

Some People Don't Celebrate Christmas ... BUT WHY???

by Bill and Karen Bishop

When people find out we don't celebrate Christmas, we get that puzzled look, then the unspoken or spoken question falls in the air, "... But Why???"

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One can see the wheels turning in their minds: "There is a great deal of joy and festivities, laughing, family fun, and a warmth in the air this time of year. How can you turn away from the beauty of this season?" It is a difficult query to address. By the standards of this world and the estimation of the majority of people in this country, this is certainly the most enjoyable season of the year. Yet on a personal level, neither the standards of this world nor the estimation of the majority of people have much influence on our decision. We will attempt to explain.

Both of us have many years behind us in which we celebrated Christmas, and for a mixture of reasons. Among them is the obvious Christian aspect. December 25 is celebrated in most Christian churches as the birth of the Christ child. But is it really? Why were the shepherds watching their flocks by night in the brutal winter weather of Bethlehem at that time of year? Why were their flocks in the fields at all? The two birthing seasons for sheep are spring and fall, so they would be carefully tending their sheep in the fields at these times – even by night. Rabbis of the region acknowledge that the sheep were in the fields from early spring to late fall, but not during the winter.

Then too, we enjoyed the Santa aspect of the holiday season, which engendered the giving and receiving of gifts, and even fostered a more intense generosity toward those in need. That sense of well-being and magnanimous spirit, combined with the shopping, specialty baking, parties, and festivities of various natures always made Christmas the highlight of the year!

As time went by though, we became more and more uncomfortable with celebrating the birth of Y'shua (Jesus) on December 25, when we were aware that it was not his real date of birth. It set us forth on a quest for the truth of the matter, and it quickly started coming into focus.

Our research led to more than we bargained for. With just a tiny bit of sleuthing spirit, we were on the trail to quite a startling discovery. First, we found that the Bible itself can pinpoint the season of the birth of the Savior, and it is in the fall of the year. The puzzle pieces were not too difficult to put together.

Luke 1:5 tells us that Zechariah was of the course of Abia, who was called Abijah in the Hebrew text of 1 Chronicles 24:10. There we find that this course was the eighth of the priestly courses for Tabernacle service. The duration of each course was about one week. Accordingly, Zechariah was serving in the eighth course of Temple service when the angel appeared to him to prophesy the birth of John the Baptist. That would mean the angel's message to Zechariah during the eighth course would have been in the spring - toward the end of month 2 on the religious calendar. This passage relates that he would have completed his ministrations (which would have been at least 56 days into the religious year), and THEN he would have gone back to his home (verse 23). He lived in Hebron, in the hill country of Judea, which was about 19 miles from the Temple in Jerusalem, so it would take him a little while to get there. Then, depending on Elizabeth's ovulation, it may have been a little longer before she conceived. Verse 24 just implies that it was shortly after he arrived home. Since Father seems to favor major timing events for significant earthly manifestations, it seems likely that she might even have conceived on Pentecost that year - about half way through the third month of the religious calendar.

Luke 1 also speaks of the timing of Mary's angelic visitation and the conception of Y'shua. Verse 36 indicates this visitation came DURING the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Now if Elizabeth conceived about half way through month three on the religious calendar, then her sixth month would not BEGIN until about half way through month nine. That would put Mary's conception sometime shortly thereafter DURING Elizabeth's sixth month - likely near the Winter Solstice, which falls during Chanukkah. How appropriate would it be for the Light of the world to be conceived during the Feast of Lights?

The gestation period of a human fluctuates, but averages to between 270 and 280 days. If we place the conception near the winter solstice, we will find that it is about 274 days to the first day of the seventh month, or the holy day called Yom Teruah or the Feast of Trumpets in September. "Yom" is the Hebrew word for "day", and "Teruah" means rejoicing and noise, especially with trumpets. The trumpets are blown repeatedly throughout that day, in a manner that depicts the celebration of something much bigger than the beginning of the secular year. Indeed, our Father commanded that the trumpets would be blown on that day, way back in the days of Moses.

*Leviticus 23:24*

*(24) Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation.*

It was to be a day of noise and excitement, though it was never specified in Torah exactly why this was to be done. Maybe it was because He knew what would happen on that very day so many years later.

Y'shua is the divider of time, taking us from BC (Before Christ) to AD (Anno Domino – year of the Lord) – at least that was how time was accounted before secular society successfully erased Y'shua from the annals of time by altering the division to become BCE (before common era) and CE (common era). Likewise, the Feast of Trumpets begins the new governmental year in Jewish reckoning, hence it is also known as "Rosh HaShannah" (head of the year). On this holy Sabbath day of blowing trumpets, we believe that the trumpet announced His arrival, which would be an entirely appropriate tribute.

The trumpet is sounded at various times. It blew loud and long when God interacted with man at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19. It will be blown when Y'shua descends from heaven to meet us in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), and it will undoubtedly be blown again when Y'shua returns to set His feet on the mount of Olives. So - why would it not be blown when he was released from the womb in His fleshly body on Earth to save us?

Others have properly identified autumn as the season for his birth, but they view the sacred birth as occurring during Feast of Tabernacles. However, if Joseph had not been in Jerusalem in time for Festival of Tabernacles to begin, he would have been in non-compliance with the feast mandates of Deuteronomy.

*Deuteronomy 16:16*

*(16) Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty:*

Caesar Augustus had decreed that all men must report to their city of birth to pay taxes that year (Luke 2:1-3). The timing may or may not have been designed to coincide with Feast of Tabernacles, but they did fall together. Stopping at Bethlehem on the way to the feast was likely the course many would be following at that time. They probably left quite early to go to the

Feast so they could deal with this tax and still find a spot in Jerusalem to erect their booth (Leviticus 23:40-42), secure all of the needed supplies, and prepare their dwelling for the week of the Feast. The Feast of Tabernacles comes 14 days after the Feast of Trumpets when we believe our Savior was born, and the trip by foot or donkey would take a few days on the crowded roads. The inns of the vicinity were probably crowded because people were still en route to Jerusalem for the festivities. If Y'shua was born on Feast of Trumpets, this would have allowed enough time for the babe to be strengthened sufficiently for the trip and for Mary to recover from the birth so that she could travel more comfortably on into Jerusalem. There Y'shua would be taken to the Temple for circumcision on day 8 of His life, the booth would be prepared, and within a week after his circumcision this holy child would tabernacle among His brethren in His human form for the first time during the Feast of Tabernacles.

After seeing this come together, we determined that we would honor the birth of our Savior when we believe it actually occurred. Though we are never instructed Biblically to celebrate his birth at all, and we don't celebrate it per se, we now acknowledge it at what we perceive to be the appropriate time of year.

We then began to see that the Festivals actually brought definition to the life and work of the Savior, beginning with His first coming, and to be concluded with His second coming. Leviticus calls these Festival days the "Lord's" "holy days". The scales began to fall off of our eyes, as we began to compare these "holy days" of the Lord to the "holidays" of the world. A bit more study revealed how centuries ago man had replaced the holy days which were observed by early Christians with their worldly counterpart which we call holidays. Even the words themselves seemed to confirm our findings. Change the "y" in "holy" to an "i" and remove the space before "day". Now the written terminology has been successfully switched from holy day to holiday.

Having seen that the birth of Y'shua was in the fall, we pondered about why it is celebrated on December 25, and we proceeded to study the background which led to this selected date, as well as its attached spiritual implications. This is not easy to relate, as it hurts our hearts to ruffle feathers among our brothers and sisters in Christ. We do not relish the thought of bringing discomfort to anyone, but we know how important it was to us to get to the truth of the matter, and we feel that others might want to come to terms with it as well. You see, we desire to serve our Master and Redeemer wholeheartedly, and to do that means that we must learn to see things from His perspective rather than to embrace the ways of the world - so we continued to dig. The results were unsettling. I would suggest that you continue to

read at this point with a strong heart and an earnest desire to seek truth, as the information which follows will be troubling to many who celebrate this day. By all means we ask, as always, that you pray for affirmation as you proceed. We believe if you do, you will be shown the spiritual dangers of continuing to honor this day as it has been celebrated for many years.

Before we write of the findings of our research though, let us relate a figurative tale of a young woman who became engaged to a young man. 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 analogy 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?

Now our research took another turn. This time it attacked the source of our childhood fantasy. Just who is this jolly old man we call Santa? What is the history behind this Christmas character? It grieves me to relate the findings

of our study on this greatly loved figure, but we feel that it will help to shed light on the true nature of this day.

To be honest, because Santa and his elves are mythological in nature, their roots are likewise mythological. Myths evolve and change, and there are multiple versions. The interesting factor in our digging, however, was the common ground. Almost none of these rooted mythological versions were of good report. The roots of these myths run deep – much deeper than the fourth century famed benevolent Turkish Catholic figure Saint Nicholas. The roots are so deep in fact that they stem at least as far back as a mythological figure named Odin. Alexander Hislop (author of The Two Babylons) from the 1800's, even associated Odin with Adon of Babylon, then back to Nimrod of Genesis (of whom the Bible has little good to say). Not only is the actual man named Saint Nicholas a much later player in the Christmas scene, but there is never any attempt to explain how such things as the North Pole and fir trees play a role in the life of this Turkish saint. Furthermore, the worldly festivities of Christmas, (though not yet practiced under this name) predated the birth of Y'shua by some 1000 years.

Using a cross-section of mythological references, we will try to piece together how Odin led to our present-day Santa. Odin was the Nordic god of thunder. His name means “the inspired one”. He was memorialized as an old man with a long white beard who carried a crosier, or a staff with a hook at the end. He had a mystical tree – the fir tree. He was also perceived to be the god of wisdom, occult knowledge, magic, war, intoxicating drink, ecstasy, and death. He was a hooded and cloaked figure who hailed from the north and was said to travel the sky on an eight-legged white horse named Sleipnir to decide who was good and would prosper, and who was bad and would die. It is said Odin captured a devil and made him his personal servant, a part goat and part man figure called Knecht Ruprecht. Children would leave food for Sleipnir in stockings hung by the chimney, and if they had been good Odin would replace this food with candy for the children. However, if the children had been bad, Knecht Ruprecht would beat them with the rod he carried, or abduct the worst children in his bag and carry them away. (Many countries today still have parades and festivities which involve men dressed to look like the grotesque character of Knecht Ruprecht, and children and women are often beaten at these times.)

Early in the fourth century, the Roman Emperor Constantine thought to combine these mythological festivities and the birth of the Mithra figure with the birth of Y'shua in a manner that would encourage non-Christians to embrace the faith. By so doing, paganism polluted the Christian faith in profound fashion. The holy days that were established by God Himself were changed to our pagan-based holidays. Constantine had watered down the

tenets of the faith, and almost totally destroyed the heritage of the Biblical festivals as revealed in God's Word for the benefit of mankind. He had justified the lecherous revelry of these festivities with his Christian veneer, proclaiming that we should celebrate the birth of Y'shua on December 25, the birthday of Mithra. This dating of the birth of Y'shua has even been found on a Roman calendar of 336 AD.

The Christmas festivities brought into the church actually involved two celebrations:

The first was for about a week, December 17-24. It was a celebration of Saturn, the god of excess, and was known as Saturnalia. In the Middle Ages it became known as Christ mass, later blurred together to make Christmas. During this time the courts were closed, and there was no punishment for misconduct, deviant behavior, or even criminal acts. Rampant debauchery reigned unchecked and unchallenged. Great orgies occurred in the streets as well as rioting, murders, and horrid rituals in honor of Saturn, the god of excess. In keeping with the season, mistletoe was hung. It was thought to render women helpless to sexual advances, and their resistance was to be forbidden. Holly was thought to ward off evil, and it was often fashioned into a wreath to accentuate its supposed power. A massive yule log was burned for 12 days to honor the Norse fertility god Jul. In attempts to contact other spirits, a sacrifice (sometimes human) was burned and offered each day at this yule log. The evergreen tree, which represented sex and fertility, was decorated with gold and silver balls depicting male genitalia. It was often topped with an eight-pointed star to depict the rays of the sun god. These trees were said to be embodied with spirits, and people took the trees into their homes to welcome these spirits into their places of dwelling. The decorated fir trees were worshiped in song, and the children bowed down before them to receive gifts.

The second celebration actually concluded the Saturn festivities with the giving of gifts on December 25 in honor of the Persian god of light. The lewd and lascivious indulgence of Christmas celebration finally became so depraved and excessive that the festivities were outlawed and fines were imposed if anyone celebrated it in any way.

In the 1500's the myth of Odin remained alive, though Odin became the Dutch Sinterklaas. Sinterklaas also traveled through the sky by night onto rooftops on his white horse. He dressed in a red cloak, carried a crosier, and was accompanied by his Black Jacks or Krampus Demons (again being part goat and part man). He would visit on his birthday (in December) and leave gifts for the good children. If, however, the children had been bad, his

Krampus Demons would beat them, and some versions even indicate that the Krampus Demons would eat them!

Dutchmen who settled here in America brought the myth of Sinterklaas to life in our country, and our English rendering of the name became Santa Claus. Due to the debauchery of the festivities, it was also illegal for a while here in this country to celebrate Christmas. However, the lust for the indulgences of the season finally won out, and the celebration was re-instituted. In 1828 New York had to begin a police force to regain control at this time of year. The wicked nature of the festivities had carried through to our country and our day.

In 1930 the marketing techniques of a Chicago based department store and a popular soft drink in our country were helpful in changing the image of Santa Claus to the rotund jolly image we see today. Complete with this change of image was the transformation of the demonic helpers into cute and joyful little elves who make toys instead of beating bad children. The white horse with eight legs became eight reindeer that flew through the sky, with Rudolph being added later to make nine (another marketing campaign).

Yes, the old myth of Odin and the devil was watered down over the years into something much more palatable. However, the roots remain. One of the definitions for "devil" in The Oxford English Dictionary (along with Beelzebub, Lucifer, and Satan) is Old Nick. Is it mere coincidence that this is another name for Santa, and that the letters in the name Santa can be transposed to spell Satan? In Shakespearean plays, it was the calling card of the devil or the evil character of the play to announce himself as he came onto the stage by saying: "ho, ho, ho".

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.

In addition, many children are eventually devastated to learn that Santa is not real, and that they have believed in a hoax. They then become confused about whether Y'shua is actually real or just another “pretend” figure. They reflect on what they have been told. Santa knows whether you are good or bad (a supernatural trait), and so does Y'shua. Santa makes a list of who is naughty and nice, while Y'shua records our names in His Book of Life. Santa covers the entire world in a night and Y'shua can be everywhere at once. Santa has no beginning or end – just like Y'shua. Santa even has his own spirit – the spirit of Christmas, while Y'shua has the Holy Spirit. Santa has hair as white as snow, and so does Y'shua. Santa has his mystical fir tree and Y'shua has His Tree of Life. Santa is supposed to love children, as does Y'shua. Children are told they can send letters to Santa to let him know what they want, and told they can pray to Y'shua to let him know what they want. How could we not begin to see the counterfeit here - begin to understand that Santa is the world's version of Y'shua being thrust into the hearts and minds of our children? How can they help but be confused regarding the two of them? It can take some time to sort through the deception and deal with the disappointment when they are confronted with the truth, and some never recover their spiritual footing properly after that. They have been deceived about Santa, so maybe Y'shua too is a myth, as He cannot be seen or touched either, and resides in another realm. They no longer know

whether they can believe what they are told by those they are supposed to be able to trust – once deceived, always in doubt.

Please keep in mind that all of these details are only a brief overview of the many cultural diversities and traditions through the years. There is ever so much more as you begin to research the roots of our seasonal festivities. It seems to us that Santa may actually be a parody - the adversary's way of poking fun at Y'shua. Let's look briefly at the song Santa Claus is coming to town. "He sees you when you're sleepin', he knows when you're awake, he knows if you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake. ... Santa Claus is comin' to town." We understand the near return of Y'shua who will bring with Him righteous judgment, and we want to be doing what is right when He comes. There is too much similarity to ignore. We also see the tongue in cheek ridicule of that concept. Then, ironically (when money is no object) every child (whether they have been bad or good) gets gifts today, so maybe there will be no negative judgment when Y'shua returns either. ??

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 has done?

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 composes the "why" that 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 it is possible and that there is life 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.

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Your input (pro or con) is welcome as long as it is considerately stated. We try not to be harsh, demeaning, or insensitive, and request the same from our readers. We look forward to hearing from you.