

# Christmas or Hanukkah?

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*“’Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house  
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.  
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,  
In hopes that Saint Nicholas soon would be there.  
The children were nestled all snug in their beds,  
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;  
And mamma in her ’kerchief, and I in my cap,  
Had just settled down for a long winter’s nap;”*

Every December, Christians around the world struggle with the commercialism and latent paganism saturating Christmas celebrations as well as the losing competition between Jesus and Santa Clause. The hustle and bustle of shopping for everyone on the Christmas list, being sure not to disappoint, is exhausting. Many families go into debt, spending hundreds or even thousands of dollars that they do not have, simply because of expectations. In addition to all this, many Christians make it their mission to “keep Christ in Christmas,” straining against the pushback from our secular society which wants to keep ‘Christmas’ but wants no part of Jesus Christ.

## **The ‘Birth’ of ‘Christmas’**

Jesus Christ has never been the primary focus of ‘Christmas.’ The early Christians did not celebrate Christ’s birth for the first three-hundred years after Christ. Not until control of Christianity was usurped by the ‘Christian’ Emperor Constantine, thereby giving birth to the state-church of Roman Catholicism, did Christians begin to celebrate a holiday in honor of Christ’s birth.

Constantine was embraced by the Roman church in large part because of the Edict of Milan where he outlawed religious persecution. He supported the church in Rome financially, and granted many privileges and positions of power and wealth to clergy. But, his benevolence came with a huge price. Constantine inserted himself into church politics and doctrinal matters, personally appointing the bishops he chose, removing those he did not like, and overseeing church councils where doctrinal creeds were developed. Pleasing the Emperor became a high priority among the church leadership.

The merging of Jesus’ birthday with the birthday of Sol Invictus was a move for political convenience, to bring harmony between pagans and the Church of Rome.

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Constantine and subsequent 'Christian' emperors sought to use religion to keep the empire unified. The Roman Catholic Church was competing with the worship of Sol Invictus (the Unconquered Sun) for official status as the favored religion of Rome. Consequently, Jesus' birthday was conveniently placed on December 25<sup>th</sup>, the already recognized and publically celebrated birthday of the sun god.

Virtually all of the trappings of the pagan festivals of the Roman sun god (Saturnalia and Dies Natalis Solis Invicti) were absorbed and blended together into what we now call 'Christmas.' These rituals included decorating trees, wreaths, mistletoe, exchanging gifts, public caroling, exchanging social roles by dressing up in costumes, partying, drinking, promiscuity, and the like. What we now call 'Christmas' was originally the Roman 'Mardi-Gras' of the winter solstice in honor of the Roman sun god.

Attaching the birth of Christ to a well-established public holiday was used to attract sun-worshippers to Christianity, and at the same time allow Christians to participate in the public festivities. This mixture of the holy and the profane has continued down to our time, and compounded, as Christmas has adopted other rituals from Nordic, Celtic, and other pagan mythologies.

Today, Christmas is the chief holiday for nominal and non-Christians. Jesus Christ is still an appendage to Christmas, just as He was from the time that Roman Catholicism first declared Jesus' birthday to be the same as Sol Invictus. In popular culture, the Nativity of Jesus is the proverbial 'fly in the ointment' of an otherwise secular holiday. Instead of trying so hard to 'keep Christ in Christmas,' perhaps we would be better served by extricating Christ from Christmas altogether.

### **Jesus' Birthday in the Bible**

Jesus was not born in December, or even in winter. He was born in September, as is indicated by a careful examination of the events surrounding John the Baptist's birth. John's father, Zacharias, was a Temple priest of the course of Abijah.<sup>1</sup> This was the eighth course<sup>2</sup> of the twenty-four courses of priests. Each course left their homes twice a year to work for one week in the Temple, from the Sabbath through the next Sabbath (so that two courses were present during the Sabbath day). The first course began their week on the Sabbath following Nisan 1, the month of Passover. During the major festivals (Passover week; Pentecost; and the Feast of Tabernacles), all of the priests were required to work. The resumption of the course rotation took place after the conclusion of the festivals. The eighth course (Abijah) worked in the Temple during the next-to-last

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 1:5

<sup>2</sup> 1 Chron. 24:10

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week before Pentecost. This occurs anywhere between about May 15-22 (when the Passover fell early) to about June 15-22 (when the Passover falls late). We can safely say that the angel appeared to Zacharias,<sup>3</sup> announcing that Elizabeth would have a son, while he worked in the Temple sometime between May 15 and June 22, depending on the year, and the day of the week on which Gabriel appeared. Allowing a month for Zachariah to finish his service, return home, and Elizabeth to conceive, we can safely conclude that John was conceived somewhere between June 15 and July 22.

We know from Luke's Gospel<sup>4</sup> that Mary conceived when Elizabeth was in her sixth month of pregnancy. The sixth month would have begun between November 15<sup>th</sup> and December 15<sup>th</sup>, and ended somewhere between December 15<sup>th</sup> and January 15<sup>th</sup>. So, the widest allowable time for Mary's conception would have been between November 15<sup>th</sup> and January 15<sup>th</sup>, with the average being around December 15<sup>th</sup>. Adding the nine month normal gestation period, Jesus birth must have been sometime close to the middle of September, anywhere between the middle of August to the middle of October.

Yet, we do not need to guess on the date. The Bible tells us the exact date using the Hebrew calendar. Jesus was born on the Festival of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah), the anniversary of day one of Creation. The date is given in Revelation 12:1-3, using the astronomical signs that were part of the calendar used throughout the Bible.<sup>5</sup>

### *Revelation 12:1-5 NKJV*

*1 Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.*

*2 Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.*

*3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.*

*4 His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.*

*5 She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.*

John saw a great sign in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon beneath her feet, with a dragon (the Serpent)<sup>6</sup> beside her. This occurred while she was in labor, giving birth to the Man Child who will rule the nations with a rod of iron<sup>7</sup> – Jesus.

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 1:9

<sup>4</sup> Luke 1:26,36

<sup>5</sup> God gave the heavenly bodies for "signs and seasons" (Gen. 1:14), and all of the festivals of the Lord were calculated by these celestial signs and seasons.

<sup>6</sup> Rev. 12:9

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John saw the positions of the sun and moon against the constellation Virgo, the only 'woman' in the sky. The serpent beside her is Hydra, which runs just below the ecliptic the full length of Virgo and Leo. This sign occurred every Rosh Hashanah (Hebrew for "Head of the Year" – New Years Day). The sun slowly moves through Virgo throughout every September. But the moon moves much faster against the constellations, completing a circuit through all twelve constellations each month (moving twelve times faster than the sun through the twelve constellations). Rosh Hashanah occurs when the sun is clothing Virgo (September), and the new moon is sighted over Jerusalem just after sunset. The new moon first becomes visible on the evening after it has passed by the sun by at least 12 degrees. This distance between the moon and sun against Virgo on Rosh Hashanah is portrayed in the sky every year by the sun being mid-body on Virgo, and the new moon under her feet. This celestial sign happens only on one day each year – only on Rosh Hashanah.



Rosh Hashanah is the anniversary of Day One of creation on the original biblical calendar, the same calendar used throughout Genesis for the creation week, the dates within the genealogies from Adam to Abraham, and the date of the flood. Rosh Hashanah is also the day that Jesus (the agent through whom God created everything) entered His own creation as a human being, according to John's vision in Revelation 12.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Psalm 2

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God commanded Israel to celebrate this day with the blowing of trumpets.<sup>8</sup> At Oasis, we celebrate both the creation week and the birth of Jesus on the festival of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah), in September, on the correct day given in the Bible (the New Moon).

As non-Christians celebrate Christmas with sports, drinking, feasting and partying, and as nominal Christians celebrate with Christmas Trees, stockings, gift-giving, and elaborate lawn decorations, where does Jesus fit into the equation? He is on the outside in the vast majority of 'Christmas' celebrations, an unmentionable appendage. Only for a small minority of Christians – those with a nativity scene on their front lawns instead of Santa and his flying reindeer, or those who say 'Merry Christmas' back to the store clerk when she says 'Happy Holidays,' – is Jesus not an embarrassment.

Given the pagan history of 'Christmas' and the almost universal secular nature of 'Christmas' today, are genuine Christians really being faithful to God by trying so hard to 'keep Christ in Christmas'? Why don't we instead honor Him by celebrating His birth on the correct day, a day that is not celebrated by the world, yet a day that God commanded His people Israel to honor with the blowing of trumpets? Why don't we let go of the pagan holiday with all of its rituals and trappings and mark a clear line of distinction between the holy and the profane?<sup>9</sup>

God not only forbid the worship of pagan gods, but He also forbid the use of pagan items and practices in His worship.

*Deut. 12:1-4, 29-32 NKJV*

*1 "These are the statutes and judgments which you shall be careful to observe in the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth. 2 You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. 3 And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place. 4 You shall not worship the Lord your God with such things. ... 29 "When the Lord your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, 30 take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' 31 You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even*

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<sup>8</sup> Leviticus 23:23-25

<sup>9</sup> Ezekiel 22:26

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*their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. 32 "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.*

### **Hanukkah - the Antithesis of Christmas**

While Christmas is the blending of pagan practices with the birth of Christ, Hanukkah is exactly the opposite – the celebration of the cleansing of the Temple of God from the defilement of paganism and idolatry. "Hanukkah" means "dedication" in Hebrew. Jesus observed it at the Temple.<sup>10</sup> Hanukkah commemorates a real historical event, the cleansing of the Temple after it was polluted by Antiochus Epiphanes (the type of the coming Antichrist). God said through Jeremiah<sup>11</sup> and through Ezekiel<sup>12</sup> that His bringing the Babylonians to utterly destroy Jerusalem and the Temple was because of their adoption of pagan practices in His house, including worshipping "the Queen of Heaven" (Ishtar/Easter), and the women "weeping for Tammuz" (the slain son of Ishtar/Easter), as well as the men "with their backs toward the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east, and they were worshiping the sun toward the east" (the symbol of Tammuz rising from Hades on Easter morning). What was God's reaction to this blending of paganism with His Temple?

*Ezekiel 8:17-18*

*17 "And He said to me, 'Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it a trivial thing to the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence; then they have returned to provoke Me to anger. 18 Indeed they put the branch to their nose. Therefore I also will act in fury. My eye will not spare nor will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them."*

If God was appalled by Israel's blending of paganism with His Temple worship, why would we expect Him to approve of our merging the "Temple of God" (our local assembly) with Roman pagan practices?

Here is what the New Testament has to say on this subject.

*2 Cor. 6:14 - 7:1 NKJV*

*14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the*

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<sup>10</sup> John 10:22

<sup>11</sup> Jer. 44

<sup>12</sup> Ezekiel 8-9

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*living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." 17 Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." 6 "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty." 7 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

*1 Cor. 10:20-22*

*20 Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.*

*21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.*

*22 Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?*

We realize that the pressure from the Christmas tradition handed down to us by Rome is great. It takes great courage to do what is right, the kind of courage the Apostle Paul displayed when he was publically stoned and dragged outside the city of Lystra and left for dead for speaking out against paganism and idolatry.<sup>13</sup> Yet, he survived, was nursed back to health, and then immediately went out "*strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God'.*"<sup>14</sup> This kind of consistent separation from pollution is why Paul could later say: "*For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.*"<sup>15</sup> We are called to follow Christ along the 'difficult path' that leads to immortality.

*Joshua 24:15 NKJV*

*15 "And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."*

Why not join us in celebrating Hanukkah (the "Feast of the Dedication"), a time for cleansing ourselves individually and as a congregation from all idolatry, instead of celebrating the birthday of the Roman sun god, and trying to shoe-horn Christ into a holiday that the world loves, while hating Christ. Let's not put lipstick on a pig by trying to keep Christ in a pagan holiday, when it was never His to begin with.

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<sup>13</sup> Acts 14:8-22

<sup>14</sup> Acts 14:22-23

<sup>15</sup> Galatians 1:10