

Growing in Our Understanding of God

by

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June 5, 2014

International Fellowship of Christians and Jews

This week I want to talk a bit about what is perhaps the fundamental similarity between Judaism and Christianity -- the Bible. More than just an historical record of the nation of Israel, the Scriptures have provided a spiritual compass for both Christians and Jews for thousands of years. But what do Jews believe about the Bible?

First, it's necessary to define what Jews mean by the term "Bible." To Jews, the Bible is the Tanach, which is an acronym formed by the initial letters of the Hebrew Bible's three basic subdivisions: T for Torah (the 5 books of Moses), N for Nevi'im (the Prophets), and K for Ketuvim (Writings). While Jews and Christians obviously differ on key theological points, these biblical texts form the foundation for both Judaism and Christianity. They have guided both communities for centuries, and serve as the cornerstone of Western Civilization. (The Tanach, of course, is referred to by Christians as the Old Testament).

Orthodox Jews believe that the Tanach, or Bible, is the actual embodiment of God's word. The Bible gives us insight into God and His will for mankind. This is why the study of the Bible is so important in Orthodox Judaism. (Not surprisingly, we have been called the "people of the book.") We believe that the Bible is eternally authoritative. Even though it was given at particular times and junctures in history, it is valid for all time and circumstances. Not only is it eternal, the Word of God is complete. Everything can be derived from it. As Psalm 19:8 says, "The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes."

For Jews, the study of the Bible is the supreme mitzvah, or good deed. Not only does it teach us how God wants us to live -- it also brings us closer to God Himself. Here, again, Christians and Jews share much in common regarding the centrality and the authority of Scripture. From the close relationships that I have with many Bible-believing Christians, I know that the daily study of the Scripture and its application to daily life is equally important. From a Jewish or Christian perspective, an understanding of the Hebrew Bible helps us grow in our understanding of God and the roots of our faith.

It is the Bible that brings solace, inner strength, and spiritual fulfillment to Jews during times of joy, security, and prosperity, as well as during periods of wandering, suffering, and adversity. It guides our path, shapes our character, and links us with the Almighty. In this way it can truly be said that the Bible is the very lifeblood of the Jewish people.

With prayers for shalom, peace,

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