

Six “Biblical” Myths Debunked

There are six “truths” I’ve been asked about many times. People think I’ve never heard these “truths” before and attempt to explain them to me — though I know them all to be myths.

In each case, there is no historical, biblical or actual basis to any of the six. Someone started teaching them, made an assertion on the internet or a book or magazine. The pious speculation gets picked up by good intentioned teachers or bloggers and as the old saying goes, “If something is said often enough, it becomes true.”

So we will address each of these myths briefly and set the record straight.

1) SHEPHERDS BREAK LEG OF WANDERING LAMB

The first now popular myth is that shepherds in the Middle East break the leg of a wandering lamb to keep it close by. Being close to the shepherd during its early years makes the lamb very affectionate and builds a special bond so it never wanders away again after the leg is healed.



The assertion is that Jesus is a good shepherd and he too would break the proverbial leg of his followers to keep them from straying.

However, this does not happen and there are no traditions or incidents known of it happening. In fact, there are a good number of reasons why it would not happen. I've been told it was in a book or books about shepherds and Psalm 23. I own those books and it is *not* in there.

Though it may sound profound and pious lessons can be drawn from it, it also portrays God in a very capricious manner. It is an urban legend of recent origin and it simply is not true—it is a manufactured tale.¹

2). THE "EYE OF A NEEDLE" IS A GATE, NOT A NEEDLE

Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Matt 19:24). Did he mean a real sewing needle or a gate into Jerusalem called the "Eye of the Needle"?



It common for preachers and writers to say that Jesus did not mean a needle but a supposed gate too small for the camel and his load. The story is lovely for preaching because it graphically explains how a camel cannot get through the small door to enter a city with his load of merchandise. The camel driver hast to remove everything from the camel's

¹ <https://greenegem.wordpress.com/2011/12/03/myth-busting-8-breaking-a-lambs-leg/>

back so it can stoop down and wiggle through the small gate without its load.

After researching this I've concluded there is no historical, written or archaeological evidence there was ever such a gate. In fact, scholars and commentators debunk the idea. The camel was the largest thing people usually saw and the eye of the needle the smallest, therefore, it made an excellent visual image how impossible it was for a rich man could get into heaven. The idea of offloading wealth and possessions made this a great teaching image.

However, the idea that the "eye of the needle" was a gate is simply a myth. If Jesus had meant a literal gate the Scripture would say, "The eye of THE needle" but it says "the eye of A needle".

To confirm that Jesus used such "large and small" comparisons he also describes the man who "strains out a gnat, but swallows a camel" (Mt 23:24). Here it an actual gnat as in the previous it is an actual needle.

Myth No. 2 debunked.

3) THE FOLDED NAPKIN IN THE TOMB MEANT JESUS WOULD COME BACK

The Gospel of John tells us that the napkin or face cloth of Christ was rolled or folded up in a place by itself. Some have invented a custom



that never existed, that in biblical times a man would crumple up his napkin and toss it aside if he was done with dinner but would fold it neatly and set it aside if he was leaving but would come right back.

Therefore, since Jesus's face cloth or napkin was folded up in the empty tomb, it was a signal that Jesus would return.

"It has been rumored that folding the napkin at the table is a Jewish custom that means the person folding the napkin intends to return. Numerous Bible study sources have been checked, but there is nothing about this alleged Jewish custom of the folded napkins. The only references to this story seem to be from internet postings and emails that appear to have originated in 2007....

"The truth is that table napkins, such as we use today, were not used in Jesus' day. Jews would do an after-meal hand washing as part of the eating ritual....

"The folding of the napkin as a sign that a dinner guest was finished may be good European custom, but it appears this custom was unknown in the land of Israel in the time of Jesus." (*Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2013).

The folded napkin, like the other four, is a myth.

4) JESUS COULDN'T HAVE BEEN BORN DECEMBER 25 BECAUSE SHEEP AREN'T OUT IN THE FIELDS IN WINTER

The presumption is often expressed that winter in Bethlehem is harsh and cold. Sheep would not be out in the fields in

December so Christmas could not have been on December 25.

Scripture says, “In the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night” (Luke 2:8).



So it is assumed that since there were shepherds out in the fields at night with their sheep at the birth of Jesus, it certainly could not have been December.

The problem with this theory of course is that I’ve been to Bethlehem over 100 times and in real life there *are* sheep and shepherds out in the fields during December. Yes, I have seen it snow in Bethlehem, but winters are mild and the snow melts very quickly. Winters in Bethlehem are not harsh like they are in Michigan or Minnesota.

So those who deny sheep and shepherds were in the fields of Bethlehem on December 25 must have never been there during those days. Sheep still have to eat and if the weather does get colder, there are large caves outside Bethlehem which are cool in the summer and warm in the winter, also used for protection of the sheep at night.²

Myth No. 4 debunked.

² “The same Mishnic passage also leads us to infer, that these flocks lay out *all the year round*, since they are spoken of as in the fields thirty days before the Passover—that is, in the month of February, when in Palestine the average rainfall is nearly greatest.” (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1 [New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896], 187.

5) PAUL WAS GIVEN A NEW NAME AT HIS CONVERSION

Simon was given a new name by Jesus. He was Simon son of John but Jesus said you are now Peter. From that point and he was called Simon Peter with his old name and his new name combined.

Saul of Tarsus was an opponent of the church and persecuted the Christians. But later we hear him being referred to as Paul and many people assume that like Peter, he was Saul in his earlier years and given the new name Paul when he became a believer.



However, that is not the case. Saul was his Jewish name. And because he was a Roman citizen (Acts 22:27-28) he also had a Roman name, which was Paul. Acts recalls "But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit..." (13:9). He had two names from birth — Saulus and Paulus, and was not given a new name at his conversion.

Myth 5 is debunked.

6) LAMBS WERE "SWADDLED" TO KEEP THEM PERFECT FOR PASSOVER SACRIFICES

At his birth, Jesus was swaddled by his mother Mary. After birth, the baby was washed, rubbed with salt, and wrapped

with bands of cloth to provide warmth, protection of the limbs and a sense of security (Ezek 16:4).

The recent myth suggests that shepherds swaddled lambs designated for sacrifice to insure they were delivered according to the requirement — a year old male without blemish (Ex 12:5). A lot of recent books assert this as a fact but I have found no evidence factual or historical to support it. It appears that someone thought it was a nice parallel — lambs swaddled and the Lamb of God swaddled in preparation for a spotless sacrifice.



There is nothing in Scripture about swaddling lambs. During the time of Christ up to 250,000 lambs were sacrificed a year on Passover. All of them were swaddled? How would a swaddled lamb eat? Lambs follow their mother around and jockey for the teat from which they get milk. Were all

of the swaddled lambs fed from a bottle? Were they swaddled for the whole year before sacrifice? There are some serious practical reasons this story is a myth.³

I have found no serious historical document, archaeological evidence, commentary or Bible dictionary that even suggests such a practice. I only found assertions on blogs and devotional material, all without a shred of documentation. Again it seems that a clever devotional idea became a “fact”

³ <https://everlastingtruths.com/2020/01/02/did-jewish-shepherds-swaddle-lambs/>
<https://christian-intellect.blogspot.com/2014/12/a-christmas-myth-pushing-evidence.html>

by good meaning folks who picked it up and spread it as truth with no evidence whatsoever.

Like the previous five, Myth 6 has no basis in history or fact.