

The Real Story of CHRISTMAS



Halloween is over. And in stores everywhere images of jolly fat men in red make their annual debut behind counters, in display windows, and in media advertisements. Canned yuletide music already pours from store sound systems. Artificial evergreen wreaths and tinsel garland plaster walls or hang from ceilings as visions of green stuff dance in merchants' heads.

This is the Christmas season, a celebration supposedly honoring the birth of the Savior of men. And each year the hype seems to emerge a bit earlier, almost subtly, until seemingly everyone is caught in the encompassing "holiday spirit."

But it isn't all "peace on earth, goodwill to men." Recent statistics show that 45 percent of all shoplifting occurs from October through December. Shoplifting accounts for \$16 billion in store losses annually. Murders increase dramatically at the Christmas season, as do suicides.

Increasingly, articles in newspapers and magazines lament the over commercialization of a day they say has nearly lost its original meaning. But what was its original meaning? Do they know? Do you?

Where did the celebration of Christmas come from? Have you ever stopped long enough from your frenzied gift buying to ask yourself why you spend yourself into debt at this time each year? Why do you observe Christmas? If it is the celebration of the Savior's birth, what on earth is Santa Claus doing in it? Why the Christmas tree, mistletoe, gift-giving, holly wreath, yule log, stockings, eggnog, and all the other trappings that are so much a part of this holiday? What do all these fixtures have to do with the Messiah's birth? Many of us even as children had a problem reconciling this question.

Too often we drift along doing what everyone else is doing without ever asking ourselves why. It is sometimes more comfortable not to ask too many questions for fear of what we may find. The truth can be disturbing.

Every year newspapers carry articles about the rank heathen origins of Christmas customs, while we smile and say, "How quaint." And we continue kidding ourselves that we really are observing the Savior's birthday. If we were only to open our Bibles, we would find that the word Christmas is nowhere within its pages. There isn't a single passage that tells us to observe the Messiah's birthday. Shocking? Perhaps, but nevertheless a fact.

It is time you stopped and took a long look at this most popular of celebrations and asked some hard questions. The Bible says in Jeremiah 10:2, "Thus says Yahweh, 'Learn not the way of the heathen.'" Then in verses 3-5 the Great Creator gives a stinging rebuke to those involved in the custom of taking trees from the forest and setting them up in *any* form of worship.

Your very salvation hinges on whether you will follow the truth of the Bible or go along with millions of others as they indulge in the popular ways of a deceived world. Paul wrote to the Corinthian assembly, "Wherefore 'come out from among them and be separate,' says Yahweh, 'and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,'" 2 Corinthians 6:17.

"But My Intentions Are Good..."

You may argue, "Okay, so Christmas isn't in the Bible. But what's wrong with doing good to others at this time of year? What's so bad about giving the kids some happiness and having a good time myself?"

If there is no Creator in heaven, then it doesn't matter. You can continue buying and displaying Christmas decorations and other trappings that in fact derive from ancient fertility rites, idolatry, and polytheism. You can have as good a time as the Babylonians who worshipped nonexistent "gods" and who actually started the whole holiday of Christmas.

But if there is a Heavenly Father, you cannot do both--you cannot mix pagan practices with the holy. The Eternal Yahweh said, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion has light with darkness?" 2 Corinthians 6:14. You cannot kid yourself that you're really observing Christmas because of the birth of Yahshua the Messiah. The name of the holiday and its declared purpose cannot hide the fact that its roots are firmly anchored in a winter festival of the pagans, which we will see shortly.

Israel's Lesson for Our Day

The Eternal Father Yahweh is quite jealous over how He is worshipped. When ancient Israel conquered the pagan nations around them, Yahweh told His people that the surrounding nations were being punished for their vile, heathen worship. The barbarians indulged in every kind of perversion and idolatry imaginable, and Yahweh abhorred it. They cherished the very practices that provided a basis for modern Christmas customs--worshipping fertility and the sun god--and even sacrificing humans to their deities.

Yahweh warned Israel not to be entrapped by the practices of the pagans: "Take heed to yourself that you be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before you; and that you enquire not after their mighty ones, saying, 'How did these nations serve their deities? even so will I do likewise.' You shall not do so unto Yahweh your Elohim," Deuteronomy 12:30-31.

He specifically commanded Israel not to ask why the pagans worshipped as they did, why they decorated their temples in such a way or why they practiced certain feasts and orgies. Why? Because Yahweh knows human nature and man's desire to participate.

What happened? Israel did exactly what they were commanded not to do. They embraced pagan customs and mixed them with pure worship: "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of Yahweh, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the mighty ones of Syria, and the mighty ones of Zidon, and the mighty ones of Moab, and the mighty ones of the children of Ammon, and the mighty ones of the Philistines, and forsook Yahweh, and served not Him," Judges 10:6 (see also 1 Samuel 7:3,4; 12:10; 1 Kings 11:5, and 2 Kings 23:13).

Just as ancient Israel, our society has adopted pagan customs and incorporated them into its

worship. Decorated Christmas trees are a common sight in many churches in December. Christmas parties of all sorts are a part of church functions. Even Santa Claus has been seen entering church doors bearing gifts. Has man changed? Let's take a closer look at this most popular of holidays and see what its customs and practices mean.

Christmas 4,000 Years Ago

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The *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1946 edition, says, "Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the church." For the first 300 years, the religious writers are silent regarding the Christmas observance. An Armenian writer of the eleventh century states that the Christmas festival was first celebrated in Constantinople in 373. In Egypt, the Western birthday festival was opposed during the early years of the fifth century, but was celebrated in Alexandria as early as 432. In 1644, the English Puritans forbade any merriment or religious services by act of Parliament on the grounds that Christmas was a heathen festival. They were so opposed to its observance that they ordered a fast on December 25.

Why didn't the early converts celebrate Christmas and what made it a "heathen festival"?

To answer that, we must go back to ancient humanity itself, to the great mother of pagan worship--Babylon. The founder of the Babylonish system was Nimrod, grandson of Ham, one of Noah's three sons. Nimrod's name in Hebrew means "he rebelled." He built the wicked city Nineveh, while his father Cush was responsible for the tower of Babel in opposition to Yahweh (Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, p. 26).

Genesis 10:9 says, "Nimrod was a mighty hunter before Yahweh." The word "*before*" here means "in defiance of." Nimrod was so reprehensible, ancient writings say, that his own mother, Semiramis, bore him a child. Semiramis would become known as the Babylonian Queen of Heaven or Goddess Mother.

Because of the people's rebellion and wickedness Yahweh confounded the one-world language at Babel and the masses scattered in confusion. Nimrod shortly afterwards set up his own kingdom based on man-ruled governments and worship of himself. An entirely pagan religious system grew out of worship of this "hero." Gradually, through trade, influence of Babylon spread to other nations as they incorporated its government and religious system. As we shall see, the customs, practices, and beliefs of these heathen Babylonians have survived to this day and are found in nearly every nation on earth.

Everywhere a Mother and Child

The universal mother and child theme, which has been passed down over the centuries through many different nations and which remains strong today, had its start with the Babylo-

nian Semiramis. Many monuments in Babylon show her with a child in her arms. As the Babylonians dispersed throughout the known world, they carried their mother-child deity worship with them. Surprisingly, many nations were already worshipping a mother and child before the Savior of men was even born!

In Egypt, the Mother and Child were worshipped under the names Isis and Osiris (*Egypt*, Bunsen, vol. 1, p. 444). In India, the pair are known as Isi and Iswara (*Hindoo Mythology*, Kennedy, p. 49). In pagan Rome it was Fortuna and Jupiter-puer, "Jupiter the boy" (Dymock's *Classical Dictionary*). In China, the mother deity was Shingmoo. She is shown with a child in her arms and rays of glory around her head. The ancient Germans worshipped the virgin Hertha holding a child. Among the Druids, the Virgo-Patitura was venerated as the "Mother of God" (*Babylon Mystery Religion*, p. 3). In each case, the child is believed to be a "reincarnation" of his father. Semiramis is also known as Rhea. Her child from Nimrod is referred to in Scripture as Tammuz (Ezekiel 8:14). In this verse Yahweh is condemning Israelite women who professed to be worshipping Him but in secret were actually worshipping Tammuz. In the next few verses, Yahweh denounces sun worship, part of the Babylonian "abominations" in the worship of Nimrod and Tammuz.

Interestingly, the Greeks adopted this son of Semiramis and gave him the name Bacchus, the deity of wine and revelry. His birthday was at the winter solstice (mid-December) and its celebration was marked by orgies in honor of the "son of the mother-god." At the winter solstice, the sun begins its northward trek once more and these pagans were celebrating the lengthening of days. The hope of spring and the rebirth of nature was rekindled as daylight lengthened. More on December 25th shortly.

Although the Bible doesn't say how Nimrod died, profane history indicates that he met a violent death at the pinnacle of his glory. Semiramis immediately proclaimed that her husband had become deified and was resurrected to life through Tammuz.

According to *The Encyclopedia of World Religions*, Tammuz was the god of vegetation. "Every year a festival was held at which his 'death' and 'resurrection' was celebrated. The vegetation god was believed to die and rise annually, and in the myths of the descent of the mother goddess into the land of the dead there is a dramatic image of the search of the mother for her lost son and lover, the search of the earth for the temporarily lost fertility which the new spring restores." p. 20.

To depict his resurrection, the Babylonians believed that an evergreen tree sprang out of a dead tree stump. The old stump symbolized the dead Nimrod, and the new evergreen was Nimrod resurrected in Tammuz. (*Babylon Mystery Religion*, p. 152). Green holly, popular at Christmas, has long been a symbol of eternal life and it played an important role in portraying the rebirth of Nimrod.

December 25

Anyone who has attended Christmas plays at school or church has probably heard Luke 2:8 quoted: "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." From the middle of November to the middle of April is the rainy season in Palestine. Shepherds, because of the cold, dampness, and sometimes snow, take their flocks into sheepfolds at night (see *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus*, by Henri Daniel-Rops), Ezra 10:9 speaks of those in Jerusalem sitting outside in early December and trembling in the rain. Yahshua considered the severity of the winter in Palestine when, in His prophecy of the end

times (Matthew 24:20) said, "Pray that your flight be not in the winter...."

Historians have long recognized that Yahshua the Messiah was born in the autumn and not in the dead of winter. The sheep were still in the open fields. "It was an ancient custom among Jews of those days to send out their sheep to the fields and deserts about the Passover (early spring), and bring them home at commencement of the first rain," *Adam Clarke Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 370.

Furthermore, at the time of the Savior's birth, Caesar Augustus was collecting taxes from Palestine, Luke 2:1-5. Each had to make a journey to "his own city" to pay his taxes. Joseph and Miriam (Mary) traveled to Bethlehem. Requiring the people to make such journeys at the severest time of the year--in the dead of winter--would have sparked a revolt against the hated Roman Empire. The simplest and most logical policy would be to collect taxes after the fall harvest, when storehouses were full and resistance would be the least.

Then there is the fact that the Jews would be congregating in the autumn anyway, "going up" to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:8-10; Acts 18:21). Perhaps this is the reason the parents of Yahshua found "no room for them in the inn": the cities were swollen with travelers to the Feast of Tabernacles.

We can determine the approximate date of the Savior's birth by knowing when John the Baptist was born. Worship at the time centered on the temple at Jerusalem, where priests were required to perform duties for a week twice in the year, 1 Chronicles 24:1-18. John's father Zacharias was from the family of Abiyah, and had his turn on the eighth week of the year, 1 Chronicles 24:10.

Beginning the count from the Days of Unleavened Bread at the beginning of the year, we come to the third Hebrew month Sivan. It was at this time that the angel of Yahweh told Zacharias he would become the father of a son, Luke 1:13. When his duties were finished he went home, verse 23. At that time Elizabeth conceived, verse 24. This was about the middle or end of our June. Moving forward nine months in the gestation period, we come to March and John the Baptist is born. Luke 1:36 notes that Yahshua was six months younger than John. So six months later, the Savior was born--at the end of September or first part of October.

It is commonly recognized that our Savior's ministry lasted three and a half years. He began when He was 30 years of age, Luke 3:23, Numbers 4:3. Therefore, he was put to death at the age of 33-1/2 and died at Passover--which falls in the spring at about April. Starting in April and counting back six months to His birthday, we end up with an autumn birth date.

How, then, did December 25 become connected with the birthday of the Messiah? Alexander Hislop explains: "Long before the fourth century, and long before the Christian era itself, a festival was celebrated among the heathen at that precise time of the year, in honor of the birth of the son of the Babylonian queen of heaven; and it may fairly be presumed that, in order to conciliate the heathen, and to swell the number of the nominal adherents of Christianity, the same festival was adopted by the Roman Church, giving it only the name of Christ." *The Two Babylons*, p. 93.

Indeed, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* confirms the merger. "The well-known solar feast of *Natalis Invicti* [The Nativity of the Unconquered Sun] celebrated on 25 December, has a strong claim on the responsibility for our December date." vol. 3, p. 727.

Mithraism Makes Its Mark

Recall that the Roman world was originally pagan and steeped in heathen customs and practices. They loved festivals and would organize a banquet at the slightest pretext. Chief among these was the Feast of Mithras, celebrating the deity's birthday on December 25. Mithraism was merely a spin-off of the ancient Babylonian worship of Tammuz. In Egypt, it was believed that Osiris (Tammuz) was born on December 25.

Often portrayed as brilliant as the sun, the deity Mithras was known as "The Invincible Sun," or "The Sun of Righteousness." Mithraism promised immortality to its faithful.

Further details on the relationship between December 25 and sun worship are brought out in *The Golden Bough* (p. 416): "In the Julian Calendar the twenty-fifth of December was reckoned the winter solstice, and it was regarded as the Nativity of the sun, because the day begins to lengthen and the power of the sun to increase from that turning point of the year. Now Mithras was regularly identified by his worshippers with the Sun, the Unconquered Sun, as they called him; hence his nativity also fell on the twenty-fifth of December.

The *Encyclopedia of World Religions* casts additional light on the connection between the Mithraic cult and Tammuz-sun worship: "The Persian Mithras was a god of contract, a mediator between gods and man, and was closely connected with both the sun and the kingship, the principle of law and order in society." p. 97.

The merger of Mithraic beliefs with the customs and traditions surrounding the birth of the Savior was largely because Mithraism was popular at the time of the Messiah's birth. "Between 1400 B.C.E. and 400 C.E., Persians, Indians, Romans, and Greeks worshipped the deity Mithras. He was particularly important in the Roman Empire in the 2nd and 3rd centuries," *Encyclopedia of World Religions*, p. 94.

Mithraism, in fact, was one of the last of the oriental "mystery cults" to reach the West. It became the chief rival of Christianity. Altars to Mithras, dating from the first to the fifth century, are common in England. The pagan feast of the Saturnalia, which the Romans celebrated in honor of the deity Saturn from December 17 to 24, eventually encompassed the Feast of Mithras. Many of the practices of Christmas trace to the Saturnalia celebration. At the Saturnalia, Romans lavishly decorated their homes with evergreens. Men discarded their togas for more festive holiday garments. Families and friends exchanged gifts of candles and clay dolls. Nero enjoyed having himself appointed "Lord of the Misrule," or the one who presided over Saturnalia merrymaking. He is reported to have led the Grand Parade, playing his harp and singing bawdy ballads. And even today, Christmas time--like the Saturnalia--lasts seven days.

The Saturnalia was instituted under the name Brumalia, which meant "Winter solstice."

The Blend Begins

How, then, did these rankly pagan festivals of sun worship become entwined with the worship of the Savior of men? The same way December 25 came to be accepted. *The New Schaff-Jerzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* explains:

The pagan Saturnalia and Brumalia were too deeply entrenched in popular custom to be set aside by Christian influence. The recognition of Sunday (the day of Phoebus and Mithras as well as the Lord's Day) by the emperor Constantine as a legal holiday, along with the influence of Manicheism, which identified the Son of

[Yahweh] with the physical sun, may have led Christians of the fourth century to feel the appropriateness of making the birthday of the Son of [Yahweh] coincide with that of the physical sun. The pagan festival with its riot and merrymaking was so popular that Christians were glad of an excuse to continue its celebration with little change in spirit or in manner. Christian preachers of the West and the Nearer East protested against the unseemly frivolity with which [Yahshua's] birthday was celebrated, while Christians of Mesopotamia accused their Western brethren of idolatry and sun-worship for adopting as Christian this pagan festival. Yet the festival rapidly gained acceptance and became at last so firmly established that even the Protestant revolution of the sixteenth century was not able to dislodge it.

Merely to placate the heathen and bring them into the church, the pagan festival of Christmas was adopted. In other words, they could have their cherished old Saturnalia as well as their new faith--merely cloaked in a different name!

This fact is supported by other sources, including the *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*: "The heathen winter holidays (Saturnalia, Juvenalia, Brumalia) were undoubtedly transformed, and, so to speak, sanctified by the establishment of the Christmas cycle of holidays; and the heathen customs. . .were brought over into Christian use." p. 276.

Also, "There can be little doubt that the Church was anxious to distract the attention of Christians from the old heathen feast days by celebrating Christian festivals on the same days. On December 25 was the dies natalis solis invicti or the sol novus (new sun) especially cultivated by the votaries of Mithraism." *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 3, p. 607. The *Britannica* says this: "December 25, the birthday of Mithra, the Iranian god of light and the contract and the day devoted to the invincible sun, as well as the day after the Saturnalia, was adopted by the church as Christmas, the nativity of [Yahshua], to counteract the effects of these festivals." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., vol. 7, p. 202.

Shocking parallels exist between Mithraism and the birth of the Messiah: "Mithra, the Iranian god of light and sacred contracts, is described as being born from a rock, the birth being witnessed by shepherds on a day (December 25) that was later claimed by Christians as the nativity of [Yahshua]." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., vol. 4, p. 552.

The "Church" Reacts

But it took nearly 400 years before the "church" began to accept Christmas into its dogma. It wasn't without objection and it wasn't until the end of the fourth century before it was declared official, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, p. 725.

A great amount of confusion initially surrounded this merger of the Saturnalia with the nativity. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* shows that the people were mistaking sun worship with worship of the Son of Yahweh: "Tertullian had to assert that Sol was not the Christians' God; Augustine denounced the heretical identification of [Yahshua] with Sol. Pope Leo 1 bitterly reproved solar survivals--Christians, on the very doorsteps of the Apostles' basilica, turning to adore the rising sun." vol. 3, p. 272.

But whether the masses adopted the celebration of Christmas or not, the fact remains that nowhere in the Bible is found the command to observe the Savior's birthday. The early converts would have nothing to do with it. In fact, His precise date of birth is obscured because Yahweh

never intended His birth to be a cause for celebration. Rather, He commands that we observe (not celebrate) Yahshua's death at Passover, His sacrifice to all who would truly seek to obey Him, 1 Corinthians 11:23-30.

The carryover of ancient pagan rites into a modern-day celebration of the Messiah is an abomination to Yahweh. Over and over He condemns these heathen rituals, and He punished ancient Israel for becoming involved in them, (see 2 Kings 17:9-23; Acts 7:39-43). Will the Heavenly Father look the other way when you indulge in this festival that Israel was forbidden to keep?

Of Christmas Trees and Yule Logs

What is not generally known is that through history trees had an important role in pagan worship. From time immemorial, man has ascribed certain superhuman characteristics to trees. Perhaps this was because of the considerable value trees have been to man; maybe the human-like forms of trees contributed to these notions. Then again, this obsession may trace to the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden.

For whatever the reason, trees have held a mystical quality through the ages. The Greek philosopher Aristotle thought trees could reason. Scandinavians worshipped trees. In Africa and South America, peoples have associated human life with tree worship. They believed spirits could inhabit trees and so would plant a sapling next to a mature tree they had cut down for the old spirit to live in. In east Africa the Wanika believe every cocoa-nut tree has a spirit. To cut it down is equivalent to matricide because the tree gives them life and nourishment as a mother.

Sacred groves were common among the ancient Germans. At Upsala, the old religious capital of Sweden, there is a sacred grove where every tree is regarded as holy. In the Forum, the busy center of Roman life, the sacred fir tree of Romulus was worshipped down to the days of the empire. Before thinning a grove, a Roman farmer sacrificed a pig to the god or goddess of the grove. Among the Druids the oak was sacred. With Egypt, it was the palm (Baal-Tamar). During the Saturnalia, the Romans decorated the fire deity (Baal-Berith) with red berries. *Curiosities of Popular Customs*, p. 242.

Trees leafing out in the spring symbolize life. And this brings us back to the old Babylonian worship of Nimrod. The Babylonian belief was that the dead Nimrod, symbolized by a yule log cut down by his enemies, came to life again in the form of a young tree springing to life overnight from that dead stump. Thus, Nimrod was reincarnated in the life of the sun-deity Tammuz --*at the rebirth of the sun at the winter solstice!*

The Romans exchanged green tree branches for "good luck" on the first of January. The Scandinavians, who you recall were tree worshippers, added evergreen trees, holly and mistletoe to their worship at Christmas and spread the practice through Europe.

In 11 passages of Scripture, scattered throughout the Bible, the green tree is associated with idolatry and harlotry. Because all trees are green part of the year, the special mention of "green" trees probably refers to some form of evergreen tree. (See Deuteronomy 12:2; 1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 16:4, 17:10; 2 Chronicles 28:4; Isaiah 57:5; Jeremiah 2:20, 3:6, 3:13, 17:2; Ezekiel 6:13).

To understand Yahweh's upbraiding of green trees in ceremonialism, one must understand the pagan custom of the time. Let's read 1 Kings 14:23: "And Judah did evil in the sight of Yahweh, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done. For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree." Judah had once again become caught up in a pagan

abomination. What was it?

"Groves" is the Hebrew *asherah*, meaning to be erect or upright. It was either a living tree with the top cut off and the stump carved into a certain shape, or it was artificially fashioned and set erect in the ground. Connected with Baal worship, the practice of the Asherah was to worship or sacrifice to idols among these "groves" of trees.

Symbolic of the Tree of Life, it was an object of veneration. Then came the perversion that simply honored the origin of life; and the Asherah was debased into rites of procreation where sexual orgies and libidinous worship prevailed.

As one source puts it, "The Christmas tree recapitulates the idea of tree worship...gilded nuts and balls symbolize the sun...all of the festivities of the winter solstice have been absorbed into Christmas day...the use of holly and mistletoe from the Druidic ceremonies; the Christmas tree from the honors paid to Odin's sacred fir," *Festivals, Holy Days, and Satan's Days*, p. 222.

So each year millions set up a Christmas tree, decorate it with symbols of fertility in the form of colored balls and lights, place gifts beneath it, and gather around it to sing. And they haven't the slightest idea that they are participating in what survives as ancient, pagan worship.

The Secret of the Mistletoe

Many species of both mistletoe and holly have been used as seasonal decorations since ancient times. Both are evergreens, although a few species of holly are deciduous. Mistletoe is a parasite that drapes its leathery leaves in the branches of host trees. Because they "grew in air," the Druids considered mistletoes, like orchids, members of the spirit world. When mistletoe was found growing on one of their sacred oaks, a white-robed priest cut it down with a golden sickle and sacrificed two white bulls beneath the oak. The mistletoe was then placed over doors to ward off evil. These Celtic priests believed the plant had the power to bring good luck, happiness and safety.

The custom of kissing under the mistletoe traces to Norse mythology. The Norse deity of love, Freya, adored her son Baldur immensely. She extracted a promise from all things on Earth to protect him--all things except the mistletoe, which she forgot. An enemy, learning of the oversight, used a weapon fashioned from the mistletoe to kill Baldur. The grieving Freya asked the mistletoe never to harm anyone again, and so the plant became a good omen, associated with love. The Druids, pagan priests of ancient Scotland, used the plant pulp of the mistletoe to cure sterility. They thought the berries were a sex stimulant.

Santa Claus's Alter Ego

"Surely there is nothing pagan about dear old Santa," you might say. "He's just imaginary."

Wrong on both counts. The person of Santa Claus traces to a fourth century Catholic bishop of Myra in Asia Minor named St. Nicholas (died c. 345). One legend tells how he bestowed dowries on three daughters of a poor man who was about to give them up to harlotry. (He put three pieces of gold into their stockings. Others who heard of it hung up their stockings and waited for the saint. Thus, we have the practice of hanging up stockings to be filled with gifts on Christmas day.) St. Nicholas was also to have brought back to life three dead children, according to tradition.

The benevolence of St. Nicholas in gift-giving was transferred to the Christmas custom of exchanging gifts.

As with just about all the practices of Christmas, the facts about St. Nicholas are more far-reaching, however. In medieval folklore, St. Nicholas acquired the attributes of Nekker, the Teutonic culture deity beloved and respected by the pagans as a lover of children.

Paradoxically, this same beneficent deity survives in an opposite role as Old Nick, harbinger of disaster, whose name refers to Satan! (*Webster's New World Dictionary*) Nekker (who seems to be a Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde phenomenon) was also known as a Teutonic water sprite, whose appearance sailors believed foreboded death. As a harbinger of death, he is closely related to the banshee of Irish and Scottish folklore, (*Dictionary of Satanism*, p. 284). "Santa Claus" is merely an American corruption of the Dutch "San Nicolaas." Dutch settlers brought the traditions of St. Nicholas to America. The image of a jolly fat character with long white beard, sliding down a chimney with a sackful of gifts, was popularized in America by Clement C. Moore. Moore's 1823 poem "A Visit From St. Nicholas" was later changed to "The Night Before Christmas."

As with nearly all the traditions of Christmas, Santa Claus has nothing to do with the birth of the Messiah. It is merely a custom of men that ultimately entwined with pagan beliefs. In millions of homes, children will be told that the gifts they received under the tree were from Santa Claus. Through this lie, they associate happiness and good things with a character of deception-related through folklore to Satan himself. At the same time, the true giver of blessings--the Heavenly Father Yahweh--is ignored. Children are told to be good for the sake of Santa Claus.

You might argue that the custom of giving gifts really stems from the fact that three wise men gave gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the newborn Savior Yahshua.

Matthew 2:11 offers some revealing facts. First, although three kinds of gifts are mentioned, nowhere does Scripture list the number of wise men who came. There could have been dozens. Second, they came to a *house* where they saw the young *child*. The popular nativity scenes erroneously show the wise men bowing before Yahshua in a manger with animals looking on. By the time they arrived, the "babe" was perhaps almost two years of age. That is why Herod, who wanted the Savior killed because he had heard He was to be king, ordered the wholesale slaying of all children up to two years of age, Matthew 2:16. The "wise men" were no doubt astrologers, as noted in Daniel 2:2. They came from the east, Matthew 2:1. Astrologers, the Companion Bible says, were prophets who assumed to announce the will of heaven and predict the future. They would be experienced in star gazing and could be led to the Messiah in that manner. There is no record that the shepherds saw the star.

Now notice. They gave their gifts to the child, not to one another. Why? The *Adam Clarke Commentary* says, "The people of the east never approach the presence of kings and great personages without a present in their hands," vol. 5, p. 46. They weren't instituting a new custom of exchanging gifts with friends, but merely were in accord with the ancient tradition of presenting gifts to a king in his presence. They were coming before the King of the Jews.

How ridiculous it would have been for them to bow before Yahshua the Messiah, turn, and start handing one another gifts! Yet, that is what is done every December 25 the world over--by Bible believers and unbelievers alike.

Is it the spirit of love and largess that motivates modern-day Christmas gift-giving? Or is it rather the spirit of greed and indulgence--I give you a gift because you gave me one or because you are on my gift list or because I want a gift from you?

More than \$10 billion will be spent on 1-1/2 billion gifts, all wrapped in \$150 million worth of paper. It's the biggest advertising and spending extravaganza the world has ever known, and without it many merchants say they wouldn't survive. All this is supposedly done in honor of a

lowly babe in a manger.

If you search the Scriptures for a precedent in exchanging gifts, you'll find one example in Revelation 11:10. This is the end of the age, and Yahweh's two witnesses are killed on the streets of Jerusalem. The wicked are so happy to hear of their deaths that we read, "And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another." That is how the unrighteous will celebrate.

All of the pagan midwinter festivals included the exchanging of gifts. The earliest form is from Babylon, where on the anniversary of his death, Nimrod was to visit the evergreen tree and leave gifts thereon. Does gift exchanging honor the Messiah?

Christmas Ham

The popularity of ham at Christmas and Easter is second only to the turkey at Thanksgiving. For many, Christmas wouldn't be complete without a nice big ham adorning the dinner table. Who ever stops to ask why ham at Christmas? It has become as much a part of the yule celebration today as it was to the ancients. Let's understand why.

Adonis or Tammuz was to have died as the result of an injury a boar did to him. In memory of that deed, many a boar lost his head in sacrifice to the deity. On Christmas day, the Saxons offered a boar in sacrifice to the Sun to propitiate it. Apparently the Romans had a similar ritual, because Martial wrote: "That boar will make you a good Saturnalia." The boar's head is still a standing dish in England at the Christmas dinner, usually with an apple or pomegranate in its mouth.

In Sweden and Denmark it is the custom to bake a loaf in the form of a boar-pig. This they call the Yule Boar and it was to insure a good harvest next year. (Recall that Tammuz was also known as the vegetation deity, and by association the pig also became connected with the harvest celebration.) According to *The Golden Bough*, a real boar was formerly sacrificed at Christmas among the Scandinavians, Part II, p. 31.

What an abomination to Almighty Yahweh! He specifically commands man not to eat swine: "And the swine, though he divide the hoof, and be cloven-footed, yet he chews not the cud; he is unclean to you. Of their flesh shall you not eat, and their carcass shall you not touch; he is unclean to you," Leviticus 11:7-8. Yet, most Christians make their finest ham dinners for Christmas, supposedly in honor of the Redeemer of men!

Stamping Out Christmas Cookies

Cut out of tin molds today, Christmas cookies have an ancient precedent. In Babylon and Egypt at Christmas time, round cookies or wafers were baked and used in worship to symbolize the taking of the sun into their lives. The roundness represented the shape of the sun, and the Saturnalia and Brumalia celebrations were to commemorate the return of the resurrected sun (Son?) at the winter solstice. In the Bible, the women of Judah had turned from Yahweh and become involved in worship of the Queen of Heaven (Semiramis). What were their sins? "And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven, and poured out drink offerings unto her, did we make her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink offerings unto her, without our men?" Jeremiah 44:19. The "cakes" were round wafers, the precursor of the Christmas cookies shaped in honor of Christmas festivities. The round wafer of the Catholic Mass and some Protestant communion services can be traced back to this idolatry.

Who Will You Please?

By now you fully realize the pagan origins in the customs and trappings of Christmas. You know now where it all came from, as substantiated by encyclopedias, histories and countless other sources. The vital question is, will you act on what you know is right? and wrong?

Many are too embarrassed to give up this celebration: embarrassed by what relatives may say or think; embarrassed by neighbors who may ask, "Where is your tree?" They are more concerned with not depriving their children of this holiday; too afraid of being called a Scrooge. It is obvious whom they are trying to please. By their refusal to give up this holiday they show what matters most in their lives.

If relatives, neighbors or children can give you salvation, then go ahead and satisfy them. But if only the Eternal Father Yahweh, who is responsible for your very existence, can offer you everlasting life, then you had better do what He says. And He says man's pagan traditions are an absolute abomination to Him.

The same warning He gave to ancient Israel through Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Amos, Hosea and all the other prophets He gives to us today: "Learn not the way of the heathen."

Yahshua the Messiah said, "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men," Matthew 15:9. Man's ways are vanity. What man reasons is acceptable and fine to do the Great Creator detests. He thunders, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him," 1 John 2:15.

Paul quoted Isaiah 52, a command first given to an ancient Israel tempted by heathen practices: "Wherefore, 'come out from among them and be separate,' says Yahweh, 'and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,'" 2 Corinthians 6:17. Are we honoring the Great Eternal Creator when we mix His worship with indulging in pagan acts? How can He possibly be happy with that? And what about continually lying to children about Santa Claus and all the rest? "And you fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of Yahweh," Ephesians 6:4. We also read, "Lie not to one another," Colossians 3:9.

You can freely do as you wish now. It's your choice. But a day of reckoning is coming when you will be responsible for every choice you make now: "For Yahweh shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil," Ecclesiastes 12:14. See also 2 Corinthians 5:10.

Know the joy of serving only the Heavenly Father Yahweh through following His Word. Come out of Babylon. The first step is the hardest. But He promises that you will not be tempted more than you are able to withstand. The blessings that will result will astound you. And the eternal future will be all yours.

Yahweh's Assembly in Messiah

HalleluYAH!