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# THE BAPTIST HERITAGE

VOLUME XXIV ISSUE 4

APRIL 20, 2000

*Will American Biblical Christianity Survive  
This Generation of American Believers?*

## THE UNDERLYING BASIC PREMISE

Concerning the church  
of the Lord Jesus Christ, Scrip-  
ture convinces me of these  
two absolutes.

*I assure you that  
the question  
is asked  
with deliberate  
seriousness.*

1. From the very mo-  
ment the Lord Jesus  
Christ Himself estab-  
lished the first church in Judea during His  
earthly ministry until the present hour,  
true believers have been present on this  
earth and a true local church has been in  
existence somewhere. In other words, there  
has never been a single hour since that day  
when true believers and at least one true  
local church were not existing and func-  
tioning on this earth.
2. From the hour of the establishment of the  
first church until the very moment of the  
Rapture, that truth of Christ's church ex-  
isting and functioning is a living fact. The  
church of the Lord Jesus Christ has never  
passed from existence and never will. There  
never was—for there never needed to be—

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Editors



# this and that

Jerald L. Manley  
Gary Roland  
Dorothy Gundersen

My title may seem cavalier. I do not believe that only I continue in the lineage of true biblical Christianity. Across the land, in small churches and in large, there are men of God in the pulpit and true believers in the pews, even though not always together in the same church. However, there is little question that the percentage against the total population is greatly reduced from fifty years ago. I have a feeling that the total number may also be lower; this in spite of the increase in the number of churches claiming to be Bible based. I do not intend to imply by my title that I think I only remain. Yet, I cannot fail to see the terribly rapid decline in the *expression* of true Christianity in this land.

Over the last fifty years, I have witnessed the tangible results of evangelism without discipleship. It became the pattern for preachers to be reapers. The fields have been gleaned, but the seed for future crops has not been sown. The

*American Believers want a twelve-step program to Bible knowledge as long as it does not include actually taking any steps in reading the Bible.*

seed sowers and the seed water-ers did not show up for duty. "Win the lost at any cost," became the battle cry. As with so many slogans, this sounds good until one thinks about what is actually being said. Sowing, watering, and reaping, that is the natural order and the biblical mandate. The word of God, defined by the Chief Shepherd, as the seed must be sown and it must be watered if there is to be a steady har-

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# this and that

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vest. Bluntly stated, preachers and churches have tried to reap without sowing.

Dr. Bob Jones Sr. used to warn his preacher boys of the danger when reaping is the only goal. His illustration was of an orchard reaped with methods that produced limbs broken resulting in the reduction of the future harvests—if the trees survived. The care of the trees was as important, in his illustration, as was the reaping of the harvest.

Churches, the trees of his illustration, require teaching if they are to grow spiritually. Teaching is the explanation and the application of truth, of doctrine. Drawing numbers through entertainment and programming, an attempt to harvest without sowing and watering, is a farming technique that will work only as long as the seed previously sown self-produces. However, very rapidly, the weeds take over the field and what self-seeding exists is continually reduced until the field of grain is a field of thorns.

America is not a field of grain.

—Pastor Manley ☒

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another word for numerical results. Quantity is more important than quality. A mediocrity is accepted and that becomes the goal. Instead of teaching the craft, industry hires a quality control expert who lowers the excellent to the medium and strives to raise the pitiful to the mark of mediocrity. This "quick in, quick out, and let's hope the product lasts the warranty period and turns a profit" philosophy became the prototype, the pattern, for evangelism and discipleship in America: *assembly line Christianity*.

Telling the American Christian he or she needs to read the Bible each day only compels them to go to the bookstore for a copy of "The One Minute Bible." American Believers want a twelve-step program to Bible knowledge as long as it does not include actually taking any steps in reading the Bible. This is the day of seminars offering their fast fixes and near instant results. American Believers want to be spiritual—if they can obtain it quick, fast, and in a hurry and as long as being spiritual does not upset their routine of life. They plead "teach me to live and pray like the saints of old, but do so by using shortcuts and, above all, keep it short and simple and do it today."

The old Kentucky preacher who warned that sermonettes would produce Christianettes was a prophet. What do you think? *Will American Biblical Christianity survive this generation of American believers?*

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acknowledgment appreciated.

—Pastor Manley

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a reformation or a restoration to reclaim what had been lost: the true faith and the true church have always been kept by the word and the promises the Lord Jesus Christ.

*While the true New Testament Church will never cease to exist somewhere, she is not promised to exist everywhere.*

*Even so, as a resident observer (with an inquiring mind) of the present age, I must ask the question,*

*Will American Biblical Christianity survive  
this generation of  
American believers?*

The question might seem surprising in the context of the 'basic underlying premise' as stated above. It might seem less than serious as either self-answering or unnecessary. I assure you that the question is asked with deliberate seriousness. My question is not a repudiation of the above premise; it is actually a reaffirmation of that truth. I believe, as an absolute, that *the church that Jesus built* (to borrow Dr. Roy Mason's book title) will be waiting

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for Him when He returns to call away His own. I also believe, as an absolute, that some believers will be waiting for Him when He comes who are not members of a New Testament Church. Salvation is not an issue of church membership. These beliefs are not the issue that I submit here for discussion or debate.

Those matters are settled, secure beyond alternative views. The Lord Jesus Himself founded His church. She, His church, has never ceased and will never cease to exist with visible identity on the earth—until she is called up, and caught up at the Rapture, and then her visible identity will be in glory. Any opinion to the contrary is a rejection of Scripture's promise and prophecy and is an insult to the Son of God Who made both.

May I be so bold, however, to affirm that there is no guarantee that such believers as the Lord Jesus called or such a church as He established will be found in every hour of every day within every city, every nation, or even on every continent until the time of the Rapture. *While the true New Testament Church will always exist somewhere, she*

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*She, His church, has never, will never cease to exist with visible identity on the earth—until she is called up, and caught up at the Rapture and then her visible identity will be in glory.*

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sions in this land is not a coincidence. The stream at the altar flows from the exposition of Scripture. Replacing consistent doctrinal teaching with result orientated programming has dried the stream. The biblical program of producing conversions is sowing, watering, and then, and only reaping, reaping. The tedious labor of the essential preparation of the field, the tiring plodding through the fields sowing the seed of the word and the arduous task of carrying the buckets to water the sprouts is not nearly as

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*The sequence of the steady decline of expositional preaching and the annual Bible Conference and the death of Bible conversions in this land is not a coincidence. The stream at the altar flows from the exposition of Scripture.*

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pleasant as the work of harvesting. There is little satisfaction in being the plow hand, the seed caster, or the water boy. There is a far greater measure of enjoyment in the gathering of the fruit of the labor of others. For generations, American believers accepted the biblical and logical mandated steps leading to the regular harvest of souls. However, American Christians have adopted the character of America. They want quick results; they do not wish to wait until the 'due season' of reaping. Remember, this nation's gift to the industrial revolution was the assembly line. Where once craftsmanship dominated the labor force, today production is the non-benevolent dictator. Production is

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Questionable respectable

Righteousness optional

Sin, as a word, objectionable, as an act, acceptable.

Truth relative

Unity primary

With the result that

Victory is peace

Wants are needs

X-rated is tolerable

Giving Baptists only a

Yearning for more

And a

Zeal for getting.

That is a mess of messes. How did Baptists come to be in such a wretched condition? They were 'taught' there by preachers. The pulpit ceased teaching doctrine and devoted itself to scratching itching ears. Writers producing commentaries thirty years ago are writing Christian fiction series today. Is it that we cannot cause believers to hear doctrine so we attempt to seduce them with fiction? Or, is it that fiction has a wider sales appeal than commentaries? Please do not show ignorance by comparing the fiction of contemporary writers with the allegories of Bunyan. He wrote of Vanity Fair, they provide vanity fare. Rather than encourage, exhort or edify these writers now entertain, excite, and entice. In short, they merchandize rather than evangelize.

Even many preachers claiming to be Bible-believers have given up on seeing conversions and have settled for decisions. The sequence of the steady decline of expositional preaching and the annual Bible Conference and the death of Bible conver-

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is not promised always to exist everywhere. It is biblical teaching that the exact opposite is true. While the Lord Jesus titled His true followers the light of the world and instructed them to place their candles in a candlestick so that his light might shine through them before the world, He also warned the candlesticks, which He identifies as His churches, that there was the danger of being removed. That this was not an idle warning is evident to the student of church history. The churches to whom the Epistles were sent have all been removed. The seven churches of the Revelation have disappeared from their place. Some of the cities in which those churches had a place continue to exist but have no current Gospel witness whatsoever. The candlesticks were removed exactly as the Lord Jesus said they would be. Ancient history is fully capable of becoming contemporary reality. What happened to Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia could happen to America. What occurred to the churches in Damascus, Jerusalem, and Antioch could happen to those in New York, Chicago, and Pensacola.

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*The churches to whom the Epistles were sent have all been removed.*

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Though not a popular message to deliver, I must insist that it is biblical truth that this once-upon-a time Christian America has no

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guarantee of always having a true Gospel witness within her borders. *Unlike His commitment to the Jewish people, God has not promised America that she will have a remnant.* American believers (not even old stock, mainline, WASP Americans--certainly not Baptist Americans) are not now, and never were, God's chosen nation, *even if certain false teachers foolishly proclaim that we are.* Americans are not descendants of the fabled "lost tribes of Israel." I wrote 'fabled' and did so deliberately, because God never lost them. To teach anything about 'lost tribes of Israel' is to teach a fable. To listen to such deviant doctrinal drivel is to have itching ears. A "real" student of the Old Testament (or, of the New) would know the error of this teaching and could never be deceived on this issue. Since God called the nation of Israel into existence, there has always been, is now, and always will be a believing remnant of Israel; however, no other nation has received that promise. There is nothing—not a direct statement

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*Unlike His commitment to the Jewish people, God has not promised America that she will have a remnant.*

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and not even a vague implication--within all of Scripture that promises or insures to America that biblical Christianity will survive even one more generation in this land, and I have legitimate, biblical

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*Baptists are in a mess today because they are a mess today. Baptists reject the concept that absolutes exist, resist the attempt to teach them doctrine, and refuse the notion that they need to be corrected.*

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may not come for awhile. The question of my title is, therefore, legitimate. It is legitimate because it is possible. I will go further, it is legitimate because I have biblical reason to believe it is probable.

Baptists are in a mess today because they are a mess today. Baptists reject the concept that absolutes exist, resist the attempt to teach them doctrine, and refuse the notion

that they need to be corrected. Contemporary American Baptists may be identified by a new alphabet of distinctives:

- Aversion to doctrine
- Belligerency to correction
- Callousness to condition
- Deadness to responsibilities
- Empathy with the world
- Freedom from discipline
- Gratification of self
- Harmony over truth
- Indulgences for the old nature
- Jingles over doctrine
- Kaleidoscope of versions
- Living for today
- Motive over truth
- Negation of standards
- Opinions over Scripture
- Permissiveness over principles

*Which makes*

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about genuine, blood-bought, born-again, Heaven-bound Baptists. My question is sincere and is precisely phrased. I am wondering 'right out in public' as to whether or not biblical Christianity will actually exist in this nation a generation from now. Obviously, (at least to this Baptist) if the Lord Jesus returns for His Own before the next thirty years pass, (my earnest prayer is that He will come quickly, even today) true believers (Baptist and otherwise, Thank God.) will be "caught up to meet Him in the air." That removal will permit the popular, anti-biblical American christianity (small 'c' on purpose) to become the christianity that welcomes the leadership of the anti-Christ. While I unequivocally believe and unashamedly confess that the Lord Jesus could, without violating any promise of Scripture, return before I finish this sentence, I also unhesitatingly affirm and unflinchingly declare that should He not return for generations, He will still not have violated any prophecy of Scripture, nor will He owe anyone an apology. Godly men from the apostles until this very hour have yearned for His return. Some honestly believed He would appear before they walked the valley, and they were right to so believe even though they were wrong as to the time of His coming. My Mother died expecting the Lord Jesus to come even to the very hour of her death; He did not. Her expectation was not vain. She died with hope and I now live with that same blessed hope. So, while I know He is coming, and I believe He could come this very moment, and I expect Him soon, He

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*To teach anything about 'lost tribes of Israel' is to teach a fable. To listen to such deviant doctrinal drivel is to have itching ears.*

reasons to believe that it might not. Therefore, my question is not asked merely to be provocative or controversial. It is asked because it is both justifiable and serious.

Thus, I ask the question again, *Will American Biblical Christianity survive this generation of American believers?*

Since Israel crossed the Jordan, no generation of God's people have had more and possessed less than do contemporary American believers. Not since the Pilgrims stood on Plymouth Rock (*Though the history books no longer mention it, those Pilgrims were believers—in fact, they comprised a church of believers, exiled from England, who had sought refuge in Holland and then moved to the New World for the express purpose to worship God according to the dictates of the Scriptures.*) has any generation of American believers possessed more and been less thankful than are we. Americans have gained the whole material world and the nation has lost its entire spiritual soul in that process. The America of the twenty-first century is not a nation seeking to

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*The Athenians  
had fewer altars  
and fewer gods  
than do  
Americans.*

worship Jehovah according to the dictates of His word. Contemporary America is more pagan than was ancient Babylon. The Athenians had fewer altars and fewer gods than do

Americans. America might even be the commercial Babylon of The Revelation; if not, she is a near mirror image.

Sadly, believers in America are fast following in the national footsteps. Asked of their present state, most would reply, "I am rich and increased with goods." They are engaged in eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, and building, knowing not the day in which they live. "Gain is godliness" is the battle cry of contemporary Christianity. Testimonies in 'great' city crusades and in 'insignificant' country churches are primarily focused on material or physical 'blessings.' Somehow, the truth that "the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word" so that the believer "becometh unfruitful" is lost on this generation with its philosophy of "To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain." The goal of American Christianity is an enjoyable retirement: "And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up of many years; take

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all Baptists have ever been Christians and not all Christians have ever been Baptists; however, Baptist have been the conscience of Christianity, especially in this country. Check the actual history—not the revisionist's concocted babble—and you will find that Baptists were leaders in establishing freedom of religion, obtaining freedom of the slaves, cessation of child labor, works of charity, provision of medical centers, and provision of education. The latter effort was prompted because Baptists believed one needed to learn to read so he or she could read God's word for his or her self and not be forced to be dependent on another for spiritual truth. Baptists fought for temperance, preached against social sins and social ills, and fought for individual liberty—because that is the essence of being a Baptist. Few even know what a Baptist is today. Books on Baptist history and Baptist distinctives are out of print or lie dusty and forgotten on the preacher's shelf.

Specifically notice that I am not addressing worldwide Christendom or even true believers everywhere in the world. My point of reference in the question is not even a broad inquiry that encompasses all of American Christendom. Rather the question is very definitive and includes only true believers in the United States. More specifically, I will further say that primarily I am concerned *with and*

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cially, Baptists have arrived. Three of them, stalwart examples of the faith (?), have lived in the White

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*In fact, the typical Baptist of today would not be received as a member of the typical Baptist church of 1950.*

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House since then--Harry Truman, Jimmy Carter, and Bill Clinton. Twenty-first century Baptists have certainly made it; they are acceptable, even electable. The move to commonality with the world, however, has been very costly. In gaining

this worldly respectability, Baptists have lost their spiritual identity. Baptists are no longer the Baptists they were. In fact, the typical Baptist of today would not be received as a member of the typical Baptist church of 1950. If somehow they had gained membership, they would soon have received a visit from two deacons with a message to repent or face expulsion. (The subject of the death of church discipline is worthy of an article all by itself.) Baptists were expected to live like Christians and not to live as does the world. That expectation has seemingly died in most Baptist churches today.

Consequently, "as a resident observer with an inquiring mind," I have very real concerns as to whether or not American Biblical Christianity will survive this generation of American believers. Not

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thine ease, eat, drink and be merry." The lifestyle of Ms. and Mr. Contemporary Christian is an extended comfort zone: "Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself? Be no over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?" When the stock market takes a trip south, the smile leaves the face of Christian America because the countenance of modern Christianity is keyed to the Dow Jones average. When the next Great Depression arrives, Baptists will be jumping out of high rise apartments right along with the leaders of commerce and industry. Christians want the reward of service rendered delivered "*here and now.*" they have no patience for "*then and There.*" The coming of the Lord is not, for them, *the blessed hope.*

Only half a century ago, Baptists were meeting in storefronts and tents. Today, Baptists sit on padded pews and opera seats in luxuriously appointed sanctuaries watching a movie-screen sized televised stream of the preacher or other entertainment. This exotic technique is required

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*When the stock market takes a trip south, the smile leaves the face of Christian America because the countenance of modern Christianity is keyed to the Dow Jones average.*

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because of the ever-increasing distance between pulpit and pew. The audio-visual system of a typical Baptist church costs more today than did her entire building fifty years back. Preachers whose fathers decried stained glass, robed choirs, and mouth-swallowed microphones have Plexiglas pulpits, back-up singers, electronic music, and make-up assistants. The closest today's Baptist comes to the sawdust trail's paperback songbooks, wooden slat benches, and funeral home fans is with an e-Bay bid.

What a difference fifty years has made in Baptists. A Baptist church in 1950 had faith, fervor, and fire; she did not have database, drums, or dance. She heard "Amen," "Hallelujah," and "Praise God," but she heard no applause, taught no aerobics, and still named the abominations. She heard 'hell-fire and damnation' preaching; but she held no financial seminars. She had a live piano player and a plain song leader, but she had no soundtracks. She had three week meetings than lasted two hours nightly—about thirty minutes of singing, announcements and offerings, an hour (at least) of preaching and likely

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*The closest today's Baptist comes to the sawdust trail's paperback songbooks, wooden slat benches, and funeral home fans is with an e-Bay bid.*

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thirty minutes of invitation; but she had no ticketed rock concerts. She had consistency. She had convictions. She had conversions. But, she had no air conditioning, no nursery, and no Life-center. She might have carpeting—on the aisles. If in the city, she might even have had ceiling fans. If she had a microphone on the pulpit, an amplifier on a shelf in the pulpit, and a couple of wall speakers, then she was moving up. Few churches had both a piano and an organ—those that did were First Baptist Churches downtown, where the rich folks attended. Most of the furnishings came secondhand from somebody's home in appreciation for having been saved. Today the average Baptist church has 'fixin's' fancier than an uptown, big city funeral home.

Fifty years ago, 'getting saved and joining a Baptist church' meant that one lost his invitation to the country club and that he quit going to nightclubs. Overnight, he or she became a social outcast.

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*Fifty years ago, 'getting saved and joining a Baptist church' meant that one lost his invitation to the country club and that he quit going to nightclubs.*

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After all, "those Baptists don't drink; they don't smoke, they don't go to picture shows; they don't play cards; they don't dance—they are no fun to be around." Well, brother that perception is not common today. Materially and so-

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