



Biblical Fiction vs. Historical Fiction Set in Biblical Times: Why I Write Both

By Tessa Afshar

People seem to have different ideas of what biblical fiction is. I have fairly high boundaries around that term. For me, biblical fiction is a novel whose main character is a real person in the Bible, and the events of the book, at least in part, focus on actual events that took place in Scripture.

On the other hand, a fictional central character and fictitious plotline that takes place in a biblical setting is historical fiction. It happens to be set in the time of the Bible, but it's still historical fiction. Even if you throw in one or two biblical characters with supporting roles, the book, to my mind, still remains historical fiction. A great example of this is *Ben Hur*, or *Quo Vadis*.

I write both categories. To me, *Harvest of Rubies* and *Thief of Corinth* are Historical Fiction set in biblical times, even though Nehemiah features in one, and Paul and Dionysius in another. But the story lines for both books are pure fabrication. They may show up under the Biblical Fiction category in booksellers' shelves. But to me, there is a slight difference.

Some readers have no interest in biblical fiction, and I understand their hesitation. It straddles two sides of the issue. One, is a concern that fiction and Bible make for an uncomfortable union at best. People don't want their Scriptures meddled with. On the other hand, there is a concern that biblical fiction would by definition feel like a sermon. As a novel, it would be dry and unexciting. And in all fairness, I have read books that fall into both camps.

As a writer, I try to avoid both of those problems, of course. My biblical fiction often concerns minor characters about whom we know little. As such, this gives me more margin to create an engaging novel, without doing violence to the text. I can bring in romance, adventure, mystery. But I can also weave in deeper spiritual themes that help readers discover healing and encouragement. **The Bible doesn't have to be boring, and that's my point as I write these novels.** That's why, when my readers tell me, with some element of surprise, that one of the books made them crack open their Bible for the first time in a while, it makes me all tingly down to my toes!

At the same time, for those who are still not convinced that biblical fiction is for them, historical novels set in the times of the Bible can contain enough of the biblical world to make it more understandable and familiar, while containing meaningful spiritual themes. And, of course, **I can go to town with the romance and adventure** side of things.

Whether you are a historical fiction fan or a biblical fiction enthusiast, I hope you will discover something fresh and new in these stories. Something that will make you want to draw closer to God. I think that's what I was made for. To help others taste of the intimate joy of God's presence. To help remove the impediments that stand in the way of that presence. And, ultimately, to **fall in love with Jesus in a deeper way**, and never look back. I can only pray that's what you will find in my novels, whichever category you choose.

