

**HOPE OF
ISRAEL
MINISTRIES**

BIBLE

CORRESPONDENCE COURSE



Nativity Scene from Eslov, Sweden

The Pagan Origins of Christmas

Lesson 1

An Open Letter from the Staff...

WHY do people all over the world observe so many different days of worship? So many different customs?

Where did this world's holidays come from? Were they established by the SUPREME AUTHORITY of YEHOVAH God Almighty? What BIBLE AUTHORITY is there for the holidays observed by most of modern Christianity?

Very few know why they observe the days they do!

Why do most professing Christians observe days which are NOWHERE commanded in your Bible -- days neither Yeshua the Messiah nor the apostles kept?

In this lesson you will learn that Yeshua himself did not observe today's so-called "Christian" holidays -- that in reality they are not Christian at all!

So what about Christmas -- with its red-nosed reindeer, Santa Claus and gift trading? You will learn that the Messiah was not born anywhere near December 25 -- that on this date the ancient pagans worshiped the sun.

Just as Satan the Devil deceived men into pagan "SUNDAY" observance instead of keeping YEHOVAH's Sabbath Day -- so Satan has instituted his own holiday of Christmas. It is a clever counterfeit contrived to HIDE YEHOVAH's Supreme Master Plan.

This holiday is made to appear as a happy time, time to enjoy YOURSELF. But it serves no useful purpose. It has no great significance or meaning. Generally, it is a day when most people simply take off from work, picnic, play in the snow, etc., while a devoted FEW attend church!

No one in the world, it seems, questions Satan's day of Christmas -- it has become customary -- "traditional"! It is assumed to be "Christian." With this lesson we will show, from the Bible, the shocking true origins of the custom of Christmas!



HOPE OF ISRAEL MINISTRIES BIBLE CORRESPONDENCE COURSE LESSON 1

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About Our Cover...

Nativity scenes such as this have a pagan origin common with all the other attributes of Christmas celebrations.

The Pagan Origins of Christmas

LESSON 1

Deception Foretold in the Bible

Long ago, YEHOVAH God foretold that pagan practices would creep into churches claiming to worship Him. He WARNED us to beware!

1. Did Yeshua the Messiah warn Christians in the end times that false ministers would deceive the many? **Matthew 24:11.** Would these seem to be “Christian” ministers who preach ABOUT Yeshua the Messiah, but still deceive many? **Verses 4-5.**

COMMENT: False ministers have cleverly adopted the name of the Messiah as a cloak for their false doctrines. Yeshua said, “Many shall come in my name” -- purporting to be Christian — “saying, I am Christ” -- even teaching that Yeshua is the Christ or Messiah — “and shall deceive many!” (**Matthew 24:5.**)

2. Can one worship Christ (the Messiah), call himself “Christian,” and still do it all in vain? **Matthew 15:9.** How? -- by worshipping according to the dictates and traditions of men? **Same verse.**

3. Very early in New Testament times, did the Apostle Paul find false teachers pretending to be Christian -- even pretending to be APOSTLES? **II Corinthians 11:13-14.**

4. Did the Apostle John write that the Church of YEHOVAH God at Ephesus had discovered some of these false ministers -- falsely calling themselves the Messiah’s Apostles? **Revelation 2:2.** How were the false apostles at Ephesus discovered -- by their fruits, their deeds? **Verse 6 and Matthew 7:20.**

5. Does YEHOVAH God say He hates the deeds of the Nicolaitanes? **Revelation 2:6.** Did the Nicolaitanes hold false doctrine? **Verse 15.** Exactly who were the Nicolaitanes?

COMMENT: A Nicolaitan is a follower of Nicolas! The name Nicolas is derived from the Greek words, “nikos” and “laos”. “Nikos” means the “conqueror” or “destroyer,” and “laos” means “people.” The original Nicolas was a conqueror or destroyer of the people!

Nicolas was a Greek word for “Nimrod” -- the original arch-rebel who conquered the people and founded man-made religion within two centuries after the Flood.

While Nimrod was alive he put himself in the place of YEHOVAH God by his dictatorial rule. And when he died, his admirers CONTINUED TO WORSHIP HIM AS A DIVINE HERO! They CALLED HIM “BAAL,” a name found later throughout the Old Testament. “Baal” means “master” or “lord.” It was only natural that Nimrod should claim that name. He put himself in the very place of the true LORD or Master of the entire universe.

But “Baal” was not Nimrod’s only other name. He had MANY names. In Babylonia he was known as “Tammuz.” In Syria and Greece, “Adonis” -- which also meant “lord.” In Egypt he was the god “Osiris,” and was identified in “mystery” symbolism as the bull!

Another of his names was “Santas,” commonly used throughout Asia Minor. (See Langer’s *An Encyclopedia of World History*, p. 37.)

Now you might ask, “Is there any connection between Nimrod, who was called ‘Santas’ in Asia Minor, and ‘Saint’ Nicolas of Asia Minor -- ‘Santa Claus’?” Yes, indeed there is!

“SANTA CLAUS” is but a shortened form of “Santa Nicholas” or “Saint Nicholas.” The followers of “St. Nicholas” or Nimrod are termed “Nicolaitanes” in the New Testament. So those people -- who falsely called themselves “Christians” -- continued to honor NIMROD in the days of the Apostle John -- just as they do

today! If you do not yet have a free copy of the article, *The PLAIN TRUTH About Christmas*, write for it immediately and study it. You will see how Satan has deceived men into worshipping Nimrod -- all the while calling him Savior!

6. What was the basic doctrine of the Nicolaitanes originally taught by Nimrod? **Genesis 10:8-10.**

COMMENT: It was REBELLION against YEHOVAH God -- against His laws. Nimrod was opposed to YEHOVAH God. The phrase "a mighty hunter BEFORE THE LORD" in the Hebrew indicates he had set himself in opposition to -- and IN THE PLACE OF the LORD. Nimrod was the world's first despot.

Josephus, prominent Jewish historian of the first century A.D., says of him, "Now it was Nimrod who excited them to such an affront and contempt of God ... he also gradually changed the government into tyranny ..." (*Ant.* Bk. I, Chap. IV, Part a).

7. What more did Nimrod do in rebellion against YEHOVAH God? **Genesis 11:1-9**, compared with **Genesis 10:10**. Wasn't Nimrod's first city Babel, or Babylon? **Same verses.**

COMMENT: Again, notice the testimony of Josephus: "He [Nimrod] also said he would be revenged on God, if He should have a mind to drown the world again; for he would build a tower too high for the waters to be able to reach!" Nimrod claimed to be the "savior" of mankind -- saving them from YEHOVAH God. Such was his blasphemy!

The people he had conquered now followed him. "Now the multitude were very ready to follow the determination of Nimrod," reports Josephus, "and to esteem it a piece of COWARDICE to submit to God."

Nimrod taught that it was wrong -- cowardice -- to submit to YEHOVAH God and His laws! This was the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes!

8. Doesn't YEHOVAH God label this false religious system by the name of its city of origin? **Revelation 17:5.** Her very name bears

YEHOVAH's indictment of her sins! Has this system been perpetuated down to our day today?



Children are confused by many impersonators of "Santa." To maintain deception, parents call them "Santa's helpers."

Review **Revelation, chapter 18.**

"Christmas" BEFORE CHRIST! "Lo Saturnalia!" -- "Merry Christmas"

Christmas customs were celebrated in Rome long before the birth of Yeshua the Messiah! They were called the "Saturnalia."

Toward the end of December the Romans set aside several days to celebrate the winter solstice -- when the sun reached the lowest point in the heavens, and the days were shortest. The high point of this solar festival was

the Saturnalia.

Notice how the customs of Saturnalia are similar to those identified with Christmas today:

“In private the day [Saturnalia] began with the sacrifice of a young pig ... all ranks devoted themselves to feasting and mirth, presents were interchanged among friends, and crowds thronged the streets, shouting ‘lo Saturnalia!’” (*Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, 3rd edition, Vol. II, Art. “Oscilla.”)

The offering was made beneath a decorated tree -- Virgil, the Roman poet, mentions a pine or evergreen.

Figurines and masks -- called “oscilla” -- were hung on the tree, as are Christmas decorations today. History admits “... there can be no doubt that we have in these ‘oscilla’ a relic of human sacrifice” Of all the pagan holidays, Saturnalia was the one on which a HUMAN SACRIFICE was required annually.

The heathen came to believe that certain gods or spirits inhabited trees; therefore, they offered sacrifices under them.

1. What does YEHOVAH God have to say about this? **1 Kings 14:23**. Does He say that these places of sacrifice and worship should be destroyed? **Deuteronomy 12:2**.

COMMENT: In the days of Imperial Rome, multitudes adopted the name of the Messiah and applied it to existing pagan customs. Today families decorate their “Christmas” trees with masks and figurines -- unwittingly perpetuating a memorial of the custom of Roman human sacrifice.

The practice of commemorating the winter solstice was not limited to ancient Rome. Nearly every pagan nation has observed a counterpart to modern “Christmas” customs!

Strange, isn’t it, that these ancient pagan customs -- which YEHOVAH God hates and condemns -- are carried on TODAY by the vast majority of professing “Christians”?

If you would like to know more about the pagan origin and 4,000-year history of Christmas, write for your copy of the FREE



Customary Yule Log dates back to rites of sun worship. As the sun’s warmth waned during the long German winter, the Yule Log was lit to encourage and revive the dying sun god.

article, *The Shocking Pagan Origin of Christmas!*

Jeremiah’s Tree

Is there a command anywhere in the Bible that one should cut a tree out of the forest, set it up in one’s home at the time of the Winter Solstice, deck it with trinkets and various decorations, and place a star on its topmost branch to show an association of the tree with the signs of heaven?

1. What does the apostle Paul say in **I Corinthians 10:14**? The apostle John underscores this in **I John 5:21**.

COMMENT: Because of these commands the authorities in post-Reformation England condemned the celebration of Christmas altogether as being a pagan institution and passed laws forbidding it to be celebrated in any form. Similar laws were put into effect in the American colonies.

The reason that the pilgrims forbade the celebration of Christmas (and the festivities that went with it) was because they were WISE ENOUGH to realize that the Bible does NOT condone such customs of the early heathen that

have nothing to do with the teachings of YEHOVAH God and the Messiah!

In fact, they could turn to many scriptures that made it quite clear that YEHOVAH God was not pleased with such idolatrous celebrations.

2. One such command is found in **Jeremiah 10:1-5**. Also **Jeremiah 10:8-9**.

COMMENT: In recent years a debate has occurred over whether the Christmas tree (or



Christmas trees are used in celebrating the birth of the Messiah. Yet history shows that their use predates the birth of the Messiah by 2000 years!

something similar to it) has been singled out by Jeremiah.

If one leaves alone the simple context with all the SUBJECTS kept in view, one is clearly left with the impression that Jeremiah is condemning the idolatrous act of “tree worship.” There are some translators, however, who

substitute other meanings to a few of the words in Jeremiah’s passages to arrive at the conclusion that he is speaking about getting some timber (cut wood) from the forest, carving it into the shape of an idol, and then plating it over with silver and gold. In brief, they claim that the subject of Jeremiah is not a tree (or trees) or “tree worship,” but a carved idol made out of wood that has been gilded with gold and silver. In effect, the translators who adopt such an idea have gotten rid of the “tree worship” theme that the simple use of the Hebrew demands, and have substituted it with a theme simply condemning the making of particular types of idols.

3. Read **Jeremiah 10:1-5** and **8-9** again in other translations that you might have.

COMMENT: When Jeremiah said “they are a tree cut down from the forest,” the word for “tree” is a Hebrew word that ordinarily means a LIVING TREE that grows in the ground. The “trees” in the Garden of Eden, including that of the knowledge of good and evil, as well as the tree of life, were indicated as being ordinary “trees” by the use of this same word. While it is true that this word can sometimes mean a block of wood, it cannot refer to such in this case because Jeremiah said to cut a tree “from the forest.” A forest is made up of many trees -- NOT many “blocks of wood” or “pieces of timber”! The true context in these passages of Jeremiah clearly show that he is really talking about a TREE that one can cut down -- and that it (the tree) can be decked or adorned with gold or silver and/or blue or purple cloths.

There is a further way to show that the context of Jeremiah is speaking of a LITERAL TREE. He states that the “tree,” which is decked with ornaments and is nailed in place, is like a “palm tree” that is upright (secured with hammered metal) so that it remains rigid and erect. This is what Jeremiah wrote using the simple meaning of the Hebrew words as a guide.

4. Where else in the Bible is a palm tree mentioned? Read **Judges 4:5**. A “palm tree” is certainly being discussed by Jeremiah because

the same word found in **Judges 4:5** is used by Jeremiah in his passages about the Christmas tree!

COMMENT: Jeremiah is clearly talking about pagan “tree worship” that the Israelites of his day had taken up. The palm tree (which is an evergreen like most Christmas trees today) was being decorated with gold and silver spiral ribbons like those that come forth from the working of a lathe, and also with blue and purple cloth ribbons.

Such trees were known as *asherahs*. They are mentioned several times in the Old Testament and are often translated by the English word “grove.” However, the word *asherah* has been shown to refer to a SINGLE TREE that can be living, cut out of the forest, or depicted in various abstract forms.

Such “tree worship” was well known in the time of Jeremiah and later. The *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* comments that the Bible makes mention of the women of Judah draping the *asherah* with their garments near YEHOVAH’s Temple in Jerusalem.

5. Notice **II Kings 23:7**. This is precisely what Jeremiah is referring to in chapter 10.

COMMENT: Jeremiah was telling the Israelites not to learn the way of the heathen by cutting a tree out of the forest and decorating it with spiral ribbons of gold and silver like those coming from the workings of a lathe, and adorned with blue and purple fabric ribbons. Such customs were normally associated with the seasonal feasts of the pagans (especially those of the Solstices or Equinoxes). The modern Christmas tree is a prime example -- in our day -- of what the heathen were doing in the time of Jeremiah.

When Did the Messiah’s Birth Occur?

A number of assumptions regarding the story of the Messiah’s birth should be examined in light of what the Bible really says. There is, for example, NO PROOF that Yeshua was born

in midwinter. How do we know this?

1. For an indication of the weather at this time of the year read **John 18:18**.

COMMENT: It does get cold in Judea during the winter! This may come as a surprise to many people. Even in April -- in the early spring when the Messiah was put to death -- certain “servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for IT WAS COLD, and they warmed themselves.” Notice what Cunningham Geikie says: “The exact time of the nativity of Christ can never be known...The twenty-fifth day of December...has little in its favor beyond the fact that it was the day on which, in antiquity, the return of the sun from its winter absence was kept...It [the Messiah’s birth] could hardly have been at that season, however, for such a time would surely not have been chosen by the authorities for a public enrolment, which necessitated the population’s traveling from all parts to their natal districts, storms and rain making journeys both unsafe and unpleasant in winter, except in specially favorable years” (*Holy-Days and Holidays*, article “Christmas at Bethlehem”).

The Bible shows that December is a COLD, RAINY season in that region.

2. **Ezra 10:9** speaks of those in Jerusalem sitting outside in early December trembling because of their deeds and in “GREAT RAIN.”

COMMENT: Winter weather did not change much from that day until the Messiah’s time. According to Henri Daniel-Rops’ book, *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus*, the shepherds took their sheep into the open fields just before Passover in the spring and brought them in again during the Hebrew eighth month -- about the middle of November -- when the rainy season began.

The sheep were in their folds during the winter months -- NOT out in the fields, and certainly NOT out in the snow!

Are there any other clues that indicate when the Messiah was born?

3. Notice what **Mark 8:27-30** says. The

NKJV of the Bible states, in **verse 29**, “You are the Christ.” The Greek word “Christ” means the “anointed one” or “MESSIAH” in the Hebrew or Aramaic. Yeshua does not deny it and tells his disciples “that they should tell no one about him” (**verse 30**).

4. Read now **John 1:40-41**. Here the passage says “We have found the MESSIAH” (which is translated the Christ” (**verse 41**).

5. Drop down to **John 1:49**. Here Nathanael exclaims, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the KING of Israel!”

6. In **John 6:69** Peter says to Yeshua -- “we have come to believe and know that you are the Christ [MESSIAH], the Son of the living God.”

7. Later, after Yeshua’s death and resurrection, Peter tells the crowd in Jerusalem “that God has *made* this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ [MESSIAH]” -- **Acts 2:36**.

COMMENT: These verses clearly establish the fact that Yeshua was BOTH MESSIAH AND KING! With this in mind, we need to find out *what* the people of Judea understood at that time regarding the Messiah. Some 2,000 years ago expectation was widespread that the long foretold coming of the Messiah was at hand. “Even the Roman historians knew about this. Not so very much later than this Suetonius could write, ‘There had spread over all the Orient an old and established belief, that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judaea to rule the world’ (Suetonius: *Life of Vespasian*, 4:5)” (Barclay’s *Daily Study Bible -- New Testament*, Vol. 1, p. 27).

The Jewish historian Josephus wrote about A BELIEF AMONG THE JEWS that “about that time, one from their country should become governor of the habitable earth” (*Wars of the Jews*, 6-5-4).

Judea was a conquered nation, ruled by Rome. Many Jews longed for a deliverer like the Messiah was portrayed to be by centuries-old prophecies contained in their sacred Scriptures.

How does this relate to the birth of the Messiah?

8. Let us now look at **Revelation 12:1-5**.

COMMENT: The scene described here is symbolic. This “woman” has the heavens associated with her -- the Sun, Moon and the Twelve Stars. The apostle John says that the display was a wonder (a sign) and that it was in “heaven” (the realm of the stars).

The essential factor in interpreting the symbol of **Revelation 12:1-5** is the identification of the “woman.” What is John signifying by mentioning her? The “woman” in the first three verses is featured as being in “heaven” and both the Sun and the Moon are in association with her. After the dragon (Satan) casts down a third of the stars of heaven (spirit beings that became demons) (**Revelation 12:4**), the woman is then found on earth (**verses 6 and 14**).

But the important factor to remember here is the BIRTH OF THE MAN-CHILD (THE MESSIAH) and the “woman’s” relationship with the heavenly signs while the “woman” is symbolically in “heaven.”

The *first three verses of Revelation 12* show the Sun clothing her, the Moon under her feet and the Twelve Stars on her head.

With this in mind the birth of this child in **Revelation 12** (whom John identifies with the MESSIAH) should have OCCURRED WHILE THE SUN WAS “CLOTHING” THE WOMAN -- when the Sun was mid-bodied to Virgo (whom the woman represents in the heavens). THIS PERIOD OF TIME IN 3 B. C. (WHEN THE MESSIAH WAS BORN) COVERED 20 DAYS FROM AUGUST 27 TO SEPTEMBER 15.

During this period of time the Jewish Holy Day known as the FEAST OF TRUMPETS occurred. It was a NEW MOON day that occurred on Tishri 1 in the Hebrew calendar and signaled the beginning of the Jewish New Year.

9. Known as Rosh ha-Shanah (Head of the Year), we read about it in **Leviticus 23: 23-26**. This would have been a SIGNIFICANT

DAY for the Messiah to be born in Judea.

COMMENT: Quite remarkably, NO OTHER DAY OF THE YEAR could astronomically fit **Revelation 12:1-3**. The meaning of this day to the Jews of the first century clearly links this day to the BIRTH OF THE MESSIAH -- and also his second coming in the future! Notice!

If we can realize that the New Testament indicates that Yeshua the Messiah was symbolically born on the Feast of Trumpets an impressive amount of symbolic features emerge on the biblical and prophetic scenes.

10. Writes Ernest L. Martin -- "The last trump in the seven months' series was always sounded on this New Moon day. This made it the FINAL TRUMPETS' DAY (**Leviticus 23:24** and **Numbers 29:1**).

"This was the EXACT DAY that many of the ancient kings and rulers of Judah reckoned as their INAUGURATION DAY OF RULE. This procedure was followed consistently in the time of Solomon, Jeremiah, and Ezra. The Day of Trumpets was acknowledged as the time for *counting the years of their kingly rule*. Indeed, it was customary that the final ceremony in the CORONATION OF KINGS was the blowing of trumpets" (*The Star that Astonished the World*, p. 198).

COMMENT: Nathanael would NEVER have exclaimed "You ARE the KING OF ISRAEL" (**John 1:49**) if the Messiah had not been born on the Feast of Trumpets as they fully expected!

11. Notice what happens at the EXACT TIME this "last trump" is sounded on the Feast of Trumpets. **Revelation 11:15**.

COMMENT: In the language of the New Testament this surely shows the time of the CORONATION OF THE MESSIAH -- and it happens at the seventh (or last) trump in the Book of Revelation (the Day or Feast of Trumpets). Truly, the Day of Trumpets' theme is that of KINGSHIP!

12. The blowing of trumpets was the sign that kings could then begin to rule (**I Kings 1:34**;

II Kings 9:13; 11:11).

COMMENT: Jewish authorities long acknowledged this ROYAL import to the Day of Trumpets. Theodor H. Gaster writes that "the Sovereignty of [YEHOVAH] God is a dominant theme of the occasion [and] it is one of the cardinal features of New Year's Day" (*Festivals of the Jewish Year*, p. 115).

The central theme of the Day of Trumpets is clearly that of ENTHRONEMENT of the great King of kings (YEHOVAH God) and His MESSIAH! This was the general understanding of the day in early Judaism and it is certainly that of the New Testament. In **Revelation 11:15** the seventh angel sounds his "last trump" and "the kingdoms of this world have become the KINGDOMS of our Lord [YEHOVAH God] and of His Christ [the Messiah]."

Explains Ernest L. Martin -- "...the Book of Revelation is giving us, in a symbolic way, the time for THE NATIVITY OF JESUS whom Christians considered to be the king of the world [actually, Israel]" (*The Star that Astonished the World*, p. 201).

No Christmas for Nearly 300 Years!

Nearly 300 years passed after the birth of the Messiah before there was any mention of celebrating his birth. Notice the CLEAR and FRANK admission of the *Catholic Dictionary* under "Christmas," by Cardinal McClosky:

"St. Chrysostom, in a Christmas sermon delivered at Antioch in the year 386 says 'It is not ten years since this day (Christmas day on December 25) was clearly known to us.'"

Therefore, if Christmas was not celebrated until fewer than 10 years before 386 A.D., it is plain that the first commemoration of the Messiah's birth did NOT take place before the year 377 A.D. For more than 300 years after his birth there was NO CELEBRATION OF DECEMBER 25 as the Messiah's birthday. But to appease pagan converts to the Catholic Church, their heathen celebrations were brought

into the church and given new meaning. The pagan customs and practices remained basically unchanged.

Once the door was opened to pagan celebrations, the practices and flavor of the early Catholic Church became more and more heathen. It made no difference whether the Bible strongly countermanded such pagan practices. Pleasing the pagans became customary.

The Messiah Foretold Pagan Worship

1. Did Yeshua the Messiah speak of false ministers deceiving many? **Matthew 24:11**. Would they be able to perform signs and wonders? **Same verse**.

2. Would these false ministers outwardly appear in the guise of "Christianity," but all the while actually be wolves seeking to devour YEHOUVAH's people? **Matthew 7:15**.

3. Did Yeshua say some would call him "Lord," yet not enter YEHOUVAH's Kingdom? **Verse 21**. Do some actually preach in the Messiah's name, yet work iniquity? **Verses 22-23**.

COMMENT: The word iniquity means "lawlessness." This doctrine of lawlessness is the same as that which Nimrod preached -- REBELLION against YEHOUVAH's government.

4. Did YEHOUVAH God warn His people not to pollute His Name by applying it to pagan worship? **Ezekiel 20:39**, last part.

5. Who is it that has perpetuated the lies of paganism -- calling them by the name, "Christianity?" **Jeremiah 14:14**. Does YEHOUVAH God promise these lying ministers will be rewarded with captivity, famine and death? **Verse 15**.

The Apostle Paul Fights Paganism

1. The apostle Paul constantly had to battle the inroads of false teachers who sought to unsettle the Church of YEHOUVAH God. What was he forced to say to the Thessalonians? **II**

Thessalonians 2:1-2. Were some sending epistles -- letters -- that were forged with Paul's own name? **Verse 2**.

2. Was a mystery system of lawlessness already at work in the time of Paul? **Verse 7**. Would this same system continue down to the second coming of the Messiah? **Verse 8**. By whose power did this mystery system work? **Verse 9**.

3. Did Paul warn the Galatians about false ministers preaching a false gospel? **Galatians 1:6-9**. Were the Galatians in danger of slipping back into the pagan rites they had observed as unconverted Gentiles? **Galatians 4:8-11**. Were these the same pagan days condemned by YEHOUVAH God in the Old Testament? **Leviticus 19:26** and **Deuteronomy 18:10-14**.

COMMENT: Paul was writing to GENTILES who wanted to return to observing "days" -- Gentile days -- the Saturnalia, Easter, Sun-day worship, etc.

The Catholic Church "father," Chrysostom, admits that these superstitious TIMES which Paul forbids were practiced by "Christians" in his day, but WITHOUT THE IDOLS as in the days of old. He says, "Many were superstitiously addicted to the observance of TIMES, and made divination and conjectures upon them....In celebration of these TIMES they set up lamps in the marketplace, and CROWN THEIR DOORS WITH GARLANDS [or wreaths]." (*Bingham's Antiquities of the Christian Church*, pp. 1123, 1124).

The factual material from ancient and modern history, from archaeology and from the Bible, ALL prove that the VERY SAME PAGAN RITES WORSHIPED BY THIS WORLD ARE THOSE WHICH HAVE BEEN PERPETUATED SINCE THE TIME OF NIMROD!

The churches of this world shamelessly admit they have adopted pagan days -- and YEHOUVAH God Almighty CONDEMNS their rites and customs in His holy word, the Bible!

The History of Christmas (by David Hughes)

One of the greatest shocks to the people who read about Christmas and the star of Bethlehem seems to be the revelation that Yeshua the Messiah was not born on December 25. What real evidence is there for this traditional date?

The first reference we have to December 25 as the date of the Messiah's nativity comes in a Roman city calendar for the year A.D. 354, at least 360 years after the original event being celebrated. This *Chronographus Anni CCCLIII* (Chronograph of 354), as it later became entitled, was edited by Furius Dionysius Filocalus, who later became calligrapher to Pope Damasus (A.D. 366-384). Among other things the calendar contains a list of the burial places of martyrs, with the days on which they were remembered and on which festivals were held in their honor. This "depositio martyrum," as it is called, contains material from around A.D. 336 and makes the statement "VIII Kal. Ian. natus Christus in Betleem Iudeae," which means that the Messiah was born in Bethlehem of Judea on the eighth day before the Kalends of January -- in other words December 25.

The originator of our modern Christmas celebration has always been thought to be John Chrysostom. He was born in Antioch about A.D. 345, later preached there, subsequently became Bishop of Constantinople, and died in A.D. 407. In A.D. 386 he delivered two famous sermons on the subject of Christmas. In the first, given on December 20, he looked forward eagerly -- and urged his congregation to do the same -- to the Christmas festival which was to be celebrated in five days time. Chrysostom says that the festival of the nativity must take its rightful place with the other great festivals of the Christian year because without the birth of the Messiah there would be no reason to celebrate his baptism at Epiphany, his crucifixion and resurrection at

Easter, or the sending down of the spirit at Pentecost.

The second sermon was given on December 25, A.D. 386 and was reported by Theodoret, Bishop of Cyprus. Chrysostom reminded the congregation that they had only known the festival for ten years, but he also stressed that it had long been very well known to those who lived in the west as well as to the people who lived between Thrace and Gades. How did Chrysostom justify December 25 as the date of the festival? He was probably relying on the incorrect assumption that Zacharias was high priest and would have entered the temple to burn incense (Luke 1:9) on the Day of Atonement, the one and only day of the year when the high priest entered the holy of holies. According to Leviticus 16:29 this occurred on the tenth day of the seventh month (Tishri 10). It was followed shortly afterward by the Feast of Tabernacles, which started on Tishri 15 and went on for a week. Tishri falls normally in September/October.

In A.D. 386 there was a New Moon on September 10, and the Day of Atonement fell on September 20. The Feast of Tabernacles occurred between September 25 and October 1. Chrysostom assumes that John the Baptist was conceived in September and he counts six months forward to arrive at April as the month of the conception of the Messiah. From here he counts nine months to December, the birth month of Yeshua. This of course assumes that Yeshua was a nine months baby, but this is not certain. The early writer Epiphanius, for example, was convinced that Yeshua was only in the womb for seven months. The Egyptians held the same view, Yeshua being in this respect similar to Osiris, who was also said to have been born seven months after conception.

When we go back in time to the oldest work of Christianity apart from the Bible, we find the conception of the Messiah put in the

spring, and the birth in the midwinter at a time in line with many of the old traditions.

One extremely fanciful approach to this problem, with its origins in deep antiquity, relies on a “plan of the ages.” According to this the seven days of creation represent seven periods of a thousand years. The Sabbath, or the seventh millennium which it becomes, represents the time in which the Messiah will reign. It was argued that the first coming of the Messiah was in the middle of the sixth day, leaving five hundred years to run before the end. The theory has now already been falsified by the passage of time.



A depiction of the Messiah’s baptism which was observed on January 6.

In the words of Cyprian, written about A.D. 243, there is an account of the lost research work by Hippolytus in which a very complicated proof was given that the nativity occurred on March 28. This was based on the idea that the first day of creation was the vernal equinox, Sunday March 25, the Sun and Moon being created on Wednesday March 28. Hippolytus concluded that the day of the nativity was the same day as that of the creation of the Sun. Christian tradition follows him here and often places the Messiah’s birth on a Wednesday. Another equally dubious argument simply puts the Messiah’s birthday on the feast of the Passover, which in A.D. 225 fell on March 25.

According to a rather cyclical argument it is concluded that as the paschal lamb was a type of the Messiah, he must be born at the time of the Passover. March 25 and 28 are obviously nowhere near the traditional midwinter Christmas and so the suggestion that the nativity occurred in March was freely taken to mean that this was the day of conception, so making December 25 the date of birth. Another tradition in favor of the March conception can be traced as far back as Tertullian, according to whom there is an exact number of years in a “divine” life, so that Yeshua must have been conceived at the same time of the year as his crucifixion.

The Christmas feast was instituted in a rather complex way. Before the fourth century the celebration of the nativity, if it occurred at all, was on January 6, which is the Epiphany or Feast of the Baptism. It is also the feast day on which the visit of the Magi and the miracle at the wedding of Cana are celebrated. The nativity was displaced from this date in Rome in A.D. 353/354 by Pope Liberius, being on January 6 in A.D. 353 and December 25 in A.D. 354. The minor point as to the date of the intervening Christmas is uncertain. It is possible that the institution of Christmas on December 25 is associated with the foundation of the Church of S. Maria Maggiore, which was the center of the Roman celebration of the feast. Christmas services in Rome are now centered on the Church of Liberius while those of Epiphany are in the older basilica of St. Peter. From Rome the celebration on December 25 spread throughout Christendom. In Constantinople it was introduced by Gregory Nazianzen in about A.D. 379. Before then, in the time of Theodosius, Constantinople was Aryan and January 6 was the favored day.

The two sermons of Chrysostom that we have discussed previously were given in Antioch at Christmas time A.D. 386. It is thought that these were delivered at the first December celebration of the nativity at that church. In

Cappadocia the December Christmas was definitely celebrated by Gregory of Nyssa in A.D. 383. By A.D. 394 the feast on December 25 had become general in Europe and Asia Minor. It arrived in Alexandria rather later, somewhere between A.D. 400 and 432. Juvenalis (A.D. 425-458) introduced the observance of the Feast of the Nativity in Jerusalem. In an interesting but probably unauthentic letter from Cyril of Jerusalem to Julius the Bishop of Rome (A.D. 337-352), Cyril asks Julius to go through the books brought from Jerusalem to Rome by the Jews at the time of Titus to see if he can find out what the real date of the nativity was. The reason was simply that he was finding it very difficult to be in two places at the same time and, because of the difficulties of travel, on the same day. These two places were Bethlehem for the celebration of the nativity and the banks of the Jordan near Jericho for the celebration of the baptism.

In Armenia the observance of December 25 is still unknown and the nativity and baptism are both celebrated on January 6.

The main point, however, is that Christmas is a relatively new feast in the Christian calendar and only started about 350 years after the birth of the Messiah. It is obvious that the birth of Yeshua was a much less important event for celebration in the early church than for example his baptism, ministry, crucifixion and resurrection. The seemingly impenetrable uncertainty as to the actual date and time of year of the nativity is ample evidence of this.

Most of the Christmas customs which now prevail in the world are not genuine Christian customs at all, but are relics of old heathen ones which have been absorbed or tolerated by the Church. Saturnalia is a good starting-point here. Many people think that Christmas was moved to December 25 simply to replace the Roman feast of Saturnalia. There is some doubt about this, however, especially since

the dates do not coincide exactly. Originally the day of Saturnalia, in the strict religious sense, was December 17, and even though the popular holiday associated with this was extended according to common usage by as much as seven days, it still did not coincide with December 25. Furthermore, there seems to be very little evidence that the early Christian writers connected the two feasts. Nevertheless, we cannot dismiss the possibility completely as there is evidence of other Christian feasts being moved to replace Roman ones. For example, the procession with lights on the Feast of the Purification on February 2 at Candlemas, forty days after the nativity, marks the end of the Christmas season and was possibly introduced to "Christianize" an obscure Roman procession known as the *Amburbale*.



Picture of a Candlemas celebration on February 2.

As another example, the Litanía major or greater litanía on St. Mark's Day, April 25, took the place of the *Robigalia*, a pagan Roman festival in which puppies of a red or reddish color were sacrificed in a rite of sympathetic magic. Similarly the Litanía minor or Rogation day occurred on the three days before Ascension Day and so took the place of the *Ambarvalia*, a rite with a procession of the sacrificial victims -- a bull, a sheep and a pig -- all around the fields,

driven by a garlanded crowd carrying olive branches and chanting.

Since Christmas incorporated many elements of the feast of Saturnalia, could this pagan festival have been the immediate predecessor of the Christian celebration? Saturn was an ancient Greek agricultural god and in his Roman form he became connected with all things that are put into the earth -- seeds, treasure and perhaps even stores of produce. In Rome he was closely associated with the market, and market days were sacred to him. Even though the god was somewhat obscure, his feast was not. As a popular holiday it was extended from the one-day religious observance to about a week. Augustus, the emperor of Luke 2, limited it to three days in respect of legal business, but later on this was increased to five. Seneca tells us that in his day all Rome seemed to go mad on this holiday.



Rome's Four Lords of Misrule -- a part of the Saturnalia celebration.

The popularity of Saturnalia was probably based on the human need to rest and enjoy oneself in midwinter. A widespread celebration took place among the northern tribes at about the time of the longest night, when the evenings ceased to draw in and the Sun began its return to the northern skies to warm the land. Saturnalia started on December 17 with a public sacrifice at the temple of Saturn followed by

feasting, and December 18 and 19 were general holidays. During the feast the day began with an early bath. Later, sucking pigs were sacrificed and cooked, friends were visited, and it was a time for happiness and merry making, games and the presentation of gifts. Noticeable among the many gifts were wax candles which rather like the traditional yule log were thought to commemorate the returning power of the Sun's light after the solstice. During the festival the schools were closed, and no punishments were inflicted. The toga was replaced by a more informal garment.

The best-known feature of Saturnalia was the part played in it by the slaves. Distinctions of rank were laid aside, slaves sat at table with their masters, and in many cases the roles were completely reversed, the slaves actually being waited on by the masters. Slaves were allowed for once in the year to say exactly

what they liked. They were allowed to gamble with dice, something which at other times was completely illegal.

What of our present Christmas customs? The adoration of the cradle of the Messiah, which takes place on Christmas Eve, seems to have been taken over from the cult of Adonis. The Empress Helena took over the cave where the child Adonis was born and this cave was richly decorated by the Emperor

Constantine in A.D. 335. Christmas obviously inherited the general merriment of Saturnalia, the excessive eating and drinking, the games, the gifts, the abundance of sweatmeats. It also inherited some of the ceremonial elements, especially the burning of candles. Centuries later at the English Court a Lord of Misrule was appointed to organize the revels, while in

Scotland the function was in the hands of the Abbot of Unreason.

Houses and churches were decked with evergreens, and mistletoe was especially important, being a definite remnant of early Celtic, druidic religions. The Christmas tree is an old German custom which can be traced back to the seventeenth century, but its popularity in England owes a lot to Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's Consort. It was introduced to France by Princess Helena of Mecklenburg. The yule log is a survivor from the calend fires. In England a tenant had the right to feed at his lord's expense so long as the log would burn. Gervase of Tilbury told how grain was exposed on Christmas night to gain fertility from the dew which falls in response to the sacred text "Rorate coeli." A tenth-century Arab geographer related the tradition that trees and flowers blossomed on Christmas night. In England Joseph of Arimathea's rod was supposed to flower at Glastonbury, a phenomenon which was carefully investigated in 1752. This was the year in which the calendar was changed and the third day of September became the fourteenth. Apparently two thousand people watched to see if the thorn bush would flower on the new style Christmas. As it did not, they refused to accept the calendar change.

The day became a favorite for court ceremonials. On Christmas Day A.D. 800 Pope Leo III inaugurated the Holy Roman Empire by crowning Charlemagne. William the Conqueror was crowned on Christmas Day at Westminster. Woden and his wife Berchta descended from the Home of the Gods between December 25 and January 6. Other figures traditionally associated with Christmas are Knecht Ruprecht, Petzmartel mounted on a wooden horse, St. Martin on a white charger, St. Nicholas and his modern equivalent, who in a sense has elements from these, Father Christmas. Things apparently got so far out of hand that under Cromwell in 1644 the Dissenters banned Christmas by Act of

Parliament: The day was to be a fast and a market day, with shops compelled to be open and plum puddings and mince pies condemned as heathen. Ironically, Christmas seems now to have more in common with the Roman Saturnalia than it has had for nearly two millennia.



Charlemagne receiving homage after being crowned by Pope Leo III.

Following the Saturnalia, which lasted from December 17 to 24, was the festival described as "dies natalis solis invicti" or "sol novus" which occurred on December 25. This was the feast of the unconquered Sun, on which the victory of light over darkness was celebrated. It took place when the lengthening of daylight became apparent. This day, consecrated to the Sun, was naturally ripe for conversion into a "Christian" festival. It stems from the supposition that the Messiah is equated to the Sun in the "plan of ages" creation myth. It is possible that the coincidence was accidental, with the calculations of December 25 coming first, the adoption of the "sol invictus" trappings coming soon after.

At the end of the twelve days of Christmas we have the feast of Epiphany and it is clear that this day, January 6, was an older feast day than the one on December 25. Originally it was probably a pagan feast associated with the

winter season and the Sun god. It is also clear that before the middle of the fourth century many churches celebrated both the baptism of the Messiah and his nativity on the same day, January 6. Records show that the Epiphany was in general observance by A.D. 311. After the separation of the nativity from the Epiphany the eastern church concentrated on its significance as the feast of baptism, whereas in the west it became chiefly associated with the visit of the Magi to Bethlehem. The twelve day interval between the feast of the nativity on December 25 and that of the Magi on January 6 is not significant. There is no indication or implication that twelve actual days elapsed between these two occasions.

Why was January 6 chosen for the ceremony? Nobody knows for sure. Epiphanius tells of the feast which used to be held in Alexandria at the Temple of Kore on January 6. The night preceding this day was spent in singing and in attending to the images of the gods. At dawn the worshipers descended into the crypt and brought up a wooden image which had the sign of a cross and a star of gold marked on the hands, knees and head. This was carried around and then returned to the crypt to celebrate "the Maiden giving birth to the Aeon."

January 6 was also associated with pagan water ceremonies. Water drawn and stored on that day had special powers and was supposed to improve with age like wine. Epiphanius goes further and says that the water actually became wine and he linked the pagan ritual with the marriage at Cana in which the Messiah actually turned the water into wine. An ancient belief was that water was especially dangerous at the turn of the year and it became propitious once more when the days started to lengthen and the Sun returned to the sky. Epiphany used to be the time for blessing the water for baptism and was the feast of the two incidents in the life of Yeshua connected with water, his baptism by John and the Cana

marriage, though both of these elements were secondary to the main element of the Christian feast -- the coming of the Messiah. In view of the importance of this coming and the manifestation of the Messiah's spirit-filled nature, by John and at Cana, it was natural that the visit of the Magi, the third manifestation, should also be celebrated at the same time.

We can conclude that December 25, although it is one of the days calculated to be the birthday of Yeshua the Messiah, has no special merit over any of the others. Furthermore, the calculation relies on the assumption that Zacharias was the high priest, but he was not. The Epiphany celebration of the Magi's visit again produces absolutely no proof that January 6 was the actual date on which they paid homage. We must therefore regard Christmas Day, December 25, as the official rather than the actual birthday of the Messiah. The date of the real event is still shrouded in mystery for most people.

Blessing of the Mistletoe -- modern paganism in practice.



NOTES:

Answers to Questions in Course Preview

1. 1955 2. YEHOVAH God the Father 3. godliness 4. wicked 5. No 6. spirit
7. character 8. right, death 9. 1000-year rest 10. Yes 11. age 12. desires for
pleasure 13. vanity

Check Your Progress...

Question 1: Who was the original Santa Claus? a. Josephus b. Apostle John c. Nimrod
d. Ezra

Question 2: The Nicolaitanes were followers of _____.

Question 3: Christmas is a copy of what Roman custom? _____

Question 4: The Saturnalia was a celebration that occurred at the winter _____.

Question 5: Who forbade the celebration of Christmas in the American colonies?

Question 6: Jeremiah 10:1-5 is talking about what Christmas custom people observe
today _____

Question 7: Trees used in pagan worship in Jeremiah's day were known as _____.

Question 8: Winter weather in Judea was _____ and _____.

Question 9: During the traditional time of the Messiah's birth (December) the sheep in
Judea were kept in _____.

Question 10: The Greek word "Christ" means _____ or _____.

Question 11: Yeshua the Messiah was both _____ and _____.

Question 12: Revelation 12:1-5 pictures the birth of the _____.

Question 13: In what year was the Messiah born? _____

Question 14: The New Moon of Tishri 1 was also known as _____.

Question 15: Christmas was NOT observed for more than _____ years after the
Messiah's birth.

Question 16: What church compromised by allowing pagan practices to be incorporated
into its services? _____

The answers will be found in the next lesson. Approximately 3 weeks after receiving Lessons 1-4, you will receive a mail-in test that covers these four lessons. The test will be returned to you after grading. Following the completion of the Hope of Israel Bible Correspondence Course you will receive a **Certificate of Completion**. If you complete the course with a grade of 75% or better you will also receive an **Outstanding Student Award**.

