

# The Untold Story of Christmas

**"Away in a manger, no crib for a bed..." is the familiar tune heard at the yuletide season. Singing the old songs is about as far as many will go into the supposed Biblical side of Christmas. For most, Christmas today really means decorating evergreen trees, buying presents, displaying Santa Claus, and partying with eggnog. What do these peculiar customs have to do with a babe born in a manger some 2,000 years ago? For that matter, is it possible to put the Savior back into Christmas? Let's find out. Be ready for a few surprises!**

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"Life without Christmas? That would be like America without Chevrolet," the man retorted. "Or meat without potatoes. Or shoes without socks."

Christmas has become the standard for traditional holidays in society today. It's taken for granted that families will gather during the week of December 25<sup>th</sup> to share in the merriment. It's a time when billions of dollars in gifts are exchanged and when most do their utmost to revel in a "merry" spirit unique to this celebration.

But wait. Beneath all the holiday hype, all the dancing sugar plums and cheer, have you ever sensed that something isn't quite right? Many have expressed it. Many more have felt it. Newspapers tell of increased crime in the frantic pre-Christmas spending spree that keeps most retailers afloat for another year, and the mental depression afterward.

If Christmas is a celebration of the birth of the Savior at Bethlehem, who came to bring peace on earth and good will toward men, why isn't there more peace and good will? After all, Christmas is the most celebrated extravaganza the world has ever seen—observed by multiple millions the world over, by professing Bible believers and (strangely?) unbelievers alike! Surely with that much participation in a holiday supposedly expressing love, kindness, and peace, we should be seeing some real changes in the behavior of people everywhere.

Yet we don't. Why? Why isn't the celebration of Christmas year after year helping to make our world better? Is it simply that people fail to catch and hold the "spirit of Christmas"? Or could there be something more, something inherently flawed with this observance?

## Looking for a Biblical Christmas

Christmas, after all, is supposed to be rooted in the Bible. It was at one time assumed to be in honor of the birth of the Savior of men in a manger at Bethlehem. The overblown rites of Santa Claus, tinsel, Rudolph, gift exchanging, and football are rapidly obscuring this significant detail. A revealing survey would be to poll frantic Christmas shoppers to find out how many know the origins of Christmas.

Do you yourself know what Christmas is all about? Are you mildly amused each year with newspaper and magazine articles detailing the strange, irreverent customs of Christmas? On the other hand, maybe you have found these facts somewhat troubling. Isn't it time you honestly investigated the matter?

If Christmas is that significant—the biggest holiday of the year taking a good deal of your time and money—shouldn't you at least know what it is all about? This is especially critical considering the religious overtones of Christmas. The great Creator in heaven may just have some definite feelings about the observance of this hybrid holiday that you need to be aware of!

Isn't it odd that we carry on much in life without giving a second thought to what we do? Our routine traditions are simply accepted. We eat bacon and eggs for breakfast, we answer the

telephone with "hello," we shake hands when we are introduced, we buy turkey for Thanksgiving, and we celebrate Christmas on December 25<sup>th</sup>. Oddly enough, we never ask why.

### **Time to Pop the Question**

Okay, so let's ask: Why observe Christmas, because it's in the Bible? Try as you might, you will not find Christmas anywhere in the Scriptures. There is neither a call to observe it nor an example where someone in the Bible observed it.

Shocking? Millions are ignorant of this simple fact!

As one authority puts it, "There is no historical evidence that our [Savior's] birthday was celebrated during the apostolic or early postapostolic times, **The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge**, "Christmas," p.47.

Another writer makes this astounding statement: "The day was not one of the early feasts of the Christian church. In fact the observance of birthdays was condemned as a heathen custom repugnant to Christians," **The American Book of Days**, by George W. Douglas, p. 658.

How can this be? Does he mean that the single most important religious holiday observed today in Christianity would have been FORBIDDEN in early New Testament times? That is exactly what he and many other historians and scholars are saying.

Now read this candid admission from **The New Catholic Encyclopedia**, "Inexplicable though it seems, the date of the [Messiah's] birth is not known. The Gospels indicate neither the day nor the month," vol. 3, p. 656.

And the **Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical literature** corroborates, "The fathers of the first three centuries do not speak of any special observances of the nativity. No corresponding festival was presented by the Old Testament ... the day and the month of the birth of [the Messiah] are nowhere stated in the Gospel history, and cannot be certainly determined," "Christmas," p.276.

"But what about the manger scene?" you ask. Yes, that is described in the Bible, but was never established as a precedent for continuing the observance of the birthday of the Savior Yahshua\* the Messiah.

If Christmas is as popular and pervasive as retail sales indicate, why isn't it mentioned anywhere in the Bible? Why doesn't the Bible even tell us which **month**, let alone which **day** to keep it?

### **Manger Myths about Christmas**

Let's look at some popular misconceptions about the manger scene or nativity. Matthew 2 opens with wise men or magi (oriental scientists or astronomers, see Dan. 2:2) seeing a star and inquiring of the Savior. There is no indication of just how many wise men there were, only that they gave three kinds of gifts. No doubt there was an entourage of servants and camels with them.

By the time they got to the Messiah, from the east, He was in a house. They presented their gifts and left, avoiding an inquiring King Herod. Herod's plot to find the young Yahshua and kill Him was foiled. Thereafter he decreed that all male children in and around Bethlehem **two years** of age and younger be killed, "According to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men," Matthew 2:16.

\*The Savior of the Bible was a Hebrew. His actual name, Yahshua reflects His mission to earth as the salvation of His Father Yahweh. His name Yahshua means "Yahweh is salvation." His name was changed by translators who were poor scholars of the Hebrew. There was no "J"

in the Hebrew or Greek languages. Write for our revealing study, **How the Savior's Name Was Changed.**

Shepherds came to the manger, but the wise men visited a house up to two years later—long after the manger had reverted to livestock use. Here's the account, right from Matthew 2:11: *"And when they were to come into the **house**, they saw the **young child** with Mary [Miriam] his mother, and fell down and worshiped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."*

Scripture never says the shepherds worshiped the babe in the manger, incidentally. Luke 2:20 says they praised Yahweh the Father for what they had heard and seen. The Savior Yahshua Himself said we are to worship only Yahweh the Father and serve only Him, Matthew 4:10. Yet the manger scene encourages worship of the babe, and even to idolize his mother!

Usually during Christmas plays someone will read the account in Luke 2:8: *"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night."* Is this Scripture describing a cold, wintry December scene?

According to Jeremiah 36:22, December is wintry in the Holy Land. It is the rainy season where on occasion snow covers the ground (see **Daily Life in the Times of Jesus** by Henri Daniel-Rops). Luke, however, says that sheep were still in the open fields. This had to be before the cold winter rains and snow began to fall. The livestock had not yet been moved to shelter.

Notice: "It was a custom among Jews to send out their sheep to the deserts about the Passover [early spring], and bring them home at the commencement of the first rain" (**Clarke's Commentary** by Adam Clarke, vol.3, p.370). Clarke says the first rain commences in October or November. He adds, "As these shepherds had not yet brought home their flocks, it is a presumptive argument that October had not yet commenced, and that, consequently, our Savior was not born on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December, when no flocks were out in the fields ...the flocks were still in the fields BY NIGHT. On this very ground the nativity in December should be given up." Night in December is not a time for flocks to be in the field.

Another indication that the Savior was born in the fall rather than in the winter is the fact that Caesar Augustus had declared a census be made of the empire, and each citizen had to report to his hometown to register, Luke 2:1-5. That is probably why the inn was full with travelers.

Now, the Romans were very conscious not to upset their subjects. Ordering the people of the empire to travel great distances in the middle of winter would have surely incited a revolt, at least among the Jews in Palestine. No right-minded king would have requested such a thing. He much more likely would have called a census in early fall after the crops were harvested and the people had money and time to travel before winter.

### **The Son and the Sun—A Deliberate Mix**

If Christmas is not in the Bible, where did it ultimately come from? The answers to that question are found in nearly every encyclopedia any many newspapers, or magazines appearing around December 25<sup>th</sup>. What they have to say about the roots of Christmas should shock every honest Bible believer into taking a hard, critical look at the annual observance.

"Christmas" is a contraction for "Christ's Mass," a Roman Catholic observance. It was designed to compete with a heathen Roman feast of Saturnalia in honor of the sun deity Mithras. Mithras bore a remarkable similarity to the Biblical Messiah and the Mithras feast, like Christmas, was to commemorate his birth.

Notice the astounding parallels, as detailed by Joscelyn Godwin, professor at Colgate University: Mithras was "the creator and orderer of the universe, hence a manifestation of the

creative Logos or Word. Seeing mankind afflicted by Ahriman, the cosmic power of darkness, he incarnated on earth. His birth on 25 December was witnessed by shepherds. After many deeds he held a last supper with his disciples and returned to heaven. At the end of the world he will come again to judge resurrected mankind and after the last battle, victorious over evil, he will lead the chosen ones through a river of fire to a blessed immortality," *Mystery Religions in the Ancient World*, p.99.

Godwin remarks, "No wonder the early Christians were disturbed by a deity who bore so close a resemblance to their own, and no wonder they considered him a mockery of [the Messiah] invented by Satan."

These two popular movements were vying for the dominance in the Roman Empire—one pagan, the other Christian. Historian and archaeologist Ernest Renan once said, "If Christianity had been halted in its growth by some mortal illness, the world would have been Mithraist" (Marc Aurele, p. 597).

Caught in the middle were the Roman emperors, who wanted to unify and solidify their diverse empire. They didn't need divisive religious factions. Their motivation was political and not particularly religious. Therefore the Roman rulership saw great advantage in synchronizing and harmonizing these similar religious beliefs into one.

The Romans knew that religion was a powerful means for assimilating other peoples and cultures. If you respect a man's deities, you are halfway toward winning his friendship. They had been doing it for years. The Romans had Latinized the Greek Olympus, giving Latin names to Zeus (Jupiter), Hermes (Mercury), Poseidon (Neptune), and many others. The Syrian Baals all became Roman Jupiters, while cults of the Celts and Gauls were given Roman deities.

Although this syncretism or combining of diverse beliefs into one was never more than a political benefit for the Romans, it had a profound effect on Christianity. Even today, much of what is accepted as Bible-based is the direct result of compromising and mixing with heathen religion.

Roman Emperor Constantine, a former pagan himself, was to give the most significant push to the Christian-pagan blending of teachings. Among other things, he would decree that worship for Christianity switch from the seventh day Sabbath to the first day of the week—Sun-day—the day the pagans worshiped the sun.

"This tendency on the part of the Christians to meet Paganism halfway was very early developed," says Alexander Hislop in *The Two Babylons*, p. 93. Interestingly, Hislop notes that at the same time the pagans gave up precious little of their own beliefs and practices. "And we find Tertullian, even in his day, about the year 230, bitterly lamenting the inconsistency of the disciples of [Messiah] in this respect, and contrasting it with the strict fidelity of the Pagans to their own superstition."

Hislop then quotes Tertullian, the most ancient of the Latin church fathers whose works are extant, as he decries the early church observances: "By us who are strangers to Sabbaths and new moons, and festivals, once acceptable to [Yahweh], the Saturnalia, the feasts of January, the Brumalia, and Matronia are now frequented; gifts are carried to and fro, new year's day presents are made with din, and sports and banquets are celebrated with uproar."

### **Why a Death Celebration in Honor of a Birth?**

A "mass" is a celebration of the Eucharist, or the emblems of the death of the Savior. Yet, "Christ-mass" is an observance supposedly in honor of His birth. Why? The answer is found with the secular ancients.

Mithras was known as the Sun Deity. His birthday, *Natalis solis invicti*, means "birthday of the invincible sun." It came on December 25<sup>th</sup>, at the time of the winter solstice when the sun began its journey northward again.

Pagan people were overly concerned with life and fertility. They saw life fading in the darkness of winter and held festivals in honor of, and to beckon back, the sun to give life and light to earth once more. **Christmas was not observed for at least three centuries after the Savior's birth!**

**The Dictionary of the Middle Ages** explains how a mass came to be celebrated for the supposed birthday of the Savior: "In patristic thought [the Messiah] had traditionally been associated with light or the sun, and the cult of the *Sol invictus*, sanctioned as it was by the Roman emperors since the late third century, presented a distinct threat to Christianity. Hence, to compete with this celebration the Roman church instituted a feast for the nativity of [the Messiah], who was called the *Sol iustitiae* .... Usually when Christians celebrated the *natalis* of a saint or martyr, it was his death or heavenly nativity, but in this case *natalis* was assigned to be [the Messiah's] earthly birth, in direct competition with the pagan *natalis*," pp.317-318. (That is, to compete with the birthday of Mithras.)

So confused were some about what or whom they were worshiping that Pope Leo I (440-461) chastised Christians who, on Christmas, celebrated the birth of sun deity!

The sun cult was particularly strong at Rome about the time Christmas entered the historical picture, according to the **New Catholic Encyclopedia**. "The Feast is first mentioned at the head of the *Depositio Martyrum* in the Roman Chronograph of 354. Since the *Depositio* was composed in 336, Christmas in Rome can be dated that far at least. It is not found, however, in the lists of Feasts given by Tertullian and Origen," vol. 3, p. 656.

Where did Mithraism come from, this Roman religion that venerated the sun deity and influenced Christianity so greatly? Kenneth Scott Latourette in **A History of Christianity** traces Mithraism to the mystery religion of Egypt, Syria, and Persia.

"Almost all the mystery cults eventually made their way to Rome," he notes. "They were secret in many of their ceremonies and their members were under oath not to reveal their esoteric rites. Numbers of them centered about a savior-god who had died and had risen again. As the cults spread within the Empire they copied from one another in the easy-going syncretism which characterized much of the religious life of that realm and age," pp.24-25.

### **Nimrod: The Granddaddy of Them All**

As we have seen, Christmas as the observance of the Savior's birth did not come into existence immediately. It was not observed for at least three centuries after the Savior's birth! That's a period longer than the entire existence of the United States.

But Christmas as a pagan holiday traces back thousands of years before to a man named Nimrod, founder of ancient pagan Babylon.

Ancient "forefather" to Mithras, Nimrod began a counterfeit religion in the Book of Genesis that was to compete with the True Faith of the Bible in every conceivable way through the centuries. The Bible refers to it as the religion of Mystery Babylon. It is the ultimate false religion that will be destroyed when the Savior Yahshua comes to set up His throne on earth, Revelation 18.

From Babylon sprang up all false worship, including the Mystery Cults, Mithraism, the Greek and Roman mythologies, modern Eastern religions and today's New Age Movement. Babylon's

false worship is found today in every nation and in some aspect in nearly all religions, including present Christianity.

The Madonna and child theme, which is universal and evident in hundreds of religions down through the centuries, had its origin in Babylon. Nimrod's wife was Semiramis, the first deified queen of Babylon. She is also known variously as Diana, Aphrodite, Astarte, Rhea, and Venus.

Her son was Tammuz, also called Bacchus, Adonis, and Osiris. Supposedly, he was the reincarnated Nimrod. He came back to life when the dead Yule log was cast into the fire and the Christmas tree appeared as the slain king-deity reborn at the winter solstice (**The Two Babylon's**, p. 98). More on the Christmas tree later.

The similarity with Biblical elements found among pagan religions is not simply coincidence. It is evidence of the designs of the Adversary to sidetrack seekers of truth into believing they are worshiping according to Scripture. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in the Babylonian's reverence for Tammuz, a false messiah:

"This son, thus worshiped in his mother's arms, was looked upon as invested with all the attributes, and called by almost all the names of the promised Messiah ... Under the name of Mithras, he was worshiped as the 'Mediator.' As Mediator and head of the covenant of grace, he was styled Baal-berith, Lord of the Covenant," **The Two Babylon's**, p. 70.

### **Saturnalia: Forerunner of Modern Christmas**

Tammuz, the sun deity, was the first counterfeit savior. The Bible condemns ancient Israel for adopting worship of Tammuz, which included sun worship and the asherah (phallic symbol). There we read:

*"Then he brought me to a door of the gate of Yahweh's house which was toward the north; and behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz. Then said he unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these. And he brought me into the inner court of Yahweh's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of Yahweh, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of Yahweh, and their faces toward the east; and they worshiped then sun toward the east. Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence, and they have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch [asherah] to their nose. Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them."*

Ezekiel 8:14-18

Elements of this worship are still found in today's Christmas rites. (see "Yuletide Customs," p.14). The Romans worshiped Tammuz as the sun deity Mithras in a special observance called the Saturnalia. The Saturnalia was named for Saturn, otherwise known as Cronus. Cronus is an alias of Tammuz. His wife and mother was Rhea (Semiramis). The Saturnalia, therefore, was just another observance for Tammuz, the counterfeit redeemer.

The Roman kept the Saturnalia in December, at the time of the winter solstice in honor of the returning sun. The festival lasted seven days. "All classes exchanged gifts, the commonest being waxed tapers and clay dolls," says the **Encyclopaedia Britannica, Eleventh Edition**. "These dolls were especially given to children. Varro thought these dolls represented original sacrifices of human beings to the infernal god," vol. 24, p. 231.

During the Saturnalia the social structure was turned upside down. Frequently the master would serve the slave, who could shout at his master and carry on as lustily as he pleased. Social permissiveness reigned.

A King of the Saturnalia was chosen by lot. He "ruled" according to his wildest whim, bringing unrestrained laughter to his subjects. His counterpart was Lord of the Misrule in medieval England and King of the Carnival or Rex in today's Mardi Gras in New Orleans. The Puritans could not tolerate this celebrating for which there was no Biblical sanction.

Anciently the King of Saturnalia was sacrificed in a primitive fertility rite at the turn of the year, ensuring that the soil would continue to be productive (**Celebrations**, by Robert J Myers).

Legend has it that the Saturnalia was instituted by Romulus under the name Brumalia (from *bruma*, meaning winter solstice), **Britannica**, p. 232. "The pagan Saturnalia and Brumalia were too deeply entrenched in popular custom to be set aside by Christian influence," notes the **New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge**, p.48. And so, the church established the birthday of the Savior to coincide with the heathen feast day." ...the Latin Church, supreme in power, and infallible in judgment, placed it on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December, the very day on which the ancient Romans celebrated the feast of their goddess Bruma. Pope Julius I was the person who made this alteration" (**Clarke's Commentary**).

This fact is supported by the **New International Dictionary of the Christian Church**, p. 223: "December 25 was the date of the Roman pagan festival inaugurated in 274 as the birthday of the unconquered sun which at the winter solstice begins again to show an increase in light. Sometime before 336 the Church in Rome, unable to stamp out this pagan festival, spiritualized it as the Feast of the Nativity of the Sun of Righteousness."

Hislop observes, "That Christmas was originally a Pagan festival, is beyond all doubt. The time of the year, and the ceremonies with which it is still celebrated, prove its origin," **The Two Babylon's**, p. 93.

This blending of observances only served to confuse worshipers. By the middle of the fifth century, Pope Leo the Great rebuked his over-cautious flock for paying reverence to the Sun on the steps of St. Peter's before turning their back on it to worship inside the west-ward-facing basilica. Even some bishops, like Troy, continued to pray to the sun. He eventually went back to sun worship entirely (**The Early Church**, by Henry Chadwick).

### **Christmas-Saturnalia Travel North, West**

As the Roman Empire spread and as merchants traveled, the customs of Christmas went also. Cultures in northern Europe contributed some of their own customs, or twists on some old themes, nearly all of which had a basis in Babylonian paganism.

The decorated tree, St. Nick, Yule log, wreaths, cookies, berries, mistletoe, bonfires, roast goose, roast pig, wassailing, caroling, and other familiar fixtures, were added or embellished for the Christmas-Saturnalia in various countries.

When the Protestant movement attempted to rid itself of the excesses and sins of Roman Catholicism, there also came an opposition to Christmas that almost obliterated it entirely in England. "In England, for example, the Puritans could not tolerate this celebrating for which there was no Biblical sanction. Consequently, the Roundhead Parliament of 1643 outlawed the feasts of Christmas, Easter, Whitsuntide, along with the saints' days," **Celebrations**, p.312.

For a period of 12 years the staunch Puritans kept the shackles on Christmas, making it an ordinary day of business and even a day of fasting. Yet "with the Restoration in 1660 the citizens reclaimed Christmas, but it was a different festival from what it had been. The religious aspects

were often neglected, with the result that the secularization of the holiday was well under way, *"ibid.*

In America, strong religious antagonism to the feast of Christmas lasted from 1620 to 1750 – 130 years! In 1776 General George Washington surprise-attacked the German Hessians on December 25<sup>th</sup>, winning a critical Revolutionary War battle by defeating the Christmas-celebrating, drunken German mercenaries. Obviously, Christmas was not an important celebration for the father of our country!

It was to take many years for the regard for Christmas to grow to what it is today in America and around the world. Henry Ward Beecher, clergyman and lecturer, wrote in 1874 of his boyhood in New England, "To me Christmas is a foreign day, and I shall die so. **Christmas Rituals---Modern and Ancient**

Most of today's popular Christmas customs are rooted in ancient rites of pagan peoples who worshiped the sun, green trees, and life. The Yule log and tree trace back to Babylonian beliefs that the dead deity Nimrod, depicted by the tree stump (below left), came back to life in the form of a palm tree through the power of the serpent Aesculapius. In Rome it was the fir tree. Mithras, the sun deity (below right), is hatched from a cosmic egg on December 25—the winter solstice. The Assyro-Babylonian bas-relief at bottom, dating from 900 B.C.E., shows the consorts to Beltis, the fertility deity, worshiping the decorative Sacred Tree.

When I was a boy I wondered what Christmas was. I knew there was such a time, because we had an Episcopal church in our town, and I saw them dressing it with evergreen, and wondered what they were taking the woods in church for; but I got no satisfactory explanation. A little later I understood it was a Romish institution, kept up by the Romish church."

Eventually the major Protestant denominations accepted Christmas, "although they reacted violently against the corruption of the Christkindl, the Christ Child, into 'Kris Kringle,'" **Celebrations**, pp. 315-316.

### **Yuletide Customs Reign Dear**

As we have been able to see so far, the roots of and motivations behind Christmas are quite different from what is usually implied by this so-called Mass of Christ, and very unlike what its celebrators assume.

Can anyone who sincerely seeks to worship in purity and truth continue practicing a legacy from rank Mystery worship? Can you feel totally comfortable and conscience-free knowing that by observing Christmas you are perpetuating anti-Messianic paganism?

"But Christmas brings so many memories," some may argue. "What's so wrong with giving the children happiness and joy at this time of the year?" From a purely human standpoint, probably nothing. If Christmas existed apart from a Creator in heaven who has very clear expectations for worship, then no harm would be done to celebrate it.

Christmas, however, is a religious holiday as well as a secular observance. It is rife with many pagan rites that Almighty Yahweh outright and forcefully condemns. Because of that fact alone we must heed when He thunders, "*Learn not the way of the heathen!*" Jeremiah 10:2.

Simply because Christmas is a worldly holiday, too, is no excuse to mentally disassociate oneself from its pagan religious aspects in order to keep the secular ones. Nor is it acceptable to the Creator in heaven to take only what seems to be properly religious about Christmas and downplay the pagan attributes. Those seeking True Worship simply cannot mix the holy with the profane. Paul writes, "*Wherefore come out from among them, and be separate, says Yahweh, and*



*touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,"* 2 Corinthians 6:17. We simply cannot pretend to be worshiping in truth while partaking of rites that the Bible condemns.

Let's examine the popular trappings and customs of Christmas more closely to see just exactly what they mean.

### **The Christmas Tree**

Perhaps it is because trees resemble human beings in shape, or maybe it is because trees give food, shelter, and heat for survival that man has from ancient held them in such high regard. Trees are so versatile and have been so vital to human existence that nearly all ancient cultures have some form of tree worship.

Greek philosophers Aristotle and Plutarch thought that trees could reason! Others have thought that trees speak as they creak in the wind or cry out when they are cut down. It isn't hard to understand why ignorant pagans would worship trees.

In Old Testament times an indispensable part of Baal worship involved the asherah, a sacred tree stem or pole (from which we get the May pole and totem pole). The asherah was a carryover of even more ancient tree worship.

These asherah were found in high places among the Canaanites, or in what the King James Version calls "groves." Typically these sites included an altar and a stone pillar (a survivor of even older stone-worship).

According to the **Dictionary of the Bible**; James Hastings, the asherah "was a tree or stump or a tree, planted in the earth, Deuteronomy 16:21; it could be artificially made, Isaiah 17:8, 1 Kings 14:15, 16:33; it was made of wood, Judges 6:26; it could receive an image-like form, 1 Kings 15:13; it could be 'cut down,' Exodus 34:13, 'plucked up,' Micah 5:14, 'burnt,' Deuteronomy 12:3, or 'broken in pieces,' 2 Chronicles 34:4," p. 165. Hastings notes that some believe asherahs were connected with phallic worship.

"At first [asherah] may have been living trees (Deut. 16:21), but in later usage were wooden poles, perhaps erected to represent a tree," **Eerdman's Bible Dictionary**, p.93.

Rather than condemn and destroy this Canaanite Baal worship that they found in Promised Land, the Israelites, as was their custom, chose instead to indulge in it. It didn't matter whether Yahweh hated it or not –Israel wanted to be like her neighbors and keep their pagan customs. And because of that Almighty Yahweh allowed Israel to be taken into captivity and nearly destroyed.

Notice 2 Kings 17:9-11: *"And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against Yahweh their Elohim, and they built them high places in all their cities ... And they set them up images and groves [asherah] in every high hill, and under every green tree ... and they wrought wicked things to provoke Yahweh to anger."*

The "green tree" is mentioned 13 times in Scripture and in every instance it is linked with idolatry! Can we find much difference between the idolizing of trees with anciently and what is done at Christmas in millions of homes today? Contests are held for the best decorated tree while today's "Canaanites" spend hours adoring its tinsel and lights and placing gift offerings beneath it. Sadly, most are ignorant of what they are doing and of the abominable custom they are keeping alive. A custom their Creator calls vain.

Notice what the prophet Jeremiah wrote in connection with tree-idol worship: *"Thus says Yahweh, learn not the way of the heathen ... for the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and gold; they fasten it with nail and with hammers, that it move not. They are*

*upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go ... "* 10:2-5.

It is a historical fact that trees were decorated and adored by ancient people in honor of pagan deities. Their tree trunks were not necessarily carved into images, as this source reveals:

"We cannot find enough instances of the use of trees, even decorated ones such as a pine tree on which images of the god Attis were hung amid rows of ribbons at a spring festival, to convince us of the ultimately pagan origins of our custom," **Celebrations**, p. 331.

Although based in mystery worship, the modern Christmas tree as we know it traces to Europe. "... tree worship is well attested for all the great European families of the Aryan stock. Amongst the Celts the oak-worship of the Druids is familiar to everyone. Sacred groves were common among the ancient Germans, and tree-worship is hardly extinct among their descendants at the present day" (**The Golden Bough**, p. 58).

How the evergreen tree was popularized for Christmas in Europe comes by way of one of the earliest stories told of St. Boniface as an 8<sup>th</sup> century missionary in Germany.

"He was trying to stamp out the pagan rite of sacrificing people to the oak tree. He led his followers into a forest at Yule time. Showing them a fir tree, he said it pointed straight upward to the [Messiah]. 'Take this tree into your homes,' he said, 'as a sign of your new worship [Christianity]. Celebrate [Yahweh's] power no more in the forest with shameful rites, but in the sanctity of your homes with laughter and love,'" **Compton's Encyclopedia and Fact Finder**, vol. 5, p. 326.

Whether this legend is accurate, it does provide an excellent example of how pagan rites were synchronized into Christian worship. Rather than abolishing what was heathen-based, the practice became to modify it—to make it fit somehow into Biblical worship.

Recall that the ancients were very concerned about the dead vegetation in December and the waning of the sun. Fir trees were always green, symbolic of life, and to the ancients represented immortality in a dead world. They were often set on fire to portray and beckon back the sun, hence the modern practice of stringing trees with Christmas lights and round bulbs and balls.

Ultimately, the Christmas evergreen springs from that old Babylonian, Nimrod. It represents the resurrected and reincarnated man-deity. "Now the Yule Log is the dead stock of Nimrod, deified as the sun-god, but cut down by his enemies; the Christmas tree is Nimrod redivivus—the slain god came back to life again," **The Two Babylon's**, p. 98. He was reborn as his son Tammuz. Hence, Semiramis was both his wife and mother.

Yule (from *huel* meaning wheel) was a Germanic and Celtic sunfeasts in the period December-January which became absorbed into Christmas. It commemorated the turn of the sun and the lengthening of the day. It was a pagan festival in Europe from ancient times, and was adapted to Christmas through the Yule log—a legacy of Nimrod.

The Christmas tree wasn't found in America until 1821, brought by Pennsylvania Germans. Christmas itself wasn't recognized until 1836, when Alabama became the first state in America to make it a legal holiday.

## **Santa Claus**

The jolly old gent is actually three traditions in one. The original is St. Nicholas, a Catholic bishop in Myra of Asia Minor during the first half of the fourth century.

A supposedly generous individual, he became the patron saint of a number of countries and cities, as well as merchants, bakers, mariners, and children. To this last he developed into a giver of gifts on the eve of his feast day, December 6, among the Dutch and Flemish. The Dutch called

it the Feast of Sinterklaas (a form of Sint Nikolaas), hence the anglicized corruption, "Santa Claus."

During the Protestant Reformation, the St. Nicholas image was nearly banished permanently to the North Pole. Taking his place was a more secular figure known as Christmas Man, Father Christmas, or Pope Noel. The Dutch clung tenaciously to St. Nick, however, and although his religious attributes died, the profane ones brought by the new Santa live on in the confused minds of youngsters everywhere.

Children are taught that Santa Claus brings them blessings for being good, and he'll check his list twice for those who are naughty or nice. These little ones must wonder who this observance is for, anyway—a babe born in a manger or a fat old elf named Santa! Who should I be good for, for goodness sake?

When the Pennsylvania Dutch came to America in the eighteenth century they brought with them the custom of the Christkindl. This "Christ Child" supposedly brought gifts for children on Christmas eve, riding a mule loaded with presents. His name was changed by the English settlers to Kriss Kringle. The notion of his North Pole home was contrived through Scandinavian or Russian tales about north-dwelling wizards.

When we tell our children lies about the existence of fantasies like Santa Claus, we introduce them at an early, impressionable age to the sin of deception. That is inexcusable. Not only do we mislead them in to believing myths, but by doing so we also shut out the true Giver of blessings, Almighty Yahweh. Proverbs 22:6 says, "*Train up a child into the way he should go,*" not in the way of traditions that replace the truth. Santa is an insidious counterfeit (Rev. 1:13-16; Dan. 7:9).

### **Gift Giving**

Today's biggest Christmas rite is the giving of gifts. Why do people give presents to one another at Christmas? Shouldn't gifts go to the Savior Yahshua if this is supposed to be His birthday?

True to form, the practice of gift giving also rests with the ancient heathen. The Romans gave gifts to one another at the Saturnalia merrymaking (**Encyclopedia Britannica**). They also exchanged gifts at the Roman New Year.

The argument goes that we give gifts at Christmas because the wise men gave gifts to the babe in the manger. As was shown, the wise men never came to the manger, but to the house to see the child who could have been two years of age (Matt. 2:11). The gifts they gave were not birthday gifts, but gifts that were traditionally given to a King by visitors in eastern cultures. They recognized him as born King of the Jews.

Had the wise men been setting a precedent for modern Christmas gift giving, they would have been given their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to one another!

The only place in the Bible where we find the masses exchanging gifts is in celebration of the deaths of Yahweh's two witnesses at the end of the age, Revelation 11:10. Those who rejoiced over their deaths by exchanging gifts soon afterward faced the wrath of the Heavenly Father. How could the Heavenly Father expect His people to observe a holiday steeped in heathen rites?

While American colonists were not accustomed to the gift giving obsession, since the 1920's Christmas has become a commercial bonanza. If Christmas is an annual greed fest, merchants must bear a large portion of the blame. They keep it hyped up year after year through their ever more premature promotions.

Their day is coming, however. We find that the destruction of Babylon and its system at the end of the age will cause financial woes. "*And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn*

*over her; for no man buys their merchandise any more." They will "stand afar off ... weeping and wailing," Revelation 18:11, 15. Mistletoe, Holly, Ham, and All the Rest*

Virtually every Christmas custom is connected with some man-made rite or tradition that has little or nothing to do with the Bible or True Worship.

- Mistletoe is a Druidic survival that was thought to cure everything from epilepsy to infertility, the wax berries of this parasite thought to be a sex stimulant.
- Holly's green leaves and red berries were respected in medieval times as protection against witchcraft and the evil eye; a good luck charm for men.
- Wreaths with their round shape symbolize the returning sun at the winter solstice; made of laurel, they depict the sun's comeback victory over darkness and death (Nimrod reincarnates to Tammuz).
- Christmas candles trace to the burning Yule log and the reincarnation of Nimrod.
- Ham is eaten because Tammuz (Adonis) was thought to have been killed by a boar. In his memory, pagans sacrificed and ate swine at the Saturnalia.
- Christmas cookies trace back to the cakes that were made to the Queen of Heaven or Semiramis (Jer. 44:19). Round ones were made for the Saturnalia and Brumalia to symbolize the returning sun.

### **True Biblical Holy Days Are Commanded**

Once we are enlightened to the truth of Christmas, we find the holiday not only artificial, but also abominable. Even a Roman Catholic priest and editor of the U.S. Catholic magazine, Peter J Riga, recently wrote that it is time to "come out of the Land of Babylon which the hucksters of wares and materialism have taken over ... and leave Dec. 25<sup>th</sup> to the pagans."

One ironic fact is inescapable: If Christmas were commanded in the Bible, there would be precious few observing it—as opposed to the vast hordes we see indulging in this heathen rite today. Messiah Yahshua said the way is broad that leads to destruction and many are on it, Matthew 7:13. Contrarily, few will find the narrow pathway to everlasting life, verse 14. It seems that whatever Almighty Yahweh says to observe, man ignores. Whatever He commands against, man indulges in.

How could the Heavenly Father expect His people to observe Christmas, steeped in heathen ritual? He kept the month as well as the day of the Savior's birth hidden. The answer is quite apparent and clear—He never wanted it to be observed! If He did, there would be no question as to the proper time. And He would have specifically commanded it, as He does His true holy days.

He does expect His True Worshipers to keep the Bible's holy days, however. We know because not only are they commanded, but He also carefully lists these annual holy times in no fewer than five main books: Exodus 12,23, 34; Leviticus 23; Numbers 28, and Deuteronomy 16. Ezekiel 45-46 shows they will be kept in the Kingdom.

These seven annual observances are not only named, but we also find precisely detailed how to calculate when they occur and exactly what is permitted to be done on them. Nowhere in the Bible can you find any other "holidays" to be observed. Not Christmas, not Easter, not New Year's, not Halloween or any of the other major, man-made holidays! They simply are nowhere commanded in Scripture.

The Apostles and the Savior Himself observed these seven commanded holy days in the NEW Testament. In no place can you find any mention that they observed a single one of today's popular holidays—not one!

Almighty Yahweh says, *"Concerning the feasts of Yahweh, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are MY FEASTS,"* Leviticus 23:2. Did you catch that? He says these are HIS Feasts, not Jewish Feasts, not ancient, outdated, done-away-at-the-cross Feasts! His observances are described as commanded "FOREVER" in Leviticus 23:14, 21, 31, and 41.

His Feasts were specifically given, commanded, kept, and passed on throughout both Old and New testaments. Shouldn't that be ample reason for us to keep them? And His holy days carry promises of blessings for eternity for those who keep them! Time to Make a Choice

Israel was condemned for worshiping Tammuz in Ezekiel 8:13-14. Tammuz rites are alive and doing well every December 25. Our sovereign Creator warns not to have anything to do with them, including lighting a Yule log, setting up an evergreen tree, hanging up wreaths and holly, and lighting Christmas candles.

If you still think you can have it both ways, read 2 Corinthians 6:14, 17: *"Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship has righteousness? Wherefore come out from among them and be separate, says Yahweh, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you."*

We can fool ourselves by arguing that we are in a paganistic society and therefore we can't help becoming involved in its ways. Yet the Savior Yahshua asked the Father in John 17:15, *"I pray not that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from evil."* It is possible to be in the world and yet not be a part of it.

Some will argue that Christmas is mainly for the enjoyment of children and is of no real harm. If there is no Creator in heaven, they are probably right. But the Mighty One of the Bible is quite particular about how we worship Him and He has no tolerance for heathen traditions or man's reasoning. He says, *"There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death,"* Proverbs 14:12.

Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16 that everything we need to know for everlasting life is in the Scriptures, and we need not to go outside the Bible for anything—especially to indulge in rites of ancient pagans.

*"Learn not the way of the heathen,"* Yahweh thunders in Jeremiah 10:2. As for doing what is right in our own sight, He commands, *"What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: you shall not add thereto nor diminish from it,"* Deuteronomy 12:32. Has He somehow changed His mind today? Not according to Malachi 3:6: *"For I am Yahweh, I change not."* And the final warning in Revelation 22:18-19 warns against adding to or taking from what is prescribed in the Bible.

Could Christmas be in fact a sinister diversion of the Adversary intended to deflect our attention from the true holy days of the Bible and get us all caught up in man-made ones that give him glory? Or can we just brush it off as an innocuous time of good cheer, no harm done?

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, asking the same question of them. They had a problem with wanting to go back to their old familiar, Babylonian ways too, even after knowing the truth and accepting it. Paul made it clear. You cannot mix unholy worship with holy worship.

*"What say I then? That the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles [unconverted] sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils and not to Yahweh: and I would not that you should have fellowship with devils. You cannot be partakers of Yahweh's table, and of the table of devils. Do we provoke Yahweh to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?"* 1 Corinthians 10:19-22.

A person who knows what is right but doesn't follow it commits sin, according to James 4:17. Only going halfway toward rooting out error makes one lukewarm. Yahweh says a lukewarm person He will spew out of His mouth, Revelation 3:16.

There is simply no alternative. We either worship correctly and scripturally—all the way—or we don't. Going halfway doesn't cut it. That would be better than none at all. A little leaven affect the whole, eventually.

Just because we live in a society that ignores the Bible doesn't mean we ourselves will be excused. It is much more difficult to swim against the current, for sure. But that is what true worship is all about.

In fact, thousand know better than to observe legacies from pagan religions that the Bible condemns. Yet they are afraid of what family, friends or children might say if they stop. You, too, may feel such pressure.

Yet, now that you know what is right, you must make a decision. Just ask yourself this: Can family, friends, or children grant me everlasting life? If they can't, then you should obey the One who can and inherit His many blessings for obedience.

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