

CHRISTMAS & JESUS' BIRTH: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

David Halbrook

What is the difference between Christmas and Jesus' birth? Jesus' birth was planned by God (Galatians 4:4). Christmas was not. The event of Jesus' birth was recorded by writers guided by God. God guided no one to write about Christmas. Paul reminded the Roman Christians of Jesus' birth (Romans 1:3). He never taught them about Christmas. Christians and atheists alike can read about Jesus' birth in Scripture. Neither can read about Christmas in Scripture.

The "holy day" called Christmas is viewed as an annual festival of the church and here is the problem--who put the church in charge of creating annual holy days? Scripture equips the church for every good work but not for annual holy days-- just the first day of the week (2 Tim. 3:17; Mt. 28:1; Acts 20:7). Christmas' origin lies in human councils and decrees. If the Catholic Pope moved Christmas to August 25, some might ask "Who gave him that right?" The authority to change the day is the same as the authority to create the day: human councils. Open the Bible and learn of Jesus' birth and church—when you do, you will find no holy day called Christmas.

-- *Editor's Note:* A lengthier version of this article is on our website now and will be in next week's bulletin. Take a look at the monthly financial statement to see how much we are spending on these articles and then help to maximize those dollars by letting people know about these articles in the *Arkansas Weekly*. When you don't have an opportunity to talk to someone about spiritual things, hand them an article and tell them to look for the article in the purple box each week. Who can't do that?

Church of Christ—Quail Valley
4104 E. Harrison St.
Batesville, AR 72501
Office- (870) 793-6700

Evangelists:
David Halbrook 569-4491
Lenoard Westbrook 612-8409

The Exhorter

Acts 11:23 *Exhorted them all... cleave unto the Lord*

Church of Christ--Quail Valley

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ROOTED IN HISTORY

Mike Willis

The modern idea of the Bible is that it is full of myth, legend, and folklore. Its history cannot be trusted. This is not because scholars have found evidence that the Bible is inaccurate; rather it is because of sunglasses of philosophical presuppositions which color their interpretation of the historical documents. The theological sunglasses which are skewing vision is the presupposition that miracles cannot occur. Because miracles cannot occur, any account of miracles is myth, legend, or folklore.

However, the Biblical historians are careful to place their narrative of events in space and time. For example, Luke prefaces his account of the birth of Jesus by saying, ***And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered (Luke 2:1).***

The events surrounding Jesus' birth occurred during the reign of Caesar Augustus (photo of his bust above {viewable at website below-*editor*}). Augustus Caesar (63 B.C. – A.D. 14) is also known as Octavius. After Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C., Mark Antony, Marcus Lepidus, and Octavius formed a triumvirate that eventually fell apart. Lepidus was driven into exile and Antony committed suicide following his defeat at the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C. Octavius became the ruler, under the facade of restoring the Roman Republic. His rule brought peace to the Roman Empire and initiated the Pax Romana or Roman Peace. Upon his death in A.D. 14, the Roman Senate declared him to be a god and conferred on him the name Augustus. The month of August bears his name.

Jesus was born under the reign of this Roman emperor. The gospel is rooted in time and space and contrasts with folklore, legend, and myth in this regard.

[\(http://willismike.wordpress.com/\)](http://willismike.wordpress.com/)

BEWARE

Stan Adams

We would use the term "watch out." The term speaks to the fact of impending peril, and issues warning, in order to avoid loss. It is used in Colossians 2:8 - "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world and not after Christ." Again, we are warned by Christ in Matthew 7:15 - "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves."

In these two passages we are told to be careful and beware about what we are taught. We are warned that we can be led astray by those who appear to have our best interest at heart. Often, those we admire, can lead us into heresy and we may not even know it, because we are prejudiced by their good traits.

I have been a member of the church for 25 years and in a preacher's household for 37. I have watched and observed my father fret over having to deal with false teachers, I have watched him be demeaned, and be accused of lack of love because he stood his ground on Truth and would not back up. The observations of Christ and of Paul are very accurate and are still true. We should be ever aware of the possibility that we, or someone we love, may teach false doctrine and draw others away from their hope. In the time I have been a Christian. I have observed the tactics of false teachers, and have listened to sound brethren more seasoned than I am in their description of false teaching and its pattern. Let us notice some attributes of false teaching.

False Teaching

1. *Often portrays itself as uncertain.* Error claims to be a learning process, but it never comes to a steadfast conclusion (**2 Tim. 3:7**). Error teaches by questioning, never takes a position that can be attributed definitely. It allows others to always wonder what the belief is.

2. *False teaching is often done by those who view themselves as the free-thinkers of the day (Acts 17:21).* In this passage we see the Athenians were forever interested in "some new thing." One who teaches false doctrine often sees himself as an innovator, one who rejects all the "traditional ideas," and is willing to mold for himself some new doctrine. Many of the young men I went to school with followed this pattern and are now in apostasy.

3. *False teaching is deceitful.* It does not advertise itself as dangerous and often on the surface seems innocent. When it is discovered for what it is and is challenged, it

often goes underground until conditions are safe to surface again. Those who followed Holt, Ketcherside, and Fudge were told not to reveal what they believed all at once, but to keep people wondering and unsure. **Matthew 7:15** tells us that it appears as innocent as a lamb.

4. *False teaching turns people against one another.* It divides, shatters and splinters until a full path of destruction is laid. Then, sadly, there are some sad soldiers on the edges of the battlefield, who stand and wring their hands, and wonder what happened, and remember when someone admonished them to stand or be consumed, but it is too late!

5. *False teaching would like for every issue to be a "matter of judgment."* It would have you believe that vital issues that are matters of doctrine are minor points, and that "we all come out at the same place anyhow, so what is the big deal?" Does that sound to you like your Baptist friend, when spoken to about baptism? He will say, "We both believe in baptism, what difference does it make, whether or not it is for remission of sins?," The live-and-let-live philosophy is gendered by false teaching. Sympathizers with false teaching often are "milktoast" Christians who will not agree with the error, but will not take an active stand against it. This makes them a partaker of the evil deeds accomplished by false doctrine (**2 Jn. 9-11**).

6. *False teaching often portrays itself as being misunderstood.* "You didn't hear me right", or "I didn't mean it." We all know that as humans we will slip and misspeak, occasionally, but when we develop a pattern of telling folks we have been misunderstood, we are either involved in false teaching, or do not know what we are talking about, and ought to keep quiet and not advertise our doubts as doctrine. Much harm is done in the church because Christians get together to "study" and all that occurs is a mass pooling of ignorance, with everyone leaving more confused than when he came, but "feeling good," because we have "studied without the shackles of tradition."

All Christians should beware of false doctrine and be unafraid to oppose it. In order to do this we must be studious (2 Tim. 2:15). We must be aware of the tactics of error, and be unafraid as David was when he met Goliath. When error is espoused, it is a slap in the face of our Savior, who died to bring us salvation and hope, not confusion and uncertainty. That should make us upset! I have never been accused of liking a fight. I have always done what I could to avoid one, but that does not mean indignation cannot come to the front when Truth is challenged. Beware! and put your armor on! (**Eph. 6:10-18**).