizing that they would be in disagreement with the Jewish Jesus.* The Christian answer today is that right beliefs are required to obtain eternal life and then they will quote verses from the New Testament, which by the way, didn't exist at the time of the Jewish Jesus. The Gospel of John is a popular place that many quote to prove their point. Let's see if John agrees with them or with the Jewish Jesus:

Amen! Amen! I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.

Amen! Amen! I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; and he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. (John 5:24-29 NIV)

Clearly John agrees with the Jewish Jesus. Another author that is often quoted to prove that right beliefs are required is Paul. Let's see if Paul thinks what people do will affect their eternal destinies?

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21 NIV)

The Jewish Jesus, John and Paul seem to be in complete agreement. Next let's turn to the man who became leader of the Jewish Jesus Movement after Jesus was crucified by the Roman army. English call him James for some reason, but his real name was Jacob. Read what he says:

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but **does nothing** about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (James 2:14-26 NIV)

Jacob also issued the famous Jerusalem Council ruling after the conflict concerning Gentile membership. Compare the following requirement with what your church requires for a person to be saved and become a member:

It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For the Law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times

and is read in the synagogues on every Shabbat. . . It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell. (Acts 15:19-29 NIV)

Once again, it is what one does that determines who will be accepted as a member, not what they believe. The Greek text indicates that there was another requirement that English translations fail to make clear – the requirement of attending the synagogue every Shabbat. **The new Gentile members would have clearly understood that they would be required to be in the synagogue with the rest of the members of the Jewish Jesus' Movement, so they would be taught the Law of Moses.** It will be through those instructions that they would learn more every week. Even when the Jewish Jesus gave one his most harsh discourses about the scribes and Pharisees, he made a point that reveals why future Gentiles would be expected to learn in the synagogues:

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: ² “The teachers of the Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So **you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do,** for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. (Matthew 23:1-4 NIV)

There was literally a seat in ancient synagogues called “Moses’ seat” where those teaching the Torah sat. But after the Roman army destroyed the Temple in 70 CE the link to the Jewish leadership and culture which the original Gentile members experienced was severed. They viewed the world through very different cultural lens from that of the original members of the movement. Gentile cultures were filled with many gods, demigods, spirits, magic, etc. It would be to their cultures that they would turn for answers about who Jesus was and what he required.

Pagan gods and beliefs about them were viewed very differently by Jews in the world in which Jesus lived. Their view had been shaped by a number of conflicts with Gentile powers. One of those powers was Antiochus Epiphanes IV (168 BCE), which played a very big role in shaping Jewish beliefs during the time of Jesus.

Antiochus Epiphanes IV marched into Jerusalem, vandalized the Temple, erected an idol on the altar, and desecrated its holiness with the blood of swine. Decreeing that studying Torah, observing the Sabbath, and circumcising Jewish boys were punishable by death, he sent Syrian overseers and soldiers to villages throughout Judea to

enforce the edicts and force Jews to engage in idol worship. When the Syrian soldiers reached Modin, they demanded that the local leader, Mattathias the priest, sacrifice a pig on a pagan altar. He refused and killed not only the Jew who stepped forward to do the Syrian's bidding, but also the king's representative. With the rallying cry "Whoever is for God, follow me!" Mattathias and his five sons (Jonathan, Simon, Judah, Eleazar, and Yohanan) fled to the hills and caves of the wooded Judean wilderness. [1]

This was the beginning of the Maccabean Revolt, which would end with a Jewish victory. They restored the ritual purity of the Temple and demanded a clear separation from all pagan beliefs by the Jews living in Judea and Galilee. During the time of Jesus anyone attempting to worship any god but Yahweh or introduce pagan beliefs would have received a very hostile reception. [2]

The Christian belief systems that developed in Gentile cultures focused on how one could obtain eternal life by becoming a member of their movements. Their new beliefs focused on salvation, which rested solely upon who Jesus was. He couldn't just be a man in their cultures, but he couldn't be a god because that would violate the primary belief they inherited from the original movement -- **monotheism.**

By the early second century Christian communities had fanned out across the Mediterranean into Asia Minor, Europe, and North Africa. Many cultures could be found in their members, which contained beliefs from Judaism, paganism, Hellenism, and Gnosticism. **Each Christian community was its own authority and Christianity remained decentralized until Roman Emperor Constantine became involved.** During the first three centuries many forms of Christianity existed throughout the Roman Empire. *What was believed to be the right belief in one place at a certain time could become heresy in the same place at a different time.*

The most importance differences of early Gentile Christianity were over who Jesus was. Some believed that Jesus had been adopted by God; others believed he a god that was subordinate to God; still others believed he was both human and divine in some unspecified way, but not equal to God. A conflict between two Gentile Christian leaders in Alexandria, Egypt would prove to be the turning point in the history of Gentile Christianity - the **Arian Controversy.** [3]

In 318, Arius accused Bishop Alexander of teaching the false doctrine that "God and Christ were of the same essence." Arius regarded himself as a devout Christian who wanted to return to the teachings of the early church. His said: "God was the Father – one, infinite, and indivisible. He was uncreated, existed forever, and ruled as sole sovereign and judge. No other God existed but He. Given His nature, He could not impart it to any other being. He had no equals."

Bishop Alexander responded: "Arius had drained the dregs of impiety by his unscriptural blasphemy against Christ." A council of bishops was called by Alexander, which condemned Arius for apostasy, schism, heresy, and blasphemy. It also declared his teachings as those of the Antichrist. Arius was excommunicated and exiled, but he continued to spread his message and his followers grew in number.

The rulings by local councils of bishops held no authority beyond their local groups. One group might excommunicate someone that at the same time would be viewed as a "true believer" by another group. This is what happened with Arius. Some of those other Christian groups that supported him were led by two very important and powerful bishops – **Eusebius of Caesarea** (the personal historian of Emperor Constantine) and **Eusebius of Nicomedia** (a relative of the imperial family). They brought this matter to the attention of Constantine.

At that time Constantine was searching for a way to unify his divided empire, which was becoming more polarized due to power struggles between the East and West. Constantine saw this as an opportunity to achieve his objective through the Christian bishops. He invited Arius and all eighteen hundred bishops of the empire to meet in the summer of 325 at Nicea, which was close to his palace at Nicomedia. However, only 300 bishops attended, of which just two were from the West.

Eusebius of Caesarea proposed a creed that he hoped Arius and his followers could accept by interpreting its meaning their way. His interpretation held that "the Son was from the Father, not however a part of His essence." But Constantine would only approve the creed on the condition that a specific Greek word meaning "of the same essence" or "consubstantial" was added to show the relationship of the Father and the Son. After making his suggestion, he followed it up by demanding a unanimous vote of acceptance.

But, Arius did not agree because it recognized Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as being divine equals of the Father. **He argued that it resulted in the existence of three gods, which was a direct violation of the monotheistic teachings of the early Jerusalem church.** This time Arius faced a very different situation from the council that excommunicated him in Alexandria. **The rulings of this council were backed by the authority and power of the Emperor of the Roman Empire.** It was no longer a local event. Not only was Arius excommunicated, *his writings were order to be burned and anyone caught with them would be a "criminal of the Empire" and could suffer "capital punishment."* The leading Arian bishops, Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognis of Nicea, were also deposed.

For the first time Christian leaders could use of state force to persecute one another over differences of beliefs and faith. Constantine's edict fixed the precedent for temporal punishment of offenses against the true

Christian faith. The two deposed Western bishops and friends of Constantine understood the political environment very well and pretended to recant to heal the rift with the emperor. It would take them a few years, but during the final years of Constantine's life they convinced him to reverse his position. Athanasius (Bishop Alexander's successor) and several other bishops who had championed the cause against Arius were condemned and exiled. They even managed to restore Arius to communion with the church.

For the next forty years Arius' position would be the official position of the Roman Church. The Arians were now the true believers and Athanasius was the heretic and deposed bishop. By 350 the Arians were completely triumphant. **The new Emperor, Constantius II, reunited the East and West under the Arian banner.** Several church councils endorsed Arian views, including the Council of Sirmium in 357, which rejected both "of one essence" and "of like essence." The Sirmium Creed expressed belief in "Jesus as Lord and Redeemer, the only Son of God," but also stated that "two Gods may not and shall not be taught."

But Athanasius wasn't finished and continued his efforts to reverse the decision of the Sirmium Council. He convinced church leaders to call new councils in 359 and 360. **Both once again condemned Arian and ruled his teachings were heresy. Athanasius was back in power and he declared the Arian bishops "Jews," "heathens," "antichrists," and "blasphemers."** The Arian form of Christianity didn't disappear, though. It would continue to be the form of Christianity practiced by many Romans.

Let's take a moment to understand exactly what took place between 325 and 360 CE in Christian history. The Council of Nicea ruled that **Bishop Alexander's position was God's will and Arius' was heresy.** In 337 the Church reversed its position and ruled that **Arius' position was God's will and Bishop Alexander's was heresy.** In 360 the Church reversed itself once again ruled **Bishop Alexander's position was God's will Arius' as heresy.** *What was God's will and what was heresy? It depends on what period of time you are asking about?*

Theodosius became emperor in the East in 379 and subsequently reunited East and West for a time. He was a devout Athanasian and a merciless ruler. A Church Council was called at Constantinople in 381, which laid the foundation of the beliefs that are still found in creeds and statements of faith today. It not only reaffirmed the Nicene Creed of 325, but expanded the beliefs about the Father and Jesus, including the addition of the Holy Spirit. Now the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were all of the same substance. *This would have been a clear challenge to the belief in monotheism taught by the Jewish Jesus.*

By the end of the fourth century beliefs about Jesus were split along the lines of the three centers of power within the Roman Empire. The Roman Church believed *"in Christ there are two natures united in one person."* The

Antioch Church held that *"Jesus was fully human, that the Godhead dwelt in him, but did not eclipse his humanity."* And, the **Alexandria Church** taught that *"Jesus' divinity must take precedence, even if was at the expense of his humanity."* In addition to the differences about Jesus, Bishop Nestorius of Antioch also wanted Mary's title changed from "The Mother of God" to "The Mother of Christ." As should be expected, the Patriarch of Alexandria opposed Antioch. In 451, the Council of Chalcedon ruled that *"Christ has two distinct natures—one divine and one human; these two natures exist inseparably in one person."* In addition it also ruled that *Mary was "The Mother of God."*

Attacks by the an East Germanic tribe plundered Rome in 455, after which the power of the Roman state began to decrease; but the power of the Roman Church continued to increase as its influence spread to Rome's enemies. The Roman form of Christianity in 500 CE was very different from the Christianities that had existed before Emperor Constantine. The union of the Church and empire made secular punishment for religious offenses a reality. **The laws Emperor Theodosius had passed made Roman Christianity the exclusive religion of the empire. Religious intolerance quickly became a Christian reality. The imperial edicts of Theodosius deprived all, who were judged to be heretics and pagans, of the right of worship, banned them from civil offices, and exposed them to heavy fines, confiscation of property, banishment, and in certain cases death.** By 435, there were **sixty-six laws against Christian heretics** plus many others against pagans.

The first instance of capital punishment of a Christian by Christians occurred in 385. Bishop Priscillian of Spain and six of his followers were **tortured and decapitated.** The next time someone says something about Muslims cutting off people's heads; don't forget that Christians were doing the same thing to other Christians long before Mohammed was born. The offense that led to Bishop Priscillian's execution involved his stance on bishops being married. He was married when he became bishop and refused to put away his wife and renounce the marriage, as was expected of a new bishop by Roman Church leaders. His position on marriage gained popularity among other bishops before the imperial court stepped in. **In the past his excommunication would have been a local decision, but now it was followed by state sanctioned executions.**

Before the Council of Nicea in 325 no universal standard existed for Christianity that could be used to test the truth of Christian beliefs. Now it did. Blasphemy and heresy became anything that was contrary to the positions of the Roman Church leaders. The Roman Church was now able to legally turn offenders over to the secular authorities, which required the cooperation of the state. Its justification was that an offender against religion, by being a rebel against God, also rebelled against the state. The state was required to protect itself and society by using its authority and force against any offender.

Sounds a lot like what political spin doctors put on political messages today -- "deviation from the true faith would mean the damnation of all the souls of Christendom." **Since the power of salvation did not exist outside the control of the Christian Church the state had to cooperate with the Church "to compel everyone to worship according to the one true faith."** Heretics, blasphemers, and nonconformists would no longer be tolerated. The suffering and death that resulted from the Inquisitions of the Roman Catholic Church and the trail held under Protestant control are well-documented. One only has to review history for the past seventeen hundred years to find see what happened.

Issues related to combining religious authority with state power surfaced immediately upon the founding of the United States. This is evident in many historical documents, as seen in the examples below. [4]

That no person, **who shall deny the being of God or the truth of the Protestant religion, or the divine authority either of the Old or New Testaments**, or who shall hold religious principles incompatible with the freedom and safety of the State, **shall be capable of holding any office or place of trust or profit in the civil department within this State**. (North Carolina's 1776 Constitution; XXXII)

And whereas the ministers of the gospel are, by their profession, dedicated to the service of God and the care of souls, and ought not to be diverted from the great duties of their function; therefore, **no minister of the gospel, or priest of any denomination whatsoever**, shall, at any time hereafter, under any presence or description whatever, **be eligible to, or capable of holding, any civil or military office or place within this State**. (New York 1777 Constitution; XXXIX. [Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, New York, South Carolina and Tennessee all denied the ability to hold public office to members of the clergy])

The man credited with being one of the most influential men in formation of the United States is **Thomas Paine**. American president **John Adams** wrote:

"Without the pen of Paine the sword of Washington would have been wielded in vain."

Benjamin Franklin met Paine in London in 1774 and helped him immigrate to Philadelphia where he became a journalist. In 1776, he published *Common Sense*, a strong defense of American Independence from England. His most famous work was *The Age of Reason* (1794-96). In it he wrote:

"I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow-creatures happy.

But, lest it should be supposed that I believe in many other things in addition to these, I shall, in the progress of this work, declare the things I do not believe, and my reasons for not believing them.

I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church.

All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, **set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.**"

Thomas Jefferson wrote his famous letter in 1802 to the **Danbury Baptists**, which made clear that the purpose of the First Amendment was to establish a "**wall of separation**" between Church and State in order to protect individuals' right of conscience:

Believing with you that **religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God**, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that **the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions**, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "**make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,**" thus **building a wall of separation between Church & State**. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.

Thomas Jefferson, in his Autobiography, made reference to the Virginia Act for Religious Freedom:

Where the preamble declares, that coercion is a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion, an amendment was proposed by inserting "Jesus Christ," so that it would read "A departure from the plan of Jesus Christ, the holy author of our religion;" **the insertion was rejected by the great majority, in proof that they meant to comprehend, within the mantle of its protection, the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and Mohammedan, the Hindoo and**

Infidel of every denomination.

James Madison was given the title "Father of the Constitution" by his colleagues at the Constitutional Convention. He was the Secretary of State under President Thomas Jefferson, and at the conclusion of Jefferson's two terms, James Madison won the 1808 presidential election to become the fourth President of the United States. In Madison's Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments (1785), he wrote:

If Religion be not within the cognizance of Civil Government how can its legal establishment be necessary to Civil Government? **What influence in fact have ecclesiastical establishments had on Civil Society?** In some instances they have been seen to **erect a spiritual tyranny on the ruins of the Civil authority;** in many instances they have been seen **upholding the thrones of political tyranny: in no instance have they been seen the guardians of the liberties of the people. Rulers who wished to subvert the public liberty, may have found an established Clergy convenient auxiliaries.**

A just Government instituted to secure & perpetuate it needs them not. Such a Government will be best supported by protecting every Citizen in the enjoyment of his Religion with the same equal hand which protects his person and his property; *by neither invading the equal rights of any Sect, nor suffering any Sect to invade those of another.*

Our goal in this and the past few newsletters is to provide you with an overview of the history of Christianity from the Jewish Jesus Movement to the first centuries of the United States. We have provided many references, which can be searched on Google or found on the BHC website for those seeking more information. Three points should be very clear by now.

- (1) Religious beliefs change over time & that's a fact.
- (2) Religious authority linked to the power of the state is deadly.
- (3) The founding fathers of our nation were aware of this danger and did their best to prevent it.

With the advances made by science, the truth claims of all religious institutions are now facing the greatest challenge to their authority and power in history. Scientific thinking has invaded the Church's sacred space to test its claims. In the past, the authority behind truth was what mattered. Science introduced a new type of truth that was backed by facts. Facts are unrelated to authority. I have no doubt that this was understood by some of our founding fathers, who did their best to accommodate both forms in their plans for the new nation. Their wisdom made the nation that we now live in possible. The continued survival of our freedom requires the separation of religion and state.

The challenge facing this generation is how to move forward with the process and create a belief system that will accommodate both science and spirituality. Even atheists have beliefs that can be linked to the religious beliefs of the past. Those of both sides, and in the between, should heed the words of Albert Einstein:

“The bigotry of the nonbeliever is for me nearly as funny as the bigotry of the believer Whoever shuts his eyes to avoid seeing the bitter injustices of our times shares the guilt for their tragic continuation.” [5]

My challenge to you is that “your beliefs will be large enough to include all of the facts; open enough to be tested; and, flexible enough to change when error is detected or you become aware of new facts.” **BHC**

Sources:

1. http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Hanukkah/History/Maccabean_Revolt.shtml
2. Biblical Heritage Center's Major Religions Index Databases.
3. Blasphemy: Verbal Offense against the Sacred, from Moses to Salman Rushdie by Leonard W. Levy (The University of North Carolina Press; Chapel Hill, North Carolina and London; © 1993 by Leonard W. Levy; pp. 15-49).
4. http://rationalrevolution.net/articles/history_of_the_separation_of_chu.htm
5. Einstein's God: Albert Einstein's Quest as a Scientist and as a Jew to Replace a Forsaken God by Robert N. Goldman; Jason Aronson, Inc., Northvale, New Jersey; © 1997.

November Memorials In Their Remembrance

In Loving Memory

**PAMELA
STRYKER**

**December 11, 1941
November 21, 2000**

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

*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.*

In Loving Memory

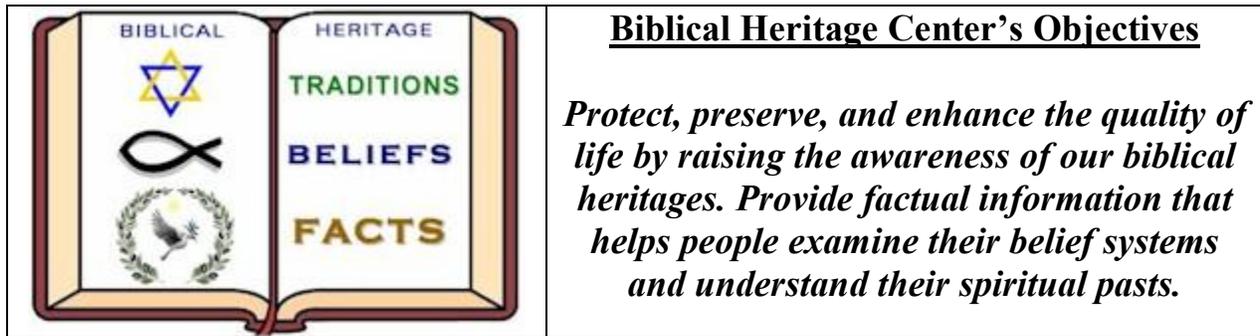
**JOHNNIE
VERA BOND**

**February 21, 1893
November 30, 1985**

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

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

Please help by making a special year-end donation.



Thank you for reading this newsletter.

Matters of belief & faith are important factors in the quality of life people live. Our religious belief systems affect the religious, political and social communities in which we live. Therefore they must be not be blindly followed, but understood and examined for accuracy. They affect how we relate to one another and are the foundation of our moral and ethical value systems. The bottom line is that they influence our daily decisions and create the realities through which we view life.

The Biblical Heritage Center is completely funded by financial gifts donated by individuals who understand the importance of its work. *Your generosity will be greatly appreciated and will make a very big difference!* We are committed to sharing as much solid factual information with as many people as possible *ó but we need the funds to be able to do it.*

There has never been a time that educating people about their religious belief systems and the heritages from which they came were more important. Religion is quickly becoming a huge emotional factor in the political arena. Spin doctors and power brokers are pulling the religious strings of the public more than ever. **A growing anger is beginning to boil below the surface in many communities today. But, their agendas won't work on informed believers.** Our job is to help people become informed. *Please send your generous year-end gift today.*

For information about how to make an **online donation** go to the BHC website (see bottom of page) or **mail your donation** to the address below. We must receive your gift no later than December 31, 2010 to be claimed on your 2010 tax return (see you account, tax consultant or visit the IRS website for more information).

The spiritual health of a nation or religion is revealed by the quality of life of its children, women, elderly and poor.

Thank you for your generous year-end contribution!