

# The Plain Truth About

## CHRISTMAS

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Where did the world get. Christmas?...from the Bible, or from paganism? Here are the astonishing facts which may shock you!

Test yourself. How much do you know of the origin of the Christmas tree--of "Santa Claus--of the mistletoe--of the holly

wreath--of the custom of exchanging gifts?

Chapter 1

### THE PLAIN TRUTH ABOUT CHRISTMAS

WHEN I was a very little boy, I was taught to hang up my stockings on Christmas eve. When I awakened the next morning,

they were filled with small toys and sacks or little boxes of candy and nuts. And beside the mantle, from which my stockings

hung, a Christmas tree had suddenly appeared, decorated with shiny tinsel. And on it hung presents. Other presents for us

children were piled on the floor underneath. I was told Santa Claus had come down the chimney during the night and left all

these things. But did I question what my parents had told me? Of course not. I accepted it--took it all for granted. Didn't you?

Stop and think a moment! Very few have ever reflected on why they believe what they do--why they follow the customs they

do, or from where those customs came. We were born into a world filled with customs. We grew up accepting them without

question. Why? Sheep instinct? Well, not exactly. But by nature we do tend to follow the crowd, whether right or wrong.

Sheep follow others to the slaughter. Humans ought to check up where they are going. How--when did Christmas originate?

Does Christmas really celebrate the birthday of Christ? Was Jesus born on December 25th? Did the original apostles, who

knew Jesus personally and were taught by Him, celebrate His birthday on December 25th? Did they celebrate it at all? If

Christmas is the chief of the Christian holidays, why do so many non-Christians observe it? Do you know? Why do people

exchange presents with family members, friends, relatives, at Christmas time? Was it because the wise men presented gifts to

the Christ-child? The answer may surprise you. Most people have "supposed" a lot of things about Christmas that are not true.

But let's quit "supposing" and get the facts!

### **What Encyclopedias Say**

The word "Christmas" means "Mass of Christ," or, as it came to be shortened, "Christ-Mass." It came to non-Christians and

Protestants from the Roman Catholic Church. And where did they get it? NOT from the New Testament--NOT from the

Bible--NOT from the original apostles who were personally instructed by Christ--but it gravitated in the fourth century into the

Roman Church from paganism. Since the celebration of Christmas has come to the world from the Roman Catholic Church,

and has no authority but that of the Roman Catholic Church, let us examine the Catholic Encyclopedia, 1911 edition, published

by that church. Under the heading "Christmas," you will find: "Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the Church...the

first evidence of the feast is from Egypt." "Pagan customs centering around the January calends gravitated to Christmas." And in

the same encyclopedia, under the heading "Natal Day," we find that the early Catholic father, Origen, acknowledged this truth:

"... In the Scriptures, no one [who obeyed God] is recorded to have kept a feast or held a great banquet on his birthday. It is

only sinners [like Pharaoh and Herod] who make great rejoicings over the day in which they were born into this world"

(emphasis ours). Encyclopedia Britannica, 1946 edition, has this: "Christmas (i.e., the Mass of Christ)... Christmas was not

among the earliest festivals of the church...." It was not instituted by Christ or the apostles, or by Bible authority. It was picked

up afterward from paganism. The Encyclopedia Americana, 1944 edition, says: "Christmas.... It was, according to many

authorities, not celebrated in the first centuries of the Christian church, as the Christian usage in general was to celebrate the

death of remarkable persons rather than their birth...." (The "Communion," which is instituted by New Testament Bible

authority, is a memorial of the death of Christ.) "... A feast was established in memory of this event [Christ's birth] in the fourth

century. In the fifth century the Western Church ordered it to be celebrated forever on the day of the old Roman feast of the

birth of Sol, as no certain knowledge of the day of Christ's birth existed." Now notice! These recognized historical authorities

show Christmas was not observed by Christians for the first two or three hundred years--a period longer than the entire history

of the United States as a nation! It got into the Western, or Roman, Church, by the fourth century A.D. It was not until the fifth

century that the Roman Church ordered it to be celebrated as an official Christian festival!

### **Jesus Not Born December 25th**

Jesus was not even born in the winter season! When the Christ-child was born "there were in the same country shepherds

abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night" (Luke 2:8). This never could have occurred in Judea in the month

of December. The shepherds always brought their flocks from the mountainsides and fields and corralled them not later than

October 15, to protect them from the cold, rainy season that followed that date. Notice that the Bible itself proves, in Song of

Solomon 2:11 and Ezra 10:9, 13, that winter was a rainy season not permitting shepherds to abide in open fields at night. "It

was an ancient custom among Jews of those days to send out their sheep to the fields and deserts about the Passover (early

spring), and bring them home at commencement of the first rain," says the Adam Clarke Commentary (Vol. 5, page 370, New

York ed.). Continuing, this authority states: "During the time they were out, the shepherds watched them night and day. As...the

first rain began early in the month of Marchesvan, which answers to part of our October and November [begins sometime in

October], we find that the sheep were kept out in the open country during the whole summer. And, as these shepherds had not

yet brought home their flocks, it is a presumptive argument that October had not yet commenced, and that, consequently, our

Lord was not born on the 25th of December, when no flocks were out in the fields; nor could He have been born later than

September, as the flocks were still in the fields by night. On this very ground, the nativity in December should be given up. The

feeding of the flocks by night in the fields is a chronological fact..." Many encyclopedias and other authorities affirm that Christ

was not born on December 25. Even the Catholic Encyclopedia frankly states this fact. The exact date of Jesus' birth is entirely

unknown, as all authorities acknowledge. Chapter 2 of this booklet covers scriptures which at least strongly indicate it was in

the early fall--probably September-- approximately six months after Passover. If God had wished us to observe and celebrate

Christ's birthday, He would not have so completely hidden the exact date.

### **How This Pagan Custom Got into the Church**

Then how did this pagan custom creep into the Western Christian world? The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious

Knowledge explains it clearly, in its article on "Christmas": "How much the date of the festival depended upon the pagan

Brumalia (Dec. 25) following the Saturnalia (Dec. 17-24), and celebrating the shortest day of the year and the 'new sun'...

cannot be accurately determined. The pagan Saturnalia and Brumalia were too deeply entrenched in popular custom to be set

aside by Christian influence .... The pagan festival with its riot and merrymaking was so popular that Christians were glad of an

excuse to continue its celebration with little change in spirit and in manner. Christian preachers of the West and the Near East

protested against the unseemly frivolity with which Christ's birthday was celebrated, while Christians of Mesopotamia accused

their Western brethren of idolatry and sun worship for adopting as Christian this pagan festival." Remember, the Roman world

had been pagan. Prior to the fourth century, Christians were few in number, though increasing, and were persecuted by the

government and by pagans. But, with the advent of Constantine as emperor, who made his profession of Christianity in the

fourth century, placing Christianity on an equal footing with paganism, people of the Roman world began to accept this

now-popular Christianity by the hundreds of thousands. But remember, these people had grown up in pagan customs, chief of

which was this idolatrous festival of December 25th. It was a festival of merrymaking, with its special spirit. They enjoyed it!

They didn't want to give it up! Now this same article in the New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge explains

how the recognition by Constantine of Sunday, which had been the day of pagan sun worship, and how the influence of the

pagan Manichaeism, which identified the SON of God with the physical SUN, gave these pagans of the fourth century, now

turning over wholesale to "Christianity," their excuse for calling their pagan festival date of December 25th (birthday of the

SUN-god), the birthday of the SON of God. And that is how "Christmas" became fastened on our Western world! We may

call it by another name, but it's the same old pagan sun-worshipping festival still! The only change is in what we call it! You can

call a rabbit a "lion," but it's still a rabbit, just the same. Again from the Encyclopedia Britannica: "Certain Latins, as early as

354, may have transferred the birthday from January 6th to December 25, which was then a Mithraic feast...or birthday of the

Unconquered SUN... The Syrians and Armenians, who clung to January 6th, accused the Romans of sun worship and idolatry,

contending...that the feast of December 25th, had been invented by disciples of Cerinthus...."

### **The Real Origin of Christmas**

But if we got Christmas from the Roman Catholics, and they got it from paganism, where did the pagans get it? Where, when,

and what was its real origin? It originated in ancient Egypt in the days of King Osiris and Queen Isis, and their son Horus, about

3,000 B.C. Yes, it stems from roots whose beginning was long before the Flood! From many ancient writings, considerable is

learned of this man, who started in Egypt a great organized worldly apostasy from God that has dominated this world until now.

After the untimely death of King Osiris, his wife, Isis, propagated the doctrine of the survival of Osiris as a spirit being. She

claimed a full-grown evergreen tree sprang overnight from a dead tree stump, which symbolized the springing forth unto new life

of the dead Osiris. On each anniversary of his birth, she claimed, Osiris would visit the evergreen tree and leave gifts upon it.

December 25th was the birthday of King Osiris reborn as the son Horus. This is the real origin of the Christmas tree. Through

her scheming and designing, Isis became the "Queen of Heaven," and Osiris under various names, became the reborn "divine

son of heaven." Through the generations, in this idolatrous worship, Osiris also became, among the later Phoenicians, Baal the

Sun-god. In this false system, reintroduced at Babylon, after the Flood, by Nimrod (see Genesis 10 and 11), the "Mother and

Child" (Isis and Osiris reborn) became chief objects of worship. This worship of "Mother and Child" spread over the world.

The names varied in different countries and languages. In Asia the worship passed under the names of Cybele and Deoious. In

Rome, Fortuna and Jupiterpuer. Even in Greece, China, Japan and Tibet is to be found the counterpart of the Madonna, long

before the birth of Christ! Thus, during the fourth and fifth centuries, when the pagans of the Roman world were "accepting" the

new popular "Christianity" by the hundreds of thousands, carrying their old pagan customs and beliefs along with them, merely

cloaking them with Christian-sounding names, the Madonna and "Mother and Child" idea also became popularized, especially

at Christmas time. Every Christmas season you'll hear sung and chanted dozens of times the hymn "Silent Night, Holy Night,"

with its familiar "Mother and Child" theme. We, who have been born in such a world, reared and steeped in these things all our

lives, have been taught to revere these things as holy and sacred. We never questioned to see where they came from--whether

they came from the Bible, or from pagan idolatry! We are shocked to learn the truth--some, unfortunately, take offense at the

plain truth! But God commands His faithful ministers, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my

people their transgression!" Shocking as these facts are, they are the plain facts of history and the Bible! The origin of Christmas

goes back to ancient times. It is bound up in the apostasy which has gripped a deceived world these many centuries! In Egypt,

it was always believed that the husband of Isis (Egyptian name for "Queen of Heaven") was reborn as the son Horus on

December 25th. Through the influence of Egypt and, later, Babylon over civilization, the nations celebrated this famous birthday

over most of the known world for centuries before the birth of Christ. December 25th is not the birthday of Jesus the true

Christ! The apostles and early true Church never celebrated Christ's birthday at any time. There is no command or instruction

to celebrate it in the Bible-- rather, the celebrating of birthdays is a pagan, not a Christian custom. Thus the ancient idolatrous

"Mysteries," have been handed down through the pagan religions under new Christian-sounding names.

### **Origin of Holly Wreath, Mistletoe, Yule Log**

Now where did we get this mistletoe custom? Among the ancient pagans the mistletoe was used at this festival of the winter

solstice because it was considered sacred to the sun, because of its supposed miraculous healing power. The pagan custom of

kissing under the mistletoe was an early step in the night of revelry and drunken debauchery--celebrating the death of the "old

sun" and the birth of the new at the winter solstice. Mistletoe, sacred in pagan festivals, is a parasite! Holly berries were also

considered sacred to the sun-god. The Yule log is in reality the "sun log." "Yule" means "wheel," a pagan symbol of the sun. Yet

today professing Christians speak of the "sacred Yule-tide season"! Even the lighting of fires and candles as a Christian

ceremony is merely a continuation of the pagan custom, encouraging the waning sun-god as he reached the lowest place in the

southern skies! The Encyclopedia Americana says: "The holly, the mistletoe, the Yule log...are relics of pre-Christian times." Of

paganism! The book 10,000 Answers to Questions, compiled by Frederic J. Haskins, says: "The use of the Christmas wreath

is believed by authorities to be traceable to the pagan custom of decorating buildings and places of worship at the feast which

took place at the same time as our Christmas." Also: "The Christmas tree is from Egypt, and its origin dates from a period long

anterior to the Christian Era" (italics ours).

### **Yes, and Even Santa Claus!**

But what about dear old Santa Claus? Is he as benevolent and holy as many suppose! The name "Santa Claus" is a corruption

of the name "St. Nicholas," a Roman Catholic bishop who lived in the 4th century. Look in the Encyclopedia Britannica,

volume 19, pages 648-649, 11th edition, where you'll read: "St. Nicholas, bishop of Myra, a saint honored by the Greeks and

Latins on the 6th of December.... A legend of his surreptitious bestowal of dowries on the three daughters of an impoverished

citizen...is said to have originated the old custom of giving presents in secret on the Eve of St. Nicholas [Dec. 6], subsequently

transferred to Christmas day. Hence the association of Christmas with Santa Claus...." Through the year, parents punish their

children for telling falsehoods. Then, at Christmas time, they themselves tell their little children this "Santa Claus" lie! Is it any

wonder many of them, when they grow up and learn the truth, begin to believe God is a myth, too? One little fellow, sadly

disillusioned about "Santa Claus," said to a playmate, "Yes, and I'm going to look into this 'Jesus Christ' business, too!" Is it

Christian to teach children myths and falsehoods? God says, "Thou shalt not bear false witness!" It may seem right, and be

justified by human reason, but God says, "There is a way that seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of

death!" "Old Nick" also is a term for the devil! Is there a connection? Satan appears as an "angel of light," to deceive! (II Cor.

11:14; Rev. 12:9.) And so when we examine the facts, we are astonished to learn that the practice of observing Christmas is

not, after all, a true biblical practice, but a human custom--one of the ways of Babylon our people have fallen into! But when it

comes to the most important part of all in this Christmas observance--the Christmas shopping season--the buying and

exchanging of gifts--many will exclaim triumphantly, "Well, at least the Bible tells us to do that! Didn't the wise men give gifts

when Christ was born?" Again, we are due for some surprises, when we learn the plain truth. Let's look at the historic origin of

trading gifts, then see exactly what the Bible does say about it.

### **Isn't Exchanging Gifts Scriptural?**

From the Bibliotheca Sacra, volume 12, pages 153-155, we quote: "The interchange of presents between friends is alike

characteristic of Christmas and the Saturnalia, and must have been adopted by Christians from the Pagans, as the admonition of

Tertullian plainly shows." The fact is, this custom fastened upon people of exchanging gifts with friends and relatives at the

Christmas season has not a single trace of Christianity about it, strange though that may seem! This does not celebrate Christ's

birthday nor honor it or Him! Suppose someone you love has a birthday. You want to honor that person on his or her birthday.

Would you lavishly buy gifts for everyone else, trading gifts back and forth with all your other friends and loved ones, but ignore

completely any gift for the one whose birthday you are honoring? Rather absurd, when viewed in that light, isn't it? Yet this is

exactly what people the world over are doing! They honor a day that is not Christ's birthday by spending every dime they can

scrape together in buying presents to trade back and forth among friends and relatives. But I can say by years of experience, as

I believe most pastors and ministers can say, that when the month of December rolls around, nearly all professing Christians

forget to give gifts to Christ and His cause almost altogether! December often is the most difficult month to keep Christ's work

from dying! People are too busy trading gifts to think of Him and His Work, it seems. Then, in January and even into February

it seems they have to catch up from what they spent for Christmas, so they seldom get back to normal in supporting Christ and

His Work before March! Now consider what the Bible says about the wise men giving gifts when Christ was born. It is in

Matthew 2:1-11. "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise

men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews?... And when they were come into the house,

they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures,

they presented unto HIM gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh." Notice, they inquired for the child Jesus, who was born

KING of the Jews! Now why did they present gifts to Him? Because it was His birthday? Not at all, because they came

several days or weeks after the date of His birth! Are we to see in this an example for us, today, to trade gifts back and forth

among ourselves? No, notice carefully! They did not exchange gifts among themselves, but "they presented unto HIM gifts."

They gave their gifts to Christ, not to their friends, relatives, or one another!

### **Gifts for a King**

Why? Let me quote from the Adam Clarke Commentary, volume 5, page 46: "Verse 11. (They presented unto him gifts.) The

people of the east never approach the presence of kings and great personages, without a present in their hands. The custom is

often noticed in the Old Testament..." There it is! They were not instituting a new Christian custom of exchanging gifts with

friends to honor Christ's birthday. They were following an old and ancient eastern custom of presenting gifts to a king when they

came into his presence. They were approaching Him, born KING of the Jews, in person. Therefore custom required they

present gifts--even as the Queen of Sheba brought gifts to Solomon--even as many people today take a gift along when they

visit, for example, the White House for an appointment with the President. No, the custom of trading gifts back and forth does

not stem from this scriptural incident at all, but rather, as quoted from history above, it is the continuance of an ancient pagan

custom. Instead of honoring Christ, it invariably retards His Work, often sets it back, at the Christmas season every year.

### **Does It Really Honor Christ?**

Now come two arguments often used to justify Christmas observance. (1) Many will reason this way: "But, even though the

exact date of Jesus' birth is unknown, should we not select some date to celebrate as His birthday?" The answer is positively

no! Did you not notice the statement quoted earlier from the Catholic Encyclopedia that sinners alone celebrate their birthdays?

The celebration of birthdays is not a Christian, but a pagan custom, observed by sinners! (2) But, many still reason, "Even

so--even though Christmas was a pagan custom, honoring the false sun-god, we don't observe it to honor the false god, we

observe it to honor Christ." But how does GOD answer in His Word? "Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by

following them [the pagans in their customs]...that thou inquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their

gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the Lord thy God: for every abomination to the Lord, which he

hateth, have they done unto their gods" (Deut. 12:30-31). God says plainly in His Instruction Book to us, that He will not

accept that kind of worship, even though intended in His honor. To Him, He says, it is offering what is abominable to Him, and

therefore it honors, not Him, but false pagan gods. GOD says we must not worship Him according to the "dictates of our own

conscience"--a term we often hear. But Jesus said plainly, "God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit

and in truth" (John 4:24). And what is truth? God's Word--the Holy Bible--said Jesus, is truth (John 17:17); and the Bible says

God will not accept worship when people take a pagan custom or manner of worship and try to honor Christ with it. Again,

Jesus said: "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9). Christmas observance

is a tradition of men, and the commandments of God, as quoted, forbid it. Jesus said, further, "full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition." That is precisely what the millions are doing today. They ignore

the commandment of God. He commands, regarding taking the customs of the pagans and using them to honor or worship

God: "Thou shalt not do so unto the Lord thy God." Still, most people today take that command of God lightly, or as having no

validity whatsoever, and follow the tradition of men in observing Christmas. We have professed to be Christian nations, but

we're in Babylon, as Bible prophecy foretold, and we don't know it! "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of

her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues"--soon to fall--is the warning of Revelation 18:4. Make no mistake! God will

allow you to defy and disobey Him. He will allow you to follow the crowd and the traditions of men. He will allow you to sin.

But He also says there is a day of reckoning coming. As you sow, so shall you reap! Jesus was the living Word of God in

Person, and the Bible is the written Word of God. And we shall be judged, for eternity, by these words! They should not be

taken lightly or ignored.

## **Chapter 2**

### **JESUS' BIRTH--THE UNTOLD STORY**

Was Jesus born in December? If not, when was he born? And in what year? Anyway, what difference does it make? These are

questions often asked. It is time they were answered!

## **A Visit to Bethlehem**

In late December of each year, thousands of tourists flock into the small town of Bethlehem in the Judean Hills south of

Jerusalem to participate in annual Christmas celebrations there. Some make the 6-mile journey from Jerusalem on foot. Upon

arrival, they crowd with silent awe into the paved expanse of Manger Square in front of the revered Church of the Nativity,

built over the traditional site of Jesus' birth. Inevitably, some of these tourists arrive in Israel unprepared. They have not

thoroughly studied their guidebooks. As they step off their plane, they receive a real shock! November through early March is

"winter" in Israel! The weather gets cold, especially at night. Often it rains--or even snows! Yet many arrive in Israel carrying

luggage bulging with summer attire, reasoning that it is always hot and arid in the Middle East. So they hurriedly purchase coats

and sweaters in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem for their pilgrimage down to Bethlehem. Nevertheless, most of those who stand in

Manger Square on December 25 each year--prepared and unprepared alike--fail to perceive the message being proclaimed by

the very weather around them! Notice this plain testimony of your Bible: On the day of Jesus' birth "there were in the same

country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night" (Luke 2:8). The shepherds were living out in the

open fields, tending their flock through the night. The point? Ask any biblical scholar, or any modern Israeli: This never could

have occurred in Judea in the month of December--nor even in November, or late October for that matter! In ancient times as

today, shepherds brought their flocks in from the fields and penned them in shelters not later than the middle of October! This

was necessary to protect them from the cold, rainy season that usually followed that date. (The Bible itself makes it clear that

winter in Palestine is a rainy season; see Ezra 10:9, 13; Song of Solomon 2:11.) Yet Luke 2:8 tells us that at the time of Jesus'

birth, the shepherds were yet abiding in the fields--by night, at that! They had not yet brought their flocks home to the

sheepfolds. Clearly the cold, rainy season had not yet commenced. Thus, on the basis of Luke's testimony alone, we see that

Jesus could have been born no later than mid-October--when the weather is still pleasant at Bethlehem. A December 25

nativity is too late!

### **More Proof**

Additional biblical evidence lends further support to the foregoing conclusion. Luke 1:24-38 informs us that the virgin Mary

miraculously became pregnant with Jesus when her cousin Elizabeth was six months pregnant with a child who would later be

known as John the Baptist. Jesus, then, would have been born six months after John. If we could know the time of John's birth,

we could then simply add six months and know the time of Jesus' birth. Does the Bible reveal the general time of John's birth?

Notice: Elizabeth's husband Zacharias was a priest at the temple in Jerusalem. Luke 1:5 records that Zacharias was "of the

course of Abia [in Hebrew, Abijah]." In the days of King David of ancient Israel (10th century B.C.), the number of priests had

so increased that they had to be divided into 24 courses or shifts, which would take turns in performing the priestly duties (I

Chron. 24). Each course served one week at a time, beginning and ending on a weekly Sabbath day (II Chron. 23:8). The

course of Abijah was the eighth course or shift in the rotation (I Chron. 24:10). The Talmud (collection of Jewish civil and

religious laws and commentaries) records that the first course performed its duties in the first week of the first month of the

Hebrew calendar. This month (called Abib or Nisan) begins about the start of spring in the Northern Hemisphere. The second

course worked the second week. The third week--being the annual festival season of Passover and the Days of Unleavened

Bread--found all 24 courses serving together, sharing the heavy duties of that special time. The third shift then took its turn

during the fourth week of the year. Projecting forward, the eighth course--the course of Abijah, in which Zacharias

served--worked the ninth week of the year. But Zacharias' course then stayed on at the temple to serve the 10th week

also--the week of the annual Pentecost festival--along with all the other courses. It was during that two-week period of

work--near the end of spring-- that the announcement by the archangel Gabriel came to Zacharias regarding his wife's imminent

conception (Luke 1:8-20). When his two weeks' service was completed, Zacharias and Elizabeth went back to their home and

Elizabeth conceived (verses 23-24)--sometime late in June or early July. The rest is a matter of biology and arithmetic.

Elizabeth's sixth month of pregnancy would have been in December. She would have given birth three months later--in late

March or early April of the following year. Six months after that, Jesus would have been born, in late September or early

October--before the sheep were brought in from the fields, as we have seen! Clearly, Jesus was not born in December. Late

September or early October was also the time of year that taxes were customarily paid--in the fall, at the end of the harvest.

Joseph and Mary, it will be remembered, had journeyed to Bethlehem to be taxed (Luke 2:3-5). The fact that there was "no

room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7) also suggests the time of the autumn harvest, because the annual fall festivals occurring at

that time attracted multitudes of Jews to Jerusalem and nearby towns, filling all available accommodations.

### **Jesus Born "Before Christ"?**

An even more frequent question received from readers concerns the year of Jesus' birth. Few subjects are fraught with so much

confusion and misunderstanding. This immediately brings up a preliminary question: How could Jesus have been born in a year

"B.C."--Before Christ--as most authorities suggest? It would seem to be a contradiction in terms! First, understand that the

manner of reckoning time according to B.C. and A.D. was devised hundreds of years after Jesus' birth. It was invented in the

sixth century A.D. by a monk in Italy name Dionysius Exiguus. This Dionysius misunderstood the time of the reign of Herod the

Great, king of Judea. So he reckoned the birth of Jesus to have occurred in December of the year 753 AUC (ab urbe

condita--"from the foundation of the city [of Rome]"). In past ages, time was often reckoned using the founding of Rome as the

starting point for counting. Thus, in Dionysius' new system, January 1, 754 AUC, became January 1,-- A.D. 1 (anno Domini,

"in the year of the Lord"). That is, he assumed Jesus was born on December 25, just a week before January 1, A.D. 1.

### **Error Later Discovered**

Later, it was discovered that Dionysius had been incorrect in his reckoning of the reign of Herod and hence of the commencement of the Christian era. Jesus had been born some years earlier than Dionysius had thought. But by then, the new

chronology was in general use and it was too late to change! It has continued in use throughout most of the world to the present

day. With that understanding, we can now proceed to determine the year of Jesus' birth. There are several ways of doing so.

Notice, first, this ancient prophecy from the book of Daniel: "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the

commandment to restore and to build from Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and

two weeks..." (Dan. 9:25). The commandment or decree to restore and build Jerusalem was made in the seventh year of the

reign of Artaxerxes I, king of ancient Persia (see Ezra 7:8)--according to the autumn-to-autumn reckoning of the Jews, in 457

B.C. The archangel Gabriel told Daniel that there would be a total of 69 prophetic weeks from that time until the public

appearance of the Messiah. Sixty-nine weeks is equivalent to 483 days ( $69 \times 7$ ). A day of prophetic fulfillment is a year in

actual time (Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:6). So 483 prophetic days (69 prophetic weeks) is 483 years. Simple arithmetic now takes

over. Four-hundred-eighty-three years from 457 B.C. (the year of the decree) brings us to A.D. 27--the year when Jesus, the

Messiah, began his public ministry. (In calculating this, be aware that you must add 1 to compensate for the fact that there is no

year zero.) Now consider further: It is generally understood that Jesus entered upon his ministry in the autumn of the year,

immediately after his baptism. (His ministry lasted 3 1/2 years, ending in the spring, at Passover time.) In Luke 3:23 we learn

that Jesus was "about thirty years of age" when he began his ministry. If he was about 30 years old in the autumn of A.D. 27,

then he must have been born in the end of summer or early autumn and in 4 B.C.! (remember, there is no year zero.) It thus

stands clearly revealed from Daniel's prophecy that Jesus was born in 4 B.C. But there is yet further proof!

### **Herod's Eclipse**

Students of the Bible recognize that Jesus was born before the death of Herod the Great (Matt. 2:15, 19). When did Herod

die? The first century A.D. Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, in Antiquities of the Jews (book XVII, chapter vi), tells of an

eclipse of the moon late in Herod's reign. I have before me, as I write, the authoritative Solar and Lunar Eclipses of the Ancient

Near East by Kudlek and Mickler. Its tables reveal that the lunar eclipse in question occurred on March 13, 4 B.C. Continuing

with Josephus' account, we discover that sometime after the eclipse, Herod--afflicted with a painful and loathsome disease--went beyond the river Jordan to bathe himself in hot springs there. The cures he undertook were unsuccessful. His

condition worsened and he returned to Jericho. There, in a wild rage, he plotted the deaths of many prominent Jews. He also

ordered his own son, Antipater, slain. All these events required some months. Josephus further reveals (chapter ix) that Herod's

death occurred sometime before a spring Passover. This Passover would have been 13 months after the eclipse, or the

Passover of April, 3 B.C. This confirms our previously calculated 4 B.C. birthdate for Jesus. Further corroborating this,

Josephus also records (XVII, viii, 1) that at his death, Herod had reigned 37 years since he had been declared king by the

Romans. That had occurred in 40 B.C., a fact that Dionysius overlooked. Herod's death therefore took place late in 4

B.C.--more specifically, according to a Jewish tradition, on the seventh day of the lunar month Kislev in the Hebrew calendar

(equivalent to November/December on the Roman calendar)--shortly after Jesus' birth in the early autumn of 4 B.C. This is the

only date that is consistent with all the provable facts!

### **The "Star" of Bethlehem**

A word is necessary at this point about the celebrated "Star of Bethlehem" (Matt. 2) that guided the wise men (Greek, Magi)

across the deserts of the East to Bethlehem. The Plain Truth receives many letters about this each December. Scholars have

tried to pinpoint the date of Jesus' birth by means of astronomical calculations related to the appearance of this mysterious

"star." For centuries, theologians and astronomers have debated this perplexing question. Dozens of theories exist purporting to

explain what this "star" actually was and when it appeared. Some hold it was a comet. Others postulate a nova (exploding star).

Still others say it was a meteor, or a planet, or a conjunction of two or more planets. (A conjunction takes place when planets

appear, from our earthly viewpoint, to briefly become a single bright object as their paths cross the sky.) Dates for proposed

celestial phenomena usually range from 7 B.C. to 2 B.C. But the heart and core of the star controversy goes beyond matters of

astronomy. To one who believes that the Bible is the Word of God and is to be taken at face value, the account of the star in

Matthew's gospel can have only one explanation. It was clearly and incontrovertibly a miracle, of supernatural, not natural

origin! What natural phenomenon in the heavens--whether comet, meteor, exploding star or planet--could "go before" the Magi

and "stand over" a specific house to precisely pinpoint it (Matt. 2:9-11)? And if it was attributable to a nonmiraculous agency,

how can we account that it appeared and reappeared to the Magi and apparently went generally unnoticed by others? Natural

explanations are sheer astronomical foolishness! If the biblical account cannot be accepted in all its details, why should anyone

believe it has any merit at all? The star was clearly a special miracle of God, of divine origin defying all the proposed natural

explanations of liberal scholarship. It is quite possible that the Star of Bethlehem was simply an angel sent to lead the Magi to

Jesus, since the Bible often symbolically uses stars to signify angels (Job 38:7; Jude 13; Rev. 1:20; 9:1; 12:14; et al.).

### **In Jesus' Name?**

We have seen the proof that Jesus was born in the early autumn, not in the winter. But, some will ask, what difference does it

make? Is it not the thought that counts? What is wrong with celebrating a day--any day--in honor of Jesus' birth? Each

December, articles inevitably appear in newspapers and magazines pointing out the ancient origins of today's Christmas

customs. All authorities agree that the customs surrounding Christmas--the Christmas tree, mistletoe, holly wreaths, yule logs,

stockings on the hearth, exchanging gifts and so on--were practiced in connection with pagan religious celebrations centuries

before the birth of Jesus. None are of Christian origin! Anciently, December 25 was the date of the pagan Roman Brumalia, the

final day of the popular weeklong Saturnalia celebration, celebrated in honor of the god Saturn. It was the day of the "invincible

sun"--a winter solstice festival. "Christmas" was not among the earliest festivals of the Church. It was not until the mid-fourth

century that Pope Julius I decreed December 25 to be Christmas ("Christ-Mass") Day. He sought to overshadow the popular

Brumalia by imparting "Christian" connotations to the day. But again, some will ask: What is so wrong with borrowing some of

those early customs and using them to honor Jesus? May we not continue to celebrate December 25, as long as we do it in

Jesus' name? Can pagan practices be "Christianized" in this way? More than 34 centuries ago, the rebellious children of Israel

fashioned a pagan idol--a golden calf--in the wilderness (Ex. 32). It was the god Apis, the sacred Egyptian bull deity worshiped

at Memphis on the Nile. Aaron declared that the pagan, Egyptian rites by which the Israelites worshiped the calf were "a feast

to the Lord" (verse 5). Did God feel honored? Did he approve of their using pagan customs to worship him? Absolutely not! It

was a great sin (verse 21), and 3,000 paid with their lives (verse 28)! They had deceived themselves that what they were doing

was right. We are commanded not to seek to worship God with customs borrowed from other religions (Deut. 12:29-32).

"Learn not the way of the heathen," God declares (Jer. 10:2). True Christians never meet paganism half way. Pagan worship--whether "in Jesus' name" or not--remains pagan worship! Christianity mixed with paganism is not Christianity at all.

Righteousness has no fellowship with unrighteousness (II Cor. 6:14). God simply will not accept that type of false "worship." If

God had wanted us to observe Christ's birthday, he would have given us the exact date and specific instructions on how to

observe it. But he has not! Christmas is an invention of man, issuing from pagan worship.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **SO YOU ARE NOT KEEPING CHRISTMAS?**

SO You have decided it's time to make some changes. This year you and your family are (sssh--don't let the neighbors

know!)--not going to keep Christmas! But it isn't quite as easy as that though, is it? Christmas has become so much a part of

most people's lives that not to observe it can mean a major disruption. No Christmas cards. What will Aunt Tess think? No

relatives over for Christmas dinner. No decorations. No lights or Santa Claus. You'll have to try to avoid the office party, and

you'd better write to the school explaining that you don't want little Fred to play an angel in the Christmas play. And no tree. I

remember the first time we didn't have a tree. It had always been a feature in our house. We would go to a lot of trouble to

decorate it beautifully, and then put it in the front window for all to see. A good-looking tree was a status symbol in our

neighborhood and, though I do say it myself, ours was one of the best and most impressive. But we noticed in the Bible where

God made some pretty pointed remarks about decorated trees. Check it for yourself in Jeremiah 10:3-4. God said it was a

futile, pagan custom--a clear case of worshipping Christ in vain. So--no tree. Even though we knew we had done the right

thing, we really missed that tree. The neighbors all had them, sparkling in their windows, but our window remained dark. We

missed it so much that we cheated a bit. We put up a few decorations--not a tree, mind you, just a few bits and pieces to make

the place look more cheerful. And we had a Christmas dinner, only we didn't call it that. It was only a celebration." We felt

guilty about it, because we knew we had compromised. It was just that the old way seemed so comfortable and without a tree

and all the rest of the paraphernalia, Christmas just didn't seem like--er, Christmas. Jesus Christ knew this would happen. He

explained to His disciples that they would indeed miss some aspects of the old way of life, and that even as they learned the

truth from him they would look back nostalgically from time to time. Jesus taught an important lesson in Luke 5:36-39: "No one

puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the

new does not match the old" (verse 36). Any seamstress understands that. New, unshrunk material cannot be used to patch

old, worn garments. When it shrinks, it will tear the old cloth even worse than before. Jesus' second analogy is not quite so easy

for us to follow in the 20th century: "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins

and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins" (verses 37-38). In New

Testament times glass bottles were rare, so wine was often transported in animal skins, usually from goats. They made a strong,