

CHRISTMAS

- Hannah Rychlik

Why December 25th is Not Yeshua's Birthday

We know that the Christian festival of Christmas is not written or commanded in the Holy Scriptures, but it is a well-established tradition within Christianity. The issue we need to resolve is, 'Is Christmas a festival that the people of the God of Abraham should be celebrating?'

December 25th is the day designated on most of our calendars as the day of the Messiah's birth; however, is this really the day on which he was born? How was this date decided upon?

Are the customs surrounding this season of Biblical origin, or is Christmas a spiritually dangerous mixture of paganism and Christianity?

Why do most scholars now doubt the validity of December 25th as the actual date of Christ's birth? There are several reasons:

1. Winter in Israel is too cold at night to be shepherding flocks.

At the time of Yeshua's birth, the shepherds were in the fields watching over their flocks at night. (Luke 2:8) The truth is that shepherds in Palestine did not abide in the fields during the middle of winter! More probably, the blessed event of Yeshua's birth took place sometime in the fall before the start of October.

2. Winter is not the logical time to take a census.

At the time of Yeshua's birth, Joseph and Mary had gone to Bethlehem to register for a census, likely for taxation purposes. (Luke 2:1-5) No records indicate that the middle of winter was the time of taxation. The more logical time would be in the fall at the end of the harvest. This would place the season of his birth again in the fall, which could have taken place during the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot).

3. Jerusalem was crowded during the time of the three feasts.

Jerusalem must have been very crowded at the time of Yeshua's birth. Scriptures state that there was no room at the inn. (Luke 2:7). During the time of the three mandatory Feasts, vast crowds would fill the city of Jerusalem and also the surrounding towns, including Bethlehem. The three Feasts are: Passover, Shavuot (Weeks) and Sukkot (Tabernacles). Likely, Yeshua was born at the time of the Fall Feast of Tabernacles. There is no mandatory feast during the winter.

4. Yeshua fulfilled the Feasts of the Lord on these specific dates.

Yeshua fulfilled the Feast of Passover on the exact day of Passover with His crucifixion - slain as the Passover Lamb of God. He fulfilled the Feast of First Fruits on that very day as he was raised to life after death - the first fruits of those who will also be raised up. When would be a more logical time, then, for the Savior to be born, than during the Feast of Tabernacles in order to also fulfill this festival time by coming to earth to dwell (tabernacle) with us. He was born as Immanuel (God with us). **"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."** (Isaiah 7:14)

He will one day return to dwell with us forever. Might this not also take place at the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot)? **"Now the dwelling (Sukkah) of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."** (Rev. 21:3-4)

Does it Really Matter? - Birth and Death

Usually, when we begin to explore this topic, there are people who question whether the issue of Yeshua's real birth date is really significant. After all, isn't it enough to celebrate the fact that he was born, and isn't December

25th as good a date as any to choose? Isn't it all right to celebrate His birth on Christmas, even if it is not truly His birthday, since it is a celebration for the Lord, and after all, 'God knows my heart'? This is a tempting position; after all, then no change would be required of us. But is it valid? In one sense, the proponents of this, 'it doesn't matter view' are in line with Jewish thought. According to Jewish custom, it is not the date of birth of the infant that is to be remembered, as much as it is the date of the death of an individual. More significant than the occasion of our birth is what we do with the gift of life we are given before the time of our death. When a family member dies in a Jewish family, the children are required to 'say kaddish' (a special prayer in remembrance of the departed loved one) on the anniversary of the death each year, and to light a candle in their name which burns in the synagogue. Often, an offering or donation is also given to the synagogue or to a charity at this time, in honor of the *jahrzeit* (anniversary of the date of death). Actually, the Kaddish prayer says nothing about death at all, but is a prayer that exalts, honors, and glorifies God. It is a reminder that even in loss, sorrow and death, God is still supreme and loving and above all. Yes, the birth of a baby is an occasion of great joy and celebration, as is each birthday as the child grows and matures, but it is the anniversary date of the death that is marked and remembered each year thereafter. The scriptures are silent about the exact time of Yeshua's birth. Although we can speculate regarding His birth, we know exactly when he died - on the Feast of Passover, when the lambs were slain; and we know that He rose from the dead after three days and three nights in the tomb, on the Feast of First Fruits.

(Note: for those who believe Yeshua died on 'Good Friday' and rose on 'Easter Sunday', I recommend reading booklet: Passover and First Fruits.)

A Day of Our Own Choosing

Let's examine each argument from a Biblical perspective. "It's acceptable to choose any day we decide upon." This kind of opinion is also used to justify taking a day of rest on the day of one's choice. The Bible describes an example of a king who choose his own date for a festival, rather than follow God's appointed times. Jeroboam instituted a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month and offered sacrifices on the altar.

"On the fifteenth day of the eighth month, a month of his own choosing, he offered sacrifices on the altar he had built at Bethel. So he instituted the festival for the Israelites and went up to the altar to make offerings." (1Kings 12:33)

Was God pleased with this man-made festival? In a later chapter, God warns of judgment upon Israel **"because of the sins Jeroboam has committed and has caused Israel to commit."**(1Kings 14:16). Jeroboam created a false, man-made religion, with its own festival, complete with unauthorized priests and sacrifices, which was displeasing to the Lord. Compare this with the scriptures about the Feasts of the Lord. God doesn't say that these are the Feasts of the Jews, nor the Feasts of Israel, but His own.

"These are My appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the Lord, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies." (Leviticus 23:1)

What are these feasts? The foundation feast is the seventh day Sabbath, followed by The Passover and Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, Feast of Weeks, Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and lastly, Feast of Tabernacles. Each one of these Feasts is not only commanded in scripture; these 'God appointed times' are highly significant from a prophetic and Messianic perspective. Remember, we always have a choice - to do things God's way, or our own.

Celebrating a Festival to the Lord

What about the view that as long as we are celebrating a feast or festival 'to the Lord', it is acceptable, even if not God-ordained? We can look back at the shameful 'golden calf incident for a Biblical example of people doing this very thing. When the Israelites grew weary of waiting for Moses to return, they took off their gold earrings and gave them to Aaron who used the gold to make an idol in the shape of a calf. Aaron then built an altar in front of the calf and announced, **"tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord."** (Exodus 32:5) God's anger was so great against the people that he told Moses to leave Him alone so that, in His anger, He could destroy all of Israel. Thankfully, Moses interceded for the people and God relented from His wrath. The people may have thought that they were worshipping God by celebrating this 'festival to the Lord'. But their sincerity was no substitute for obedience; nor was it an excuse in God's eyes for disobedience. All we need to do is look around us and see the tremendous numbers of sincere people, who think they are worshipping God, who are completely deceived. Whether New Age, Mormon, Jehovah Witness, or Hindu the problem with these and other such false religions is not the sincerity of the people, nor their love for God necessarily, but that the practice of

their religion does not line up with Truth according to the Word of God.

Truth or Lie

Another serious argument along this line that we need to examine is the issue of Truth. The more we walk in truth, the more we are walking in the light. Inversely, the more we walk in a lie, the more we are covered with and by darkness. We know who is the Father of lies, the deceiver. He comes to steal, kill, and destroy; but Yeshua came to bring us out of darkness into the light. I believe that as much as the Holy Spirit reveals to us, we need to walk in light and truth, casting off any shadow of darkness or lie. If December 25th is not the truth, then why should we persist in walking in this falsehood?

The most important point, though, is the actual significance of this date. It seems that we would have enough reasons to abandon the celebration of December 25th as a 'festival of our own choosing' or a 'festival to the Lord', if it had just been chosen at random. However, there exists a sinister and evil root to this date that must be revealed.

The Origin of Christmas

What is the origin of the December 25th celebration of Christmas? It was certainly not included in the early celebrations of the Christian church. The Catholic Encyclopedia says, "*Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the Church. Irenaeus and Tertullian omit it from their lists of feasts.*" (The Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 3, p. 724, art. "Christmas.") Later, when churches at various places did begin celebrating the birthday of Christ, there was much difference of opinion as to the correct date. It was not until the latter part of the fourth century before the Roman Church began observing December 25th. (Ibid.. p.725) Yet, by the fifth century, it was ordered that the birth of Christ be forever observed on this date, even though this was the day of the old Roman feast of the birth of Sol, one of the names of the sun-god. (The Encyclopedia Americana, vol. 6, p. 623)

A large, pagan, religious cult which fostered the celebration of December 25th as a holiday throughout the Roman and Greek worlds was the pagan sun worship - Mithraism. This winter festival was called, 'the Nativity' - the 'Nativity of the sun'. (Frazer, The golden Bough, p. 471) Could this pagan festival actually be responsible for the date of December 25th being chosen by the Roman Church? "*The well known solar feast of Natalis Invicti - the Nativity of the Unconquered Sun - celebrated on the 25th of December, has a strong claim on the responsibility for our December date.*" (The Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 3, p. 727, art. "Christmas.")

Semiramus, the Queen of Babylon, (also called the Queen of Heaven or Eashtar) contaminated the Israelites worship of God with Baal worship. (Jeremiah 7:18, 44:17). She ordered the ancient world to celebrate the birth of her son, Tammuz. He apparently was believed to be the sun god reincarnated. She set December 25th for the date of Baal's birth date on the advice of her astrologers, since the sun is at its farthest point from the earth during the winter solstice. The sun god, over time, was worshipped all over the ancient world on this date. It was a time of sexual orgies, drunkenness, and the sacrificing of infants to Baal, just as today, Christmas is a time of drunkenness, and general partying, despite Christians' desperate attempts to keep 'Jesus as the reason for the season'.

Because this feast was so popular amongst the heathen population of Greek and pagan Rome, the date was simply adopted as the time of the birth of Christ by the Roman church. Many customs associated with the season - the giving of gifts, the general rejoicing and festivity is due to this winter festival of Saturnalia - a remnant of paganism that has attached itself like a blood-sucking leach onto the Christian Church. The Feast of Saturnalia, characterized by drunkenness and sexual orgies, glorified Nimrod, a slain pagan god who, according to myth, came back to life. Is it any wonder that Jewish anti-missionaries use the example of this myth, and Christians' celebration of this date as an opportunity to discredit Christianity and the Messiah Himself?

The Christmas Tree

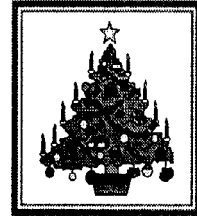
The custom of decorating a Christmas tree dates back only a few centuries, however the principle behind it - about sacred trees - is ancient. Holy trees, symbols of the life force, were also associated with Canaanite cults. Cylinder seals dating from the Late Bronze Age often show a worshipper standing in front of a tree. Other seals dating from the 10th - 8th centuries BC, which depict a tree flanked by worshippers, have been found at T. Hlif, Lchish, Beth-shemesh, Gibeon, Samaria, and Megiddo. A 'tree of life' with lily flowers being eaten by two ibex was found drawn on a large pithos at the religious center of Kuntillet 'Ajrud. Gold pendants of the Late Bronze Age from T. el- 'Ajjul (near Gaza) and from Ugarit show stylized trees growing out of the navel of the pudenda of a formalized goddess. Sexual intercourse under these holy trees was thought to transmit the potency and vitality of the goddess (Hos 4:13-14). These female deities could well have been the Asherah or Astarte who are often mentioned in the Old Testament as the consort of the weather god Baal (Judges

3:7)

(Pritchard, James B., Editor, The Harper Atlas of the Bible, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1987, P.101-102.)

In at least ten Biblical references, the green tree is associated with idolatry and false worship. (I Kings 14:23, etc..) The colorful, shining balls symbolize the sun and sun worship. The use of holly and mistletoe comes from the Druid ceremonies. Places of worship with sacred trees are frequently mentioned in the Bible (Josh 24:26) and the prophets condemned their use:

**"Do not learn the ways of the nations...
For the customs of the peoples are worthless;
they cut a tree out of the forest,
and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel.
They adorn it with silver and gold;
they fasten it with hammer and nails
so it will not totter." (Jeremiah 10: 1-4)**



Although December 25th is now used to commemorate the birth of Christ, it is a compromise with the pagan, sun-worshipping religion that God distinctly and repeatedly warned Israel not to have anything to do with. God hates this false worship and anything associated with it. He is called a jealous God - El Kanah. He says to the prophet Ezekiel,

"Have you seen this, O son of man? Turn again, you will see greater abominations than these ... there ... were about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, and they were worshipping the sun toward the east ... Therefore I also will act in fury. My eye will not spare nor will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them." (Ezekiel 8:15-18)

Perhaps we should take a lesson from God's dealings with the nation of Israel. In ancient Israel, strangers and aliens to the faith were always welcome to join Israel and to worship her God with one stipulation - they had to forsake their pagan ways and pagan gods, and adopt the lifestyle and worship of Israel. Leaving behind one's paganism and idolatrous worship also marked the decision of the Jerusalem Council and is implied in the practice of the Mikvah (ritual water immersion or baptism).

Days And Months And Times And Years

Some use the words of Paul to `prove' that we are no longer to celebrate the feasts of the Lord. To the Galatian church, the apostle Paul preached,

"Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years, I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain." (Gal. 4:9-11)

The context of this letter, however, shows that the Galatians were former pagans who had been converted to faith in the God of Israel. The `days and times' that they had formerly observed and were now turning back to were not the feasts of the Lord, which Paul celebrated himself, but the times set aside to honor their pagan gods. Isn't it ironic that some of these very days have been `Christianized' and merged into the worship of the professing church.

I have heard Messianic Jews saying that they successfully move between both Christian and Jewish worlds, celebrating both Christmas and Chanukah with their families. One Messianic Pastor appeared in a Canadian city's newspaper posing with both a Christmas tree and a Hanukkah. Sadly, this only creates more confusion and damages the image of Messianic Judaism.

"When Messianic Jews bring a Christmas tree into their homes, synagogues, etc., and then try to justify it as a secular custom, or relate to it as a celebration connected to the ancient winter solstice, they are no better than the Hellenistic in the days of Judah the Maccabee. This is just part of the paganism he fought so hard to drive out from among Israel. As Messianic believers, we can reaffirm our faith in the true God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by rejecting any signs or symbols of pagan customs that have infiltrated the true message of our Messiah Yeshua." (Editor's Note: The Winter Festival, an excerpt from "Mystery Babylon Religion" by Ralph E. Woodrow)