

## DO WE BELIEVE IN THE BIBLE?

by Lillian Daniel

**O**f course, we believe in the Bible. In worship, the reading and understanding of God's holy word is the heart of what we do together. We hold scriptural phrases in our hearts that hold our lives together. These may be words we have memorized or words that sing out to our souls when we hear them for the first time. We cherish these words in Bible studies, sermons, devotionals and music.



While we believe that there are rich expressions of God's word in religions other than our own, for us as followers of Christ, the Bible is the great book, above all others. It is not a god itself, or an idol to be worshipped. It is God's word for us as Christians and we are called to take it seriously.

We take the Bible seriously but not literally. In our tradition, we take it so seriously that we take the time to study the social and historical context in which it was written. So you will hear us talk about the history of the Jewish and Christian people, as well as the work of modern scholars. We believe that God intentionally planted the word in the middle of history and culture, and therefore that background is part of the story we need to learn. We believe in the Bible so much that we think it deserves our best questions. We believe that the Bible is the opening of a conversation in which God is still speaking. We do not think the Bible will shrivel up and die because we dare to question why it says what it does. We believe that the Bible has withstood similar questions for thousands of years and that in asking the questions together, in communities of faith, over time, we are part of a life-changing conversation that will go on forever.

We believe that the Bible is God's own holy word passed down to us through fallible human beings. We can imagine that some of what is in the Bible was a product of a particular time and place and is not what God desires for this time and place. We tread carefully in these waters, using the tools of history and the gifts of the spirit to ask the still speaking God for a word for today.

We honor the word so highly that we do not take one phrase out of context and fling it around. We do not use phrases as stand-alone weapons to prove our point or to injure another person. Rather, we read the phrase as it has been nested in the text. We read the story around it.

We are not afraid to notice and point out places where scripture disagrees with itself. We know that we are not the first generation to notice these things. Those who carefully put the Bible together over the early centuries wrestled to decide which books should be included and which left out. In their wisdom, they left us a collection of holy words that offer a rich variety of descriptions of God.

These different pictures of Jesus, the Holy Spirit and our creator all stand next to one another, sometimes in tension. As mature, thinking Christians, that is a tension we can live with. More than that, we can marvel that God thought so highly of us that we were not left with a mere rule book, but rather a word of so many dimensions that it would take a lifetime to explore. And that is what we must be prepared to give to this holy word, in all its glorious complexity.

Why would we devote so much spiritual passion and intellectual energy to this one book? Because we are a people who believe in the Bible.