

Rom. 14:19 So  
then let us follow  
after things which  
make for peace,  
and things  
whereby we may  
edify one another.



John 8:32 and ye  
shall know the  
truth, and the  
truth shall make  
you free.

**December  
23  
2018**

## THE MYTH OF A BIBLICAL “CHRISTMAS”

Jim Stauffer

There is an old joke on Seinfeld that says, “It is not a lie if you really believe it.” Of course this is just an attempt at humor. However, the fact is many have come to believe things over the years that simply are not true.

This is not an attempt at breaking news, but rather the hope of this writer to dispel something people have chosen to believe without attempting to check it for veracity.

Every reference in the Bible to the birth of Jesus is to His mission as the Savior of mankind. And those who worship His birth are fully aware of that mission and have as a result elected to declare His birth as an object or point of focus in worship.

When Joseph was told Mary would give birth it was explained to him, *“She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”* (Matthew 1:21) When Mary was told of her impending conception it was related to her in these terms. *“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.”*

(Luke 1:31–33) When Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist prophesied concerning Jesus, he said, *“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant —”* (Luke 1:68–69). Even Simeon of whom it is said, *this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him.* (Luke 2:25), identified Jesus as the salvation of the people and, *A light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel.* (Luke 2:30-32)

The continual references to the mission of Jesus at the time of His birth and infancy are unmistakable indications it was His life that was to be observed and His role as Savior that was to be worshiped.

When the wise men came to worship Him, they came to worship the, *King of the Jews*. One must ask when Jesus ever became the King of the Jews (See **Mat. 2:2; Acts 2:34-36**). When the angel advised the shepherds in the fields of Jesus’ birth it was to tell them a Savior had been born, *Who is Christ the Lord.* (Luke 2:11)

The only record of any worship of the birth of Jesus was in recognition of His mission to, *save His people from their sins.*

Let us raise the question, if we are expected to worship the birth of Christ, why is there not one instruction concerning it? Why is there no mention of when it should be done? Why do we not know the date of His birth? The obvious answer to all these questions is there is no expectation from God or Christ that we worship His birth.

Why would we conclude this? The revelation of the mind of God is our Bible from which we receive instruction concerning worship (**1 Cor. 2:10-13**). This book tells us how and when and where to pray. It tells us how and what we should sing in efforts to praise God and teach and admonish one another. It teaches us when and how to commemorate His death with the Lord’s Supper. It tells us how and when to give of our means to the work of the church. It teaches us what things we should preach and teach both in and out of the assembly of the church.

The Christmas feast and worship evolved from the Roman worship of Saturn, the god of agriculture and Mithra, the god of the sun which was conducted on December 25. That is the origin of both the religious significance of Christmas and the date on which it is observed. I have no desire to be associated with idolatry.

There are many people this far removed from those days and reasons and they observe Christmas as a man made holiday where people exchange gifts and kindnesses rule the day. There can be nothing wrong with this, but we must not implicate our Savior in such things we do for our own joy and happiness.

## Why is There So Much History in the Bible?

Bible readers know that much of the Bible is written in the genre of history, that is, historical narratives. Starting with Genesis and going all the way through to Esther, it is a (basically) continuous historical story. That is roughly half of the Old Testament. Although we sometimes think of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy as the books of the Law of Moses, you will notice that the Law is actually recorded in history books, and it is related to us as readers as Moses tells the history of Israel. Furthermore, if you read the books of the prophets, you will of course see the record of the preaching they did in their day. But if you look more closely, you will find that the books of the prophets are very much like historical narratives themselves, and even more, the prophets often recalled the history of Israel and commented on the significance of that history. As my friend Phil Roberts used to point out, the prophets were actually the true interpreters of Israel's history. The result is that most of the Old Testament is written as history of one kind or another.

A similar phenomenon confronts us when we turn to the New Testament. Up front we get four accounts of the life of Christ – biographies, if you will, which are specialized forms of historical narratives. Then we get the book of Acts – the history of the earliest Christians. Again, about half the New Testament is written explicitly as history. The rest of the New Testament is made up of a collection of letters written by apostles and other early Christians. Although these are not written as historical accounts, they certainly give us “snapshots” of various “moments” in the lives of churches in the first century. So again, history dominates the collection.

I believe it is common that many people think of “doctrine” first when they think of the Bible. For many people, the Bible is a book that tells us religious truths. While that is true, it would be inaccurate to think of the Bible as if it were simply a digest or collection of religious doctrines (like some kind of ancient doctrinal encyclopedia). The fact is that the Bible is mostly history, and the doctrinal truths revealed in the Bible are presented as parts of the history.

What's so important about history that God, in his providence, filled his book with it? While there are many facets to this question, let's focus on one of them:

**history provides a people with a definition and an identity.** That is one of its primary purposes, and this has been true ever since history began to be written. From ancient times until today, we write histories as an expression of who we are. Where we came from, where our ancestors came from, what they did, the struggles they endured, the victories they won – all of these things give us a sense of who we are.

We do this all time when we think of ourselves, don't we? We like to say that United States was born from a

revolution, and that we Americans are free-spirited, independent-minded people. That is, the way we tell our history says something about us, it says something about how we want others to view us. Of course, the story can be manipulated (or even twisted and perverted) to make a political point or to create an identity that is not exactly “true,” and history often defines one people *against* another — but all of this is a subject for another day. The point is that, whether it is done with good motives or bad, history is a way of establishing an identity. It's significant, isn't it, that Luke wrote a history of the early Christians. He was trying to show the outsiders who Christians were, and the easiest way for outsiders to understand this group of people was to see their history.

The Bible is trying to tell us who we are. The Bible is the history of mankind, the history of every one of us. It tells us about our Father who created us, so that we understand that all of us are his offspring (**Acts 17.28**). It tells us about our ancestors, and in particular, our very first ancestor, Adam. The significance of Adam is that he, in a very important way, set the course that all of his descendants have followed – a course of sin and rebellion against our creator! Yet from among the descendants of Adam God found a man of faith, Abraham, and God entered into a special relationship with him. God promised that he would make a whole nation of people come from Abraham, a nation so numerous that its members could not be counted. Abraham's reaction was that he believed in God (**Gen 15.6**), with his heart and with his actions. In a very real sense, Abraham was what Adam should have been. The story continues to tell us about the physical descendants of Abraham, a story that is mostly about failure and disappointment. However, the nation that God promised to make from Abraham was supposed to be a nation of people who were like their ancestor – a people of faith. In time, Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth and called all people to believe in him – and to become the nation of believers God promised to make from Abraham. By his death and resurrection Jesus offers us a place in this new humanity, this nation of believers, the family of God.

So, according to the Biblical history, who are we? In short, we are sinners who come from a long line of sinners, but who have now been brought into the family of God because of the forgiveness that Jesus has offered to us. We are a people who have left our past behind to start a new life, a life of faith in Jesus, to become a new people. Or to put it another way, we are a people who have been separated from our Father for a long time, but now found our way back home through Jesus. That's who we are.

If we understand what the Bible is telling us about who we are, then it is appropriate that we live humbly before our God. Our history is not one of seeking God, being faithful and pious, and loving truth. *“We were*



enemies,” Paul says plainly (**Rom 5.10**), who have now been reconciled (note the passive voice there) by a loving God who has reached out to us to save us from our foolishness. There’s nothing in that history for us to brag about. *“Where then is boasting? It is excluded”* (**Rom 3.27**).

**David McClister**

## BIBLE ELDERS

*“This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work”* (**1 Timothy 3:1**).

Timothy’s work included teaching about elders in the Lord’s church. Paul is concerned about order in the church (**Titus 1:5**). First Timothy contains direct, systematic, and detailed instructions about elders; here are “hands on” possibilities in a congregation. **Acts 20:17-38** speaks about how the elders in Ephesus would function among God’s people.

Were there unqualified elders in the church at Ephesus? Had some fallen into sin? Were some displaying behavior that hurt the church? Numerous passages point to false teaching and false teachers (**1 Timothy 1:19-20; 6:1-3**). When people deviate from the sacred trust of the gospel, true teaching and right applications are the only solution that will once again enable the church to be the pillar and support of the truth. That is why elders must be able to teach and convict the gainsayers.

When men desire to be bishops (overseer, *episkopos*), they validate a *faithful* (trustworthy) saying. Sometimes *desire* can refer to lust or covetousness (**Matthew 5:28**), here, the desire is pure and honest. Contrast this noble desire with warnings about being covetous, falling into pride, and being puffed up. We might say that sooner or later a fellow’s true colors will show through, so be careful. The work of the bishop is a good work; it is useful and excellent. How could it be otherwise when the Lord and His church are in view?

A bishop is not someone different from an elder; Paul does talk about elders (*presbüteros* **1 Timothy 5:17**). The word elder describes an older man who functions as a leader among God’s people (**Titus 1:5, 7**). While Paul speaks about a bishop (singular), he also speaks about elders (plural). There must be a plurality of elders in a local congregation. The pages of “Church History” (so-called), speak about one elder or bishop or overseer who functioned alone in a church and then in many churches. Paul warned the Ephesian elders about this possibility of apostasy (**Acts 20:30**).

Bishops are men without blame; no one can grab ahold of something in this man’s life that is wrong or out of step with God’s word. This man is faithful to his wife and to God’s instructions about marriage; he is a one-woman man. He is of sound mind; he is free from the ill

effects of alcohol. If he is not sober, how can he make proper decisions in helping God’s people? The bishop’s life is well-arranged; his behavior is modest (see **1 Timothy 2:9**). Hospitality expresses love and concern for others. A failure in this qualification shows a lack of love for others. Bishops must be able to teach publicly and privately. Wherever the gainsayer shows up, he must be stopped. Bishops must have knowledge, readiness, and ability. Feeding the sheep (now the figure is *shepherd*) requires an understanding of God’s word along with the ability to teach and apply it correctly.

Let us remember that when a man desires to be a bishop, he is desiring a good *work*. Bishops work. They achieve. They act. They don’t sit idly by as the church flounders in false teaching and lethargy. Sounds tiresome doesn’t it? Remember, though, it is a *good work*!

**Randy Harshbarger**

## Everybody Messes Up!

You are only human. You make mistakes. That’s what you say, right? I know that’s what I say. And it’s true! It’s one of those basic elementary truths that seem to have been forgotten in much of American Society. You start to succeed and then people go back through every stupid thing you ever said and hold it against you for all time, even if it’s something you have repudiated repeatedly since. We need to practice this grace toward others and remember to extend it to ourselves as well.

It won’t be long till we’ll be making New Year’s Resolutions, at least most of us will. Then, as the New Year creeps along, those resolutions will drop by the wayside one by one. You know why? It’s because we fail to extend the grace of forgiveness to ourselves when we mess up on our New Year’s Resolution. NOBODY NEVER MESSES UP! Sooner or later that old habit you want to break will rear its ugly head. You’re going to forget to work out. Someone is going to offer food not on your diet and you’re going to scarf it down and then feel bad about it.

Most folks will then reason, wrongly, that they were never going to make it anyway and give up, thus sowing the seeds of weakness into their character. But not you! Nope! You are going to see it as a mere glitch on your path to success. You’re going to get back on the road to success and sow seeds of strength into our character. This is God’s way, *“I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”* (**1 John 2:1**)

**Cleveland Reddinger Jr.**

*Let us be reminded to pray for those we support who are preaching in other areas of this country and also of the world. Remember to pray for Kyle Bennett in Boston Ma., Matt Hodge in Marshfield, Mo. and Cleveland Reddinger in El Dorado, Ks. Overseas we need to remember, Wilfredo Pelino and Jonathan Sapitula in the Philippines as well as Arao Uchaio, Francisco Vascob in Mozambique.*

## **HOURS OF WORSHIP**

Sunday A.M. 9:30 Bible Study

Sunday A.M. 10:20 Assembled Worship

Sunday P.M. 5:00 Assembled Worship

Wednesday P.M. 7:00 Bible Study and Worship

***Visitors welcome***

***We conduct in home Bible Studies***

***We offer Correspondence Courses***

## **OUR ADDRESS IS:**

7845 Cottonwood Dr.

Lenexa, Kansas 66216

913-764-9170

***Check out the following websites:***

[facebook.com/LenexaChurchofChrist](https://facebook.com/LenexaChurchofChrist)

[lenexachurchofchrist.org](http://lenexachurchofchrist.org)

**Evangelist and Editor Jim Stauffer**

**Elders: Ron Peck and Jim Stauffer**

**Deacons: Bill Miller**

**Brandon Jimison**

**Casey Dent**

**Joe Hurd**

### **NEWS AND NOTES:**

PLEASE REMEMBER JAN PATRICK  
(WHO HAS A BROKEN FOOT),  
STEPHEN KIMKER, STEVE AND  
SUZANNE WIMP, ALMA  
BAUMGARTNER, AND GEORGE  
ROOT.

### **BIBLE CLASSES**

SUNDAY MORNING  
FOLLOWING THE MESSIAH  
RON PECK - TEACHER

WEDNESDAY EVENING  
CHRIST IN YOU  
JIM STAUFFER - TEACHER

### **SUNDAY SERMON:**

WHERE WAS CHRISTMAS IN  
INSPIRATION?



## ***What Must I Do To Be Saved?***

**Hear** the gospel - Romans 10:17

**Believe** in Jesus Christ - Hebrews 11:6

**Repent** of sins - Acts 17:30

**Confess** Christ as Lord - Romans 10:9,10

**Be Baptized** for remission of sins - Acts 2:38

**Be Faithful** unto death - Revelation 2:10