

WHAT ABOUT CHRISTMAS?

A part of me does understand the concern that some have over the observance of anything connected with Christmas; however, I confess that most of me finds the debate confusing.

PREPARATION FOR CHRISTMAS

The Scripturally literate child of God knows that the Bible's story of Christmas begins in Genesis and does not find its completion until The Revelation. The passages in Matthew and Luke provide only a portion of the Christmas chronicles. I realize that by using the word "Christmas" that I approach offending some readers. While I understand the reasons why some of my preacher friends, as did the Puritans of three centuries ago, do not choose to use the word Christmas, I find myself continuing to do so. I could allow the reasonableness of their reasoning and, if I could find a suitable, realistic, recognizable, substitute definitive term, I would gladly use it. At the same time, however, I must also recognize that these same friends do not hesitate to use the common identifications for the twelve months or the standard designations of the seven days of the week—even though all nineteen names originated from a pagan religious dedication to various false deities. Even to speak of Sunday as the Lord's Day is to use a title derived from the worship of the sun. Thus, while I do not question anyone's sincerity in wishing to avoid the use of the word "Christmas," I must acknowledge there is generally an inconsistency in doing so when the commonly accepted names for months and days are not avoided with the same reasoning. I prefer the title "the Lord's Day" for the first day of the week, and use it often, but I also still refer to the "First day" as "Sunday." "Sunday" is the term generally used: and only scholars, a few real worshippers of Sol, and some "scrupulous" preachers recognize the derivation of the name. In the same way, I continue to use "Christmas" simply because the word "Christmas" has come into such common usage that it no longer has any suggestion of a special mass or feast commemorating the birth of the Christ. Only a very few of those who exchange Christmas presents, send greetings, take a Christmas vacation, spend a Christmas bonus, or say "Merry Christmas" even think of the meaning of what is conveyed by that action. The same is true with the names of the months and the days. How many know that Friday is a religious recognition of the only female deity in the names of the days, or why Saturday is dedicated to Saturn (the planet, not the car)? How many who say, "See you in church Sunday," realize the day declares a worship of the sun? The word "Christmas," after dwelling nearly a thousand years in the English language, has assumed a wider association than even a given day. It defines the period from Thanksgiving Day through New Year's Day—that is the Christmas season, or even "Christmas" in the mindset of this age.

There are also those believers who think it inappropriate to commemorate the birthday of Jesus of Nazareth in any fashion. They believe that since the Bible does not establish such a "festival," does not record any disciple ever celebrating the birth of Christ, and does not provide the actual day, such as December 25, the conclusion is that neither should we.

It seems to me that there is sufficient information in Scripture to make December 25 a genuine possibility. Frankly, after more than four decades of reading all I can find on the matter, I conclude there is more actual biblical (and historical) reason to hold to the traditional date (December 25) as there is for any other day of the year. However, for the sake of peace, I can sincerely concede that the exact date on the calendar is unknown and yet continue to use December 25 with a clear conscience.

The Queen of England has an actual date of her nativity that is not the same as, and has no

bearing on, the day the English Kingdom (or is it Queendom?) annually, officially celebrates her birth. I believe it is proper, indeed, more than proper, for the King of kings to have a day set aside to remember that He was born, even if the particular day chosen is not the same as the actual date of the birth. However, I do not insist on that as an absolute. What I do insist must be considered as an absolute is that there was a specific day on which the Son of God was supernaturally conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary and that there was a particular day on which the Son of God, incarnate in the flesh, was born, in the city of David, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. That His birth was anticipated for over four thousand years by the faithful, announced by angels, verified by shepherds, and commemorated by wise men. Therefore, the customary, traditional English name may be replaced without loss, because the fact remains, He had a birthday. One may dispute with conviction that December 25 is not the proper date for having the remembrance, but no believer will argue that there was no date of birth.

So, debate the date—make it March, June, or October—and name it as you might chose—The Day of His Nativity, The Birthday of the Son of man, The Night the Son of David was born, the Day of Messiah’s birth, or Christmas—the event that came to pass that night in Bethlehem of Judea is a time well worth remembering. Indeed, a time that ought to be remembered with great joy. I rejoice that my Saviour, the LORD Jesus Christ, the Son of God was made flesh, took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and I encourage all other believers to do the same. That fact, that He was born, is worth a commemoration and, even, a celebration. That which made angels rejoice—who have no part in the incarnation, receive no benefit from the atonement, and know no gift from the ascension—surely should cause believers to sing praises and give glory to the great Triune God. To give one day each year to remember His birth is not unseemly, and I think, it is both proper and wise. Select whatever day seems best to you and do, on your day, what I do from Thanksgiving through New Year’s Day—rejoice that in the fullness of time, God was manifest in the flesh.

The time of the birth of the LORD Jesus Christ in the city of the David was the day that the prophets anticipated and preached a consistent message to prepare the people since the beginning of the world, as Zacharias reminds us. The apostle John informs us that the Godhead arranged for that particular day from before the foundation of the world. This was not a day that arrived unexpectedly or unannounced to a world unaware or unprepared. The birth of the Messiah is promised to Adam and Eve in the first conversation with the LORD God after the Fall. Every prophet that lived before His birth, in promise or picture, proclaims that His day of birth is to be expected. “He is coming” was their unwavering, universal message. Since that day of His birth, every preacher of the Gospel has been privileged to announce that He was born. At the appointed time, God sent forth His Son into the world and told men to call His name Jesus. Multiplied millions have rejoiced at the news, believed the message, and received Him as Christ the Lord, the Saviour of the world. How can I not devote attention to His birth? Why would I not desire to do so? The Creator entered His creation by being made flesh that He might dwell among His creatures to seek and to save that which was lost. That such did occur is worthy of a special remembrance. We grant a day to remember the “birth” of our nation, why not at least a day to recognize that Jesus Christ was born? (As a side note, historians squabble as to when the nation was actually birthed—but those who were there used July 4, 1776 as the day. That day was chosen because the Declaration of Independence was signed then—this is the document that the ACLU, the atheists, and the one-worlders hate. It speaks of God as the Giver of rights. So, they insist on “understanding” the Constitution apart from the context of the Declaration.) I do not

think that a proper in manner, suitable in decorum, appropriate in style, acknowledgment of the birth of the Son will be deemed wrong by the Saviour or His Father.

To consider the exquisite preparations that our God invested in this one event on this one day is a blessed contemplation to me and I believe it must be also to you. Before the foundation of the earth was laid, the “groundwork” for this day and this event was established. Before Adam and Eve were banished from Eden, the LORD God committed to their keeping a promise of the birth of the Redeemer. Announcements of that promise of this day and this event were continually repeated for the next four thousand years by a succession of prophets specially selected and purposefully called to that unique mission. When Satan, in his attempt to defeat this promise, had so corrupted the race, a worldwide flood intervened to remove the contamination and preserve the line of the Seed in the ark to protect the purity of the race to enable the event of this day. Later still, a man and, through him, a nation was “designed” and separated to bring this very day and this very event to pass. Still later, a tribe and then a family of that tribe were designated to bring this very day and this very event into reality. As the fullness of the time approached, an entire empire was disturbed so that one man and his espoused wife would be in a designated village at the exact time required for the event of that special day to transpire in the prophesied and prepared place.

Not only were Joseph and Mary in the land of Judea, in the city of David, Bethlehem, exactly as the promises of the prophets had prepared the people of God to anticipate, they were at an inn that was also prepared for this very night. The story of the preparation of that inn is also a blessing to me. It all begins the night Absalom instigated an insurrection against his father King David.

One of the intriguing traits of the character of David is that he was one who was always preparing for the future. He had an ability to see beyond the horizon. One early indication of this is his provision for his parents when King Saul determined to kill him. His was not the act of the fool, having eyes “in the ends of the earth.” David was preparing for what God might do for or with him next.

No King setting on any throne ever gave more thought, devoted more energy, or expended more personal money in actual preparations for the King who would follow him than did the son of Jesse. King David was one who readily acknowledged that the great God of Heaven, his King, made great preparations on David’s behalf. He quickly gives thanks for those provisions (Psalm 23 and 61 come to mind as examples) and, David, recognizing that God had prepared him for the throne through the events of his life, became a man given to measures that provided arrangements for the King that should follow him.

David made a Tabernacle for the Ark of the Covenant. This act in itself is a very interesting study. While the altar to receive the sacrifices remained in the Tabernacle of Moses, David brought the Ark to Jerusalem and erected a Tabernacle there to house the Ark. He instituted the orders of singers in this connection. Sometime we will explore David’s “adjustments” to the worship of Israel, David’s Tabernacle, and the relationship all this has with our worship and service today; however, for now, in this article I only call attention to his preparation of that Tabernacle and its order of worship. The desire of his heart was to build a house for the LORD. Though he was denied the privilege of the actual construction of the Temple, David established the preparation for the Temple as the highest priority of the last years on the throne. He made it not only a personal calling, but also the function of his kingdom.

1 Chronicles 22:5 And David said, Solomon my son *is* young and tender, and the house *that is* to be builded for the LORD *must be* exceeding magnificent, of fame and of glory

throughout all countries: I will *therefore* now make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death.

1 Chronicles 29:1-5 Furthermore David the king said unto all the congregation, Solomon my son, whom alone God hath chosen, *is yet* young and tender, and the work *is* great: for the palace *is* not for man, but for the LORD God. Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God the gold for *things to be made* of gold, and the silver for *things* of silver, and the brass for *things* of brass, the iron for *things* of iron, and wood for *things* of wood; onyx stones, and *stones* to be set, glistening stones, and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance. Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, *which* I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, *Even* three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses *withal*: The gold for *things* of gold, and the silver for *things* of silver, and for all manner of work *to be made* by the hands of artificers. And who *then* is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the LORD?

The plans for the Temple were given to David (1 Chronicles 28:19) and he transmitted them to Solomon and charged him to build according to that pattern. He was faithful and meticulous in his preparation for this Temple.

However, King David had another preparation on his mind. He knew, because of the promises of God, that of his seed would come Messiah, the King, Who was his (David's) Lord. He knew this and he prepared for this event. That preparation seems to begin the night the war with Absalom began.

Rather than fight against his son, David left Jerusalem. Sometimes as I look at this event, it seems as if David abandons his throne and yet, it is also as if David is content to leave the question as to whether or not he is on the throne of Israel to the Throne in Heaven. David leaves Jerusalem, traveling down to the Jordan River. Pausing there, he receives word that the rebellion is established and that his life is to be taken.

2 Samuel 17:22-29 Then David arose, and all the people that *were* with him, and they passed over Jordan: by the morning light there lacked not one of them that was not gone over Jordan. Then David came to Mahanaim. And Absalom passed over Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him. And it came to pass, when David was come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash of Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and Machir the son of Ammiel of Lodebar, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim, Brought beds, and basins, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched *corn*, and beans, and lentiles, and parched *pulse*, And honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David, and for the people that *were* with him, to eat: for they said, The people *is* hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness.

Among those who met David and was apparently the motivator of the help was Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim. This is our first meeting of this man who is destined to have a vital part in the preparation for the birth of the Messiah. Notice that the first item mentioned that this man and his friends provided for David is "beds." "For," it is recorded, "they said, The people *is* hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness." His first concern was to give the weary traveler a place to lay his head. Barzillai was a practical man. As we will see, he viewed all life in the most practical ways "practical."

Time, as it always does, passes. The unavoidable battle has been fought. Absalom is dead.

David begins the return to Jerusalem. He desires to honor his friend Barzillai. The story resumes.

2 Samuel 19: 31-40 And Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim, and went over Jordan with the king, to conduct him over Jordan. Now Barzillai was a very aged man, *even* fourscore years old: and he had provided the king of sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim; for he *was* a very great man. And the king said unto Barzillai, Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem. And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? I *am* this day fourscore years old: *and* can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king? Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king: and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward? Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, *and be buried* by the grave of my father and of my mother. But behold thy servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good unto thee. And the king answered, Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do to him that which shall seem good unto thee: and whatsoever thou shalt require of me, *that* will I do for thee. And all the people went over Jordan. And when the king was come over, the king kissed Barzillai, and blessed him; and he returned unto his own place. Then the king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him: and all the people of Judah conducted the king, and also half the people of Israel.

Barzillai, ever the practical man, states that he would not be able at his age to enjoy the social life with the king and implies that he would simply be a burden to David. He asks David to take his son Chimham and look after him. This David promises to do. Chimham is not a major principal in the kingdom. He is not made a general. He does not become one of “the mighty men” of David. We know that David gives instruction for his continued care to Solomon; but neither David nor Solomon assigns him a royal title. He almost disappears from the biblical account—almost, but not quite.

Centuries pass and Chimham reappears, at least, his name does. With that reappearance, we learn volumes about David and Chimham. In Jeremiah 42:17, almost in an incidental way, we discover that the inn at Bethlehem is known as the “habitation of Chimham.”

Perhaps, Barzillai, the practical man, knew his son was not destined to be the next mayor of Rogelim and this prompted him to ask David to “take care of the boy.” David, using some of the family land near Bethlehem (remember the land, as divided under Joshua, was not to “leave the family” forever), established a business for Chimham to operate—something suitable to his ability and nature. Chimham became the innkeeper of Bethlehem. He had, as his father before him, the gift of hospitality, and David made use of it. I wonder if David did not know that one day a weary traveler and his espoused wife, great with child, would arrive in Bethlehem and need a place to rest. The man who was always preparing for *the KING Who would follow him*, prepared an inn to receive Him.

Generations pass and the inn of Bethlehem remains in place and “open” through all the changes of kings and rulers and conquerors. One night, a road-weary Joseph and Mary arrived. The inn that night was already filled to capacity. The innkeeper, however, with the gift of hospitality still evident, somehow was still prepared. In his heart, he could not turn them away. He would find room somewhere, if not in the inn. Perhaps, he thought “this might be the very One for Whom I and my fathers before me were given this job.” The inn is full, but he fulfilled his responsibility as best he could; he made room in the stable.

Through the years, the innkeeper has been given a terrible reputation. Described in the meanest of terms, this descendent of Chimham is not honored, but is instead vilified. I wonder if eternity will not reveal a very different character of this innkeeper than that which he is assigned most often. There was another eye, an evil eye, watching Bethlehem that night and that Wicked One may well have maneuvered to make certain no sheltering room existed in the inn for the birth of the Messiah. This malevolent student of Scripture may have begun his murderous intent even before the slaughter of Bethlehem's babes. I wonder if we will not find that the God of Providence, Who never slumbers nor sleeps, watched over Israel that night in such a way as to fulfill even the most minor of prophecies—Isaiah 1:3, for instance—and, in doing so, also to grant the desire of David to prepare for *the KING that was to follow him*.

I believe David made Christmas preparations a thousand years before Christmas. He prepared a place for the King of Kings to be born.

What have you prepared for the King among your multitude of seasonal preparations?

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,” “papal,” “heathen,” “compromise,” and phrases as “not in the Bible,” “worldly customs,” and “unscriptural superstitions” (apparently forgetting that no superstitions are scriptural) are directly 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.

**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 entire 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 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 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 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 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 are sound and solid reasons to have a time to rejoice in the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, and 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 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 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 unwalled 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 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 Purim; 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 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 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 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 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 Maccabean 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 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.”

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 Testament 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?

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 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 Millhouse 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, indeed, the following comments from his sermon on Sunday, December 24, 1854 are very 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 wrong way as others the right. But we will tomorrow 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!”

Spurgeon said it and I certainly find nothing within the paragraph to fault. I therefore sign my name in agreement and

—Dr. Jerald Manley

I realize that not everyone that reads this publication has received the gift of salvation. The LORD Jesus Christ actually was born of a virgin in Bethlehem those centuries ago. He came as God manifest in the flesh and He did die to secure the atonement for your soul. You cannot achieve or attain Heaven by your own efforts. Salvation is by grace through faith. Grace is unmerited favor. Faith believes what God has said, because God said it and not because it may be proved by experiment or observation.

**For God so loved the world,
that he gave his only begotten Son,
that whosoever believeth in him should not perish,
but have everlasting life.**

**For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through
him might be saved.**

**He that believeth on him is not condemned:
but he that believeth not is condemned already,
because he hath not believed**

**in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life:
and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life;
but the wrath of God abideth on him.**

John 3:16-18, 36