



The Zion Letter

The Monthly Newsletter of For Zion's Sake Ministries, Inc.
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Jesus Celebrated Hanukkah, Part II

Beloved,

Every year *For Zion's Sake Ministries* holds a Hanukkah celebration to which we invite the local community. Why do we celebrate Hanukkah you may ask? We celebrate Hanukkah because Yeshua/Jesus celebrated Hanukkah: "Then came Hanukkah (Feast of Dedication); it was winter in Jerusalem. Yeshua (Jesus) was walking in the Temple around Solomon's Colonnade," John 10:22. Do you know that He walked about seventy five miles to Jerusalem during cold winter and possibly even snow to celebrate Hanukkah? There are some important lessons we can learn from the fact that the Savior's winter Holiday was Hanukkah.

What is Hanukkah?

Hanukkah is the celebration of the Jewish victory over the Syrian Greeks in 165 B.C. Israel was ruled by the infamously cruel Antiochus Epiphanies, who began to force the Jewish people to worship idols of Zeus and to eat pork, a meat that was forbidden under the Law of Moses. Furthermore, Antiochus banned the Bible and he banned weekly Shabbat/Sabbath worship. He basically banned Judaism and attempted to paganize and assimilate the Jewish people into Greek culture and religion, known as Hellenism. Had he succeeded there would have been no babe in a manger, no Mary and Joseph, no little town of Bethlehem, no New Testament, and no Jesus. Nevertheless, God raised up a Jewish deliverer in a man named Judah Maccabee. Judah led a militia of farmers, shepherds and workmen who fought the mighty Syrian army. After three years (168 B.C to 165), the Maccabees took back the Temple of the Living God in Jerusalem. They cleansed it, repaired it, and they relit the seven branch Menorah that God had commanded to be constantly lit in the Temple. Nevertheless, there was only enough consecrated oil to last for one day. Miraculously, the oil burned for eight days until fresh oil could be consecrated. So there were two great miracles of Hanukkah: 1. The Jews defeated the mighty Syrian army and their paganism, paving the way for the Messiah to be born! 2. The oil in the Menorah (lamp) burned for eight days when there was only enough for one day! Antiochus attempted to destroy the Jews and Judaism between 168 -165 B.C. Had he succeeded, there would have been no Messiah and no Christianity. Perhaps Yeshua/Jesus was



thinking of this fact as He celebrated Hanukkah.

Why did Yeshua celebrate Hanukkah?

Interestingly, the events of Hanukkah took place during the intertestamental period of history. So why did Jesus celebrate the recently instituted "minor" holiday that was not addressed in the Old Testament Scriptures?

1. It was Satan's final attempt to destroy the Jews before the birth of the Jewish Messiah. (Herod attempted to destroy all Jewish boys born in Bethlehem, but that was after Jesus' birth.)

2. By celebrating Hanukkah Yeshua was affirming the message of the first and second Commandments: **"I Am the Lord your God... You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven**

above or on the earth beneath...You shall not worship them or serve them; for I the Lord your God, am a jealous God," Exodus 20:1-5.

King Antiochus forced many Jews to bow down to his idols of Zeus and worship them. He was forcing the Jews to break God's commandments and commit idolatry. In other words, **Jesus celebrated Hanukkah because He hated idolatry.**

At the same time Yeshua was celebrating Hanukkah, many Jewish people were most likely

participating in the same ancient pagan practices that Judah Maccabee fought against. And believe it or not, these same pagan practices from ancient times are the very origins of what we know today as Christmas. As I mentioned before, "Hanukkah" means dedication. Jesus the Jewish Messiah was dedicated to letting the world know about His Divinity (The Gospel). He was dedicated to ending all worship of false gods and idols, and He was dedicated to teaching His people not to worship Him in conjunction with those false gods... Yeshua is very dedicated!

So What About Christmas?

Did you know that Christmas didn't arrive in the Holy Land until the 4th century when Helena, the mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine, imported the "New" holiday to Bethlehem and built the church of the Nativity. Why did it take more than 300 years for Christmas to arrive in Israel? Isn't that where Jesus was born and what about December 25th? So let's get it straight. Nowhere in the Bible does it say the Savior was born on

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December 25th. According to the New Testament, there is no record that Yeshua's mother Mary, Peter, James, John, Mary Magdalen or Martha ever held a birthday celebration for Him. In fact, his birth date is never mentioned in Scripture at all. Why? The reason is because in those days only pagans celebrated birthdays. Birthday parties were not a yearly custom for Jews. For example, in the story of Joseph, the Bible mentions Pharaoh's birthday (Gen 40:20). In Matthew 14 we read about Herod, who was a Jewish pagan, celebrating his birthday. In Scripture, birthdays were celebrated only by pagans. So how did we come up with a big celebration of Yeshua's Birthday on December 25th as? **The answer is Syncretism.**

What does Syncretism have to do with the Messiah's birthday?

Syncretism is the worship of the true and living God mixed with the worship of false Gods. According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "***The well-known solar feast, however, of Natalis Invicti (The birth of the invincible Sun), celebrated on 25 December, has a strong claim on the responsibility for our December date (for Christ's birth). For the history of the solar cult, its position in the Roman Empire, and syncretism, with Mithraism... has collected the evidence for the feast, which reached its climax of popularity under (Emperor) Aurelian in 274.***" (1) In other words, what the *Catholic Encyclopedia* is saying is that the Romans borrowed the birthday of the Sun god Mithras (an Iranian deity or Helios in Greek), who is said to have been born on December 25th and superimposed the birthday of the Messiah Yeshua onto the birthday of this pagan god.

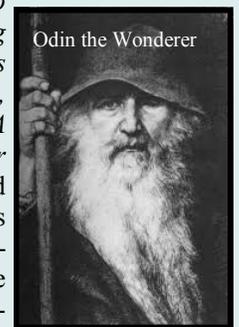
"*The earliest record of the recognition of Dec. 25 as a church festival is in the Philocalian calendar (copied 354 A.D.) but representing Roman practice in 336(A.D.).*" (2). "*Sun worship, became (in the third century A.D. the dominant official creed*" (of the Roman Empire). So strong was the belief in the Invincible Sun (Sol Invictus) that for example Constantine I (d.337), himself at first a devotee of the Sun cult (Mithraism), found it, indeed perfectly compatible with his pro-Christian sympathies to authorize his own portrayal as Helios (Greek/Roman name for the Sun God). And in 354 the ascendant Christian church in the reign of his pious but unsavory son, Constantius II, found it prudent to change the celebration of the birth of Jesus from the traditional date (January 6th) to December 25, in order to combat the pagan Sun god's popularity.—his "birthday" being December 25th.(3). "*Bishop Liberius of Rome ordered in 354 (A.D.) that all Christians celebrate the birth of the Christ child on that day.*"(4). And finally, "*The reasons for celebrating our major (Catholic) feasts when we do are many and varied. In general, however, it is true that many of them have at least an indirect connection with the pre-Christian feasts celebrated about the same time of year – feasts centering around the harvest, the rebirth of the sun at the winter solstice (now Dec 21, but Dec. 25 in the old Julian calendar), the renewal of nature and Spring, and so on.*" (5) Essentially, the early Roman Christians were also sun worshippers who celebrated the birth of the sun god on December 25th because that was the winter solstice on the Julian

calendar (the shortest day of the year). The symbol of the Roman Empire was "Sol Invicti" (the Invincible Sun) Emperor Constantine found it easy to mix the truth of the Messiah with pagan customs so as to win pagans to the new religion. **This is syncretism.** In the Old Testament people were put to death for doing this (see Lev 18:21, 24-29). 2Kings17:33 says, "***They feared the Lord, and served their own god, after the custom of the nations from among whom they had been carried away into exile.***" I know some of you are saying, "Rabbi Joe, that's Old Testament, we're under grace!" At Mars Hill the apostle Paul in the midst of Greek influence and culture explained to the pagan Greek philosophers about the Living God, who is not anything like the gods they worshiped. (See Acts 17). In Acts 19, a pagan silversmith said of Paul, "***this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all...but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship should even be dethroned from her magnificence,***" Acts 19:26-27. Friends, was Paul encouraging the Greeks to mix their pagan religious practices with the worship of Jesus, or was he exhorting them to give up those practices and follow Yeshua/Jesus alone? I think if you read the story of Artemis in Acts 19 you'll see that for Paul there was no room for mixing of the Gospel with paganism.

Yuletide, Santa Claus and More

Did you know that Yule was not just a famous actor, but rather a pagan festival held near mid-winter? Wikipedia says "***Yule or Yuletide ("Yule time") is a religious festival observed by the historical Germanic peoples, later being absorbed into and equated with the Christian festival of Christmas. The earliest references to Yule are by way of indigenous Germanic month names (Ærra Jéola (Before Yule) or Jiuli and Æftera Jéola (After Yule). Scholars have connected the celebration to the Wild Hunt, the god Odin and the pagan Anglo-Saxon Modranicht.***

Terms with an etymological equivalent to Yule are used in the Nordic countries for Christmas with its religious rites, but also for the holidays of this season. Yule is also used to a lesser extent in English-speaking countries to refer to Christmas. Customs such as the Yule log, Yule goat, Yule boar, Yule singing, and others stem from Yule. A number of Neopagans have introduced their own rites" Even the greenery, so loved and used to adorn the Christmas season, comes from this pagan feast of Yule. The Germanic and Nordic pagans would decorate their homes with evergreen boughs to symbolize the expectation of spring. They also would roast a wild boar and feast as they worshipped their false god Odin, which is where we get the tradition of "Christmas ham". What does the "Yuletide" Spirit have to do with Jesus or the Holy Spirit? Answer: Nothing! You can google the origin of Christmas trees, elves, Santa Claus, wreaths, reindeer, mistletoe and even advent, if you want to know more things that have nothing to do with the Bible. It's all syncretism, the mixing of pagan idolatry and the traditions of men, with Biblical truth. Jesus said, "***This people honors Me with their lips but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines***



the commandments of men. Having left behind the commandments of God, you hold on to the tradition of men,” Mark 7:6-8. Yes the birth of the Messiah was a great miracle. Nevertheless, salvation was demonstrated in His death and resurrection, not His birth. God is asking us to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and that His death and resurrection is atonement for our sins.

Some might say, “My heart is in the right place in celebrating Christmas”. In 2 Samuel 6, King David attempted to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. They loaded it onto a cart and began to worship God, “*David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the Lord with all kinds of instruments...but when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the Ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it. And the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and God struck Him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the Ark of God. And David became Angry,” 2 Samuel 6:5-8.* In his heart, King David was attempting to do a good thing by bringing the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem. The problem was that he attempted to do it his own way. Numbers 4:15, 19-20 says that only Levites were to

carry or touch the Holy objects of the Temple, and yet Uzzah wasn't a Levite. Thus he was struck down according to God's commandment. The chapter goes on to tell us that David gathered some Levites, went back and successfully brought the Ark to Jerusalem. **Did David have a pure heart?** Sure he did, but his ignorance cost a man his life. When he went back and handled the Ark the right way, everything went great! I know that some of you will say, “Rabbi Joe that was Old Testament. God doesn't strike people down anymore because we're under grace now.” Well friend, what about the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts Chapter 5? Beloved, you can worship God with a pure heart, but if it isn't in accordance with His commandments, then your worship is in vain.

Conclusion:

I know that many of you who celebrate Christmas are not worshipping pagan gods, and I understand that you believe that you are worshipping the Messiah with a pure heart. King David was in the same frame of heart when he attempted to move the Ark of God. But if it is true that Christmas is a syncretized holiday then should we really be doing it? Is it really pleasing to God?

I am not anti-Christian. I love Christians so much that I married one! As a believer in the Messiah I am eligible to celebrate Christmas along with the masses. But my Savior celebrated Hanukkah, and I will have to stand before Him one day and give an account (Romans 14:12), and so will you. It would be much easier for me to just give in and celebrate Christmas like everyone else, but the gate is wide that leads to destruction and the gate is narrow that leads to eternal life. I don't want to follow the multitudes. I want to follow my Lord and Savior. Jewish people can't tell the difference between the “Elf and Santa folks” and the “Jesus is the reason for the season folks.” But Jewish people

know that while Jesus may be a Jew, Santa, reindeer, elves and holly have nothing to do with Israel. Beloved, I love you enough to tell you what I see as the truth. This is not a popular message, but it was for mixing pagan worship with worship of the God of Israel and idolatry that my ancestors were exiled and destroyed (see 2Kings 17). Many pastors know the truth, but they won't tell the sheep. Why?

I encourage you to search the internet yourself look up Christmas and paganism, or the origins of Christmas. Far be it from me to tell you to stop your traditions and cease from celebrating a holiday that has so much meaning to you. Only God should tell you that. I am just a messenger. I can only present the truth as I see it.



Lastly, may I suggest an alternative? I dream of a day when Christians and Messianic Jews will come together and celebrate Hanukkah, the true Biblical winter festival of lights that our Savior celebrated in John 10:22. You can still give gifts and send shoe boxes to children who have very little. You can do all that wonderful stuff that you do on Christmas, and you can do it without mixing your celebration with paganism.

May God bless you abundantly as you seek to know more truth!

In His love,
Rabbi Joe

Footnotes: (1) <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03724b.htm>

(2) <http://www.biblelight.net/xmas.htm>

(3) Ibid, p.3

(4) Ibid, p.3

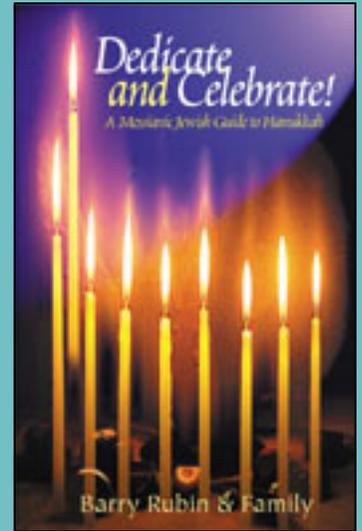
(5) Ibid, p.5

(6) Wikipedia (Search word: Yule)

(7) The picture above of Santa and Odin is taken from <http://infolocata.com/mirovia/irrefutable-proof-that-santa-is-odin/>



For your love gift of \$35 or more, we will send you a copy of the book, *Dedicate and Celebrate*, explaining Hanukkah and how to celebrate it. We will also include a CD of Rabbi Joe's holiday teaching.



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Help us get the word out



Congregation Lion of Judah



Meets weekly

Saturdays

10:30 AM

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