

Introduction

The key to having successful conversations is for each participant to agree to follow the **BHC Explorer's Guideline** below -- *and treat each other respectfully.*

*My **belief** system will be large enough to include all **facts**,
open enough to be examined and questioned,
and flexible enough to change if errors or new facts are discovered.*

Why is talking about "**the Bible**" important? It is important because it is important to over **2.4 billion Christians** and over **45,000** Christian institutions (denominations). Let's begin our conversations with two facts:

1. "**The Bible**" is the name many people use when they are referring to a book -- a *physical object that is sensory perceivable.*
2. "**The Bible**" is the name of a **complex Belief Model** located in the *neural networks of the brain*, which is not a physical object and is not sensory perceivable.

This email will focus on #1 – "**The Bible**" a physical object. The word "**the**" is a "*definite article*" which means it refers a **specific** thing. "**The Bible**" is a specific Bible, not "**a Bible.**"

One specific Bible does not exist, and it has never existed.

Over the past 1,900 years there have been many different Bibles. I do not mean they had different translations.

They were comprised of different books, in different orders, in different languages.

*Jesus and his original followers were Jews. Their Scriptures were what we now call "**the Tanakh.**" The biggest difference between Jewish and Christian Scriptures is that **only Christians** have a "**New Testament.**" The first *New Testament* canon was created over 120 years after the crucifixion of Jesus and over 70 years after the execution of Paul.*

The New Testament did not exist during the time of Jesus or Paul.

Only Christians have an "**Old Testament,**" but even though the Christian *Old Testament* and the Jewish *Tanakh* share many of the same books – *not even the Christian Old Testaments contain the same books.*

*And, even in books which Christian Old Testaments share,
Christian institutions interpret shared verses differently.*

*Another fact is the Christian Old Testament and the Jewish Tanakh are not **self-standing books.***

- Christians read their *Old Testament through the lens of the New Testament.*

Let's Talk About "The Bible" Series

- Jews read *the Tanakh through the lens of postbiblical Jewish commentaries* (which usually include the *Mishnah* and *Talmud*).

These differences above raise major interpretive questions, like the ones below.

- Who is the Bible's main character?
 - Is it God?
 - Is it Jesus?
 - Does it lack a main character?
- What is its main point; or is there one?
- Does the "original" meaning of a passage, apart from Christian or later Jewish interpretation, still have anything to say to us?

Different interpretive communities answer these questions differently.

- When read through **Christian lenses**, what the **church** calls the "*Old Testament*" **points Jesus**.
- When read through **Jewish lenses**, what the **synagogue** calls the "*Tanakh*" speaks to Jewish experience, **without Jesus**.
- When read through **the eyes of historians**, these original texts **yield meanings often lost to both church and synagogue**.

In the past, "**the Bible**" has been a source, used by many institutions, to "**legitimize their authority, doctrines, and beliefs**." *It is the battles for power between those institutions that have led to disagreements, polarization, conflicts, and even wars!*

For many years, Ike (Dr. Ike Tennison), Jeffrey (Rabbi Leynor), and I have been talking about the points above and we witnessed Christians, Jews, atheists, agnostics, and others build relationships that were impossible before. *Following the guideline at the beginning of this article, treating each other respectively, exploring together, and helping each other examine their individual belief systems transformed conflicts into building values-based relationship opportunities!*

Shalom,
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