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FEASTS OF THE GODS

PRIESTHOOD OF THE BELIEVER

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FEASTS OF THE GODS

I have known for several years that some Christian holidays had their origins in pagan festivals, but I did not give much thought to it. At some point I had raised the question about the matter and had been directed to Colossians 2:16 which says, “Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day.”

Accompanying this verse was an explanation that I have held to for several years. In a nutshell it went something like this. The verse means that Christians do not have to worry about Jewish holidays. We can keep them or make our own, it is up to us. In ancient times when Christians were persecuted they had to be secretive about keeping their celebrations, so they celebrated when everyone else did. This way they would not be found out. Eventually when Christians became prominent in society they continued to keep the same holidays and this has continued through modern times. Of course I did not question if the explanation fit the context of the verse. It does not. Nor did I question the historical facts of the explanation. They are erroneous.

As I have begun to learn about the Jewish roots of the church, I have considered keeping the Jewish feasts. But the way I was considering would have made them more of a sideshow to the ‘real’ Christian holidays. This was the case up to taking this course, *The Priesthood of the Believer*, which was an eye-opener for me.

Several times throughout the course Dr. Lake referred to the pagan origins of Christian holidays and how they are an affront to God. He also spoke of how the feasts given in the Torah are events that we should still recognize. This got me thinking and praying.

In the next pages I will discuss what I discovered about this matter. First I will look at a chapter from the Bible that challenged the Jewish people to properly keep their rituals and explain how this also applies to Christianizing pagan holidays. Then I will look at the actual historical origins of the holidays, both at what the holidays originally were and how they became Christianized. Finally I will give my thoughts on what the Christian's course of action should be.

Properly Keeping the Rituals

When I first started to consider the matter and pray about it, the Lord pointed me to Malachi 2, which is a very interesting chapter when one considers I had just finished a course explaining my duties as a priest. The first three verses of the chapter say:

“And now this commandment is for you, O priests. If you do not listen, and if you do not give honor to My name, “says the LORD of hosts, “then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them already, because you are not taking it to heart. Behold, I am going to rebuke your offspring, and I will spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your feasts, and you will be taken away with it.

Clearly this commandment is an important one. If one looks at the context of the first chapter, it becomes clear that the command was to correctly keep the covenant rituals, and that the priests were not doing this. Failure to heed the command resulted in receiving the curse. Not a curse, but ‘the curse,’ which points back to the curses in Deuteronomy 28. These are not curses to be taken lightly. But the priests were already

in trouble because the curse had started to take effect. Dung was going to be smeared on their faces as a result of not properly keeping the feasts.

As a side note, before I begin to explain how this passage applies to Christians, I want to say I will not spend much time arguing the degree to which the Torah applies to us. I will simply say keeping the Torah is not a matter of salvation for us, it never was because salvation has always been by faith. But it does concern the fullness of our lives and whether we will receive the blessings of obedience or the curses of disobedience, as it always has been. While Jesus completed all the requirements of the blood covenant, He did not abolish any part of the Torah and it is still profitable in its entirety for Christians today.

Also, the priesthood of the believers is not part of the Levitical priesthood, which is spoken of in this chapter, but of the order of Melchizedek. However, this does not mean that we can ignore the parallels between our priesthood and that of the Levitical priests. I confess I do not fully understand how the Melchizedek priesthood, which is largely described in the book of Hebrews, compares with the Levitical priesthood given in the Torah. But I do know that the new priesthood cannot and should not ignore the wisdom given to the old priesthood. Certainly all the moral commands given to the Levitical priests would apply to our priesthood.

That being said, I saw the following modern application in these first few verses of Malachi 2. Since the command is to priests, it is to all believers, who are now the modern priests of God. We still observe rituals in our service to God. We keep the holidays and the Lord's Day. We offer sacrifices of praise. We dedicate our children and we baptize new believers. In light of this command we should be very careful to observe these rituals correctly. The blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 28 can still affect us

and our children. If improperly kept Jewish feasts were like dung before God, what is it like to God if we keep a festival to a pagan god whose name and trappings have been changed to those of the Messiah?

Just as the curse had already started in Malachi's day, I fear it has started in our day. It is very possible that we have lived under the consequences of these curses so long that we have forgotten what it is like to live free of them. While there are a number of reasons that we have enabled the curses in our society, I now believe that improperly kept rituals is one of the primary reasons.

As I read on in Malachi 2, I saw that we have a duty to preserve the truth. Verses seven through nine say the following:

For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the LORD of hosts. So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction.

The clear teaching here is that Christians, the modern priests, should be the ones who preserve the knowledge of the Lord. Humanity is dependent upon us doing this correctly. Certainly the Lord will keep guard over His word, but we are the ones He has entrusted to complete the task. We are now the ones who stand between the people and the Lord. It is an incredible responsibility and one that we take much too lightly.

When it comes to holy days Christianity has an incredible heritage within the feasts given in the Hebrew Scriptures. These feasts are so full of meaning that the observance of them coupled with the correct explanation can tell much of what has been and what is to come. What an incredible thing it would be if Christian parents would teach their children through these celebrations. But very few non-Jewish Christians can

name the seven feasts, and even a smaller group still could explain the feasts in any detail. An incredibly deep well of knowledge has not been neglected. We have failed to preserve knowledge.

Instead we have replaced the feasts with modified pagan holidays. We have “turned aside from the way.” As a result entire societies have stumbled by our instruction. One only needs to look at Christmas to see where pagan roots and shallow theology lead. Through history Christians could have blessed the cultures they were a part of by teaching the Biblical feasts with all their associated symbols of the Messiah. Instead Christianity embraced pagan traditions early on and now we have holidays that are confusing and misleading, that allow a culture to break easily away from the weak Christian ties they offer.

To many it might seem that I am being a bit extreme in my statements about the holidays, but I think Protestants either owe Catholics an apology or we need to confess that we have shown partiality in our instruction. We look at their veneration of the saints and prayers to the Virgin Mary and angels and call it idolatry. And rightly so, because in these practices they have taken the pagan gods and given them the names of saints, changed the name of the goddess Diana the Queen of Heaven to Mary the Queen of Heaven. Then they pray to these things instead of to God, whose only chosen intermediary is His Son Jesus.

However, is there much of a difference when we take feasts to Ishtar (or Eastre) and Bacchus, and gives them names like Easter and Christmas, and celebrate them by reading Holy Scripture at the same time we are hunting for eggs (fertility) and decorating groves of trees? We have mixed the holy with the profane, and the clean with the

unclean. We need to begin to differentiate between the two before the people. It is our duty as priests (Ezekiel 44:23).

Malachi 2 gives a warning to us if we continue in our relationship with this form of ‘common paganism.’ Verses eleven and twelve say:

Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD which He loves and has married the daughter of a foreign god. As for the man who does this, may the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob everyone who awakes and answers, or who presents an offering to the LORD of hosts.

When we celebrate the pagan holidays we are marrying Christianity to paganism, the daughter of a foreign god. This thought carried to its ultimate conclusion means that we are trying to marry Jesus to one of the pagan deities. This cannot be pleasing to Him. God did not tolerate it when the Jewish people would marry outside of His covenant. How much greater is His displeasure when we attempt to place His only begotten Son in the middle of a pagan fertility ritual?

Just as Judah profaned the sanctuary, we are profaning the sanctuary of the Lord every time we incorporate symbols or concepts of paganism into our worship. Because the marriage of Christianity and these pagan feasts has been made so complete through history we are often unaware when we bring instruments of pagan worship into our homes and churches. We have been dangerously ignorant as we have taught our children to keep pagan rituals, with much more enthusiasm than we displayed while instructing them in the ways of the Lord. Even though we did not know, in our blindness we were profaning the sanctuary.

To summarize this section, it is clear that God does not approve when His children approach Him incorrectly. The Jewish people had clearly defined rituals and

feasts they were to keep, so it was clear when they stepped out of the boundaries. When it comes to modern Christians rituals the boundaries are not as clear, or so it would seem.

But it is clear that we have gone over the line when we incorporate paganism into our worship of God. When we do this we are in a very real sense attaching the name of Jesus to the honoring of demons. We are mixing pure religion with abominable cults. Taking a pagan ritual and Christianizing it is much too similar to Aaron making a golden calf and naming it Yahweh for us to be flippant about it (Exodus 32:4-5).

But how much of paganism is really in the Christian holidays? Is it really that bad? Certainly if the holidays we keep are so corrupted, wouldn't have the Church rejected them by now? In the next section I will look into the origins of the holidays and examine just how polluted they really are.

Origins of the Holidays

I limited my research the origins of Easter and Christmas, the two most prominent 'Christian' holidays. But I also bumped into information that would suggest that most of the non-Jewish holidays that the Catholic and Protestant churches celebrate have pagan roots. Given the Masonic roots of American society it did not surprise me when I found that even some of the 'secular' holidays have occultic origins.

During my research I found that the association of Easter and Christmas to paganism is clearly explained in secular encyclopedias and even dictionaries. I read articles by pastors, theologians, witches, warlocks, rabbis, conspiracy theorists, and atheists. While some argued that it was acceptable for Christians to observe these two holidays, all of them acknowledged the pagan aspects of each holiday. What was particularly disturbing to me was that the occultists who wrote on the matter did not have

any problem with Christians sharing their holidays. In fact they even welcomed it and used the relationship to speak of Christianity like a younger sibling who liked to wear the clothes of her older sister.

Easter

The first holiday I will focus on is Easter. Western Christians view Easter as the day Jesus rose from the dead. Most would associate the day with Passover, primarily because the Bible says Jesus died on the eve of this day. In reality, the day is connected to a completely different holiday.

Along with Jesus' resurrection we add in bunnies, chicks, and eggs. Most Christians would presume these cute and fuzzy creatures somehow are symbolic of the resurrection, but as we will see they have no connection to Jesus, the resurrection, or Christianity at all.

First, let us look at the actual origins of this holiday. To do so we will need to go back into the murky depths of history, through ancient Celtic ceremonies and even back to Babylon. For a general overview of Easter's history I turned to an encyclopedia which gave this explanation:

Easter, a Christian festival, embodies many pre-Christian traditions. The origin of its name is unknown. Scholars, however, accepting the derivation proposed by the 8th-century English scholar St. Bede, believe it probably comes from Eastre, the Anglo-Saxon name of a Teutonic goddess of spring and fertility, to whom was dedicated a month corresponding to April. Her festival was celebrated on the day of the vernal equinox; traditions associated with the festival survive in the Easter rabbit, a symbol of fertility, and in colored easter eggs, originally painted with bright colors to represent the sunlight of spring, and used in Easter-egg rolling contests or given as gifts. Such festivals, and the stories and legends that explain their origin, were common in ancient religions. A Greek legend tells of the return of Persephone, daughter of Demeter, goddess of the earth, from the underworld to the light of day; her return symbolized to the ancient Greeks the resurrection of life in the spring after the desolation of winter. Many ancient peoples shared

similar legends. The Phrygians believed that their omnipotent deity went to sleep at the time of the winter solstice, and they performed ceremonies with music and dancing at the spring equinox to awaken him.¹

From this article it is clear that the deity with the strongest tie to Easter is the Teutonic goddess Eastre, not Jesus. As the article explains, there is a connection to other religions, even those denounced in the Bible as explained in the following article:

What is the meaning of the name "Easter"? You have been led to suppose the word means "resurrection of Christ." ... But that is merely one of the fables the Apostle Paul warned readers of the New Testament to expect. The name "Easter," which is merely the slightly changed English spelling of the name of the ancient Assyrian and Babylonian goddess Ishtar, comes to us from old Teutonic mythology where it is known as Ostern. The Phoenician name of this goddess was Astarte, consort of Baal, the sun god, whose worship is denounced by the Almighty in the Bible as the most abominable of all pagan idolatry. Look up the word "Easter" in Webster's dictionary. You will find it clearly reveals the pagan origin of the name.²

As the article challenged, I looked in the dictionary and found that indeed the origin of the word Easter comes "from the name of a goddess and her festival."³ Though the goddess' name changed through the centuries, her ceremonies have remained recognizable over time and cultures. Whether she is known as Ishtar or Eastre, or working backstage at Easter, it is easy for the learned eye to see her presence.

But how did the ancient Christians end up associating this clearly pagan deity with the resurrection of Jesus? The actual events are murky, but the following article gives a good theory, and also adds more insight into the pagan roots of Easter, suggesting roots even back to Sodom and Gomorrah:

¹ Microsoft Encarta 98 Encyclopedia, s.v. "Easter: Pre-Christian Tradition."

² Herbert W. Armstrong, "The Plain Truth About Easter," <<http://www.destiny-worldwide.net/rcg/easter.htm>>. Accessed February 19, 2006.

³ Random House Webster's College Dictionary, 1992, s.v. "Easter."

Easter and the other "holy days" associated with it, Lent, Palm Sunday, Shrove Tuesday, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday, are not Biblical "Holy Days". In fact Easter, the oldest of these holidays, and perhaps the one that spawned the rest, has its beginnings in paganism. When the I AM destroyed the city of Sodom, Genesis chapter 19, the city was celebrating a yearly Spring festival of fertility and "rebirth" in honor of their "goddess of Spring". This false deity (sic) had several names thru the ages such as "Estera", "Eastre", and "Ostern". It should be obvious where the name "Easter" came from. The "Easter Bunny" came from the Saxsons (sic), who used the rabbit as the earthly symbol for their "fertility goddess", and decorated eggs have been around even longer. The Egyptians buried eggs in their tombs, and the Greeks placed eggs on their tombs. A Roman proverb says "All life comes from eggs". In the second century Christian Church, the egg became a popular symbol of the newly instituted "Easter" celebration. Wealthy Christians would cover eggs in gold leaf, and the peasants would dye their's (sic). By the way, "Easter", or Messiah Yeshua's resurrection, was not observed by the early Christian Church until about 155 AD. Thereby denying the possibility of the observance being instituted by the original Apostles, much less the Messiah Himself. How did "Estera" get mixed up with the Christian Church? When the early Christian missionaries took the Gospel to the "heathens", in order to do away with the pagan festival, since the time of the festival was about the same as the resurrection, they "invented" the observance of Messiah Yeshua's resurrection. Thus all of the pagan tradition of "Estera" was introduced into the early Church. The day upon which Easter is celebrated was decided on by the Roman emperor (sic) Constantine in 325 AD. He decreed that Easter would be observed on the first Sunday after the first new moon after the vernal equinox. (First day of Spring.) This does not always correspond to the day that the resurrection actually took place, which was, of course, the first Sunday (sic) after the Sabbath that followed Passover during the Jewish "Feast of Unleavened Bread".⁴

As this article explains, Easter likely entered Christian culture because missionaries were trying to make it easier for pagans to swallow Christianity. This was capitalized on by the Emperor Constantine, who did much to harm to Christianity by thoroughly synchronizing it with paganism. It would have been much better had the early missionaries not set this precedence and eradicated any connections to demonic gods. This is something that can and should be done without eradicating the culture of the people.

⁴ Reverend Steve, "Holiday Histories," < <http://www.ysministries.org/id1.html?row2col2=id13.html>>, Accessed February 19, 2006.

In the case of Easter though, paganism was not only allow to remain, but it was thoroughly intermeshed with Christianity. A witch explains this strong connection of Easter and Lady Day, a sabbat of witchcraft:

The other Christian holiday which gets mixed up [with Lady Day] is Easter. Easter, too, celebrates the victory of a god of light (Jesus) over darkness (death), so it makes sense to place it at this season. Ironically, the name 'Easter' was taken from the name of a Teutonic lunar Goddess, Eostre (from whence we also get the name of the female hormone, estrogen). Her chief symbols were the bunny (both for fertility and because her worshipers saw a hare in the full moon) and the egg (symbolic of the cosmic egg of creation), images which Christians have been hard pressed to explain. Her holiday, the Eostara, was held on the Vernal Equinox Full Moon. Of course, the Church doesn't celebrate full moons, even if they do calculate by them, so they planted their Easter on the following Sunday. Thus, Easter is always the first Sunday, after the first Full Moon, after the Vernal Equinox. If you've ever wondered why Easter moved all around the calendar, now you know. (By the way, the Catholic Church was so adamant about NOT incorporating lunar Goddess symbolism that they added a further calculation: if Easter Sunday were to fall on the Full Moon itself, then Easter was postponed to the following Sunday instead.) ... Needless to say, the old and accepted folk name for the Vernal Equinox is 'Lady Day'. Christians sometimes insist that the title is in honor of Mary and her Annunciation, but Pagans will smile knowingly.⁵

Every time that we send our children out to hunt for an Easter basket that a rabbit hid, we are teaching them the basic rites of a pagan ritual. Every time that the date for Easter is set it is not looking back to the resurrection of Jesus, it is looking back to the pagan festival in honor of a demon goddess.

Aside from early Christians imposing the resurrection onto Easter because of its general proximity to Passover, there is very little that Easter has to do with Christianity. The roots and traditions of Easter are thoroughly pagan. It is a high day for the occult that has its roots in Babylon and likely even earlier.

⁵ Mike Nichols, "The Sabbats of Witchcraft: Where did all of these Christian holidays come from?" < <http://www.2think.org/hii/holiday.shtml>>, Accessed February 19, 2006.

Christmas

Christmas is very similar to Easter. While Christians celebrate it as the birthday of Jesus and give gifts to each other, supposedly in honor of the gift of the Christ child or some variation of that theme, its roots are neither in the birth of Jesus nor Judaism. Some might think there is a relationship to the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, which occurs about the same time, but there is not. While pagans readily point out their ties to Christmas, a warlock acknowledges the following:

Hanukkah is the only one of the seasonal celebrations whose origin is precisely known and does not have its roots in paganism. It celebrates a battle in which the Jews beat the bejeebers out of a powerful enemy in 165 B.C.⁶

While Hanukkah is kosher, Christmas is Christianity's pig in the parlor. The encyclopedia definition of Christmas is a bit blander than Easter's when it comes to paganism and says the following:

Christmas, in the Christian church, annual festival, held on December 25, to celebrate the Nativity, or birth of Christ. The origin of the festival is unknown. Scholars believe that it is derived in part from rites held by pre-Christian Germanic and Celtic peoples to celebrate the winter solstice. Christmas festivals, generally observed by Christians since the 4th century, incorporate pagan customs, such as the use of holly, mistletoe, Yule logs, and wassail bowls. The Christmas tree, an evergreen trimmed with lights and other decorations, is derived from the so-called paradise tree, symbolizing Eden, of German mystery plays.⁷

In reality the origins of the festival are quite clear and the pagan ties touched on are actually quite deep.

⁶ "Solstice: Christianity's debt to paganism," < <http://mind-nmagick.com/flexphpnews/news.php?newsid=391>>, January 1, 2006. Accessed February 19, 2006.

⁷ Microsoft Encarta 98 Encyclopedia, s.v. "Christmas."

Christmas is actually another sabbat of witchcraft called 'Midwinter Night's Eve' or 'Yule.' To explain this I will refer again to the informative witch quoted earlier. Here is the description she gives of Christmas:

Our Christian friends are often quite surprised at how enthusiastically we Pagans celebrate the 'Christmas' season. Even though we prefer to use the word 'Yule', and our celebrations may peak a few days BEFORE the 25th, we nonetheless follow many of the traditional customs of the season: decorated trees, carolling, presents, Yule logs, and mistletoe. We might even go so far as putting up a 'Nativity set', though for us the three central characters are likely to be interpreted as Mother Nature, Father Time, and the Baby Sun-God. None of this will come as a surprise to anyone who knows the true history of the holiday, of course. In fact, if truth be known, the holiday of Christmas has always been more Pagan than Christian, with it's associations of Nordic divination, Celtic fertility rites, and Roman Mithraism. That is why both Martin Luther and John Calvin abhorred it, why the Puritans refused to acknowledge it, much less celebrate it (to them, no day of the year could be more holy than the Sabbath), and why it was even made ILLEGAL in Boston! The holiday was already too closely associated with the birth of older Pagan gods and heroes. And many of them (like Oedipus, Theseus, Hercules, Perseus, Jason, Dionysus, Apollo, Mithra, Horus and even Arthur) possessed a narrative of birth, death, and resurrection that was uncomfortably close to that of Jesus. And to make matters worse, many of them pre-dated the Christian Savior. Ultimately, of course, the holiday is rooted deeply in the cycle of the year. It is the Winter Solstice that is being celebrated, seed-time of the year, the longest night and shortest day. It is the birthday of the new Sun King, the Son of God -- by whatever name you choose to call him. On this darkest of nights, the Goddess becomes the Great Mother and once again gives birth. And it makes perfect poetic sense that on the longest night of the winter, 'the dark night of our souls', there springs the new spark of hope, the Sacred Fire, the Light of the World, the Coel Coeth. That is why Pagans have as much right to claim this holiday as Christians. Perhaps even more so, as the Christians were rather late in laying claim to it, and tried more than once to reject it. There had been a tradition in the West that Mary bore the child Jesus on the twentyfifth day, but no one could seem to decide on the month. Finally, in 320 C.E., the Catholic Fathers in Rome decided to make it December, in an effort to co-opt the Mithraic celebration of the Romans and the Yule celebrations of the Celts and Saxons. There was never much pretense that the date they finally chose was historically accurate. Shepherds just don't 'tend their flocks by night' in the high pastures in the dead of winter! But if one wishes to use the New Testament as historical evidence, this reference may point to sometime in the spring as the time of Jesus's birth. This is because the lambing season occurs in the spring and that is the only time when shepherds are likely to 'watch their flocks by night' -- to make sure the lambing goes well. ... Remembering that most Christmas customs are ultimately based upon older Pagan customs, it only remains for modern Pagans to reclaim their lost traditions. In doing so, we can share many common customs with our Christian

friends, albeit with a slightly different interpretation. And thus we all share in the beauty of this most magical of seasons, when the Mother Goddess once again gives birth to the baby Sun-God and sets the wheel in motion again. To conclude with a long-overdue paraphrase, 'Goddess bless us, every one!'⁸

I don't know about you, but I found the witch's comments and insights disturbing. All of my research says that not only is she accurate, but she has captured the true essence of Christmas, or Yule as she might call it. To confirm and expand on what she has written, I will add a description of Christmas from a Messianic believer:

The birth of Messiah Yeshua is supposed to be the event we celebrate, but there is very little to do with Messiah Yeshua's birth in most of our traditions. Christmas was not celebrated until 354 AD when the Roman Emperor (sic) Constantine declared that the birth of Christ would be celebrated on December 25th. Up until that time, Christians celebrated Christ's baptism on January 6th. This was known as the Epiphany. (The twelve days of Christmas came from counting the days between December 25th & January 6th.) The reason Constantine used the 25th of December as the date of Yeshua's birth was to make the celebration "blend in" with traditions that the Roman citizens were familiar with. Prior to Constantine's declaration of Christianity, the citizens of Rome worshipped the sun. The date of the birth of the "sun god" since the time of King Nimrod and his tower of Babel was December 25th! Now, the Bible doesn't specifically say what day or month Yeshua was born in, but anyone familiar with agriculture in Israel will tell you that past the month of October there are no sheep in the fields grazing. The Bible does specifically state that there were sheep in the fields! (There is a really good case for the birth of Messiah Yeshua being approximately September 29th, and it's Biblically based!) The pagan celebration that Rome observed before Christianity was called "Saturnalia". It was a celebration of the death and re-birth of the "sun god". At winter solstice, the longest day of the year, the "sun god" would supposedly die, only to come back to life, "re-born" so to speak, the next morning when the days began to get longer once again. This belief is where the tradition of the yule log and the Christmas tree came from. The tradition is Chaldean, (some say it is Scandinavian, but it goes back much further). The burning of the yule log on the eve of the winter solstice was a symbol of the death of the old "sun god", (the word "yule" in Chaldean means "infant") followed by the erecting of a trimmed tree the next morning to symbolize the re-birth of this pagan god. This practice goes back to king Nebachadnezzar's Babylonian empire.⁹

⁸ Nichols

⁹ Reverend Steve

Like Easter, it seems that Christmas was a pagan holiday at least as far back as Babylon. Though unlike Easter, December 25 actually does hold a special place in the Jewish consciousness:

On December 25, 168 BC Antiochus Epiphanes plundered and desecrated this temple by introducing pagan worship within it, and also by sacrificing a pig upon the altar of God. He then poured the hot fat of this burned pig all over the inside of the temple. Three years later...Judas Maccabeus completed the repairs on this temple and rededicated it to the Lord. This marked the beginning of the Jewish holiday Hanukkah.¹⁰

Incidentally, December 25 was the day that the Greeks held festivals for Zeus. This is why Antiochus chose that particular day for the sacrifice. In his mind he was actually making a sacrifice to himself since he believed he was Zeus incarnate.

So the warlock quoted above in a sense is wrong. Hanukkah does have roots in paganism. But Hanukkah's roots are not in the embracing of paganism, but the defeat of it. I would image that there are Jewish people who take note that Christians celebrate on a date that is has a dark history for them. Granted, the eight days of Hanukkah sometimes do cross over Christmas, but there is not the direct connection to that particular day that Christmas has.

But Christmas still has more pagan problems. Whereas Easter has bunnies and eggs, Christmas has the Christmas tree, which we will see has several problems all of its own.

I will begin with the Christmas tree's possible appearance in Jeremiah 10.

Though many people view this passage as a reference to a carved idol, there is reason to

¹⁰ Al Maxey, "The Silent Centuries: Religious Institutions During the 'Intertestamental' Period, < <http://www.zianet.com/maxey/Inter6.htm>>. Accessed February 26, 2006.

think otherwise. Here is an argument for the Christmas Tree/Jeremiah 10 connection, which begins with a quote from Jeremiah 10: 1-5, 8-9 with short notes added by the writer:

"Hear you the word which the Lord speaks unto you, O house of Israel. Thus says the Lord. Learn not the way of the heathen and be not dismayed at the signs of the heaven; for the nations are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain. For one cuts a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman with the axe. They deck it [the tree] with silver and with gold. They fasten it [the tree] with nails and with hammers that it move not. They [such trees] are upright as the palm tree, but speak not. The tree [KJV: stock] is a doctrine of vanities. Silver is spread into plates is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, the work of the workman, and of the hands of the founder. Blue and purple is their clothing. They [the trees] are all the work of cunning men."

The King James Version gives a reasonable translation of the Hebrew words as spoken by Jeremiah. You will notice that I have identified the pronouns in brackets, and what I have stated follows the Hebrew wording and context precisely without ambiguity. These trees are decked with gold, silver, as well as with rich weavings of blue and purple fabrics. Jeremiah compared the use of these decked-out trees to the practice of idolatry and such trees were being used in false worship.... Jeremiah is really talking about pagan "tree worship" that the Israelites of his time 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 often are translated by the English word "grove." But 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. Indeed, the most ancient form of all pagan religion is simple "tree worship." Long before most nations of the world took up depicting their gods and goddesses in human or animal form, it is known that well-nigh the whole of the world's population (civilized or savage) were thoroughly engrossed in various forms of "tree worship." The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics has a large article that shows the universal proclivity of all ancient peoples (including the Hebrews) to indulge in the worship of living trees and those they had cut out of the forest for religious reasons (vol.12, pp.448-457).¹¹

¹¹ Ernest L. Martin, "The Christmas Tree Debate," <<http://askelm.com/doctrine/d911101.htm>>, November 1, 1991. Accessed 2/25/06.

I will note that in interest of space I have cut out much of the writer's argument, which is quite developed. But there is a counterpoint to this argument also. For this I will quote part of an argument given by a Lutheran pastor, which is again cut short due to space:

First, there is the immediate context of this passage. ... This passage and the passages that follow make it crystal clear that the "decorated tree" that Jeremiah was talking about in 10:3-4, was a tree that was cut down and made into an idol, a very common custom in the ancient world.... Second, when we search the rest of the Old Testament, we find many other examples of trees being planted, cut down, or carved into idols. One of the most common examples of a tree idol was the Asherah, mentioned often in the Old Testament.... Isaiah 44:14-19 gives a detailed picture of how a tree was cut down and fashioned into an idol - and the absurdity of it all.... From the foregoing, it is abundantly clear that the "decorated tree" to which Jeremiah 10 refers is an idol, very likely the Asherah. Therefore, it is very superficial Bible interpretation and pure silliness to understand this passage as directly referring to the use of a fir tree for Christmas! ... I think it is abundantly clear that Christians who erect Christmas trees are NOT worshiping them as gods or goddesses, nor are they loving them more than their Savior Jesus Christ. They are simply using the Christmas tree as a fun custom, one that can remind them of Jesus who is the branch of David (Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15), the root of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1). One that can remind them of the tree that led Adam and Eve to sin, but more importantly, the tree on which Christ Jesus died to make atonement for the sins of the whole world (Acts 5:30; Gal. 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24). Christians should know that they can use a Christmas tree with a good conscience. It is unfortunate and wrong when well-meaning Christians call something sin that is not sin, and enslave the consciences of their fellow believers with imaginary sin! Shame on such Christians! Those who continue to believe that the Christmas tree is pagan and sinful, even after having their conscience correctly informed, should not use them. For it is not right to sin against conscience. This is regrettable, however, since there is absolutely nothing wrong with using a Christmas tree.¹²

After researching the matter, I remain unclear if Jeremiah 10 is a good passage to use to forbid Christmas trees, though I am inclined to think that it does. But even if the pastor from the quote above is right, there are still several reasons he did not consider as to why we should not bring them into our houses.

¹² Richard P. Bucher, "Jeremiah 10 and the 'Pagan' Christmas Tree," <<http://www.orlutheran.com/jer10.html>>, December 2000. Accessed February 25, 2006.

The Christmas tree actually has a dark past. When its murky origins are traced it could even be argued that it is connected to human sacrifice. First a bit of the actual history of the Christmas tree:

The evergreen tree has also been long associated with gift giving- citizens of ancient Rome celebrated the Saturnalia, a week long December festival honoring the God Saturnus, by exchanging gifts attached to evergreen branches. These branches, called *strenae*, were part of a week long festival that was so popular, it was retained largely intact by Christians. . . . Other evergreen traditions come from pagan sources as well. In an old Norse tradition, evergreens were burned to encourage the return of the sun. A direct descendent of this practice, which is still carried out in remote parts of Europe, is the Yule log. (These same Norse traditions also inspired the popular notion of stealthy nocturnal gift giving by sleigh-riding elves!) A similar custom, which is the ancestor of the modern Christmas tree, took place in Pagan Germany- the twelve 'raunacht,' or wild nights, were commemorated with a decorated evergreen. This custom of burning a tree was eventually replaced with trees or wooden pyramids decorated with burning candle, which are still common in many households in Europe.¹³

Even the act of decorating the tree has strong ties to paganism as explained in the following quote:

The first decorating of an evergreen tree began with the heathen Greeks and their worship of their god Adonia, who allegedly was brought back to life by the serpent Aessulapius after having been slain." The ancient Pagan Romans decorated their "trees with bits of metal and replicas of their god, Bacchus [a fertility god]. They also placed 12 candles on the tree in honor of their sun god" Their mid-winter festival of Saturnalia started on DEC-17 and often lasted until a few days after the Solstice. In Northern Europe, the ancient Germanic people tied fruit and attached candles to evergreen tree branches, in honor of their god Woden. Trees were viewed as symbolizing eternal life. This is the deity after which Wednesday was named. The trees joined holly, mistletoe, the wassail bowl and the Yule log as symbols of the season. All predated Christianity.¹⁴

¹³ Jennifer Emick, "O, Tannenbaum: The evolution of the Christmas tree," <<http://altreligion.about.com/library/weekly/aa122102a.htm>>. Accessed February 25, 2006.

¹⁴ B.A. Robinson, "All About the Christmas Tree: Pagan origins, Christian adaptation, & secular status," <http://www.religioustolerance.org/xmas_tree.htm>, December 29, 2000. Accessed February 25, 2006.

The most sinister connection of the Christmas tree to paganism is not a strong one, but it is present. It comes through the Yule tradition:

Among early Germanic tribes the Yule tradition was celebrated by sacrificing male animals and slaves by suspending them on the branches of trees. According to Adam of Bremen, in Scandinavia the pagan kings sacrificed nine males of each species at the sacred groves every ninth year.¹⁵

As mentioned previously, the occult recognizes Christmas as their Yule sabbat. And here we see what the original Yule tree was decorated with.

Christmas is a pagan holiday through and through. Though it occurs around the same time as Hanukkah there is not any positive connection to it. Like Easter the only Christian connection to Christmas is the fact that early Christians imposed a part of Jesus' life on to it.

Christmas is not as benign as most people would like to think. Like Easter the pagan roots of Christmas have possible links back to Babylon and other Scriptural events and topics that were viewed negatively by the prophets and ultimately God Himself. My research has led me to believe that there is very little that Christians do on Christmas that is related to true Christianity. In reality, most of our activities started out as a form of worship to a demon. Certainly once a Christian realizes this, something must be done.

Thoughts Concerning the Pagan Holidays

On a personal level, the only good response when we become aware of defilement in our rituals should be to take the pagan thing and completely destroy it (2 Kings 23:4). After what I have learned I do not believe there is any way I could celebrate Easter or

¹⁵ "Christmas tree," <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas_tree>. Accessed February 25, 2006.

Christmas again with a good conscience. Or Valentines Day for that matter, which is the witch's sabbat of Candlemas, which Catholics might be surprised to find is definitely not a Christian holiday.

But when it comes to our interaction with other people, particularly other Christians, the matter becomes more difficult. From a commercial standpoint these holidays, particularly Christmas, are crucial for our economy. From an emotional standpoint most Americans have fond memories of Christmas and Easter they do not want to relinquish, and want to pass on to their children. From a theological standpoint most Christians believe that Easter and Christmas are really at the foundation of Christian culture.

Recently I read the following quote by a well-known, intelligent Christian lawyer in a conservative Christian magazine, he said, "It would be as ridiculous to rename Christmas trees as it would be to call a Jewish Menorah a candlestick."¹⁶ I believe this well-educated man loves God and I know that he does a considerable amount of good for Christianity in the legal arena. Where before I would have grouped his advocacy for Christmas into the good category, now I believe he is at best wasting his time.

Though it is a strong statement, I believe it would be best for Christianity if we allowed the secular forces remove Christmas and Easter from the public square. We are fighting over the dirty bath water while the baby goes neglected. I strongly believe that we should keep Christianity in the public square, but not through pseudo-Christian holidays.

¹⁶ Mathew D. Staver, "Christmas Returns to Prominence," <http://www.nljonline.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=272&Itemid=161>, December 2005. Accessed February 27, 2006.

The shallow theology and pagan roots of these holidays can only lead to trouble. Most Christians may not realize it but Halloween and Mardi Gras were pagan holidays that were Christianized for a time. As commonly known, Halloween is a occultic sabbat, but the current name comes from All Hallows Eve, the night before All Saints (Hallows) Day. Mardi Gras, originally a decadent celebration to Roman and Greek gods, took a respectable face for a short time as celebrations prior to Lent, but now has returned to its roots and become one of the most decadent events on earth.

Like Christmas and Easter, Halloween and Mardi Gras had tenuous and shallow Christian connections and strong connections to paganism. The enemy ultimately exploited this and hatched dragons out of the incubator of Christianity. It does not take much to see that Christmas is following this same path. Just as Halloween and Mardi Gras returned to their original forms, every year Christmas is becoming more and more like the wanton pagan festivals it spawned from. Easter is not as far along this path as Christmas is, but it would not surprise me to see it vigorously head that direction in the next few years.

With all the strong ties to paganism is puzzled me that Christians through the centuries have tolerated these holidays. But as I researched I realized this was not the case. As a quote above pointed out Martin Luther, Calvin, and the Puritans abhorred Christmas. Below is an additional quote about the Christmas tree that I found interesting:

Tertullian (circa 160 - 230), an early Christian leader and a prolific writer, complained that too many fellow-Christians had copied the Pagan practice of adorning their houses with lamps and with wreathes of laurel at Christmas time. The English Puritans condemned a number of customs associated with Christmas, such as the use of the Yule log, holly, mistletoe, etc. Oliver Cromwell preached against "the heathen traditions" of Christmas carols, decorated trees and any joyful expression that desecrated "that sacred event." In America, the Pilgrim's second governor, William Bradford, a Puritan, tried hard to stamp out all "pagan mockery" at Christmas time. Christmas trees were not used by Puritans in

colonial times. However, if they were, they would certainly have been forbidden. In 1851, Pastor Henry Schwan of Cleveland OH appears to have been the person responsible for decorating the first Christmas tree in an American church. His parishioners condemned the idea as a Pagan practice; some even threatened the pastor with harm. But objections soon dissipated.¹⁷

Another thing that I found surprising was that for short time a Western nation actually had laws against Christmas:

The authorities in Post-Reformation England condemned the celebration of Christmas altogether as being a pagan institution (without the slightest warrant in the Bible) and made laws forbidding it to be celebrated. Anyone found cooking a Christmas ham had their dinner taken away and they themselves were arrested. Similar laws were put into effect in the American colonies. In Massachusetts, the following law was passed in 1659 and was enforced on the people for 22 years before it was finally repealed. "Whosoever shall be found observing Christmas, either by forbearing of labor, feasting, or any other way, every such person shall pay as a fine five shillings to the county."¹⁸

So by refusing to keep the pagan customs that cultural Christianity has embraced we enter into good company. To be sure, there are few nut-cases in that group too, but then again one would not do this to improve his reputation.

In the process of turning away from these pagan holidays there is something positive that we can do though. Where Christmas and Easter are shallow at best and evil at the worst, the Jewish holidays offer all Christians an incredibly rich and spiritually deep avenue to take. One writer has this to say about the matter:

Apostles Observed Passover: The World Almanac, 1968 edition, page 187, says: "In the second century A.D., Easter Day was, among Christians in Asia Minor [that is, in the Churches at Ephesus, Galatia, etc. - the so called "Gentile" churches raised up by the Apostle Paul] the 14th of Nisan, the seventh month of the Jewish [civil] calendar." In other words, the 14th day of the first month of the sacred calendar, and it was not then called by the name of the pagan deity "Easter," but by the Bible name "Passover." Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and the holy days God had ordained forever were all observed

¹⁷ Robinson

¹⁸ Martin

by Jesus, and the early apostles, and the converted Gentile Christians (Acts 2:1; 12:3; 18:21; 20:6, 16; I Cor. 5:7- 8; 16:8). Passover is a memorial of the crucifixion of Christ (Luke 22:19). Passover, observed by the early true Church, occurred not on Sunday or any fixed day of the week, but on a calendar day of the year. The day of the week varies from year to year. Easter is one of the pagan days Paul warned Gentile converts they must not return to observing (Gal. 4:9-10).¹⁹

In the keeping of the Biblical holidays not only are we keeping days ordained by God, but we can learn much about our faith through the keeping of them. Though I am only beginning to learn about the richness of the feasts, I know there is an incredible well of knowledge and wisdom in them.

We would give our children an unforgettable legacy if we would keep the feasts and explain to them how each of the components point to the Messiah Yeshua. This is clearly one of the reasons that God instituted the feasts, so we could visually see the story of the Messiah in them.

If we would stop keeping the pagan feasts and start keeping the Jewish feasts our culture would also be changed. First, we would move out from under the curse discussed in the first part of this paper and into the blessings associated with keeping the Biblical feasts. This would initially happen individually, but as it began to happen corporately, even among a remnant, God will begin to bless the culture as the remnant takes their stand in the gap on this matter.

Also, as the salt became salty again, the flavor of our culture would change. If one teaches two, two teach four, and so on, eventually society will begin to take notice. Even a handful of people can raise an issue to the awareness of the public. If this energy were to be expanded it would of course not be focused on the holidays, but the holidays

¹⁹ Armstrong

would be part of a larger package that challenged people to turn or return to Biblical living. While there would be a part of our society that would not be bothered by the fact that they are celebrating the sun god during Christmas, there are still many who would be made uncomfortable by the fact.

But does this mean that we should abandon these days to the pagans. Definitely not! The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains! (Psalm 24:1) Every day is His and we should not concede a single second to Satan. That is why above I suggested it would not be a bad idea to let secular forces remove the pseudo-Christian holidays from the public square. But when this begins to happen, and even now, Christians have a responsibility to engage in deliberate and vigorous spiritual warfare over the sanctity of these days. Just as the early Christians did. But unlike them, hopefully we do not fall short.

Conclusion

Most people, even if they agree with me, would likely say that the holidays are only a small part of the big picture, and I would agree with them. But because something is small does not mean that it is unimportant. A tiny nail has the potential of running an eighteen-wheeler off the road given the right circumstances. Given the right circumstances, allowing paganism to remain in our Christian practices could spell the end for Christianity in our society.

Also, the tiny toe provides balance to the whole body. Apparently, when someone loses a toe they need to learn to walk again because they have lost their sense of balance. By neglecting the Jewish feasts and embracing pagan holidays Christians are out of balance. But we have an opportunity to not only amputate the gangrenous toe, but

to replace it with the original healthy toe. While this will not solve all of our problems, it will help to bring us back into balance.

It would be foolish to allow the holidays become a primary issue in our lives, but it would also be foolish to not act on the knowledge we now have. Every person must make a choice how they and their families will react to this. I do not believe it is a matter of conscience whether or not we should continue to keep the pagan holidays, it is clear that we should not. But how far one will divorce themselves from these holidays is a matter that needs to be worked out. For instance, will I refuse to go to the company Christmas party which usually occurs in early December and is tied to Christmas by name only? This and other issues I will still need to work out.

I am thankful that I was able to do this paper and go through the *Priesthood of the Believer* course. Both have helped me to realize how far off I still am. But they have also given me an idea of how to get to where I need to be. I look forward with excitement and anticipation to what the future will hold as I increasingly come into line with the word of God.

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