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# Bet Emet Ministries

(House of Truth)

*Discovering the Hebraic Roots of the Christian Faith*

*By Craig Lyons*

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## COME OUT AND BE YE SEPARATE-THE TRUTH ABOUT CHRISTMAS

"This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips: but their heart is far from me" (Matt. 15:8)

"...Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15)

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21)

### WHAT IS CHRISTMAS ABOUT ANYWAY?

These three verses from God's Word **should be intensely startling** to anyone who is in the habit of celebrating Christmas. They ought to search out the very depths of the conscience and bring a conviction and condemnation to every Christian who has been active in any way, in the festivals of Yuletide. But you say : "I am not aware that God is not pleased with me celebrating Christmas, for after all, is it not the celebration of the birth of God's son?" The truth, as hard as it may be for you to believe is that "NO, it is not the birth of His son, but rather paganism masqueraded as a Godly event." I will explain fully in what follows.

From these words of the Spirit quoted above, we should have no trouble understanding that what ever is very popular in the world is not of God. The Bible states: "**That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.**" Could this be applied to the celebration of Christmas? "No way" you say...keep reading. I would like to present to you the chilling fact that things are not always at heart what they appear to be. **And again, here we find a lesson as positive as it is appalling, that the saints of Christ are often, even if unwittingly, led through man's traditions into idolatry, which God hates.**

We all know holiday seasons are very popular. Any time of celebration and festivity seems to have great sentimental appeal to the hearts of most people. Add to this emotional expectation, the complex of a conscience which compels a vague respect of the day **when Christ supposedly was born** and we have - the Christmas spirit. No date on the calendar is anticipated and welcomed more. Old and young, rich and poor, and saint and sinner, with boundless frenzy, run with ceaseless vigor the race to celebrate Christmas day. Christmas is the day when the driving power of this festival love reaches its zenith. No other day can equal it for fleshly revelry, and

debauchery combined with the **heathen misrepresentation of Christ** which, as a fanatical religious orgy from every quarter swirls to a literal vortex of confusion and jamboree on December 25th.

No, as hard as it is for me to tell you and burst your bubble, Christmas is NOT of God. It is abomination to Him. It is NOT honoring to Jesus Christ. It only calls forth from multitudes of unthinking people a natural sentimentality and a false worship of Him. The observances of Christmas are in no way inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Christmas spirit is only a terrible mockery to Him.

Christmas time is not a season of revival and upbuilding in the church of God. Instead it is a pagan spell of evil, which spreads spiritual pollution as it rages among churches and believers for the time appointed. Thousands of evangelical believers who would be horrified and deeply depressed to find "church folk" smoking or drinking or dancing, calmly and deliberately indulge in **idolatrics of the heathen at Christmas time**. And those who know and love the truth are counted to be narrow minded and sacrilegious if a protest is raised. So, such honest souls are forced to stand aside and witness annually this glittering cloud of pagan observances descend on all people. And as we watch parents, who loudly proclaim the necessity of truthfulness in children, who advocate the need of so many social reformations and who bemoan the juvenile delinquency which prevails, deliberately teach their unsuspecting little ones the monstrous Santa Clause lie, we can only cry with the Apostle John "I wondered with great wonder" (Rev. 17:6 R.V.)

**"A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land. The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" (Jer. 5:30-31)**

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 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 lasting 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?**

### **THE BIRTH OF JESUS-THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH SETS YOU FREE:**

The Apostolic Assembly began zealously to witness the truth of the Messiah's advent to the world. They took this message into the far reaches of the known world. Especially outstanding was the Apostle Paul, who accomplished much through his extensive travel, preaching throughout the Roman Empire.

But, a very strange thing took place. Ancient ethnic peoples could not maintain sound doctrine. The pagan people appropriated the account of the supernatural person of Yahweh's true Messiah, and superimposed his life upon their pagan customs and practices. The results are tragic as seen today.

With unreasoned abandon the people of the Western World spend lavishly for gifts which they cannot afford. They indulge in parties featuring alcoholic beverages. They feast on a variety of seasonal delicacies. All of these traditional practices are done in the name of celebrating the birthday of the one they profess to be their king. As a matter of fact the reverse is true. Through false doctrine the Messiah becomes subservient to their own human concepts. Would Yeshua the Messiah approve of such loose conduct to celebrate His birth? Obviously not!

The traditional practices of nominal churchianity never find a foundational basis in the Scriptures. Decorative lights displayed upon colorful trimmed Christmas trees, the hanging of evergreen leaves and mistletoe, are never mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures, much less commanded. Holding a boars head festival, sending Christmas cards, and having midnight masses or church services on December 25th cannot be found anywhere in the word of Yahweh.

Actually the diligent Bible student already knows that nowhere without the pages of our Bibles can you ever find any commandment to celebrate a birthday, especially that of the Messiah. As a matter of fact three times birthdays are mentioned in the Bible, and on each of these occasions a violent death occurred. Gen.40:9-22; Job 1:4 & 9; Matt. 14:3-12.

The celebration of birthdays was unknown in primitive Judaism, so it is certain that the Messiah never celebrated his birthday. Apparently Yahweh did not wish it to be observed, and consequently we can readily understand the reason for omitting mention of a specific day in the scriptures.

Many times authors will confess sheepishly that Dec. 25th is not the Messiah's birthday. Did you know that it was actually 200 yrs. after the birth of the Messiah before anyone ever fixed Dec. 25th as His birthday? Apparently the first to set this as the date of the Messiah's birth was Julius Sextus Africanus, a historian of Alexandria, Egypt, who composed a chronicle of events of the world to 221 CE. Two and a quarter Centuries!

### **THE MESSIAH WAS NOT BORN ON DECEMBER 25TH:**

Several scriptural passages prove that the Messiah could not have been born in the winter, on

Dec. 25th. Zechariah, the Priest, was a member of the course or section of Abiah (meaning when he served in the Temple in Jerusalem). The "course" of service was dated in Israel, thus we have a starting point on the calendar to calculate from. If we calculate correctly, the Messiah would have been conceived around the middle of December, rather than being born at that time. Such information is quite staggering, when you realize that Luke pinpoints the conception of John the Baptist to have occurred two months after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which occurs in the spring. The course of Abiah was the eight priestly section to serve in the Temple. 1 Chronicles 24:10. These priests served 8 weeks after the conclusion of the spring sacred season. see Luke 1.

Logically, the only time that can accommodate all facts of evidence concerning when our savior was born would be the fall of the year. The crops were harvested, people were traveling to The Feast of Tabernacles at Jerusalem anyway, the weather was still agreeable enough to impose no extreme hardship upon the women and children, and revenue was readily available to pay the tax. all of these points combined will direct the Bible student to focus his attention upon the fall of the year, around the annual feast days of the seventh month which are legislated in Leviticus 23.

It is no coincidence that we should encounter the confirmation of John 1:14 where The Sacred Scriptures translates: " And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us, ( and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten Son from the Father ), full of grace and truth. " Yeshua the Messiah took upon himself a human existence. He came to tabernacle ( live temporarily )with the human family he was appointed to save.

To further understand correctly and accurately the birth of Jesus, I will address for you many very important questions which, once understood, will show you when Jesus was born.

### **DATING THE BIRTH OF YESHUA ACCURATELY:**

#### **Yeshua (Jesus) Was Born During Hag Sukkot (Festival of Tabernacles):**

**Discerning the correct date for Yeshua's birth** is easily arrived at if we do three things correctly: 1). **Discern the date that Gabriel the angel tells Zechariah** (soon to be father of Yochanan ..John the Baptist), **about his son's birth.** The birthdate of Yochanan (John) is established by going forward nine months which is the normal term of pregnancy, 2). **The approximate date of Miriam's (Mary's) conception,** and 3). **The date of Herod's death.**

### **WHEN DID GABRIEL TELL ZECHARIAH HE WAS TO HAVE A SON?**

The Gospel of Luke, chapter 1, verse 5, states that **Zechariah is a priest of the course of Abijah.** If you remember, King David, according to **1 Chronicles 24,** had divided the **priestly families into twenty-four groups.** Each group was called a "**course**", and named after the head of that particular family. Each "**course**" served for one week in the first half of the year, and for another week the second half of the year. These **two weeks of service per year** was in **addition to the three more weeks of Unleavened Bread (Hag haMatzah, Shavuot, and Sukkot,** when **ALL the courses of priests were required to be present in Jerusalem and the**

**Temple (Deut. 16:16).** As you might imagine, the first course served the first week of the year (Aviv, the month of Passover); the second course; the second week; then **all the courses, the third week which was Passover week** (Passover began on the 14th of Aviv, thus the third week of the year began after the first two weeks of the year). Thus the year began in the month of Passover. Why were all the priests required to appear on the third week of the month of Aviv and not the second or fourth week of Aviv? The third week of the new year was dedicated to the **Festival of Hag haMatzah** (Unleavened Bread; a 7 day festival beginning with Passover and culminating with First Fruits) and all the priests were required to attend. For our interests, however, **I Chronicles 24:10** lists the **course of Abijah** as the **eighth course** to come to Jerusalem in the year. **This course would serve the tenth week of the first half of the year.** The reason that the eighth course served on the tenth week (2 week gap) is because **Hag haMatzah** and **Shavuot** took up **two weeks** in observances, and all the priests were required to attend (2 weeks all priests had to attend and Zechariah was to serve eight weeks later, thus we have ten weeks from the beginning of the cyclical year). **It is at this time, the tenth week of the year, when Zechariah was ministering in the Temple that he received the prophecy from the angel Gabriel of the future birth of Yochanan the Immerser (John the Baptist).**

**Luke 1**

**8 And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course,**

**9 According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.**

**10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the time of incense.**

**11 And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.**

**12 And when Zacharias saw [him], he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.**

**13 But the angel said to him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.**

You may find it interesting but one of the prayers that the people were praying outside the Temple while awaiting Zechariah to finish his ministry within the Temple is for the coming of Elijah to usher in the coming of the Messiah. Is it not ironic that indirectly the people were praying for Zechariah's barren wife to conceive, and the fruit of her womb would be the "Elijah" that would come and he would announce the coming of the Messiah?

Allowing for the two additional weeks to have been counted (due to the week long Festivals of Passover and Pentecost), and going forward toward a normal pregnancy (9 months), the time of Yochanan's birth (John the Immerser) would be approximately at the time of Pesach (Passover), when it is expected that Elijah would appear to usher in the Messiah! **This is exactly what Yochanan the Immerser did!** If you count forward **six months from the conception of Elizabeth** with John the Baptist (the tenth week of the year), we find that the angel Gabriel was sent to Miriam (Mary), the cousin of Elizabeth, to announce to her of her selection to bear the Messiah of Israel.

**Luke 1**

**26. And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,**

27 To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name [was] Mary.

28 And the angel came to her, and said, Hail, [thou that art] highly favoured, the Lord [is] with thee: blessed [art] thou among women. {highly...: or, graciously accepted, or, of much grace}

29 And when she saw [him], she was troubled at his saying, and considered in her mind what manner of greeting this should be.

30 And the angel said to her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS (Yeshua or YHVH's Salvation).

32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give to him the throne of his father David:

33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Counting six months from the time of the year in which Zacharias' received his revelation of the conception of Elizabeth, we arrive at the **month of the Chanukkah celebration** which is a Festival commemorating the miracle of light (**Festival of Lights**). This festival commemorates the miracle of light as only one days worth of oil that lighted the Menorah in the Temple burned for eight days; thus allowing for the production of new oil, and the light of God never went out! Since the light of God went out in the "fall" with Eve's sin, so the grace of God can be seen in choosing another woman to be the agent to return the light to the world. Miriam was to be used of God to bring the "light of the world" to earth through the birth of the Messiah! Yeshua would later preach three sermons in which he declares himself the "light of the world", and all three would be during the **Festival of Dedication (Chanukkah)** in the winter of the year (December). Starting at **Chanukkah (the time of Miriam's conception)**, which begins on Kislev 25 and continues for eight days, and counting through the **nine months of Miriam's pregnancy** one arrives at the approximate time of the birth of Yeshua at the **Festival of Sukkot (the Festival of Tabernacles)** was always in the early fall of the year). **It is at this time we find Yeshua's birth.**

## **Was Zechariah Given The Prophecy In The First Or Second Half Of The Year?**

Besides what I shared above concerning the chronology of events, we also can know that Zechariah received the prophecy from Gabriel in the **first half of the year rather than the last**. The key is found in the life and death of King Herod, a man hated by the Jewish people. In the Gospel of Matthew King Herod is visited by "wise men from the East."

### **Matthew 2**

1. Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and have come to worship him.

This passage tells us that the **wise men are Jewish and not Iranian astrologers!** While the verse does not tell how many wise men there are, it does give reference to where they were from. In the Bible, the "**land of the East**" is always the land of **Babylon** (Gen. 29:1; Judges 6:3). **During the first century C.E., the largest Jewish population, and where the head of all Jewish scholarship resided was in Babylon.** These people were the descendants of the

captivity of Nebuchadnezzar. Even though Ezra, Nehemiah, and others had returned, most of the people had refused to return to Israel and remained behind. **The fact that the wise men are looking for the Jewish Messiah, who was only expected by the Jewish people, is an important fact too often overlooked.** Besides, the **Hebrew word for "Magi" is "wise men, or Torah Scholars"**. It was only because they studied the Scriptures that they were aware of the times which were to produce their Messiah (see Daniel's seventy weeks prophecy).

### **A STAR OUR OF JACOB:**

A prophecy relating to the Messiah that only the Jewish people were aware of is found in the book of Numbers.

#### **Numbers 24**

**17 I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not near: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. {smite...: or, smite through the princes of}**

Because of the prophecy, a star was related to the coming of the Messiah. An example of this is tragically seen when, about one hundred years after the time of Yeshua, Rabbi Akiva mistakenly proclaimed a military leader to be "the Messiah". He was titled "Bar Kochba," which means "Son of the star." Bar Kochba would lead the nation and its leaders not only to military defeat by the Romans, but utter exile and banishment which lasted until 1948 C.E.!

### **WHO ARE THE WISE MEN?**

The rabbis or the sages were known as the "chakamim," which means "the wise men." The sage Daniel was referred to by this same title. A related word, "mag" is also used for "wise men." The Greek "magi" is taken from the Babylonian word "mag," which has a number of meanings. It is true that the word does mean "astrologer," but this is not its only usage by any means. It is an obvious conclusion, then, that the Jewish sages or wise men from Babylon, knowing the prophecy of Numbers 24:17, relating it correctly to the Messiah, and having seen His star, traveled to Jerusalem to seek out their Messiah.

### **HEROD AND THE WISE MEN:**

Herod was possibly one of the coldest, and most bloodthirsty men who ever lived. He killed his sons, his favorite wife, and thousands of innocent people. His fear of losing his throne drove him to insanity. Augustus Caesar, having noted that Herod observed the Jewish Law and therefore would not eat pork, once made the statement that it was better to be a pig in the house of Herod than to be one of his sons. It is no surprise that Herod sought the Messiah's life as a child, nor that all of Jerusalem would be troubled as Herod received this news.

Traditional teaching is that the "wise men" appeared about a year to eighteen months after the birth of Yeshua. **This is incorrect!** This erroneous teaching has been based upon Herod's killing of the male children under two years, according to the date that the wise men had given him for the appearance of the star.

Matthew 2

7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found [him], bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

Matthew 2

16. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked by the wise men, was exceeding angry, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.

**The wise men's arrival was coordinated with the birth of the Messiah.** What we fail to understand is that it was the custom in ancient Israel to count the years of one's age from the date of conception; therefore, Herod actually killed the children one year old and under and not according to the way that age is calculated today. In fact, the wise men arrive in Jerusalem either just prior to or just after the time of Yeshua's birth.

#### **THE MESSIAH'S BIRTH WAS NOT A SECRET:**

It is important to note that up to this time, no one in Jerusalem, including the Temple priest, had heard that Yeshua had been born. Knowing the nature of Herod, and his practice of having spies throughout the countryside, it is impossible that he would not have heard of his birth. Luke's account of the birth relates the experience of the shepherds of Bethlehem, who after seeing the newborn Yeshua, broadcast what they have seen and heard to the entire region.

Luke 2

17 And when they had seen [it], they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

Realizing that Bethlehem is within five miles of Jerusalem makes it **very improbable that Herod or the Temple priest would be ignorant of His birth.** Further proof is seen in that **forty days after the birth of Yeshua, Miriam (Mary) carries baby Yeshua to the Temple for his dedication and her purification.** It is here that two well known individuals within the Temple compound make known and prophesy concerning the child.

#### **DEDICATION WITHIN FORTY DAYS OF HEROD'S DEATH DATES YESHUA'S BIRTH:**

Luke 2

22 And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present [him] to the Lord;

23 (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;)

24 And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

25. And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name [was] Simeon; and the same man [was] righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Spirit was upon



him.

26 And it was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,

28 Then he took him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:

30 For my eyes have seen thy salvation,

31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

32 A light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

33 And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken concerning him.

34 And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary his mother, Behold, this [child] is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;

35 (And, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;

37 And she [was] a widow of about eighty four years, who departed not from the temple, but served [God] with fastings and prayers night and day.

38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise to the Lord, and spoke of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. {Jerusalem: or, Israel}

#### **THE "SUKKAH" (A MANGER) DATES YESHUA'S BIRTH:**

Correct understanding of the current situation will make it impossible for the wise men to arrive after these events, thus it is assumed that they must have spoken to Herod about the time of Yeshua's birth. Traveling to Bethlehem, they found the child and his parents in a house, (Matt. 2:11); whereas, in the Luke account the shepherds found him in a **manger or stable** (Luke 2:7, 16). There is no discrepancy between these two accounts, for likely the new mother and child were moved from the stable following the birth. The fact that Yeshua was born in a stable is interesting for the **Hebrew word for stable or manger is "sukkah"** (Gen. 33.17). "**Sukkot**," the name for a festival, is the plural form of the word. It is even **significant that they had to seek cover in the "sukkah" due to there being "no room in the inn"** (Luke 2:7). **It was only during the three pilgrim festivals (Pesach/Passover, Shavuot/Pentecost and Sukkot/Tabernacles) that Bethlehem would overflow with people.** The thousands of pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for the festivals would spill over to the surrounding towns. **Thus it is very easily understood that there would be little or no room in the inn during the Festival of Tabernacles (or Passover or Pentecost for that matter).**

#### **MARY'S PURIFICATION & YESHUA'S DEDICATION: WITHIN 40 DAYS OF TABERNACLES:**

Joseph and Miriam **bring the child into Jerusalem forty days after Yeshua's birth for Miriam's purification and the child's dedication.** This indicates that Herod died within the same forty days. **The chronology of these forty days is imperative in correctly finding the**

**birth day of Yeshua.** Joseph and Miriam came to Jerusalem for the festival of Sukkot in September or December of that year. Unable to find a room at the inn because of the influx of so many pilgrims, they are **given shelter in a "sukkah," which just happens to be built ONLY during a seven day period each year accompanying the celebration of the Festival of Sukkot, or Tabernacles.** These sukkah are not built in December! During the night or one of the first nights the wise men arrived in Jerusalem and spoke to Herod. Following the birth of Yeshua, the shepherds see the heavenly host and hear their proclamation of the birth of the Messiah. They go to pay him homage in the "sukkah," while the wise men are making their way to Bethlehem. The shepherds leave to "noise it abroad," and Miriam is moved to a house. The wise men arrive and during the night are warned by God concerning Herod. Joseph and Miriam take the child and flee to Egypt and remain there until they are told by God that Herod is dead. On returning to Judea (within forty days for Miriam's purification) they dedicate Yeshua according to the Torah (Miriam undergoes her ceremony of purification; which according to Torah had be done within 40 days of the birth of a male child), and it is here they receive the prophecy of Anna and Simeon. After this, they travel to Galilee, where they will live.

It is evident that as long as Herod was alive, they could not appear at the Temple. Thus, their appearance at the Temple is proof positive that Herod is dead, or else he would add one more baby to his list of murdered male babies rather quickly!

#### **JOSEPHUS DATES HEROD'S DEATH: THUS YESHUA'S BIRTH:**

If the approximate date of Herod's death could be determined, it would establish the season of Yeshua's birth. The Jewish historian, Josephus, who lived during the first century C.E., documents in detail Herod's death.

Josephus relates that Herod became ill immediately following an act of impiety against the priesthood, at which time an eclipse of the moon occurred. This eclipse, the only one mentioned by Josephus, happened March 13 in the year of the Julian period 4710, and the fourth year before the Common Era. Herod's illness lasted several months and is documented in great detail as being painful and distressful. Many times cures were sought and brought about temporary relief; however, nothing prevented imminent death. **According to Josephus' calculations, Herod's death occurred about September, in the fourth year before the Common Era (4 B.C.E.).** Let us not forget that Israel is on a lunar calendar and not a solar calendar like America. Therefore, half of the month of September and October would correspond to our September. Therefore, with the knowledge that Herod died in autumn, **Miriam's purification within six weeks of the birth of Yeshua, it is relatively easy to see Yeshua's birth in September or October of the year, thus corresponding to the Festival of Sukkot which comes in the Fall of the year (September and October). Herod died in autumn, the same time of the year as Sukkot, an thus his death was within forty days of the birth of Yeshua. Therefore, we can absolutely rule out Yeshua being born in December.** It would have been a sin for Miriam not to have been purified according to the Torah or within that forty day window of opportunity. If we are even to try to stretch the day to December, we encounter a period of time that ranges from between 60 to 90 days, which is considerable more than the forty allowed by the Torah for Mary to present herself for purification. **Therefore, you now understand the pagan origins of the day we sanctify to Yeshua which has absolutely no**

**bearing upon his birth, and the Festivals of the Lord which reveal the ministry and work of our Messiah, we, more often than not, pay little or no attention. This year, celebrate the birth of Yeshua at Tabernacles when it really occurred.** The Hebrew word "Tabernacle" means dwelling or to dwell. Remember, that the Torah became flesh and dwelt (Tabernacled) among us! Will you dwell in the truth of His word and reject your false traditions?

### **LOOKING FOR A BIBLICAL CHRISTMAS? YOU WON'T FIND ONE:**

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, credit cards 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. You would be mightily surprised!

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. After reading this article, even up to this point, isn't it time you honestly investigated the matter for yourself?

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 without question by the vast majority of Christians who would never be involved in idolatry KNOWINGLY. 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. Oddly enough, we never ask why. It was this type of mentality of believers that caused hundreds to drink grape kool-aid under the leadership of Jim Jones.

### **TRUTH OR FABLE: FACTS DON'T LIE:**

Okay, so let's ask: why observe Christmas? Because it is 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. Shockingly 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 post apostolic 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's 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 observance of the nativity. No corresponding festival was presented by the Old Testament ... the day and 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 Yeshua 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 Yeshua 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. The Savior of the Bible was a Hebrew. His actual name, Yeshua, reflects His mission to earth as the salvation of His Father Yahweh. His name Yeshua 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.

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 **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 Yeshua 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 Time 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 snows began to fall. The livestock had **not yet** been moved to shelters.

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 25th 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 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.

### **WHAT DO YOU GET WHEN YOU MIX THE "SUN" WITH "SON"? PAGANISM:**

If Christmas is not in the Bible, where did it ultimately come from? The answers to that question are found in nearly any encyclopedia or in many newspapers or magazines appearing around December 25. 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 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 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 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—Sunday—the day the pagans worshiped the sun.

"This tendency on the part of 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 Matronalia 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."

## **WHAT A PARADOX: A DEATH CELEBRATION IN HONOR OF A BIRTH..WHAT'S GOING ON?**

A mass is a celebration of the Eucharist or the emblems of the death of the Savior. Yet, "Christmas" 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, at the time of the winter solstice when the sun began its journey northward again.

Pagan peoples were overly concerned with life and fertility. They saw life fading in the darkness of winter and so held festivals in honor of and to beckon back the sun to give life and light to the earth once more.

*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] 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 worshipping that Pope Leo I (440-461) chastised Christians who on Christmas celebrated the birth of the sun deity!

The sun cult was particularly strong at Rome about the time Christmas enters 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 religions 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.

## **IT ALL BEGAN WITH NIMROD IN GENESIS:**

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 Yeshua comes to set up His throne on earth, Revelation 18. From Babylon sprang 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 churchianity.

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 Babylons*, p. 98). More on the Christmas tree later.

The similarities 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 worshipping 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 Babylons*, p. 70.

## **SATURNALIA-FORERUNNER OF MODERN CHRISTMAS**

Tammuz, the sun deity, was the first counterfeit savior. The Bible in Ezekiel 8:14-18 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 the 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 the 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 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."

Elements of this worship are still found in today's Christmas rites. (see "Yuletide Customs" later in this article). 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 Romans 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 *Encyclopedia 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.

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. 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 25th 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 Babylons*, 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 backs on it to worship inside the westward-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 TRAVELS 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, 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. 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 evergreens, 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 'Kriss Kringle,'" *Celebrations*, pp. 315-316.

## **YULETIDE CUSTOMS-PAGANISM AT ITS BEST:**

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 worshipping 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 times 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 stoneworship). According to the *Dictionary of the Bible* by 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 the 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 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 with gold; they fasten it with nails 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 peoples in honor of pagan deities. Their tree trunks were not necessarily carved into images, as this source reveals: "We can find enough instances of the use of trees, even decorated ones such as the 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 origin 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 8th 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 come to life again," *The Two Babylons*. 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 sunfeast 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 the 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 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 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 northdwelling 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 into 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 in 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).

## **GIFTGIVING:**

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 Yeshua if this is supposed to be His birthday? True to form, the practice of giftgiving also rests with the ancient heathens. 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 a 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 giftgiving, they would have 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.

While American colonists were not accustomed to the giftgiving obsession, | since the 1920s Christmas has become a commercial bonanza. If Christmas is an annual greedfest, merchants and retailers | 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 manmade 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 BY GOD:**

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 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. The Messiah Yeshua Himself 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 seven 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 and not 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 worshipping 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 with unrighteousness? and what communion has light with darkness? 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 Yeshua 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 the 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 own 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 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 in Leviticus chapter 23 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, Babylonish 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 drink of the cup of Yahweh, and the cup of 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?" I 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 spue 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 no better than none at all. A little leaven affects 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 and holiness is all about.

In fact, thousands 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.