

IS CHRISTMAS CHRIST'S BIRTHDAY?

INTRODUCTION: "It is beginning to look a lot like Christmas, everywhere you go...". Many business people have made preparation for this day. Many denominations will have their own "Christmas programs". Denominations are not the only ones doing this. Some of our brethren are participating in programs of like nature. (See: MATERIAL ON CHRISTMAS) Since Christmas is practiced as a religious holy day by many, it is necessary that we make an investigation concerning this festive occasion.

There is a sign in front of a denominational church building which reads, "Happy Birthday, Jesus". Who authorized the observance of Christmas as the birthday of Christ? Was it authorized by God or by man? (Mk. 11:30; Jn. 1:33) These are very important questions that need to be seriously considered. If the celebration of Christmas, as the birthday of Christ, is authorized by men, then our worship is vain! (Matt. 15:7-9) Is the observance of Christmas, as the birthday of Christ, in the teachings of Christ? If we do not abide "in the teaching of Christ" we are without God! (II Jn. 9)

A good way to investigate a subject is to thoroughly answer questions which are related to the subject. This is what we shall do in this lesson.

I. WHEN WAS CHRIST BORN?

- A. The year of His birth is uncertain
 - 1. The Bible does not give the year of Christ's birth
 - 2. Most people think that Christ was born in the year "0" B. C., but He was not
(Note: Read paragraph by Henry Halley in *Halley's Bible Handbook*)
- B. The month and day of His birth are unknown (Lk. 2:8-17)
 - 1. (Read statement by Albert Barnes in *Barnes' Notes On The New Testament*)
 - 2. Collier's Encyclopedia states, "It is impossible to determine the exact date of the birth of Christ, either from the evidence of the Gospel or from any sound tradition."

II. WHY WAS DECEMBER 25th CHOSEN AS THE BIRTHDAY OF CHRIST? (See: MATERIAL ON CHRISTMAS)

- A. Liberius, Bishop of Rome in 354 A. D., ordered that Dec. 25 be adopted. "In A. D. 354, Bishop Liberius of Rome ordered the people to celebrate on December 25th. He probably chose this date because the people of Rome already observed it as the Feast of Saturn, celebrating the birth of the sun." (*World Book Encyclopedia, Vol. 3, p. 416, 1960 ed.*)
- B. The Lincoln Library of Information states that, "December 25 was already a festive day for the sun god Mithra and appealed to the Christian as an appropriate date to commemorate the birth of Jesus, the 'Light of the World.'"
- C. Earle Carins, in his book, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, states, "The Festival of Christmas became a regular practice about the middle of the fourth century with the adoption of the December date that had been previously used by worshippers of Mithra."

III. HOW DID THE WORD "CHRISTMAS" ORIGINATE?

- A. I looked in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* and could not find the word "Christmas". The word "Christmas" is not in the Bible!
- B. *Encyclopedia Americana* states, "The name is derived from the medieval Christes Masse, the Mass of Christ"
- C. This word originated with the Catholics. They have a special "mass" (their corruption of

the Lord's Supper) for Christ on this day

IV. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT CHRIST'S BIRTH?

- A. The following is a Biblical chronology of the birth of Jesus and His early life
 - 1. Birth of Jesus - Matt. 1:25; Lk. 2:1-7
 - 2. Visit of Shepherds (same night) - Lk. 2:8-20
 - 3. Jesus' circumcision (eight days old) - Lk. 2:21
 - 4. Jesus Presentation (at least 40 days after birth) - read Lev. 12:2-6; Lk. 2:22-38
 - 5. Visit of Wise Men - Matt. 2:1-12
 - 6. Journey to Egypt - Matt. 2:13-15
 - 7. Male Children Killed - Matt 2:16-18
 - 8. Return to Nazareth - Lk. 2:39; Matt. 2:19-23
- B. The Bible does not state the number of wise men
 - 1. Two or more men could have brought three kinds of gifts
 - 2. The wise men found Jesus in a house - not a stable (Matt. 2:10-11)

V. CAN A CHRISTIAN OBSERVE CHRISTMAS IN ANY RELIGIOUS WAY? NO!

- A. We do not know the time of Christ's birth
- B. If God had wanted us to celebrate one day in the year as the birthday of His Son:
 - 1. He would have commanded us to do so
 - 2. We could read in the Bible about the early Christians observing this day
 - 3. He would have revealed the date for such a memorial as He did the "Day of Atonement" which was "the tenth day of this seventh month" (Lev. 23:27; Ex. 30:10)
- C. We are to observe the death of Christ upon the first day of the week, but no special day is given for the observance of Christ's birth (Matt. 26:26-29; Acts 20:7; I Cor. 11:23-29)

VI. AM I OBSERVING CHRISTMAS AS A RELIGIOUS HOLY DAY WHEN I PUT UP A TREE, PUT LIGHTS ON IT, MAKE REFERENCE TO SANTA CLAUS, ETC.?

- A. I know that many of these customs have their origin in pagan worship, but they have changed their meaning through the years. (Example: Saint Nicholas for Santa Claus; saying the word "Christmas"; etc.; Read about the origin of Santa Claus, mistletoe, Christmas tree, etc. in *Baylife, The Tampa Tribune, Dec. 17, 2001*)
- B. My observance of these customs does not convey to others that I am a worshiper of idols (Example: Atheists put up Christmas trees and exchange gifts, etc.)

VII. CAN A CHRISTIAN OBSERVE CHRISTMAS AS A CIVIL HOLIDAY? YES!

- A. To observe December 25th as a civil holiday is as innocent as observing July 4th!
- B. Many things that are right within themselves become wrong when religious significance are attached to them
 - 1. We do not have to eat pork, but if we do not eat because we think it is wrong in the sight of God, we are in error (Acts 10:9-16; Lev. 11:3; I Cor. 8:8; I Tim. 4:1-5)
 - 2. We can be circumcised, but we are wrong if we do it as a religious act (Acts 15:1-2; Gal. 5:2-6)
- C. It is good for families to show their love for one another (Acts 20:35)
- D. The observance of Christmas as a civil holiday is a matter of personal choice, but you must not violate your conscience (Rom. 14:23)
- E. Don't let your observance of Christmas include the drinking of alcoholic beverage or wild parties (Rom. 13:13-14; Gal. 5:19-21)

VIII. ARE YOU KEEPING RELIGION OUT OF CHRISTMAS?

- A. Do you have a manger scene, or something of like nature, in or outside your home?
- B. Do the greeting cards you send portray a religious scene?
- C. Are there any ornaments on the tree that have a religious significance - angels, star, etc.?
- D. Do you sing Christmas carols which relate to the birth of the Lord?
- E. Do the postage stamps portray the birth of Christ?

CONCLUSION: We can't put Christ back into Christmas for He was never in it! Let us respect the word of God by abiding in the teaching of Christ! Let us be grateful every day that Jesus humbled Himself in "coming in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:7) It is sad many people insist on vainly honoring Christ, by observing one day in the year as His birthday when He didn't authorize such an observance. However, they fail to commemorate His death as He commanded it to be done! (I Cor. 11:23-25) Jesus will tell us to depart from Him if we do that which He has not authorized. (Matt. 7:21-23; Jn. 8:31; Col. 3:17)

~ Don Hastings ~

MATERIAL ON CHRISTMAS

1. From the church of Christ in Hollywood, Calif.: "Christmas party for the children: because of the success of our Halloween party, it was decided at the last business meeting, (which was the best attended in recent months, especially the young people) to have a Christmas party for the children ages 1-100. Plans for each Sunday School class to put on a brief skit depicting some phase of the spirit of Christmas were discussed. A meeting of all Sunday School teachers this Sunday at 5 p.m. is requested to decide which class will supply Santa Clans and his helpers... who do you think will be Santa Claus?" (*Sounding Trumpets, by Luther Blackmon*)
2. "When Christ was born time was reckoned in the Roman Empire from the founding of the city of Rome. When Christianity became the universal religion over what had been the Roman world, a monk named Dionysius Exigus, at the request of the Emperor Justinian, made a calendar, 526 AD, reckoning time from the birth of Christ, to supercede the Roman calendar. Long after the Christian calendar had replaced the Roman calendar it was found that Dionysius Exigus had made a mistake in placing the birth of Christ in the year 753 AUC. (From the founding of Rome). It should have been 749 or a year or two earlier. So the reason we say that Christ was born 4 BC is merely because the maker of the Christian calendar made a mistake of 4 or 5 years in coordinating it with the Roman calendar which it replaced." (*Halley's Bible Handbook, p. 492*) (A.D. is the abbreviation of two Latin words "Anno Domini" which means, "In the year of our Lord", drh)
3. "The climate was mild; and to keep their flocks from straying, they spent the night with them. It is also a fact that the Jews sent out their flocks into the mountainous and desert regions during the summer months and took them up in the latter part of October or the first of November, when the cold weather commenced. While away in these deserts and mountainous regions, it was proper that there should be someone to attend them, to keep them from straying, and from the ravages of wolves and other wild beasts. It is clear from this that our Saviour was born before the 25th of December, or before what we call Christmas. At that time it is cold, and especially in the high and mountainous regions about Bethlehem. God has concealed the time of his birth. There is no way to ascertain it. By different learned men it has been fixed at each month of the year. Nor was it of consequence to know the time; if it had

been, God would have preserved the record of it Matters of moment are clearly revealed. Those which God regards as of no importance are concealed." (*Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, by Albert Barnes, p. 189*)

4. "Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the church, and before the 5th century there was no general consensus of opinion as to when it should come in the calendar, whether on January 6, March 25, or December 25." (*Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. V, p. 642, 1960 edition*)

5. "St. Nicholas was a real bishop, who lived in the fourth century and became the patron saint of children. The children have adopted him as the 'gift-bringer*' in some countries." (*Book of Knowledge Encyclopedia, Vol. 17, p. 6095-6097, 1954 edition*) One line in a Christmas carol is "Jolly Old Saint Nicholas lend your ear this way".