

Preface

Considered by many retailers to be the most important holiday of the year, Christmas is often bemoaned as having become too commercialized. Many, in our culture, max-out their credit cards in a flurry of buying for those whom they feel the need to impress, appease, or to whom they feel a sense of obligation. The cry is often that we need to pause for a moment in the midst of the bedlam, and return to the old-fashioned traditions, which were about family and enjoying time together. Perhaps you can relate to these feelings.

However, we must pause for just a moment longer and consider whether we really know what this season is all about. Many who profess to be Christians raise the cry, “Jesus is the reason for the season,” or “put Christ back into Christmas,” which I’m sure we’ve all heard at one time or another, or maybe even voiced. Is He really the reason? Was Christ ever a part of the celebration, or, have we simply lost sight of where this season of celebration began? Perhaps we might even acknowledge that some pagan traditions have had an influence, but, like so many today, are we willing to overlook a little paganism – after all, we don’t celebrate that, do we?

If we call ourselves Christians, then we must be prepared to measure all that we do according to the standard of God’s Word. The fact that the majority of Christians are participating in the celebrations of this season does not automatically render them acceptable to God. God’s standards do not vary – if something was Biblically wrong a thousand years ago, then it is still wrong today. To put it another way, a long history of involvement in a practice may well make it a tradition, but that does nothing to sanctify it before God. The question that we must ask ourselves is this: Am I willing to change my conduct in order to be obedient to the teachings of the Word of God? If not, then I must ask myself whether I have been born-again by the Spirit of God. That is not an unbiblical exercise, for Paul issued the command: “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith ...” (2 Corinthians 13:5).

The challenge that I humbly lay before you, the reader, is this: read on with a mind prepared to accept what is supported by the Word of God. God’s heart-desire for us is that we would live according to His calling; “... put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). Let us strive to live in obedience to God’s Word, for then we will exemplify the righteousness of walking with the Spirit of God (Romans 8:4), and, thereby, we will demonstrate our love for the Lord Jesus Christ, Who redeemed us to Himself (John 14:15). God bless you to that end!

All Scriptures are taken from the King James Version.

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Introduction

Many will acknowledge that the celebration of Christmas is without Biblical authority. Nowhere in Scripture will you find anything that would indicate that we are to celebrate the birth of Jesus, which many readily proclaim to be the reason for the season. As a matter of interest, the *Encyclopedia Judaica* states that “the celebration of birthdays is unknown in traditional Jewish ritual.”¹ However, on the other hand, the *Jewish Encyclopedia* states that for “the second or third birthday of a child whose coming into the world was very much desired by his parents was usually made the occasion of a feast, because the child was then weaned, and had consequently passed the dangerous and uncertain stage of infancy.”² In Genesis we read of Abraham making a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned, which, accordingly, could have been held on his birthday (21:8). However, we find no Biblical record of anyone celebrating their birthdays on a regular basis; the only birthday celebrations mentioned in Scripture are for two godless kings: Pharaoh (Genesis 40:20) and Herod (Mark 6:21). It is clear that everyone marked the passage of the years, but there is no evidence that the saints of God made celebrations for the annual occasion. From this we could conclude that it was very unlikely that Joseph and Mary held birthday parties for Jesus as He was growing up, but it is equally clear that they marked the passage of time in His life (Luke 2:42). You might wonder why I have included this information, but, as incredible as it might seem, I have faced the serious argument that, since Joseph and Mary probably celebrated Jesus’ birthday as He was growing up, we should, therefore, celebrate His birth on December 25! Clearly, this is based on nothing more than wild, subjective speculation, and a determination to hold onto a tradition that has been deemed to be important.

Nevertheless, this does not make remembering Christ’s birth wrong, but, in a world that is rife with rationalism, we must be very careful as to how we remember His birth. We have the narration of the events surrounding His birth in the Scriptures (Matthew 1-2; Luke 2), but the date of His birth is carefully excluded. Therefore, we can freely celebrate His coming to earth, for He left the splendor of heaven for the express purpose of purchasing our redemption from sin – what could be a better reason for celebration! However, our reflection on the sacrifice that He made just coming to earth should not be considered a “birthday” celebration (since we do not know the date), but rather, simply heartfelt gratitude that He was willing to leave heaven’s glory to become Immanuel, “God with us.” Probably the best way to celebrate His birth is to live in obedience to the Scriptures, His Word; Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Unfortunately, Christians today seem determined to mix their “remembering Jesus’ birth” with the hugely popular festivities of the world; even if it is to show that we celebrate His birth in a different manner than the rest of society (yes, I’ve heard that excuse as well). Objectively, we must recognize that rationalism has led to many “reasons” for keeping the tradition with which we have all become familiar. This is a matter for great concern, as we will discover.

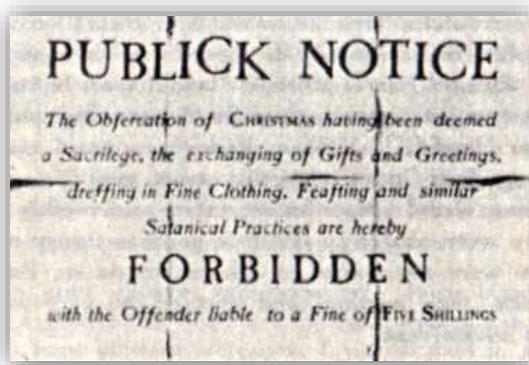
Something we may not be aware of is that it was the pagan origins of this December festival season that led men like Martin Luther and John Calvin to abhor the celebrations, why the Puritans refused to even acknowledge them, and the reason that the holiday was, at one time, outlawed altogether in Boston.³ It seems that the majority of today’s Christians blindly claim this season as

¹ *Encyclopedia Judaica*, “birthday.”

² <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3322-birthday>

³ <https://www.msu.edu/user/rohdemar/earth/sabbats/yule.html>

being rightfully theirs, ignorant (whether deliberately or naively) of the fact that many Christians in by-gone days have condemned it because it was pagan.



Ever since Adam chose to violate God's commandment, mankind's propensity to sin has left no one out; we sin because that is who we are – we are born sinners, children of Adam. However, as Christians, those who have been truly born-again by the Spirit of God, we continually face an enemy who goes out of his way to snare us; there is nothing that gives Satan more torment than someone who is prepared to walk in obedience to the Lord's commands. Before we consider anything about this season of celebration, we must reflect on what God would have of us; this will provide a foundation upon which we can then build a Biblical

understanding of this subject.

What we face today (specifically regarding the season in question) is nothing new; Moses addressed the children of Israel about a similar matter. "When the LORD thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, whither thou goest to possess them, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their land; Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deuteronomy 12:29-31). Moses proclaimed two things that the Lord wanted Israel to understand: 1) do not go after the gods of the inhabitants of the land, and 2) give diligence to do the Lord's commands without variance. It was common at this time for the conquering nations to inquire as to how the defeated peoples served their gods; in their superstition, they were concerned that the gods, with which they were unfamiliar, would require particular rituals in order to be appeased. However, God's instruction through Moses was that this pagan tradition was not to be followed; Israel was simply to enter the land, defeat the inhabitants, and do what the Lord had commanded. This instruction is timeless, and is as applicable to us today as it was to Israel of old. To the Philippians Paul said, "Do all things without murmurings or disputing" (Philippians 2:14); the context of this establishes that we are to walk in obedience to God's commands without complaining and without questioning what He asks of us. If we hold obedience to God's commands as our focus, then the paganism around us will not be a distraction.

As we follow the history of Israel forward, we find this recorded of them at the time that the Lord was about to use the Assyrians to remove their northern tribes: "... the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God ... and had feared other gods, and walked in the statutes of the heathen And the children of Israel did secretly *those* things that *were* not right against the LORD their God, and they built them high places [a cultic platform – used in idol worship] in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city. And they set them up images [monuments] and groves [the word is *asherah* – the name of a Canaanite goddess] in every high hill, and under every green tree [where they carried out pagan rituals]: And there they burnt incense

in all the high places, as *did* the heathen whom the LORD carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger: For they served idols, whereof the LORD had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing” (2 Kings 17:7-12).⁴ Despite Moses’ admonition to avoid the gods of the heathen, the Israelites embraced them. Although they were supposed to remove the heathen from the land, that isn’t what took place: they conquered some, made treaties with others, and lived among the rest. Temptation to depart from the Lord was close at hand, and, by allowing their eyes to turn away from the Lord and His commands, they fell prey to paganism.

Some year later, by the time of Jeremiah, not much had changed; we’ve seen that Israel did not heed the words of Moses, and so the problems that Jeremiah faced were nothing new. Consider the words of the Lord through this prophet: “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 [taken as omens of favor or doom; astrology]; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people *are* vain [vanity, literally a vapor or breath] ...” (Jeremiah 10:1-3).⁵ The overarching principle that the Lord wanted Israel (and wants us) to learn is this: do not take on the life-style of the heathen! What is unmistakable in this is God’s call to separate from heathen practices! This is a “thus saith the Lord,” which we must heed for our spiritual wellbeing; this word is just as certain for us today – **we are not to learn the way of the heathen!** Paul reiterated this principle to the Corinthians: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers ... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you ...” (2 Corinthians 6:14, 17). However, when viewed through the eyes of compromise, the *unclean* can often appear to be clean and pure. As Eve considered the forbidden fruit, after listening to the smooth words of the devil, she saw something that was good for food, it was beautiful to look upon, and it would make the partaker wise (Genesis 3:6); the *unclean* (forbidden) took on the aura of all that was good. Through the years, the world (with all of its uncleanness) has steadily crept into the camp of Christianity (not unlike the experiences of Israel), so that, today, there often remains little difference between the two.

For those who are at all concerned about living in accordance with God’s Word (which must be every child of God), even a hint of pagan infiltration should be sufficient to make us step away. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Notice the conditional promise that the Lord extends: if we separate from the unclean, then He will receive us; do not miss the alternate - if we do not separate, then He will not receive us. Today’s Christians are like Israel of old; they have “followed ... the gods of the people that *were* round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger” (Judges 2:12). This is why it is good for us to examine the history of commonly accepted practices in order to determine if there is a relationship with paganism – if there is an element of uncleanness of which we might not be aware, at first glance. If there is, then God’s very clear message is that we must separate from them. Christmas, the tradition under

⁴ Strong’s Online; BDB.

⁵ Ibid.

scrutiny here, has been claimed by Christians as being their celebration (hence we hear, “Jesus is the reason for the season”), yet we must take heed lest we, too, become guilty of practicing paganism.

The Date

Oddly enough, it seems to be fairly widely acknowledged that Jesus’ birth did not take place on December 25, yet, for some reason, this does not seem to cause Christians to pause and wonder about the rest of the celebration. Rather, it seems to be tucked away as so much irrelevant information, another piece of trivia that really doesn’t change anything – let the festivities continue!

Even a superficial inquiry into the significance of December 25 will reveal that its roots are really quite ancient. Most pagan practices are fraught with superstition, and, as we trace the historical importance of this date, it is no exception. As the ancient pagans would observe the sun sinking lower and lower in the sky as the year approached the winter solstice, they instituted a celebration to encourage the sun-god to rise again, and bring them warmth and renewed life in the world around them. Were they such dullards that they did not recognize the passing of the seasons? In all likelihood, in their rejection of the God of creation, it simply became a custom to use this as an excuse for a time of drunkenness, gluttony and unbridled revelry. Whatever the rationale for the festivities, the annual event soon became an entrenched tradition, and the reason for the season was established long before Jesus came to earth.



Emperor Aurelian

Within the Roman world, December 25 was noted as the date for the “(Re) birth of *Sol Invictus*” (which means “unconquered sun”), a state-supported god.⁶ The celebrations that took place in honor of this sun-god were commemorated from their inception by the Emperor Aurelian in AD 274 through to about AD 391; however, they did not originate in Rome. Interestingly, it was after a conquest in the East that Aurelian introduced the worship of the sun, the *Sol*, into Roman life. To the East is the land of Persia, and the city of Babylon, which is symbolic of evil; as we will see, the influence of this ancient civilization on these celebrations was significant.

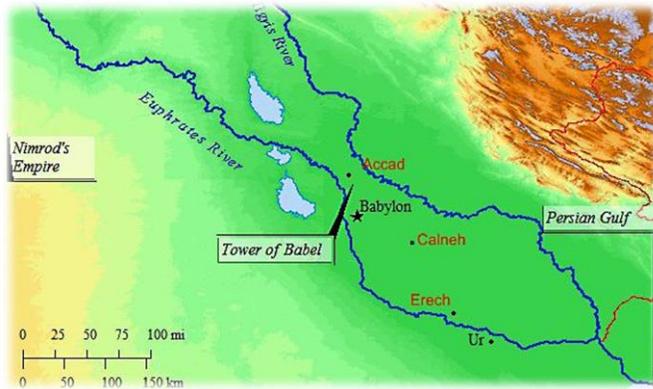
It is generally accepted that ancient Babylon originated through the efforts of Nimrod (whose name means *rebellion* or *the valiant*⁷), who “began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before [against] the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before [against] the LORD” (Genesis 10:8-10).⁸ The Hebrew word translated as *mighty one* also includes the concept of one who magnifies himself, a tyrant.⁹ Nimrod became powerful as a successful hunter and provider for all who followed him. It seems evident that Nimrod earned his name from those about him – he was mighty before them, but he was also in rebellion against the Lord. He ensured that his people looked to him for guidance, provisions, and protection, rather than to Jehovah; hence, he became the ruler of a kingdom: “And the beginning of his kingdom was

⁶Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sol_Invictus

⁷ Strong’s Online.

⁸ Kiel & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament.

⁹ BDB.



Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar” (Genesis 10:10). Clearly, Nimrod was a leader who accomplished much, and his influence was significant.

Many historians identify Nimrod as one who began his practices as an alternative to walking in the ways of the true God; if he was not walking with God, then he must have been in step with Satan – there are no other options available (Jesus made that

abundantly clear – Luke 11:23). What we see, as the mythology of Nimrod evolved, is that Satan, the great perpetuator of lies and rebellion (Jesus called him the father of lies – John 8:44), is also the good counterfeiter. It is fascinating to read of ungodly historians who point out the similarities between the heathen religious systems and the truths of God, and then leap to the conclusion that the truth (which they refer to as the Judeo-Christian religion) has been derived from the error of pagan mythology. They use this as justification to equate the Word of God with the pagan literature of man’s history, thereby denouncing God’s truth as being no more valid than the mythological musings of pagans. Satan has used this misconstrued perception of history to blind the eyes of many. It is true that many of today’s Christian religious practices have been derived from paganism, but such failure must never be confused with the truth that God has given us. Consequently, it is important to give consideration to some of the common practices that take place within Christian circles to determine their integrity in the light of God’s Word.

Babylon is viewed as being the progenitor of many of the pagan religious systems around the world: Egypt, Greece, Phoenicia, and Rome all seem to have received a form of the religion that sprang up within Babylon.¹⁰ As already indicated, the beginnings of the Babylonian traditions are generally agreed to have originated with Nimrod. We first read of Nimrod, the great-grandson of Noah, in Genesis 10:8-10, “And Cush begat Nimrod ...”; the family line is: Noah → Ham → Cush → Nimrod; although it seems that Nimrod was a later son of Cush, it is very likely that Noah would have still been living, for he lived for 350 years after the flood. The Jewish historian, Josephus, attributes Nimrod with establishing the first dictatorial form of government, setting himself up as the provider (all the people under Nimrod’s control looked to him rather than to God), and he views the construction of the tower of Babel as an open rebellion against the Lord.¹¹ Nimrod’s wife, Semiramis, was the first deified queen of Babylon, and in the descendant religious systems was alternately known as Diana (Roman), Aphrodite (Greek), Astarte (Greek, in Jewish areas), Rhea (Greek), Isis (Egypt) and Venus (Latin).¹² Shortly after conquering the land of Canaan (Judges 10:6), we read of Israel going after Ashtaroth (a plural form of Ashtoreth, which is a variation of the name of the Greek goddess, Astarte, and the Phoenician goddess, Asherah – both known as the queen of heaven);¹³ Solomon, in his later years of apostasy, pursued the worship of Ashtoreth (1 Kings 11:5). Jeremiah tried to alert the Israelites to the idolatry with which they were entangled, and spoke against the worship of the “queen of heaven,” which had become a part of Israel’s religious activities (Jeremiah 7:18; 44:17). Even though this is one of the titles that the

¹⁰ Alexander Hyslop, *The Two Babylons*, p. 14.

¹¹ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Chapter 4.2.

¹² <http://www.yrm.org/b-day-sun.htm>; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen_of_heaven_%28antiquity%29

¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen_of_heaven_%28Antiquity%29

modern Roman Catholic Church assigns to Mary, the mother of Jesus, it was first held by numerous goddesses, including Astarte of Greece and Isis of Egypt. Israel had been involved with the worship of Ashtoreth ever since entering the Promised Land (in fact, they brought this idolatrous practice with them from Egypt – Joshua 24:14). What is very evident is that many of those who professed to be God’s people (Israel) were very involved in idolatry at various times throughout their history; therefore, it is not altogether surprising to see those who profess to be Christians today also participating in idolatry. Evangelicals might be too savvy to display a carved idol in a shrine in their homes, but idolatry can take many forms. An idol is a representation of something or someone that is used in worship, or is worshipped. However, even further, an idol “can be anything that takes the place of God,”¹⁴ is specifically condemned by God in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:4-6), and is characterized in the Scriptures as being spiritual fornication (Judges 2:17).



Nimrod

Returning to the beginnings in Babylon, when Nimrod died, Semiramis proclaimed him to be a god, and not a mere mortal. Tammuz, born after Nimrod’s death, was hailed by Semiramis as the reincarnation of Nimrod; his birth took place at the time of the winter solstice. Tammuz, the Babylonian sun-deity, assumed the role of a savior within the ancient mythology¹⁵ – a counterfeit redeemer within a pagan culture. Satan is neither blind nor stupid; in the Garden of Eden he was paying attention when the Lord God proclaimed judgment against him (Genesis 3:15), and, therefore, it’s not surprising that pagan religions will most often include some sort of savior and/or salvation ritual. Within Babylonian tradition, Tammuz died, and was brought back to life, something that was celebrated annually.¹⁶ We find mention of Tammuz in Ezekiel 8:14 where the Lord shows Ezekiel the abominations of Israel. It was the custom for the women of ancient Babylon to weep for the death of Tammuz, and Ezekiel sees this same practice taking place among the Israelites. The Romans incorporated the Tammuz traditions into their Saturnalia festival in honor of Saturn, the harvest god, by adding Mithras, the god of light (their counterpart of Tammuz, the sun-god); this became one of their largest and most popular celebrations.¹⁷ What began as a one day event that the Romans celebrated on December 17, soon became a weeklong festival, climaxing on December 25.¹⁸

However, what is even more noteworthy is the veneration of the 25th day of December as a birthday of many gods. “Bacchus of Egypt, Bacchus of Greece, Adonis of Greece, Chrishna of India, Chang-ti of China, Chris of Chaldea, Mithra of Persia, Sakia of India, Jao Wapaul (a crucified Savior of ancient Britain), were all born on the twenty-fifth of December, according to their respective histories.”¹⁹ Notice the god, Mithra, comes from Persia (Babylon’s neighbor to the east) and was incorporated into the Roman culture, and duly honored during Saturnalian

¹⁴ http://www.carm.org/dictionary/dic_i-k.htm#_1_86 , “Idol/Idolatry.”

¹⁵ <http://www.yrm.org/b-day-sun.htm>

¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tammuz_%28deity%29

¹⁷ <http://www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/Psychology/xmas/celeb.htm>

¹⁸ <http://www.yrm.org/b-day-sun.htm>

¹⁹ http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/kersey_graves/16/chap8.html

celebrations as Mithras. Many Romans celebrated the birth of Mithras (their counterfeit redeemer, after the manner of Tammuz) on December 25, and regarded it as the most holy day of the year.²⁰ As the Christian religion (to be carefully differentiated from the Christian faith) became the officially sanctioned religion of Rome, the matter of dealing with all the pagan festivals became an issue. Convincing the pagans to give up their times of revelry, even for those pagans who “converted” to the new Christian religion, was an impossibility. Practicing the adage that if you can’t beat them, then join them, Pope Julius I (pope from AD 337-352²¹) selected December 25 as the day when Jesus’ birth was to be celebrated, even though logic dictated against such a selection. However, this was an attempt by the Roman Catholic Church to draw the pagan festivities of Saturnalia toward a more Christian theme, even though the activities continued to be as debased as before. The Romans, who were eager for any celebration, seemed to find little difficulty in making the shift from their pagan gods to a Christianized god as the “reason” for celebrating; the reason was far less important than the celebration. Somehow, this doesn’t sound much different from today.



Pope Julius I

The date, December 25, is important – but not for any reason that is remotely related to the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Savior for the world. It was a common date for the birth of the sun-god within the traditions of the pagan religions of the world; it fit well with the superstition of encouraging the sun-god to return and breathe new life into the world.

Unfortunately, the leaders of the forming Roman Catholic Church had no qualms about taking pagan traditions and molding them so as to give the appearance of being Christian. As we can well imagine, Satan would have encouraged this, as he does with everything that is a violation of God’s Word.

The Name

The word *Christmas* finds its origins from the Old English, *Cristes mæsse*, and, as is very commonly understood, it comes from simply bringing the words *Christ* and *mass* together.²² With a few exceptions in Spain and Portugal, the Roman Catholic tradition is to uniquely celebrate three masses on December 25: one at midnight, one at dawn, and one during the day; the first to celebrate the birth of Jesus, the second His resurrection, and the third is simply a regular service.²³ The phrase *Mass of Christ* has been found in use as far back as AD 1038,²⁴ with the use of the one word, *Christmas*, dating to the middle of the fourteenth century.²⁵

What we cannot miss is that the Roman Catholic mass is central to the name of this celebration. The term *mass* includes all aspects of their service; however, the core of the mass is the celebration of the Eucharist, which is also called the Holy Sacrifice.²⁶ Within Catholic tradition, it is believed that, “through the words of consecration spoken by the priest” during the Eucharist, the Lord Jesus

²⁰ http://www.history.com/minisite.do?content_type=Minisite_Generic&content_type_id=1253&display_order=2&sub_display_order=3&mini_id=1290

²¹ Wikipedia, “Julius I.”

²² http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=c&p=30&allowed_in_frame=0

²³ <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/activities/view.cfm?id=1002>

²⁴ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03724b.htm>

²⁵ http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=c&p=30&allowed_in_frame=0

²⁶ http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P3Y.HTM

Christ becomes “present sacramentally, body, blood, soul and divinity” in the bread and the wine; however, this is very carefully clarified: “the two material things, bread and wine, are completely changed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, leaving behind only their sensible appearances.”²⁷ Notwithstanding, they have taken this one step further: “Since Christ is sacramentally present under each of the species [the bread and the wine], communion under the species of bread alone makes it possible to receive all the fruit of Eucharistic grace.”²⁸ It is common, particularly in the West, to see only the wafer used in the services; following the service, a consecrated wafer (which they believe to be the Lord Jesus Christ) is often placed in a monstrance and put on display, where it is worshiped by Catholics as being the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a very brief overview of the Catholic tradition as it pertains to the Mass of Christ. There is no Biblical basis for the Mass, and the Eucharist is a travesty of the one sacrifice that Christ made for the sins of the world.

Before we leave this subject of the Mass and the Eucharist, we need to understand just a little more about how the Catholics view this Eucharistic celebration. The Council of Trent declares, “this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the mass, that **same Christ** is contained and immolated [sacrificed] in an unbloody manner, who once offered Himself in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross; the holy Synod teaches, that **this sacrifice** [the Eucharist] is truly propitiatory ...” (emphasis added).²⁹ This Council may have met more than four centuries ago, but “it is still present in the doctrine and life of the Church.”³⁰ This same section from the Council of Trent appears in a current version of the Catholic Catechism as support for this heresy.³¹ The essence of this is that the “unbloody” sacrifice made during the Mass is as effective for the cleansing of sins as the sacrifice that Jesus made upon the cross! They sincerely believe that Jesus is being sacrificed again in their Mass celebrations, and that the wafer eaten offers the same cleansing as the blood that Jesus shed while on the cross. This is nothing short of blasphemy!

The second king of Rome, Numa Pompilius (reigned 715–673 BC), introduced what came to be considered as the oldest, and most pure religion; frequently when there was a calamity, the people would advocate that they return to the pure religion of Rome, which was introduced by their second king.³² King Numa received this religious practice from his meeting with the highest of gods, Jupiter; the Numa tradition, as it became known, was a bloodless sacrifice (the shedding of blood was actually forbidden).³³ This would seem to harken back to the sacrifice that Cain made – an “unbloody” sacrifice that was unacceptable to God (Genesis 4:3-5). Within the Numa tradition, the appeasement of the gods was accomplished through offering a *mola salsa*, a small, thin wafer made from ground, parched spelt, salt and water.³⁴ We have just considered a religious system based in Rome that uses a small, thin wafer in its bloodless, sacrificial ceremony; the similarities are striking!

Despite this, the word *Christmas* rolls off the lips of Evangelicals today with no thought given to the travesty done by the Mass to the sacrifice that the Lord made for our sins. After some seven hundred years of use in its one-word form, it seems that we have lost most of our sensitivity to

²⁷ <http://www.ewtn.com/faith/teachings/euchsum.htm>

²⁸ http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c1a3.htm

²⁹ Session 22, Chapter II; <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct22.html>

³⁰ <http://www.catholicculture.org/news/headlines/index.cfm?storyid=19885>

³¹ <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resources/sacraments/eucharist/the-sacrament-of-the-eucharist-catechism-of-the-catholic-church/>

³² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Numa_Pompilius

³³ <http://www.novaroma.org/nr/Numa>

³⁴ http://www.novaroma.org/nr/Mola_salsa

what is offensive to God. Today's ecumenical stance, by most Evangelicals, only serves to dull their minds even further to the travesty of this word.

The Yule Log and Christmas Tree

There are differing thoughts on the Yule log within the traditions of the Scandinavian peoples (where it is most common); it was a custom that extended as far west as Ireland, south to Greece and north to Siberia.³⁵ One thought is that *Yule* is a Chaldean word for *infant* or *child*, and Yule Day thus became a part of the ancient Anglo-Saxon practice of celebrating the birth of the sun-god. The burning of the yule log took place around the winter solstice, and celebrated the rebirth of the sun (or sun-god) – the fire of the continually burning log being representative of the sun's growing strength. Some attribute this very old tradition to the Babylonian character, Nimrod, and the celebration of his subsequent resurrection in the form of his son, Tammuz. "The Yule Log is the dead stock of Nimrod, deified as the sun-god, but cut down by his enemies; the Christmas-tree is Nimrod *redivivus*--the slain god come to life again."³⁶ This ties the Yule log and the evergreen tree together, one representing the death of the old, while the other speaks of the birth of new life.

Another branch of thought ties the word *Yule* to the old Norse word *jol*, a heathen feast held around the time of the winter solstice, and a festival taken over by the Christian religion.³⁷



Yule Log Traditions

Tradition says that the log was to be the largest that could be handled by the hearth for which it was intended; generally, it was to be taken from one's own property (never purchased), it was burned in honor of the gods, and it marked the beginning of the winter solstice celebrations. It was also believed that the festivities would continue as long as the log burned, which sometimes extended to twelve days. Offerings of food, wine and decorations were often placed on the log, symbolizing the removal of all the mistakes, faults and bad choices that the contributors had made in the previous year; there was no need for confession or repentance – simply put a cookie on the log, and let your sins burn away. The log was never permitted to burn up completely, splinters of the log were kept to start the fire for the Yule log of the following year; the portion that was kept was considered to be a talisman offering protection of the home from fire, lightning and hail.³⁸ However, if the log burned out before it should have (it was supposed to burn for at least 12 hours), it was viewed as a bad omen, and a sign that tragedy would strike the home in the following year. This tradition was fraught with superstitions; however, the association with gods and goddesses seemed to be minimized (within this culture) in favor of the celebration aspect. It appears that the Babylonian roots for the celebration (the reason for the season) had been lost along the way. What typically happens is that the tradition becomes central, and its basis fades in the haze of the past. However, those who adhere to the paganism of the traditions, even in our day, do acknowledge

³⁵ <http://www.noelnoelnoel.com/trad/yulelog.html>

³⁶ Hislop, p. 97.

³⁷ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=y&p=2> , "Yule."

³⁸ <http://www.noelnoelnoel.com/trad/yulelog.html>

that the historical roots for the celebration is the mother goddess giving birth to the sun god on the shortest day of the year, thereby instilling hope for new life (the ancient Babylonian mythology).

“Sadly, now in the 21st century, it [the Yule celebration] is more like a mass exercise in commercialism, even though the church has tried to take over the ancient festival of Yule, so called Christians seem to have no idea what or why they are celebrating!”³⁹ It is interesting to read this comment made by a modern pagan who recognizes that the winter solstice celebrations are really theirs, but, through the efforts of the Roman Catholic Church, so-called Christian themes have been imposed on their most holy day. As one pagan notes, “Our Christian friends are often quite surprised at how enthusiastically we Pagans celebrate the ‘Christmas’ season.”⁴⁰ Interestingly, the pagans are far more discerning than the Christians in understanding the reality of all the trees, lights and merriment.



The Christmas tree – early 1900s

Within our traditions, we have probably all heard of the Yule log even if we have never participated in its use during the seasonal celebrations (those of Scandinavian heritage would be more familiar with this custom). One of the reasons that the Yule log lost its favor is the simple fact that hearths began to disappear, and gradually the huge Yule log was replaced by a smaller one that would fit the stoves that came into use, only to be replaced further by a baked, edible “log,” which would grace the tables of those who sought to maintain a semblance of the tradition. However, what cannot be missed is that its roots lie in the paganism of the sun-god and celebrations of the winter solstice.

We have already noted one thought regarding the “Christmas tree” – that it represents the reincarnation of Nimrod in his son, Tammuz (the deadness of the Yule log, the new life in the green tree). “The Christmas tree, now so common among us, was equally common [with variations] in Pagan Rome and Pagan Egypt.”⁴¹ Egyptians homes were decorated with palm rushes, symbolizing the victory of life over death; the Romans celebrated Saturnalia, in honor of Saturn, the god of agriculture, by decorating their homes and temples with evergreen boughs.⁴² Even though it seems that most ancient cultures did not bring a whole tree into their homes, they did bring greenery in to celebrate the lengthening of the days; some cultures considered the evergreen to be a special plant of the sun-god because it never lost its appearance of life. The focus on the evergreen during the winter solstice was a reminder of the new life that would come as the sun, once again, began to rise higher in the skies.

Often the words of the Lord to Jeremiah are referred to as being a condemnation of this practice: “Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the

³⁹ <http://www.wiccaweb.org.uk/yule.html>

⁴⁰ <https://www.msu.edu/user/rohdemar/earth/sabbats/yule.html>

⁴¹ Hislop, p. 96.

⁴² <http://www.history.com/topics/christmas/history-of-christmas-trees>

signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people *are* vain [this is the over-arching principle of what follows; we must guard against simply participating in the pagan customs]: for *one* cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it [beautify it] with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not [so it doesn't wobble or totter]. They *are* upright ["a hammered work" often formed from a single piece] as the palm tree [as the trunk of a palm, like a column], but speak not: they must needs be borne [carried], 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).⁴³ We have looked at several of the pagan practices surrounding the winter solstice, and it is clear from the Lord's words to Jeremiah that we are not to incorporate any of them into our lives. However, by carefully considering this passage, and comparing it to a similar passage in Isaiah 44:12-19, it would seem that the context deals more generally with idolatry and the making of idols, rather than something like today's Christmas tree (although a case could be made for calling the tree an idol). Having said that, it is very clear that we are to avoid making pagan traditions our own – which would include the practice of bringing trees (or portions thereof) into our homes at the time of the winter solstice. The greater principle, dealt with here, is that we are to guard against becoming involved in the customs of a pagan world (their ways are vain, empty, like a vapor). The practice of bringing an evergreen tree into the house dates back to the Romans and the Egyptians, and probably the Babylonians before them – it springs from the superstitions of a pagan people at the time of the winter solstice, and their perceived need to encourage the sun to rise again to warm the earth. The thrust of Jeremiah 10:2-3 establishes the error of such heathen practices, with the overriding command that we "learn not the way of the heathen," and Jeremiah 10:10-11 affirms the living power of the true God in contrast to the impotency of the idols.



Christmas tree - modern

We've mentioned the use of the evergreen within the customs of the Babylonians, the Egyptians and the Romans. Consider the Lord's instructions to Israel before they possessed the Promised Land: "These *are* the statutes and judgments, which ye shall observe to do in the land, which the LORD God of thy fathers giveth thee to possess it, all the days that ye live upon the earth. Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and **under every green tree**: And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves [*asherah*] with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place" (Deuteronomy 12:1-3).⁴⁴ Twelve times mention is made of the "green tree" in the Old Testament, and every one of them is in reference to pagan practices. Central to the pagan religious traditions of the people of the land were these *green trees* – they held a place of high regard, symbolizing immortality and fertility. Today, the tradition of the evergreen continues as the tree (an evergreen, whether real or fake) is given the central place within most homes and many churches during this season. However, the word of the Lord is unchanged: "... utterly destroy all the places ... under every green tree ..." (Deuteronomy 12:2-3); "Learn not the way of the heathen ... The customs of the people *are* vain" (Jeremiah 10:2-3). Lest we consider this an OT command that has no bearing on us today, consider Paul's words: "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be

⁴³ Strong's Online.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:16-18). We serve a God Who does not change – how quickly we forget; how easily we turn a blind eye to the Lord’s commands.

Decorating the symbol of life (the evergreen tree) dates back at least to Rome, when they were adorned with bits of metal during the Saturnalia celebrations (carried out during the time of the winter solstice). The Scandinavians would put bells in their trees to alert them to the presence of spirits, and they would hang food and other treats on the tree for the spirits. Often atop the tree would be placed a “five-pointed star, the pentagram, symbol of the five elements.”⁴⁵ The pentagram is the generally accepted symbol of Wicca, and the five elements are commonly considered to be wood, fire, earth, metal and water (with some variations, depending on the cultural context). Although the star may have changed designs, and even though we might like to think of it as representing the guiding star of the Magi, that does not change the origin of the practice. The reality is that any decorations, whether applied to a tree or to the house generally, would all be in agreement with the ancient Roman celebration of Saturnalia.

Christmas Wreaths

As we have already noted, the evergreen was considered to be a symbol of immortality within the pagan cultures, and we have seen that the Romans and Egyptians all brought the greenery into their homes at the winter solstice as symbols of new life. The wreath has always symbolized honor, importance and success, and originated within the ancient Persian Empire – which should be no surprise.⁴⁶ It was initially much smaller than what we see today and was worn on the head. Laurel wreaths (which trace their history back to the god, Apollo, in the ancient Greek mythologies) were typically awarded the victors in the early Olympic Games. Eastern Europeans would form a wreath from evergreen boughs, and place candles in it believing that it would bring spring and sunshine sooner.⁴⁷ Not surprisingly, the wreath was readily taken into the Catholic Church’s traditions, and today the Advent wreath (used to count down the time to the “coming of Christ”) is a well-established custom. However, most interestingly, this is no longer an exclusively Catholic tradition. Before my wife and I left the Evangelical Free Church in 2002, the lighting of the Advent wreath candles was an accepted part of their December traditions; it was simply added without a word of explanation.



Advent Wreath

The wreath is typically made of an evergreen branch, which represents the permanence of life or new life in Christ, and formed into a circle (without beginning or ending), which is said to symbolize the eternity of God. The adaptation of pagan traditions can, obviously, be very easily justified through applying wonderful, spiritually sounding symbolism. Nonetheless, the circular formation of the wreath also represents the sun (and the sun-god), that all-important symbol at the time of the winter solstice. Within ancient Egypt, the circle came to represent the sun, and became

⁴⁵ http://www.blueworldgardener.co.uk/articles/xmas_tree_pagan.html

⁴⁶ <http://www.worldofchristmas.net/christmas-wreath/history.html>

⁴⁷ <http://festivals.iloveindia.com/christmas/christmas-wreath/history.html>

a significant part of the portrayal of their sun-god, Ra.⁴⁸ Interestingly, our word *halo* comes from the Greek *halos*, meaning the disk of the sun or moon;⁴⁹ many of the world's religions use halos to identify those whom they consider to be holy – it is found in ancient Greece and Rome, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Catholicism (as well as many of the Reformation denominations).⁵⁰ A slight modification of the symbol for the sun-god, and you have a perfectly acceptable halo – which came to be used prolifically in religious art.

The Advent Wreath typically includes four or five candles, the four represent the four weeks of the advent, the weeks leading up to the celebration of the “birth of Jesus,” and the fifth, if used, represents His birth and is generally lit on December 24. Once again, we have a pagan tradition redefined, tweaked and polished to give an appearance of Christianity. What Christians are too often prone to forget is that Satan is no fool, and he loves to disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14); making the pagan sun-god traditions to appear to be “Christian” is a small task for him, and a great victory in sowing confusion in the minds of those who should know better.

Mistletoe

The mistletoe is a plant that typically sends roots out that penetrate a host tree from which it derives its life; even though it is capable of living independently, it is most commonly seen as a parasite, and so it is referred to as a hemiparasite.⁵¹ The white berries that it produces are considered poisonous, yet provide food for birds. The berries are produced around the season of the winter solstice and are said to symbolize new life or immortality (it's amazing how many things, within paganism, symbolize immortality or new life), and they were popular among the ancient Druids, and in Norse mythology. Mistletoe represented a false “messiah”: the Druids considered it to be a divine branch that had dropped from heaven, and then grew upon a tree on earth.⁵² Contained within such pagan mythology is an obvious corruption of God's



Mistletoe

prophetic Word concerning the Christ, the “Branch” of Zechariah 6:12, coming from heaven. To the Druids, the mistletoe symbolized the reconciliation between god and man (again a satanic corruption of the role of Messiah). Since it never touched the ground (being parasitic), the mistletoe was considered very spiritually powerful (most particularly the mistletoe that would occasionally be found growing on an oak tree – a sacred tree for the Druids).⁵³ Mistletoe was once referred to as “All-heal,”⁵⁴ and was used as an antidote against poisoning, to ensure fertility, and to protect against all kinds of witchcraft.⁵⁵ Druids would cut

branches of the plant from where it grew, being careful to catch the cuttings in a white cloth so that they would not hit the ground and lose their potency. These would then be divided among

⁴⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ra>

⁴⁹ http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=h&p=2&allowed_in_frame=0

⁵⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halo_%28religious_iconography%29

⁵¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mistletoe>

⁵² Hislop, p. 97.

⁵³ <http://gardenline.usask.ca/misc/mistleto.html>

⁵⁴ <http://www.candlegrove.com/mistletoe.html>

⁵⁵ <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/noel/angl/gui.htm>

them and attached to their doorways to protect their homes from storms and evil⁵⁶ – “... the customs of the people *are* vain ...” (Jeremiah 10:3).

As to the practice of kissing under the mistletoe, this seems to have come from Norse mythology. As the story goes, a particularly popular and well-loved god, Balder, was killed by an arrow made from mistletoe. His mother’s tears became the white berries. When Balder was resurrected to life, his mother reversed the reputation of the mistletoe and proclaimed that anyone passing under the plant would receive a kiss from her (a sign of approval and blessing). The tradition also has roots that extend to the Roman Saturnalian celebrations – reminiscent of the temple prostitution and sexual license that flourished during this time (the winter solstice celebration).⁵⁷ As the Roman Catholic Church absorbed these pagan traditions into their calendar, it seems that the mistletoe was not to be left behind, although it isn’t as central to the seasonal celebrations as many others.

Obviously the pagan stories surrounding the mistletoe needed to be upgraded in order to be acceptable within the Roman Catholic traditions, and so another “more spiritual” tale was devised. It is said that it was the wood of the mistletoe tree that was used for the cross of Christ, and because of this it was cursed to live as a parasitic plant on the goodwill of other trees (in similar fashion to the curse upon the serpent in the Garden). “Some believe that an additional penance was required: that the Mistletoe was obliged to bestow good fortune and blessings upon everyone who walked beneath it from that time forward.”⁵⁸ Within the Roman Catholic Church, we find great veneration for the cross itself, and this legend strikes a chord for the acceptance of the paganly-sacred mistletoe into their religious traditions.

Giving of Gifts

There seems to be one primary source for this custom: Saturnalia celebrations from ancient Rome. It was common during this time of the year (around the time of the winter solstice), in particular, for gifts to be given to the emperor, who was looked upon as being divine. Even the Roman Catholic Church recognized the pagan roots of this practice, and banned it during the Middle Ages for that very reason. However, paganism began to prevail, and so an acceptable “Christian” context needed to be devised. The “reason” for the gift exchange took one of two approaches: 1) the Magi brought gifts for the Christ child, or 2) St. Nicholas, that imaginary saint of the fourth century, was known to give gifts. With these “proofs” in hand, the practice of giving and receiving gifts at this time of the year was thereby considered to be sanitized and deemed acceptable.



⁵⁶ <http://www.candlegrove.com/mistletoe.html>

⁵⁷ <http://www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/Psychology/xmas/celeb.htm>

⁵⁸ <http://www.novareinna.com/festive/mistle.html>

Santa Claus

This has become the epicenter of modern celebratory traditions, virtually across the board, for both the pagan and Christian alike. Within today's context, this marvel of human invention has taken on the very attributes of God, and yet he continues to hold a place in the seasonal celebrations for many Christians. Santa Claus is all knowing (omniscient) – everyone in the world is subject to his determination as to whether they have been good or bad; he is everywhere at once (omnipresent) – he delivers presents to all the children of the world in one night; he is all powerful (omnipotent) – he makes a sleigh and reindeer fly through the sky and works the miracle of climbing down every chimney to deposit presents for the children. No professing Christian would claim that he is real, yet they unabashedly include him in their celebrations.



Santa demonstrating divine abilities



Dutch Sinter Klaas with helper Black Pete

Tradition says that the modern-day Santa Claus found his origin in the life of fourth-century Saint Nicholas, Catholic bishop of Myra in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).⁵⁹ Although this is a popular tradition, even the Catholic Church admits that there is virtually no evidence to indicate that there ever was a bishop Nicholas.⁶⁰ However, despite that, he was canonized by the Roman Catholic Church, and December 6 was a day for commemorating his life, which often includes a visit from “St. Nicholas” dressed in the red robes of a bishop and sporting a long beard; he goes to the children, inquires about their behavior, and distributes simple gifts.⁶¹ Although the Reformation cut into these Nicholas visits (the concept of saints was frowned upon by the Reformers), the Dutch continued to observe December 6 in honor of *Sinter Klaas*, as he was known to them.⁶² When the Dutch brought this over to America, there was some contention between the English and Dutch children – and much hesitation on the part of the English to accept such a “Catholic” tradition. The solution was to move the activities of *Sinter Klaas* (or Santa Claus, as he became known in English) to December 24. The seasonal celebrations of December 25 were already so much a part of the English traditions that they did not recognize that they had been duped into shifting the St. Nicholas celebrations from one Catholic determined date (December 6) to another (the eve of the selected date to celebrate the birth of Jesus).

⁵⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Nicholas

⁶⁰ <http://www.americancatholic.org/features/saints/saint.aspx?id=1221>

⁶¹ Greg Dues, *Catholic Customs and Traditions*, p. 60.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

Santa Claus actually incorporates the traditions of several cultures (not just Roman Catholicism), making him an international prodigy. There are elements of his supernatural abilities that find their roots in the Norse mythology of Odin (or Woden) and Thor. Odin, the chief god (often referred to as the “Allfather” of the gods⁶³) was said to sport a long, white beard, would ride through the air on a white (or gray) eight-legged horse, and was benevolent to the common people.⁶⁴ Children would place straw or carrots for Odin’s horse in their boots by the fireplace



Odin

when Odin was on his journeys at the time of the winter solstice; as a reward for their offerings, their boots would contain presents in the morning (can you recognize another tradition?). The long, white beard, riding through the air, and leaving presents behind all speak of the modern-day Santa Claus. Thor, on the other hand, was a hammer-wielding god associated with thunder, lightning, storms, strength and fertility.⁶⁵ He is said to ride through the skies in a chariot pulled by two white goats, and makes his home in the north;



Thor

his color is red (in keeping with being the god of lightning, fire was his element), fireplaces are sacred to him, and he is said to come down the chimney into his element, the fire.⁶⁶ We can see some of the characteristics of these Norse gods finding expression in the modern-day Santa. However, the Germanic tribes did not readily accept the infiltration of their culture by the Catholics, and they wore emblems of Thor’s hammer in rebellion, and incorporated the names of their gods into their place names as much as possible. Today we see the remnants of that evidenced in the names assigned to two days of our week: Wednesday (Woden’s day) and Thursday (Thor’s day).⁶⁷

Clearly, Santa Claus is a hybrid of mythology and imagination, carefully polished during the 20th century to his present day appearance. The ads run by Coca-Cola during the 1930s did much to popularize the modern-day appearance of this god. Up to this time, it was generally accepted



Molding Santa’s image

that justice came with Sinter Klaas or St. Nicholas – rewarding of the good, and punishment of the bad. However, with his appearance in the ads for Coca-Cola, it was deemed inappropriate to include anything that was not strictly positive, therefore, all punishment had to go (he might be said to check a list, but that’s as far as it goes).⁶⁸ What has become a central, significant part of December celebrations, we must admit, finds its origins within the mythology and superstitions of ancient peoples. Despite this, professing Christians will still stand in line to have their children sit on Santa’s lap for a picture, but they find little or no time (or

⁶³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odin>

⁶⁴ <http://www.orlutheran.com/html/santa.html>; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sleipnir>

⁶⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thor>

⁶⁶ <http://www.av1611.org/othpubs/santa.html>

⁶⁷ <http://www.thortarp.com/norse.htm>

⁶⁸ <http://www.realmagick.com/7014/how-odin-became-santa-claus-symbolism-and-pagan-origins-of-a-gift-giving-saint/>

interest) to give consideration to the warnings in God's Word to avoid the vain customs of the pagans.

Summary

As we consider the celebrations that are supposed to be in honor of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, we must keep God's view of such in mind. Deuteronomy 12:29-32 gives us the Lord's instructions to Israel as they were going into the Promised Land: there was to be absolutely no compliance with the heathen customs. However, what we find is that Israel did not obey this command and, even after King Manasseh "housecleaned" the spiritual practices in his day, the high places were not rejected by the people (2 Chronicles 33:15-17). The failure of Israel is often referred to as syncretism – they merged the pagan practices into what the Lord required of them. God is holy and has called us to live lives that reflect His holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16). We cannot be holy before God while participating in heathen practices; therefore, this is not really syncretism but would be more accurately characterized as capitulation to heathenism. Paganism can easily tolerate incorporating foreign practices into their regiment, because the final product is simply a variation on the broad road that leads to destruction; however, faith in God absolutely cannot accommodate any form of paganism, for doing so immediately destroys the faith in God and leaves only paganism. God's desire is for a holy people, free of contamination from all the pagan practices of those who do not know Him. The December seasonal traditions might not include the physical burning of children, nevertheless there can be no doubt that they spring from paganism, which will only serve to destabilize faith in God. If it is our desire to live in holiness (in obedience to God's call – 1 Timothy 2:9), then we must not permit the stain of paganism to touch us. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:17-18). This is a conditional promise: I (the Lord) will receive you, IF you come out from among them and do not touch the unclean!

There are many other traditions not specifically dealt with here, but perhaps this has laid a foundation for discernment upon which the Spirit of God can build. We must not adopt the "see-no-evil, hear-no-evil, speak-no-evil" approach when it comes to spiritual matters; nor can we naively and/or blindly follow the "pastor." The crème-de-la-crème of the religious elite of Jesus's day heard these words from Him: "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me." (Matthew 15:7-8). Pastors are not being trained to think Biblically, nor are they taught how to study the Word of God – they are steeped in the traditions of their denomination, or of Evangelicalism generally. Unfortunately for most Evangelicals, they will not be able to hide behind their pastor when they stand before God and have to give an account of what they did in this life – we are individually accountable, and it is time that we shouldered that responsibility (Romans 14:12).

Even though those who are responsible for merging the pagan with the sacred might bear the greater blame, we are all accountable to "try the spirits" of this season to determine if they are of God (1 John 4:1). The common excuse is that it is important to celebrate Jesus' birth – who said it was important? There is not a word in Scripture that says we are to celebrate His birth; however, we are told explicitly how we are to remember Him – whenever we eat of the bread and drink of the cup we are to bear Him in mind (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). In our simple, uncluttered communion service, we remember the Lord Jesus Christ (His birth, death, and resurrection), and

proclaim His death (His payment for our salvation) until He returns for us. The celebration of His birth is an extra-Biblical custom that cannot be traced to the Scriptures, but its pagan roots can very easily be exposed. Just because something has been a tradition among professing Christians for 1500 years does nothing to sanctify it in God's eyes; God will not change His standard even if those who call themselves by His name practice paganism for a million years. The words of the Lord to Israel ring through to us today, "Learn not the way of the heathen ... for the customs of the people are vain" (Jeremiah 10:2-3) – we would do well to heed this warning!