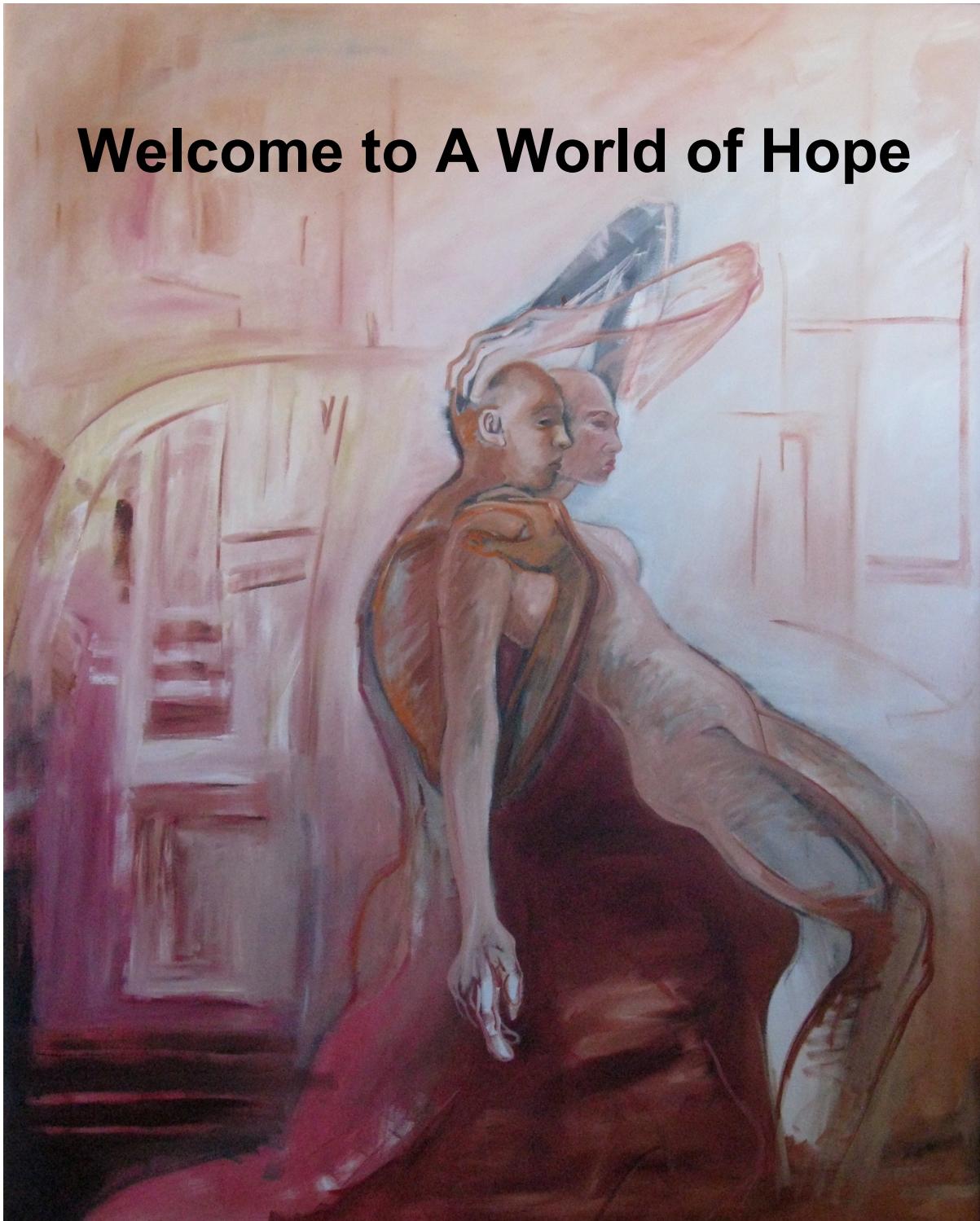


*Read the Bible, © John D. Raphael, June 30, 2019, (1665 words)*

# Welcome to A World of Hope



## **One Story, One Book**

Even if the local church turned you off, reading the Bible can be rewarding:

- Western civilization in the United States, like it or not, is based on Judeo/Christian values straight from the Bible. Take our judicial system, of local courts, county courts, state and federal courts, etc. *Exodus 18:25, "Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of the fifties, and of tens. And they judged the people at all times."*
- Our novels and movies often reflect bible stories: Steinbeck's East of Eden, Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom, Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises, CS Lewis's The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe, Porter's Pale Horse, Pale Rider, Mickey Spillane's Vengeance if Mine (Mike Hammer) and hit tunes from the Sixties and Seventies, plus dozens of authors writing about "Through a Glass Darkly."
- Shakespeare owes a debt to the Bible and paid it.

To say nothing of the religious conflicts in the Mideast over three visceral and conflicting interpretations of the same Bible: Muslim, Jewish, and Christian.

A basic understanding of the Bible is the basis for our understanding of our times. For the first 1500 years after Christ's birth, only the Catholic Church had bibles, copied by hand by Monks. But in 1500 Gutenberg invented moveable metal type press. The first book he printed was the Bible, and finally, they were distributed throughout the Western world. It caused a revolution called the Reformation, going back to what God's word said, instead of taking somebody's interpretation. You know what happened after that, The French and American Revolutions and the Constitutions they wrote based on the idea that individual men had God Given rights and not only the ones the King gave them.

So, if the politics or petty infighting of the local church turned you off; if the news reports of abuse at the hands of Priests and Nuns made you mad and vow to stay away – I don't blame you. These are shortcomings

caused by men and women exercising the free will God gave them, just as you use your free will avoiding religion, Christian, Muslim or Jewish.

Is this as good as it gets? Is each of us alone? Do we have to make our own reality? Is that freedom, or prison? No wonder we can become depressed or anxious or both.

I spent a long, long time dancing around reading the Bible for myself. I read references to it, I read angry protests to it; in the Sixties, I read alternatives, like all the versions of God individuals concocted, feel-good gods that became popular.

I urge you to read it for yourself. Read it directly, instead of somebody's interpretation. If that proves to be too difficult, then add a Commentary, to read second.

An excellent commentary is Dr. Bill Creasy's "One Year Bible." Listen to it while you drive. Cost me \$15 on Audible.com.

Dr. Creasy taught this at UCLA for 20 years. It was voted one of the most popular courses on campus for each of those years. He explains it as a single story, not a collection of 66 books with separate authors; God's story written to men. Look him up on Wikipedia.

## **Overview**

The Old Testament is the story of the first man and woman, their extended family and God's promises - and the people's screwups. Finally, after leaving them alone for five hundred years, God is exasperated and sends his Son Jesus to offer a solution.

The New Testament first four books detail Jesus short life on earth. The rest details Paul's trips throughout the world retelling the story of Jesus



and His message, and Paul's letters of advice to individual churches with a few others of importance to complete the story.

It is compelling when read directly. Much may move you. Much may confuse on the first reading. A Cliff Notes summary never does any book justice; you simply must read it for yourself. You might have been enchanted by the Hobbit, Steinbeck, Sherlock Holmes or any of a hundred other great books, so or why not try the what some call The Greatest Story Ever Told.

And, please, don't let the vast array of Hollywood movies take the place of the original. Videos must, by design, focus on conflict, battle, and emotion to bring in the box office. Books are meant to be one-on-one experiences, Author to reader. The Bible is no different in this respect, just You and the Author.

The experience may amaze you.

Fair warning – like any profession or novel, each has a vocabulary of its own. Some might be familiar - some you have to look up. Jargon turned me off for years.

That's one of the reasons there are so many translations of the Bible. I had a good friend who graduated with a degree in Electrical Engineering, so I asked him, "Did you learn anything?" I was joking, of course, but his answer was serious, "I learned the jargon, the unique language used by engineers. I became a member of the club. Now I can begin my studies. I'm going to graduate school."

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the new in Greek. Neither was written in English, so we don't argue about what the original intent was, as much as argue about if the latest translation got it right. You can skip those arguments. Just read the major stories and skip the rest the first time. Take them at face value. If you get interested in the more subtle reasons and how they might affect your life, you'll find a ton of resources to iron out the wrinkles later.

Unless you are fluid in Middle English skip the King James translation. You'd be safe with either the NIV or ESV. Why do they keep updating

and rewriting? Has the story changed? No, but our language keeps modernizing. Do your kids have the same slang you did? Can you keep up? They hope not. Each generation hopes to redefine itself, which is as it should be.

I came late to Christianity. I was an “intellect.” I went to church with my best friend’s family, then my girl friend’s family, but only enjoyed the organ music. I hiked in the canyons above L.A. every weekend and felt God around me. I hugged the trees just to hear the life pulsing through their veins. I knew God existed, I just didn’t know what, if anything, to do with it.

Then I was a physics major and Carnegie Fellow in the Astronomy department at Caltech, working with the world’s best astrophysicists on Mt. Palomar’s 200” telescope. I met few who didn’t believe there was a God, a Creator who planned the universe. “Physics discovers God’s laws, it doesn’t invent them.” Or, as Einstein said to Max Born, “God doesn’t play dice with the universe.” Think about it.

Finally, America was built on Christian values. Read the Bill of Rights or the Constitution. Our Forefathers were Christians fleeing religious persecution and refusing to bow down to the State Religion of England. They carried bibles and read them. Were they perfect? Far from it. But they did create the most successful Nation in history, with God’s guidance and help.

Today we are made a target for those beliefs, held or not, by Muslim terrorists, in and out of our own society, which brings me full circle to “Read it for yourself. Don’t take someone else’s word for it.”

Christ, rejected or embraced, has influenced the world more than any other individual ever born to a woman. It pays to know what it is all about, first hand. Read it for yourself. The Bible is the most printed and most-read of any book, ever and still.

May God speed you own your way. My way included finding Christ and embracing Him. I certainly changed my ways, not fixing them with my own devices, but having them repaired when I finally took my eyes off me. It was a long journey.

In America, we are taught that what happens to us, as individuals, is the most crucial thing in history. We fight the freedom to build the life we want. No one has the right to get in our way, and the State must help us if we can't help ourselves. In America, we claim our "God-Given Rights." The Federal government has helped at times and stood in the way at others. Is this what God had in mind? You probably ought to know before you vote next time. Begin with the Bible.

People invent religions. Count them. I can't count that high. Some were born in fear; fear of the loss of crops, of too little rain, too much rain, invasion, loss in battle, you name it. But notice they all share something in common – our human desire to know our Creator, to believe He has the power to help or hurt us, and want to know how to influence Him.

You might want to read the book He wrote just for you before dismissing Him and perhaps letting Him know it isn't worth your time.

Quotes by C. S. Lewis (Author, *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*)

- “If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end; if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin, and in the end, despair.”
- “A man can no more diminish God’s glory by refusing to worship him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling the word, ‘darkness’ on the walls of his cell.”
- “I gave in and admitted that God was God.”

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