

# **How the Bible became the Bible**



# How the Bible became the Bible

Exploring how the Bible came to be and why a  
literal interpretation of it may be dangerous.  
This exploration can open a door to your  
continued spiritual growth.

**Donald L. O'Dell**

Florida Writers Association Royal Palm  
Library Award for Non-Fiction

2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

New Material and a New Preface

## How the Bible became the Bible

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# Do You Know?

- **Who was Jesus?**
- **Did God write the Bible? If he did, why doesn't everyone read it?**
- **Why do people sing about "The blood of the lamb?"**
- **Does the Bible really teach us to hate gay-ness?**
- **The only true Bible is the King James Version because that's the Bible the Apostle Paul used. Right?**
- **Your child asks: "When Mikey's mother says: 'Jesus died for my sins?' Did he? Why? What did she mean that I was born in sin? Did I do something wrong?"**
- **Does God really decide who is going to die and when? If he does, why doesn't he just kill the bad guys?**
- **If I don't believe in Jesus, will I go to hell? Did Mahatma Gandhi, a Hindu, go to hell?**
- **Does the Bible ever call itself the Bible?**

~ ~ ~

**A**ren't most of us don't understand the Bible. If the Bible wasn't word-for-word dictated to men by God as "his Word," then how can it be that the Bible is "... wholly accurate and trustworthy in every way," which is a favorite phrase used by Protestant fundamentalists and evangelicals or the fervent Christian Right?

There is a strong movement today for simplistic, literal, biblical beliefs and practices. Why? It provides a sense of safety and security – but it is fear-based and fear is the opposite of faith. This desire for literal biblical beliefs *is really a desire to control the knowledge of good and evil and, therefore, to be absolutely certain about what it is God wants.*

This fear-based desire for security is not unique to our current times. It runs throughout the Bible, had its beginnings in the Old Testament, led to abuses in Israel's Temple-State system, and influenced what was included and excluded from the New Testament.

This fear-based desire for security lies behind many of the Protestant fundamentalists or fervent evangelicals and their desire to "overhaul" our society. As they use the Bible to buttress their position, they are misusing it by misinterpreting it.

Many of the Bible's writers edited existing, original material or wrote under the name of a familiar author. These latter-day editors/authors came from the perspective of a fear-based set of beliefs based upon purification and sacrifice. Upon reading this book you will understand how and why this occurred. You will also understand the original positive message of the prophets and of Jesus.

Perhaps you are one of the millions of "mainstream" church-going Christians who do not consider yourself to be a fundamental evangelical. Perhaps you have developed a deeply personal sense of spirituality as a result of your involvement in a Twelve-Step recovery program. Perhaps you have found an inner peace and calm through a form of New Thought religion, including variations of Eastern religions. Regardless, quoting scripture is probably not your "strong suit." Neither is a fully engaged religious discussion with those that do frequently quote scripture. Consequently, we need to understand how much we humans were involved in the process that produced the Bible and then apply some common sense, grounded in recent scholarly research, on these kinds of issues.

In short, there are three reasons for you to read this book:

- It's time you know the real story of the Bible for yourself.
- Many Protestant fundamentalists and evangelicals believe the Bible was almost literally "faxed" from God, and they are not shy about saying so. *What is it you believe about the Bible?* This book will help you answer that question.
- There are times when issues about gays or Jesus or miracles or abortion come up. You need to be able to offer yourself (and your children) a real answer – *your* answer.

## Acclaim for O'Dell's Book

**T**he major strength of O'Dell's book is the commentary that relates the Bible and its history to our everyday lives. Rev. Evelyn J. (E. J.) Niles, Embracing the Bible (ETB) Ministry, Manassas, VA. ETB is a sanctioned alternative ministry of the Association of Unity Churches.

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How the Bible became the Bible can put years of Bible study and Scripture reading suddenly into focus. It sharpens the big picture no matter how clear it seemed before.... The research and scholarship are excellent, yet it can be read as easily by those with little biblical knowledge as by those with [Bible study] experience. *Karen Harvey, historian, published author, and active member of the Memorial Presbyterian Church, Saint Augustine, FL.*

~ ~ ~

I visualize this book reaching out and touching the many people who may have settled for a ritualized and meaningless experience with God, or may have given up on their spirituality altogether.... I really appreciated the way the book concluded with a very practical spiritual message. *Rev. Elizabeth Claire, Center for Positive Living, a congregation of Religious Science International, Saint Augustine, FL.*

~ ~ ~

Even though I've had a lot of Bible study, I found it wonderfully informative and alive. *Ms. Amy George, Licensed Unity Teacher, Reston, VA.*

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“The history and mystery of the Bible have been in the literary hands of only a few people compared to the millions who do not know the true meaning of the Bible – including what it really is and what it really is not. Mr. O'Dell has done insightful research to explain simply the pure intent ...

*Donald L. O'Dell*

of this greatly misunderstood book and how it came to be. I highly endorse and recommend O'Dell's exciting new work.” *Dr. Tom Costa, Minister Emeritus and founder, Palm Desert, CA, Church of Religious Science and author of “Life: You Wanna Make Something of It?”*

This is such a unique and helpful book! I know many people who will find this 2nd Edition of *How the Bible became the Bible* to be invaluable: seekers who want to reflect more deeply on the practical application of Jewish and Hebrew sacred texts; religiously-minded people whose questions about the history and use of the Bible have not been answered adequately; and individuals like me who are privileged to work with people who want to deepen their inner lives experientially. I especially appreciate Don O'Dell's ability to draw on the riches of academic scholarship without befuddling interested “lay people,” while simultaneously tapping the author's personal experience with sources such as the 12 Steps. A great resource. *Robert Field, Episcopal minister, Founding Director, Center for Spiritual Wisdom, Brevard, North Carolina.*

# Dedication

This book is dedicated to my three grandchildren:  
Christopher Elliot, Ian Christopher, and Jackson David.

**B**y the time they are adults I hope our society will be more focused on an open and honest spirituality, bearing fruits of love, peace and truth, than in trying to prove itself to be right.

I believe this book is a step in that direction.



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## Preface to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

**T**hese have become very disturbing and confusing times for me. What I hear on the news or read in letters to editors doesn't sound like the America I thought I knew. People are no longer agreeing or disagreeing about issues. It has all gotten very, very personal.

I witness outright hateful speech and actions – whether it is in a commentary on TV, or from the White House, or in a grocery store or restaurant. I had a customer accost me in a restaurant telling me, after overhearing some of my conversation, saying his preacher said, “If you are not a Republican, you cannot go to Heaven.” I also hear folks stating, “I wish all religions and preachers and sermons would just dry up and blow away. They are not helpful anymore. They are causing much, much more harm than good.”

For those of us trying to remain true to the Spirit of the Christ, all this can be very confusing and can be very discouraging. At least it can be for me. Maybe it is for you, too.

I hear and see those of a very conservative disposition using the Bible to justify truly unbiblical concepts and actions – most recently hearing federal officials quote a single out-of-context verse from the Book of Romans to justify separating immigrant children from their parents. I see and hear very spiritual people who no longer listen to news or even bother to vote. A few have told me, “Earthly matters don't matter to me anymore.” I see and hear progressive/liberal people being repelled by all things religious since, to them, all religions lately seem to be “out of control.” That attitude quite often may cut them off from experiencing anything spiritual and uplifting.

You may be asking: **“What does all this have to do with the Bible?”**

All of these reactions are, in my opinion, of people whose spiritual foundations have been shaken and who are struggling to find some solid

footing. But: It does seem odd watching the Taliban in Afghanistan, following a strict male-dominant interpretation of the Quran, taking Islam to the brink; or watching Zionistic Jews express the view that “the only good Palestinian is one who is no longer living here;” or watching fundamentalist Christians and a lot of evangelicals hating, despising, and condemning virtually anyone who disagrees with them or their political views – and doing so in the name of the Prince of Peace, the God of Love, and the purity of the Holy Bible.

I need to remember, for those who consider themselves to be spiritual, many base their spirituality on some form of personal transformative experience. Many who consider themselves to be very religious seem to be basing their religiousness on believing in someone else’s spiritual experience – primarily those personalities in the Bible.

People seemed to find my initial book a useful guide in navigating misunderstandings in and the conflicting emotions of contemporary Christian responses to the events of the day. It is my hope that this 2nd Edition, along with this new Preface, will offer you a path to finding calm and centeredness in today’s seemingly unending cascade of turbulent news.

In many ways what is happening in society today – fast-paced, multi-level political and social events happening all day long every day – reminds me of the late 1960s through the early 70s when I was a young graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary, working as a Street Minister in the inner city of Trenton, NJ, and when the world was torn between the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War protestors, and the rise of Women’s Liberation. Sometimes they all seemed to merge, only to separate and regroup. The response of the “religious community” to all of this was to hunker down and declare anything significantly different from what they were used to as “unholy or unbiblical or sinful.” They used the Bible any way they could to harm the movement de jour. If bra-burning or female sexual freedom were today’s headline, then sermons would be about the submissiveness of women and the holy sanctity of sex. If a burning of a black church or a non-violent march confronting “official,” but violent, suppression was the headline, then sermons would be about the uncivility of African-Americans and the duty to abide by legal precedent and reverence for legal authorities. If the headlines were about the Vietnam War, then sermons would be about how the USA was God’s gift to the world and, as Christians, we were to support that. Sermons also were preached, regardless of which simultaneous movement prompted it, to communicate the wisdom of the most popular bumper sticker of the day: “America – Love it or Leave it!”

It was a confusing and discouraging time then, too. But we came through it. We will come through this as well.

Again, you ask: “***What does all this have to do with the Bible?***” All this has to do with bibliolatry. *Bibliolatry is an unhealthy “worship” of the Bible. This generally includes a belief that each word – primarily in the King James Version – must be taken literally.* It has to do with incomprehension of what the Bible is not. It has to do with your believing every word in the Bible in order to make sure God smiles on you.

Understanding *How the Bible became the Bible* has to do with trying to see the personalities in the Bible as real people – as real as your next-door neighbors. When you are able to see a little bit of yourself in biblical characters, you will also begin to see a little of them in you. Opening that little window of understanding, depending on your willingness to change your thinking, will allow a small breeze of spirituality and human Oneness into your very being. Welcoming that little breeze is the key to your ability to begin the journey to finding peace, joy, and acceptance in today’s world of turmoil.

This is why I am reissuing my book with this Preface as well as a few textual modifications.

But, first, to make this all make sense, I need to tell you about spiritual truths (not religious dogma) that I have *experienced* as a grateful member of Alcoholics Anonymous and a student of A Course In Miracles. These experiences transformed my life. This is important because we need to comprehend the difference between the world of Form and the world of Content or Meaning. I also need to say that my descriptions of my interactions with my sponsor and AA old-timers are of my own experience. I do not speak for AA. The “official” voice of AA is the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, New York City.

I know I am to be IN this world but not OF this world. But how do I do that when being bombarded by news stories – every day – that boggle my mind? How do I control myself so I respond rather than react? How do I balance my understanding of human Oneness and, at the same time, watch people do terribly disturbing things to other people? IN the world but not OF the world. Simple. Not easy. It is a delicate, confusing dance we are asked to perform – dance lessons with no painted footprints on the floor to guide us. I offer my version of how to dance that dance later in this Preface.

As I wrote the original text I included my personal experiences and revelations in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) because what I had witnessed was similar to the experiences of embryonic pre-New-Testament Christians during the forty years following the crucifixion of Jesus. (I discuss this in Chapter Nine). But I was *unaware* of the content of A Course In Miracles (ACIM). As I began my ACIM studies in 2009 (continuing to the present), I was awed by the similarity between the *spiritual* truths of ACIM and the

*practical guidance* of AA. They seemed to me to be the same language. ACIM focused on the Truth of humankind's existence and the importance of willingness to make fuller contact with the spiritual dimension of True Reality. In order to follow AA's suggested program of recovery, the focus was on practical, simple guidance in day-to-day life. I would eventually have a spiritual experience in AA, while learning how to live a life as a mature responsible adult for the first time.

Let me give you a few examples.

## Forgiveness

A problem that had always bothered me was how to forgive someone AND forget. Forgive and forget. AA old-timers taught me the easiest way to forgive someone was to not blame them in the first place. No blame – nothing to forgive. They just had made a mistake. Their act that “hurt” me was all about them, not about me. If, in fact, I was able to change the way I looked at things, the things I looked at would change. If I chose to hold on to that “hurt,” then it would evolve into resentment, which would, indeed, hurt me. If that happened, the resentment I *created* was mine to own and mine to “fix.” The resentment was no longer theirs. When dealing with my resentment of a former boss who used employees like a depreciating asset, I was told to pray for him. That is the most effective way to deal with resentments. Otherwise, it'll eventually lead to a strong desire to drink. So, I prayed for him, asking God to make him happy and content. That was really hard. My first prayer, in fact was: “God, make the SOB happy.” I did that daily for almost a month. Over time, my prayers “softened,” and eventually I noticed my anger and resentment had morphed to a general sadness. During that month, praying for the source of my resentment transformed it into sadness. My prayers had dissolved the blame.

In ACIM I learned the 3 steps of forgiveness: First, forgive others because the image I have of them isn't real. It is a projection of mine placed upon them by myself. Second, forgive myself for projecting that image/state-of-mind/intention onto them. After all, it's MY image/state-of-mind/intention that I'm projecting. Third, *be willing* to ask my Guide (or Holy Spirit) to give me another way to look at these others or situations or events. Then I need also to *be willing* to listen to the small whispers, rather than the loud voices, in my head. If I listened to and followed those whispers, my perception would change and alter the situation. I need to always remember that the third step is not mine to take – that is Spirit's job. I need only to be willing to change my mind. Not always easy, even though I'm miserable, if I think I'm right.

But it works! Not consistently and not predictably because the key is always my willingness to change. My willingness is what remains inconsistent

– not the reliability of the Holy Spirit. My willingness is mine to own. It’s the same message I learned from old-timers in AA.

## **Living in the NOW**

Going to AA taught me to live one day at a time: Just for today go to a meeting, don’t drink, pray, share honestly, talk to your sponsor, simply do the next right thing *and the rest of my life is none of my business*. Learning about my True Self in ACIM taught me: Every person I meet is an opportunity for a Holy Instant, an event where (through my willingness to let the Holy Spirit lead me) I see that my True Self and the other’s True Self are spiritually One. I begin to see with the Holy Spirit’s eyes – that all there *REALLY* is can be described as either *acts* of love or *calls* for love. That happens in the Eternal Now. That is the miracle. That is all that matters. However, that is not my job – that is the job of the Holy Spirit.

I kept saying, at early ACIM meetings, that all I needed to do was to shine my light and the results of that, if any, would be the responsibility of my Higher Power. I needed to do the daily work, but I was to leave the results to God. That is also what I had learned from old-timers in AA. However, the more I studied ACIM and learned from those with more experience in the Course, I learned that my “light” was already there – emanating from my True Self. What I really needed to do was to simply wash away all the egoic “crud” in my life and the inner light of mine would automatically become visible. AA’s day-to-day guide to getting sober was, for me, the best way to wash away my old habits, thoughts and actions that had encrusted me in “crud.” Simply by changing my words from “**trying** to shine my light each day” to “**allowing** my light to shine each day,” changed the whole focus of my spiritual growth.

The Course over and over teaches the healing of my mind, which will heal the perceptions I have. It will enable me to change the way I look at people, situations, and events. My changed perception will change what I originally perceived. But this change does not happen in the world of Form. Real change occurs in the world of Spirit, which ACIM calls the world of Content or Meaning. It is a change of my perception. It is a change that will change the world. It is a transformation.

## **The World of Form and of Content**

ACIM distinguishes between two aspects possessed by things in this world: the shape (Form) something takes – e.g., words, images, or the behavior it is clothed in and the essential Meaning (or Content as the Course describes it) which that Form is meant to communicate. The ego disregards Content, believing that the Form IS the content or that Form IS the meaning. The Holy Spirit sees the Form as neutral, inherently meaningless

and content-free. Because His only concern is the Content or Meaning, He will adapt the Form to suit the need. Our only concern should also be the Content. We must realize that what will save us is not a change of Form but a change in Content – a change in the meaning we see in things, events or people. However, we cannot will ourselves to do that. All we can do is be willing to let the Holy Spirit provide us with a new way of looking at this world. [Adapted from Robert Perry, *Glossary of Terms from A Course In Miracles*, Circle Publishing]

As a student, A Course in Miracles has taught me that all each of us know about this physical world (Form) is filtered through each of our own perceptions and emotions. Everything we think is real is simply our perceived reality colored by our emotions. So, what is really real? The only thing that is really real (Content) is Love. Whatever each of us says, thinks, or does is interpreted by the Holy Spirit only as acts of Love, itself, or our Call for Love. To God no other reality exists.

I now know, indeed, I have a lower and a higher mind. My lower egoic mind – which I have named Felix – is totally absorbed by the apparent reality of the world of Form. In other spiritual writings this is often referred to as the three dimensional (3-D) world or the world of duality and scarcity. Key to believing in the reality of this world – the world of Form – is to believe in the reality of my body. To believe, in short, I am my body. When I find myself identifying with that thought I know Felix is absolutely in control of me. My higher mind is still of my ego, but it is vaguely aware that there is more to me than my “form” and there is more to reality than the world I perceive. There is a difference between the “I” that states, “I need a new car,” and the “I” that states, “I am upset by this person or situation and I need help to perceive this differently.” There is a world of Spirit. Qualities of love, acceptance, trust, generosity, kindness, compassion, forgiveness and empathy all belong in this “world of Content.” ACIM has taught me that the world of Spirit is the real world and what Felix believes as real is totally imaginary – it’s only my perceived world; it only exists in that universe that resides between my ears.

## **Developing a Foundation for Understanding the People and Events of the Bible**

Just as in the 1960s-70s, people today react to what is happening and then search the Bible for reinforcement. This leads to misunderstanding and misuse of the Bible. Beyond that, however, I believe people misuse the Bible because they do not understand *what it isn't*. It is a guide rather than a spiritual instruction manual. This misunderstanding is not new. It has had very, very severe consequences throughout history. Misunderstanding and misuse of the Bible led to consequences such as the Templars and the

Crusades against Islam, the Inquisitions in Spain and France, the Protestant Reformation and its turmoil and wars, and the subsequent and various wars between Protestants and Catholics, most recently in Ireland. Of course the wars and tensions that assail us today involve Christians and radical Islamists misusing their Scriptures (the Bible and the Quran), involve the tensions between the Sunni and Shia factions within the Muslim world, and involve the cultural divisiveness between our Fundamentalists or Evangelicals and our nation's growing openness to and support for cultural and social diversity within our society including LGBTQ issues, women's and immigrants' issues, and support for individual choice embodied in *Roe v. Wade*.

I want to focus your attention in this Preface on a more detailed trajectory of the politically conservative biblical literalists towards bibliolatry and its potential damage. As stated earlier, bibliolatry is worshipping the literal Bible itself. I want to help you focus on the dangers of the biblical literalists and understand how their interpretations of Scripture are not new but still remain very damaging. These interpretations have been going on since the earliest writings of the Old Testament with consequences similar to the consequences we are witnessing now – fear and divisiveness.

You are probably not a biblical scholar – and don't want to be. You notice the mindset of many people who frequently do quote the Bible and that reinforces your decision not to be a biblical scholar. Why worry about people who do not understand the Bible, yet quote texts out of context and misuse those out-of-context quotes while trying to make political or cultural points in their world of Form?

We must care deeply because these kinds of severe consequences are happening now. We become aware of these consequences when we watch or listen to the news. In 2005-6 when I was writing the initial edition of this book, I was vaguely aware of the growing agenda of the politically active biblical literalists and the potential damage it might cause. As a result, I only vaguely implied as much throughout the text.

Unfortunately, biblical literalism and the misuse of the Bible apply biblical words of Spirit to the egoic perceptions of the world of Form. It doesn't work that way. When people do try to force it to work that way, they will "bend" the eternal words of Spirit to "fit" their perceived world of Form. I have heard evangelicals tell me, hoping for an end to *Roe v. Wade*, "I held my nose when I voted for Mr. Trump. After all, God uses very bad people to achieve good things." Again, "When Jesus told Peter that you must forgive someone seventy times seven," an Evangelical minister went on to tell me, "Jesus clearly hadn't heard of radical Islamic terrorists." People have to believe in that kind of logic in order to twist God's message of Love and the

Oneness of the human spirit into supporting their egoic perceptions of the world, its problems, and its solutions. That “twisting” and “bending” is the danger of bibliolatry. That process of scriptural literalism will undermine the spirituality of biblical texts and distort the message and messengers of the Bible, itself. I believe that is exactly what has been happening.

Underlying much of the politically active biblical literalists’ vocal support for or silent tolerance of current events, as a means to achieve their agenda, are several key beliefs that have become inviolable for them. They believe:

- 1) America is no longer God’s answer to the world. We are no longer the “beacon on the hill” shining God’s light on the world. That is because we have sinned as a nation by virtue of our cultural tolerance for a woman’s choice for an abortion, for gay/lesbian/transgender issues, for sexual freedom, for providing equal rights for women, for providing healthcare to the unfortunate, and for allowing immigrants to petition our nation for asylum. Once we can get rid of all these national sinful acts through federal and state legislation or judicial decree, God will love us again and He will fix us – politically, economically, culturally, and spiritually and we will once again be His favorite people: mostly white and generally biblical literalists.
- 2) The Holy Bible, the Holy Spirit, and the Love of Jesus Christ have all become synonymous terms. This is very dangerous. This evolving flow of religious beliefs toward bibliolatry (literally making the Bible an idol worth worshipping) goes something like this: Jesus is God. The Holy Spirit flows from Jesus. The Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the Bible. Therefore, since the Holy Spirit flows from Jesus, Jesus actually wrote the Bible – all of it. Consequently, we must believe every single word in the Bible if we are to truly show our love for Jesus as our Lord. (I discuss bibliolatry in more detail in Chapter 12).

Bullet #1 describes the Old Testament God these biblical literalists worship. This was the posture of the 7th and 6th century BCE priestly class in Israel – in unified Israel and in both subsequent kingdoms of Judah and Israel. Just as they believed an individual’s troubles and illness was God’s punishment for the individual’s sins, all the tribulation in the nation was caused by God as a punishment for not following the prescribed Temple rites and rituals’. If the people would only do as they were told by the priests, then God would favor Israel and restore it to the glory enjoyed when David and Solomon were kings.

*This sounds familiar. In today’s language: “If the people would only do as the biblical literalists’ interpretation of the Bible instructed them to do, then God will favor the USA once more.”*

However, since the biblical literalists are Christian, where is the love of Christ in all this national righteousness? Well, referring to Bullet #2, since Jesus really wrote the Old as well as the New Testaments, then these Old Testament priestly directives are now believed to be actually from the Christ. That's not a problem to believe as long as one is unaware that:

- The Old Testament prophets were preaching to and admonishing this same priestly class, implying that in our current society the observations and warnings of the prophets would be directed at the leadership of congregations of biblical literalists;
- The culture of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the patriarchs of the embryonic Jewish/Christian/Islamic Faiths, functioned under the Code of Hammurabi, the most famous king of the Babylonian Dynasty. That culture – dominated by males relegating women simply as cooks and child-bearers and venerated today by literal interpretations from the Old Testament and from the Apostle Paul – is best represented currently by the Muslim Taliban in Afghanistan.
- Jesus, following the prophets' example some 600-700 years earlier, threw out the money-changers in the Temple during the approach to Passover in Jerusalem, and throughout His ministry He constantly bantered with the self-righteous Sadducees and Pharisees, keepers of the Jewish Law – the Torah; and
- The Zionists of Jesus' time wanted a political Jewish rebellion against Rome and desperately wanted Jesus to join them – but He steadfastly refused, staying out of politics and solutions based on the perceptions of the world of Form.

Strange tricks the mind can play when the focus is solely on an egoic religious/political *agenda* and searching always on ways to find anything anywhere in the Bible that seems to bolster the belief that the *agenda* is godly and right.

Commenting on Bullet #2, the impetus for the unconscious merging of Jesus, the Bible, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit is fear-based. The attempt to mitigate that fear is by exercising our egoic control, including control of our political process and the message God has given humankind. Some of the more common public faces of fear are anger, guilt, hatred, envy, and resentment. Acting on all these emotions is antithetical to the Gospel or Good News proclaimed by Jesus. Acting on all these emotions ignores Jesus' three basic commandments, which supplanted the Ten Commandments of Moses: Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength; Love your neighbor as yourself (defining a "neighbor" as anyone in need as in the parable of the Good Samaritan); and Love and serve each other as I have loved and served you. *I have always wondered why Christian*

*congregations will always display the Ten Commandments and virtually NEVER display Jesus' Three Commandments. If they do acknowledge the Three Christian Commandments, are they stating that Christians now must follow Thirteen Commandments or just Jesus' Three? Biblical literalists prefer the Old Testament's Ten Commandments, because they are easier to comprehend and follow. Negative instructions ("Don't do") are always generally easier to deal with than positive instructions ("Do this.") Negative instructions rely only on avoidance. Positive instructions demand active deliberate action and often require different actions under different circumstances. (I discuss these "fuzzy" moral instructions from God in Chapter 12)*

Getting the Old Testament, New Testament, favored cultural norms (e.g., repeal of LGBT rights), capitalism, and perceived conservative politics all rolled up and wrapped in the Stars and Stripes makes for a sticky, gooey mess. What goes unnoticed in this roll-up? The Gospel of Jesus the Christ.

*I have always been very impressed with the words Jesus spoke to describe who he was and what he was all about. It's sort of His resume. John the Baptist had baptized Jesus and now was in prison about to die. He sent his disciples to Jesus with his question: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to expect some other?" Jesus didn't say He'd come to distribute scrolls of Jewish Scripture to the poor or to communists. He didn't come to write a book (ouch!) or discuss theological issues. He didn't come to build huge congregations with immense sanctuaries. He didn't come to purposely stoke fear and anxiety in order to overthrow the existing religious/social government of Palestine. Jesus answered: "Go tell John what you hear and see – the blind recover their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead (in terms of Essene Communities) are raised to life, the poor are hearing the good news – and happy is the man who does not find me a stumbling block." [Matthew 11.5ff]*

I don't hear and see much of that message from the politically active biblical literalists any more.

## **Let Me Conclude:**

The problems that face us – fear, hate, anger, resentment, envy, tribalism, self-pity, and an obvious we-versus-them mentality – are the same today as they were when I wrote the original text. They are the same as they were when Old Testament events and wisdom were being first recorded in written form. They are the same as they were when the people of the New Testament were wrestling with the issue of figuring out who this Jesus person was – this person who had somehow transformed their lives. Their transformation was very real (as was mine, described in Chapter 9), was very spiritual, very much not in the world of Form, and still is very difficult to verbalize.

I try throughout the book to make the people of the Bible very real. If you can begin to relate to the characters in the Bible as “real” people, you will begin to see a little of yourself in them and a little of them in yourself. Cultural differences will begin to melt away. That inclusive “seeing” will open us to a universal spirituality lying underneath the surface. Similarly, I hope that our understanding of the fears and anxieties pummeling those who seem so emotionally tied to their religious convictions will lead us to begin to see some of our reactions as being quite similar to theirs – differing only in what literature we quote. They seem to “hate” us based on their egoic interpretations of select passages from the Bible. We seem to “hate” them back based on our interpretations of some form of what we consider “basic human decency.” We need to understand that their hate and our hate is simply hate. Hate is not a family value nor is it a spiritual one.

This is not a book you “must study.” It presents a high level overview of how the Bible came to be. Understanding this will help you maintain a perspective to deal with daily events and people. It will begin to allow you to be open to the world of Content – where the Spirit of God is still very present and still very transforming.

There are hundreds of thousands of everyday people who are working for a world based on love, empathy, sharing, cooperation (rather than competition) and moral commitment. Perhaps speaking from our hearts and following our moral compasses will —overcome a world fraught with fear and us/them divisiveness e.g., racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamaphobia, anti-Semitism.

As I have come to understand the honest humanity of biblical persona, I have also come to understand a little of how to dance the precarious dance of being IN the world without being OF the world. I came from a solid family but one with few financial resources. As I struggled as a young man to attend an Ivy League graduate school, struggled through a divorce with young children in the balance, struggled with alcohol abuse that almost took my life, I learned how difficult it is to ponder spiritual thoughts when my children were hungry and I was broke. I learned how difficult it was to focus on doing godly, sacrificing work when I was worried about next month’s rent. I learned that there are certain basic human needs that have to be met before anything else can be introduced to elevate the Spirit.

So I work IN this world to promote the meeting of basic human needs.

Let me provide an analogy: I want to grow vegetables for my family. I need to develop a good garden soil for my packets of seed. I need to till, fertilize, and add natural organic matter to the soil so the ground will provide a wonderful “home” for my seeds. That is all I can do to develop good, healthy, nutritious crops. Is that a guarantee for a good harvest? Nope. But it’s all I can do to help the seeds, which I believe will help both their

growth and the subsequent harvest.

So, to dance the dance of being IN this world of Form, but not OF it, is to dance in order to do all I can do to nurture the development of a society that will work together to provide a wonderful “soil” so all of its citizens will grow and mature – and, hopefully, move from only perceiving the world of Form into perceiving the potential reality of the world of Content: love, acceptance, trust, generosity, kindness, forgiveness, compassion and empathy – and perceiving this spiritual reality in the eternal NOW. That means I give, and share, and stay informed, and vote. It means I accept the current situation – and I define acceptance as being aware and informed without judgment and without fear.

I was very pleased that, as I got to understand ACIM, I realized my original text was not that far off. However, in this edition I have included an additional **Appendix E** in this book that contains a description of A Course In Miracles written by the authors of the book. Please don't take these several paragraphs of mine as a definitive explanation of ACIM. It is not. However, if this should tickle your fancy into exploring where this magnificent teaching might take you, I have included some resources for you (below) and will encourage you to find an ACIM group and join – with an open mind and a willingness to change.

Other than this Preface, Appendix E, and changes in a few paragraphs, the text of this book remains the same as the original publication. It offers a high-level presentation of biblical development that will help all of us understand:

- All forms of wisdom dictate we are to be clear and balanced in our thinking. It is *just as unbalanced* to believe the Bible is only myth, metaphor, or distorted history, *as it is* to believe each word must be interpreted literally. It requires us to think. It requires us to be willing to change our opinions.
- People desire to know their religion is right, which increases a sense of control, quells doubt, and is fear-based. This inclination began in the Old Testament, led to abuses in Israel's temple-state system, and influenced the embryonic Christian Church as it included and excluded documents from the New Testament. These same fear-based beliefs are alive and well in many churches today in the form of bibliolatry and are purposely stoked by politicians for votes and ministers for congregational increases. Understanding the power of these fear-based beliefs may offer you the opportunity to be willing to begin accepting (being informed and aware without fear or judgment), rather than villifying, biblical literalists.
- Understand how and why bibliolatry occurred – Understand what is happening now – Understand the original messages of the prophets and Jesus – Decide what makes sense for you – Become clear, balanced and willing

to change your perception. It might just open the window to a small breeze of spiritual reality that will open your heart to perceive in a way that will bring a sense of calm and serenity to you.

Namaste,

Donald L. O'Dell, Winter 2018-2019

### **Resources: A Course in Miracles**

1. Miracle Distribution Center – [www.miraclecenter.org](http://www.miraclecenter.org) - Get *The Holy Encounter* magazine
2. “From the perspective of *A Course in Miracles*, when we dwell in fear, we are deceiving ourselves about our reality. As we are told in the Course, if there could be an opposite to love it would be fear, but what is all encompassing (love) can really have no opposite. Therefore, when we dwell in fear we are denying not only our reality of love but our real power. We are living a lie.” *The Holy Encounter*, November, 2018
3. Jon Mundy [www.miraclesmagazine.org](http://www.miraclesmagazine.org) - Get *Miracle Magazine*
4. Visit and utilize the materials offered through the Foundation for A Course in Miracles - [www.FACIM.org](http://www.FACIM.org)
5. Appendix E of this book is taken from the website of the Foundation for A Course in Miracles ([www.FACIM.org](http://www.FACIM.org)) and is courtesy of The Foundation for Inner Peace

### **Resources: Biblical Literalism**

1. Kurt Andersen, *Fantasyland*, Random House
2. Bishop John Shelby Spong, *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism*, Harper San Francisco

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