

THE 25TH OF DECEMBER

The majority of people have probably heard or read about the controversy concerning the day of December 25th being held as the birthday of our prophet and Savior, Jesus of Nazareth. The controversy being Christian names and events being integrated with those of heathen ones, thus giving the festival the outward appearance that it is of Christian origin while in fact the festival retains all of its heathen traditions with the addition of new non-Christian practices.

Many people, including persons professing to be Christians, seem to have a "I don't care attitude" towards the heathen origins of December 25th festivities. One who truly seeks to perform God's Will has to wonder if such people are serious believers in the Son of God or a Supreme God. For many people who celebrate Christmas, it seems they follow the festival for the simple reason of its traditions, including the revelry. There is also the love of the social aspects connected with it. Something we should be aware of is that the early Catholic church was ready to infuse any belief, including pagan ones, into the church dogma and traditions for the sake of making converts. Often, when an average Christian is first made aware of the pagan origins of Christmas, they initially may feel shock and in some cases, guilt, but in most cases, this rapidly fades as people place great attachment to the social and cultural traditions they had been brought with during their life. It is extremely hard for people today to give up the traditional practices of the world that is so commonplace. These festivals have become so commercialized and made to appear innocent because of the way they are portrayed in an atmosphere of love and merriment. However, these portrayals of festivities are not a true picture of their origin. We are all too often ready to deceive ourselves in our acceptance of them. We need to know that God explicitly says not to follow the ways of the heathen or our end will be eternal death.

All too often we take scriptural quotes to be poetic but idle words. We should not read scripture as if it is a fictitious novel. Read the following biblical texts on this matter: "*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*" Proverbs 14:12; "*Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen...*" Jeremiah 10:2a; "*The LORD is King for ever and ever: the heathen are perished out of his land.*" Psalm 10:16; "*And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.*" II Thessalonians 1:7 to 9; "*And ye shall know that I am the LORD: for ye have not walked in my statutes, neither executed my judgments, but have done after the manners of the heathen that are round about you.*" Ezekiel 11:12.

Have you ever wondered why none of the gospel writers had not mentioned the date of December 25th nor even the celebrating of the birthday of our Lord Jesus? Think about it for a minute: why did not Matthew, Mark, Luke or John give us this information in their gospels? Similarly, Paul, Peter, James and Jude never mentioned celebrating Jesus' birth. The answer why is a simple one: because none of the disciples were concerned about the birth date of Jesus, as it relates to a religious celebration. Those early Christians only kept the 14th of Nisan (ie. the Lord's Supper) in commemoration of Jesus' death and the bringing in of the new Covenant that came with his death. Please refer to our booklets on the subject of the Lord's Supper on our website for more details. The early Christians kept the remembrance of his death as they were so instructed by their Lord. To emphasize: the early Christians were instructed in the keeping of the Lord's Supper, but they were never instructed to celebrate his birth, nor the observance of the 25th of December. It would have been likely that they had heard of this festival being kept in late December because it was observed by many non-Christian people in the Orient and it was also widely held among the Roman soldiers given it was considered the birth date of Mithra (or

Mithras) who was one of the Roman peoples' favorite gods, which we shall discuss in this booklet.

But before going further into the traditions and the worship of the Roman god, Mithra, we should consider whether there is any proof from scripture as to another date being given besides the traditional December 25th as Jesus' day of birth. The answer: No! There is no day given for Jesus' birth, however, from the scriptures we can narrow the time of year when his birth took place. The approximate time of year for Jesus' birth can be determined from the following verse: *"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night."* Luke 2:8. At first glance, this verse does not appear to say much about the time of Jesus' birth. However, on a closer examination, it tells us quite a lot about the season in which Jesus was born. This Biblical verse states that there were shepherds abiding in the field at night. What is the significance of such a statement? Turning to some dictionaries and encyclopedias, they tell us relevant information about the seasons in Judaea. From the "New Compact Bible Dictionary", under the topic of 'Palestine', is written: *"The winter season, from November to April, is mild and rainy; the summer season, from May to October, is hot and dry."* Moving on to the "Chambers Encyclopedia", under the topic of 'Palestine', it gives us a more complete picture of the country's weather: *"Rain falls only in the colder months – almost all in December, January and March – but the 'former rains' moisten the ground for ploughing in October and November and the 'latter rains' continue the annual fall into April, and on their abundance largely depends a successful harvest. In the mountains the rainfall is between 20 and 30 inches, in the plains somewhat less..."* The last book we will refer to is the "Geography of Israel" printed by the Israel Pocket Library. In Chapter 4 ('Climate') we read the following: *"Rain fall normally begins in Erez Israel in November, increasing in intensity to about January - February, and decreases again to May... Most of the rainfall, some 72% of the seasonal total, occurs in December, January, and February."* The previous sources tell us that the month of December is one of the months of heavy rains, and that the rain "falls only during the colder months [i.e. Winter]." Going back to Luke 2:8, we read: *"Shepherds abiding in the field keeping watch over their flock by night"*. In light of what we have read about the weather in Palestine, can we deduce from this verse in Luke that Jesus was likely born in December? No. It is even more unlikely given that mainstream churches suggest Jesus was born near the end of the month of December, nearing January, which is well into the colder, wet weather. Most churches that teach the observation of Christmas are suggesting that shepherds were out in the open fields and slopes with their sheep far into the winter season when Jesus was born. However, there is something wrong with such a belief given the chilling wet nights occurring in the month of December in the land of Israel. It would seem, based on the information provided, that December 25th cannot be Jesus' birth date.

Many who celebrate Christmas knows the carol "The First Noel". It contains the following words: *"The first Noel, the angel did say, was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay: In fields where they lay keeping their sheep, ON A COLD WINTER'S NIGHT THAT WAS SO DEEP."* When this carol is sung by hundreds of millions of people who observe Christmas, we can be sure that they are not taking the words of the carol into consideration and making comparisons with Luke 2:8, and the country's typical weather conditions for December.

Many shepherds may be in the fields (although not necessarily) for the "former rains", but during the winter rains, the sheep were sheltered. Following are three excerpts from Chapter 18 of the book "Manners and Customs of Bible Lands" by Fred H. Wight: *"In the late autumn or winter months, there are times the shepherds can find no pasturage that is available for his flock, and then he must become responsible for feeding the animals himself. If the flock is small there may be times when it is stabled within the peasants house, and the family lives on a sort of mezzanine floor above it."* (under the heading "Food and Water for the Flock"); *"Sheepcotes in connection with caves - There are many caves in the Holy Land, and when one of these is available it is*

utilized as a sheepcote. During stormy weather, and at night, the sheep retreat into the cave, but at other times they are kept in the enclosure immediately in front of the cave's mouth." (under the heading "The Sheepfold"); "Permanent sheepfolds - Such shelters are usually built by a shepherd in a valley, or else on the sunny side of a hill where there is protection from cold winds. This fold is a low building with arches in front of it, and a wall forming an outdoor enclosure, joining the building. When the weather is mild, the sheep and goats are allowed to be in the enclosure during the night, but if the weather is stormy or the evenings are cold, then the flock is shut up in the interior part of the fold, with its protection of roof and walls." (also under the heading "The Sheepfold"). The shepherds mentioned in Luke were in the fields during the night with their flock, not in the folds or caves, therefore, it would not have been a month during which the winter rains fall.

We will now see if we can find the approximate time of the year for Jesus' birth. Let's consider the following facts. Jesus began his ministry when he was about thirty years old: "*And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age...*" Luke 3:23. This was at his baptism (ie. the start of his ministry) and the wording suggests he was nearing his 30th birthday. We also know his crucifixion took place at Passover time: "*But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?*" John 18:39. The Passover always occurs in the spring, always falling on the Jewish date of Nisan 14th which can occur in March or April of the Julian calendar. Now if we go back to the book of Daniel, it foretold how long Jesus' ministry would be, given the text refers to the 'Messiah' which Jesus is for us. Some may dispute our understanding of this passage, however, we believe that Daniel 9:27 foretold his ministry would last for three and half years given the following words: "*And he [ie. The Messiah] shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifices and the oblation to cease.*" In biblical prophecy, a day often represents a year, so when applied to the previous verse, it suggests Jesus would preach three and a half years (ie. mid-week being 3.5 days into a full week). Tracing the time back from the Passover festival (preparation), which occurs in March or April of the modern calendar, and was also the time of his crucifixion, this suggest that Jesus could have been born in the latter part of September or first half of October (ie. half a year or 6 months before March or April). Is the exact day known? No. No one knows the exact day, but the forementioned information suggests his birth can be narrowed to September and October because we know his death occurred at Passover time in the spring.

Returning to the verse of Daniel 9:27, one of the more serious controversies stems from the quote "*he shall confirm the covenant [ie. testimony] with many for one week.*" Being that this is in reference to prophecy, we believe 'one week' or seven days would represent seven years. It is believed that Jesus preached for a total of three and a half years up to the time of his crucifixion, but in order for the prophecy to be true (ie. that his testimony would be confirmed for 7 years), then there is another 3.5 years of Jesus testifying to account for after his ascension to the right hand of the Father. Is there evidence that Jesus confirmed his testimony after his crucifixion? Yes, there is. Firstly, he appeared to his twelve disciples and other persons after rising from his grave which is described in the ending chapters of the various Gospels and is also said to have spoke of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God for 40 days after being risen (Acts 1:1 to 3). In addition, he yet made another appearance upon earth, of which we often forget about. It was Jesus' appearance to Saul who changed his name to Paul. This appearance on the road to Damascus led to Paul's conversion: "*And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks....And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way*

as thou camest, hast sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit... But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.” Acts 9:3, 4, 5, 17, 27. See also Acts 22:14, 15, and I Corinthians 9:1. We read in I Corinthians 15:8: “And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”

By the chronology of James Ussher (1581-1656 A.D.), an Anglican church leader known for the development of biblical chronologies, this happened two years after Jesus' crucifixion, however we know that Ussher's chronology of Jesus' year of birth is incorrect. This is because Ussher gives Jesus' year of birth as 1 A.D. but it is well known that Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. Given this fact, Jesus would have been born at least in the year 6 or 7 B.C. and that is because Herod the Great was alive when Jesus was born and then he sought to kill all babies two years and younger based on the time that the Magi consulted with Herod when they were seeking the young Jesus (see Matthew 2:16). Therefore, there is no way his crucifixion could have happened in 33 A.D. as calculated by Ussher, because if Jesus was crucified in 33 A.D. and born as we know in 6 or 7 B.C., that would have made him between 38 and 40 years old when crucified. Going by prophecy, we have read Jesus' life span on earth was to be 33 1/2 years (ie. the Gospels suggest he began his ministry at his baptism at about the age of 30 and Daniel's prophecy suggests he would minister for 3 1/2 years). We are then left with the question: how many years had passed from the crucifixion of Jesus to his appearing to Saul (Paul), which was his last earthly appearance quoted in scripture? Ussher suggested that this happened in 35 A.D., but if we accept that Jesus was born in 6 or 7 B.C., then the prophecy of Daniel 9:27a, in order to be accurately fulfilled, means Paul would have seen Jesus between 30 to 31 A.D. with Daniel's 'prophecy week' spanning 7 years in total (ie. Jesus' ministry lasting 3.5 years from his baptism to his crucifixion and 3.5 years from the crucifixion to his appearance to Saul (Paul) on the way to Damascus).

Getting back to our main topic, we cannot find one text that can be used as proof for a precise day of Jesus' birth. So, where did the date of December 25th as being Jesus' birth originally come from? There have been all sorts of claims made from numerous religious groups, but many are inaccurate and just plain fables. The date of December 25th as being the birth date of Jesus can be proven by historical records to have been a fallacy and shown to have been interwoven with Christian events and names which can confuse people who are not acquainted with both Christian and heathen teachings, making it very difficult for individuals to distinguish falsehoods from truth.

Christmas is a Christian-heathen festival, the institution of which, has been attributed to Telesphorus, who existed during the reign of Antonius Pius (138 - 161 A.D.), however, it is doubtful this is true. The reason is that references are heard about a festival for Jesus' birthday during the time of Emperor Commodus (180 - 192 A.D.), but there was no widely-held festival and it was not celebrated as Christmas is today, nor was it called Christmas or even held on December 25th or any one specific date for that matter. During the reign of Diocletian, when a group of Christians at Nicodemia were celebrating a certain day for the birth of Jesus, this was a sporadic affair. Nevertheless, we are told while this service was taking place, the ruler heard about it while keeping court. He ordered the church doors closed on the occupants and set fire to the church and those that were within perished. Those sporadic groups of Christians who desired to observe a day for Jesus' birthday did not know the date, thus, were not unified in celebrating one particular date of observance. Some held it in January, others in May and some in April. It should be said that from the biblical accounts, those Christians who celebrated Jesus' death on Nisan 14th (and this was practically the whole church, outside of the city of Rome which held another date) did so, because they were instructed to do so by Jesus himself "in remembrance of him". Chambers Encyclopedia has this to say under the heading of "Christmas": *"One of the principal causes that cooperated in fixing this period [December 25th] was that almost all the heathen nations*

regarded the winter solstice as the turning point of the year – the beginning of the renewed life and activity of the powers of nature and of the gods... In more northerly countries this fact must have made itself peculiarly palpable – hence the Celts and the Germans, from the oldest times, celebrated the season with the greatest festivities. At the winter solstice the Norsemen held their great Yule-feast commemoration of the fiery sun-wheel; and believed that during the 12 nights from December 25th to January 6th they could trace the personal movements and interferences on earth of their great deities, Odin, Berchta, etc." By the fourth century, at the time of Chrysostom, the western churches (Rome, Alexandria, etc.) adopted the date of December 25th. The eastern churches at first rejected this heathen date, but gradually accepted it with the exception of the Greek church, who celebrates January 6th, but adopted many of the same pagan traditions.

The Romans, from the earliest of times, had the custom of accepting and incorporating other gods that were introduced into their country into their religious system. Their sun god was the old, long existing god, the great Sol. But the Persians introduced an even greater god, Mithra, a god that the Roman legions in time made their main god. Due to the fact that the military held many political positions, Mithraism became a strong religion at Rome and eventually throughout the empire. It was so strong that it became a serious contender with Christianity. Many historians believe it did win against Christianity in that so many of the heathen practices were adopted by Christendom. There is the exception of the names of the Messiah and his apostles, and the names of many questionable Christian leaders of the 2nd and 3rd century replacing most of the heathen names. However, most of today's churches of Christianity do NOT adhere to the teachings of its High Priest, Jesus, in the absorption of that Spirit of truth from the One God, YHVH, through His Anointed.

With respect to the significance of December 25th, it is the traditional birthday of the god, Mithra, and not Jesus of Nazareth. The Roman armies left much evidence of their favorite god, Mithra, where they set up altars and images in many of the old frontier towns and camps of Britain and Gaul (France). On page 176 from the book "Roman Panorama" we read; *"Mithras, making his way from Persia into Rome about the same time (Isis) attracted innumerable worshippers especially in Roman armies, who set up altars to him in every frontier town and camp, celebrating his birthday on 25 December till the Christians took it from him [ie. for Jesus' birthday]."* Thascius Cyprian (200-258 A.D.) was born of heathen parents at Carthage. He became a Christian, being baptized in 241 A.D. and was made a bishop in 248 A.D. Cyprian made the following remarks in reference to December 25th: *"How wonderfully acted Divine Providence that on the day that the Sun was born - Christ should be born."* Unfortunately for Cyprian, we know that Jesus was NOT born on that day.

Julius I was Bishop (Pope) between 337 - 352 A.D. He proclaimed in 350 A.D. that the date of December 25th was to be held as the day for Jesus' birth. It was from that year on that the feast of the Nativity was held by most Christians. Some Christians tried to justify the Nativity date with weak excuses. One of these men was Aurelius Augustine (354 - 430 A.D.). He was born in Numidia, Africa and was one of the Latin Fathers. He wrote: *"We hold this day [December 25th] holy, not like the pagans because of the birth of the sun, but because of Him who made it."*

From the book "Augustus Caesar World", we quote from page 171: *"On December 25th, about the time of the Saturnalia, when the Roman streets were thronged with merry-makers, those who had lived in the East thought of how the people there would be celebrating the birthday of the sun god. Rejoicing in his yearly triumph over the darkness of winter, while the Romans had continued to add more and more gods, the Persians had been led by Zoroaster to worship one god. Mithra the old god of the sun, Mithra was now to be worshipped as the Son of Ahura Mazda (Wise Lord). Within a hundred years Sun worship became the leading religion of the Romans...this Persian religion was to leave behind as an*

heritage to future generations their Christian holiday and Sunday. For in years to come, when the early Christians of Rome were uncertain on which day of the year to celebrate the birth of Christ, it was decided that it would be wise to use that day, long held sacred to the sun. 'AND WE DO RIGHTLY SO', St. Chrysostom was to say, 'THE WORSHIPPERS OF MITHRA CALL THIS DECEMBER 25th THE BIRTHDAY OF THE SUN BUT IS NOT OUR LORD THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS?'" Chrysostom, who is regarded as one of the greatest Christian orators of his time was called "golden-mouthed". He was born in 347 A.D. at Antioch.

From the former remarks made by Chrysostom and other early church figures, we can understand why this heathen practice of celebrating December 25th entered the Christian church, when men of Chrysostom's character sold out their Christian principles such as worshipping God in truth, for heathen traditions. As posited earlier, we should ask ourselves: did the early Christian church, as many would claim, win over Mithraism? If so, why do most Christians celebrate a day associated with ancient paganism?