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# THE TRUTH ABOUT THAT TRADITION

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## Celebrating CHRISTMAS

Only months after my husband and I had been ordained in ministry (1980) we were approached with the question, "Should Christians celebrate Christmas?" Up until that time, it had never been a question in my mind, for I assumed that all I had been taught about Christmas, as a child, was true.



I grew up in a fairly religious family where we attended church regularly, and had been taught that Christians celebrated Christmas in remembrance of Jesus' birthday; but had we actually been told that Jesus was born on December 25th? I didn't know for sure. And what was the connection between Jesus' birth and the Christmas tree, mistletoe, Santa Claus, and all of the other holiday traditions? I didn't have a clue! So when the question arose, coming from a young college student in our newly formed campus ministry, we were not quite sure how to respond.

However, the Lord led that student to share a passage of scripture that became a turning point for us, **Jeremiah 10:1-5**. We were shocked at our discovery... there it was in the Bible, *the perfect description of a Christmas tree!* And in that passage, God warned His people saying, "learn not the way of the heathen!" Well, needless to say, that was the beginning of our quest to understand the history and truth about Christmas (and soon, the other holidays as well).

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*“Thus saith the Lord, **Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. 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. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good.”***

*Jeremiah 10:2-5*

So how did we proceed? Well, it was actually quite simple. We discovered that most of the information needed could be easily found in any common encyclopedia (today's equivalent would be the Internet, of course). We were amazed to find that the customs associated with the celebration of Christmas actually existed hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus Christ! ***The decorating of the tree, mistletoe, holly berries, the Yule log, wreaths, and even gifts under the tree were all customs taken from various pagan practices that had nothing to do with Jesus or his birthday!*** They were ancient traditions associated with pagan gods, deities, and demons; hence... *idolatry*.

So once darkness and lies were exposed, we had a decision to make. Would we continue to walk in darkness based upon lies, or would we hold fast to the truth? The Word of God tells us, *"Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (John 8:32). But what if we chose to continue in religious traditions based upon lies? I asked the Lord, and this is how He explained it to me... "Pagans know their gods. Christians, likewise, must know their God"; we must understand His nature and His character. Jesus is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all (1 Jn. 1:5). "The true worshippers" must worship Him in Spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:23). But if we choose not to obey the truth, by compromising with the pagan world, rather than being sanctified and *made free*, then we will remain in spiritual darkness.

### Religious Compromise

*God does not like compromise.* Rev. 3:15 states that He would rather we were hot or cold, but not be lukewarm (compromising). From the beginning (the Old Testament Law), God commanded His people to be separate, and not to follow the ways of the heathen, as expressed in Ex. 20:3, *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me"*. The world must be able to see that there is a difference between true believers in Jesus Christ and unbelievers who walk in disobedience to His Word.

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**"LEARN NOT THE WAY OF THE HEATHEN..."**



Have you ever wondered why people worldwide, regardless of their religion or nationality, celebrate Christmas in like fashion? It is Satan's nature to blend darkness and light, for he operates in the realm of deception. It was the early Catholic Church that adopted pagan customs, disguised them, and incorporated them into the church to deceive the uninformed masses. However, history reveals that these pagan customs were not actually observed by the early Christians for the first two to three hundred years of church history, and was initially rejected in the U.S. as Roman Catholic traditions.

The word "Christmas" originated from the Catholic Church's "Christ Mass"; however, it was known as "Yule Day" among pagans. This would explain why "Christmas" is not found in the Bible, and neither is there any record of Jesus' date of birth. December 25<sup>th</sup> is actually the birthday of Baal, the ancient Babylonian *"sun god"* (also known as Mithra, in Rome) which was later changed to *"the son of God"* by the Catholic Church. Personally, it is my belief that there was purposely no mention of Jesus' date of birth in the Bible, probably because He wanted no emphasis placed on His flesh. He knew that men had the tendency to worship *the creature*, rather than *the Creator*, who is God.

Therefore, as the holiday season once again rapidly approaches, I would admonish all that call themselves Christians to study your traditions! Search the scriptures, because we are accountable to a "jealous God" (Deut. 2:24) who will not be mocked! Therefore, *us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."* Eccl. 12:13-14

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## THE TRUTH ABOUT THE BIRTH OF CHRIST



The greatest myth about the birth of Christ is that Jesus was born on December 25<sup>th</sup>. As previously stated, the truth is that we really don't know the actual date of His birth, because the Bible doesn't mention it. So, why December 25<sup>th</sup>? "The precise reason why Christmas came to be celebrated on December 25<sup>th</sup> remains obscure, but most researchers believe that *Christmas originated as a European Christian substitute for pagan celebrations of the winter solstice*" (History.com).

The Bible tells us that at the time of Jesus' birth, there were "shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night" (Lk. 2:8). Therefore, it most likely *was not in December*, because it is cold in Bethlehem in December; so the shepherds would not have been in the fields with their flocks at night, in the midst of winter. The usual custom was for the them to provide shelter for their sheep in the winter, while they themselves slept indoors. We are also told in Luke 2:1-5, that Mary and Joseph were traveling to Bethlehem for the mandatory Roman census at that time. History records that the censuses in those days "were normally held in September or October -- after the fall harvest, yet before the harsh winter" when travel would be difficult, especially for women and children (Christian Answers, Boyett).

## HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

### CHRISTMAS TREE

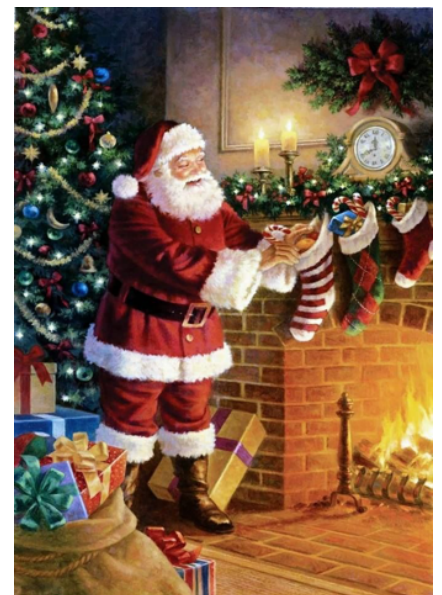
Evergreens were used in ancient Egypt and Rome, and continued with the German tradition of using candles. It was part of the winter solstice celebration. This tradition started long before Christianity. Evergreen boughs were hung on their doors and windows. Some believed the evergreens represented eternal life, because they never lose their leaves, even in the winter; they were also believed to keep away witches, ghosts, evil spirits, and illness. Those who worshipped the sun god (Romans) during their feast of Saturnalia (in honor of the god of agriculture) believed that the solstice meant that soon farms and orchards would be green and fruitful again; so they marked the occasion by decorating their homes with evergreens. The Druids and Celtic priests decorated their temples with evergreens as a symbol of everlasting life.

### SANTA CLAUS and GIFT-GIVING

Santa Claus, also known as ST. NICHOLAS and FATHER CHRISTMAS, traced back to St. Nicholas, a monk born in Turkey around 280 AD (died 343 AD). He was "a patron saint" who helped the needy and gave gifts to children and the poor. After his death, he was transformed into the legendary character, Santa Claus, who brought Christmas presents to children around the world. In Germany, the pagan god, Odin, was worshipped; he had a long white beard with an 8-legged horse called Sleipnir, who was said to ride through the skies (like Santa and his reindeer). Kids would fill their booties with carrots and straw and leave them by the chimney for Sleipnir to feed on.

### CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

Christmas trees were first decorated with candles, which were *said to symbolize* "Christ being the light of the world". By mid-20th century, they began using strings of electric lights. "This custom was borrowed from pagan yule rituals that celebrate the return of the light of the sun as the days grow longer after (winter) solstice: the evergreen trees symbolizing the renewal and continuance of life in dark times" (Wikipedia).



### MISTLETOE

Kissing under the mistletoe was part of the ancient Greek festival of Saturnalia; in the Middle Ages, the plant was associated with fertility, with healing powers for restoring health. As part of the Christmas custom, men were allowed to steal a kiss from any woman caught standing under it; if she refused, it was considered bad luck.