

MESSIANIC

WINTER HOLIDAY HELPER

edited by Margaret McKee Huey

MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
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Messianic Winter Holiday Helper

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Abbreviations and Special Terms

The following is a list of abbreviations for reference works and special terms which are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as *TWOT* for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

ABD: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*

AMG: *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament*

ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)

Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament

Ara: Aramaic

ASV: American Standard Version (1901)

ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)

b. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)

B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.

BDAG: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)

BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*

C.E.: Common Era or A.D.

CGEDNT: *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Barclay M. Newman)

CGL: *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (2021)

CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Holladay)

CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)

CJSB: Complete Jewish Study Bible (2016)

DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition

DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls

EDB: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*

EJ: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*

ESV: English Standard Version (2001)

Ger: German

GNT: Greek New Testament

Grk: Greek

HALOT: *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner)

HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)

Heb: Hebrew

HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible

IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*

IDBSup: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*

ISBE: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*

IVPBBC: *IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)*

Jastrow: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Marcus Jastrow)

JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)

JETS: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*

KJV: King James Version

Lattimore: *The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore* (1996)

LITV: *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green (1986)

LES: *Lexham English Septuagint* (2019)

LS: *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott)

LSJM: *Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie)

LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
 LXX: Septuagint
 m. Mishnah
 MT: Masoretic Text
 NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
 NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
 NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*
 NEB: New English Bible (1970)
 Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*
 NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)
 NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*
 NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*
 NIV: New International Version (1984)
 NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)
 NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
 NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
 NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
 NLT: New Living Translation (1996)

NT: New Testament
 OT: Old Testament
 REB: Revised English Bible (1989)
 RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)
 t. Tosefta
 Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
 Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
 TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
 TLV: Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version (2014)
 TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)
 TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
 UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition
 v(s). verse(s)
 Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
 Vul: Latin Vulgate
 YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)
 WMB: World Messianic Bible (2020)

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The Christmas Challenge

J.K. McKee

No matter who you are or what religious ideology you hold to, the Winter holiday season involving Christmas will be a challenge.¹ It is first a challenge to non-Believers as they are continually presented with the message of the birth of Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) into a world which is lost in sin. Secondly, the Christmas holiday is a challenging time for many Christian people who seek to remember the birth of the Messiah, but at the same time all too often indulge themselves in overly frivolous gift-giving. And thirdly, the Christmas season is a challenge to a great number of Messianic people, as we largely choose not to celebrate or acknowledge this holiday.

The Reformation certainly did a great deal of work eliminating many non-Biblical Roman Catholic traditions and theologies from the faith. Today, evangelical Protestants believe in salvation by grace through faith and in the priesthood of all Believers, rejecting the claim that the pope is the "vicar of Christ" on Earth. Many evangelical Believers recognize that if something originates from historical Catholicism, it should be tested against the inspired Word of God to see if it is truly

¹ This article was originally written for J.K. McKee, *Torah In the Balance, Volume I* (Kissimmee, FL: TNN Press, 2003).

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Biblical. The Bible does not instruct God's people to pray to saints, or confess sin to a priest to be forgiven. Scripture does not teach transubstantiation. Furthermore, Scripture nowhere teaches or implies that Mary, the mother of our Lord Yeshua, is the so-called "Mother of God," for our Creator has always been and ever will be (cf. Micah 5:2-3).

Many contemporary Protestants pride themselves on being *Sola Scriptura*, Scripture Only. However, it is an unfortunate reality that many Protestants today still adhere, unknowingly, to some non-Biblical tradition originating in Roman Catholicism. There are various practices and traditions among Christians today, which can neither be found in Scripture nor find their origins in Scripture, but rather on customs established long since the death of the Apostles and early Believers. Here are a number of excerpts from some mainstream theological resources, to at least see how Christmas on December 25 was a development which came centuries after the death of the Apostles and their immediate successors:

Baker's Dictionary of Theology: "The early Christians did not observe the festival of Christ's birth, to which they did not attach the importance ascribed to his death and resurrection. In the East, and later in the West, Christ's birthday was observed on January 6th in connection with his baptism, a day on which the pagan world celebrated the feast of Dionysius, associated with the lengthening of the days. The night of January 5th-6th was devoted to the Feast of Christ's birth and the day of January 6th to his baptism. A fourth century papyrus contains the oldest Christmas liturgy in existence. The nativity festival was separated from the early Christian Epiphany feast and given its own day, December 25th, between the years 325 and 354. In Rome, December 25th is attested as the day of Christ's birth in 336. It was introduced perhaps by Constantine the Great who evidently chose the day because of the popular pagan feast of the sun. Gregory Nazianzen and Chrysostom popularized the new festival in Constantinople. But opposition to the new feast was stubborn throughout the East, especially in Syria (Antioch). Egypt did not receive it till 431, Armenia never."²

² J. Theodore Mueller, "Christmas," in Everett F. Harrison, ed., *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), 117.

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Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible: "From OE *Christes Moesse*. Not knowing the date of Christ's birth, the early Church sought one by combining calendrical speculations with the exegesis of biblical numbers. Several dates were suggested, including Mar. 25, Apr. 2, May 20, Nov. 8, Dec. 25, and Jan. 6. The earliest evidence, the *Depositio martyrum*, has the Feast of the Nativity being celebrated on Dec. 25 by the year 336 in Rome. Within a century this date was almost universally accepted.

"Dec. 25 marked, in the Julian calendar, the winter solstice (the beginning of the victory of light over darkness after the year's longest night) and, after 274, the feast of the birthday of *Sol Invictus* (the 'invincible sun'), patron deity of the emperor. The association between Jesus and the sun occurred early and naturally; Jesus rose on Sunday (the 'Lord's Day'). As early as Clement of Alexandria (d. 216) Jesus was being identified with the 'Sun of Righteousness' (Vulg. *Sol Iustitiae*) of Mal. 4:2 (MT 3:20) (*Exhort.* 11). A related early tradition identified Mar. 25, the 'Sunday' of creation week, as the date of Christ's conception (nine months before Dec. 25!) It was only natural that after Constantine had abandoned the patronage of *Sol Invictus* in 324, *Sol Iustitiae*, the light of the world, should supersede him."³

Pocket Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship: "A major feast celebrating the birth of Christ. In earlier times the EC celebrated Christmas on January 5 (the Armenian Church retains the later date). The commemoration dates to at least 336 (Rome). This date was also significant in antiquity as the birthday of Mithras. Astronomically the date is closely associated with the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year. Thereafter, for the next six months, the length of daylight *increases* with every passing day, and thus December 25 is associated with the birth of a new year, or New Year's Day, and was well known as the date for the birth of the sun in ancient Rome (*Natalis Solis Invicti*). Metaphorically, such a date could be connected with the birth of a significant person, as for example, a new cycle of time is associated with the birth of an Apollo-like hero in the *Fourth Eclogue* of Virgil (c. 37 B.C.). While there are disputes about whether Christianity took the date over from Mithras or Mithraism from Christianity, the impulse to celebrate Christ's birth on December 25 is likely more deeply rooted in the culture of the

³ Ronald V. Huggins, "Christmas," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 240.

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Hellenistic world. Indeed, a well-known iconographic theme of the ancient church is Jesus as Helios (the sun = *Sol Invictus*; cf. Mal 4:2) on the chariot pulled by horses (the *quadriga*), a fine example being that in the Tomb of the Julii of the necropolis beneath St. Peter's at Rome. With Jesus all of creation enjoys its rebirth, or new creation (cf. Rev. 1:12-18, where Jesus is presented in the imagery of the triumphant Helios). Thus December 25 is not only appropriate to celebrate the newborn infant Jesus in his first advent, but the triumphant Jesus of the second coming brings to a close the further prophetic anticipation of the Advent season. Color: white.

"The date of December 25 may have also at one time commemorated the Cana wedding event (Jn 2:1-12), a pericope evoking Dionysian imagery of miraculous wine production at a wedding, with concepts of fertility and new life/beginnings apparent. . ."⁴

To be sure, these scholastic entries ask more questions than answer them. . .

All too often, it has been my family's unfortunate observation over many years, how you will find many people in the Messianic community strongly and vehemently criticize our evangelical brothers and sisters during the Winter holidays. Statements along the lines of "Christmas is a pagan holiday!" are all too commonplace. This turns many away from hearing the origins about a holiday which cannot be specifically found in the Bible, but is seemingly good. Many Christians believe that when you denounce Christmas, you are denying the Biblical reality of the virgin birth of our Lord and Savior. Certainly, Luke ch. 2 is a part of our Holy Scriptures, and the miracle of the birth of Yeshua is a sacred Biblical event. In an effort to stress balance, grace, and understanding during the Winter season among both Christians and Messianic people, we offer our analysis of "the Christmas challenge."

A Brief History of Christmas

Why is it asserted among many contemporary Christians that if there are those who do not celebrate Christmas, then obviously such

⁴ Brett Scott Provance, *Pocket Dictionary of Liturgy & Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), pp 37-38.

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people cannot be true Believers? Are today's Messianic people, who opt out of Christmas on December 25, dangerous cultists who do not believe in the virgin birth of the Messiah?

Obviously, Luke ch. 2, which fully details the miraculous birth of Yeshua the Messiah, the Savior of the world, is something which none of us should ever deny or consider unimportant. If Yeshua had not been born, He would not have grown up to become the perfect sacrifice and atonement for human sin. None of us would be able to have His blood covering us, and we would have no hope for permanent forgiveness of sin.

But what of the holiday which is called "Christmas"? Where did it come from? If its celebration is not specified in Holy Scripture itself, then how was it established? How have people reasoned through this?

Author Susan E. Richardson makes some interesting observations in her popular book *Holidays & Holy Days*:

"During the Roman Empire, people usually celebrated the birthdays of rulers and other outstanding people, though not necessarily on the exact date of their birth. The early Christians' desire to honor Christ's birth may come from the fact that they gave him the title and other honors that pagans gave to the 'divine' emperors. These Christians lived in a culture where the birth of a ruler was a major celebration. What could be more natural than celebrating the birth of the King of Kings?

"Despite the logic of this, Christmas has long been surrounded by controversy. In A.D. 245, Origen wrote that even to consider observing it was a sin. Early Christians in Armenia and Syrians accused Roman Christians of sun worship for celebrating Christmas on December twenty-fifth."⁵

It is witnessed from ancient Christian history, that commemorating the birth of the King of Kings, has been something controversial. Still, the birth of the Messiah is a recorded event in the Gospels. Typological connections are undoubtedly intended to be made between the birth of Yeshua, and the birth of Moses seen in Torah reading *Shemot* (Exodus 1:1-6:1). However, we should find serious problems remembering

⁵ Susan E. Richardson, *Holidays & Holy Days* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 2001), 119.

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Yeshua's birth at a time which has historically been associated with the honoring of pagan deities, as Richardson later comments that "pagan celebrations held on December 25 included Mesopotamian celebrations for Marduk, Greek ones for Zeus, and Roman *Saturnalia* in honor of Saturn."⁶ In their textbook *History of the World Christian Movement*, which I had to use for Church History I at Asbury Theological Seminary (Summer 2005), Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist summarize,

"Prior to the year 300 there had been no consensus among Christians concerning the date on which to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. Some argued for a spring date, but others suggested December 25. That latter date was the day celebrated in honor of the Invincible Sun, who had grown in imperial favor through the third century. Through the course of the fourth century most Christians came to accept December 25 as the celebration of the birth of Jesus, integrating elements of this solar monotheism with Christianity."⁷

The celebration of the Messiah's birth on December 25 likely came as a result of generations of Christian people, long after the death of the Apostles, employing syncretism to evangelize pagans. Their original intent was to reinterpret local religious holidays with Biblical meanings, or superimpose them with Biblical meanings, in an effort to more easily share the good news or gospel. Without any doubt, the motives of some were sincere, as they wanted to "adapt their faith" for the pagans around them, and use Biblical overtones of their holidays, "reclaiming them for Christ," as it were. However, such adaptations came at a time after the destruction of Jerusalem when anti-Semitism was at a serious high in the Roman Empire, and the majority of Believers in Yeshua were ejected from the Synagogue. Anything perceived as "Jewish," namely the appointed times or *moedim* of Leviticus 23, would be looked down upon and not be observed. Substitute and replacement holidays had to be created instead, and Christmas is a reality to this very day.

How Christmas has been celebrated over the centuries has been determinant on a variety of cultures, world regions, typography and climate, and Christian denominations. The name Christmas does come

⁶ Ibid., 123.

⁷ Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, Vol. 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 164.

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from “Christ’s mass,” or a service which is held in Roman Catholic churches. Many evangelical Protestants realize how many of the non-Biblical elements of the Roman Catholic service derive from ancient paganism, the foremost of which might be transubstantiation,⁸ so the name Christmas has already to an extent been tainted. What is perhaps more disturbing is that other such “masses” exist on the Roman Catholic service calendar, such as Michaelmass, a service to be held for the Archangel Michael, which I must admit is very strange in light of Colossians 2:18 and its warning against the “worship of angels.”

What about the Christmas tree?

For many Protestants throughout the centuries, Christmas was not like we consider it today. For those living in Great Britain and colonial America, Christmas Day was a very serious occasion when a family would attend church services, sing hymns about the birth of the Lord, and return home and sometimes exchange small gifts in remembrance of the three Magi who later gave gifts to Yeshua. There would have been no Christmas tree. Up until the mid-Nineteenth Century, Christmas trees were largely unheard of in either Britain or the United States. Decorating a tree at Christmas time, was mainly a German or Nordic custom, which German immigrants to America brought with them in the early Nineteenth Century. Prince Albert brought the tradition to Great Britain when he married Queen Victoria.⁹

The most common modern-day association with Christmas is obviously the Christmas tree. Its usage for “honoring the Lord,” of course, is not detailed anywhere in the Bible, and it is certainly not rooted in any of the events surrounding Yeshua’s birth—especially given the topography of Bethlehem. Unfortunately for those Christmas tree lovers, Holy Scripture strongly prohibits God’s people from introducing decorated trees into their homes for spiritual adoration. The following

⁸ Transubstantiation is the belief that during communion, the bread and wine actually become the *literal* body and blood of Christ. During the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther advocated a position known as consubstantiation, where the bread and wine did not change, but the presence of Christ was active during communion. Today, most Protestant traditions see the practice of communion as only being a memorial of the Last Supper.

For a further discussion, consult the Messianic Apologetics FAQ, “Communion.”

⁹ Richardson, 132.

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words from the Prophet Jeremiah detail how the present day Christmas tree had its likely forbearers in Ancient Near Eastern religion:

“Thus says the LORD, ‘Do not learn the way of the nations, and do not be terrified by the signs of the heavens although the nations are terrified by them; for the customs of the peoples are delusion; because it is wood cut from the forest, the work of the hands of a craftsman with a cutting tool. They decorate *it* with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers so that it will not totter. Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field are they, and they cannot speak; they must be carried, because they cannot walk! Do not fear them, for they can do no harm, nor can they do any good” (Jeremiah 10:2-5, NASU).

Various contemporary Christians have astutely observed how these Bible verses speak of pagan idolatry. While not wanting to directly accuse contemporary evangelical people, who sincerely know Yeshua as their Savior, of participating in idol worship—it is also true that God’s Torah does state,

“You shall not plant for yourself an Asherah of any kind of tree beside the altar of the LORD your God, which you shall make for yourself” (Deuteronomy 16:21, NASU).

We cannot, and we should not, accuse all evangelical Protestants of volitionally participating in idolatrous worship of trees. However, these quotations from Jeremiah and Deuteronomy, respectively, are the most explicit examples of what we can compare today to the Christmas tree in Scripture. For even if Believers, who in ignorance, have Christmas trees in their homes and do not worship them—as I have many fond personal Christmas memories—what of non-Believers who have Christmas trees? What of the non-Believers who have rejected the salvation of Yeshua (Jesus), and who celebrate Christmas by indulging themselves? What is the god which they worship during the Christmas season? Richardson observes,

“Using trees as part of religious celebrations goes back well beyond the first recorded Christmas tree. Egyptians decorated green date palms indoors for winter solstice rites. Romans hung trinkets on pine trees during *Saturnalia* and used evergreens for *Natalis Sol Invicti*.

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In Britain, Druids placed candles, cakes, and gilded apples in tree branches as offerings.”¹⁰

Some Christians when confronted with the verses, seemingly forbidding Christmas trees, have stated things along the lines of, “In many cultures, trees symbolized life,”¹¹ justifying their usage of something which may have its roots in idolatry. In addition to just the Christmas tree, an evergreen is commonly employed in various decorations throughout the Christmas season. Unfortunately for them, this is not what Holy Scripture says: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement” (Leviticus 17:11, NASU). Our eternal life is neither found nor represented in evergreen trees, but rather in the shed blood of Messiah Yeshua, in which “we have confidence to enter the holy place” (Hebrews 10:19, NASU) and be forgiven of our sins.

The argument that to the ancients evergreen trees symbolized life, and thus Messiah followers should have them in their homes, is patently weak. What did the ancients do when they celebrated? The Romans held wild orgies where they would take hallucinogenic drugs, consume vast amounts of alcohol, and have illicit group sex. Following in their pattern, should we do these things when we celebrate? **God forbid!** Scripture clearly states, “do not get drunk with wine” (Ephesians 5:18, NASU) and “the *marriage* bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4, NASU). Certainly, we should rejoice in our Messiah Yeshua and remember Him every day of the year, but we should not knowingly participate in things which are spoken against in Scripture and are most likely connected to ancient idolatry.

None of us can judge the heart intent of various people who have Christmas trees in their homes during the Winter season. Yet, we should also recognize how Scripture both condemns and forbids adorning trees. Christmas trees have nothing to do with the birth of the Messiah; they should be considered a prohibited custom. Certainly, **a great number of**

¹⁰ Ibid., 130.

Please note that these comments specifically speak of trees involving religious ceremonies; they do not speak of having potted plants for decoration.

¹¹ L. Smith (2001). *The History of Christmas*. Christian Study Center. Retrieved 02 December, 2001 from <<http://www.christianstudycenter.com>>.

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Christian people who have Christmas trees do not at all worship them, but recognizing how their origins are less than Biblical, should hopefully be conviction enough to change, and actually prompt Believers to consider what God might want His people to do instead during the Winter season. If it is acceptable to have Christmas trees in one's house, is it likewise acceptable to have a statue of Buddha, Shiva, or some other pagan god?

Santa Claus is a Child's Myth

We should not feel the need at all to really address Santa Claus and the "eight tiny reindeer." Such things are about as factual as the Tooth Fairy and the Easter Bunny. They are child's myths and have no place among Believers, even in seemingly "Biblical" celebrations such as Christmas. The propagation of the existence of Santa Claus during Christmas time to young children, and the knowledge of him not being real in later years, has resulted in many people also denying the truth of Jesus being real as well—as both are entities human beings cannot see. Even when my family celebrated Christmas many years ago as conservative, evangelical Believers, we did not play the "Santa game." Why should others?

Is Christmas mentioned in Scripture?

Is there any specific reference to "Christmas" in Scripture? There are certainly prophecies which speak of the virgin birth of our Messiah, His entry into the world, and the Biblical record which details the event itself—but this is *not* Christmas itself, per se.

Is the holiday the world has come to know as Christmas mentioned in Holy Scripture at all? Some Christians would actually say yes—and if it is indeed Christmas, then it is in a place which should get us all very concerned:

"And their dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations *will* look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. And those who dwell on the earth *will* rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send

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gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth” (Revelation 11:8-10, NASU).

When I was taking a homeschooling Christian prophecy course back in 1999,¹² I was taught that after the two witnesses of Revelation are killed, that then the holiday of Christmas will occur. This is based on the assumption that since the world will “make merry, and shall send gifts one to another” (KJV), that it must be Christmas time or the month of December. While it is more likely that this is probably referring to some future ecumenical holiday where people exchange gifts—and not Christmas on December 25 itself—suffice it to say, the fact that some Christians believe that this holiday is Christmas, is extremely disturbing.

If the only reference to “Christmas” in the Bible which various Christian people can present, is with a passage which speaks about the murder of God’s two witnesses, then sincere Believers should most certainly reevaluate their participation in it. Already, many secularists are doing their best to “eliminate Christ from Christmas,” which many evangelicals would view as a sign of apostasy—but Christmas is not a Biblical holiday so technically it would not be a sign of apostasy. But for a number of people, this might be what is actually necessary to encourage Believers to participate in the God-given festivals as specified in the Torah, rather than in substitute holidays which are tainted by questionable practices and customs.

Should Chanukah be celebrated as an alternative to Christmas?

Many Messianic people who decide to give up the Christmas tree and the trappings of this holiday want to know what they should do. A valid alternative which many discover is the remembrance of the Jewish holiday of *Chanukah*, which often occurs in December around the same time as Christmas. But, as has unfortunately been the case, for many, *Chanukah* presents become substitutes for Christmas presents, and the birth of the Messiah is something which can be readily looked down upon.

¹² This course’s main textbook was Beka Horton, *Book of Revelation, Church History, and Things to Come* (Pensacola: Pensacola Christian College, 1993).

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It must be readily emphasized that *Chanukah*, surprisingly to many Christian people and even some Messianic people, has not been mandated in Holy Scripture. However, unlike Christmas, *Chanukah* should be considered extra-Biblical as opposed to non-Biblical, the events of which are detailed in the Books of 1-4 Maccabees in the Apocrypha. The story of *Chanukah* is quite moving and inspiring, as it speaks of the Maccabees' defeat of the Syrian Greeks and the rededication of the Temple. *Chanukah* contains a significant message of opposing assimilation to the ways of the world.

We encourage today's Messianic people to remember *Chanukah*, but emphasize that it is imperative to keep it in proper perspective. None of us should uplift this celebration over the birth of our Messiah Yeshua (who some Messianics believe was conceived around the time of *Chanukah*). When you celebrate this holiday with your family or local fellowship of Believers, **do not forget who the Light of the World is**. Also remember that as the Lord is in the process of currently restoring His people, via the growth of the Messianic movement—the season of *Chanukah* should be a time when we all rededicate ourselves to Him, and seek reconciliation with one another.

The only stated reference in Scripture to *Chanukah* or the Feast of Dedication **actually occurs in the New Testament**, in John 10:22-23: "At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Yeshua was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon" (NASU). These verses do not directly state that Yeshua actually celebrated *Chanukah*, but it may be safely assumed that He did. *Chanukah* is a national commemoration for the Jewish people, much like Fourth of July celebrations for Americans, albeit with strong religious overtones. We should have no problem rejoicing in the historical triumphs of the Jewish people, but likewise we should not uplift them over the miraculous birth of our Lord and Savior.

Christmas in Perspective

It is an unfortunate predicament that a number of today's Messianic people (but most especially those in the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement) who do not celebrate Christmas, *mercilessly and vehemently* criticize Christian people who do. This, in the long run, **will not work well** for any of us, and will turn many Christians off to the truths we believe God is restoring to His people. Calling Christmas

The Christmas Challenge

"utterly pagan" will seriously deter many sincere Believers to reexamine the holiday. It may be true that Christmas is not a Biblical holiday, but by calling it "pagan" many Christians will interpret these statements as meaning that someone rejects the virgin birth of Yeshua (Jesus), **when this is not was is intended**. It is more appropriate to call Christmas a non-Biblical holiday, which is an accurate description that should not get as many people heated or turned off to the questionable nature of its origins, as the term "pagan" does.

Fortunately, we serve a Creator who is much bigger than we are and He looks beyond our many shortcomings: "The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression" (Numbers 14:18a, NASU). I believe that the Lord does honor those who celebrate Christmas in ignorance, who do not realize its dubious connections. During the Christmas season, many sincere evangelical Believers seek to please the Lord, and He who is in control of all things will use nativity scenes and the proclamation of the birth of Jesus to bring many to Himself. During the Christmas season, the Lord also, no doubt, looks beyond the contentious attitudes of various Messianic and Hebrew Roots people who unwarrantedly criticize Christians without the love, grace, or mercy which He desires us to have in our hearts.

We Need to be Careful in our Criticism

As Messianic men and women, we each need to be very tactful during the Christmas season and month of December. **We should not vehemently and cruelly criticize those who celebrate Christmas**, lest they conclude that any of us is denying the Messiah's birth. We must not exclusively emphasize negative aspects of the holiday.

Many Messianic people who observe the Biblical festivals of Leviticus 23 have been found wanting, at times, by *excluding* Messiah Yeshua's substance in them. At a number of "Messianic" Passovers, the Last Supper and sacrifice of Yeshua may not be spoken of or emphasized to the degree which they should. A number of people fail to emphasize that *Shavuot*/Pentecost is all about the Torah *and* the Holy Spirit being given to God's people. At *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*, the gathering of the holy ones or saints, the return of Yeshua, and wrathful Day of the LORD may not be emphasized together. And, Messianics might just find it appropriate to talk about Yeshua's birth during *Sukkot*, the Feast of Tabernacles, instead of the traditional Christian practice of

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remembering it on December 25. Furthermore, how many “Messianic” *Chanukah* celebrations may be devoid of honoring the Light of the World?

What you do during the Winter holiday season is ultimately up to you, and is between you and the Lord—whether you celebrate Christmas, *Chanukah*, or do nothing at all. I certainly cannot be the Holy Spirit for you, because God Himself is the only One who can fairly evaluate and judge the intentions of the human heart.

The Christmas challenge for today’s Messianic Believers is not going away any time soon, so each of us must endeavor to be as loving and grace-filled as much as possible when showing various Christians the problems with Christmas. We must not forget the words of our Messiah Yeshua who said, “For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you” (Matthew 7:2, NASU). If any of us mercilessly attacks someone for celebrating Christmas—who in their minds is sincerely honoring the birth of the King of Kings—we could be mercilessly attacked by the same for honoring the Lord’s appointed times. We will become part of the problem as opposed to the solution, and the enemy will have won once again. Contrary to this, demonstrate the great blessings of remembering a holiday such as *Chanukah*, and radiate Yeshua’s light to all you encounter during the Winter holiday season!