

Believing, Behaving & Belonging

By Jim Myers

Below are the options of believing, behaving and belonging that existed in the world of Yeshua in the first century CE.

Sadducees

- *Believing is being faithful to Yahweh.*
- *Behaving is living according to the literal words of the Torah.*
- *Belonging is being a member of the Covenant of Abraham.*
- *There is no final judgment by Yahweh.*
- *The world will continue with people being born and dying.*

Essenes

- *Believing is being faithful to Yahweh.*
- *Behaving is living according to the Torah, Prophets, Writings and Other Sacred Texts as interpreted by the Teacher of Righteousness.*
- *Belonging is being a member of Essenes.*
- *There is no Kingdom of God or Heaven, or a resurrection.*
- *Only Essenes will be saved from destruction on the Great Day of Judgment, not other Jews.*

Pharisees

- *Believing is being faithful to Yahweh.*
- *Behaving is living according to the Torah and Prophets as interpreted by the Oral Law.*
- *Belonging is being a member of the Covenant of Abraham or a Gentile that does acts of tzedakah like Noah. (Tzedakah will be defined on p. 6 below.)*

- *The Kingdom of Heaven is the Messianic Age that comes before the Day of Judgment. Yahweh will raise up a descendant of David and make him king. He will drive all Gentiles out of the land and defeat Gentile nations.*
- *Only Jews (living and resurrected) that follow the Oral Law's interpretations of the Torah and the Prophets, as well as a few Gentiles that did acts of tzedakah like Noah (living and resurrected) will be saved from destruction on the Great Day of Judgment.*
- *After the Great Day of Judgment the Age of the World to Come will begin in a cleansed and purified Earth.*

Yeshua Movement

- *Believing is being faithful to the Creator.*
- *Behaving is living according to the Creator's Blessing on Day Six of the Creation.*
- *Belonging is being a member of the Kingdom of the Creator that was established on Day Seven of Creation.*
- *The Kingdom of the Creator is a kingdom of people from all nations that do acts that measure TOV (tzedakah) like the Creator. They are the Creator's Co-Shepherds over all life on Earth. They are the representatives of the Creator to the rest of creation.*
- *After the Great Day of Judgment those who belong to the Kingdom of Heaven will enter into eternal life in the New Age. The rest of mankind will cease to exist. Life in the New Age will begin in a cleansed and purified Earth.*

Paul's Movement

- *Believing is believing that Jesus was resurrected and he is the only apostle.*
- *Behaving is living according to the teachings of the self-proclaimed apostle Paul.*
- *Belonging is being a member of resurrected ones.*
- *After the resurrection the resurrected ones will ascend upwards into Heaven where they will be given spiritual bodies and live forever.*

Timeline

27 to 30 CE – Yeshua’s Movement began when he was 30 years old and he led it for either one or three years. During that time he trained twelve apostles and his brothers to be leaders of the Kingdom of Heaven Movement. After the crucifixion his brother Jacob (James) became the leader and Judas died.

40 – The first group to be called “Christians” appear in Antioch and they are led by Saul, who will be later called Paul.

50 – Paul’s Movement spread into other areas of the Roman Empire and groups of Gentile Christians began to spring up. Their Scriptures were the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Jewish Scriptures). They also followed the Epistles of Paul.

65 – Jacob, Peter, Paul and other apostles had been executed by Romans.

70 – Romans destroy Second Temple and Yeshua’s Kingdom of Heaven Movement is severed from its Jewish culture. Now there is no Jewish nation for a Jewish king to rule.

100 – All of the original apostles had died, the Great Day of Judgment had not come, Yeshua’s Jewish Kingdom of Heaven Movement was being replaced by individual groups of Gentile Christians led by Greek and Latin speaking Gentiles that had no knowledge of the history of the Jewish people or their Sacred Hebrew Texts. Believing was determined by Gentile leaders of local congregations, as were behaving and belonging.

200 to 300 -- New authority figures appear in Gentile Christian congregations – *bishops and elders*. Their authority is linked to the apostles by stories of founding of each congregation. The Septuagint, along with written accounts of the teachings of Jesus, the apostles, stories about Christian martyrs and other writings were widely circulated among Gentile Christian congregations. Congregations would make copies of them and send them to other congregations. By 300, the bishops of Rome, Constantinople, Antioch and Alexandria were viewed as having more authority than other bishops.

300 to 400 – The memory of the original Yeshua Movement had faded from memory. Believing in Gentile Christianity became believing the right things about God, Jesus, the Church, salvation, etc. Behaving and belonging was based on the rulings of local bishops and elders. True Christians were the people with the right answers.

400 to 1900 -- “*The Age of Belief*” began in 325 when *the authority and power of Roman Emperor Constantine the Great backed the authority of the Roman Catholic Church*. Rome became the center of Christian authority and the leader was the Bishop of Rome, the Pope. Believing was believing in the Church. Behaving was determined by Councils of the Roman Catholic Church. Belonging was being a member of the Roman Catholic Church.

1054 -- The Eastern Orthodox Church split from the Roman Catholic Church. It was identical to the Roman Church with one exception – it had no pope.

16th century -- Martin Luther created a new form of Gentile Christianity that reject the authority structures of the Roman Catholic Church, but kept many of its doctrines and rituals. It was based on the authority of the Bible as interpreted by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individual believers. Believing was believing that people are saved by faith through faith alone. Behaving is determined by what the Holy Spirit reveals to people. Belonging is based holding specific Protestant beliefs.

1800 -- Authority claims behind Christian doctrines began to give way as science and archaeology challenged their accuracy, along with the accuracy of stories of the Bible. Darwin’s theory of evolution challenged Christian doctrines about the creation. Freud’s discovery of the subconscious functions of the mind challenged the idea of freewill. In addition, scholars discovered how to translate ancient Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian and other languages, thus providing their views of stories found in the Bible.

1900 - Science and “modernism” became the enemies of evangelical Christians. They responded by *insistence on obligatory belief systems, nostalgia for a mythical uncorrupted past and claims to an exclusive grasp on truth*.

1970 -- The decline of “*the Age of Belief*” accelerated with increasing numbers of Christians leaving “*institutional Christianity*” and turning to *spirituality, agnosticism, atheism* or *simply self-identifying as “none”* when asked about their religious beliefs.

1980 *The age of “religious switching” was gaining momentum. Roughly 44 percent of Americans had left their childhood faith in favor of another denomination or religion -- or by dropping any religious affiliation at all. In the past people were born into a religion – faith often was passed down through many generations – and many tended to stay with their childhood church. Inherited faith was an important dimension of personal identity, often intertwined with ethnicity or national origin. As the connection between identity and family religious traditions unraveled people chose their own spiritual paths: A Jew becomes a Buddhist? A Mormon, an Episcopalian? A Baptist, a Catholic? A Catholic, a Hindu? A Presbyterian, a Sikh? A Buddhist, an evangelical? A Methodist, a Muslim? The possibilities are unlimited.*

2000 -- Global Christianity consisted of 33,820 denominations/paradenominations, most of which were Protestants. There were now 33,820 centers of Christian authority – all claiming to be speaking in the name of God! However, they were saying very different things about believing, behaving and belonging.

2008 – A Pew study found that the “net belief in God” in the United States was 92 percent of the population; the same as it has been for decades. But Baylor University researchers found that even though 92 percent of Americans say “*they believe in God,*” but when they describe the God they believed in -- *they were talking about four different Gods!*

1. **The Authoritarian God** (31%) -- *a wrathful sin-hating deity, may come closest to beliefs about God that once dominated American Protestant-majority culture.*
2. **The Distant God** (24%) -- *the cosmic creative force behind and beyond the natural universe.*
3. **The Benevolent God** (23%) -- *the forgiving friend of sinners, peacemaker, and caring healer.*
4. **The Critical God** (16%) -- *the bringer of justice who will make all right at the end.*

Options for Shared Beliefs of Faithfulness & Love

For Yeshua, the Jewish Jesus and his followers, believing had nothing to do with weighing evidence or making intellectual choices.

*Belief was more like a marriage vow --
a pledge of faithfulness and loving service to and with another.*

Believing, faithfulness, trusting, loyalty and loving are used synonymously by Yeshua. In one of his most famous teachings, a Pharisee asked – “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Torah?” Below is his response (Matthew 22:35-40):

*“You shall love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’
This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’*

According to Yeshua, the only way to love God is by loving people -- *beginning with yourself and your neighbor.*

*Loving God includes believing God, being faithful to God,
trusting God and being loyal to God.*

Let me repeat Yeshua's vision of the *Kingdom of Heaven* before we continue:

It is a kingdom of people from all nations that do acts that measure TOV (tzedaqah) like the Creator. They are the Creator's Co-Shepherds over all life on Earth and representatives of the Creator to the rest of creation.

With that in mind, for Yeshua loving yourself meant:

*Believing the Creator, trusting the Creator,
being loyal to the Creator and your neighbor
and being faithful to the Creator and your neighbor.*

Yeshua's vision of the Creator's Kingdom is clearly revealed in his teaching about the *Great Day of Judgment* (Matthew 25:31-46).

Then the King will say to those on his right hand (the ones that did tzedaqah), "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world . . . the ones that do tzedaqah shall go into eternal life."

First, notice the reference to "*the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" Next notice the role "*doing acts of tzedaqah*" play in determining who enters eternal life. Now let's see what "*doing acts of tzedaqah*" meant to Yeshua:

Feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, giving shelter to stranger, visiting the sick and going to those who were in prison.

Now let me repeat the words of Yeshua in a different way:

- *Feeding the hungry is loving and being faithful to God, loving and being faithful to yourself and your role as a Co-Shepherd and loving and being faithful to your neighbor.*
- *Giving drink to the thirsty is loving and being faithful to God, loving and being faithful to yourself and your role as a Co-Shepherd and loving and being faithful to your neighbor.*
- *Clothing the naked is loving and being faithful to God, loving and being faithful to yourself and your role as a Co-Shepherd and loving and being faithful to your neighbor.*

- *Giving shelter to a stranger is loving and being faithful to God, loving and being faithful to yourself and your role as a Co-Shepherd and loving and being faithful to your neighbor.*
- *Visiting the sick is loving and being faithful to God, loving and being faithful to yourself and your role as a Co-Shepherd and loving and being faithful to your neighbor.*
- *Going to those in prison is loving and being faithful to God, loving and being faithful to yourself and your role as a Co-Shepherd and loving and being faithful to your neighbor.*

When you recognize the ideas above, you will be able to see them repeatedly in all of the teachings of Yeshua in the *Matthew, Mark and Luke*. Interestingly, the opening chapters of Genesis, and many of the Prophets, warn people about putting religious rituals and beliefs about God above caring about and for the lives of other people. Neither the opening story of Genesis nor the teachings of Yeshua require “*believing the right things about God*” or “*doing any religious rituals.*”

Yeshua was teaching a parable, not creating a new commandment. It is a story that teaches principles his followers could apply in their lives. The key was paying attention to the lives of the people around them. The goal was to practice becoming better Co-Shepherds and helping people in need. They were not expected to become “the Shepherd” who fixed everything for everybody. They were not expected to put themselves in the position of not being able to meet their own needs. Again, the goal is networking with others and working together to help others.

America’s Future is Linked to Finding Something in Common to Believe

For almost all of the history of America, a large majority of citizens identified themselves as Christians, had some kind of relationship with a church and agreed on the *Ten Commandments* as a moral a code. Even in the fragmented America today, about 90% of the population “*believe in God*” or “*believe one of the four models of God*” in the Baylor survey.

Without shared common beliefs, there will be increasing levels of uncertainty about who or what to believe, how to behave and who belongs and who does not belong.

For Christians, “*the teachings of Yeshua*” and “*the histories of Gentile Christianities*” offer viable alternatives to the belief models of “*The Christianities of the Age of Beliefs*” or “*belief models of 20th century evangelical fundamentalist groups.*”

Unless Americans find common beliefs they can share and create a common identity for belonging, the same thing will happen to America that happened to Protestantism – increasing fragmentation until the democracy becomes too weak to survive!