



Biblical Heritage Center's

# ***DISCOVERING THE BIBLE***

*Viewing the words of the Bible through the eyes of their ancient authors  
in order to hear their messages and learn from their experiences.*

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## **What Kind of Jew Was Jesus?**

*By Jim Myers*

Back in the early 1980s when we talked about Jesus being a Jew, a lot of people disagreed strongly. Some even became very angry. Today, when people say the same thing, most people completely agree. Over the past few decades so much information about the Jewish Jesus has appeared on television and in movies, as well as in numerous books, that most people would think not knowing that Jesus was Jewish sounds ridiculous. This is now something that most Christians and Jews are able to agree on.

Belief in Jesus as *the Messiah* is a different story. The Jewish response is usually something like this:

*How could anyone believe in Jesus? Since we live in a world of cancer and AIDS, war and genocide, earthquakes and hurricanes, the messianic age cannot be here yet. Since there is no messianic age, obviously the messiah has not yet come.*<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, the Christian response usually goes something like this:

*How could anyone not believe in Jesus? Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life! It is proved by Jesus's resurrection, confirmed by the Bible, and experienced by the soul.*<sup>2</sup>

What is self-evident to one is incomprehensible to the other. And then there is that other problem of Christians that deny that other Christians are really Christians -- *The pope is the anti-Christ vs. Protestants are heretics!*



Jim Myers & Ike Tension in the "good ole days"

Lots of things have changed in the world since this picture was taken over 30 years ago. I had been doing research on *the Jewish Jesus* for about five years. It was also about the time I began doing research on **Religious Belief Systems**. I had been taking classes at a local university in *linguistics, Jewish history, Greek history, Roman history, Greek language, Hebrew language, Christian history* because I knew they were essential for doing this research. Ike was my professor in a *Classical Greek* class.

One thing that became clear through our research is that dealing with religious beliefs like those above are very difficult because both sides *grab their Bibles* and *identical books* to prove they are right!

Both sides usually quote verses, which are usually taken out of context, as divine evidence for *their truth*. It is very unusual for either side to immediately walk away from their beliefs and adopt those of the other side. However, it has also been our experience that months or even years later, some of those people contact us and let us know the *factual seeds* we planted finally sprouted and they changed some of their beliefs about things we discussed earlier.

The difference between what we do at BHC and what I did as a pastor is *educate* instead of trying to persuade people to believe doctrines. At BHC new participants agree to use this guideline:

*My Belief System will be large enough to include all of the Facts, open enough to be examined or questioned, and flexible enough to change if errors or new facts are discovered.*

As a pastor I focused on persuading people to believe something by providing information that supported my church's official position. Questioning or disagreeing with those doctrines was off limits, especially during a church service or Sunday School class. As a matter of fact, it could prove to be a quick way to get escorted out of the building. Questioning a church doctrine was also a quick way of being labeled as *one of them* instead of as *one of us*.

BHC's approach is to use questioning beliefs as a way to see how they measure up to facts. Facts are things that are sensory perceivable to all participants, unlike beliefs that exist only in brains. Since the ultimate proof used by both sides is linked to *the Bible*, we realized that discovering facts about the Bible was very important. This was the *official* belief about the Bible in my nondenominational Charismatic Church:

*The Bible is the inerrant infallible Word of God.*

For us, *the Bible* meant *the revised King James Version*, *God* meant *the Trinity*, and *inerrant and infallible* meant *there are no errors, conflicts or contradictions* in the Bible -- *from the first book (Genesis) to the final book (Revelation)*. I discovered a problem with this doctrine long before I first heard that Jesus was a Jew.

<b>Genesis 6:19-20</b>	<b>Genesis 7:2-3</b>
<i>And of every living thing of all flesh, <u>two of every sort</u> shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female. Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, <u>two of every sort</u> shall come unto thee, to keep them alive.</i>	<i>Of <u>every clean beast</u> thou shalt take to thee by <u>sevens</u>, the male and his female: and of <u>beasts that are not clean</u> by <u>two</u>, the male and his female. Of <u>fowls also of the air</u> by <u>sevens</u>, the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth.</i>

*Two, a male and female*, does not mean the same thing as *by sevens, the male and his female* ó *2 does not equal 14*. I had been taught there are *no contradictions*, but *this was clearly one!* This happened while was being trained to become an ordained minister.

When I brought this up in meetings with my teachers, their response went something like this ó *if there are errors in it, then we should just throw the whole Bible away*. Where did that type of thinking come from? Years later we traced it back to a conflict between religion and science which was ignited

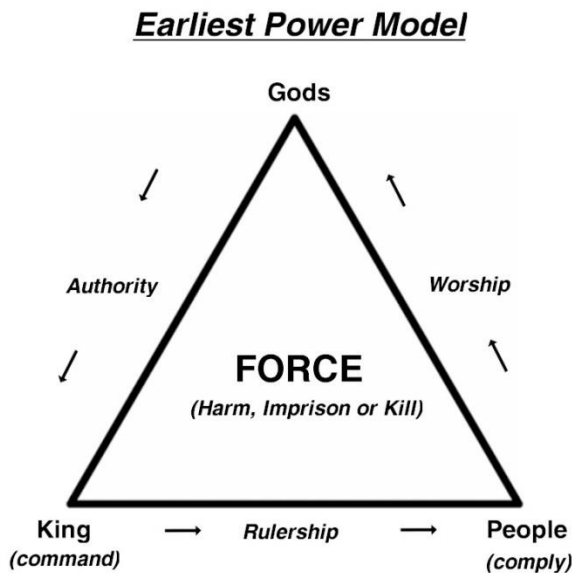
by **Charles Darwin**'s publication of his 1859 book *On the Origin of Species* in which he revealed his *theory of evolution*. Darwin challenged a core Christianity's doctrine about *creation*.<sup>3</sup> Two very interesting events took place as Darwin's theory spread among the masses.

(1) **First Ecumenical Council of the Vatican of 1869** (1870) *“In virtue of the promise of Jesus to Peter, the Pope is preserved from the possibility of error” “when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole Church.”*<sup>4</sup>

(2) The Niagara Bible Conference of 1895 developed its famous *“five points of fundamentalism”* (the essential elements of Christianity).<sup>5</sup>

- Belief in the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ.*
- Belief in the Atonement of Jesus for human sins.*
- Belief in the physical Resurrection of Jesus.*
- Belief in the imminent return of Jesus to earth.*
- Belief in the inerrancy of Scripture.*

Notice that the events above introduced new *“truths”* about inerrancy of church authority -- *1,800 years after Jesus*. The **Niagara Bible Conference**'s *“Five Points of Fundamentalism”* defined the basic requirements for being an evangelical Protestant Christian, like my church's position. We were told this came straight from Jesus -- *no one ever mentioned the Niagara Bible Conference*.



*Fundamentalist thinking “either/or” thinking “has been part of Christianity since 325 CE when Roman Emperor Constantine the Great became part of Christianity and backed church doctrines by judicial force. The history of that power model can be traced to back to “The Sumerian Kings List” (before 3000 BCE) “After the kingship descended from heaven. . . .”*<sup>6</sup>

*Kingship originated in heaven with the gods and they placed upon a person in a specific place for a certain number of years and then moved it to another person in another place. The basic model is “kings command, people comply and both worship the gods. Failure to comply is punished by divinely sanctioned use of physical force.*

So, back when I mentioned the problem concerning the number of animals Noah took on the ark, it wasn't viewed as a great discovery *“it was viewed as an attack on Christianity and raised the question of whether I was really a Christian or not.* In our group, questioning any belief or anything the minister taught was a *no-no*. As you may probably imagine, when Ike and I started working together, some of the discoveries created real challenges for me in my role as the pastor of a church.

*Should I comply with authority or share fact-based information?*

While following the facts I realized that almost all of those facts came from the research of non-Jews. I was not having any personal interactions with Jews about their beliefs and or culture. So, a few years after meeting Ike, I signed up for classes at the *Jewish Community Center* in Dallas. One class was taught by a new rabbi in town, **Jeffrey Leynor**. This picture was taken a few years ago. I hoped this would help me more accurately understand the life and words of Jesus. It was a very different experience.



Jeffrey Leynor & Jim Myers

Instead of just studying things like the *Shabbat*, *synagogue services*, *Jewish holidays*, etc., I was invited to participate in them. Watching people being called to read portions from the *Torah* and *Prophets* during synagogue services gave new meanings to words I read in the *Gospels*:

*So Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Shabbat, and stood up to read. And he was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.<sup>7</sup>*

When Jeffrey's son Perry was born, Jeffrey invited me to the *bris* where he was circumcised and named when he was eight-days-old.

*And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the child, his name was called Jesus.<sup>8</sup>*

Or every year when we celebrated Hanukkah, which means *dedication*.

*Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade.<sup>9</sup>*

I was witnessing the words of the *Gospels* of my Bible being lived in Jeffrey's religion. Why didn't Christians do the things Jesus did? So I decided to change things and incorporate some of them at my teachings at church. I even changed the sign in front *and it didn't do unnoticed!*



*Jesus kept Shabbat from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown, so did we.*

*Jesus attended synagogue services on Shabbat – we had services on Friday immediately before sundown and on Saturday morning.*

*Portions of the Torah and Prophets were read at the Shabbat morning service, so that's what we did.*

*Jeffrey's members celebrated Shabbat meals in their homes on Friday after sundown, so did we and we always invited guests to share it with us.*

I began to *feel* why Jewish people were offended when we called their Scriptures the *öOldö* testament and our Scriptures the *öNewö* testament. The *öNewö* scriptures didn't exist in the life of Jesus and wouldn't become the *öNewö* testament like the one in my King James Bible until many centuries later.

*So why didn't we all just convert and become Jews?* When Jeffrey and I began studying together, I asked him to agree to follow the guideline I required all members of my BHC Bible studies to follow.

*My Belief System will be large enough to include all of the Facts, open enough to be examined or questioned, and flexible enough to change if errors or new facts are discovered.*

I had met other rabbis in the past, but they were not interested in applying the same criteria I used to examine my Christian beliefs to their Jewish beliefs. Jeffrey not only agreed, he was enthusiastic about using it. So, while I was learning about his people and his religion we were also examining Jewish Belief Systems -- *and researching the origins and histories of beliefs*. It didn't take long for some things to get my attention as we studied the *Jewish Bible ö the Tanakh*.

- (1) No rabbis were mentioned.
- (2) There were no synagogues in it.
- (3) The people weren't studying Jewish Scriptures.
- (4) The people were called *öIsraelites,ö* not *öJews.ö*
- (5) At the First Temple multiple gods were worshiped, not just Yahweh.
- (6) The final chapter in the Jewish Bible closes with these words *ö Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth Yahweh the God of Heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May Yahweh his God be with him, and let him go up!<sup>10</sup>*
- (7) Cyrus is also mentioned in Isaiah -- *öThus says Yahweh to His anointed, to Cyrus. . .ö* If we translated this the same way as verses in the New Testament it would read -- *öThus says Yahweh to His Christ, to Cyrus. . .ö*



I was aware of what I was feeling because I knew I had felt it before. Jeffrey's religion had also changed over the centuries. Both of our religions originated after the Second Temple was destroyed. The Temple was the center of the life and movement of Jesus. It was where he was circumcised, where he studied with scribes and priests, where he prayed and taught, and where he participated in holidays like Passover, Yom Kippur, Shavuot and Hanukkah. The Temple was where leaders and members of the Jesus Movement assembled and continued to do the same things after Jesus was crucified. If we had been there we would have seen Jacob (James), Peter, John and all the apostles. We would have also seen Hillel, Shammai, Gamaliel and many other famous teachers that were very important teachers in Jeffrey's religion ó *Rabbinic Judaism*.

The groups from which both of our religions sprouted were sects of *the religion of the Second Temple – the Jesus Movement and the Pharisees*. The critical event that changed those sects took place when Roman armies destroyed the *Second Temple* in 70 CE. This wasn't the first time a foreign nation had destroyed their Temple. So most Jewish people simply began making plans for what to do next.

But by that point in time, a new sect had emerged led by a Jewish man from Tarsus who was also a Roman citizen. He claimed to have a different gospel from the one Jesus taught his apostles. The majority of its leaders and members were foreigners and Gentiles who were unfamiliar the Jesus Movement, his Gospel or his Galilean/Judean culture. Members of Paul's sect were called "Christians," something members of the Jesus Movement were never called. The centers of Paul's Christianity became Antioch, Athens, Alexandria, Byzantium and Rome.

The destruction of the *Second Temple* created a fork in the road in which Christianity and Judaism took separate paths. People in many nations heard a new message -- "believe in Jesus and you will be resurrected from the dead and live in heaven forever." In 325 CE, when Roman Emperor Constantine became actively involved in the leadership of Christianity, he used the power of the Roman Empire to promote and defend Christian authority ó *Rome became the center of Christianity*. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century an excommunicated Roman Catholic priest and professor ó *in need of a new way of salvation* -- created a new Christian religion ó *Protestantism*. He unknowingly also launched the "Age of Individualism."

In the aftermath of the destruction of the *Second Temple* -- over a century later -- **Rabbi Judah the Patriarch**, also known as *Rabbi Judah the Prince* and *Yehudah HaNasi*, undertook to collect and edit the oral laws of the Pharisees which had never been written down -- *so that the Oral Law would not vanish*. His written collection was published about **200 CE** and is called the "Mishnah." In the world described by the *Mishnah*, the Temple still exists and the *oral laws* that governed it are expressed in the present tense. Over the next few centuries the *Gemara*, which interprets and comments on the *Mishnah*, was added by rabbinic schools in Galilee and Babylon. They became the *Jerusalem Talmud* (about 400 CE) and the *Babylonian Talmud* (about 500 CE).

The *Mishnah* itself ignores the events of the Roman occupation of the land of Israel. In this way, the *Mishnah* is a document that describes a life of sanctification, in which the rituals of the Temple are adapted for communal participation in a world that has no Temple, which escapes the ups and downs of history.<sup>11</sup> The *Talmud* is the foundational document upon which Rabbinic Judaism is built. Today, *Rabbinic Judaism* has different "denominations" ó *Orthodox, Haredi, Hasidic, Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, Jewish Renewal, Humanistic Judaism, etc.*<sup>12</sup>

In the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, **Anan ben David** founded the *Karaite movement*. His followers did not believe the Rabbinical Oral Law was divinely inspired. He developed his movement's core tenets in the

*Sefer HaMishvot ("The Book of the Commandments") in which he attributed many principles and opinions to the old **Second Temple** sects of the Sadducees and Essenes.<sup>13</sup>*

What happened to *Paul's Christianity* as it spread throughout the world? It divided too. In the comprehensive book -- *World Christian Trends AD 30 – AD 2200* ó we find the following information:

*In 1970 global Christianity had 18,630 denominations/paradenominations.*

*In 2000 global Christianity had 33,820 denominations/paradenominations.<sup>14</sup>*

*Today, it is estimated that there are around 40,000 denominations/paradenominations.*

*So, what kind of Jew was Jesus? He was neither a òRabbinic Jewö nor a òPauline Christian.ö He was a member of the religion of the Second Temple. He interacted with members of other sects. He agreed on some things and disagreed on other things as he interacted with these sects:*

*Sadducees*

*Pharisees*

*Essenes*

*Hasidim*

As for the disagreement today between Christians and Jews over Jesus being òthe Christ,ö their positions are rooted in views that originated *post-Second Temple Christian religions and Rabbinic Judaism denominations*. However, Jeffrey and I found something in the religion of Second Temple period in which the roots of the Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism were anchored that is valued and important to both religions today:

*The supremacy of valuing human life as the highest value and taking actions that protect and preserve lives, make lives more functional, increase the quality of life and make actions of religious, political and business leaders that value power or profits above human life transparent.*

Together we learned some very important things over the past twenty-five years:

- (1) *Religions change -- no one is practicing the original unchanged version of the founder.*
- (2) *Monotheistic religions claim to be the only authorized agents of the only God that exist. There are three of them – Rabbinic Judaism, Christianity and Islam.*
- (3) *All religions have done very good and very bad things.*
- (4) *Most importantly, we discovered that once people believe something, their brains search for things that confirm their beliefs and filter out things that do not – without their being aware of it.*

We created a *hashtag* that reflects what we are trying to teach people -- **#doingwhatslife**.

**BHC**

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Page 7

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# May Memorials

*In Loving Memory*

**SIDNEY PERRY  
DOSH, JR.**

**Born: October 18, 1938  
Died: May 17, 2006**

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

*In Loving Memory*

**SIDNEY BERRY  
WARD, SR.**

**Born: October 3, 1891  
Died: May 27, 1976**

*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.*

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

<sup>1</sup> *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* by Amy-Jill Levine © 2006; Harper One, New York, NY; p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> *The Misunderstood Jew*; p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles\\_Darwin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Darwin)

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papal\\_infallibility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papal_infallibility)

<sup>5</sup> <http://jamespaulgaard.wordpress.com/2009/02/09/biblical-inerrancy-history-analysis/>

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian\\_King\\_List](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_King_List)

<sup>7</sup> Luke 4:16-17

<sup>8</sup> Luke 2:21

<sup>9</sup> John 10:22-23

<sup>10</sup> II Chronicles 36:23

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/mishnah/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-jewish-denominations/>

<sup>13</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karaite\\_Judaism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karaite_Judaism)

<sup>14</sup> *World Christian Trends AD 30 – AD 2200* By David B. Barrett & Todd M. Johnson, © 2001 by David B. Barrett; William Carey Library, Pasadena, CA; p. 33.

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