

**A Biblical Perspective on:  
Is Christmas a Pagan Holiday?  
Should Christians have Christmas trees?  
Should Parents Encourage Santa?  
Did the New Testament Church  
Celebrate Christian Holidays?**

**What part of modern Christmas celebrations is Biblical?**

**Is the date of December 25 in the Bible? No.**

**December 25 (2500 BC):** the date, because you see December 25 came from a Pagan observance of the birthday of the unconquered sun. It certainly isn't biblical. During that time the Pagans held two weeks of feasts', parades, special music, gift giving, lighted candles and green trees. Many of the earth's earliest inhabitants were sun worshipers because they depended on the sun's yearly course in the heavens. Most people held feasts at the time of the winter solstice (mid-December)-- a time when the days were shortest. They built bonfires to give the sun god strength and bring him back to life again. When it became apparent that the days were growing longer, there was great rejoicing.

**Is it because the early church celebrated Christmas? No.**

**Christmas time Worship of Christ (336AD):** Some ambitious church members living in that Pagan culture decided to Christianize the holiday and in 336 Emperor Constantine declared Christ's birthday an official Roman holiday. There were some protesters such as Chrysostom, who rebuked Christians for adopting this Pagan thing, but it stuck. The Roman Empire was filled with sun worshippers. The church leaders in Rome decided to celebrate Christ's birth during the winter solstice in an attempt to Christianize these popular pagan celebrations. For the most part their efforts failed to make the people conform, and the heathen festivities continued. What resulted was a bizarre marriage of pagan and Christian elements that characterizes our modern celebration of Christmas.

**Is the word Christmas in the Bible? No.**

**The Word Christmas (1038AD):** Well, it's a short form of Christ Mass, a Catholic Mass, which grew out of a specific feast day called Christis Masse, which was

established in 1038. So it certainly has nothing to do with Scripture. No, Christmas is not a holy day. Christmas is not a divinely prescribed day.

## **Is the Christmas tree in the Bible? No.**

**The Tree (9<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> Century AD):** It is believed that Boniface, English missionary to Germany in the eighth century, instituted the first Christmas tree. He supposedly replaced sacrifices to the god Odin's sacred oak with a fir tree adorned in tribute to Christ. But certain other accounts claim that Martin Luther introduced the Christmas tree lighted with candles. Based on that information you could say the Christmas tree has a distinguished Christian pedigree.

## **Is Santa Claus in the Bible? No.**

**Santa Claus (16<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch):** is a contraction of St. Nicholas, a bishop in Asia Minor during the fourth century known for his extraordinary generosity. He was later associated with giving presents at the end of the year. St. Nicholas was adopted by the Netherlands as the patron saint of children. On St. Nicholas eve, the children would leave their shoes filled with hay for the saint's white horse. Saint Nicholas became very popular in Holland and he got imported to America by way of Holland. Dutch children expected the friendly saint to visit them on December 25 and the custom grew that on December 25 they placed their wooden shoes by the fireplace to be filled with goodies.

## **Did Early American believers celebrate Christmas? No.**

**Early America (1644AD):** Puritans even in early America called Christmas Romish rags. They deliberately worked on the first December 25 in order to show disdain for the Pagan holiday, and in 1644 (this is an interesting note) English Puritans passed a law making Christmas Day a working day. It became illegal to cook plum pudding and mince pie.

## **What parts of modern Christmas is Biblical? The only Biblical parts are the words of Matthew & Luke that describe Christ's birth.**

Strip off the date, the name, Santa Claus, the cards, the presents, the tree and the food, and what have you got? Nothing. That's precisely how much of most people's Christmas is Biblical: none of it.

# What should we do with Christmas?

1. **Use it for Christ's Glory.** Remember what Spurgeon said: "Look, Christmas is here. We might as well live with it and take the opportunity to exalt Christ."
2. **Keep Christ's perspective.** In Revelation 22:16 Jesus Himself summarizes the entire book of Revelation and says, "I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David." Jesus here reminds us of His coming to be born as a son of David, but He does so tied to His second coming.
  - The first time He came, He came veiled in the form of a child. The Last time He comes, He comes unveiled.
  - The first time He came, a star marked His arrival. The next time He comes the whole Heaven will roll up like a scroll and all the stars will fall out of the sky, and He Himself will light it.
  - The first time He came, wise men and shepherds brought Him gifts. The next time He comes, He will bring gifts, rewards for His own.
  - The first time He came there was no room for Him. The next time He comes the whole world won't be able to contain His glory.
  - The first time He came a few attended His arrival some shepherds and some wise men. The next time He comes, every eye shall see Him.
  - The first time He came as a baby. Soon He comes as sovereign King and Lord.
3. **Take the Biblical Challenge.** Give a gift to Jesus. Then, like Christ, give to those who can't repay you. Pause to sense the darkness outside at night, and then thank God for sending the light. Read the four chapters of Christmas Scriptures to your family. Start and maintain some personal and family traditions that point to Christ. Enjoy this wonderful time of the year, don't lose the season for the rush.
4. **Three final lessons:**
  - Don't lose the Spiritual Depth of Christmas because of its Pagan association.
  - Don't miss the Spiritual Delight of Christmas because of the Commercial association.
  - Don't forget the Spiritual Despair of the World because of Christmas and its wonders.

# Where did All the Christmas Traditions Start

Christmas is so full of wonder, meaning and tradition. But, where did all these things that we now call Christmas -- come from? Lets just briefly sketch the origin and development of what we now celebrate as Christ's Birth.

## *The Biblical Celebration*

- The Dawning of Light Luke 1:78-79
- The Fullness of Time Gal 4.4-5
- The Mystery of Incarnation 1 Timothy 3:16

## *The Pagan Connection*

- Dr. Phillip Schaff, a noted church historian of the last century, wrote a monumental 8 volume History of the Christian Church<sup>1</sup>. In this work he relates that history records that the ancients celebrated an annual victory of the Sun over the long night of winter. This religious festival was held near the winter solstice of 12/21 -22 each year.
- By Roman times there was:
  1. A silent testimony of nature: the seasons that show winter as death and spring as life and resurrection. And,
  2. A Public Celebration in Paganism that:
  3. Related the Sol Invictus legend of the conquest of darkness by the Sun.
  4. This tradition was embodied in the Saturnalia Festival. This festival was a feast of images, the giving of gifts, and the setting free of slaves.
- According to the Astronomers, on the night of 12/21-22, the earth is at its darkest, the night is the longest, the light of day is the shortest, and the Sun is closest to the Earth of any time of the year.
- What an amazing picture of Christ's coming to us. As John 1 says He came to a sin darkened world, He came as a Sunrise from on High and offered a free gift of salvation and liberation from servitude to the servants of darkness.

## *The Christian Regeneration of this Pagan Celebration*

- By the year AD 360 the church was celebrating the Birth, Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ.
- By AD 386, Chrysostom was preaching, "Without the birth of Christ there is no Baptism, no Passion, no Resurrection, no Ascension and no Pouring out of the Holy Spirit..."
- As the centuries went on the tradition grew to include Epiphany [manifestation] when Christ was circumcised on the 8th day after His birth. The eastern church celebrates this on January 6th.

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<sup>1</sup> III, pp. 394ff.

### *The Christian Meaning to Ancient Traditions*

- December 25th was the Saturnalia Festival of emancipation, gift giving and the triumph of light after the longest night. The Christian sees the truth implicit in this pagan tradition that reflects: Christ the Light of the world, His triumph over the night of sin in Luke 1:78-79
- Evergreen Trees were the symbol of eternal life. Martin Luther introduced them to the Reformation Church as a picture of our endless life in Christ, by bringing in a tree to his family on Christmas Eve lit with candles. Isaiah 60:13
- Candles are a picture that Christ is the Light of the world John 8:
- Holly speaks of the thorns in His crown Matthew 27:29
- Red is a color of Christmas that speaks of Christ's blood and death.
- Gifts are a reminder of the gifts of the Magi to baby Jesus. Each of them speak to a component of His incarnation: Majesty in life, Bitterest Agony in Death and He as Gods Perfect gift to us. Matthew 2.
- The Yule Log was a symbol by which all the men in the family would carry a log large enough to burn for 12 days into the house. They were identifying with Christ and His Cross. The fire was started with a fragment from the previous years [this refers to the eternal existence of Christ before His birth] log. it speaks of warmth, unity, joy and the security of endless life.
- Mistletoe was an ancient symbol from the Roman times. It was under Mistletoe that old enmities and broken friendship were restored. So Christ was the One who took away the enmity and gave us Peace with god. Romans 5:1; 8:1.
- Bells are associated with ringing out news. Christ is the good news, the best news of all.
- Christmas Eve is a time when we remember that Christ came in the darkest night of Earth's need to be the Light of the World.
- Shepherds who were watching lambs for use as sacrifices in the Temple, were the first to hear the great news that the Lamb to end all sacrifices had appeared.
- Christmas Pie is an old tradition that uses a Mince pie with various spices to remember the spices of the Magi. For centuries it was made in a manger shape.

### *Modern Additions*

- In 1822 Clement Moore wrote a poem for children that has never been forgotten. It was entitled, "Twas the Night before Christmas...!"
- Santa Claus is a Dutch word that is actually Sinter Claus, Saint Nicholas in English.
- Saint Nicholas was the supposed early Bishop of a church in Asia Minor [the modern country of Turkey]. He became of some desperate needs in his congregation, and a family having to sell their children into slavery, so one night he came and left money on their doorstep. It was gold in a stocking.
- Christmas Cards started in 1844. An English artist named William Dobson, drew up some pictures in England for use at this season. They found local use there and soon

spread to America. In 1846 Cole and Horsley saw the commercial potential of this growing tradition and started the production of what is now over a \$1,000,000,000.00 industry, that sees 4 billion cards sent each year in America alone.

*A Final conclusion:*

- Don't lose the Spiritual Depth of Christmas because of its Pagan association.
- Don't miss the Spiritual Delight of Christmas because of the Commercial association.
- Don't forget the Spiritual Despair of the World because of Christmas and its wonders.
- Some challenges:
  1. Give a gift to Jesus.
  2. Like Christ, give to those who can't repay you.
  3. Pause to sense the darkness outside at night, and then thank God for sending the light.
  4. Read the Scriptures to your family.
  5. Start some traditions that point to Christ.
  6. Enjoy this wonderful time of the year, don't lose the season for the rush.

## Table of the Nations

The key to the past history of planet Earth is the Bible. The key that unlocks all the mysterious past events in human history is God's Word. The key to open the vistas of future history for the destiny planet Earth hurtles toward is the Word of God.

Across the face of our world seethes ethnic rivalry, genocide, ancient hatred, religious and regional warfare. Where did the races and nations come from? Nationalism is rising from the Balkans to the Orient. Terrorists seek to cause concessions to gain independence in the Basque country, Northern Ireland, Palestinian areas and other places. How did all this start? Genesis 10 gives us the birth of the nations. So, the Bible is the key to the present, which is written in God's Word in the past!

Open with me to perhaps the most fascinating chapter in the Bible, The Table of the Nations. God's map of all the human family. The ultimate geneology. All of our relatives are found in just one chapter of God's Word!

As we look over these 32 verses tonight you will come to the same conclusion I have. Namely, the Biblical explanation[1] of national and tribal origins is far superior to any evolutionary ideas, both morally and genetically. Note that the Bible does not mention the concept of "race" at all, only languages, peoples, tribes and nations. The most important difference between groups of men, of course, is not skin color, but language. It is only the language barrier that could enforce isolation and inbreeding among men, and it is only such inbreeding that could have produced the many distinctive physical characteristics of the different groups.

God created Adam and Eve the first couple of humans in the History of Earth, they had 2 sons, 2 lines, God chose one Abel's. Only one of Abel's line survived the Flood. So God again chose one couple - the Noah's to start over with, they had 3 sons. God worked down one line Shem's to one man - Abraham, through a son of promise Isaac, to a son of election Jacob, to 12 sons of which one was Judah through whom came Jesus the Christ! WOW! God is in charge and directs the affairs of humans who as they make absolutely responsible choices, do His will.

Now to Genesis 10. As far as the early nations are concerned, the three major groups of nations naturally stemmed from the three sons of Noah. Seventy original nations are listed in Genesis 10, extending evidently to sometime soon after the scattering of the people from Babel.

In general, the Table shows the descendants of Japheth (10:2-5) migrating into Europe, those of Ham (10:6-20) southward into Africa, and those of Shem (10:22-32) remaining in western Asia. Although not certain, it seems probable that the Far East was later settled by certain groups from the Hamitic and Japhetic nations. In any event, there is certainly nothing in either Genesis 10 or Genesis 11 that has been disproved by archaeology.

This is the reason why every nation and tribe of the past or present (except those whose cosmogony is based on Genesis 1 and 2, such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) has a religious system which is fundamentally:

- Pantheistic (believing that the physical universe rather than the transcendent Creator of that universe, is the ultimate reality),
- Polytheistic (believing that this deified cosmos manifests itself locally as various forces and systems of nature, which are personified as “gods” and “goddesses”),
- Idolatrous (believing that these gods and goddesses, or personified forces and systems of nature, should be worshiped through images constructed to represent them and which they then possess and energize). This monstrous system of evolutionary, polytheistic, pantheistic, spiritistic, astrological idolatry has permeated practically every culture in the world in one form or another. Even modern evolutionary scientism is nothing but this same ancient paganism in more sophisticated garb. All religions and philosophies except those founded on special creation as revealed in Genesis worship and serve the creation more than the Creator (**Romans 1:25**) and thus are under God’s condemnation. They are either
- Evolutionary (believing that these personified forces of nature somehow generate higher and higher orders of beings, including man and--in many cases--even spirits),
- Animistic/spiritistic (believing that the spirits so generated, including the spirits of dead men and women, continue to survive and perhaps evolve into still higher beings),

- Astrological (believing that the highest beings so developed either inhabit or are identical with the starry host of heaven, so that these stars control events on earth), and
- Humanistic (worshiping man as the highest attainment of the cosmic process)