

## Facts About Christmas Celebrations

'Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers for what fellowship has righteousness with iniquity? What fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony can there be between the purity of Jesus and the devil? What has a believer in common with an unbeliever? What agreement can there be between a temple of God and idols? We are the temple of the living God. The Lord God said, "I will dwell among them and will walk among them. I will be their God and they will be My people, so come out from among the unbelievers and separate yourselves from them and do not touch any unclean thing then I will receive you. I will be to you a Father. You will be to Me sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty' (2 Corinthians 6:14 to18).

This Bible study is about the way Christians combine Christianity with ancient paganism. The general attitude is, it is okay to do this, yet we can read in the above verses God strongly forbids it. 'Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing! Go out from the midst of Babylon, cleanse yourselves and be clean, you who bear the vessels of the Lord' (Isaiah 52:11).

Christmas is as pagan as any celebration can be, and we as Christians need to stop merging Christmas with Christianity. There is nothing Christian about Christmas. Parents who tell their children 'Santa' is real are in reality, blatantly lying to innocent, impressionable children and that is sin. Parents need to tell their children honestly, they, other family members or friends are the ones giving the gifts. The modern Christmas is a mixture of Babylonianism, paganism, Hellenism, idolatry and ancient Egyptian rituals, plus a few more modern traditions and extreme materialism. Genuine Christians should be horrified at the thought, for all their lives they have been 'touching the unclean things'. There is a way we can enjoy the festivities of the season, such as the holidays, gifts and family time, without resorting to the paganism of it.

Looking back at the history of Christmas we can see it is a complete corruption of the holy feast of Hanukkah, which is the Hebrew word for 'dedication'. Hanukkah is also called The Festival of Lights and the Feast of Dedication and is held for eight days during the month of December, varying the days from year to year according to the lunar calendar given to the Jewish people by the Lord, not the solar calendar originally written by Caesar. Jesus celebrated the holy festival of Hanukkah. 'It was the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter and Jesus was walking in the Temple, in Solomon's porch' (John 10:22 & 23). Jesus never, ever celebrated any pagan holiday and as Christians, neither should we. Hanukkah is an integral part of the Jewish holidays celebrated annually. It is the time of the re-dedication of the Second Temple after the Greeks defiled it. Hanukkah is about remembering the Jews who showed incredible faithfulness to God and immense courage and many were killed for their efforts. They refused to give in and go against God's Word in the face of a stronger enemy. They refused to compromise their faith. With God's help, the Jewish people won a resounding victory and Hanukkah is the annual memorial service for the fallen Jewish martyrs and praise for God's victory over strong pagan enemies. The Jewish people who fought hard for Israel were the ones who secured the Land of Israel so our Saviour Jesus could be born in a land made ready for Him. How sad it is for Christians to forget those who died preparing the holy land for our Saviour to come, in favour of a pagan festival.

The events behind Hanukkah began with Alexander the Great and his conquest of the known world about 400 BC. Alexander had one goal and that was to conquer the world. He introduced the world to everything Greek – and pagan. Greek language, thoughts, customs, philosophies, theatres, chariot races, gymnasiums, stadiums, education, cooking and Greek idolatry. The holy Land of Israel was swept up in this paganism. Alexander died in 323 BC but the Greek culture lived on and continued to spread its Hellenistic views into the minds of the populations of the conquered lands. After Alexander's death, the Greek empire was split into four parts ruled by Alexander's four top generals. One of the generals took control of the area later called Syria. Several years later a new leader emerged named Antiochus who called himself Epiphanes, which means 'god manifest'. He idolised himself stating he was a divine god.

In 167 BC. Antiochus ordered Jerusalem to be destroyed because the Jews did not worship him as their god. Houses were burned to the ground, the city walls were broken down, forty thousand innocent Jewish people were murdered and another forty thousand were sold into slavery. His soldiers destroyed the Temple, stripping it of everything including golden vessels, treasures, the altar of incense, the Menorah and the table made of acacia wood overlaid with gold (Exodus 25:23 & 24). Antiochus erected an idol of Zeus on the holy altar. On the supposed birthday of their pagan god Zeus, which is the 25th December, he sacrificed a pig on the holy altar then he sprinkled pig's blood around the Holy of Holies and poured its broth over the Scriptures written in scrolls, which he cut to pieces and burned. The sanctuary and the Holy of Holies were desecrated

and defiled. The holy Temple was converted to a shrine for Zeus and only pigs were allowed to be sacrificed there. Christians celebrate Christmas on Zeus' so-called birthday and they cannot get more pagan than that.

The wicked goal of Antiochus was to eradicate every trace of Judaism. He forbade circumcision, observing the Shabbat, kosher diets, and the study of the Torah and Tenach (the Old Testament). Any Jewish person who continued to stand firm and live according to the Scriptures was murdered. Jewish history records many courageous acts of faithful devotion, living according to their covenant with God. Up in the mountains, hiding with his sons was a man named Mattathias. He was a Godly man, a Levi from the priestly line of Aaron. He formed a small army of freedom fighters then fell ill, passing his leadership to his son Judah. Mattathias died but his freedom fighters continued and became known as Maccabees, which means 'hammer'. Judah knew the Scriptures and knew the great victories wrought by the Jews with the help of the Lord and he trusted the Lord to help them win this war. Judah told the freedom fighters, "It is easy for many to be overcome by a few. In the sight of heaven there is no difference between deliverance by many or by few, for victory in war does not depend on the size of the army but on strength that comes from heaven. With great presumption and lawlessness they have come against us to destroy us, our wives and children and to despoil us. We are fighting for our lives and our Torah Laws. God Himself will crush them before us so do not be afraid of them."

The Maccabees knew they were outnumbered but they trusted God and knew He was in control. In 164 BC, three years after Antiochus destroyed the Temple, these courageous Jewish men won an astonishing victory against the Greeks. They seized Jerusalem, cleansed the Temple and established an independent Judea, which remained independent until conquered by the Romans. In an incredible victory the Lord overthrew a massive army before the small group of faithful freedom fighters. No one gave the small band of rebels the slightest chance of winning. It was clearly a miracle from heaven. To celebrate this great victory the Maccabees established the Feast of Hanukkah – the Feast of Dedication, referring to the re-dedication of the Temple, which was restored. The defiled altar was demolished and rebuilt. The altar of incense and the table were cleansed and brought back to the Temple. They put the shewbread on the table, hung new curtains and prepared the House of God for His presence. Everything was ready except the pure olive oil for the Menorah. There was only enough oil to burn the lamp for one day but it would take eight days to prepare more pure oil. By faith, the Menorah was lit and miraculously burned for eight days until the new oil was ready. This is the true celebration Christians should observe, not the pagan one. The War of the Maccabees was over 2,000 years ago, but just as we remember fallen soldiers of the Western Wars, so too we should remember the millions of Jewish people who have died defending their land where our Saviour was born and where He will return to rule.

Christmas was celebrated in Rome by 336 AD, about twenty-four years after Constantine made Christianity the official state religion. The Winter Solstice and the pagan festival Saturnalia (December 17th), which was the Roman feasting week occurred at the same time. This was a time of merrymaking, dancing, feasting and the exchanging of gifts. The ancient Roman New Year's Day pagan festival was held on January 1st. We still celebrate New Year's Day because it has carried over. To appease the Greeks within the Roman Empire, they allowed the birthday of Zeus, the 25th December to be celebrated a few days prior to their New Year. The Christians of the day merged the paganism with the Holy Truth of the Word of God, thus defiling the early church. That is quite probably one of the reasons the church died off for so many centuries during the 'Dark Ages'. What is even worse, the 25th December is also the celebrated birth date of the ancient Persian mystery god Mithra – known as the 'sun of righteousness'. Christmas, with its feasting, gifts and New Year's Day, are both ancient pagan festivals still observed by the modern world, and have nothing to do with Christianity in any way. Christmas and New Year are both utterly pagan.

In Roman Latin, the word 'Christus' was a mistranslation of the Hebrew word 'Messiah' or the 'Anointed One of God', and Christus was a derogatory term for the believers of the Jewish Messiah. The Latin word 'massa' means 'to form together into a mass' or 'bring together in masses'. The Romans put the two words together and they came up with Christus Massa; literally 'these silly believers in the Jewish Messiah all massing together'. The word 'Christian' was the Greek version of the same derogatory term first used in Antioch (Acts 11:26) the place named after Antiochus – the man who defiled the Temple! Christmas back in the early days had nothing whatsoever to do with glorifying the birth of our Lord, but on the contrary – it was to ridicule believers in the Messiah who regularly met together. The English word Christmas, adopted from the Latin words Christus Massa, was spelt this way about 1488, was changed to Cristesmasse, then Christ-tide, then to the word Christmas about 1656. The ancient Greeks spelt it as Xmas, and the word for 'Christian' was spelt as the equivalent of Xtian. The term 'Christ' was spelt Xt.

The 'Madonna and child' has nothing to do with Mary and Jesus. It was adopted from the Babylonian religion mentioned in Bible where they worshipped the 'queen of heaven' (Jeremiah 44:17 to 44:25), and that brought great curses onto those who practiced it. The worship of the 'queen of heaven' and her son as the 'Madonna and child' was considered such an evil practice by the Lord, it was the reason the exile of the children of Israel to Babylon under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar took place (Jeremiah 44:30). Once in Babylon the children of Israel repented of their sin of idolatry (Daniel 9:1 to 27), they returned to Israel after seventy years then built the second Temple (Books of Ezra and Nehemiah). After that time the Jews were cleared of their sin but after the early Christian church had distanced itself from their Jewish roots, the worship of Mary was set up in 381 AD. There is no mention of worshipping Mary until then and there is no worship of Mary in the Bible. This actually dates back to the days of Babylon and the Tower of Babel. It was Babylon who started heathen worship which became known as Babylonianism and is still practiced today. When Damascus became the head of the Babylonian cult which worshipped the 'queen of heaven' and her son (the Madonna and child), the Catholic Church thought it would be politically expedient to give them a parallel figure to bring into their new officially imposed worship. That was when Mary was elevated to divine status. The image of mother and child had been an object of primary worship from Babylon for centuries before the birth of our Lord Jesus our Messiah. The Trinity scene was a take of the Madonna and child, plus with Joseph added to go along with the new Christian beliefs. The early lukewarm Christians added paganism to their religion, thus defiling it further.

The Christmas tree was also adopted from sinister beginnings. The worship of decorated evergreen trees was the custom of ancient Egyptians and Europeans as a symbol of eternal life. An evergreen tree, usually the Yule tree was put into the entrance of homes and decorated with bees wax candles, apples and wafers on the 24th December to 'scare away the devil'. Even after converting to Christianity, the Europeans did not do away with their worship of the evergreen Yule tree, they simply added the ancient Germanic and Celtic rites to their new religion. The Celtic Germans renamed their Yule tree the 'Paradise tree', in line with their new religion, supposedly to depict Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The Germanic Paradise tree has given way to the modern Christmas tree. It was brought to England by the German Prince Albert who married the deeply religious British Queen Victoria – so merging the ancient pagan symbol with the so-called Christian Christmas as recently as the 19th century. The Christmas tree was taken to America by the original Britons who first arrived in America as missionaries then later by German travellers. So the Christmas tree is another ancient pagan custom still observed by the modern world. Another adoption of a pagan symbol is the star atop the Christmas tree and other decorations. One pagan symbol that has largely died out is the Christmas pyramid. It was made of wood with shelves to hold the small pagan idols. The pyramid was decorated with a star on top (like Christmas trees are today) and surrounded with candles and evergreen leaves. The Christians merged the ancient Egyptian pyramid and an evergreen tree with their 'new religion'. Even today, there is still the Yule log (symbolising the tree), Yule cakes (symbolising the wafers) and blinking lights (symbolising candles).

In 1645 the British Parliament ordered Christmas Day be a day of fasting not feasting, and in 1648, Christmas was abolished altogether. In 1660, King Charles II revived Christmas and it slowly became the celebration we know today. There are some modern traditions attached to Christmas that have nothing to do with any ancient ritual. The Christmas card began in the Middle Ages as an expression of goodwill. Wood engravers would produce prints with religious themes by carving their etching into wood then quickly painting it and pressing it onto paper. They were very expensive – selling for a shilling (10c) each! This practice began in England by publisher Sir Henry Cole and has been followed by all English-speaking countries, and is growing in many others.

The Christmas turkey began as a new tradition when the first six turkeys arrived in England from Mexico in 1526. Yorkshireman William Strickland bought the six turkeys from an American Indian trader and sold the turkeys in Bristol for two pence each. British King Edward VII made eating turkey at Christmas time, popular. Christmas crackers were developed in 1840 by an English confectioner, Tom Smith. They began as individually wrapped sweets like Tom had seen in Paris, then he added a love motto. A few years later, watching a log crackling on a fire, he had the idea of adding a 'crack'. They were called Cosaques. Later he added tiny metal toys or charms. Francis of Assisi started a tradition of displaying a doll in a crib, the beginning of the nativity scene.

The original Santa Claus was a fourth century bishop from Turkey named Saint Nicholas who was known for his acts of kindness towards children. He became very popular in medieval Holland where he was known as Sinterklaas when they celebrated feasting. Around 1870 the Americans changed the name to Santa Claus. The English character of Father Christmas, a jolly, laughing old man who provided the Christmas feast,

merged alongside Santa. He was depicted as tall and thin, and who wore green and brown. In 1890 Santa's appearance changed to the red and white clothed, portly old gent by Swedish artists Jenny Nystrom, who drew a series of Christmas cards, and Haddon Sundblom who adopted the new image for Coca-Cola's advertising campaign. Then Santa was given a herd of flying reindeer. An American poet Clement Moore, had the idea of Santa dropping down chimneys. Christmas stockings were supposed to be Santa's boots full of toys for children. The English plum pudding began as plum porridge. It was a soft sweet mixture enriched with nuts and various dried fruits, and over time it became thicker. The fairy as an ornament on a Christmas tree started as a 'baby Jesus' and in Europe became a shining angel. Eventually the angel reverted back to a female fairy, complete with dress and wand. Christmas carols became popular around the 1400's. The general population wanted something less severe than the old Latin refrains. In 1822 the first modern collection of Christmas carols was published to be sung outdoors – not in church. Towards 1900 when church music writers wanted to recover the old carols, they looked to ancient texts and the tradition of singing Christmas carols outdoors was established. Churches began singing Christmas carols only about the 1950's.

We can see by all this, Christmas is not in the least Christian, nor is it Scriptural. To appease their uncertainty regarding the festive season, Christians have adopted the attitude, we celebrate the birth of Jesus, but the trouble with that is, He was not born in December. The Scriptures we have regarding the birth of Jesus shows us He was born around the time of the Day of Atonement – about September. That date fits in with why Jesus came to earth – to atone for our sins. The Puritans and the Armenian church never celebrated Christmas due to its paganism. Christmas and New Year were accepted as a public holiday in the USA about 1870. The date chosen by Constantine to celebrate Jesus' birth was not based on good historical or Scriptural evidence. It was based on appeasing the weakened church and unbelieving pagans.

There is no need to feel uncomfortable with celebrating this holiday season as a Christian, as long as we do not worship the tree or be involved in any of the pagan rituals. Giving gifts, resting, feasting with family, sending notes, letters and cards of goodwill and peace, and having a holiday is all good, because if we read the book of Esther, we can see the Jews celebrated Purim by feasting, giving gifts, enjoying a holiday and enjoying a good rest. It was a time filled with gladness and they wrote letters of greeting one to another. Their leader spoke peace to his people (Esther 9:17 to 22; 10:3). Although Purim is during February, the concept is similar. It is a time of family gathering and rest. If people want to celebrate in December, they should be celebrating Hanukkah. If they want to celebrate the birth of our Messiah, they should be celebrating according to the Day of Atonement in the Jewish calendar. Although Jesus our Messiah was not born in December, we can still celebrate His first coming to earth as a baby, while we wait for His second coming to earth as our King. Jesus said we are to remember Him until He comes again (Luke 22:17 to 20). Many Christians no longer celebrate Christmas but because our Gregorian calendar gives people a holiday in December and January, many Christians observe Hanukkah by gathering family together, feasting, resting, giving gifts and worshipping the Lord, without Santa, trees, candles, blinking lights, decorations, plastic angels, Madonna and child or anything pagan. May you have a very blessed and restful time this festive season with family and other loved ones. 'Purge out the old yeast (ancient sin) so you may be a new lump (made righteous) as you are unleavened (purified). Jesus our Passover has been sacrificed in our place, therefore let us keep the feast, not with old yeast (sin) nor with the yeast (sins) of malice and wickedness but with the unleavened (righteous) bread of sincerity and truth' (1 Corinthians 5:7 & 8).

Amen and God bless you.

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