

CHRISTMAS, ITS MYTHS AND TRADITIONS

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At the beginning of 1997 I was challenged during a workshop that both my wife and I attended in Portland, Oregon. The speaker was teaching on the subject of pagan and occult practices in the Christian church. He explained how paganism and occultism were actually co-opted into Christianity and how these compromises were blended into our seasonal celebrations. I felt like a bullet hit me between the eyes. Could this be true? Has the Christian church really allowed the blending of pagan and occult practices into church celebrations?

How come no one every told me about this in my bible classes and required ministerial training? Did I really tell the story of the birth of Christ wrong? How come I didn't know He was not born on December twenty fifth? As an educated and trained Christian pastor was I guilty of planning and participating in ancient fertility rites when I approved and assisted in hosting sunrise services, bunnies and Easter Egg hunts for the children's church? I was challenged to find out for myself if this is true. As I prayed about this, the following scripture pricked my heart;

"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ".¹

I now was on a quest to understand if I had unknowingly gone down the path of men's traditions after the vain rudiments of the world and not Christ. So I began a journey that is still ongoing. One of the most fascinating aspects of this journey was learning that the bible actually has "*holidays and feasts*" for believers to celebrate.² They were given to Israel in the Torah and were celebrated by Jesus, the Apostles and first to third century church as normal weekly and seasonal celebrations. I discovered that it was not until the late third and into the fifth centuries that these "Hebrew influences" were diminished and systematically removed. The result of this "anti-Semitism" was the blending of pagan, occult and Christian practices into a form of *hybrid* celebrations I now refer to as, "*The Hallmark Holidays*." I soon began to challenge these holiday practices because I found that they had no biblical base or supportive Hebrew history. It literally was like laying hands on a sacred cow! I can understand how Gideon must have felt when he tore down the Ashrah Poles and everyone came against him for it. This experience produced a favorite saying of mine; "*Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Hamburgers*." While I was making this gourmet hamburger I learned the truth about how, when and why these "Hallmark Holidays" came to life in the Christian Church.

The historical facts reveal the *paganization* of the church and the anti-Semitism of Constantine and the Church of Rome. History describes a Messianic Judaism movement that was persecuted and systemically eliminated in the general population of the gentile churches. It took two centuries before it was adrift from its original Hebrew Roots, this occurred approximately from 325 to 525 A.D. During this time period an anti-Semitic persecution took influencing believers to depart from biblical feasts supported by the scriptures and Hebrew history. The Church of Rome became *inclusive* to pagan practices and a campaign to distance or eliminate anything Jewish was successful.

This practice of co-opting the religious practices of pagans into the first century to third century Apostolically planted churches was set in motion and a unifying of religions under the rule of Constantine and the Church of Rome was now underway.³

What I discovered during this study is that there is not a single shred of evidence to support December twenty fifth as the birth of Jesus Christ or Easter as the biblical Passover celebration of the Jewish Messiah. The reality of this research revealed that Christmas evolved from different variations of The Winter Solstice practices of pre-Christian Germanic, Roman, and Celtic cultures and Easter was variations of ancient fertility rites. These cultures used holly, mistletoe, Yule logs, wassail bowls, mistletoe, giving of gifts in homes and the decorating of cut and uncut trees. They celebrated stories of gods being born or re-born centuries before the word Christmas ever came into being. Easter practices with bunnies, egg decorating, ham and sunrise worship that dated back to ancient Babylon and Nimrod was the actual root of these celebrations even though they had evolved into their own cultural variations.

The Apostle Paul around A.D. 55-56 sees this challenge developing even before anti-Semitism gets a foothold in the New Testament church. He addresses this Greek and Roman thinking in 1 Corinthians chapters 8-10 when he writes these words to the church;

“No, I am suggesting that what the pagans sacrifice they offer [in effect] to demons (to evil spiritual powers) and not to God [at all]. I do not want you to fellowship and be partners with diabolical spirits [by eating at their feasts]. You cannot drink the Lord's cup and the demons' cup. You cannot partake of the Lord's table and the demons' table.”⁴

On June 29, 2005 Chuck Pierce of Glory Zion International Ministries organized a trip to Asia Minor and Persia for an intercessory prayer team. Their focus was to pray about redeeming and reversing the power loss in Christian authority. The following is what they found out and experienced firsthand. It is a *modern day* discovery that helps explain the issue surrounding the paganization of “the natural and wild olive branch” of Romans 11:14-24.

“It was from Constantinople (modern day Istanbul) that the official "paganization" of the church was carried out, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of believers who wanted to remain true to apostolic Christianity. One of the main places for us to visit was the Church of Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom). This structure was a good picture of what happened in the Church during this time. This enormous structure was originally built by Constantine as the showplace of his new church, and later reconstructed by Justinian. For its construction they made use of huge marble columns from the Temple of Diana in Ephesus, and other items from a pagan temple in Pergamum (which John called "The seat of Satan.") This was a physical picture of the way elements of paganism were incorporated into the church, resulting in a new religion that had worldly power, but lacked the presence and power of God.

Constantine made Christianity the religion of the empire. He attempted to blend the monotheistic worship system of Judaism and Christianity with the worship of the sun, the veneration of Mithras, and other pagan forms of religion. He longed to produce a unity of religion. For instance, he combined the Father-God of the Christians with the much worshipped Mithras. Consequently, this combination of worship removed the persecution of the Christians - - but only for those who were not extreme in their worship. Actually, Constantine not only

protected the Christians, but he also protected the heathens' rights. He suppressed any divination or magic that was being used privately in homes and declared that any practice of heathen worship would be done on public altars and in sacred places. Therefore, in general, he prohibited family sacrifice and made everything public. This formed a mixed worship that created a "unity of religion."

Acts 15:5, for example, speaks of church members who were still actively involved in the party of the Pharisees. In Acts 21:20, James boasts that in Jerusalem there were many "tens of thousands" of Jews who believed in Jesus yet remained zealous for Torah. Repeatedly we see Paul and other members of the church still taking Nazirite vows, still practicing Jewish rituals, still observing Sabbaths and feasts, and still bringing offerings to the Jerusalem Temple.

In Acts 23, when Paul was before the Sanhedrin, the leaders of the Pharisees' party stood up in Paul's defense, saying, "We find nothing wrong with this man!" (Acts 23:9) Paul never speaks of his Judaism in the past tense. He proudly proclaims, "I am a Jew!" (Acts 22:3) and "I am a Pharisee!" (Acts 23:6). In the very last chapter of Acts, Paul meets with Jewish leaders in Rome and assures them that he still identifies himself with Judaism, and has done nothing to violate Jewish customs."⁵

Dr. Robert Heidler writes this about his discovery during this same trip; "This was an unexpected discovery, and quite at odds with much I had been taught. As I continued my research, I found that throughout the book of Acts, members of the church continued as active members of the Jewish community. I arrived at the end of Acts without ever finding the expected break with Judaism. While some Gentile writers in the second and third centuries were clearly anti-Semitic, there is much evidence that most of the church remained pretty Jewish. It was not until the fourth century, under the influence of Constantine, that the church finally broke from its Jewish roots. Even then, however, it took several centuries of persecution to completely remove the Jewish influences. This left me with an unexpected question, 'Was it really God's will for the church to break with its Jewish roots? If the apostles established and maintained the church in Jewishness, have we lost something God intended us to have?'"⁶

Fundamentally the church left its ancient Hebrew paths and opted for a blending of pagan and occult traditions with current Church of Rome practices. Because of this the church began to ignore the Torah, Feasts of Lev. 23 and the practice of the Sabbath Day. This type of Greek and Roman thinking fostered the paganization of the church and continues to this very day.

But there is a Forerunner Movement today that is not accepting this paganization. They are marching to a different drum beat, "*The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.*"⁷

The Persian Mithra cult was wide spread during the third and fourth centuries. On December twenty fifth Mithra worshippers would sacrifice a bull and celebrate the Sol Invictus known as

the birth of a young sun god who sprang from a rock or a cave in the form of a newborn infant (Mithra). The Romans celebrated the Winter Solstice on December twenty fifth as the renewing of the sun and this sun god. Also the festival of Saturnalia was celebrated from December seventeenth to the twenty fourth to honor Saturn, the god of grain and agriculture. It could last a month and was known for food, drunkenness and orgies. All of these festivals consisted of a period of goodwill, devoted to visiting friends and the giving of gifts much like modern Christmas. During Saturnalia another celebration took place called Juvenilia. This was a time for children and gift giving. All of these were practiced in the region and location of the Corinthian church. This is why Paul instructed them about non involvement in pagan activities.

“No, I am suggesting that what the pagans sacrifice they offer [in effect] to demons (to evil spiritual powers) and not to God [at all]. I do not want you to fellowship and be partners with diabolical spirits [by eating at their feasts]. You cannot drink the Lord's cup and the demons' cup. You cannot partake of the Lord's table and the demons' table” [Deut 32:17].⁸

From the Apostolic Age into the late third century Jesus Christ's birth *was not* celebrated. It was not until around the mid to fourth century that Christians began to celebrate His birth. Pope Liberus introduced the Nativity on December twenty fifth in 354 C.E. The Roman church knew it could not outlaw pagan celebrations so it adopted a *live let live approach* and by the fifth century, the combined events became so customary that it began to mark the beginning of the ceremonial year.⁹

In England during 835 A.D. this same co-opted approach was again taken by the Roman Catholic Church in order to subvert the pagan Celts Samhain festivals. The Roman Catholic English leaders allowed a *live let live approach* that also flourish with Celts. This inclusion process evolved over the centuries into the Eve of All Hallows, Hallowmas, All Souls Day, Day of The Dead and is currently known as All Saints Day and Halloween.¹⁰

The motive behind the mixing of these celebrations was to *subvert* the practice of pagan rituals and the *inclusion* of the pagans into the church as numerical converts. Today these co-opting practices are still celebrated with ornaments on trees, mistletoe, giving gifts, bunnies, egg decorating with *sun not Son* worship continuing in Christian churches. But the bible and secular history proves Hebrew history and apostolic participation was in Pesach not Easter, Shavuot not Valentine's Day or May Day, Yom Teru'ah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot not All Saints Day or Halloween and Hanukkah not Christmas were the founding celebrations of the churches that had been planted by the original twelve apostles and were actually practiced in them for over three hundred years. We have scripture in John 10:22, 23 that Jesus celebrated Hanukkah in Jerusalem teaching everyone, *“He is the door and the way and that He and The Father are One.”* But there is not one shred of biblical or Hebrew history to support the other celebrations.

Why am I taking the risk of being misunderstood or offending someone by discussing these facts? It is because the vast majority of leaders have no interest in dealing with these *“sacred cows.”* I have spoken to many church leaders who are aware that the above pagan celebrations are not biblical in origin. To my surprise some have known these facts longer than I have! Those who know express concerns about several key issues. One is that parishioners would have a meltdown about any discussions of changing or removing these *“sacred cows”* and transitioning to the biblical celebrations. Two, it has become too engrained in church culture to do anything about it now.

This is the same thinking that that was present during the early Protestant Reformation. They avoided restoring the seventh day Sabbath because Sunday was just too engrained into the Christian culture. This is why the Catholic Church will "gladly mention" that it changed the day, for this reveals that the Protestants are not relying on the Bible as their only rule of faith as they claim, but are instead acknowledging the "authority" of the Roman Church to change God's laws.

"The Protestant world at its birth found the Christian Sabbath [Sunday] too strongly entrenched to run counter to its existence; it was therefore placed under the necessity of acquiescing in the arrangement, thus implying the Church's right to change the day, for over 300 years. The Christian Sabbath [Sunday] is therefore to this day the acknowledged offspring of the Catholic Church... without a word of [protest]."¹¹

Stephen Keenan in A Doctinal Catechism, p. 174:

Question: Have you any other way of proving that the Church has power to institute festivals of precept?

Answer: Had she not such power, she could not have done that in which all modern religionists agree with her—she could not have substituted the observance of Sunday, the first day of the week, for the observance of Saturday, the seventh day, a change for which there is no scriptural authority.

Question: When Protestants do profane work upon Saturday... do they follow the Scripture as their only rule of faith?

Answer: On the contrary, they have only the authority of tradition for this practice. In profaning Saturday, they violate one of God's commandments, which He has never clearly abrogated, "Remember thou keep holy the Sabbath."

The Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine, 3rd ed., p. 50:

Question: Which is the Sabbath day?

Answer: Saturday is the Sabbath day.

Question: Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday?

Answer: We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church, in the Council of Laodicea [c. 363] transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday."

Catholic Press, Aug. 25, 1900

"Sunday is a Catholic institution, and can be defended only on Catholic principles. From beginning to end of Scripture there is not a single passage that warrants the transfer of weekly public worship from the last day of the week to the first."

Some Christian leaders I have spoken with know the truth about these matters but continue to emphasize the non biblical "sacred cows." Why? Because I believe it would cause such a stir within the congregations that they would run the risk of individuals leaving their church taking with them tithes and offerings thus creating a financial crisis. Leaders must remember this is the church of Jesus Christ and He has never winked at pagan or occult practices. The patterns of scripture are very exact. Kings, Prophets and Priests who did not pull down every high place always suffered loss personally and corporately for the covenant people they led.

Instead of pulling down all the high places, theological sound bites are developed to explain why certain "sacred cows" are left in place. An example of these sound bites are; "we are taking back what the devil has stolen from us" or "greater is He that is in us, then he that is in

the world.” This type of thinking concerning pagan and occult activities cannot be supported or justified by scripture. God has never ignored pagan or occult activities in the Torah nor is it justified in the Apostolic writings of the New Testament. The devil never stolid the Winter Solstice, Yule Tide, Christmas or Easter celebrations he is the spirit behind it. Christmas and Easter are not scriptural feasts; they are birthed from man’s traditions and rebellion and exploited by Satan. Why would we want to take back something that is not biblical? The Apostle Paul assigned by Jesus Christ to take the gospel to the gentiles is very clear about such activity. He writes to the gifted but carnal church of Corinth and tells them to not mix the cup of the Lord with the cup of demons.

“Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What say I then? that the idol is an thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?”¹²

If you accurately study the birth of Jesus you will discover that the story we tell during the Christmas season is a mistruth and does not accurately represent scriptural truth. We invite family and friends to our singing Christmas trees and Christmas re-enactments and then tell them a biblical fable.

- Jewish Sheppard’s do not watch sheep in the hills during winter.
- We tell them 3 wise men came, the bible actually says wise men; we assume it was three because of three gifts.
- Jesus rite of purification takes place forty days after His birth. The wise men appear chronologically in scripture after this forty day event.
- We teach that they came to a manger. Jesus most likely was six to eighteen months old when they arrived. This is why Herod killed all the infants less than two years old.
- Elizabeth (John's mother) was in her sixth month of pregnancy when Jesus was conceived (Luke 1:24-36), we can determine the approximate time of year Jesus was born if we know when *John was born*. John's father, Zacharias, was a priest serving in the Jerusalem temple during the course of Abijah (Luke 1:5). Historical calculations indicate this course of service corresponded to June 13-19 in that year. It was during this time of temple service that Zacharias learned that he and his wife, Elizabeth, would have a child (Luke 1:8-13). After he completed his service and traveled home, Elizabeth conceived (verses 23-24). Assuming John's conception took place near the end of June, adding nine months brings us to the end of March as the most likely time for John's birth. Adding another six months, the difference in ages between John and Jesus brings us to the end of September or Mid October as the likely time of Jesus' birth (Tishrei / Tabernacles).¹³

Ask yourself where did all this come from and how did it become Christianized into a birthday celebration for the Messiah? If these symbols and dates really come from pagan and occult practices, can a believer in Yeshua the Jewish Messiah maintain a clear conscience about mixing the cups of “paganism and The Lord?” What biblical precedent or pattern is used to justify these practices? Is there any *Hebrew history* for such an event? The holidays of God are recorded in Leviticus twenty three and they are to be kept forever. When these celebrations are practiced in the Christian Church the pagan and occult traditions will lose all of their appeal and attractions for the people of God.

I believe the primary reason why the “Church” has lost the authority to tell the biblical stories of Jesus Christ accurately is because the church has co-opted for the *hallmark holidays and cultural practices* instead of the biblical Sabbaths and feasts of the scripture. It is the little foxes of compromise that ruin the vine and bring barrenness to the vineyards of truth.

“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.”¹⁴

PERSONAL COMMENTS

Christmas has become the foremost winter celebration, it’s important to remember that many people we know who love Christ are still observing the non-biblical holiday of Christmas. It’s important to note that they are not worshipping pagan gods, just as we were not worshipping pagan gods when we used to celebrate Christmas Traditions. We were seeking after Jesus with our whole heart just as they are, but we were worshipping without knowledge, just as they are today. This lack of knowledge about God’s Law causes many of God’s people to fall into the trap of using *pagan imagery* as forms of worship, which He forbids:

“beware that you are not ensnared to follow them [the heathen], after they are destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How do these nations serve their gods, that I also may do likewise?’ You shall not behave thus toward the Lord your God, for every abominable act which the Lord hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it.”¹⁵

In other words, the Word of God is saying that you cannot take the pagan gods out of the pagan rituals and *plug* Him into them – i.e. we cannot worship God by putting gifts under a tree, lighting a Yule log, incorporating fables like Santa Claus, reindeer, fertility symbols like mistletoe and wreaths into our observances, etc. Nor can we worship God *on* the dates that the pagans worship their gods. By doing this we are taking away from God’s Law and adding our own law to it, which is something God commands us not to do until the very end of age (Deut 4:2; Pr. 30:6; Rev. 22:18).

It is my hope that this article will assist you in making informed decisions. You now have enough facts about how these celebrations migrated into the church and how they became Christianized to look into it for yourself and Teshuvah.

The Christianized Symbols And Roots Of Christmas

Roman transition rites and pagan Germano-Celtic Yule (juleis) rites were interwoven with Christian practices of the Roman Catholic Church. The first known use of the word Christes-Maess was in England around 1038. The traditional English Feast Days and Mass Days were scheduled for December twenty fifth. In colonial New England Thanksgiving, not Christmas, became the important seasonal holiday. Few Americans are aware that early Americans know as Puritans passed a anti-Christmas Misrule law in 1659, but it was repealed in 1681. Many of the Puritans left England for the New World because these laws had also been repealed. It was part of their quest for religious freedom. The first recorded post-repeal celebration was held in 1686.

Christmas became a declared holiday in Louisiana in the year 1837 and in 1885 a law was enacted giving all federal employees Christmas Day off. ¹⁶

The Christmas Tree

In the German-speaking countries the Christmas tree is part of the pre-Christian tradition of the "12 Rauhnächte" (12 harsh or wild nights), which later became the "Twelve Nights of Christmas." The tree is put up on December 24 and taken down after New Years or on January 6, known as the "Twelfth Night." A part of the tradition of taking down the tree is the "Plündern," raiding the tree of cookies and sugar plums, an event, anxiously awaited by the children. Winter in the northern countries was harsh. As the early Germans observed fall and the gradual dying of the plants and leaves they knew that winter with ice and snow was near, they blamed evil spirits for the "killing of nature." A few trees would survive winter. These evergreens became a symbol of immortality and good spirits. They believed in the special powers of these trees and wherever they were, evil spirits could not go, so they brought the greenery into their homes.

The English Puritans under the leadership of Oliver overthrew the King of England and *banned* the Christmas Misrule celebration 1652. Churches were required to stay closed and shops were to remain open. In 1656 men in Canton Canterbury passed a resolution that said if we cannot celebrate Christmas Misrule then we would have the King back and so the King was restored. With the fight in England lost, a group of Puritans set out for the new colonies landing in Plymouth Massachusetts in 1620. This exodus was in order to live in religious freedom *without* the Christmas Misrule celebration. In 1659 the city of Boston outlawed the celebrations and a fine of five shillings would be levied to anyone breaking this law.

This outlawed view of Christmas Misrule was so engrained into the colonies even the newly formed *Congress of 1789 did not break* for the holiday and stayed in session all day, this practice continued for 67 more years or until 1856. This was the practice for almost two hundred years before it began to change. Christmas trees didn't become popular among the general population about 1850. ¹⁷ "It is from Germany that we get many of our customs, songs, images of Santa, pine trees and European hand blown glass ornaments. How these traditions traveled to England and America is interesting. Queen Victoria often visited relatives in Germany in the town of Coburg and while there she fell in love with a young Prince Albert. After they got married they returned to England to raise their family. The tree that Prince Albert made for his family was admired by all in England. This tree was decorated in the finest of hand blown glass ornaments. Everyone liked the Queen so they copied her Christmas customs including the tree and ornaments. The Christmas tree tradition most likely came to the United States with Hessian troops during the American Revolution, or with German immigrants to Pennsylvania and Ohio. But the custom spread slowly. A Cleveland minister nearly lost his job because he allowed a tree in his church. Schools in Boston stayed open on Christmas Day through 1870, and sometimes expelled students who stayed home.

The English Puritans condemned a number of customs associated with Christmas, such as the use of the Yule log, holly, mistletoe, etc. Oliver Cromwell *preached against* "the heathen traditions" of Christmas carols, decorated trees and any joyful expression that desecrated "that sacred event." In America, the Pilgrim's second governor, William Bradford, a Puritan, tried hard to stamp out all "pagan mockery" at Christmas time. Christmas trees were *not used* by Puritans in colonial times. Pastor Henry Schwan of Cleveland OH appears to have been the

person responsible for decorating the first Christmas tree in an American church. His parishioners condemned the idea as a Pagan practice; some even threatened the pastor with harm. But objections soon dissipated.

President Franklin Pierce (1804-1869) arranged to have the first Christmas tree in the White House, during the mid-1850's. President Calvin Coolidge (1885-1933) started the *National Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony* on the White House lawn in 1923.¹⁸

Some Fundamentalist Christian groups oppose Christmas trees and even the celebration of Christmas for their members. Part of the opposition is because the custom of decorated trees originated in "Paganism". You can see the paganism in this Christmas carol about life going on even in the dead of winter, green branches when winter is here, the tree brings us pleasure in Christmas tide, what does Christ have to do with pagan tree practices? Jeremiah the prophet addresses this issue of household decorated trees and children kneeling before it in order to receive their gifts (Jer. 10:4).

O Tannenbaum

O Christmas Tree, Your branches green delight us.
They're green when summer days are bright:
They're green when winter snow is white.
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
Your branches green delight us.
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
You give us so much pleasure!
How oft at Christmas tide the sight,
O green fir tree, gives us delight!
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
You give us so much pleasure!¹⁹

"Hear ye the word which the LORD speaketh unto you, O house of Israel: 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."²⁰

Gift Giving

The Christians attribute the giving of gifts at Christmas to the wise men who brought gold, frankincense and myrrh to the newborn Jesus. But this tradition was common well before the time of Jesus, during Saturnalia. "Giving gifts at Christmas probably originated with the pagan Roman custom of exchanging gifts at the New Year". The giving of gifts by the Magi is often used to justify the practice of exchanging Christmas gifts. What is overlooked is that the Magi *did not* exchange gifts among themselves. Rather, they presented all their gifts "to Him" – to Jesus (Matt 2:11) because it was a custom to honor royalty in that way. How *different* is the modern custom of trading Christmas gifts and giving nothing to Christ on a day mistakenly called his birthday.²¹

Candy Canes

- Curved to hang on tree limbs.
- They are not Sheppard's rods.

Canes were never the special creation of a pious Christian candy maker. When the Christmas tree became popular in Germany, it was commonly decorated with sweets and colored paper. Cane-shaped candies were made to fit over tree branches. The effort to Christianize this practice and its popularity with children might have led some to take advantage of their shepherd's crook shape to teach some religious lessons.²²

The Christmas Tree Star

- Pentalfa (five pointed star)
- A Masonic Symbol
- Sacred symbol of Nimrod

Shapes like the pentagram and hexagram are called "stellated," meaning that they appear "star-like" in their appearance. Unlike the polygons, which are convex, they have concave surfaces like the "five-pointed star" or pentagram. This is important, since stars have a quality of transcendence in mysticism. In fact, in the magical lore, the upper point of the pentagram, when pointing up, shows the triumph of spirit over matter, the four lower points are assigned to the four elements of alchemy: earth, wind, fire, water.²³

Yule And The Yule Log

- Symbolizes the winter-gods.
- A piece of the "yule log" is kept and is used to relight next year's "Yule log" completing the cycle of reincarnation. Represents the reincarnation of Nimrod.

'Gledelig Jul!' Norway is the birthplace of the Yule log. The ancient Norse used the Yule log in their celebration of the return of the sun at the winter solstice. "Yule" came from the Norse word hweol meaning wheel. The Norse believed that the sun was a great wheel of fire that rolled towards and then away from the earth. Have you ever wondered why the family fireplace is such a central part of the typical Christmas scene? This tradition dates back to the lighting of the Norse Yule log. It is probably responsible for the tradition and popularity of log-shaped cheese, cakes, and desserts during the holidays.

A different type of Yule log and found on the mantles of many modern fireplaces is the type that is used as a base to hold three candles. It is made from small branch of oak or pine and flattened one side so it sets upright. Three holes are drilled in the top side to hold red, green or white (seasonal colors) or gold and black (the Sun God) or white, red, and black (representing the Goddess). Then it is finished with greenery consisting of red and gold bows, rosebuds, cloves, and dust with flour. The deities of Yule are all Newborn Gods, Sun Gods, Mother Goddesses, and Triple Goddesses. The best known would be the Dagda, and Brigid, the daughter of the Dagda. It is believed that Brigid taught the ancient smiths the arts of fire tending and the secrets of metal work. Brigid's flame, like the flame of the new light pierces the darkness of the spirit and mind while the Dagda's cauldron assures that Nature will always provide for all the children.²⁴

The Winter Solstice Night

Celebrated while everyone waited for the rebirth of the Oak King, the Sun King, the Giver of Life that warmed the frozen Earth and made her to bear forth seeds protected through the fall and winter in her womb. Bonfires were lit in the fields and crops and trees were "wassailed" with toasts of spiced cider. The ceremonial Yule log was the highlight of the festival. In accordance to tradition, the log must either have been harvested from the householder's land, or given as a gift. It must never have been bought. Once dragged into the house and placed in the fireplace it was decorated in seasonal greenery, doused with cider or ale, and dusted with

flour before being set ablaze with a piece of last year's Yule log, held onto for just this purpose. The log would burn throughout the night, then smolder for twelve days before being ceremonially put out. It is the sacred tree of the Teutons, known as Yggdrasil and it is believed that ash brings light into the hearth at the Solstice.²⁵

The Symbolism In Yule:

Yule log, or small Yule log with 3 candles, evergreen boughs or wreaths, holly, mistletoe hung in doorways, gold pillar candles, and baskets of clove studded fruit, a simmering pot of wassail, poinsettias and Christmas cactus.

- Herbs of Yule: Bayberry, blessed thistle, evergreen, frankincense holly, laurel, mistletoe, oak, pine, sage and yellow cedar.
- Incense of Yule: Pine, cedar, bayberry and cinnamon.
- Colors of Yule: Red, green, gold, white, silver, yellow, black and orange.
- Activities of Yule: Caroling, wassailing the trees, burning the Yule log, decorating the Yule tree, exchanging of presents, kissing under the mistletoe, honoring Kriss Kringle and the Germanic Pagan God of Yule.
- Spell workings of Yule: Peace, harmony, love, and increased happiness.
- Deities of Yule: Goddesses-Brighid, Isis, Demeter, Gaea, Diana, The Great Mother. Gods-Apollo, Ra, Odin, Lugh, The Oak King, The Horned One, The Green Man and The Divine Child, Mabon.²⁶

Norm Franz of Ascension Ministries wrote the following about Yule Day;

"All of this activity around the Yule Log gave birth to the Babylonian festival called Yule Day, which is Chaldean for Infant Day. They set the time for this festival during the winter solstice, because that was when the sun hits its lowest point (symbolizing death), and then begins to rise toward spring (symbolizing resurrection). They established the evening of December 24th as "Mother's Night" and December 25th as the "Birth-Day of the Unconquered Sun."⁷

In Asian Greek mythology, Yule Day is seen as a modified version of Nimrod's experience. There, it is a story about Smyrna, who is mystically portrayed as a tree that gives birth to her divine son Adonis and subsequently called "Man the Branch."⁸ After he was killed and torn apart by a wild boar, he, like Nimrod, was also symbolized by a lifeless tree stump. Then, on "Mother's Night" (Dec. 24th), Smyrna throws the stump on a briskly burning fire, and the next morning (Dec. 25th) Adonis (the sun god) is resurrected out of the fire as a brand new tree called the "Branch of God," also referred to as the "Tree that brings divine gifts."⁹

This mystic folklore is most likely behind the pagan ritual that apostate Israel practiced when a father would sacrifice his child by making "...his son or his daughter to pass through the fire for Molech" (2 Kgs. 23:10). Today, many believe this pagan worship continues through the practice of abortion. Throughout history, many would even decorate these trees with elaborate ornaments and set them up as shrines, in their homes, to honor the pagan sun god of their particular culture. In addition, they named the day of his birth SUNDAY, and gave each other gifts in celebration.

God had Jeremiah instruct Israel not to observe these pagan tree rituals surrounding the Yule Log and Yule Day when he prophesied:

"Learn not the way of the heathen (nations) and be not dismayed at the signs in the heavens..." "For the customs and ordinances of the people are false, empty and futile. It is but a tree which one cuts out of the forest [to make for him a god], the work of the hands of the

craftsman with an axe or other tool. "They deck it with silver and gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, so it will not fall apart or move. "Their idols are like pillars of turned work upright [and stationary] as a palm tree like a scarecrow in a cucumber field; they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk" (Jer. 10:2-5 Amp).

Yule Day, the December 25th. worship of the sun god's rebirth, is obviously the origin of the customs and ordinances surrounding the Christmas celebration. Christians who insist that Christmas is the Biblical celebration of Jesus' birthday, must face the fact that our pagan Anglo-Saxon ancestors were celebrating Yule Day on December 25th. long before they came in contact with Christianity".²⁷

Mistletoe

- Sacred plant of the druids.
- Poisonous, white berries used in potions.
- Kissing under mistletoe, bestows a blessing of fertility.

Traditionally, mistletoe has always formed part of the decorations of the Christmas season if only to provide the excuse for a kiss when hung in a prominent doorway. This tradition is decidedly pagan in origin. The Celts use of the plant included a much darker side and gave us the Christmas connection by using mistletoe as part of the Yule festival where it decorated the houses and strengthened all magical workings for the protection of the home. Mistletoe was also known as the golden bough and was held sacred by both the Celtic Druids and the Norse. Mistletoe was used by the Druid priesthood in a very special ceremony held five days after the New Moon following the winter solstice. The Druid priests would cut mistletoe from a holy oak tree with a golden sickle. The branches had to be caught before they touched the ground. Celts believed this parasitic plant held the soul of the host tree. The priest then divided the branches into many sprigs and distributed them to the people, who hung them over doorways as protection. The folklore and the magical powers of this plant blossomed over the centuries. The sprig placed in a baby's cradle would protect the child from faeries.

Many sources say that kissing under the mistletoe is a purely English custom. But additional folklore suggests another explanation that extends back into Norse mythology. It's the story of a loving overprotective mother. The Norse god Balder was the best loved of all the gods. His mother was Frigga goddess of love and beauty. She loved her son so much that she wanted to make sure no harm would come to him. So she went through the world securing promises from everything that sprang from the four elements of fire, water, air, and earth that they would not harm her beloved Balder. This winter festival eventually became absorbed into the Christian calendar along with the mistletoe customs and other pagan practices such as the burning of the Yule log and the gathering of holly.²⁸

The Wreath

The Wheel of the Year is often symbolized by the wreath. Its circle has no beginning and no end, illustrating that everything in its time comes back to its point of origin and travels onward over and over again. Scandinavians began the tradition of hanging the wreath at Yule, the beginning of their new year to commemorate new beginnings in the cycle of life. Today in rural Germany, a giant wreath, known as St. Catherine's Wheel is a holdover from another pagan custom which involved sympathetic magic to lure the sun's warmth back to the earth. A giant four-spoke wheel with an effigy of a person bound to it is lighted on fire and rolled down a hill. The effigy probably hearkens back

to a time when human sacrifices were made in plea to the sun. In some traditions Yule was a more important holiday for honoring the Sun God than Midsummer. In winter Mother Earth was cold and barren without the fertilizing power of Father Sun.

Holly (Holly King)

The Holly King and the Oak King are part of Celtic mythology, and they represent two sides to the Greenman, or Horned God. They battle twice a year, once at Yule and once at Midsummer (Litha) to see who would rule over the next half of the year. At Yule, the Oak King wins and at Litha, the Holly King is victorious. In other words, the Oak King rules over the lighter half of the year, and the Holly King over the darker half. The change from one to the other is a common theme for rituals at Yule, and also at Midsummer.

Another version of the Holly King and Oak King symbolism is that they do not directly switch places twice a year, but rather both live simultaneously. The Oak King is born at Yule, and his strength grows through the spring, and peaks at Beltane (Celtic May festival of bonfires) and then he weakens and dies at Samhain (Halloween). The Holly King lives a reverse existence, and is born at Midsummer waxing more powerful through the summer and fall until reaching his peak at Samhain. His influence then lessens until Beltane when it is his turn to pass away. At any given time they both exist but have varying levels of influence throughout the year. Either way each King represents different ideas. The time of the Oak King is for growth, development, healing, and new projects. The Holly King's time is for rest, reflection, and learning.²⁹

Santa Claus Characteristics (anagram –satan)

- Omniscient, knows who is naughty or nice.
- Omnipresent, brings presents to everyone, worldwide in one night.
- Omnipotent, Woden/Odin Head of the Scandinavian pantheon.

St. Nicholas made his first inroads into American popular culture towards the end of the 18th century. The name Santa Claus evolved from Nick's Dutch nickname, Sinter Klaas, a shortened form of Sint Nikolaas (Dutch for Saint Nicholas). In 1809, Washington Irving helped to popularize the Sinter Klaas stories when he referred to St. Nicholas as the patron saint of New York in his book, *The History of New York*. As his prominence grew, Sinter Klaas was described as everything from a "rascal" with a blue three-cornered hat, red waistcoat, and yellow stockings to a man wearing a broad-brimmed hat and a "huge pair of Flemish trunk hose."

Today's Santa is a folk figure with multicultural roots. He embodies characteristics of Saturn (Roman agricultural god), Cronos (Greek god, also known as Father Time), the Holly King (Celtic god of the dying year), Father Ice/Grandfather Frost (Russian winter god), Odin/Wotan (Scandinavian/Teutonic All-Father who rides the sky on an eight-legged horse), Frey (Norse fertility god), the Tomte (a Norse Land Spirit known for giving gifts to children at this time of year), and Thor (Norse sky god who rides the sky in a chariot drawn by goats). Julbock or Julbuk, the Yule goat, from Sweden and Norway, had his beginnings as carrier for the god Thor. Now he carries the Yule elf when he makes his rounds to deliver presents and receive his offering of porridge.

Santa Claus as we visualize him today sprang from the imagination of American political cartoonist Thomas Nast (yes- the man who gave the world the word "Nasty" also gave us Santa Claus!) Santa's British counterpart, Father Christmas, is a little bit

St. Nick and a little bit Father time. Italian children don't know Santa; they await gifts from Befana, a kindly witch. Dutch children leave shoes out and hope for a small gift from the Kriskind, an angel representing the Christ child (another name for Kriskind is 'Kris Kringle,' so referring to Santa by that name creates a sort of Jesus/elf-angel hybrid).³⁰

Christmas Stockings

- Ancient Hearth gods

There is plenty of debate about when American kids started hanging their stockings by the fire on Christmas Eve. Some give credit for the idea to Thomas Nast, who drew stockings on the mantelpiece in his 1886 illustrations for a George Webster story called "Santa Claus and His Works." But it was Clement Clark Moore's famous poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas" was written 64 years earlier than Nast's illustrations and contained these immortal words; "The stockings were hung by the chimney with care in hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there."

Like most American customs, the Christmas stocking probably came across the ocean with generations of immigrants. Perhaps some Catholics knew the legend of St. Nicholas. Perhaps some Dutch transformed their tradition of putting out clogs full of straw for Santa's reindeer. Italian children brought the idea of putting out their shoes for La Bufana, the good witch. And in classic American tradition, all these legends and customs mixed together.³¹

Santa's Elves and Gnomes

- Demonic imp-like creatures who are Santa's little helpers.

During Christmas elves show up everywhere especially in Santa's workshop, but who exactly are these creatures? An elf is a kind of fairy. Elves appear in Germanic folklore. These elves were pranksters. According to legend, they would cause diseases and give people bad dreams. In fact, one German word for nightmare is *alpdrucken* (ALF-droo-ken), which means "elf-pressure." In Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland, elves became associated with Christmas. In these countries, people say elves are small and mischievous. They wear red clothing and have long beards. The lads leave behind presents. Today in the United States, many people believe that elves work with Santa Claus in the North Pole. Here, the elves help make Christmas presents.³²

Elves find their origin in the Scandinavia house of gnomes. Since pagan times it was believed that these gnomes guarded homes against evil and were benevolent and helpful to good people. However they could be quite nasty to people who were rude to them or had been naughty. They are even depicted as trolls and cannibals. Thus for centuries they were both loved and loathed. In the mid eighteenth century Scandinavian writers such as Thiele, Toppius, Rydberg transformed the image of these gnomes to Christmas elves that were almost like mischievous fairies but were good at heart.

In keeping with the popularization of Christmas, they were depicted as true friends and helpers of Father Christmas or Santa Claus. Artists such as Hansen and Nyström painted Santa's elves in their present forms. At first it was believed that Santa and his elves lived at The North Pole but when it was found in 1925 that The North Pole had no reindeer and that a huge population of reindeers lived in Lapland and Finland

people started believing that since reindeer draw the sleigh of Santa Claus, he must be living in an area where there are large numbers of these animals available. It is also important to note that male reindeer shed their horns prior to the Winter Solstice. So Rudolf the red nose reindeer really must be a female along with all of Santa's other reindeer. It is also believed that there is a secret village with a secret passage, somewhere in Lapland, where Santa, his wife and his team of elves live. The secret of its location is known only to Father Christmas and the elves but still people believe that it is somewhere in Korvatunturi mountain in the Savukoski county of Lapland on the Finnish-Russian border. Some people think Santa employs six elves, while others think that he has nine elf assistants. Others think that there are as many as 13 elves living with Santa to help him. Elves are the children of Gryla and Leppaludi and are very clever. They help Santa to design toys and process requests of children that are sent to them through snail mail or emails. The popular Western names of the Christmas elves helping Santa Claus and their duties are as follows:

1. Alabaster Snowball - Administrator of the Naughty & Nice list.
2. Bushy Evergreen - Inventor of the magic toy-making machine.
3. Pepper Minstix - Guardian of the secret of where Father Christmas's village is located.
4. Shiny Upatree - The oldest friend of Santa and the cofounder of the secret village in Lapland.
5. Sugarplum Mary - Head of the Sweet Treats, she is also known as Mary Christmas. She is an assistant to Mrs. Claus and helps her in the kitchen.
6. Wunorse Openslae - Designer of Father Christmas's sleigh and responsible for its maintenance. He also looks after the reindeers and it is believed that his reindeers reach speeds faster than Christmas tree lights.

On the sixth of January or the last day of Christmas, it is believed that the elves light up their torches and come down from their secret village in the mountain to play in a secret field and celebrate the successful completion of their Christmas project.³³

Reindeer

- Horned animals representing the "horned-god" or "stag-god."
- 8 reindeer: 8 in gematria = new beginnings or the cycle of reincarnation.
- Only female reindeer have horns during the Christmas season.
- Santa's reindeer all have male names.

Santa's reindeer most probably evolved from Herne the Celtic Horned God. Eight reindeer pull Santa's sleigh representative of the eight solar sabbaths. In British lore the stag is one of the five oldest and wisest animals in the world embodying dignity, power and integrity. From their late autumn dramatic rutting displays stags represented strength, sexuality and fertility. Antlers in folk dance recreate the sacred male shaman figure called Lord of the Wild Hunt, Cernunnos, or Herne the Hunter, among others, is he who travels between worlds, escorting animal spirits to the afterlife and sparking wisdom and fertility in this world.³⁴

Summary

The historical facts outline the paganization of Christianity in the later third century. History describes a Messianic movement that left its Hebrew roots because Constantine and The Church of Rome made Christianity into the state religion of the empire. He attempted to blend the monotheistic worship system of Judaism and Christianity with the worship of the sun, the

eneration of Mithras, and other pagan forms of religion. It was during the late third century, under the influence of Constantine, that the church began the break from its Jewish roots. Even then it took several centuries of persecution to completely remove the Hebrew influence of the first, second and third century apostolically planted churches. History clearly reveals that Christian groups isolated from the influence of Constantine and the Church of Rome continued to practice the seventh day Sabbath, Feasts and circumcision and even today there is remnant church that continues these practices.

This leaves each of us with an unexpected question, *“Was it really God's will for the church to break with its Hebrew roots?”* If Jesus and the apostles established and maintained the church in biblical Judaism celebrations, we must ask, *“have we lost something God intended for us to have?”*

These Christianized traditions bear no correlation to scripture, Messianic Judaism and cannot be found in Hebrew history. If we choose to ignore the pagan roots of these celebrations we risk deceiving ourselves into thinking we are not practicing them because our main interest is only the birth of the Messiah and winning souls to Jesus Christ. But the Word of God says;

“beware that you are not ensnared to follow them [the heathen], after they are destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How do these nations serve their gods, that I also may do likewise?’ You shall not behave thus toward the Lord your God, for every abominable act which the Lord hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it.”³⁵

This is the reasoning that the Church of Rome used to start all of this with. If what you have read is true, the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ should be during Tabernacles and not Christmas. This is not rocket science nor is it complicated. The complication is found in our emotional attachment to these “sacred cows and hallmark holidays.” What will I do if there is no Christmas? How do we explain it to the children or our family? People will think we are in a cult! I suggest trying the biblical Sabbaths and Feasts in Lev. 23. How about the Hanukkah celebration a story of deliverance from spiritual oppression with eight days of family togetherness, why not....Jesus celebrated it in Jerusalem (Jn. 10)? The celebration of Esther (Purim) based on a biblical story? To do this you have to put feelings aside and choose obedience over the acceptability of men.

Elijah said; *“How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.”*³⁶

Joshua said; *“but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”*³⁷

It is decision time; do I leave at the very best.....questionable practices steeped in paganism for truth supported by scripture, Hebrew history and apostolic examples? Can I in clear consciences as a believer continue to mix the cups of demons and The Lord together? What action will I take, now that I know the real origins of these traditions?

Jesus said; *“But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?”*³⁸

I believe the primary reason why the “Church” has lost the authority to tell the biblical stories of Jesus Christ accurately is because the church has co-opted for sacred cows and the rudiments and traditions of men, instead of the “biblical Sabbaths and feasts of the scripture. It is the little foxes of compromise that ruin the vine and bring barrenness to the vineyard of truth. Will you be barren or fruitful?

“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.”³⁹



Blessings Pastor Bob Hill

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¹ Col. 2:8 kjv

² Lev. 23

³ Nicea Council 325 A.D.

⁴ 1 Cor 10:20-21 AMP

⁵ Chuck Pierce Redeeming and Reversing the Power of Loss, www.glory-of-zion.org

⁶ Robert Heidler The Messianic Church, an unfinished manuscript and the finished manuscript www.glory-of-zion.org

⁷ Isa 40:3-5 KJV

⁸ 1 Cor 10:20-21 AMP

⁹ Catholic Encyclopedia www.newadvent.org/cathen/05504c.htm (6-20-07)

¹⁰ The History Channel documentary AAE-71925

¹¹ “The Catholic Mirror The Protestant world” (Sept. 23, 1893).

¹² 1 Cor 10:18-22 KJV

¹³ The Companion Bible, 1974, Appendix 179, p. 200

¹⁴ Col 2:8

¹⁵ Deut. 12:30-32 NAS

¹⁶ The Origin Of American Christmas Myth And Customs B. K. Swartz, Jr

www.Bsu.Edu/Web/01bkswartz/Xmaspub.Html, The History Channel Documentary AAE-71925.

¹⁷ “Christmas tree: Pointing towards heaven,” at: <http://www.netnitco.net/users/legend01/xmastree.htm>

¹⁸ O Tannenbaum - o Christmas tree <http://www.serve.com/sheagermusa/xmastree.htm>

¹⁹ “What is a tree?” at: <http://www.serve.com/damien/personal/chain/paper2.html>

²⁰ Jeremiah 10:1-4kjv

²¹ The Encyclopedia of Religion (1987 edition, article “Christmas):

²² www.altreligion.about.com/library/weekly/aa122005a.htm

²³ www.wicca.com/celtic/akasha/yule.htm (6-20-07)

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Norm Franz The Mystery of Christmas www.ascensionet.org

²⁸ www.paganwiccan.about.com/cs/aboutyule/a/paganxmas.htm

²⁹ www.paganwiccan.about.com/cs/aboutyule/a/paganxmas.htm and B. Hill personal research.

³⁰ www.altreligion.about.com/library/weekly/aa122005a.htm (6-20-07)

³¹ Rebecca Roberts, The History of the Christmas Stocking, www.plumpstocking.com

³² National Geographic News December 15, 2003 ,

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/kids/2003/12/elves.html>

³³ Christmas World <http://www.worldofchristmas.net/santa-claus/christmas-elves.html>

³⁴ <http://www.worldofchristmas.net/santa-claus/christmas-elves.html>

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- ³⁵ Deut. 12:30-32 NAS
 - ³⁶ 1 Kings 18:21 kjv
 - ³⁷ Josh 24:15-16 kjv
 - ³⁸ Luke 6:46 NKJV
 - ³⁹ Col 2:8 KJV

UNWRAPPING CHRISTMAS