

Yahweh's Truth About Winter Holidays



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Yahweh's Philadelphia Truth Congregation

Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. - John 17:17

All Bible quotes are from the New International Version unless noted otherwise.

Introduction

Merry Christmas. Happy New Year. Happy Holidays. Seasons Greetings. We have arrived at that time of the year when everyone in the Western World, as well as many other nations, typically uses such greetings and salutations in casual conversation. It does not matter whether or not a personal relationship exists; the standard public greeting is to wish one a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year or to convey the more general Happy Holidays.

Little thought is given to the possibility that some do not observe these celebrations and do so for good reason. The obvious group to refrain from such merriment would be those who reject the Bible due to their own set of religious beliefs. Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism would be examples.

However, there also exist individuals and groups that reject these observations based on other factors. Consider that every year in most local newspapers articles are published which speak to the pagan roots of Christmas. They frequently also refer to the fact that the Messiah was not born in December. Usually, these articles are presented as a type of interesting information of no real value. However, as believers in the Bible and its veracity, should we not be concerned with doing all in our power to ensure our practices are perfectly in tune with those our Creator approves?

If you, the reader, would strive to consider this information without any preconceived notions, maybe your eyes will be opened and you will remove yourself from any further involvement in these Biblically unproven and unapproved customs.

CHRISTMAS

Since the pagan origins of Christmas, as previously mentioned, are regularly mentioned in local media, this article shall focus on the New Year's Day celebration. However, Christmas is completely connected to New Year's Day and it is difficult if not impossible to discuss one without discussing the other.

Consider the following quote from Grolier's Encyclopedia: "Despite the beliefs about [Messiah] that the (Bible) birth stories expressed, the church did not observe a festival for the celebration of the event until the 4th century. The date was chosen to counter the pagan festivities connected with the winter solstice; since 274, under the emperor Aurelian, Rome had celebrated the feast of the "Invincible Sun" on December 25. In the Eastern Church, January 6, a day also associated with the winter solstice, was initially preferred. In course of time, however, the West added the Eastern date as the feast of the Epiphany, and the East added the Western date of Christmas. Thus, the West subsequently divided the Christmas celebration between December 25 (the birth of [Messiah] and homage of the shepherds) and January 6 (the homage of the magi). In medieval Europe, folk customs connected with the winter solstice were perpetuated together with the church celebration. The Puritans in England and in New England tried to abolish Christmas, but that move was unpopular, and Christmas survived and has been developed commercially since the Industrial Revolution. This has had the effect of pushing back the Christmas festivities to the period before Christmas; in the traditional church calendar the pre-Christmas season of Advent was one of quiet preparation, the festivities belonging to the Twelve Days (December 25-January 6)."

It is important to spotlight the fact that the birthday of the Messiah was not celebrated until the 4th century. If there is such significance and importance in this observance, why did not the Apostles observe it? Why did they not teach the various congregations of the era and subsequent eras to do so? Why did it take almost 300 hundred years for it to become a part of worship?

The answer to these questions is that birthdays as observed today were unimportant to men and women of faith through the ages.

First of all, there is no indication in the Bible that birthdays are to be celebrated. Second, despite the extreme magnitude of the birth of the Messiah, the Savior of all mankind, there is no command or even reference in the Bible for the Bible believer to commemorate that day. Third, most Bible reference works conclude that the ancient Hebrews and later the Jews did not celebrate birthdays due to the common link to idolatrous worship. Finally, the only Biblical evidence we have concerning His date of birth points to a birth at or around the Feast of Tabernacles. "And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father," John 1:14.

The term dwelt in this passage is not the same term used for the sense of dwelling in most other New Testament passages. Here it is "skenoō", #4637 in Strong's Concordance of the Bible. Its primary meaning is to tent or encamp. Figuratively, it means to occupy as a mansion or specifically to reside (as Yahweh did in the **Tabernacle** of old), a symbol of protection and communion.

When you combine this information with the facts presented in Luke concerning the birth of John and its link to Yahshua the Messiah, it seems much more likely that the Messiah was born during or around the Feast of Tabernacles, which occurs in the fall each year—more specifically either in late September or early or mid-October.

Therefore, the Messiah was not born during the month of December and was more likely to have been born during the scriptural seventh month. And, the Bible believer cannot in good conscience acknowledge December 25 as His date of birth nor can he or she celebrate any other date as a Holy day (modern holiday) to commemorate His birth.

Consider also that most of the traditions associated with Christmas are steeped in paganism. Note this one example concerning the Christmas tree.

The major decorative object in the celebration of Christmas in the Western world is the Christmas tree, an evergreen, usually a Douglas fir or a balsam fir. The symbolic use of evergreens has its roots in ancient times, especially in the Egyptian, Hebrew, and Chinese cultures, *in which it signified eternal life*. During the Middle Ages, when Christianity became widespread in Europe, *the pagan custom of tree worship nevertheless lived on*, especially in northern Europe. In Germany a tree with apples hung on it was called a paradise tree and was employed as a Garden of Eden symbol in a popular medieval drama about Adam and Eve. Germans came to set up a paradise tree in their homes around Christmastime and decorated it with wafers (emblematic of the Eucharist), and later cookies, candles, and other forms of decoration. By the 18th century the custom of the Christmas tree was common in Germany, and, in fact, German settlers had introduced the practice into North America as early as the 17th century. The tradition was brought to England in the early 19th century and popularized there in mid-century by Prince Albert, the German husband of Queen Victoria. The tree's use as the decorative focal point of Christmas celebration has not waned. Electric lights, candy canes, shiny ornaments, religious symbols, and other objects are hung on the trees annually, and this decorating activity has spread to the lawns, trees, shrubs, and building exteriors of many suburban homes.

Cities and towns often exhibit large, spectacularly decorated trees and make a ceremony of the lighting of the tree, as at Rockefeller Center in New York City.

Yahshua the Messiah specifically warns us to avoid the traditions of man of which Christmas has become a major type.

Much more could be referenced concerning the pagan roots of other Christmas traditions such as the Yule Log,

Christmas wreaths, Santa Claus, lighting lights, etc. Suffice it to say that the sincere seeker of truth avoids such practices.

NEW YEAR'S DAY

Have you ever wondered why the year ended and a new year started just after the official start of winter? Fall has completely ended and the full effect of the snow, sleet, freezing rain and daily cold temperatures have just started and will last for at least another 2 to 3 months. Most days are cloudy and dreary and for a lot of people are quite depressing.

It is against this backdrop that ancient man, who shared the dispirited view of his dreary December surroundings, sought a solution for his misery. As the days grew shorter each year, he initially thought it to be an indication that the sun's appearance would decrease each day until it disappeared all together. They recognized the value of sunlight for their agriculture and for their personal comfort as well as for the glee it provided due to its brightness.

Since they worshipped most if not all natural phenomenon (moon, stars, trees as well as the sun), they initiated a service for the purpose of petitioning the sun not leave them to die in its absence but instead to return and renew the hope of life for them for another year. This service occurred for several days beginning in mid to late December and lasted until they noticed the days lengthening again by early January.

Over the centuries, the celebrations took on riotous and wicked attachments as heavy drinking and lewd behavior filled the festivities. The Greeks celebrated a festival to Dionysus, their deity of fertility, wine and drama at this time of the year. The raucous feast lasted for over a week with much drinking and licentious behavior. Included was a tradition to parade around a baby in a basket representing the rebirth of Dionysus as the spirit of fertility. It is interesting to note the ancient Egyptians also used a baby to symbolize rebirth at this time of the year.

In Scotland the Hogmany festival continues to be observed each year's end. This festival includes an extensive feast as well as abundant strong drink for its participants.

Other countries had winter solstice festivals with many tying a type of Christmas observance to a New Year's Day festival. Names include Saturnalia, Brumalia, and Matronalia. There is even some indication that Isaiah 65:11 references this time of the year. "But you are they that forsake my holy mountain, that prepare a temple for Gad, and that furnish the drink offering unto Meni." As Alexander Hislop describes in *The Two Babylons*, is a probable reference to sun worship, while the offering to Meni corresponds to worshipping the moon. This latter reference may also be related to aforementioned Hogmany festival.

It is quite easy to see the direct link with the riotous celebrations that are associated with New Year's Day today with those of pagan times and traditions. New Year's Eve becomes a communal festivity with strangers and friends alike gathering to begin a new year collectively. Many of these gatherings are quite large such as the one in Times Square, New York City. Tens of thousands brave sometimes uncomfortable elements to share in this gala event, which is literally televised around the world. This makes this a worldwide holiday, or more properly holy day, observance—one that is not authorized by the Word of Yahweh.

JANUARY 1—NEW YEAR'S DAY?

What natural event served as the basis for determining January 1 should begin the new year? The winter solstice occurs nearly two weeks earlier. There is no new moon or full moon that occurs every year on this date, making the choice quite arbitrary. The Romans are credited with specifically selecting this date to begin the new year. It seems to have started as the date newly elected officials started their terms of office. This policy seems to date from before 150 BCE (before common era) and held until the end of the Roman Empire. In fact, the date continues to be used by the Western World in these times.

It is interesting to note that different cultures around the world observe the new year at different times. Nations in the Far East, most notably China, look at the end of January or beginning of February to start the year. Judaism wrongly looks at late September to mid October as the time to begin the year. Other cultures have the date or time of year fluctuate over several months. However, the question for the Bible believer is when does our Creator, Yahweh indicate the new year is?

THE BIBLICAL NEW YEAR

“Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, This month shall be for you the beginning of months; *it shall be the first month of the year for you,*” (Ex. 12:1-2). It is clear from this passage that Yahweh has set up a time to be considered as the beginning of the year. We can also see that it corresponds to the time Israel was delivered from Egyptian bondage, Passover.

When we look at Ex. 9:31-32, we see a relationship between this time of year and the barley harvest. “(The flax and the barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in the bud. But the wheat and spelt were not ruined, for they are late in coming up.)”

Note that the barley was nearing harvest stage, while the flax was just beginning to bud. Also, this is before the wheat plants are even pushing through the soil. The agricultural cycle of Egypt points to late January or February as the time of year referenced. It would be another month or so until the grains were ready for harvest.

We can further look at Deut. 16:1 for more clarification. “Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to Yahweh your Elohim; for in the month of Abib Yahweh your Elohim brought you out of Egypt by night.” The term Abib is defined as being from an unused root meaning to be tender; green, that is a young ear of grain (see Strong's Concordance, #24 in the Hebrew dictionary). Most reference works indicate that this is a reference to the barley in the ear as described in Ex. 9:31-32.

Furthermore, the term month in Deut. 16:1 is primarily defined as new moon and by implication refers to a month. (Once again refer to Strong's Concordance Hebrew dictionary #2320.)

Therefore, we can see that Deut. 16:1 relates to the new moon of green ears of barley.

As soon as we see barley in the ear, we look for the next new moon and it begins the new year. At this point, we finally have a new year indication that makes sense--the spring. The earth is about to begin to renew its beauty for

another year. Flowers are about to bud as are the trees and various shrubs. Spring is a psychologically uplifting time of year and it is against this setting that Yahweh demands the new year to begin.

Every reference to the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread indicate their observance to be conducted in the first month. Bible students and scholars alike agree that this refers to the month Abib, which is in the spring of the year. Note that no command exists to make this a celebration as the world now does and has done for several millennia. The new moon is to be noted as beginning of a new month and in the case of Abib also the beginning of a new year.

It is obviously a joyous time. However, no raucous celebration should be attached. As Bible believers and students, it should be our intention to maintain the banner of Yahweh's truth in every aspect of our lives. Since the Bible points to a spring new year, we must begin the new year in the spring. We must also avoid the celebrations associated with the worldly new year, which have their roots in pagan practices from the ancient cultures of Babylon, Egypt, Rome and Greece.

We look to the Word of Yahweh for guidance and do not celebrate January 1 as the new year. Instead, we look to the beauty of the spring when Yahweh's new year begins.

The Sacred Names have been inserted.

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