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Sunburned Part I

"Others, with greater regard to good manners, it must be confessed, suppose that the sun is the God of the Christians, because it is a well-known fact that we pray toward the east, or because we make Sunday a day of festivity."

(Tertullian [155-225 AD.], Ad Nationes, i 13, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. III, p. 123)

INTRODUCTION

If this is your first time exploring this particular subject, we invite and encourage you to consider this material with a *"test everything"* approach concerning Christmas and Easter.

This teaching may push the limits in regards to many of our emotional attachments we often have toward these traditions....emotional attachments that may conflict with our spirit led desire to seek, adopt, and practice only truth.

Clearly, many of us have generations of fond memories formed around these times and traditions, so we are not going to pretend that there might not be some difficulty in maintaining engagement with this teaching.

Families often get together on these days, share in fun and loving moments, and spend much quality time together. Without a doubt, testing these days is going to be challenging, and it's going to be difficult...and it will be uncomfortable. There will be many things said that we may not want to hear. At one time, we simply did not want to hear it either. But we must approach these things in the faith boldly:

Proverbs 28:1

The wicked flee when no man pursues: but the righteous are as bold as a lion.

We encourage you to not flee from this teaching, but test it, study it, and determine yourself as to whether these things are true...we need to be bold, despite our discomfort.

There is much that we will cover that most will not want to be true. You might even be tempted to dismiss the historical and Biblical facts presented in this teaching, and you might find that the thought: *"but God knows my heart..."* might enter your mind. We certainly understand that thought, we have been there as well. But we urge you and encourage you to not fall into the paralyzing trap of believing that *our heart* can lead us in His Word...that *our heart* can decide what is right in our own eyes...

Remember what He says about our heart:

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?

Do we really want to follow our own heart, which is wicked? Or....do we want to follow God's heart? It is *God's heart* that leads us into the Word...it is *God's heart* that is the Word. Isn't that what our faith is to be all about? Are we not to be constantly conforming to His image, and not the image of the world? Not necessarily what we want for us, but what He wants for us?

The image of God is the image of the Word...

So that is what our focus will be as well. We will Biblically present God's perspective and contrast such with the traditions and history surrounding Christmas and Easter. We will make every attempt to stick with the facts, as sometimes studies on this subject reveals imaginary problems hidden within every aspect of the Christian faith. We are setting out to discover what God wants, not what we want. We are the first to admit that the days of Christmas and Easter likely conjure up feelings of warm fuzzies, and happy moments, and that is what these days might mean to us. But does it matter more what it means to us, or what it means to God, our Creator. Should it be our way, or His way, that's the question at hand.

Throughout this teaching, you might be compelled to focus on your personal perspective on Christmas and Easter, however that will not be our focus. Our focus will be on God's perspective, according to His own Word, on Christmas and Easter. We are going to draw lines, and a choice will have to be made.

It will be up to you as to whether you want to adopt God's perspective, or a contrary perspective, and throughout this presentation, we will be sticking to only the Bible and historical facts. Material that you can test yourself, to determine if these things are true. Before we begin unraveling, dissecting, and testing the traditions of Christmas and Easter, let's establish a few Biblical understandings.

In **Malachi 3:6**, we learn that the Lord does not change:

"For I the LORD (Yahweh) do not change;

Yahweh says that *"He does not change"* in the context of listing many things that He passionately hates and is against, things He does not want for us, yet He still has spared Israel despite their offences. You can see this in the previous verse.

This means that God will always detest sorceress, adulterers, those that swear falsely and oppress the workers...he mentions all of these things in the previous verses.

To offer a simple example, if God says He hates French fries, then He will always hate French fries...He does not flip flop and he does not change what He does or does not like. We realize that sounds like an absurd example, but the point stands. God does not change. If He says He does not like something, then He will never change and decide that He likes it, and vice versa. He is most certainly NOT wishy washy...he does not flip flop...He knows what He wants and doesn't want, He knows what He likes and does not like. So we must ask the question, how many of us know what He likes and does not like? We have a whole Bible to tell us... *Do we care? Should we?*

If John was correct, then God is the Word, and if we want to get to know God, then we must get to know the Word. It really is that simple. If God cannot and does not change...and if God is the Word and the Word is God...then nothing in the Word has changed...it is all just as true, just as it always has been. His character that defines Him consists of what He likes and does not like....and these things never change. And if He tells us what He does or does not like...shouldn't that matter to us? He is consistent and unchanging...He knows what He does and does not like. To put it more bluntly, do we even care about what God cares about? Should it be all about us, or Him?

Sure, it might be so easy to give the right answer there...we all know the right answer...but do we live out the right answer? Do we really want to live out the right answer?

So often we state that it is all about the relationship with the Father...how many times have we heard that said, or even said it ourselves that it is all about the relationship? If that is true, then we should care about what He likes and dislikes...and we never have to worry about him changing what He likes or dislikes, because He does not change...He told us that He does not change. Isn't that what a relationship is all about? Getting to know the other person and responding appropriately to their likes and dislikes? Keeping that in mind, here are some things that God said to us in His unchanging Word:

Deuteronomy 12:30

Take heed to yourself that you are not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before you; and that you do not enquire after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? We will do the same." You must not worship the LORD (Yahweh) your God in their way!

Jeremiah 10:2

Thus says the LORD (Yahweh), Learn not the way of the heathen,

Deuteronomy 12:4

You must not worship the LORD (Yahweh) your God in their way.

Clearly Yahweh is telling us that He does not like to be worshipped in the same way that the pagans worshipped their sun gods. That should make perfect sense to us. Imagine your significant other trying to love you in the SAME way of their old relationships instead of the way that you say you want to be loved. It is simply would not go over too well. That is the same thing Yahweh is saying to us here....Let's review again:

Deuteronomy 12:4

You must not worship the LORD (Yahweh) your God in their way.

Do we think that Yahweh, who does not change, actually changed here? Does He now like it? Was He confused before, and after some further thought He decided that He likes being worshipped in the way that sun gods were worshipped? Clearly not.

So, what if worshipping God through Christmas and Easter are actually the same as worshipping God in sun god ways and traditions? *Would that be serious? Would we care?* And more importantly, *does He care?*

You might be thinking, well, it wouldn't really bother me that much...that's not what those days are about anymore...we have Christianized those days...and we changed them.... It is completely natural for us to think that, that's what our heart says...

But remember what our heart is:

Jeremiah 17:9

"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"

Anyone who says "I follow my heart" should be absolutely terrified by what they just said. It does not matter if it bothers us or not, it matters if it bothers the one we are in relationship with. Would you tell your spouse...*It doesn't bother me, so why should it bother you?*

Why would you then tell that to God, our Creator? Why would we then tell God what matters to us when we worship Him? If we want a personal relationship with our Creator, then let's get personal.

Let's dig in and really find out what He likes and does not like, and then, respond appropriately...live it appropriately...let our actions agree with His desires for us...put aside for a moment what we want to be truth, and what we like...and focus on loving Him instead of ourselves and our desires...

Remember, if Yahweh does not like it then, it is then absolutely certain that He does not like it now. And God Himself said in His Word, He does not change what He likes or dislikes. He is suddenly not going to be ok with or enjoy being worshipped in the same manner of sun god traditions. Thus, if we see any aspects of Christmas and Easter founded on sun god ways, days, and traditions...then according God's own Word, He does not like that.

So that is what we intend to do, we will set out to determine if Christmas and Easter have any pagan roots in sun god traditions. That should be what we want to do because we have a relationship with our Creator. We should care more about what He likes and what He wants, rather than what we like or what we want.

If we care at all about what our Father likes or dislikes, then we must test this...it is all about the relationship with Him...not always about what pleases us, but what pleases Him.

Jesus (His Hebrew name being *Y'shua*) cared about what His Father liked. Y'shua only spoke the Words of His Father, and only followed His Father.

John 4:23-24

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

Our worship must not only be of the spirit and from the heart, but also grounded in truth. Thus, if any aspects of Christmas and Easter are not grounded in truth, then obviously we have a problem in the compatibility of what the Father wants from us. Not only do we now know how He does not like to be worshipped in the form of ancient sun god traditions, but now He has told us, through His son Y'shua, what He would rather have.

According to our Messiah, we need to worship in spirit and truth, not in spirit and what is false, BECAUSE...that is what the Father is seeking...and that is what He wants. So, is that what we want? **Truth?** *To worship in Truth?*

We then must ask, are sun gods traditions true, or false ways? If we really want a relationship with our Creator, if we really care about the way He feels, if we really care about how much He loves us. Then we propose, let's care about Him, let's serve Him and worship Him in truth...and only truth.

This is where we begin to "**Test Everything**". This is also where it might start becoming uncomfortable. So many of us have grown up in a system and culture that declares Christmas and Easter to be completely normal, especially in the Christian faith.

But as Paul rightfully said:

1 Thessalonians 5:21

"Test everything, only hold on to what is good"

Then let's test everything, and determine if Christmas and Easter are good...

So, those are the two main things we need to test about Christmas and Easter, how God said He does not like to be worshipped, and how God said He likes to be worshipped. Meaning this:

1) We need to determine if Christmas and Easter are rooted in sun god holidays and traditions...if they are, Yahweh, who never changes, says he detests such things, and he pleads with us multiple times for us to not worship him in such ways.

2) We also need to determine if Christmas and Easter are rooted in things that are not truth, but instead what is false, because we are told the Father desires us to only worship in spirit and truth and we need to respect that.

We are not setting out to discover what Christmas and Easter often means to us, or even means to you, but instead, what it means to God...not our way, but His way. What we think doesn't matter...and the reality is this, what you think doesn't matter. The **ONLY THING THAT MATTERS**, is what God thinks.

We told you that this teaching was going to be tough, and that you might be tempted to find a reason to walk away. However, we would simply like to encourage you to test your faith, to really test it and focus on building a closer relationship with the one who loves you more than anything, the one who created you, and saved us from ourselves and our sin. In His love, He gives us grace...In our love back, He simply asks for obedience:

1 John 5:3

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

If you are beginning to wonder if you might have to challenge your views on Christmas and Easter, because God wants us to worship Him in truth, and because He says He does not like to be worshipped like the sun gods were worshipped. Have some peace in all of this...His commandments are not burdensome. His law, His commandments, His instructions...what He wants for us...that is freedom....true freedom from the world's ways, and freedom in His ways.

Psalm 119:44-45

So shall I keep thy law continually forever and ever.
And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.

You may be feeling like your whole world might be about ready to fall apart...but though it seems painful, please consider, it is a good thing...we have been there...there is freedom in truth:

John 8:32

And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

So, we need to compare Christmas and Easter to ancient sun god traditions, and we need to determine if worshipping God through Christmas and Easter is worshipping in what is truth, or what is false.

Now that we know what we need to do, here is what the remainder of the teaching will look like:

1. We will first examine the modern scholarly position on the roots of Christmas and Easter
2. We will then proceed to explore the modern defense and rationale for observing Christmas and Easter and see if it holds up to the Word.
3. We will then find that we will need to answer the question, "How did this all happen?" To answer that, we will go back in time, all the way back to the time of Nimrod, and the Babylonians. We will then progress through history. The Chaldeans worshipped the sun god. So did the Assyrians. The Babylonians - The Medo-Persians - the Grecians - the Romans, they were all sun worshippers. We will discover how, when, and why such ways crept into the Christian faith.
4. Then, we will actually examine some of the traditions of Christmas and Easter. We will ask questions that perhaps many of us have never really asked. Why do we dye eggs on Easter. Where did the name Easter come from? What is with the rabbit and what about Santa Clause? What is with the Christmas tree and the wreath? Why presents? We show where all of these ancient traditions came from and then became a part of many of our lives, and all in the name of worshipping our Creator.

5. Finally, we will discuss the holidays that God actually gave us, holidays that many have forgotten about....days designed to take our relationship with Him to an all new level of joy and worship. Days that were given by our Father, to be all about our Messiah.

So let's begin to examine some of the things on Christmas and Easter. It is so funny how times change....believe it or not, at one time, in the early U.S. settlements, Christmas was illegal. Christmas was banned in America, not by any representative of the American Civil Liberties Union, but by Christians themselves.

Sounds shocking doesn't it...imagine trying to ban Christmas today. Macy's and Wal-Mart sure would not tolerate that....neither would most Christians...

"Christmas was once banned in Boston. The Puritans forbade the celebration of Christmas because it was a 'pagan feast.' Episcopalians were the first in Boston to observe the holiday. They were followed by increasing numbers of young people who raised 18th century eyebrows with 'frolics, a reveling feast and ball.' But it wasn't until 1856 that the legislature--recognizing a losing battle when it saw it--gave in and made Christmas a legal holiday." (The Phoenix Gazette, December 22, 1967)

Isn't that interesting...

Were the early U.S. Christians right? Or were they simply misinformed and misled...and then we just went the right direction since then?

Many are aware who Charles Spurgeon was. Many realize his influence he had over the Christian faith...shaping and presenting doctrine like few others in history. We are not saying that we agree with everything Spurgeon preached...we are simply noting a man who has had a profound Christian doctrine influence across a broad spectrum of topics, yet, when it comes to his position on Christmas, it is often selectively unheard. Most do not realize what he preached as it relates to Christmas....

"We have no superstitious regard for times and seasons. Certainly we do not believe in the present ecclesiastical arrangement called Christmas: first, because we do not believe in the mass at all, but abhor it, whether it be said or sung in Latin or in English; and, secondly, because we find no Scriptural warrant whatever for observing any day as the birthday of the Savior; and, consequently, its observance is a superstition, because not of divine authority." -Charles Spurgeon, Sermon on Dec. 24, 1871

"When it can be proved that the observance of Christmas, Whitsuntide, and other Popish festivals was ever instituted by a divine statute, we also will attend to them, but not till then. It is as much our duty to reject the traditions of men, as to observe the ordinances of the Lord. We ask concerning every rite and rubric, 'Is this a law of the God of Jacob?'" and if it be not clearly so, it is of no authority with us, who walk in Christian liberty." -Charles Spurgeon's Treasury of David on Psalm 81:4.

Clearly, times have changed....most pastor's would not dare to say the things Spurgeon taught on Christmas, they would lose their whole congregation. Is that a reason not to speak truth? The

whole world seems to be all about Christmas and Easter. Many who celebrate these days are not even part of the Christian faith...so what gives?

Since when is the world all about Godly things?

Since when is the world all about Biblical things?

Why does the world get so excited about Christmas and Easter?

Spurgeon went back as far as the Roman Catholic Church and declared that institution as the vehicle that was used to inject the pagan sun god ways and customs into the Body of the Messiah. And now we know why the world is so interested in those days...because the world is not interested in the things of God. That of course does not speak too well about Christmas and Easter. The world actually loves those days. The world hates things of God, yet loves Christmas and Easter. Have you considered that? Do the math, right? The question is *why*?

As we mentioned earlier, later in the teaching we will review all of the history that details how, when, and why this all happened. But we're getting a little ahead of ourselves. How do we even know that Christmas and Easter derive from sun god worship and traditions? How do modern scholars view the origins of Christmas and Easter? This is where it all starts to become rather interesting.

Though there are hundreds of sources and valid resources to choose from, because of time constraints, the following will be a couple dozen quotes from Encyclopedia's and even Christian scholars on the nature of Christmas and Easter. These will all be things that can be validated if one is interested in testing it themselves.

What we will find is that Christmas and Easter are most certainly rooted in what is false, in cultic pagan sun god traditions, not rooted in truth like He says He desires in our worship of Him. What we will find is not only does secular academic work prove these things without a shadow of a doubt, that even the most prominent and educated Christians scholar's basically plead "no contest" and have no defense against the origins and nature of Christmas and Easter.

Let's read...starting with one of the most dominant Christian resource authorities, Zondervan.

"Gradually a number of prevailing practices of the nations into which Christianity came were assimilated and were combined with the religious ceremonies surrounding Christmas. The assimilation of such practices generally represented efforts by Christians to transform or absorb otherwise pagan practices.

The Feast of Saturnalia in early Rome, for example, was celebrated for 7 days from the 17th to the 24th of December and was marked by a spirit of merriment, gift giving to children and other forms of entertainment. Gradually, early Christians replaced the pagan feast with the celebration of Christmas; but many of the traditions of this observance were assimilated and remain to this day a part of the observance of Christmas. Other NATIONS, the Scandinavians, Germans, French, English and others, have left their mark . . . as well (The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible) (pp. 804, 805).

Perhaps this verse now comes to mind:

Jeremiah 10:2

Thus says Yahweh "Do not learn the way of the nations"

Concerning these ancient elements, The Christian Encyclopedia says:

Various symbolic elements of the pagan celebration, such as the lighting of candles, evergreen decorations, and the giving of gifts, were adapted to Christian signification. Later as Christianity spread into northern Europe, the Celtic, Teutonic, and Slavic winter festivals contributed holly, mistletoe, the Christmas tree, bonfires, and similar items. (The Christian Encyclopedia)

The giving of presents was a Roman custom; while the Yule tree and Yule log are remnants of old Teutonic nature worship. Gradually the festival sank into mere revelry The custom was forbidden by an act of parliament in 1555; And the reformation brought in a refinement in the celebration of Christmas by emphasizing its Christian elements. (Unger's Bible Dictionary)

So basically, Christmas was illegal because of the sun god elements, until we "Christianized" the sun god worshipping traditions.

"The observance of December 25 (as a Christian festival) only dates from the fourth century and is due to assimilation with the Mithraic festival of the birth of the sun" ~(World Popular Encyclopedia, Volume 3). (193)

So, now you know why the date December 25th was chosen...not because our Messiah was born on that date, but because the sun god Mithra was born on that date. There is substantial evidence that Y'shua was not born in December, but born in the Fall, likely on the Feast of Sukkot.

Eventually we realize that the early Roman Catholic Church could not discontinue the pagan sun god practices, so they adopted the practices themselves, completely giving into a "if you can't beat them, then join them," approach....

Let's continue...

The transition from festivals commemorating the birth of a sun god to a celebration ostensibly for the Son of God occurred sometime in the fourth century. Unable to eradicate the heathen celebration of Saturnalia, the Church of Rome, sometime before 336 A.D., designated a Feast of the Nativity to be observed.- James Taylor, "Christmas," in The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church (J. D. Douglas, ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), p. 223.

Christian scholars are clear that they understand how sun god practices and days became a part of the Christian faith. They don't deny it...

Many of the customs associated with Christmas also took their origins from the heathen observances. The exchanging of gifts, extravagant merriment, and lighting of candles all have previous counterparts in the Roman Saturnalia. The use of trees harkens back to the pagan

Scandinavian festival of Yule.~James Taylor, "Christmas," in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (J. D. Douglas, ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), p. 223.

"On the Roman New Year (January 1), houses were decorated with greenery and lights, and gifts were given to children and the poor. To these observances were added the German and Celtic Yule rites . . . Food and good fellowship, the Yule log and Yule cakes, greenery and fir trees, gifts and greetings all commemorated different aspects of this festive season. Fires and lights, symbols of warmth and lasting life, have always been associated with the winter festival, both pagan and Christian" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 15th edition, Micropaedia, Vol. II, p. 903, "Christmas").

"December 25, the birthday of Mithra, the Iranian god of light and...the day devoted to the invincible sun, as well as the day after Saturnalia, was adopted by the [Roman Catholic] church as Christmas, the nativity of Christ, to counteract the effects of these festivals." [The New Encyclopedia Britannica.]

"Christmas... It was, according to many authorities, not celebrated in the first centuries of the Christian church, as the Christian usage in general was to celebrate the death of remarkable persons [e.g. Passover - death of Christ] rather than their birth..." "...A feast was established in memory of this event [the assigned birth of Jesus] in the fourth century. In the fifth century the Western Church ordered it to be celebrated forever ON THE DAY OF THE OLD ROMAN FEAST OF THE BIRTH OF SOL [SUN], as no certain knowledge of the day of Christ's birth existed." - Encyclopedia Americana, 1944 Edition

"The idea of using evergreens at Christmas also came to England from pre-Christian northern European beliefs. Celtic and Teutonic tribes honored these plants at their winter solstice festivals as symbolic of eternal life, and the Druids ascribed magical properties to the mistletoe in particular." [The Encyclopedia Americana International Edition. New York: Grolier, 1991. p666.]

"The Roman festival of the winter solstice was celebrated on 25 Dec. (dies natalis solis invictus). The Celtic and Germanic tribes held this season in veneration from the earliest times, and the Norsemen believed that their dieties were present and active on earth from 25 Dec. to 6 Jan." [Everymans Encyclopedia. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1967. p1,672.]

"Christianity thus replaced a pagan holiday with a Christian one, while keeping the same symbolism-the birthday of Christ corresponds to the birth of a new year. Many of the pagan customs became part of the Christmas celebrations." [New Standard Encyclopedia. Chicago: Standard Educational, 1991. pC-320.]

"Pagan celebrations on December 25 had included feasting, dancing, lighting bonfires, decorating homes with greens, and giving gifts. So when this became a Christian festival, the customs continued, but with a Christian meaning imparted to them." [Encyclopedia International. USA: Lexicon, 1980. p414.]

Again, sun god days and ways, with a Christian stamp supposedly changing them into something good...

"The use of evergreens was so closely associated with the garlands of pagan days that in many of the early Church celebrations they were forbidden." [Alfred Carl Hottes, 1,001 Christmas Facts and Fancies. New York: A.T. De La Mare, 1954. p15.]

"Equally old was the practice of the Druids, the caste of priests among the Celts of ancient France, Britain and Ireland, to decorate their temples with mistletoe, the fruit of the oak-tree which they considered sacred. Among the German tribes the oak-tree was sacred to Odin, their god of war, and they sacrificed to it until St Boniface, in the eighth century, persuaded them to exchange it for the Christmas tree, a young fir-tree adorned in honour of the Christ child . . . It was the German immigrants who took the custom to America" (L.W. Cowie and John Selwyn Gummer, The Christian Calendar, 1974, p.22).

And now on to Easter...

"The term 'Easter' is not of Christian origin. It is another form of Astarte, one of the titles of the Chaldean goddess, the queen of heaven. The festival of Pasach [Passover and the Feast of Unleavens] was a continuation of the Jewish [that is, God's] feast...from this Pasch the pagan festival of 'Easter' was quite distinct and was introduced into the apostate Western religion, as part of the attempt to adapt pagan festivals to Christianity." (W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, article: Easter, p.192)

We should all find that slightly disturbing...that means when we say we are "Celebrating Easter" that is the same thing as saying we are "Celebrating the bare breasted fertility goddess" ...clearly we do not want to do that. That is why some churches just call it "resurrection Sunday" ...however, if we wanted to get really Biblical, the Bible calls it "First Fruits" and tells us exactly on what day it is on...more on that later...

Let's continue...

Ish-tar : or Easter - Mythology The chief Babylonian and Assyrian goddess, associated with love, fertility, and war, being the counterpart to the Phoenician Astarte. (The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition. 2000)

Tammuz: ancient nature deity worshiped in Babylonia. A god of agriculture and flocks, he personified the creative powers of spring. He was loved by the fertility goddess Ishtar, who, according to one legend, was so grief-stricken at his death that she contrived to enter the underworld to get him back. According to another legend, she killed him and later restored him to life. These legends and his festival, commemorating the yearly death and rebirth of vegetation, corresponded to the festivals of the Phoenician and Greek Adonis and of the Phrygian Attis. The Sumerian name of Tammuz was Dumuzi. In the Bible his disappearance is mourned by the women of Jerusalem (Ezek. 8.14).(The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition. 2001)

"The term Easter was derived from the Anglo-Saxon 'Eostre,' the name of the goddess of spring. In her honor sacrifices were offered at the time of the vernal equinox. By the 8th cent.

the term came to be applied to the anniversary of Christ's resurrection." (International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, edited by Geoffrey Bromiley, Vol 2 of 4, p.6, article: Easter)

"The English word Easter is derived from the names 'Eostre' - 'Eastre' - 'Astarte' or 'Ashtaroth'. Astarte was introduced into the British Isles by the Druids and is just another name for Beltis or Ishtar of the Chaldeans and Babylonians. The book of Judges records that 'the children of Israel did evil ...in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, ...and forsook the LORD, and served not Him.' Easter is just another name for Ashteroth 'The Queen of Heaven.' Easter was not considered a 'Christian' festival until the fourth century. Early Christians celebrated Passover on the 14th day of the first month and a study of the dates on which Easter is celebrated will reveal that the celebration of Easter is not observed in accordance with the prescribed time for the observance of Passover. After much debate, the Nicaean council of 325 A.D. decreed that 'Easter' should be celebrated on the first Sunday after the vernal equinox. Why was so much debate necessary if 'Easter' was a tradition passed down from the Apostles? The answer is that it was not an Apostolic institution, but, an invention of man! They had to make up some rules. History records that spring festivals in honor of the pagan fertility goddesses and the events associated with them were celebrated at the same time as 'Easter'. In the year 399 A.D. the Theodosian Code attempted to remove the pagan connotation from those events and banned their observance. The pagan festival of Easter originated as the worship of the sun goddess, the Babylonian Queen of Heaven who was later worshipped under many names including Ishtar, Cybele, Idaea Mater (the Great Mother), or Astarte for whom the celebration of Easter is named. Easter is not another name for the Feast of Passover and is not celebrated at the Biblically prescribed time for Passover. This pagan festival was supposedly 'Christianized' several hundred years after Christ." (Richard Rives, Too Long in the Sun)

"...the egg as a symbol of fertility and of renewed life goes back to the ancient Egyptians and Persians, who had also the custom of colouring and eating eggs during their spring festival." (Encyclopaedia Britannica, article: Easter)

"The exchange of Easter eggs, which symbolize new life and fertility, is one of the oldest traditions. Rabbits and flowers are also pagan fertility symbols." (New Standard Encyclopedia, Vol. 6, Chicago: Standard Educational, 1991. pE-25-E-27)

"The hare, the symbol of fertility in ancient Egypt, a symbol that was kept later in Europe, is not found in North America. Its place is taken by the Easter rabbit, the symbol of fertility and periodicity both human and lunar, accredited with laying eggs in nests prepared for it at Easter or with hiding them away for children to find." (The New Encyclopædia Britannica, 15th ed. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1992, p.333)

"The custom of a sunrise service on Easter Sunday can be traced to ancient spring festivals that celebrated the rising sun." (The New Book of Knowledge, Danbury: Grolier, 1981, p.41)

That might bring to mind the following verse from Scripture...

Ezekiel 8:15-16

Then he said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? You will see still greater abominations than these." And he brought me into the inner court of the house of the

LORD (Yahweh). And behold, at the entrance of the temple of the LORD (Yahweh), between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men, with their backs to the temple of the LORD (Yahweh), and their faces toward the east, worshiping the sun toward the east.

We could have spent hours presenting more academic and Christian scholar research on this subject, but we're sure you get the point. Ask yourself, does Christmas and Easter still feel right to you?

Deuteronomy 12:30

Take heed to yourself that you are not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before you; and that you do not enquire after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? We will do the same." You must not worship the LORD (Yahweh) your God in their way!

Jeremiah 10:2

Thus says the LORD (Yahweh), Learn not the way of the nations,

Deuteronomy 12:4

You must not worship the LORD (Yahweh) your God in their way.

Is Christmas and Easter rooted in cultic pagan sun god worship and traditions? Clearly the answer is a disappointing yes! And what about

John 4:23-24

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

Is Christmas and Easter rooted in what is truth, or rooted in what is false? Clearly, they are both rooted in what is false. This means that anyone teaching from the pulpit likely knows all of this...there are not many that even attempt to suggest that Christmas and Easter are derived from Godly origins....nearly everyone who has entertained an ounce of study on these matters knows that Christmas and Easter are purely the result of sun god ways and traditions.

The only thing that changed was the name of who was being worshipped and the supposed symbolic meaning behind the traditions. Meaning this, the sun god days and traditions of what became Christmas and Easter were clearly changed in the sense of what they mean to us. But does that mean that we can change what it all means to God? Is it alarming to realize that Yahweh, who says He does not change, said He hates being worshipped with sun god traditions, yet, that is exactly that nature of Christmas and Easter?

That leads us into the second part of this teaching.

How is it that all of this is so well known, but Christmas and Easter still continue amongst those in the faith? Y'shua even had words for those who continue to promote and practice such tradition despite what is written in the Word ...

Mark 7:9 &13

And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! ... 13 thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do."

How is all of this rationalized? Why is all of this not a big deal? The answer lies within the same deceit that the adversary has presented to God's people from the beginning.

"God didn't really mean you would die if you eat the fruit" (Genesis 3:4-5)

Meaning this, "God doesn't really mean that He doesn't like being worshipped by pagan sun god ways and traditions" or perhaps, "God really didn't mean that He only wants to be worshipped in spirit and truth, He is ok with what is false."

Supposedly, these things no longer matter to God, so then, of course it should not matter to us either.

Let's consider some dominant examples of this way of thinking. If one searches Google on whether Christians should keep Christmas, the first article that pops up is one from *Bible.org*. Keep in mind, *Bible.org* is one of the top dominant websites on the whole planet for the Christian faith.

In this article from Bible.org, "*Should Christians Celebrate Christmas*" the author spends several paragraphs agreeing that Christmas came from pagan cultic sun god ways, days and traditions. Then, after all of that, here is his quote:

"The pagan associations were lost long ago"

Long ago!?! As if since we forgot where those days came from and those ways came from, then God did as well? Do we really think that God forgot? Do we really think He no longer cares? Did He violate His Word and change?

The author then concludes that section of man made opinion and speculative reasoning, ignores God's thoughts on the matter, and makes this, hate to say it, but rather arrogant statement:

"We can make something evil out of it or something good."

That is literally saying that we can take what is evil in the mind of God, turn it around like we are some magical Christian fairies, and "*poof*" ... make it good! That we ourselves, as man, not God, somehow have the choice to define it as evil or good! How in the world can we make good out of what God defined as evil! Right now your brain should be screaming the following verse:

Isaiah 5:20

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

That type of thinking and doctrine should scare the living daylights out of most faith based people...yet, this is the ONLY defense that theologians and scholars have for keeping Christmas and Easter....*that we can change something evil into something good.*

Nearly every popular Christian defense of Christmas and Easter uses similar statements. Why? Because there is no other defense...they already admit that the traditions are of pagan cultic sun god origin. What else can they say? It's all they can say.

You will find nearly the exact same argument from *equip.org*, *gotquestions.org*, *Grace to You Ministries*, and many other popular Christian resources and ministries. The only defense they have is to pretend that God is suddenly ok with sun god days and traditions, and that we have the power to turn what is evil in the sight of God into something good. Can we now make something unholy now holy? Can we make the profane now pleasing in the sight of our Creator? Even though God is a God who does not change, can we change what He hates into something He likes, just because we put His name on it and say it is for Him and His son? *Think about it.* Come on, let us reason together!

How would that go over with your spouse? Suppose you gave a gift to your spouse, but that gift is something your spouse detests. What would you say as you smile and give it to her? Would you say that you should like it anyway because it is what is in my heart that counts? ...that I put your name on the box, so you should like it and be happy? God forbid we do something like that to our spouse, and may we never do that to our Creator. Such an approach is literally making ourselves out to be God instead, by saying we will do it our way, instead of God's way! It is saying we will give what we want to give, not what He desires from us.

This way of thinking is nothing new. It is literally, the way of Cain. In the account of Cain, Cain decided to do things His own way...what was right in His own mind... or He followed what was right in His own heart, if you will.

1 John 3:12

We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

You might be thinking, surely defending Christmas and Easter cannot be just like Cain...how is that the same at all? Well, let's find out. According to John, Cain murdered his own brother because Cain's ways were evil, and his brother's were righteous. Before we begin discussing Cain, we need to mention something rather important that not all realize.

When the Bible uses **LORD** in all capital letters, it is actually the translators replacing the Creator's name as a Tetragrammaton in Hebrew, **YHWH**...we often place that back into the Scriptures as He intended...and based on our best scholarly guess, and many others, we pronounce that as *Yahweh*.

Genesis 4:1

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten* a man with the help of the LORD. (Yahweh)" 2 And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. 3 In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD (Yahweh) an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD (Yahweh) had regard for Abel and his offering, 5 but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. 6 The LORD (Yahweh) said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted?* And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

Cain most certainly knew the Law of God, or the Torah in Hebrew, meaning instructions, it demanded that at an appointed time, or “*moed*” in Hebrew, God instructed a certain sacrifice. Sometimes the Law of God demands a grain offering, sometimes a sacrifice. In this instance, God requiring a sacrifice, like Able offered, Cain decided to do and offer what He wanted to offer. Able heard and obeyed the Father. Cain decided to do what he thought was right or what he thought was best, to worship in his own way, to follow his own heart. Thus, the Cain attitude is to do things our own way, despite what Yahweh wants or desires.

Jude 11

Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam’s error and perished in Korah’s rebellion.

It is easy to get caught up in the trap thinking we can worship God in any way we choose. God’s people have been known to make that mistake over and over again. The most classic example of the way of Cain mentality is in the event of the golden calf. Yeah, believe it or not, Christmas and Easter can be compared to the event of the golden calf. How many realize that the intent of the Israelites was not to worship a false god with the golden calf, but Yahweh our God?

In the story of the golden calf, once again, God’s people start doing things and worshipping God their own way. God does not appreciate His people worshipping Him in any way that they choose. There is a protocol that He has defined for us...a way to worship Him....and the ways not to worship Him. He is the one being worshipped, not us. We need to understand how we are to worship and not worship Him. We should not want to mess that up. But that is what God’s people do all too often, and the golden calf is perhaps the most classic example of us trying to worship God in our own way, not His way.

It all starts in Exodus 32. Here we find that Moses has gone up to the mountain, but after some time, the Israelites begin to panic. For they fear that Moses has died.

Exodus 32

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”

Moses was much more than simply a leader to them. Moses was their only mediator between God and man. Moses spoke to God on their behalf, and God spoke to the Israelites through Moses. Moses was the mediator between God and man...this head role is now reserved for Y’shua alone, and only Y’shua now functions as Moses. (1 Timothy 2:5)(1 Corinthians 11:3)

However, during the time of the exodus, Moses was the mediator. Here is their perceived problem...they feared that they lost Moses...they believed they needed to replace their mediator. They were afraid that they were not going to be able to communicate with Yahweh any longer, because their mediator, Moses, is missing, or perhaps even dead.

Since they were in Egypt they happened to learn a thing or two about the Egyptian tradition of interacting with gods....in their understanding, you require a physical medium to facilitate such

divine interaction. They needed a mediator between them and God... We know that this is what they are thinking, because they instructed to Aaron:

“make us gods who shall go before us.”

And then what do we see at their reason for saying this?

“As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”

So, in their mind, Yahweh, through Moses, brought them out of Egypt. Yet, Moses is now missing, and in their mind - that's a big problem...and big problems require urgent solutions. So, their solution was to make us “gods”.

But how would “gods” replace Moses and how would “gods” be a good thing in their mind? Have they already forgotten who brought them out of Egypt and have they forgotten who just spoke to them down at the mountain, before they became afraid and asked Moses to go up to get the commandments for them?

In the English, this certainly sounds bad. However, the word here, for “gods” in Hebrew, is *Elohim*. *Elohim* is the Hebrew word also translated as the one true God or it could also be translated as gods. So nearly any time you see the word “God” in your English translations, the Hebrew word is in fact *Elohim*, despite the fact that *Elohim* is plural. *Elohim* can refer to false gods, or the one true God. The context determines the correct understanding. So, we need to figure out if the Israelites were attempting to make a physical image “God” as a mediator to reach God...or were they trying to make “gods” as in false gods?

The Israelites, as a solution to replace the perhaps dead Moses, to replace their mediator with God, decided that they need to “make God” ...or really, create that interface they believed they needed to have so they could talk with God...to replace Moses, who they feared was dead. So often, we have been taught that the Israelites were making a false god. But in the English, it says they wanted to make *gods*, not God. Clearly, they only made one God, despite the fact that they used the plural form of El, which is *Elohim*. That suggests that they meant they wanted to make the one True God, *Elohim*, not false gods, otherwise they would have made multiple gods, just like the English translation suggests.

Now, that may not be enough to prove the point for you, but there is much more to consider. Most already know that the Israelites chose to make a calf. In fact, they seemingly entertained no debate or discussion about it.... it simply seemed to be the understood form that Yahweh should take. But why did they choose a calf?

Exodus 32:2-4

So Aaron said to them, “Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” 3 So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. 4 And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf.

If the Israelites were trying to make Yahweh in a physical form, as a mediator to replace Moses, it was certainly no accident that the Israelites chose a calf. Why? Why did they choose a calf to represent Yahweh? In scripture, God is often likened to an ox, even in the context of the Exodus. For example:

Numbers 24:8

*“God brings him out of Egypt;
He has strength like a wild ox;*

Why though, and how would they have known this? They knew this because they spoke and wrote ancient pictograph Hebrew. Do you recall the Hebrew Word translated as God in English Bibles? It is the Hebrew word Elohim. There are two Hebrew words commonly translated as God, *el* and *elo'ah*.

When reading the Bible it is better to have an Ancient Hebrew perception of God rather than our modern western view. The word *el* was originally written with two pictographic letters, one being an ox head and the other a shepherd staff. The ox represented strength and the staff of the shepherd represented authority.

First, the Ancient Hebrews saw God as the strong one of authority. The shepherd staff was also understood as a staff on the shoulders, a yoke. Secondly, the Ancient Hebrews saw God as the ox in the yoke. When plowing a field two oxen were placed in a yoke, one was older and more experienced and the other the younger and less experienced and the younger would learn from the older.

The Hebrews saw God as the older experienced ox and they as the younger who learns from him. The plural form of *elo'ah* is *elohiym* and is also often translated as God. While English plurals only identify quantity, as in more than one, the Hebrew plural can identify quantity as well as quality.

Something that is of great size or stature can be written in the plural form and in this case, God, as great strength and authority is frequently written in the plural form *elohim*. The two letters in these Hebrew words are the ox head representing strength and the shepherd staff representing authority. Combined they mean "the strong authority" as well as "the ox with a staff"the yoke is understood as a staff on the shoulders. If you are interested you can learn more at the Ancient Hebrew Research Center - *Ancient-Hebrew.org*. So, the choosing of a calf to represent God was clearly intentional.

There is a logical reason that they did not choose a rabbit, or a fish, or anything else. Elohim in the Hebrew gives us the word picture of the "Ox" and "authority". And guess what, they said they were going to make Elohim:

“make us “Elohim” who shall go before us.”

Remember, Elohim is the same Hebrew word that is translated as "God" in scripture. And Elohim as a word picture fits their interest in making a calf perfectly. Thus, they were not interested in making 'gods' so to speak...they were interested in making God, or Yahweh! Not so much as they literally thought that they were making God, but they were continuing in the Egyptian tradition and practice of making an image of god so you could connect and speak to Him... Which of course,

is what Moses was for, but they feared that he was dead. After the golden calf is presented, Israel says something very interesting...

Exodus 32:4

4 And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"

In the English, it seems they are presenting the golden calf as "gods". But that doesn't make any sense – it's *singular*. In reality, he is saying to Israel, here is your Elohim, or if you will, here is your god who brought you out of Egypt, meaning the one true God. Now clearly, in most English translations, the usage of 'gods' does not make any sense for multiple reasons.... Israel already declared Yahweh to be their only God. Why would Israel suddenly believe that a different god took them out of Egypt? That would make no sense whatsoever. In addition, only one God took them out of Egypt...and the Israelites knew this...so why do English translators use the plural form gods, as in false gods, when that would make no sense? Aaron is only presenting one golden calf, not golden *calves*. Meaning singular, not plural.

Meaning this, and this is important to understand, the Israelites clearly never intended on making gods, but instead, God, as evidenced by the one (singular) god they made in the form of a calf...which happens to be the exact same word picture that the pictograph of Elohim represents in Hebrew. And then they say that this "golden calf" brought them out of Egypt. Clearly they know this is not literally the case, as Yahweh brought them out of Egypt.

So why do English translations say gods, and not God? Because of the nature of the Hebrew word Elohim. Elohim can mean the plural form of false gods, or the one True God. This would mean that the Israelites believed that they produced an image of Yahweh as the calf. They believed that they created the image of the one true God who took them out of Egypt. This should make MUCH more sense because the ancient Hebrew pictograph of Elohim is an Ox with authority.

So, they are simply creating what they already understood about God, in an effort relieve their concerns about losing Moses as their mediator...they in fact, created an image of their understanding of Yahweh to worship and connect with Him, as their new mediator. They were so worried that they lost Moses, which was their mediator to connect with Yahweh...that they believed they had to replace Moses with an object to be the new mediator between Israel and God. So all of these things clearly tell us that they were intending to worship Yahweh through the calf.

Still don't believe it, despite all of the evidence?

Do you still believe that the Israelites were trying to worship false gods, instead of worshipping Yahweh in their own way? There is still one more thing that solidifies this understanding...and this is huge... In the Hebrew, we are told that Aaron actually dedicates a feast to Yahweh.

Exodus 32:5-6

When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD (Yahweh)." 6 And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

Aaron declares that the feast is for Yahweh...and then they offer gifts to Him. Unfortunately, this is the way of Cain mentality to the extreme... You might be thinking, in my Bible says LORD, not Yahweh. But recall what we mentioned earlier, anytime that we see Lord in all capital letters in English Bibles, we know that it is intentionally replacing the Tetragrammaton YHWH, or as we often pronounce it, Yahweh.

Anyone can look into any Hebrew concordance and see for themselves that Aaron literally dedicated the feast to Yahweh, the God that took them out of Egypt. This proves without a doubt that the Israelites were simply trying to replace Moses and connect to Yahweh in different way. The Israelites were not trying to make "gods" so to speak but "God" - Elohim. They chose a calf for Yahweh because He is Elohim. This is what is important to understand, because this is what they did. They chose to invent their own feast, their own holiday, to Yahweh instead of the feasts outlined in Leviticus 23. They chose to worship God their own way, instead of God's way. They sincerely thought that they were doing the right thing. They thought it was ok to make up their own holiday for Yahweh and worship Him how they chose.

But clearly, despite the fact that the Israelites were sincerely attempting to worship God, even dedicating the day to Him, giving gifts to him, God did not see it that way. They were worshipping God through the pagan practice of using things to worship God, and declaring and putting into effect a false holiday. They even made offerings to Yahweh...they really thought that Yahweh would accept their worship, just like Cain did. *The way of Cain.*

And here is the main issue of the problem at hand.

Because the Israelites decided to do things their own way, instead of God's way, they made themselves out to be their own gods. Though they fully and sincerely wanted to follow Yahweh, they followed themselves and their own heart instead.

This is exactly what we do with Christmas and Easter....we take the ways of man, ways of false gods, and then offer them all up to God and expect Him to smile, while we please ourselves in the process.

Now we realize that might sound harsh, and many will not want to hear it, but we know it is the truth.

When we do these things our way instead of His way, then who in our mind is God at that point? Do you see the problem from God's perspective?

We can still be claiming to be worshipping the one true God, but if we abandon His way and do it our own way, we are actually worshipping false gods in the process...sadly, we are worshipping ourselves...bowing down to ourselves, and following ourselves...We're following our own instructions instead of his. How does He want us to worship Him?

John 4:23-24

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

How does He *not* want us to worship Him?

Deuteronomy 12:4

You must NOT worship the LORD (Yahweh) your God in THEIR way.

What ways should we *not* learn?

Jeremiah 10:2

“Learn not the way of the nations...

We fully realize that much of what we covered was shocking in the least. In reality, so far, this is mostly just an introduction to the topic. At this point, a couple of things should be clear. Yahweh said that we cannot worship Him in the ways that the pagans worshipped their sun gods. That fully eliminates Christmas and Easter all together in that alone.

In addition, clearly, Christmas and Easter are not rooted in truth. They come from false ways of worshipping false gods. These are the ways of the nations...ways He has told us not to learn. It might be surprising to many, but God is not on the same page of the let's keep Christ in Christmas bandwagon. God does not appreciate the Cain mentality, the mentality that says it's ok in one's heart to worship God in the way we choose, contrary to the way that He requests.

We must learn from the mistakes of Israel, who, doing what was right in their own mind, chose to worship God in their own way, offering Him a new holiday, a new festival, with gifts and worship up to Him. Cain was also sincere...Israelites with the golden calf were sincere...our intent in celebrating Christmas and Easter may be very sincere as well...

But the problem is this...according to God...not according to us or not according to anyone else, despite all of the theologians promising you it's simply ok....God Himself said no, it is not ok, it is not how I want to be worshipped. He loved us so much that He sent His own son that we might live! That being said, let's live for Him, in His ways, not our way. Let's love Him back in the way He has told us He wants to be loved.

We hope that this has given you much already to consider...however, there is simply so much more. The question still remains, *“How did all of these pagan cultic sun god traditions become married to the Christian faith?”* Where did all of this come from? How did it get here? ...and what do all of these traditions originally mean?

You will be shocked to learn that many of these pagan cultic sun god traditions, and their original symbolism, and where they came from. In the next part of this teaching, we will cover all of these things and much more. You will find that it starts to become even more interesting. We hope that this teaching has blessed you, and remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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Please proceed to PART II