



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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Would Jesus Want People to “BELIEVE IN” Him or “BELIEVE” Him?

By Jim Myers

The **Sermon on the Mount** is one of the most important blocks of the teachings of the Jewish Jesus to have survived the 2000 year journey of being passed down from one generation to the next by non-Jews from a variety of non-Jewish cultures. Those cultures have left cultural scars in the copies of manuscripts they made and their translations. However, beneath those scars are the Jewish teachings of Jesus that are still detectible and fit well into his **Late Second Temple Period** culture.

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For those who believe Jesus would want people to “BELIEVE” him, understanding what he taught is of primary importance.

Which choice Christians make affect not only what they believe, but how they understand what Christianity is and why it exists. This makes a culturally accurate understanding of what Jesus taught on the mountain that day very important. And, as you will learn, it not only affects Christianity *ó it affects America. It is essential for Christians to consciously increase their knowledge of the Jewish culture and the historical environment in which he lived.*

What happens if they don't? Their minds will assign other meanings to the words of Jesus and make it impossible to accurately understand what he taught. Until Christians assign the meanings from his culture and time period to his words, Christianity will continue meaning different things to different people and splitting into more and more competing religious sects that just happen to share the same brand name -- **Christian**.

But, when people reconnect his cultural meanings to his teachings, an amazing healing process begins. One thing I have learned over the past thirty years of study and sharing what I learned with Christians from a variety of churches and denominations is this -- *the vast majority earnestly wants to understand what Jesus taught as accurately as possible.* And, as they understood his words more accurately, they began to build bridges and cross Belief Gaps that have separated them.

Jesus's Jewish followers recognized that his teachings were loaded with hints and veiled references to well-known cultural ideas and portions of Scriptures. Many had been immersed in those ideas from birth and every Shabbat they set in synagogues listening to the words of the **Torah, Prophets and**

Writings as they were read from Hebrew scrolls and interpreted by scribes and teachers. It took a three year cycle for the entire Torah to be read in the synagogues and as soon as one cycle ended the next began. When Jesus used certain words or phrases, they knew exactly what he meant. But readers today are not familiar with those ideas and hints, so their minds fill in the blanks from whatever sounds familiar. I am going to attempt to bridge a few gaps in this newsletter by providing some cultural links to the words he taught. I do not have space enough to provide many details about the conclusions they are based on, but I will provide some links to more information. Let's begin!

Do not think that I came to destroy the Torah or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. (Matthew 5:17)

Why would Jesus tell people *he didn't come to destroy but fulfill* the Torah and the Prophets? Unless you understand what those words meant in his culture, you may come up with all kinds of ideas. Based on our research, here is what his Jewish followers understood:

I am not here to misinterpret the words of the scrolls of the Torah and Prophets. I am here to correctly interpret them.

To learn more about this go to <http://therealjesua.blogspot.com/2013/08/yeshua-came-to-fulfill-law-not-abolish.html> . Now let's take one step back to the verse before the one above to see what words of the *Torah* and *Prophets* he felt needed to be interpreted correctly.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

The above verse ends the immediate context that began with verse 14, but I only have space to address *light*, *light shine before men*, and *see you good works* in the verse above. In his culture *light* and *life* are often used interchangeably. When the Jewish audience heard *light* and *good works* used together, chances were very good that they recalled the opening verses of the **Torah** in which the Creator did the first act of creation *light*. It also signaled the creation of **life**. After He created *light/life*, He measured it by his **Standard** to see if it was **TOV** (*good*). Five days later He created humans *creatures created to do works like Him*. The additional five days have provided reader with important information that allows them to better understand what **TOV** means -- *acts of TOV protect life, preserve life, make life more functional and increase the quality of life*. Based on this information, the Jewish audience would have understood the above words of Jesus to mean something like this:

Live your life before men so they see the light of the Creator through your acts – works that protect life, preserve life, make life more functional and increase the quality of life of those around you -- and they will praise and give honor to the Creator. (Matthew 5:16)

One thing his followers would no doubt have all known is how important the scroll of Isaiah was to him. He used it to announce he was the *Anointed One* when he was called upon to read Isaiah 61:1-2 at his home synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21). It provides another important link:

The Spirit of Yahweh is upon me, because He has anointed me to announce the good news to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of Yahweh.

By the way, none of his Jewish followers called him "Christ." "Christ" is the English transliteration of the Greek word *christos* which is translated "anointed." What the Jewish crowds wanted to know was "Are you the 'Anointed one'?" And, according to what he read and said in the synagogue that day "he said he was!" Don't assume that proves any theology, because in his culture "anointed" meant "he was appointed by Yahweh to do something." What was he anointed to do?

- *announce the good news to the poor*
- *heal the brokenhearted*
- *proclaim liberty to captives*
- *proclaim the recovery of sight to the blind*
- *set at liberty those the oppressed*
- *proclaim the acceptable year of Yahweh*

His followers also understood that the words of Isaiah 61 were linked to the "light." It is found in chapter 58. Pay close attention to the opening words of verse 8:

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn . . .

The first word is very important "then." For the light to break forth something else must be done and that is spelled out in verses 3b-7:

Indeed, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your workers. Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high.

Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to Yahweh?

Is this not the fast that I have chosen; to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?

Who are the oppressed? They are the "workers." The oppressors are those in authority over the workers "fellow Israelites not foreigners." The oppressors are also worshippers of Yahweh and active participators in religious rituals, but they are not doing them for the purposes Yahweh intended. Fasting is supposed to be a time of inner reflection to purify oneself and get back on the acceptable path of Yahweh. The oppressors fasted to please themselves, while exploiting workers, arguing and doing wicked things. Isaiah reminded them of what Yahweh wanted them to do as they fasted:

- *share their bread with the hungry*
- *bring those who were homeless into their homes*
- *provide clothes for those who were naked*
- *go to the aide of their fellow Israelites*

Now we know that the above actions were the conditions referred to by the **ōthenö** in verse 8:

- (1) *then your light shall break forth as the dawn*
- (2) *then your healing shall quickly spring up*
- (3) *then your **TZEDAQAH** shall go before you*
- (4) *then the glory of Yahweh shall gather you*

One of the most important words in the teachings of Jesus appears above ó **TZEDAQAH**. It is usually translated *ōrighteousness,ö* and in this context it is used in parallel to *ōlight.ö* Doing acts of **TZEDAQAH** is *ōletting your light shine.ö* Now, take a moment to visualize the words of Isaiah:

*As Israelites do acts of **TZEDAQAH** they free the oppressed and their nation begins to heal. News of their acts of **TZEDAQAH** travels before them. They come together as they honor and give glory to Yahweh through their actions.*

Isaiah's vision became Jesus's vision for his movement. He and his followers would do what Isaiah prophesied and that would launch the **Kingdom of God**. His fellow Jews also knew Isaiah's vision and they were looking for the *ōAnointed Oneö* who would be teaching and doing the things Isaiah taught. Jesus made it very clear that this was his goal, but many translations do not allow readers to see that vision. For example, what do you visualize when you read the words below:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:9-10)

What does *ōpeacemakerö* mean to you? I pictured people who were **resolving conflicts** between people. Since the ancient manuscripts of New Testament books are written in Greek, translators link Greek meanings to Jesus's words. But, he taught in Hebrew, not Greek, and the word for *ōpeaceö* he spoke was *ōSHALOM.ö*

Usually translated by *ōpeace,ö* has in effect little in common with its English equivalent. **SHALOM** does not have the passive, even negative, connotation of the word *ōpeace.ö* It does not mean merely "the absence of strife." **SHALOM** is pregnant with positive, active and energetic meaning and association. It connotes **totality, health, wholesomeness, harmony, success, the completeness and richness of living in an integrated social milieu.** (See the [ōYeshua's Vocabularyö](#) page in the BHC website.)

This painted a very different picture from the one I originally visualized. How about you? The next translation problem we must resolve concerns the phrase *persecuted for righteousness' sake*. *Persecuted* paints pictures in my mind of people being *yelled at, beaten, arrested, killed, etc., because they were Christians*. Scholars have reconstructed the Hebrew beneath the Greek words and their translation is *pursue* instead of *persecuted*. The reconstruction below reflects how Jesus's Jewish audience would have understood his words:

*Blessed are those making lives total, whole, complete, healthy, harmonious, successful, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who pursue **TZEDAQAH** by their actions, for they are the Kingdom of God. (Matthew 5:9-10)*

Now let's compare what Jesus taught to Isaiah's vision above:

*As Israelites do acts of **TZEDAQAH** they free the oppressed and their nation begins to heal. News of their acts of **TZEDAQAH** travels before them. They come together as they honor and give glory to Yahweh through their actions.*

The importance of *acts of **TZEDAQAH*** is stressed throughout Jesus's teachings.

*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. Lay up for yourselves treasures with God, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The lamp of the body is the eye. If you have a **good eye**, your whole body will be full of light. But if you have an **evil eye**, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*
(Matthew 6:19-23)

The key terms in this lesson are idioms *good eye and evil eye* and the translators of most English Bibles fail to recognize it. An **idiom** is a word or phrase that cannot be translated literally into another language and the meaning of it cannot be understood by defining its component parts. An idiom Americans will recognize is underlined in this sentence -- He really put his foot in his mouth this time. What would someone think if they didn't know it was an idiom? Below are the meanings of the idioms Jesus used:

(1) **good eye** is a generous person who does acts of **TZEDAQAH**.

(2) **evil eye** is a stingy or greedy person who gives those in need nothing.

Keep in mind that *light* and *life* are used interchangeably and consider their opposites *death and darkness*. Now let's reconstruct the message Jesus taught:

*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. Lay up for yourselves treasures with God, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The lamp of the body is the eye. If you are generous person who does acts of **TZEDAQAH** for those in need, your whole body will be full of life. But if you are a stingy greedy person who does not do acts of **TZEDAQAH** for those in need,*

your whole body will be full of death. If therefore the life that is in you is death, how great is that death! (Matthew 6:19-23)

How does one lay up treasures with God? It is by doing acts of **TZEDAQAH**. Why should people lay up treasures with God? I believe Jesus found that answer in Isaiah's words (58:10) too:

And if you let out your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your darkness shall be like noon.

Now let's take another look, but this time with what we learned about light and darkness:

*And if you let out your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then **your life shall rise in death** and **your death shall be like life**.*

Keep this in mind as we now read what is undoubtedly the most important lessons Jesus taught:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy messengers with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. He will set the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on the left. The King will say to those on his right hand:

“Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world because I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me.”

The righteous will answer him, saying:

“Master, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or naked and clothe you? Or when did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?”

The King will answer and say to them:

“Amen! Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.”

He will then say to those on the left hand:

*“Depart from me, you cursed, into the judgment **OLAM** prepared for the adversary and his messengers, because I was hungry and you gave me no food; I was thirsty and you gave me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take me in, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.”*

They will also answer him, saying:

“Master, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?”

He will answer them, saying:

öAmen! Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.ö

These will go away into punishment **OLAM**, but those who did **TZEDAQAH** go away into life **OLAM**. (Matthew 25:31-46)

(**OLAM** is usually translated öeternal,ö which may be the meaning here, but there are other considerations, but we will have to have that discussion later.) Who will enter life eternal? The answer is the people who *laid up treasures with God -- did TZEDAQAH*. When we reconstruct the teachings of the Jewish Jesus and view them in their cultural context not only do they take on completely new meanings, they are in harmony with messages of Isaiah.

So, what do the teachings of Jesus above have to do with the title of this newsletter -- *Would Jesus Want People to “BELIEVE” Him or “BELIEVE IN” Him?* To answer that question we need to consider the translations of a very important verse in Christian theology. Below are two translations of Genesis 15:6:

(1) *And Abram **BELIEVED IN** Yahweh, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*

(2) *And Abram **BELIEVED** Yahweh, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*

Rabbi Harold Kushner addressed this situation in his book *Nine Essential Things I’ve Learned About Life* (p. 159) -- *Does it make a difference if Abraham believed God or believed in God?* Pay close attention to his answer:

(1) *It makes a significant difference.*

(2) *To **BELIEVE IN** God is a statement about God, that He exists and is not the product of wishful thinking. It is theology . . . something that exists inside an individual’s heart and mind.*

(3) *To **BELIEVE** God is a statement about Abraham, that Abraham was prepared to trust God, to rely on God to do what He had promised to do . . . to act in obedience to God’s demands.*

So, what’s the difference between ö**BELIEVE IN**ö Jesus or ö**BELIEVE**ö Jesus?

(1) *To **BELIEVE IN** Jesus is a statement about his existence that is a product of theology . . . something that exists inside an individual’s heart and mind.*

(2) *To **BELIEVE** Jesus is a statement about the person that believes – he or she demonstrates their trust Jesus by doing what he asked -- lay up treasures with God, be **SHALOM** makers, do acts of **TZEDAQAH**, etc.*

It is clear that the author of the *Gospel of John* understood what Jesus meant: *Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth — **those who have done good**, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation* (5:28-29).

Paul was also given the message by the apostles: *When James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. **They desired only that we should remember the poor**, the very thing which I also was eager to do.* (Galatians 2:9-10)

So, do you think Jesus would rather have people who **öBELIEVE INö** him or **öBELIEVEö** him?
Which choice would make America a better place?

BHC

I want to hear from you!

What is the difference between **öBELIEVING INö** Jesus and **öBELIEVINGö** Jesus? Which would Jesus want Christians today to do? How does one little word **öINö** change everything? How does it affect the quality of life for not only the 2 billion Christians in the world, but that of the other 5+ billion people they share the planet with? How does the **öINö** affect the very meaning of what a Christian is, what a church does and what being a Christian nation means? This is the single most important question that individual Christians and members of churches must answer *ó and they need to do ASAP!* Why? Because the **öINö** depends on what Christians Value the Most & Where they Focus their Actions. Not because church memberships have been in a steady decline for years. Christianity is still one of the largest collectives in the world *ó and that means if they are able to act together on anything it will have tremendous effects on individuals, families, neighborhoods, cities, companies, educational institutions, government institutions, financial institutions, etc.*

I want to hear from you. Email me and tell me if you think Jesus wants you to **öBELIEVE INö** him or **öBELIEVEö** him. [Click here to email me.](#)

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February Memorials

In Loving Memory of

ALBERTA HARLESS MYERS d. Feb. 5, 1979	PHYLLIS WYRE d. Feb. 8, 1998	JAMES HENRY MYERS d. Feb. 13, 1953	GLORY ANN ROSS d. Feb. 19, 2008	MARIA ESTELLA RUIZ d. Feb. 22, 1996
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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.*

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