



Discovering the Bible *Exploring Our Biblical Heritages*

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After Forty Years, I Finally Understand the Answer to My Prayer!

By Jim Myers

You may have heard this story before, but I prayed the prayer below in **August 1980** when I was preparing to begin education to become an ordained minister. I had just purchased a new Bible to launch my new calling and career.

Dear God, please show me what you want me study in my new Bible.

Immediately, these words literally “popped” into my mind:

*Unless you know how words work
you can't understand the words of the Bible.*

That definitely wasn't what I expected and it made no sense to me -- *so I forgot about it!* After that I began my education, completed it, became an ordained minister and founded a church. In 1984 an advertisement for a new book came in the mail -- “*Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus.*” I ordered it, read it and when I finished it I remembered the prayer above. That was the moment I decided to find out “how words work.” I spent an entire month in a university library doing research which led to the creation of what I called the Law of Language.

Today I know that the answer to my prayer was right – “*Unless you know how words work you can't understand the words of the Bible.*” I am going to share what I have learned about how words work – *in a revised and more user friendly form.*

1. A word consists of symbols (alphabet) with a Source's bundle of associations.

The symbols are the letters of the alphabet and they reveal the language the message was written in. The *bundle of associations* consist of the memories of the Source, the one who wrote the message. The bundle of associations provide the meanings of the words of the message.

2. Identify the Language, Source, Time, Place and Receptor.

Someone (**Source**) decided, at a specific **Time** and **Place**, to **Communicate** something (**Message**) to someone (**Receptor**) for a reason (**Purpose**). Understanding the **Message** begins with **Identifying** the **Language**, **Source**, **Time**, **Place**, and **Receptor**.

3. Identify the Context (Beginning and Ending of the Message).

When it comes to understanding the words of the Bible, there are lots of different messages between the first and last book. Even in one book, there are lots of different messages, and they may have been written by different Sources at different times and places. One of the first things *Explorers of Biblical Heritages* must learn to do is ignore all **chapter and verse numbers**. In addition, double check **punctuation marks and the capitalization of words**. They may also impact a reader's ability to see the original context of the Source. Use your natural instincts as a hearer of stories – **identify the beginning and end of a story**.

4. Dig into the Source's bundle of associations.

The **treasure chest of information** that contains lots of a Source's associations is **Culture**. It is a huge "**catch-all term**" that includes all of the following:

- **Behaviors and technologies of people that are passed on from generation to generation -- languages, knowledge, beliefs, morals, laws, religions, customs, concepts, habits, skills, institutions, & other capabilities of a given people in a given period.**
- **More than a set of rules to guide behavior; culture is a comprehensive worldview and way of relating to one's fellow human beings.**
- **Complex cultures do not spell everything out literally; they leave much to inference. A culture's strength lies not only in what it says, but also in what it chooses not to say, and this too must be learned.**

Usually, the cultural clue is the language the message is written in. However, when it comes to understanding the meanings of the words of Jesus, we must dig down through English and Greek symbols to get back to his language – **Hebrew**.

As we scan through the message, we must **always be aware of information about the Source's Personal Experiences**, beginning with *gender, family roles, relationships, work, education, religion, nation, economic status and emotionally laden experiences (joy, pride, hope, fear and pain)*. Those factors affect what certain words mean to a Source. For example, the appearance of a Roman Emperor in a message can be linked to **pride and joy if it is a Roman citizen** or **if it's an enemy of Rome, fear and dread**.

The First Story in the Bible

Now you know the basics, so let's apply what you know to the first message in the Bible.

In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth.

One thing you need to be aware of is that Scribes wrote the ancient manuscripts of books of the *Jewish Scriptures*, **Tanakh** (for Jews) and **Old Testament**. Scribes *only* wrote for Scribes. Ninety-five percent of the people could not read. Scribes often **embedded multiple layers of meanings** in the scrolls. It would take pages to explain scribal meanings just linked to the first verse in Genesis. Focus on the two underlined words, after you do this.

Write down what those two mean to you when you read Genesis 1:1.

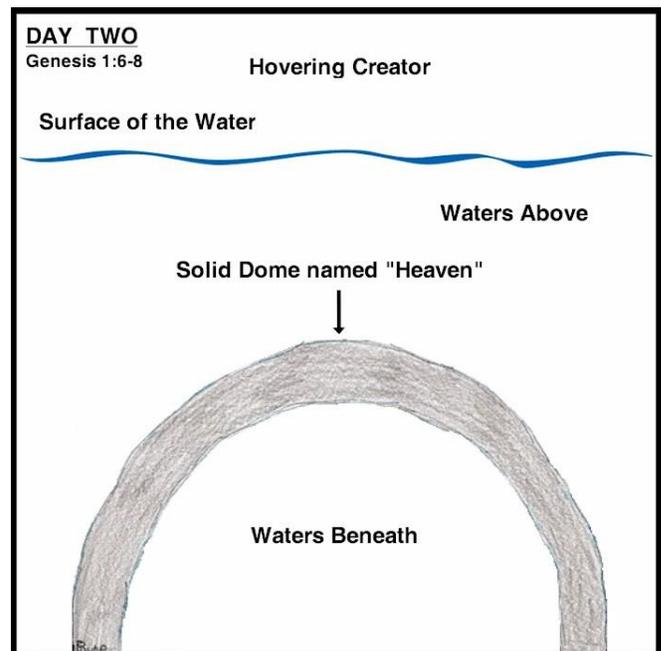
Now let's see what those two words meant to ancient scribes. We won't even have to go back to the ancient Hebrew language the scribes wrote in. Below is Genesis 1:6-7 from the *New King James Version*. Pay close attention to the underlined words.

Then God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so.

The picture below is what ancient scribes visualized as they wrote the words above.

1. A firmament" is *something "firm."*
2. It was placed beneath the waters.
3. It divided those waters into two separate bodies of water – one body was under (inside) and the other above (outside) of it.
4. In Genesis 1:8: *And God named the firm thing "**Heaven(s)**".*

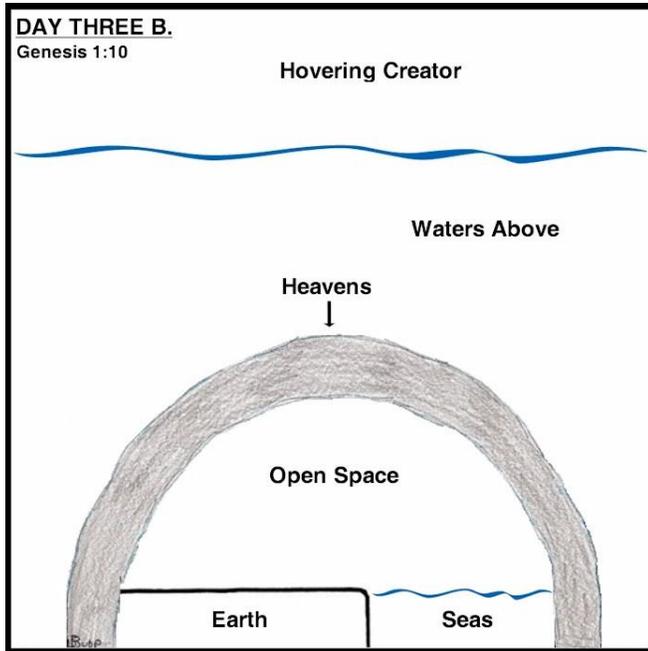
In the past, when you read Genesis 1:1, did the word "Heaven(s)" trigger the picture at the right? →



If you didn't visual what that picture, we have identified one word in the Bible you didn't understand the meaning of. Now let's see how you do on the word "Earth." Surely no one could get the meaning of that word wrong! Now let's go to Genesis 1:9:

Then God said, "Let the waters under the Heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry appear"; and it was so.

Pay close attention to the words above. After the waters moved to the new place, "something dry" was revealed in the place the waters had covered.



1. God told the waters inside (below) the firm thing to gather in one place.
2. The waters moved to the place called "Seas."
3. An open space was created above the Seas and a space to the left that was "dry."
4. In Genesis 1:10: *God named the dry place "Earth."*

In the past when you read Genesis 1:1, *did the word "Earth" trigger the picture of a dry place beneath a firm thing below the surface of the water?*

If you did not picture this, we have identified a second word in the Bible you didn't know the correct meaning of. Now, by understanding the meanings the scribes above, you will be able see some things most Bible readers never see when they read Genesis 2:4b below:

In the day that the LORD God made the Earth and the Heavens.

1. *In the first story, the God that was the central character was "not named."*
2. *The change to LORD God signals the beginning of a new story. Is this the same or a different God?*
3. *The unnamed God in the first story created things, the LORD God makes things.*
4. *In the first story it would be impossible to create a "dry thing" named "Earth before the "firm thing" named "Heaven(s)" had been created to keep the waters away from it.*

The Message and Vision of the Jesus of History

Are you beginning to understand why how words work is so important? Now I want to introduce the model I created for applying it to the words of the Bible. It helps us build a Source Profile for the *Source of words we studying*, which in this case is Jesus.

1. **Source**: *Yeshua ben Yoseph (Jesus son of Joseph).*
2. **Symbols**: *Jesus taught orally in Hebrew; spoke Aramaic in his daily life. He may have been familiar with Greek and Latin too.*
3. **Time & Place**: *b. 6 BCE – crucified about 28 CE.*
4. **The Culture of Jesus**: *Late Second Temple Period Galilean Judean.*
5. **Personal Experiences of Jesus**: *Probably educated by Joseph and teachers at the synagogue in Nazareth; his childhood textbook was the Torah (first five books of Bible); at age twelve interacted with leading teachers at the Temple in Jerusalem; probably worked as a carpenter with Joseph until age 30; influenced by the teachings of John the Baptist; he had a lot of knowledge about the Torah and the Prophets (especially Isaiah); began his movement around 25 CE (probably called “The Kingdom of Heaven Movement”); led the movement for either one or three years; crucified by Romans for a political crime (claiming to be king without Roman approval).*
6. **Receptors**: *He only spoke to Jewish audiences about Jewish things.*
7. **Purpose**: *Proclaim the Kingdom of God had arrived & the Great Day of Judgment was imminent. Teach people how to enter eternal life instead of eternal punishment.*

In the example below you will see the words peace (SLM) and righteousness (TDQ). The three letters in parenthesis (**SLM**) and (**TDQ**) represent the Hebrew letters of the two Hebrew words translated “peace” and “righteousness.” I did this to remind readers to always use Hebrew meanings for those words -- not their English meanings.

The Jesus of history was a “*master teacher*.” His skills are very evident here as *he sums up his complete Gospel* in two blessing from the *Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5:9-10):

*Blessed are the peace (SLM) makers,
for they shall be called Sons of God.*

*Blessed are those who pursue righteousness (TDQ),
for they are the Kingdom of God.*

Each blessing is written in a form of Hebrew prose called a parallelism to make specific points.

1. *The peace (SLM) makers shall be called Sons of God.*
2. *Those who pursue righteousness (TDQ) are the Kingdom of God.*

The Hebrew speaking audience recognized that the two blessing were also a parallelism that makes this point:

*The Kingdom of God is a kingdom of future Sons of God
who are now doing acts of righteousness (TDQ) to create peace (SLM).*

Knowing what *righteousness (TDQ)* and *peace (SLM)* meant to Jesus is the key to understanding his message and movement.

- The Hebrew word translated peace (SLM) is "shalom." *It signifies a sense of safety, well-being and harmony both within and without - completeness, wholeness, peace, health, welfare, safety, soundness, tranquility, prosperity, fullness, rest, harmony; the absence of agitation or discord, a state of calm without anxiety or stress.*
- The Hebrew word translated righteousness (TDQ) is "tzedakah." *Acts of righteousness (TDQ) change the things that are preventing people from living lives of peace (SLM). Jesus described specific acts of righteousness (TDQ) in his teachings -- giving food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, shelter to the homeless, visiting the sick and going to those in prison.*

Jesus based his teachings on two very important teachings of Isaiah. The first is Isaiah 32:17, which reveals the relationship of righteousness (TDQ) to peace (SLM).

*The work (acts) of righteousness (TDQ) will be peace (SLM),
and the service of righteousness (TDQ) will be quietness and trust forever.*

Doing (acts) of righteousness (TDQ) creates peace (SLM). The second verse is Isaiah 58:6-7, which also describes specific acts of righteousness (TDQ).

Is this not the fast I will choose: to open bands of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, and to let the oppressed ones go free, and every yoke you shall pull off? Is it not to break your bread with the hungry, and the wandering poor you should bring (to your) house; when you will see a naked, you shall cover him, and from your flesh you will not hide yourself?

Isaiah 58:8 also reveals how doing acts of righteousness (TDQ) affects the person's future.

*Then your light shall break forth as the dawn, your healing shall quickly spring up,
your righteousness (TDQ) shall go before you, the glory of God shall gather you!*

He used Isaiah's words --"light" & good deeds (righteousness [TDQ]) – in Matthew 5:14-16:

*You are the **light** of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people **light** a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives **light** to everyone in the house. In the same way, **let your light shine** before others, that **they may see your good deeds** and **glorify your Father in heaven**.*

When Jesus connected righteousness (TDQ) to peace (SLM) he made his view of the Kingdom of God very clear:

*The presence of peace (SLM) indicates the presence of God.
The absence of peace (SLM) reveals the absence of God.*

*When people do acts of righteousness (TDQ)
they reveal the presence of God and people glorify God.*

As Jesus stood before crowds of Jewish people, he declared that the *Kingdom of God* which they had been asking God to send had arrived. For his proof, he directed their attention to the growing number of people around them that were doing acts of righteousness (TDQ).

Back then Jesus invited people listening him to become part of God's Kingdom by spreading the presence of God across the earth through their actions!

If Jesus preached to Americans today, he would say:

*"Make your acts of righteousness (TDQ) go viral
so the world will see the presence of God through your actions!"*

What would they see?

An increasing sense of safety, well-being and harmony both within themselves and around themselves as more and more people experienced completeness, wholeness, health, soundness, tranquility, prosperity, fullness, rest, harmony.

I never heard that message at any church I attended and I never preached it until I learned how words work. I think the message of Jesus is needed more today than ever! Notice, people are not required to believe in him or do any religious rituals. Jesus repeats this message many times in his teachings, especially when he taught this:

And you shall love Yahweh the god with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment.

The second commandment is like the first, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.

The only way to love God is by loving yourself and loving your neighbor.

The Profiles of Jesus Have Changed

As we examine documents written about Jesus after 28 CE, we must make new *Source Profiles* for Jesus when he appears in them. By the time we get to the 18th century, we have a collection of Jesus Profiles – ¹ *Jesus the Christ of History*, ² *the Christ of Paul*, ³ *Jesus the Christ of Athanasius*, ⁴ *Jesus the Christ of Arius*, ⁵ *Jesus the Christ of Constantine the Great*, ⁶ *Jesus the Christ of Augustine*, ⁷ *Jesus the Christ of the Trinity* and ⁸ *Jesus the Christ of Martin Luther*. Each profile reveals changes made to previous profiles – changes in Christian Belief Systems. This information, for me, resulted from understanding the answer to my prayer -- **but recently I have discovered things that may be more important!** **BHC**

September Memorials

In Loving Memory

**KAREN
LEYNOR**

March 31, 1966
September 9, 2004

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

In Loving Memory

**HAROLD
“COZELL”
McAFEE**

August 21, 1926
September 5, 2014

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

In Loving Memory

**JAMES
EDGAR
MYERS, SR.**

September 13, 1913
September 19, 1999

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

When We Remember Them

*May their memories inspire us to seek in our lives
those qualities of mind and heart
which we recall with special gratitude.
May their memories help us bring closer to fulfillment
their highest ideals and noblest strivings.
May their memories deepen our loyalty to each other
and to those things which cannot die –
faithfulness, love, and life giving values.
We are blessed by our memories of them!*

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

Remembering those who came before us is a very important part of the Biblical Heritage Center's mission. It is our privilege to honor them by the BHC Memorials which are printed in this newsletter. If you would like to add a loved one, send their information to us. There is no charge, but donations are accepted.

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THEM!