

## ***What Are We Celebrating on December 25?***

*by Bill and Karen Bishop*

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As if there weren't enough considerations in just uncovering the roots of Christmas, we heard a story – an allegory of sorts about a young man who became engaged to a young woman. During their betrothal, she surprised her groom-to-be with a wonderful dinner, gifts, and a birthday card. He was somewhat pleased with her effort, but he asked her why she had chosen that particular day, as it was not his birthday. She responded by saying, well I had a boyfriend for many years before I found you, and this was his birthday. It is easy for me to remember, so I thought we could just call it your birthday from now on and celebrate your birth then.

Of course, this is simply an allegory to depict what Y'shua might feel when we celebrate his birth on December 25. That day would be particularly egregious to Him, as our research has led us to understand that it is the birthday of his antithesis figure, Mithra, who is also known by various other names in other regions and cultures.

A study of Mithra reveals many parallels to Y'shua. He was a counterfeit version that was brought to the stage by the enemy to precede the true. Just as the "anti" will precede the true in the second coming of the Messiah, Mithra preceded the first coming of Y'shua. Mithra worship is the epitome of sun worship. He is the Persian god of the unconquerable sun, the light between heaven and earth. This is the obvious counterfeit forerunner to Y'shua, the Son, the true light of heaven who would soon come to earth. 1 Corinthians 2:12 contrasts the "spirit of the world" with the "spirit which is of God" and strongly implies that to follow the "spirit of the world" is in direct opposition to the ways of God's Spirit. The pagan roots of Mithra represent this spirit of the world - all that we were attached to in the past. We were to put it all behind when we found Y'shua. In a typological sense, we were betrothed to the world (Mithra) before coming to Y'shua, and we are now betrothed to Y'shua instead. So - Mithra is like our ex-boyfriend. Ironically, Mithra's birthday was December 25, and his birthday was celebrated on this day long before Y'shua was ever born. Why would we want to honor the birth of our Savior on the birthday of our old boyfriend – the counterfeit and adversary of our betrothed bridegroom?

In our present era, not too much is commonly understood about the antics of the past, but the traditions of burning yule logs, hanging mistletoe, putting holly wreaths on our doors and decorated trees in our homes continues. Sinterklaas has been given a face lift to become a jolly old man called Santa Clause and his Krampus Demon helpmates, are now depicted as cute little friendly elves. So, is it now OK to participate in the Christmas activities? Matthew 7:17-18 tells us that an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit. In our modern day, we might say that you can put lipstick on a pig, but it is still a pig. It is still the way of the world, steeped in wickedness, and it is alien to the way of God. Even the non-believer might want to look again at Santa's roots and reconsider whether his lap is really where they want their child to be sitting. Ho Ho Ho! The enemy is good at making his ways very alluring, camouflaging the true character as needed. It is up to us to be discerning and to disengage from his ways.

Much good is accomplished this time of year, and yes, there are even beautiful miracles associated with this season. God has a heart, and He loves His own. The Turkish Catholic Saint Nicholas may be a highly-revered man, but linking him to this day that has been established through unholy lecherous behavior does not make Christmas OK. Because there are some good things presently associated with this season does not mean God is happy about this overturn of His ways for the ways of the world. Along with this season also comes heartache when one who has lost a loved one sees others so happy. People go into debt to "keep face". They can't admit that they can't afford the extravagant gifts they lavish on their friends and relatives. The buying frenzy has actually cost some their lives on Black Friday, and it is being expanded into longer and longer stretches of time to accommodate the lust for buying and the dollar gain of merchants. Overindulgence of food and drink often turns the supposedly sacred day into an excuse to get drunk and crass. So often our children are encouraged to covet and develop an attitude of greed when confronted with the surplus of gifts that greet them under the tree in most homes today. They become obsessed with the gifts they will get, they expect more and more, then they complain that they did not get what their brother got. Children learn a message that material possessions are an indicator of how good or worthy they are.

As adults, we (Bill and Karen) have become somewhat repulsed at Santa (being a twisted version of Y'shua), and we no longer want anything at all to do with him or any of the trappings associated with this day. We don't decorate a tree, deck our halls, hang stockings by the hearth, or ring any bells. This day simply comes and goes as any other. We realize we can no longer participate in festivities that have ancient roots in such debauchery, nor can we acknowledge a figure who stems from that tradition and projects

a counterfeit version of our Savior, Y'shua. Since Y'shua wasn't even born in December, there is nothing left for us to adhere to in the seasonal festivities known as Christmas today. Of course, we still attempt to have a genuine attitude of good will and generosity, but that is something we aspire to throughout the year rather than for a brief period in time.

We came to realize that while God may be pleased by our desire at this time of year to make others happy and might take joy in the good nature we exhibit. However, He is surely not pleased, and potentially even offended by many other aspects of the season. It is not our intent to be unduly hurtful to the hearts of our readers, but we do feel that it is necessary to put this information out there so our readers might weigh it all in the balance. For a time after we understood bits and pieces of the deceit relative to this paradoxical day, we maintained the same stance we hear repeatedly today: "But, that isn't what it means to me!" Then we had to acknowledge that this statement puts "me" (us) in the seat of importance. We were forced to look at not what it means to "me" (us), but what it means to "Him". Again, the parallel story of the two young people who are betrothed comes to mind. Y'shua is our bridegroom-to-be. What does it mean to Him? In view of that concept, what it means to "me" (us) suddenly became totally irrelevant.

What does God think when man mixes the ways of the world with God's truth? James 4:4 and 1 John 5:19, as well as Jeremiah 10:2-4 and many such Old Testament passages confirm that He is not pleased. Then Mark 7:7-13 relates the words of Y'shua himself, again showing great disdain for mixing the traditions of men and the ways of the world with God's ways. When man replaced God's holy days with man's holidays is that not what he did?

It all seemed to come down to this one thing: What does it mean to Him? If it was not pleasing to Him, why did we still want to do it? Did the joy we got from the glitz, the glitter, the glamour, and the frivolity of the season justify our conformity to the world instead of to His ways? We had to say it did not. All of the information above formed our decision not to participate in Christmas. Once confronted with the truth, such a decision is one that each person (particularly each Christian) must make. Maybe it is time to take Christ back out of Christmas, as He never belonged there in the first place. Then let the world have their day, but we don't need to be a part of it. While it is not easy to depart from the years of fond memories and traditions that have structured this season in days gone by, it can be done. Pleasing God somehow seems more important. Things of the world are not easy to put away when they have become entrenched. However, we can attest that life is possible after departure from Christmas.

Many who have departed from the worldly tradition of Christmas have reached out to the true holy days of the Lord, His Feast Days and Festival weeks. One that receives little Biblical press, other than a brief mention as the Feast of Dedication in John 10:22, is Chanukkah. It is an eight-day period of celebration which is often also called Feast of lights. It celebrates the reclaiming of the Temple and its cleansing and rededication, by the Macabees of the tribe of Judah. The lighting of the Temple's menorah (which had been dark for some time) shined a magnificent light in Jerusalem once again, showing God's victory for the Jewish people. Homes are frequently decorated with lights, and exchanging gifts is often entertained. It falls about the same time of year as Christmas, and many choose to reduce the impact of their withdrawal from Christmas by looking to this eight-day festival and the warmth and pleasure it provides.

Please realize however that although Y'shua himself may have acknowledged and observed this festival, its origin is with the tribe of Judah, and it is not one of the Lord's holy days. We see no problem with observing it, but it too has taken on some of the overtones of secular materialism, so caution may be needed to avoid the traditions of men now associated with Chanukkah. We greatly appreciate the true origin of this festival, and we also see it as the miraculous time when the "Light of the World" was lit, when the virgin Mary was visited by an angel as described in Luke 1:35. How appropriate it is that Y'shua's conception could be on Feast of lights!

So here it is for your prayerful contemplation; the ball is now in your court. We have become keenly aware that to love appropriately from a Christian perspective is to share with our brothers and sisters in Christ that which God puts on our hearts to share. We are to share it even when it is uncomfortable to do so – yes, even when it hurts. It is with such painful love that we reach out to you with this writing, yet with joy in knowing that some will embrace its truth and be even more endeared to Father above as a result. May His blessings rest upon you.