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THE BAPTIST HERITAGE

VOLUME XXVII ISSUE 12

DECEMBER 20, 2003

He Had a Birthday

IS CHRISTMAS PAGAN OR CHRISTIAN?

The Annual Question

While the question is expressed using a variety of words arranged in differing orders, the essence of the issue is always the same: "Are true Christians supposed to celebrate Christmas?" Though the inquiry is sometimes sincere, more often than not, the question is merely the cover for a challenge and the hopeful instigation of a debate. Since I have no means to know the attitude of the heart prompting the query, other than reading the demeanor of the face of the individual, I try to couch my response in terms both to answer the sincere inquirer and to identify the inquisitor. Thus, my usual response is "Yes, no, and maybe." If the person approached the issue with genuine concern, he or she will look confused. If, however, the intent was conflict, the mouth opens and the subtle (Genesis 3:1; 2 Samuel 13:3) approach instantly vanishes as the battle is engaged. Words such as "pagan," "Catholic," "papa," "heathen," "compromise," and phrases as "not in the Bible," "worldly customs," and "unscriptural superstitions" (apparently forgetting that no superstitions are scriptural) are directly

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this and that

Editor and Staff

Jerald L. Manley Gary Roland
Dorothy Gundersen J. Alan Wolf

Regardless how we may differ in the recognition and the remembrance of the Incarnation, all believers rejoice in the fact that God was manifest in the flesh. One cannot read John 3:16 aright without acknowledging the birth of the LORD Jesus

Christ. We dare not let the precious truth of the Word becoming flesh slip from the world's understanding of what Christianity is.

We trust that "the grace that drew salvation's plan and the love that brought it down to man" will become most precious to you, especially at this time of the year.

—Pastor Manley

This publication is mailed to you on purpose. Someone who knows of you believed that you would profit by receiving and reading it. If you do not agree, we will remove your name from the next possible mailing. We have no desire to intrude or to offend.

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wrong way as others the right. But we will to-morrow think of Christ's birthday; we shall be obliged to do it, I am sure, however sturdily we may hold to our rough Puritanism. And so, "let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." Do not feast as if you wished to keep the festival of Bacchus; do not live tomorrow as if you adored some heathen divinity. Feast, Christians, feast; you have a right to feast. Go to the house of feasting to-morrow, celebrate your Savior's birth; do not be ashamed to be glad, you have a right to be happy. Solomon says, "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment." "Religion never was designed to make our pleasures less." Recollect that your Master ate butter and honey. Go your way, rejoice tomorrow; but, in your feasting, think of the Man in Bethlehem; let Him have a place in your hearts, give Him the glory, think of the virgin who conceived Him, but think most of all of the Man born, the Child given. I finish by again saying, — "A HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO YOU ALL!"

—Pastor Manley

Recently, we have been entrusted with several prayer requests involving heavy burdens faced by pastors and churches. We appreciate the trust and we do remember these needs in prayer. I encourage you to pray for these pastors and churches that are enduring the fires of trials. If you know of a good web site that posts prayer requests, I will be glad to list it and encourage its use.

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consider myself politically correct but spiritually incorrect. If I should excitedly anticipate the sales for Washington's Birthday or the Presidents Day and eagerly await the celebration of the nation's birthday, but then ignore a day to recall the incarnation, then I think I ought to be ashamed.

If Queen Elizabeth, President George Washington and forty-two other men, including Millard Fillmore, Rutherford B. Hayes, Warren G. Harding, Richard Milhouse Nixon, and William Jefferson Clinton all receive the honor of a day to be thankful for their birth and for them to be honored, then how in the name of common courtesy can I not have at least one day—I care not which day—just one day to celebrate and commemorate the birth of the One Who loved me and gave Himself for me? How can I allow the Jews to remember a physical deliverance and an earthly temple rededication with more joy, more celebration, more gladness, more charity, more gifts, and more faithfulness than I acknowledge the birth of the One Who gives me spiritual deliverance and eternal life?

The Jewish people give me an example, which I am glad to follow. I will most gladly remember the day that Jesus of Nazareth was born.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon said many things well and the following comments from his sermon on Sunday, December 24, 1854 are indeed well said.

Now, a happy Christmas to you all; and it will be a happy Christmas if you have God with you. I shall say nothing to-day against festivities on this great birthday of Christ. I hold that, perhaps, it is not right to have the birthday celebrated, but we will never be amongst those who think it as much a duty to celebrate it the

Reprint permission always granted;
acknowledgment appreciated. *(Continued on page 23)*

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employed, with zealous, even fanatical, fervor.

Having identified the motivation of my questioner, I will then know how best to answer. For example, "Does the word 'Christmas' derive from a particular, ancient Catholic mass?" Absolutely. "Does 'Yule' have reference to a pagan practice?" Yes. "Are there certain customs or rituals connected with Christmas that are pagan, Catholic, papal, heathen or Baptist in origin and that are not in the Bible and are, in reality, superstitions or cultic practices?" Yes. "Does the Bible command us to remember Christmas?" No.

Were I to stop here, the conclusion would be clear. A *true* believer should avoid Christmas. However, if the question is phrased slightly differently, but in just as valid a form, the conclusion must be exactly the opposite. "Should *true* Christians remember the birth of the LORD Jesus Christ?" Yes. "Is it wrong—does the Bible forbid having a special time established to do this remembering?" No. "Is there a Bible precedent for *true* believers, honest worshippers to observe such a time or day?" Yes. "Is there a Bible precedent for *true* believers, honest worshippers to give gifts on such a time or day?" Yes. "Is there a Bible precedent for *true* believers, honest worshippers to feast on such a time or day?" Yes. "Is there a Bible precedent for *true* believers, honest worshippers to rejoice and sing on such a time or day?" Yes. Now the response must be an 'affirmative action' and not a negative, critical, judgmental rejection.

I offer the following article with no real hope of changing anyone's mind. I have found that those devoted to a cause seldom will listen to (let alone reason over) an opposite view. My purpose is simply to answer the annual question in printed form.

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WHY I, WITH MY FAMILY AND IN MY MINISTRY,
OBSERVE A REMEMBRANCE OF
THE BIRTH OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Or,

WHAT I THINK MIGHT BE
THE JEWISH ROOTS OF CHRISTMAS

Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

In a few days, a large portion of the world will celebrate, whether cheerfully or begrudgingly, the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Within an additional eight days, the literate world will commemorate, willing or unwillingly, for an en-

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The birth of the LORD Jesus turned sorrow to joy and mourning into a good day.

I rejoice to make it a day to be remembered, even as Queen Esther, Mordacai, Judas Maccabees established and generations of Jews have observed their respective innovative feasts to be an annual remembrance of the intervention of the Godhead in the affairs of this earth. Surely, the birth of the Son of man, the Saviour of the world, is a greater day than the death of Haman and the deliverance of the Jews of Persia and Media. Surely, the birth of the Son of God, the Lamb of God, is a greater day than the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Were I to refuse to observe Christmas solely because of the name—'Christ's mass'—in order to be consistent, I must forgo the use of every month of the calendar (since all are named after pagan gods), find new names for the days of the week (since all are named after pagan gods), throw away the calendar (since it was devised by a Pope), toss aside the use of A.D. (since it is Latin and descends from Rome also), and I should refuse to ride in a Saturn, Mercury, or Aries and my Calvinist friends must find a new patron saint besides Augustine.

Were I to refuse to celebrate the birth of the LORD Jesus simply because I cannot find such a service mentioned by name in Scripture, then, in order to be consistent, I must close the Sunday School, the Morning Service, and the Mid-week Prayer Meeting.

Were I to refuse to set aside a day to remember the birth of the LORD Jesus and continue to recognize Presidents Day, then I would be rendering to Caesar and not rendering to Christ. If I were to have a holiday for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (the only national holiday for anyone's birthday) and none for the KING of Kings, then I would

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tament was completed. It is built upon an unrecorded miracle of a continual supply of oil. It was instituted by the Jewish people (and is still observed by them) at the time of the LORD Jesus and (PLEASE TAKE NOTE) there is no rebuke from the LORD Jesus regarding the Jews observing the feast.

Apparently, the event that produced the feast happened in connection with the winter solstice; therefore, the timing was not chosen by the Jews for any reason other than the event itself. The winter solstice was a providential coincidence and was accepted and then used by the Jews as a testimony to the real Sun of Righteousness.

The early believers were largely Jewish (by birth or as proselytes) or they were God-fearers, Gentiles such as Cornelius who sought to worship the God of Heaven, recognizing that this God was indeed the God of Abraham. It would not be out of character had these Jewish and Jewish-influenced believers, following the patterns of their ancestors, established a feast to remember the birth of the Saviour—the feast of the nativity. If that birth had occurred in the winter, as Luke would seem to indicate, and if the course of Abia (Luke 1:5) was, as history would indicate, in Jerusalem for Zacharias to perform his duties in October—then the birth would have been in December. However, I again emphasize that the particular day is not the issue; the issue is whether there is any proper basis for recognizing any day in any month as a time to remember the birth of the LORD Jesus Christ.

No one can deny that the day that the Lord Jesus was born is a day speaking of deliverance.

Who could deny that it is a day worthy of feasting and gladness, and a good day, and a day worthy of sending portions one to another and gifts to the poor?

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tire year, the fact of His birth, even as that birth has been marked for centuries, by counting from the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. In the westernized parts of the world, every time a calendar date is written on a letter, printed on a newspaper, scrolled across a television screen, or placed on a check, the birth of Jesus of Nazareth will be noted. Even Oriental, Muslim, and Jewish newspapers printed for Western distribution provide a reference to the date on the Gregorian calendar of the West. Humanists, atheists, cultists, and multi-culturalists launched such a concerted war against the use of A.D. (Anno Domini, Latin for the year of our Lord) over the last ten years that one now sees [even in 'Christian' publications] the year listed as 2003 C.E., which is supposedly the abbreviation for 'Common Era.' In the reality of their hearts, they arrogantly intend it to signify, Christ Eliminated. Their visceral hatred for all things 'Christian' is self-evident and needs no special exposure.

Pope Gregory, under whose leadership the Gregorian calendar was finalized and propagated, and I would have serious disagreements over a great many topics—his participation in the Council of Trent as a delegate of the then Pope, for example. That Council of Trent places an anathema (a curse of consignment to an eternity in hell) on those who believe that baptism does not save, that grace through faith alone does save, and a multitude of other, as I believe, non-negotiable biblical doctrines. The Vatican Councils of our lifetime began with the unrepentant affirmation of the pronouncements of the Council of Trent. It is my assumption that I would have the same argument with the present Pope, whom I have read is an honest man. An honest man would maintain the same position in public as in private; therefore, he and I are in opposition over the doctrine espoused by him and the religious institution that

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he leads.

It was through the edict of Pope Gregory that the calendar changed from the Julian calendar, the official calendar of the Roman Empire since the days of Julius Caesar, to that which we presently use. Among its problems, the old calendar of the Roman Empire was uncoordinated with the astronomical calendar. Among the changes that he instigated to make the necessary adjustments was the disappearance of ten days from the month of October in 1582. Thursday October 4, 1582 (Julian) was followed by Friday October 15, 1582 (Gregorian). The use of the Gregorian calendar chiefly followed Roman Catholic influence in nations and among peoples. It was rejected, at the time, by the Reformers and Protestants as a tool of the anti-Christ to confuse worship times for their church feasts. There is no record of how the Baptists of the day regarded this new calendar. This absence is likely for two reasons: (1) they were involved more with staying alive, avoiding the persecution of Rome and her divisions, than they were with writing, and (2) very little of what our Baptist ancestors actually wrote survived the fires of persecution.

The different calendars caused no end of confusion especially since the start of the year also was determined differently on the Continent than in England. For example, the date '11 February 1672' in England was '21 February 1673' on the Continent. After 1700 in which the Julian calendar had a leap year but the Gregorian did not, the difference in dates became eleven days. As the world became more interconnected, (A fact that we take for granted, but which was very new then.) the confusion became more than a minor irritant. The dates on correspondence between, for example, Paris and London, required interpretation. The British Empire (including the American colonies) finally

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Josephus wrote, this feast was called "lights"; though he seems to assign another reason of its name, because that prosperity and happiness appeared to them beyond hope, and unexpected: and though this was only an order of Judas and his brethren, and the congregation of Israel, yet the Jews observe it as religiously, as if it was the appointment of God himself, and they do not spare to call it so; for in the service of this feast, they have these words; "blessed art thou, O Lord our God, the King of the world, who hath sanctified us by his commandments, and hath 'commanded' us to light the lamp of the dedication; blessed art thou, O Lord our God, the King of the world, who did wonders for our fathers on those days, at this time; blessed art thou, O Lord our God, the King of the world, who has kept us alive, and preserved us, and brought us to this time; these lamps we light, because of the wonders and marvellous things, and salvations, and wars, thou hast wrought for our fathers on those days at this time, by the hand of thine holy priests. — These lamps are holy, we have no power to use them, but only to behold them, so as to confess and praise thy great name, for thy miracles, and for thy wonders, and for thy salvations." (underlining mine-JLM)

And though this feast is said to be at Jerusalem, yet it was not confined there, as were the other feasts of the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, for this might be kept in any part of the land: mention is made of the feast of dedication at Lydda, and in other countries; Maimonides says "it is a common custom in all our cities in Spain, that all the men of the house light up a lamp the first night, and add as they go along, a lamp every night, till he lights up on the eighth night eight lamps, whether the men of the house be many, or there be but one man."

This feast was instituted by the Jews after the Old Tes-

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the temple, on the very same day it was cleansed again, even the five and twentieth day of the same month, which is Casleu. They ordained also by a common statute and decree, That every year those days should be kept of the whole nation of the Jews."

Maimonides gives this: "when the Israelites prevailed over their enemies and destroyed them, it was on the twenty fifth of the month Chisleu; and they went into the temple and could not find any pure oil in the sanctuary, but one vial; and it was not enough to light but one day only, and they lighted lamps of it for eight days, until the olives were squeezed, and they brought forth pure oil: wherefore the wise men of that generation ordered, that those eight days beginning at the twenty fifth of Chisleu, should be days of rejoicing and praise, and they lighted lamps at the doors of their houses; every night of these eight nights, to show and make known the miracle; and these days are called "the dedication"; and they are forbidden mourning and fasting, as the days of "purim"; and the lighting of the lamps on them, is a commandment from the Scribes, as is the reading of the book of Esther. How many lamps do they light at the feast of the dedication? the order is, that every house should light one lamp, whether the men of the house be many, or whether there is but one man in it; but he that honours the command, lights up lamps according to the number of the men of the house, a lamp for everyone, whether men or women; and he that honours it more, lights up a lamp for every man the first night, and adds as he goes, every night a lamp; for instance, if there be ten men in the house, the first night he lights up ten lamps, and on the second night twenty, and on the third night thirty; until he comes to the eighth night, when he lights up fourscore lamps."

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joined Europe and accepted the new calendar in 1752, dropping eleven days. One historical side-note is that George Washington was born on the 11 of February in the Julian calendar, but his birthday was moved to the 22 of February Gregorian. February 22 became the day our nation commemorated the birth of our founding father until we were compelled to honor all former Presidents and found ourselves with a Presidents Day. Another intriguing change is that the beginning of the legal year moved from March 25 (the vernal equinox, the beginning of spring, the start of the solar year) to January 1 (with no relation to anything solar or lunar). This date was entirely a religious choice and not connected to anything astronomical. January 1, following the birth of Christ by eight days, is the day that the LORD Jesus was brought to the Temple, circumcised, and named (Luke 2:21).

Well before Gregory made these calendar changes, the present dating system of starting with the year 1 as the year of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth had been widely followed in the West for over a thousand years. Caesar was replaced by 'Christ.' Though the origin apparently goes well before 500 A.D., it is not easy to document prior to the writings of a monk named Dionysius about 532. Most Bible scholars through the centuries have agreed that he missed the date. How much he missed the date is the source of more contention—the suggestions range from two to six years. Therefore, in addition to the juggling of days and years already attested, the calendar is not accurate in selection of a starting date. The calendar is wrong in its foundation.

If you are confused over this discussion of calendar-changing, date-moving, and year-altering—remember it the next time a date-setter bends your ear. Basing anything

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prophetic upon the foundation of the Gregorian calendar is foolish on the face of it. The calendar is befuddled, bewildering, complicated confusion.

Even so, the western secular calendar, whether accurately reflecting the correct time of the event or not, is a continuing testimony to the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Your life is lived on a foundation of time erected on the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is so, whether you know Him as Lord and Saviour or not. Every time you write your birth date on a document—every time you write the current day, you give a testimony to the birth of Jesus of Nazareth.

The calendar is most likely wrong on the marking of the year of His birth and it may be wrong on the identification of the day on which He was born. I believe December 25 is as good a day to set aside as any other day of the year. Biblically, it may be an appropriate choice or it may have been selected for other reasons entirely, even as the reigning Monarch of Great Britain has an official day observing her birth that is not identical to the actual day on which she was born. The actual issue is not the particular day chosen, but whether or not it is scripturally permissible to commemorate *any* day as a testimony to the birth of the LORD Jesus Christ.

No one reading this has not thought of the birth of the LORD Jesus Christ over these past few days—and no one of us will be able not to think of His birth this coming Tuesday. Certainly, most of those across this world who have any connection with using this day for marking the birth of Jesus of Nazareth will not have either the proper motivation or even the understanding of what actually they are commemorating. However, I emphasize again that a larger question is at issue—"Is it proper to have any day assigned

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with the worship rituals. Unrest followed and in 143 BC, Antiochus sent General Nikanor to Jerusalem with an army. After a fierce struggle and the deaths of many Jews, as a token of the total defeat of the Jews, a pagan altar was erected in the Jewish Temple. Nikanor brought a pig on the altar, offering its blood to the Temple's Holy Courtyard.

The following years are those marked by the Macabean Wars. The Jewish fighters eventually drove the conquerors from the land and reclaimed the Temple—then, it had to be cleansed and then re-dedicated. One scholar describes the events as follows:

Megilat Ta'anit (*chapter 9*) relates: "During the days of the Greek Kingdom, the Chashmonaim entered the Sanctuary, rebuilt the altar, repaired the Sanctuary's walls, replaced the sacred vessels and were engaged in its rebuilding for eight days."

The Chashmonaim fashioned a make-shift pipe menorah and, miraculously, found a small flask of undefiled olive oil, closed with the *Kohen Gadol's* seal. The day was the 25th of Kislev, the same day that Aaron Hakohen, the brother of Moses, was commanded to dedicate the original altar. The small flask contained enough oil for only one day's lighting. Miraculously, the minuscule amount lit the *menorah* for eight days, ample time to press a new supply of oil.

A year later, the Sages enacted the eight-day festival of Chanukah, in commemoration of the miracle of oil. Chanukah means "dedication." It also means "*Chanu- Ka'H*" or "They encamped on the 25th (day of Kislev)." On the 25th of Kislev, the Jewish People's Third Exile ended; the mighty Greek Empire had been extinguished by the small light of the Jewish People.

"Now upon the same day that the strangers profaned

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dedication of Solomon's temple was in autumn, at the feast of tabernacles, about September, (1 Kings 8:2,65,66); and the dedication of the house in Zorobabel's time, was in the spring, about February, (Ezra 6:15,16);

This was the eight day feast of dedication, appointed by Judas Maccabaeus and his brethren, on account of the purging the temple, and renewing the altar, after the profanation of them by Antiochus

While Chanukah is not recorded within sixty-six Books of the Bible, this special celebration is mentioned in the Apocrypha—those books rejected by Jews (and Baptists) as not among the inspired texts.

1 Maccabees 4:55-59

Now on the five and twentieth day of the ninth month, which is called the month Casleu, in the hundred forty and eighth year, they rose up betimes in the morning, And so they kept the dedication of the altar eight days and offered burnt offerings with gladness, and sacrificed the sacrifice of deliverance and praise. Moreover Judas and his brethren with the whole congregation of Israel ordained, that the days of the dedication of the altar should be kept in their season from year to year by the space of eight days, from the five and twentieth day of the month Casleu, with mirth and gladness."

Briefly, the circumstances of that which is called "Chanukah" (Hanukkah) are as follows. After the death of Alexander the Great, his empire was divided between his four generals. Israel came under the domination of the Syrian-Greek portion, called the Selucidian Kingdom. About 151 BC, Antiochus Epiphanies became the ruler. A man without integrity or morality, he sold the priesthood of Israel to the highest bidder. He also interfered drastically

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as a day to remember the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God?"

We are most surely not commanded to do so by Scripture nor do we have apostolic pattern to follow in doing so. We also have neither command nor pattern to observe Easter. Nor do we have an admonition to encourage Sunday Morning or Mid-week Services—there is a pattern shown, but no command given, to have a Sunday evening service. Sunday School is a relatively modern addition—some believing it is less than two hundred years old. Bible colleges and seminaries have no mandate in Scripture—a pattern, perhaps, in the schools of the prophets of Elijah and Elisha and the three years the LORD Jesus trained His apostles—but there is no Bible passage that requires undergraduate and seminary training for a man called to preach. Thus, the lack of a clear charge to observe the birth of Christ is not a valid reason to prohibit such an observance. If, however, we are not commanded to do so, why do we remember a day each year for the birthday of the LORD Jesus Christ?

Realizing that many good men feel exactly the opposite and without desiring to be confrontational, I believe there is are sound and solid reasons to have a time to rejoice in the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world.

I remind you that tradition, legend, myth, and paganism have all attached themselves to the recognition of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth—just as tradition, legend, myth, and paganism have been, by sinful humanity, attached to every other teaching, every other doctrine of Scripture. Satan uses all means to blind eyes and dull hearts. Remember that every aspect of paganism is a corruption of truth. The LORD Jesus Christ is called the Sun of Righteousness in Malachi 4:2 and a Sun and Shield in Psalm 84:11. Do not

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accept the foolish suggestion by some commentators that the Scriptures use the term "Sun" as a reference to Christ because the pagans worshipped the sun. The truth is exactly the opposite; the pagans worship the sun because the truth of God was turned into a lie. David and Malachi did not try to adapt, accommodate, or purify paganism; paganism had corrupted revelation. Romans 1 is unmistakable—those who reject truth worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator. David and Malachi (and later Luke and Peter, who use the term Daystar in reference to Christ) did not follow paganism; paganism copied truth and defiled it.

Scripture gives no mandate to have any day established as a day to remember that God was manifest in the flesh, that the Word became flesh, that He Who spoke the worlds into being was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. I believe that those who acknowledged Him as King determined to do so and did so to honor Him as King of kings and LORD of Lords.

Historians find apparent references to a remembrance of the birth of Jesus Christ by churches as early as the second century—referred to, in translations from the Latin, as "the Feast of the Nativity." It became a part of the Roman Catholic calendar in the 330's—but it did not originate there or then. It was added, because it was already being observed. This feast rose from the people.

Now the question is fairly asked, "Were those who first began the observance of a feast to remember the birth of the LORD Jesus Christ true believers or were they those trying to redeem pagan customs?" Why would believers, true believers, ever begin observing a day or a time for the remembrance of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth? Even more, why would they select a day connected with the worship of the sun—the winter solstice, the pagan celebration of the

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friend loves Chanukah. He waits a whole year for it to come. I once asked him, "What are you celebrating?"

"The cleansing and re-dedication of the Temple."

"The one built by King Herod and destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Romans?"

"Yes, we have a wonderful time. This is our favorite time. We wait all year for Chanukah."

Interestingly enough, there was a great debate among the Jewish scholars living at the time of the LORD Jesus as to whether the practice should be to light eight candles the first night and reduced the number by one each day or to start with one and increase by one each day. The latter opinion finally won the struggle and became the accepted method of observance in later times.

Chanukah is an interesting celebration for the Jews to observe so faithfully through the centuries. The Jews have no Biblical warrant to observe Chanukah. There is no mention in the Old Testament—no suggestion, no hint, no prophecy of this event and no record of the actual circumstances because Chanukah is connected with an incident that occurred between the Testaments, about 160 years before the birth of Christ. There is no scriptural basis for Chanukah—yet no commentator that I have read ever condemns the Jews for creating Chanukah. Instead, the commentaries take great pains to explain the background of the feast and, then, apply the great background this man-devised, man-instituted, man-named Chanukah provides for the sermon by the LORD Jesus in John 8. As John Gill wrote,

And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, etc. That is, of the temple; not as built by Solomon or as rebuilt by Zerubabel, for there were no annual feasts appointed in commemoration of either of these; and besides, they were neither of them in the winter time; the

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be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

Simeon calls the eight-day old Baby the "Salvation" of God to all people, verse 28-32.

Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

Certainly, the birth of the LORD Jesus is THE birth of all births worth rejoicing and celebration. However, there is an even stronger and, to me, a far stranger prototype in another Jewish feast that is not mentioned in the Old Testament—but is acknowledged in the New Testament—the Jewish commemoration of Chanukah, called "the Feast of Dedication" in the New Testament. I call attention to John 10:22.

And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter.

A Messianic Hebrew friend uses this passage to affirm that the LORD Jesus recognized Chanukah and to validate his remembrance of the day. (Actually, the passage shows that the Feast of Dedication was observed at the time of Jesus of Nazareth and nothing more. While this mention by John does not prove that the LORD Jesus observed the feast, it also cannot be used to show that He disapproved of the feast. It does prove that the Jews observe this day as a special time and that the LORD Jesus did not rebuke them for having violated the word of the LORD by doing so.) This

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rebirth of the sun?

There is a pattern, a precedent, in the Scriptures by which believers *could* have decided to observe the birth of the LORD Jesus. The story is the essence of the Book of Esther. The pertinent passage for our thought is found in chapter nine, verses 17 through 32.

On the thirteenth day of the month Adar; and on the fourteenth day of the same rested they, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. But the Jews that were at Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth day thereof, and on the fourteenth thereof; and on the fifteenth day of the same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. Therefore the Jews of the villages, that dwelt in the unwall'd towns, made the fourteenth day of the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another. And Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all the Jews that were in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, *both nigh and far, To stablish this among them, that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly, As the days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day: that they should make them days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor.* And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them; Because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is, the lot, to consume them, and to destroy them; But when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked

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device, which he devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. Wherefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur. (underlining mine-JLM)

The King James translators placed a marginal note here showing that the word "Pur" means "Lot"; they did this even though the word is explained in the wording of verse 24. This double emphasis surely indicates that the translators believed that Purim needed special attention. I do not know to what specific purpose they did this; however, it was used to call Purim to my consideration.

Therefore for all the words of this letter, and of that which they had seen concerning this matter, and which had come unto them, The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so as it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to their writing, and according to their appointed time every year; And that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed. Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority, to confirm this second letter of Purim. And he sent the letters unto all the Jews, to the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth, To confirm these days of Purim in their times appointed, according as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had enjoined them, and as they had decreed for themselves and for their seed, the matters of the fastings and their cry. And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Pu-

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rim; and it was written in the book. (underlining mine-JLM)

The ancient Jews did not call this a 'holy convocation' nor did they use any of the other terminology connected with the God-ordained feasts of Israel. They clearly did not intend this to *replace* or to *compete* with the feasts of JEHOVAH. They simply (on their own authority) established a time to remember what God had done for them and they gave it a name. This feast is remembered by Jewish folk to this very day. Not all who do so actually give any recognition to the covenant God that made Israel His chosen people or do they even believe that Esther was a real person. One contemporary liberal Rabbi has written that the book of Esther is fiction that was produced after the fact for the sole purpose of justifying the feast.

Notice the intriguing pattern of the celebration as given in verses 17, 18, 19, and 22.

17 a day of feasting and gladness.

18 they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness.

19 a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another.

22 days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor.

They commemorated a Day of Deliverance with joy, gladness, feasting, gift giving, and benevolence work. All of which are associated with the day used to remember the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. A day as described by the angel as the day of good tidings to all people:

Luke 2:10-14

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall

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