

CHAPTER 24

The Truth About Christmas

*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (Luke 6:46
KJV)*

Christmas. It's that festive season again. The little children are filled with anticipation and excitement. The whole family is busy putting up decorations. Boughs of holly and evergreen are assembled and placed about on the house and on the front door. The mistletoe is hung for a little romantic fun. A Christmas tree is chosen and decorated with lights and sparkling trinkets and ornaments. Stockings are hung on the fireplace mantle. The kids are waiting for Santa Claus to come down the chimney on Christmas Eve night and fill those stockings with small toys and candy and things, and to leave all those presents under the tree for Christmas morning.



It is a season of giving and receiving presents, a time to sing songs, admire all the pretty lights, and burn the Yule log. There will be the Christmas parades and special parties with sumptuous meals and merrymaking.

We've just described a modern Christmas celebration. And from whom did we learn about Christmas? You probably learned about it from your parents as a child. Did you ever question what your parents had told you? Of course not. You accepted it, took it all for granted. Stop and think for a minute! Very few have ever reflected on why they believe what they do, and why they follow the customs they do, or where these customs came from. Except, maybe when as a young child, someone told you Santa Claus was not real, but a mythical character, and you found it hard to believe. Your parents had told you so and it had to be true. Asking your parents, they explain that Santa Claus is a myth. What a let down!

You were born in a world filled with such customs. And you grew up accepting them without question. Why? Sheep instinct? Well, not exactly. By nature we do tend to follow the crowd, whether right or wrong. Sheep follow others to slaughter, but we as Christians, ought to check up on where we are going.

Christmas 2000 Years Before Christ!

Did you realize, these same type of celebrations were taking place in various nations of Europe at the end of December and beginning of January, 2000 years before Jesus Christ was born! That these festivals were celebrated over 4000 years ago by the pagans. If Christmas is the chief of the Christian holidays, why do so many non-Christians observe it? Does Christmas really celebrate the birthday of Christ? Was Jesus born December 25th? Did the apostles, who knew Jesus personally, celebrate Christ's birthday? How and when did Christmas originate? Do people exchange gifts at Christmas time because the wise men presented gifts to the Christ-child? The answers may surprise you. Most people have supposed a lot of things about Christmas that are not true. Now, let's get the facts.

Where Christmas Customs Came From

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 Catholic Church from paganism.

Since the celebration of Christmas came to us from the Roman Catholic Church, and has no authority but that of the Roman Catholic Church, let's examine the Catholic Encyclopedia, 1911 edition, published by that church. Under the heading "Christmas" you will read "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." Under the heading "Natal Day," we find that the early Catholic

father Origen acknowledged this truth "...In the Scriptures, no one is recorded to have kept a feast or held a great banquet on his birthday. It is only sinners who make great rejoicings over the day in which they were born into this world."

It was a Christian practice to celebrate the deaths of remarkable persons rather than their birth. So we see that Christmas was not instituted by Christ or the apostles, or by Bible authority. It was picked up afterward from paganism. Christmas was not celebrated by the Christian Church, in the first two or three hundred years. That is a period longer than the United States has existed 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. You can find such information in any good encyclopedia.

How This Pagan Custom Got Into The Church

Then how did this pagan custom of Christmas enter into Christianity. The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge explains it clearly, in its article on "Christmas": "How much of 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 for 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. Christians were few in number up to the fourth century and were being persecuted by the Roman government and the pagans. When Constantine became emperor in the fourth century, he made his profession of Christianity, and placed Christianity on an equal footing with paganism. These people had grown up in pagan customs, chief of which was the idolatrous festival of December 25th. They enjoyed it and didn't want to give it up. Now this same article on "Christmas" 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 their excuse for calling their pagan-festival date of December 25th (birthday of the Sun-god), the birthday of the SON of God. The people of the Roman world now began to accept this now popular Christianity by the hundreds of thousands. **And that is how Christmas came to be fastened on our Western World! We may call it by another name, but it is still the same old pagan sun-worshiping festival.**

Where Did The Pagans Get It?

If we got Christmas from the Roman Catholics, and they got it from paganism, where did the pagans get it? It was a chief custom of the corrupt system denounced all through Bible prophecies and teachings under the name Babylon. It was started and originated in the original city of Babylon by Nimrod, a son of Noah. Nimrod also built the tower of Babel and the ancient wicked city of Nineveh. Nimrod was the father of the great organized worldly apostasy from God that has dominated this world until now.

From many ancient writings we know a lot about Nimrod. **Nimrod was so evil, it is said he married his own mother, whose name was Semiramis. After the untimely death of Nimrod, his so-called mother-wife, Semiramis, propagated the evil doctrine of the survival of Nimrod 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 Nimrod. On each anniversary of his birth, she claimed, Nimrod would visit the evergreen tree and leave gifts upon it. Sound familiar. December 25th was the birthday of Nimrod. This is the real origin of the Christmas tree.**

Mother and Child

Through her scheming and designing, Semiramis became the Babylonian "Queen of Heaven," and Nimrod, under various names, became the "divine son of heaven." Through the generations, in this idolatrous worship, Nimrod also became the false Messiah, a son of Baal the Sun-god. **In this false Babylonish system, the "Mother and Child" (Semiramis and Nimrod reborn) became chief objects of Worship. This worship of "Mother and Child" spread around the world.** The name varied in different countries. In Egypt it was Isis and Osiris. In Asia it was Bybele and Deoius. In pagan Rome it was Fortuna and Jupiterpuer. Even in Greece, China, and Japan the counterpart of the Madonna, existed 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. Many have been taught to revere these things as holy and sacred. They are not. You never thought to question where they came from.

So the real origin of Christmas goes back to ancient Babylon. December 25th is the celebration of the birth of Nimrod. Paganism celebrated this famous birthday over most of the known world for centuries before the birth of Christ. Christmas is bound up in apostasy which has gripped a deceived world these many centuries. Thus the ancient "Chaldean Mysteries," founded by this wife of Nimrod, have been handed down through the pagan religions under new Christian sounding names.

How Was it Celebrated?

In ancient times, many people realizing their dependence upon the sun for

growing food, observed at different seasons various feasts and celebrations to help the sun in its yearly course through the sky. The end of December was an especially significant time in the Northern Hemisphere. The days were short and the sun at its lowest point in the sky. Special festivals of thanksgiving and encouragement to the sun in its movement were celebrated. When at the winter solstice, the days began to lengthen, and there was great celebration lasting into the first part of January. **The reason was that the sun, the light of the world, had been reborn. Such festivals, once meant to honor the sun and its god, were freely adopted by the spreading and increasing popular "Christian" religion. Why not, in the same way, honor Jesus, the real light of the world, they reasoned (Even though Jesus was not born in December as we will show later).**

Christmas Trees

The modern Christmas tree is supposed to have originated in Germany in the Middle Ages. But long before that, the ancestors of the Germans customarily decorated their homes with lights and greenery at the winter festival. Since evergreens were green throughout the dead of winter, the ancient Germans looked upon them as especially imbued with life. The Romans also trimmed trees with trinkets and toys at that time of year. The Druids tied gilded apples to tree branches. It was in honor of the tree spirit or the spirit of fertility that greenery was a prominent part of ancient pagan winter festivals.

Holly, Mistletoe, Yule Logs, Wreaths

Branches of holly and mistletoe were likewise revered. Not only did these plants remain green through the winter months, but they actually bore fruit at that time, once again honoring the spirits of fertility. 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. Still today, catching someone under the mistletoe can serve as a springboard for romantic activity. Holly berries were also considered sacred to the sun-god. Few people have stopped to wonder what in the world such strange customs have to do with the birth of Jesus.

The ancients lit festive fires in late December to encourage the sun, just as Christmas bonfires, candles and other lights burn today at the same time of the year. Use of the "Yule log," harkens back to the ritual burning of a carefully chosen log by the Druids. The yule log is in reality the "sun log." The word "yule" comes from the old Anglo-Saxon word *hweol* meaning "wheel," a pagan symbol of the sun. Yet today professing Christians speak of the "sacred yule-tide season"! The use of Christmas wreaths is believed to be traceable to the pagan customs of decorating buildings and palaces of worship at the feast.

Christmas Shopping and Parties

Listen to how **fourth-century** writer Libanius described end of the year gift

giving and partying in the ancient non-Christian Roman Empire: "Everywhere may be seen...well-laden tables...The impulse to spend seizes everyone. He who through the whole year has taken pleasure in saving...becomes extravagant...A stream of presents pours itself out on all sides" (Christmas in Ritual and Tradition). And you thought the Christmas shopping spree was a 20th century phenomenon? Then, as now, there was a constant round of partying. Drunkenness was widespread. It was indeed the season to be jolly.

Santa Claus

An important part of the pagan harvest festivities involved good and bad spirits and began in October- November with what has become known as Halloween. Mythical visitors, usually bringers of good or evil, became the center of attention in the winter season. Through blending ancient legends with traditions about saints, certain figures emerged. One of these was Santa Claus. Although, he is known by different names in different nations. The "Christianization" of this fictional person perpetuated certain folk rituals wherein varying degrees of rewards and punishments were dealt out to celebrants. Through the centuries these customs came to be centered around children. Remember the phrase "He's checking to see who's been naughty or nice"?

It is not hard to see a connection between Santa using the chimney, and the ancient superstitions about hearth spirits. The fireplace served as the natural entrance and exit of the gods of fire and solar gods when they visited homes. For thousands of years, especially among the Chinese, it was customary to sweep and scour the house in preparation for the visit of the heart spirit.

The name "Santa Claus" is a corruption of the name "St. Nicholas," a Roman Catholic bishop who lived in the 5th century. In the Encyclopedia Britannica you can 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 children for telling falsehoods. Then, at Christmas time, they themselves tell their little children this "Santa Claus" lie! 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? Is it any wonder many of them, when they grow up and learn the truth, begin to believe God is a myth too?

Christmas is not Christian!

And so when we examine the facts, we are astonished to learn that the practice of observing Christmas is not, after all, a true Christian practice, but a pagan custom, one of the ways of Babylon our people have fallen into! Popular

Christmas customs, as we have seen, plainly reflect non-Christian legends and practices. The logical question to ask is: What is there that is Christian about Christmas? Did you know, for example, that some of the very Christmas customs observed today were once banned by the Catholic Council of Rome, the English Parliament, and the Puritans of New England? More importantly, what does the Bible say about Christmas? Should a Christian have anything to do with such holidays?

What the Bible Says About The Christmas Tree?

The Bible nowhere tells us to observe Christmas, but it does have something to say about the Christmas tree. This will come as a surprise to many. But here it is:

Jeremiah 10:2-6: "Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen...For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not..."

There is a perfect description of the Christmas tree, termed by God as "the way of the heathen and "the customs of the people." Notice, we are commanded not to learn that way or follow it! It is viewed in these scriptures as idolatry. The fifth verse says that these trees cannot speak or walk, and must be carried. "Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good." They are not gods to be feared. God says such customs are an abomination to Him, because it honors false pagan gods. (Deut. 12:30- 32)

Isn't Exchanging Gifts Scriptural?

Isn't exchanging gifts at Christmas scriptural? Didn't the wise men give gifts to the baby Jesus? Again, you are in for some surprises. Let's look at the historic origin of trading gifts back and forth.

From the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 12, pp. 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 has not a single trace of Christianity about it. This does not celebrate Christ's birthday nor honor it or Him!

Suppose someone you love has a birthday and 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, but ignore completely any gift for the one whose birthday you are honoring? But, that's what people are doing at Christmas time, and they say they are honoring Christ. Rather ridiculous, when viewed in that light, isn't it?

Now consider what the Bible says about the wise men giving gifts when Christ was born. It is found in Matthew 2:1-11. "**N**ow when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea 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 worshiped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

Notice the wise men inquired for he who was born "King of the Jews". Notice also 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. Now why did they present gifts to Jesus? Was it his birthday? Not at all, since they came weeks after the date of his birth. The wise men presented gifts to Jesus, because He was a King. "The people of the east never approach the presence of kings and great personages without a present in their hands" (Adam Clarke Commentary, Volume 5, page 46, verse 11). There it is! They were not instituting a new Christian custom of exchanging gifts with friends to honor Christ's birthday. They were simply following an old and ancient custom of presenting gifts to a king when they come into his presence.

The Year of Christ's Birth

The Bible nowhere tells us to celebrate the birth of Christ. The date of his birth is not explicitly given. Though Jesus was a historical person, a full biography of accurate chronology is not given in the Bible or in history. The New Testament writers were less concerned with such difficulties than the person who attempts to construct some chronological accounts in retrospect. Both the indifference of early secular historians and the confusions and approximations attributable to the simultaneous use of Roman and Jewish calendars make the establishment of an exact chronology of Jesus' life difficult and somewhat confusing. The points of reference are best taken from the passages of the Bible reflected in the knowledge of the history of the times. We will attempt to clear up this confusion by comparing what we do know from the Bible with secular history.

The best explanation is available from an article titled "*When Was Jesus Actually Born?*" by Fred Coulter from the www.truthofgod.org website. His site has "*God's Calculated Hebrew Calendar*", the only correct computerized calendar of the Biblical Holy Days for dates in the past and in the future. Here is his explanation:

"Jesus Was Born During the Reign of Herod the Great

The Gospel of Matthew records that the birth of Jesus Christ occurred during the reign of Herod the Great. Shortly after Jesus' birth, Herod heard that the prophesied King of the Jews had been born and feared the Jews would begin to revolt against his rule (Matt. 2:1-3). God warned Joseph in a dream that Herod would attempt to kill the infant Jesus and instructed him to take Mary and Jesus and flee to Egypt (verse 13). Matthew's account indicates that Herod died not long after they fled to Egypt. After the death of Herod, Joseph brought Jesus and Mary back to Nazareth, a city in the district of Galilee (Matt. 2:19-23).

This scriptural record offers conclusive evidence that the birth of Jesus occurred a short time before the death of Herod. Through the historical writings of the noted historian Josephus, we can determine precisely when Herod reigned and when he died. Josephus reveals the specific year that Herod was crowned king at Rome: “And thus did this man receive the kingdom, having obtained it on the hundred and eighty-fourth Olympiad, when Caius Domitius Calvinus was consul the second time and Caius Asinius Pollio [the first time]” (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 14:14:5).

An Olympiad is four years in length and is reckoned from July to July. The 184th Olympiad extended from July 1, 44 BC, to June 30, 40 BC. Records of this period show that Calvinus and Pollio were consuls in the year 714 AUC (years from the founding of Rome), which was 40 BC (Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, p. 96). Thus, we know that Herod became king in 40 BC. While the Olympiad was reckoned from July 1 to June 30, the calendar year for consuls was reckoned from January 1 to December 31. Since the 184th Olympiad ended on June 30, 40 BC, and the consuls did not take office until January 1 of that year, we know that Herod was made king sometime during the six-month period from January through June of 40 BC.

Although Herod was crowned at Rome in 40 BC, three years passed before he conquered Jerusalem and began to reign there. Josephus writes: “When the rigour of winter was over, Herod removed his army, and came near to Jerusalem and pitched his camp hard by the city. Now this was the third year since he had been made king at Rome...” (Josephus, *Ant.*, 14:15:14). While Herod launched his attack in the spring, it was not until the summer of that year that he was able to take the city of Jerusalem. Josephus reveals the specific date of this event: “[It] was summer time.... This destruction befell the city of Jerusalem when Marcus Agrippa and Canninius Gallus were consuls of Rome, on the hundred eighty and fifth Olympiad, on the third month, on the solemnity of the fast...” (*Ibid.*, 14:16:2, 4).

The 185th Olympiad extended from July 1, 40 BC, to June 30, 36 BC. Agrippa and Gallus became consuls in 717 AUC, which corresponds to 37 BC. The fast of the third month that Josephus refers to was the 23rd of Sivan, according to the Hebrew calendar, which was June 22 on the Julian calendar. Herod completed the conquest of the city of Jerusalem in the summer of 37 BC, and began to reign as king in Jerusalem at that time.

Josephus provides additional historical records concerning the reign of Herod that enable us to determine the time of his death: “[Herod] died ... having reigned since he had procured Antigonus to be slain, thirty-four years; but since he had been declared king by the Romans, thirty-seven” (*Ibid.*,

17:8:1).

Josephus records elsewhere in the same book that Antigonus was killed shortly after Herod had conquered Jerusalem (Ibid., 14:16:4).

In linking Antigonus's death with Herod's conquest of Jerusalem in 37 BC, Josephus confirms that Herod did not reign in Jerusalem until three years after his coronation at Rome. Consequently, there are two methods of reckoning the reign of Herod the Great—the Jewish method, which counts thirty-four years from 37 BC, and the Roman method, which counts thirty-seven years from 40 BC. Since the first year of his reign is included in the count, both methods of reckoning arrive at 4 BC as the end of Herod's reign. This date is conclusively established by the records of history as the year that Herod died.

Josephus' detailed account also enables us to pinpoint the time of the year of Herod's death.

Josephus records that Herod died after a total eclipse of the moon—but before Passover. The lunar eclipses that occurred during this period of history have been recorded in the book Solar and Lunar Eclipses of the Ancient Near East by M. Kudler and E. Mickler (published by Neukirchen-Bluyn: Verlas Butson & Bercker Kevelaer, 1971). Here is a listing of relevant lunar eclipses:

- 7 BC - No eclipses
- 6 BC - No eclipses
- 5 BC - Total eclipse, March 23, 8:30 PM
- 5 BC - Total eclipse, September 15, 10:30 PM
- 4 BC - Partial eclipse, March 13, 2:20 AM
- 3 BC - No eclipses
- 2 BC - No eclipses

The first lunar eclipse to occur during this period was a total eclipse on March 23 in the year

5 BC. In this year the Passover, Nisan 14, was observed by the Jews on March 22. Because the scriptural reckoning of days is from sunset to sunset, the Passover day extended from sunset March 21 to sunset March 22. Since the total eclipse that occurred at 8:30 PM on the night of March 23 was after Passover, this was not the eclipse that Josephus refers to in conjunction with Herod's death.

The second total eclipse of the moon during this period took place on September 15, 5 BC, which was a significant day by scriptural reckoning. According to the Hebrew calendar, September 15 was the 14th of Tishri (the seventh month). The moon was totally eclipsed at 10:30 PM that night, which was the beginning of the 15th of Tishri, the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles. For a total lunar eclipse to occur twice in the same year—such as those in 5 BC—is extremely rare. In fact, such an event

only occurs once in about 2717 years (Canon of Lunar Eclipses, 1500 B.C.-A.D. by Bao-Lin and Alan D. Faila).

Josephus' account of this period of Jewish history includes a number of events which point to this eclipse as the one that occurred shortly before the death of Herod. In recounting the final months of Herod's reign, Josephus gives us an accurate time frame for establishing the date of Jesus' birth.

Historical Records of Herod's Death Reveal the Year of Christ's Birth

Josephus gives us detailed records of the events that took place before the death and burial of Herod. These events are listed chronologically in the synchronized Hebrew/Roman calendar beginning on page 1263. Events that are not specifically dated by historical records have been given approximate dates based on the evidence that is available in history. This calendar accurately depicts the sequence of events that took place during that time period.

Josephus relates that shortly before his death, Herod sent ambassadors to Rome. As noted on the synchronized Hebrew/Roman calendar, this is estimated to have occurred during the week ending August 26, 5 BC. Sometime during the next week, a group of zealots stormed the Temple and proceeded to chop down the golden idol that Herod had erected over one of its gates. Herod learned that Matthias, the high priest, had incited the zealots to undertake this action in the mistaken belief that Herod was dead. Herod punished Matthias by removing him from the office of high priest and burning him alive. In his writings, Josephus shows that these events took place in the fall of the year and were marked by an eclipse of the moon. Josephus' gives this detailed account: "He deprived Matthias of the high priesthood, as in part an occasion of this action, and made Joazar, who was Matthias' wife's brother, high priest in his stead. Now it happened, that during the time of the high priesthood of this Matthias, there was another person made high priest for a single day, that very day which the Jews observe as a fast day [the day of Atonement, the 10th day of Tishri, the seventh month] 'the great day of expiation.' The occasion was this: Matthias the high priest, on the night before the day when the fast was to be celebrated, seemed in a dream to have conversation [sexual relations] with his wife: and because he could not officiate himself on that account, Joseph, the son of Ellemus, his kinsman, assisted him in that sacred office. But Herod deprived this Matthias of the high priesthood, and [later] burnt the other Matthias [on Tishri 14], who had raised the sedition, with his companions, alive. And that very night there was an eclipse of the moon [Tishri 15]" (Ant., 17:6:4).

This eclipse was obviously an autumnal eclipse, as it occurred in Tishri, the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar, which corresponds to September/October on the Julian calendar. As documented in the record of lunar eclipses by Kudler and Mickler, only one autumnal eclipse occurred during that

period of history. This was the eclipse of September 15, 5 BC, on the evening beginning the Feast of Tabernacles—the 15th day of Tishri.

Josephus records the decline of Herod's health after this autumnal eclipse and the state of insanity that preceded his death. Shortly after the Feast of Tabernacles, Herod's "distemper" increased, and he sought the help of the warm mineral baths at Callirrhoe, which was located beyond the Jordan River. It has been estimated that he went there the week ending November 4. There is no record of the exact length of his stay; but since his funeral procession and burial took place after the winter, he must have stayed there approximately eight or nine weeks. He then went to Jericho, probably arriving by January 13. Josephus describes Herod's deplorable mental state at that time: "[Herod] came again to Jericho, where he grew so choleric, that it brought him to do all things like a madman; and though he was near his death, he contrived the following wicked designs" (Ibid., 17:6:5).

Herod commanded the principal men of his government to come to Jericho, intending to have them killed after his death. It is estimated that these men arrived at Jericho by January 20th to the 27th. A few days later, Herod received letters from Rome. Although the news was good and seemed to revive him, he attempted suicide soon afterward. His attempt was not successful, as he was restrained by Achiabus. In his rage he ordered his son Antipater to be killed, and he himself died five days later. Josephus writes: "When he had done these things, he died, the fifth day after he had caused Antipater to be slain; having reigned, since he had procured Antigonus to be slain, thirty-four years; but since he had been declared king by the Romans, thirty-seven" (Ibid., 17:8:1).

Herod died thirty-seven years from the time of his coronation at Rome in the spring of 40 BC. Although his reign began near the end of the 184th Olympiad (reckoned from July 1 to June 30), it is included as the first year in Josephus' count. Based on the records of Josephus and other historical evidence, Herod's death is estimated to have occurred during the week ending February 17, 4 BC. After Herod's death, Archelaus succeeded him as king. He carried out Herod's wishes for an extended period of mourning and a long funeral before his burial. The time needed for these ceremonies was approximately twenty-five days, not counting Sabbaths. As illustrated in the synchronized Hebrew/Roman calendar, the funeral procession finished with the arrival of Herod's body in Jerusalem during the week ending March 24, 4 BC, at which time Archelaus began his rule in Jerusalem.

The records of Josephus clearly contradict the commonly held theory that the eclipse of March 13, 4 BC, was the eclipse before Herod's death. If Herod had died after March 13, the extended mourning and funeral procession could not possibly have been completed by March 24. As Josephus shows, these extended ceremonies began many weeks before the Passover day and ended with Herod's burial in the middle of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. To further substantiate the time of Herod's burial,

Josephus records that at that time Archelaus slaughtered 3,000 people who had crowded into the Temple area to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This slaughter occurred during the week which ended April 14, 4 BC, confirming that Herod's burial took place about two months after his death. According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus was born in Bethlehem during the reign of Herod. After His birth, Jesus was taken to Egypt and remained there for a period of time before Herod died. Matthew's record of these events indicates that the birth of Jesus occurred several months before the death of Herod. Since Herod's death occurred very early in 4 BC—about mid-February—it is evident that Jesus was born sometime during the preceding year. Thus Herod's death places Christ's birth in the year 5 BC. The Gospel of Luke provides additional evidence that enables us to know the specific season of the year in which Christ was born.

Scriptural Evidence of the Season of Jesus Christ's Birth

In his account of the birth of Jesus Christ, Luke records a major historical event of that time. "Now it happened in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered" (Luke 2:1). The taxation and census decree by Caesar Augustus was carried out according to the Jewish custom which required that such taxes be collected after the fall harvest (See Unger's Bible Dictionary, Chronology, New Testament, pp. 199-200). Thus, Luke's record of this taxation reveals that the birth of Jesus took place during the autumn. When we combine Luke's record with Matthew's account of Herod's death, it is evident that Jesus was born in the fall of 5 BC.

Luke gives us additional evidence that Jesus was born during the fall harvest season by recording that there were no guest rooms available at the inn when Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem. The scarcity of room was due not only to the taxation but also to the festival days that followed the fall harvest. Many thousands of people were already in the Jerusalem area to observe the fall festival season. Bethlehem was extremely crowded because of its proximity to Jerusalem. Since there was no room at the inn, Joseph and Mary were resigned to lodge in a stall, where Jesus was born.

In addition, Luke makes it clear that Jesus was not born in the winter by noting that shepherds were tending their flocks in the fields that night (Luke 2:8). Shepherds in that region of Palestine always brought their flocks out of the fields before the onset of winter. Flocks were never left to graze during winter because the cold weather prevented grass from growing.

Records of John the Baptist's Ministry Confirm Jesus' Birth in the Fall of 5 BC

In Luke's account of the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry, he gives another historical reference that helps to verify the date of Christ's birth. He tells us that John began his ministry in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1-3).

Tiberius began his co-rulership with Augustus in 12 AD, two years before the death of Augustus. Counting from this date, we arrive at 26 AD as the fifteenth year of Tiberius and the beginning of

John's ministry. Other scriptural and historical records confirm that John began his ministry in the spring of 26 AD and that Jesus began His ministry six months later in the fall.

Additional supporting evidence is found in the Gospel of John, which details the first Passover of Christ's ministry. During this particular Passover season, the Jews stated that the Temple had been forty-six years in building (John 2:20). We can determine the date of this Passover, and the first year of Christ's ministry, by counting from the year that the building of the Temple began.

Josephus records that the building of the Temple began during the eighteenth year of Herod's reign (Ant., 15:11:1). The eighteenth year of Herod's reign in Jerusalem was from the summer of 20 BC to the summer of 19 BC. Counting forward, the forty-sixth year of building was from the summer of 26 AD to the summer of 27 AD. The only Passover that occurred during this period of time was the Passover of 27 AD. Thus, scriptural and historical records place the first Passover of Christ's ministry in the spring of 27 AD. Since His ministry began in the fall of the year, we can date its beginning to the autumn of 26 AD.

The Birth of John the Baptist a Key to the Day of Christ's Birth

In the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke, we find a detailed account of the circumstances and events that preceded the birth of Jesus Christ. In this account, Luke reveals that the conception of Jesus by the virgin Mary occurred six months after the conception of John by Mary's aunt, Elizabeth, the wife of Zacharias. Zacharias was a priest of God who served at the Temple in Jerusalem.

Luke records: "There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest of the course of Abijah, Zacharias by name.... And it came to pass that in fulfilling his priestly service before God in the order of his course, according to the custom of the priestly service, it fell to him by lot to burn incense when he entered into the Temple of the Lord" (Luke 1:5, 8-9).

Zacharias was executing his priestly duties according to the order and course of Abijah. This information is most helpful in establishing the time frame of Luke's account. In ancient Israel, King David divided the duties of the priests into twenty-four working courses, or shifts (I Chron. 24:7-19). Each course or shift was assigned to work one full week, from noon Sabbath to noon Sabbath (Talmud, Sukkah). The Old Testament records the exact rotation and time order of the priestly courses, which continued down to New Testament times. Zacharias was of the course of Abijah, which was the eighth course or shift in the series of yearly assignments for the priesthood.

Josephus—the noted Jewish historian—was a priest of the first course or shift. He confirms that the priestly courses established by King David were still functioning in New Testament times:

“He [King David] divided them also into courses ... and he found [or established] of these priests, twenty-four courses ... and he ordained that one course should minister to God eight days, from sabbath to sabbath ... and this partition hath remained to this day” (Ant., 7:14:7). This record confirms that the courses of priests remained in effect down to the time of Zacharias and the birth of Christ. These courses undoubtedly continued until the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD.

The Talmud reveals that the first priestly course, or shift, began in the first full week of the first month of the Calculated Hebrew Calendar. The second course worked the second week. This rotation continued on a week-by-week basis through all twenty-four courses. Each priestly course served a one-week shift twice each year. In addition, all courses were required to work during the three weeks in the year that coincided with the three festival seasons: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Thus, all the priests shared equally in the priestly responsibilities for the entire year.

We know that the angel Gabriel delivered the promise of John’s birth while Zacharias was serving in the Temple. The Gospel of Luke reveals that John was born six months before Jesus (Luke 1:35-36). Our examination of both the scriptural and historical records has established that Jesus was born in the fall of 5 BC. Accordingly, John the Baptist was born in the spring of 5 BC and was conceived nine months earlier in the summer of 6 BC. Knowing the year that John was conceived enables us to determine the exact period of time that Zacharias was serving in the Temple.

In the year 6 BC, the first day of the first month (the month of Nisan according to the Hebrew calendar) was a weekly Sabbath. According to calculations synchronizing the Hebrew calendar and the Julian calendar, this Sabbath was March 20. Projecting forward, the course-by-course assignments were: Course 1, the first week; Course 2, the second week; all courses for the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, the third week; Course 3, the fourth week; Course 4, the fifth week; Course 5, the sixth week; Course 6, the seventh week; Course 7, the eighth week; Course 8, the ninth week; and all courses the tenth week, which was the week of Pentecost.

Because Zacharias was of the course of Abijah, the eighth course, he was assigned the ninth and tenth weeks from the beginning of the year. These weeks of service were counted from noon Sabbath to noon Sabbath. The ninth week was from Iyar 27 through Sivan 5, which corresponds to May 15 through May 22 on the Julian calendar. The tenth week, Sivan 5 through Sivan 12, or May 22 through May 29, was the week of Pentecost. Sometime during these two weeks, the angel Gabriel appeared to

Zacharias
in the Temple and prophesied the birth of John.

Although the exact time of Gabriel's appearance is not recorded, it is reasonable to conclude that Gabriel delivered this message from God on the day of Pentecost. The announcement that Zacharias's wife Elizabeth would bear a son came during the two weeks in which Zacharias served at the Temple, and the day of Pentecost occurred on Sivan 6, in the middle of the two-week period. Since John the Baptist's birth was a major fulfillment of prophecy, it is appropriate that God would send Gabriel on a holy day to announce the promise of his conception to Zacharias. Luke records Gabriel's message to Zacharias as he was in the Temple offering incense (Luke 1:9-17).

Because Zacharias did not believe God's promise, Gabriel pronounced a sign from God. Zacharias would be unable to speak until the child was born and given the name John, which God had chosen (Luke 1:13, 19-20). After completing his service at the Temple, Zacharias returned to his house, and John was conceived in the following days: "Now it came to pass that when the days of his service were fulfilled, he departed to his house. And after those days, Elizabeth his wife conceived, but hid herself for five months..." (Luke 1:23-24).

The Gospel account indicates that Elizabeth became pregnant shortly after Zacharias returned home. Since he returned on May 29, it is reasonable to assume that she became pregnant between May 30 and June 12 (Sivan 13-26) in the year 6 BC. This estimated time allows a two-week conception period.

Luke was inspired to record that Elizabeth was in the sixth month of her pregnancy when the virgin Mary was miraculously impregnated through the power of the Holy Spirit and conceived Jesus. The angel Gabriel told Mary: "Now behold, Elizabeth your kinswoman has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren" (Luke 1:36). Based on the estimated time of conception, the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy was November/December by Roman reckoning.

When Was Jesus Christ Born?

Luke gives additional details that indicate Mary became pregnant in the last two weeks of Elizabeth's sixth month. Mary was told by the angel Gabriel that Elizabeth was already in the sixth month of her pregnancy. Mary then visited Elizabeth and stayed with her almost three months (Luke 1:39-40, 56). Soon after Mary left, Elizabeth reached her full term of nine months, and John was born sometime

between Adar 19 and Nisan 3, or February 27 and March 11, in 5 BC.

As illustrated by the synchronized Hebrew/Roman calendar, Mary's probable conception period coincides with the last two weeks of Elizabeth's sixth month. That two-week period was Keslev 17-30, or November 28-December 11. Projecting forward nine months from the estimated time of Mary's conception, we arrive at the two-week period during which Christ was probably born. This two-week time period was Elul 24-Tishri 8, or August 27-September 9. As the synchronized Hebrew/Roman calendar shows, the Feast of Trumpets was the middle day of this two-week period.

Many passages in the Bible show that the Feast of Trumpets pictures the second coming of Christ. The Day of the Lord and the angelic trumpets in the book of Revelation clearly project this symbolism and meaning. Is it not reasonable to conclude that God also chose the Feast of Trumpets as the day of Jesus' birth? The apostle Paul reveals that the prophesied birth of Jesus was fulfilled at a set time. Paul wrote, "But when the time for the fulfillment came, God sent forth His own Son, born of a woman..." (Gal. 4:4). While the Gospels do not reveal the specific day, the birth of Jesus Christ on the Feast of Trumpets would be in harmony with God's "Master Plan" as portrayed through His annual holy days.

Although the Scriptures do not record the exact date of His birth, the biblical and historical evidence makes it abundantly clear that Jesus Christ was not born in the middle of winter. All the evidence clearly points to the two-week period around the Feast of Trumpets, in the fall of 5 BC, as the time of the birth of Jesus Christ.¹

The Census of Caesar Augustus

Luke 2:1 says: "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed." "And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)" Luke 2:4 KJV"

This census of Caesar Augustus may well have been the record of the census filed in the archives of Rome.

There can be little doubt that this documentary evidence was actually available for inspection in the second century, for Justin Martyr, in presenting his *First Apology to the Jews*, said that according to Micah 5:2 the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. "Now this Bethlehem," he went on, "is a place in Judaea, thirty-five stadia distant from Jerusalem, in which Jesus was born; which you can confirm for yourselves from the census records which were prepared under Cyrenius." His argument would have carried no weight at all, if no such census record was to be found. Tertullian, likewise, referred to our Lord's enrollment in the census of Augustus--that most faithful witness of the Lord's nativity, kept in the archives of Rome."

¹ *When Was Jesus Actually Born?* by Fred Coulter from the www.truthofgod.org website.

This documentary evidence appears to have been well known to Orosius early in the fifth century. He said that "It was also in this year, when God had deigned to assume the appearance and nature of man, that this same Caesar . . . for the first time ordered a census to be taken of each and every province, and that all men should be enrolled. In these days, then, Christ was born and His name was entered in the Roman census list immediately after His birth. This is that earliest and most famous acknowledgment, which designated Caesar first of all men, and Romans lords of the world; for in the census list all men were entered individually, and in it the Maker of all men wished to be found and enrolled as a man among men" (VI, 32).

The description of the census as "this earliest and most famous" record of the Incarnation, suggests that its existence in the archives of Rome was still well known among Christians, but it may well have been destroyed when the Goths sacked Rome in A.D. 410. By the end of the sixth century its existence seems to have been forgotten, for Orosius was the last to make mention of it.

After The Death of King Herod

In chapter two of Matthew there are references made to King Herod. He was King of Judea when Jesus was born. We know he tried to kill Jesus soon after his birth and he died soon after Jesus' family went on the run from him to Egypt. His son Archelaus succeeded Herod, as king of Judea, at his death. Because Joseph was in fear of him also; the fugitive family ended up in Mary's hometown of Nazareth in Galilee, steering clear of Joseph's ancestral town of Bethlehem in Judea.

Confusion over the date of the death of this King Herod has resulted in major errors being made in dating the birth of Jesus, in spite of the mass of sound dating evidence.

Jesus Not Born December 25th

Was Jesus born in December? If not, when was he born? We have seen that December 25th was the birthday of Nimrod, the sun god. However, Jesus could not have been born in the winter season! Notice this plain testimony of your Bible. When Jesus was born "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 flocks of sheep through the night. The point? Ask any Biblical scholar, or any modern Israeli: This could never have occurred in Judaea in the month of December, nor even in November, or late October as far as that is concerned. The shepherds always brought their flocks in from the fields and penned them in shelters not later than October 15th, 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 keep their flocks 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, p.370). And these first rains began early in the month which answers to our October. Continuing, Adam Clarke states: **"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 ground the nativity in December should be given up. The feeding of the flocks by night in the fields is a chronological fact."**

On the basis of Luke's testimony we see that Jesus could have been born no later than Mid-October, when the weather is still pleasant in Bethlehem. A December 25th nativity is too late.

The Interrelated Lives of John and Jesus

By God's arrangement Jesus was exactly six months younger than John the Baptist was. In Luke 1:24-36 the record shows John's aged mother Elizabeth was already miraculously six months pregnant when Mary first became pregnant with Jesus. Mary visited Elizabeth who was then a full six months further along in her pregnancy. When the two mothers-to-be met, John while in the womb of Elizabeth reacted physically to the presence of the newly conceived fetus of Jesus in Mary's womb (check Luke 1:39-45).

John was a Levite the son of Zechariah a priest who officiated at the temple (check Luke 1:5-9). Levites started their ministerial work at the age of 30 years. This qualifying age requirement was laid down as part of God's law regarding the Levite priests. These laws set out what age their priestly careers were to start and finished. At Numbers 4:1-3 it tells us that they could not start their priestly activities until they were 30 years old and they had to retire when they reached 50. An example of this is found in Ezekiel the son of a priest, he started serving God in his 30th year, after having spent five years in exile at Babylon (Ezekiel 1:1-2). John was a Levite of the family of Aaron the son of the priest Zechariah and so was qualified to carry out special priestly duties on behalf of God. Jehovah would certainly not have broken his own laws by calling John to start this work before reaching the legal age of 30.

John started his Ministry in the fifteenth year of Tiberius when he was thirty years old (Luke 3:1). Tiberius began his co-rulership with Augustus in 12 AD, two years before the death of Augustus. Counting from this date, we arrive at 26 AD as the fifteenth year of Tiberius and the beginning of John's ministry. This information leads to the conclusion that John reached the age of 30 sometime between February and March of AD 26. Born 30 years earlier, John's birth must have occurred sometime between February and March of 5 BC.

Jesus in his ministry carried out the work of a 'Melchizedek priest' on behalf of his God (Hebrews 3:1 and 5:1-6). If we apply the same reasoning as applied to John, Jesus would have been called by Jehovah to start his schedule of priestly activities also at the

age of 30. This proves to be the case, for at Luke 3:23 it says; Jesus was about 30 years old when he commenced his work, six months after John started his priestly preparation ministry. This would make it sometime between September and October 26 AD when Jesus started his ministry. It follows that Jesus being born six months after John would have been born Jesus was born sometime between August 27 to September 9 in 5 BC. While the Gospels do not reveal the specific day, the birth of Jesus Christ on the Feast of Trumpets on September 2, in 5 BC, would be in harmony with God's annual holy day plan.

Pinpointing the Month and Day

Can we pinpoint the month and day? The Bible lays a three and a half-year pattern for Jesus' ministry between the Messiah appearing when Jesus was baptized and his sacrificial death. We know there were four Passovers attended by Jesus during his ministry:

Passover Friday March 22, AD 26

Passover 1 Wednesday April 9 AD 27 reference John 2:13

Passover 2 Monday March 29, AD 28 reference John 5:1, 4:35

Passover 3 Saturday April 16, AD 29 reference John 6:4

Passover 4 Wednesday April 5, AD 30, reference John 13:1

Passover 2. Monday 26 March, AD 31,

Passover 3. Monday 14 April, AD 32,

Passover 4. Friday April 3, AD 33,

If we can fix either Jesus' baptism or his death in the year then we will be able to fix the rest from it. Can we can do this? Yes! The Bible tells us exactly when Jesus died, on the Jewish Passover festival day, the 14th day of the month of Nisan. There were four Passovers during Jesus' ministry as mentioned in John's gospel. We know from Scripture that Jesus was to be cut off in the middle of the week. Daniel 9:26-27 says: “²⁶And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off [NKJV: Messiah shall be cut off], but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. ²⁷ And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: **and in the midst [NKJV: middle] of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease**, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon

the desolate." The middle of the week is Wednesday. Only two Passovers occurred on Wednesday during Jesus' possible times of ministry. One occurred on Wednesday April 9 in 27AD and the other on Wednesday April 5 in 30AD. All other Passovers from 26 to 33 AD occurred on Monday, Friday, or Saturday. The one on Wednesday April 9, in 27AD is too early but was probably the first Passover Jesus attended. The one on Wednesday April 5 in 30AD is the one that fits all the Biblical data. It is also to be noted that the Passover date in 30AD was not postponed by the rules of postponements.

If Jesus died on the 5th of April, then three and a half years earlier brings us to the beginning of September/October AD 26. Jesus must have started his ministry at the beginning of the month of September/October in AD 26, when he was baptized by John, and John must have commenced his preparation work six months earlier at the March/April AD 26. As John and Jesus were both 30 years old when they commenced their respective ministries then John would have been born 30 years earlier at the beginning of March/April BC 5, and Jesus at the beginning of September/October BC 5, six months after John. It is very likely John was born about Passover and that Christ was born about the Feast of Tabernacles as important Biblical events usually occur on God's holy days.

The Three Wise Men

Many people believe the Bible account tells of three kings arriving on the night of Jesus' birth at a stable led by a star that directed them there. Anyone familiar with the Bible accounts will soon tell you this is not so. The events were much different. King Herod first gets involved with the birth of Jesus when these astrologers arrive in Jerusalem making inquiries as to where they might find a new born Jewish King. The Bible nowhere says there were three Magi, only "Wise men" in the plural, any number more than two, there could have been a small group of a dozen or more.

They had come from the East according to Matthew 2:1, that must mean east of Jerusalem probably the Babylonian area. Isaiah 47:13 describes the Chaldeans (Babylonians) as stargazers. This star alerted them to the birth of the seed (Genesis 3:15). Turning to the scriptural account what do we find? At Matthew 2:1-2, a "star is seen in the east" a sign of a king to be born to the Jews. Note the account does not say the star guided them to Jerusalem it only alerted them in Babylon. Logically, for these Magi to find out more about this sign and of a possible new-born king of the Jews the place to go was Jerusalem, which they duly did, a journey of some 500 odd miles, at least a months travelling by camel.

When they arrive at Jerusalem they start inquiring around, most probably in the temple courtyards where most activities were carried on. Their inquiries had the effect of causing a great deal of speculation and agitation among the Jewish attendants, upsetting many of the people so much that verse three says, "all Jerusalem became troubled." The news of this eventually reaches the sick 70 year old Herod. He is also upset by the possibility of a new king being born. Why? Because being old and sick Herod knew he

would soon die and his sons would then inherit his kingdom. He does not want any new pretender king robbing him and his heirs of their kingdom inheritance. This greatly troubles him; the Magi had sounded the alarm bell in his head.

Herod wants to find out who and where this king is so he can sort out his problem and remove the possible usurper. He calls the chief priests and scribes and demands to know where and who this possible usurper is? This forces the scribes and priests to study the scriptures for the answers. They find the prophecy of Micah 5:2 referring to Bethlehem as the possible birthplace of a king. Herod secretly summons the Magi and asks them when they saw this "star." Unfortunately we have no record of their reply, which would have been interesting (Matthew 2:7). It is Herod that has to tell the Magi where to go to search for the child, as there was no star to follow, it had disappeared weeks earlier.

Herod wants information on where the child is. Why? So he can pay his respects? No! So he can destroy him! The Magi now set off to Bethlehem with their traveling directions from Herod as to where to go and how to get there. The star, which they had only seen in the east, now miraculously reappears! Its reappearance makes them very happy (Matthew 2:9-11). The star stops over a house not a stable. The Magi when they arrive go into this house which would have been by now many weeks after the birth based on the following Bible chronology of events.

1. The birth in the stable occurs 1st of October 5 BC (Luke 2:7).²
2. Jesus is circumcised at the temple 8 days after his birth on the 9th of October 5 BC. The family continue to remain in Bethlehem (Luke 2:21).
3. Mary attends the temple for birth purification of a boy child 40 days after the birth (7 plus 33 days, Leviticus 12:1-8 and Luke 2:22-24). The family remain in Bethlehem moving into a house by the 11th November 5 BC.
4. Magi arrive and present gifts in the **house!** At the earliest some six weeks after his birth and their first seeing the star in Babylon. This would include the time needed to travel from Babylon to Jerusalem, make their inquiries, and continue on to Bethlehem.
5. Probably the same night, as Bethlehem is only 5 1/2 miles, a two hour walk from Jerusalem, and Herod would be anxiously waiting their return, the Magi are warned off from reporting back to Herod as they had agreed.
6. Likely that same night or the following day an angel warns Joseph to flee to Egypt to avoid Herod and Satan's maneuverings to destroy the child. Being only an 11-mile

² We know the exact time and date of Jesus' death therefore we are assuming his birth was exactly 3 1/2 years earlier. His birth may have been as much as a week earlier or a week later than October 1.

round trip from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, Herod would have expected the Magi to return within 24 hours and knew something had gone wrong when they were late, triggering his reaction in dispatching troops to destroy all the boy infants. Herod specifies all two year olds and under to be killed.

7. The same night, Joseph starts the family's 300 mile flee down to Egypt. It would take about three weeks to arrive in Egypt, around early December, 5 BC. The family remains in Egypt for about two months until Herod dies on the 17th of February 4 BC and the angel tells them to return to Israel. But they do not return to Judea for fear of Herod's son Archelaus, now the king. Instead, they go directly to Galilee (Matthew 2:15,19,21-23).

If, as the chronological events support, the flee to Egypt occurred within 24 hours of the Magi failing to return to Jerusalem, then Jesus must have been at least 40 days old as Mary had already undergone the purification ceremony at the temple. She could hardly have done this down in Egypt. All these events fit within the timetable for a birth of the Messiah on the 1st of October 5 BC, and the death of Herod on the 17th of February 4 BC. Thirty years later, on the 1st of October 27 AD, Jesus starts his ministry and 3 1/2 years later, on the 5th of April 30 AD, comes the all important date of Jesus Christ's death.

Does It Really Honor Christ?

We have seen the proof that Jesus was born in the early autumn, and not on December 25th. The New Catholic Encyclopedia frankly admits that Christ was not born on December 25th: "Inexplicable though it seems, the date of Christ's birth is not known. The Gospels indicate neither the day nor the month" (article, "Christmas and Its Cycle"). If God had wished us to observe and celebrate Christ's birthday, he would have given us an exact date and specific instructions on how to observe it. But he has not. **No where in the Scriptures are we told to celebrate the birth of Christ.** Though it does date the day of his death and commands us to commemorate that event annually.

All authorities agree that the customs surrounding Christmas, the Christmas tree, mistletoe, holly, wreaths, yule logs, and exchanging gifts and so on, were practiced in connection with pagan religious celebrations centuries before the birth of Christ. None are of Christian origin. Anciently, December 25 was the date of the Roman Brumalia, the final day of the popular week-long 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 days 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.

Some will say Christmas is all in fun with only good intentions, but not so to God. Now, someone will ask: "What is 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? Absolutely not.

God Rejects Christmas Worship

Many will reason, "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 yourself that you are not snared to following them...and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise. 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 even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.**" (Deut. 12:30- 32). God plainly says in the Bible that He will not accept that kind of worship, even though intended in his honor. To Him, He says, **it is taking what is abominable to Him, and therefore it honors not Him, but false pagan gods.** Notice too, God said that what ever he commanded us to observe we should observe it as he commanded and not add to it or take away from it. The celebration of Christmas was never commanded in God's Word, yet people have added these pagan customs to the worship of Christ's birth.

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. Jesus said, "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9). Christmas is a tradition of men. Jesus said, further, "Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition." "Learn not the ways of the heathen," God declares in Jeremiah 10:2. **True Christians never meet paganism half way. Pagan worship in Jesus' name 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.

How to Change

When someone begins to understand the teachings of the Bible, it is a totally new experience, like new wine or a new piece of cloth. Now what most people try to do is to fit this new truth into their old way of life. It is not surprising that so many people, even though they acknowledge the truth still prefer to cling to their old beliefs. 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. 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, And no one having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, the old is better."

So do not mix this new truth you have found with your old beliefs. Don't make that mistake. You cannot have it both ways, observing this world's customs and still expecting God's blessings. Do not compromise. God tells us to come out of the religious system of this world and to be "separate" (II Cor. 6:14-18). How can a

person be separate from such goings on and continue at the same time to dabble in them? Jesus said: "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). He expects total commitment.

How To Tell Your Friends and Relatives That You No Longer Observe Christmas

Tell your friends and relatives that you no longer observe Christmas and no longer wish to exchange presents. Show firmness, but do it with a smile, be relaxed and friendly about it. One of the biggest mistakes you can make is to come across as a religious fanatic fired up with emotion on the subject. There is no need to make friends and relatives feel condemned and guilty. Most of them have not the faintest idea where Christmas customs came from or why they are following them. You probably did not have any idea either, before reading this book. Your example will be testimony enough.

Many of the problems arising from the Christmas season can be resolved if you apply three principles:

1. Stress your objection to the commercialism of the season. Who can deny that. All you have to say is you've had enough of it, and that when you want to give a gift you want to do it spontaneously, instead of a slave to some custom. Most people will respect your stand and wish they had the courage to do likewise.
2. Maintain a sense of humor. Let's face it, cutting trees down and then setting them back up loaded with ornaments, the whole gift-trading rigmarole, the thought of an overweight, bearded individual decked out in red and traveling in a sled, slithering up and down someone's chimney, these and so many other traditions are ridiculous. Feel free to point that out. Who can deny it?
3. Put the burden of proof on those who are celebrating Christmas. Say in effect, "If you can show me where the Bible says I ought to observe Christmas, or where it says early Christians celebrated Jesus' birthday, then I will celebrate it also!" The discussion will probably end very suddenly at that point. Of course, if the person shows an obvious interest in learning about the real origin of Christmas, you should be prepared to give an appropriate answer.

It is important not to leave a void in your children's lives by removing Christmas observance and putting nothing in its place. Arrange special activities centering on the Holy Days God has ordained in the Scriptures, the days he does want us to observe. Tell them that you have come to understand that the world is wrong in its observance of Christmas, and that they will no longer be receiving Christmas presents. Tell them God's ways is better than Christmas. As proof of this, tell your children that you are going to give gifts to them throughout the year because you love them all year long, not just on Christmas day. That, in turn, is precisely what they can tell their friends who will be showing off their Christmas gifts.

We Are in Babylon

Christmas has become a commercial season. The "Christmas spirit" is created each year, not to honor Christ but to sell merchandise. We have professed to be a Christian nation, but we are in Babylon, as Bible prophecy foretold, and we don't know it. **God demands that we come out of the Babylon of confusion that characterizes so much religion today. "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" now soon to fall, is the warning of Revelation 18:4.** God is showing you the way to avoid those plagues. Won't you and all of America wake up and heed these warning