



“A Homily on the ‘Feast of Dedication’ at Christmas Time”

An Essay in Messianic Judaism



by

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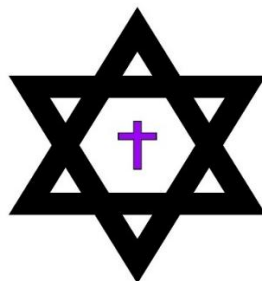


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PREFACE

“Hear ye the word which the LORD
Speaketh unto you, O house of Israel:
Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the
Way of the heathen, and be not dismayed
At the signs of heaven; for the heathen
Are dismayed at them. For the customs
Of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree
Out of the forest, the work of the hands
Of workman, with the axe. They deck it
With silver and with gold;
They fasten it with nails and with hammers,
That it move not. They are upright as the palm tree,
But speak not: they must needs be borne,
Because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them;
For they cannot do evil,
Neither also is it in them to do good.

-- Jeremiah 10: 1-5

These prophetic words of the sixth century prophet Jeremiah were spoken to the southern kingdom of Judah— i.e., to the Jews of ancient Palestine— whom he described as having “a revolting and a rebellious heart.”¹ At the heart of Jeremiah’s indictment of his beloved Jewish nation was their having “forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, neither walked therein; but have walked after the imagination of their own heart.”² The Jews of Jeremiah’s day had “hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward.”³

¹ Jeremiah 5: 23-24 (KJV).

² Jeremiah 9: 13-14 (KJV).

³ Jeremiah 7:23; 11:8; 13:10 (KJV).





When we come to chapter ten of the Book of Jeremiah, we find the great prophet forewarning the Jews against, among other things, copying and carrying out “the ways of the heathen.”⁴

But who were these “heathen”?

And why was Jeremiah admonishing his fellow Jews to not copy “heathen” practices?

Notably, the “heathen” in the Old Testament did not always or necessarily apply to all Gentile peoples, because Job (i.e., the protagonist in the Book of Job) was a Gentile who was not a “heathen.” And there are numerous instances in the Old and the New Testament where Gentiles did not act like “heathen.”

And so, to be clear, the word “heathen” could apply in general terms to anyone who systematically rebelled against God. During the times of ancient Israel, many of its surrounding nations rebelled against God through their idolatry. Idolatry, in this sense, meant any belief or practice that put objects— whether manmade or non-manmade— above the true God who has made all things.

Jeremiah’s prophecy alludes to a form of idolatry. In Jeremiah’s day, the cutting down, the fastening to the floor, and the decoration of trees with silver and gold had become part and parcel of customary practices of the “heathen.” In other words, such practices were, as Jeremiah described them, wholly “vain,”⁵ and should not be replicated among the Israelite faithful.

Three very remarkable observations can be drawn here.

First, we notice that the symbolism of a tree being cut from a forest, fastened with nail and hammer, and decorated with silver and gold is eerily similar to the Christmas trees that are utilized all throughout Christendom during Christmastime.

Second, we find that Jeremiah’s prophecy against this idolatry had come as a forewarning to the kingdom of Judah, which, because its rebellion against God,

⁴ Jeremiah 10: 2 (KJV).

⁵ Jeremiah 10: 3 (KJV).





would go into Babylonian captivity (c. 597 BC). This historic captivity of the Jews lucidly demonstrates God's seriousness in executing his divine laws against sin and idolatry.

Third, we find that instead of restoring this old kingdom of Judah, as it had previously existed, that God would make "a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah... after those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."⁶ Indeed, the institution of this "new covenant" certainly suggests that God's future chosen people would have no genuine, heart-felt desire to engage in idolatrous practices such as cutting down, fastening, and decorating trees with silver and gold.

I believe that when this great Hebrew prophet wrote this admonition against copying the practices of heathen, that he was prospectively speaking into the future to we Christian faithful.⁷ Jeremiah was here forewarning us against idolatrous practices.

Let me be clear: I am not implying that the Christmas holiday or that the Christmas tree are inherently "heathen" practices; but that, when used improperly, and if we are not careful, they may indeed become idolatrous and sinful practices.

Indulge me for a moment—I can explain!

The Christmas holiday, as you may already know, is of pagan origin. When it existed in its pagan form, the Gentiles from throughout the Greco-Roman empire did not know Christ! They were bogged down in superstition! They needed a "schoolmaster"⁸ in order to bring them to Christ! And the Roman Catholic priesthood designed the Christmas holiday to function as a "schoolmaster" in order

⁶ Jeremiah 31:33.

⁷ Jeremiah 10: 1-5.

⁸ Galatians 3:24 ("Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ....")





to bring the pagan Gentiles of the Greco-Roman empire to Christ! It was originally designed to teach the pagan Gentiles how to worship Jesus Christ!

Our church fathers “invented” the Christmas festival during the middle of the fourth century to serve as a “substitution” for Roman winter festivals such as Saturnalia (December 17-23) and Sol Invictus (December 25). This “substitution” of the Christmas holiday for these winter festivals was designed to wean the newly-admitted Christian faithful off of pagan superstition.⁹

The Christmas holiday, then, is as a “schoolmaster”¹⁰ that is designed for “babes in Christ.”¹¹ It was never meant to constitute the “meat”¹² that is the crucifixion, the death, or the resurrection of Christ Jesus who is the “Light of the World.” The fundamental point of this paper is to emphasize this important fact.

When properly utilized, Christmas is a “schoolmaster.” It is designed to teach children. It is designed to teach adults who have never heard about Christ.

But where the Christmas holiday has become idolatrous, when it has been abused and improperly used, we often find grown men and grown women engaged in excessive spending, excessive drinking, and excessive forms of debauchery leading to divers forms of depression. And we often find our churches and sanctuaries infiltrated with the money-changers and the merchants of materialism and idolatry.

The Christmas holiday has for so long functioned simply as the “milk” of the Christian religion— not as the “meat.” But this need not always be the case.

⁹ When construed from this perspective, Christmas holiday is a great good. And, yet, when not placed into its proper historical perspective, the Christmas holiday can become – as it has over the past century – a nuisance to the authentic Christian faith.

¹⁰ Galatians 3:24 (“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ....”)

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 3: 1-2 (“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat....”).

¹² Ibid.





I believe that our Christmas celebrations have for too long served as the “milk” of the Christian faith, while offering us nothing more that can be even remotely described as the “meat” of the Christian faith.

But where can we find this “meat,” or where can we find this “solid food” of the Christian religion on Christmas day?

I believe that we can find this “meat” in great Gospel music. We can also find it in the recorded sermons of our great preachers and in the sermons that are preached from the pulpits of our churches on Christmas day. But I also believe that we can find this “meat” in that higher understanding of the Jewish foundations of the Christian faith. Specifically, I believe that we can find the “meat” of the Christmas holiday in a greater understanding and appreciation of this holiday’s Jewish roots in the feast of Dedication (i.e., Hanukkah).

If you will, please indulge me for moment— I can explain!

What the Christmas holiday needs today, I think, is a *deeper reflection* of who Christ really is—a *deeper reflection* that is prefigured in that first Feast of Dedication (i.e., Hanukkah) that is described in 1 Maccabees 4:1-61. Here in the Feast of Dedication, we are reminded that Christ Jesus took on, and was born into, human flesh in order to serve as the eternal “*Light of the World*.” This is truly the “meat” of the Christmas holiday.

And so, in this paper, I write thus— not simply as a Christian— but as a Messianic Jew; and, here, I suppose that by thus so acknowledging my Jewishness, my readers may better understand the prism from which I have, in the next several pages, conceptualized the true meaning Christmas.

December 25, 2025

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INTRODUCTION

I can remember when I was only 13 or 14 years old, during the early 1980s, my dear mother made a decision to terminate my family's participation and involvement in an upcoming Christmas holiday.

The decision to terminate the participation in any form of annual Christmas celebration is an extremely difficult one for any follower of our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus to make.

I cannot recall if my mother's decision had been influenced by the local Jehovah's Witnesses; or if, after having herself obtained her own understanding of the Sacred Scriptures, whether she had decided simply to boycott and cancel that particular Christmas celebration.

But I can vividly remember both the week leading up to that cancelled Christmas holiday and the events that transpired throughout that Christmas day. The whole experience turned out to be a very stressful ordeal! I can recall that, even as a young teenager, I was doubly committed to the Lord; but still yet, as an adolescent child, I still yearned for the "milk" of Christmas gifts and the "milk" of the enjoyment of the Christmas festivities!

Over and again, my mother explained to me the reasons why we would not be celebrating the upcoming Christmas holiday; and, for that matter, why we would not be celebrating another Christmas holiday in the foreseeable future. I distinctly remember that she continued to read the following passage in Jeremiah 10: 3-4, to wit:

For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not.





And so, like the Puritans of seventeenth-century colonial New England, my mother decided not to celebrate Christmas that year!

My mother's decision caused a great stir within our extended family and community!

How could she suddenly engage in such antisocial behavior, thus breaking up the entire equilibrium of the Christmas season, of family gatherings, and of Christmas day itself!

As I can recall, during the early 1980s living in rural northern Florida, we became strong bible-believing Christians – if not altogether “self-righteous” Christians too – as well as strong, powerful apologists for the Christian faith.

Indeed, all of this caused others to see us as both antisocial and sacrilegious – our boycott of the Christmas holiday caused much confusion; and, seemly, our boycott did more harm than good. It seemingly diminished both our own spiritual well-being and the overall spirit of Peace and Goodwill to All Mankind.

As things turned out, in retrospect, we later realized that the Christmas Season was not the best time to interject new and controversial theological critiques and arguments about the true meaning of Christmas. Our boycott of Christmas was an attempt that simply fell flat, especially when directed at close family members and friends – all of whom had done us no harm, and who had only come to expect the annual exchange of Christmas love, peace, and goodwill.

For instance, on that fateful Christmas day on which we boycotted the Christmas holiday, I can recall overhearing my mother getting into prolonged verbal disputes with my grandmother, aunt, and cousins. Instead of Christmas cheer and celebration, they argued over my mother's new spiritual awareness and her ongoing efforts to enlighten them about





her own biblical interpretation of the pagan origins of the Christmas Holiday, and to persuade them that the Christmas holiday had actually had made a mockery of Christ's life, death and resurrection.

That fateful Christmas Day ended with so much stress! Even if our theological views were right and justified, it sure seemed as if our whole approach was misplaced, wrong, or simply just a bad idea. I never forgot that experience. In fact, our entire family never forgot about that experience. And so, my mother and I lived the rest of our lives [my mother recently passed away in 2025] celebrating the Christmas holiday in a more subdued, private, spiritual, and secretive manner. Instead of outwardly and openly boycotting Christmas and shutting others down, or turning others away, on Christmas day, we continued to outwardly wish others a "Merry Christmas." But we thereafter maintained a "bifurcated" approach to the Christmas season and to Christmas day.

Never again would we try to impose our own austere, Puritan-like beliefs about Christmas upon friends and family members. We continued to extend Christmas greetings and glad tidings and to promote peace and goodwill even among other friends and family members whom we disagreed with on some particulars about that holiday.

But we also internally readjusted how we celebrated the Christmas holiday. We jettisoned the Christmas tree. We played Gospel music and prepared a traditional meal on Christmas Day. We prayed together and studied the Bible. We emphasized the biblical meaning of Christ's birth, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. And, simultaneously, we continued to exchange the usual "Merry Christmas" salutations to friends, relatives, and strangers who initiated such greetings. I guess you could say that we figured out how to mix both "milk" and "meat" together at Christmas time.





Since then, I never forgot that lesson. Nor have I changed this “bi-furcated” approach to the commemoration of Christ’s birth on Christmas day – i.e., a general mixture of “milk” and “meat.”

In other words, my general approach to the Christmas holiday is to balance the needs of those Christians who continue to expect the more “traditional” Christmas celebration – e.g., Christmas trees, gifts, and so forth – while simultaneously playing the role of the “reminder” to everyone else around me regarding the true meaning of Christmas! And here, I think that I am, with this paper, continuing to carry out the same obligation as the “reminder” of the true meaning of Christmas.

My mother’s ordeal during that early-1980s Christmas Day was really a tiny microcosm of the whole history of the Christmas experience, since the Roman Emperor Constantine legalized the Christian religion in 313 AD.

In fact, if I could go back in time to the early 1980s, and if I could speak with my mother who was then in her forties, I would advise her to find a nearby church-synagogue of Messianic Jews; to substitute the Christmas holiday with the Feast of Dedications (i.e., Hanukkah); and to commemorate the birth of Christ as the Early Church did during the first three centuries of its existence; to wit, through the prism of Hanukkah.

Indeed, during the first three centuries of the Early Church’s existence, there had been no concept of a Christmas holiday. It was widely circulated that Christ might have been born during the Spring, and not during the Winter.

The Early Church was not then regulated by Roman law, but rather by the Old Testament and by Jewish law and custom. And while there had been some acknowledgement that Christ’s birth was important, Jewish law





and custom had frowned upon the celebration of birthdays. The celebrations of the birthdays of deities were then construed to be pagan practices and thus forbidden under Jewish law. The Early Church early and largely adopted this approach to birthdays, and hence Christ's birthday was never officially celebrated during this period.

Then came the Roman Emperor Constantine's conversion to the Christian faith in, circa, 312 A.D. With that conversion soon came a widespread interest in the conversions of entire groups of Gentile peoples and Gentile nations which existed under the rule of the Roman empire. This led, at the first, to the legalization of the Christian religion in 313 A.D., with Edict of Milan.

At this point in the history of the Christian church, during the middle of the fourth century, a major challenge arose, and it was namely this: *How can large segments of superstitious, pagan Roman subjects and citizens be persuaded to embrace the new Christian religion!*

The Roman bishops thus reasoned within themselves.

One way to accomplish the widespread conversion of the multitudes of pagans was to "sanitize" and (or) to "baptize" the pre-existing pagan temples, pagan rituals, pagan beliefs, pagan practices, and pagan festivals – making all of them legitimately Christian!

Heretofore, the Early Church, during the first three centuries of its existence, had been thoroughly Judaized. But now, following the conversion of Emperor Constantine in 312 A.D., the Early Church would become thoroughly Romanized (or Hellenized).

The implications of this new Romanized conversion of the Early Church were decisive and profound – the hierarchal pagan college of bishops soon dominated the ecclesiology of the Roman church; the palaces of the pagan pontiffs now characterized the seat of the bishop of Rome (the





seat of the humble St. Peter himself); and the wealthy pagan temples which the Roman senate and Ceasar had underwritten and funded became Roman Catholic basilicas, cathedrals, and churches.

Many centuries would elapse before Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) and other Protestant reformers would begin to chisel away at this ecclesiastical system—including its legal system; its hierarchical episcopal system; its ordination and charter systems; its systems of patronage and nepotism; its perversions of the written text of the Sacred Scriptures; its brutal suppression of the poor and underprivileged; and its general superstitions and corruptions, including the sale of indulgences.

Significantly, the Christmas holiday itself did not escape the scrutiny of these Protestant reformers. Many of the reformers fiercely criticized the Christmas holiday as unbiblical and, in practice, as quite nefarious.

By the late 1500s, and throughout the 1600s, the Christmas holiday was widely known for *excessive drinking* and *other sinful activities*—which is why the Puritans of Great Britain and colonial New England banned the Christmas holiday during the years immediately following the English Civil War.¹³

¹³ I have highlighted the Puritans here because they were led by dozens of very learned, able scholars and theologians. The influential Puritans, who protested the excessive powers of Anglican bishops within the Church of England, had persuaded King James I to print what became known as the King James Version of the Bible. The Puritans had also crafted the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647 and other similar erudite documents. The Puritans have produced the founders of colonial New England—erudite scholars and theologians who founded what is today known as the Ivy League colleges. The Puritans, then, were highly influential Englishmen—many of them were graduates of Oxford and Cambridge; hence, the point here is that if these Puritans, while relying upon their reading of the Sacred Scriptures, determined that the Christmas holiday was wasteful, sinful, and unbiblical, then present-day Christians (such as my mother had been) who express criticism and concern about the Christmas holiday stand with great company and upon the shoulder of very able, very erudite Christian scholars and theologians known as the Puritans.





As I am myself both a Puritan theologian and a Messianic Jew, I would be especially remiss if I did not point out that Puritans were actually “Judaizers”; that is to say, the Puritans admired the ancient Hebrews more than they admired the ancient Greeks and Romans.

For this reason, the Puritans were thus willing to read the Bible as printed in original Hebrew and original Greek (i.e., the Septuagint); and they had grown suspicious of, and were willing to bypass, the Latin Bible (i.e., the Vulgate). The Puritans also disdained many other Roman Catholic laws and customs which they believed had tainted the Western Church.

Like the Messianic Jews, the Puritans wanted to establish their churches and their civil polities, particularly in colonial British North America, along ancient Hebrew lines. Thus, holding the Old Testament in very high esteem, the Puritans of colonial New England copied and implemented Jewish customs and Jewish laws in a manner similar to how those laws were implemented in ancient Israel. This caused the Puritans to question, among other things, all of the Romish practices within the Church of England that resembled Greek and Roman paganism, such as the Christmas holiday.

Hence, I have in this paper traced the Christmas holiday back to its Hebrew roots; namely, to the Feast of Dedication (i.e., Hanukkah). Here, I have demonstrated that the Early Church, during the first three centuries of its existence, did not celebrate birthdays or Christmas; and that it commemorated the birth of Christ through the ancient Jewish Feast of Dedication (i.e., Hanukkah), which they believed reflected Christ’s purpose for entering into the physical world as a human person, i.e., to be the “Light of the World.” Here, I also argue that the Christmas holiday was created more than a century after the Early Church had already begun to associate Christ’s birth with the Feast of Dedication; and that the cultural foundation of the Christmas holiday was not ancient Hebrew or Jewish





practices, but rather that foundation was the pagan Roman festival of Saturnalia and Sol Invictus.

Nevertheless, although this may appear as counterintuitive, this paper is *not* a rejection of the Christmas holiday on the sole basis that it has pagan foundations. To the contrary, this paper is designed to provide a fair and balanced summation of the history and theology of the birth of Christ as it was commemorated through the Jewish Feast of Dedication and, later, through the Roman-sponsored Christmas holiday. I give our Roman Catholic fathers great credit in creating a Christmas holiday that was designed to be a tool (i.e., “milk”) to teach children and adults who were “spiritually child-like” about the Christian religion.

My objective here is thus not to weaken the organized Christian church, but rather my objective here is to provide a platform upon which both individual Christians and organized churches might make an attempt to improve how the Christmas holiday is organized, perceived, and celebrated.

There is no reason why the last vestiges of commercialized, pagan superstition should remain the predominant conception of the Christmas holiday! And there is no real reason why the Christmas holiday should be seen as something that is separate and distinct from the Feast of Dedication (i.e., Hanukkah). In this paper, I have demonstrated that Hanukkah was the original and first “Christmas” holy day.





I. The Early Church of the First Three Centuries was Dominated by Jewish Law and Customs and Did Not Celebrate Birthdays or Christmas

The idea of Christmas is anathema to Hebrew-Jewish civilization. The celebration of birthdays was not part and parcel of the Hebrew-Jewish religion from which the Early Church sprang. And, indeed, many first-century Jews (and Early Christians) considered the celebration of birthdays – and especially the birthdays of gods – to be “heathen” or “pagan” practices. For instance, Jewish historian Shmuel Safrai had described how ancient Jews viewed birthdays as follows:

As some laws were concerned with a child’s exact age, it may be assumed that Jewish families usually remembered the date of birth, but birthdays were not celebrated. Josephus even informs us that the Torah forbids the practice of turning the occasion of one’s birth into an opportunity for celebration and drink.... The gospels note the birthday celebrations of Herod Antipas... but tannaitic literature [from about AD 10 to approximately AD 220] mentions the celebration of birthdays only as a Gentile practice.¹⁴

Under these conditions, where the first churches were “Messianic Jewish” church-synagogues committed to following Jewish law and custom, a conceptualization of Christ’s birthday celebration was not possible.¹⁵

During the Christian era, the early followers of Christ didn’t believe in celebrating birthdays.... Their belief was that only in death was there true deliverance worthy of honoring... [a

¹⁴ Shmuel Safrai, *The Jewish People in the First Century*, (Philadelphia, PA.: Fortress Pub., 1976), vol. 2, p. 767. See, also, Norm Schneider, “The Strange Origins of Our Modern Birthday Customs,” *AssociatedContent.com*, August 13, 2008).

¹⁵ Id.





reference to Ecclesiastes 7:1, where Solomon asserts that the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth]. They also believed that Egyptian and Greek birthday celebrations were pagan festivals and should not be duplicated.¹⁶

Early Christian theologians, such as Origen of Alexandria, expressly adopted this Jewish law and custom for the Christian faithful during the first two centuries of the Early Church's existence. The early Christians and the Early Church thus condemned the celebration of birthdays as pagan practice.¹⁷

I believe, therefore, that a theological inference may be drawn that the Early Church – and particularly the Messianic Jewish church-synagogues of the first, second, and third centuries – would have construed the celebration of Christ's birthday to be more consistent with pagan, Gentile custom and practice than with Jewish custom and law. The famed Christian theologian, Origen of Alexandria (184 – 253 AD), for instance, opposed the celebration of birthdays as a practice among Christians, writing:

...of all the holy people in the Scriptures, no one is recorded to have kept a feast or held a great banquet on his birthday. It is only sinners (like Pharaoh and Herod) who make great

¹⁶ Schneider, "The Strange Origins of Our Modern Birthday Customs," *AssociatedContent.com*, August 13, 2008).

¹⁷ Bob Theil, "Did Early Christians Celebrate Birthdays? NO, only the Pagans did!" <https://www.1stcenturychristian.com/Birthdays.html> ("This article will begin with an introduction on the origin of birthdays, discuss some ancient and modern Judaic views of birthdays, discuss the Bible and early Gentile views of birthdays, and discuss how birthdays became to be celebrated amongst those that profess Christianity"). See, also, Rod Reynolds, "Should Christians Celebrate Birthdays?" *Living Church News*, May-June 2002. pp.16-18





rejoicings over the day on which they were born into this world below.¹⁸

Origen's Christian theological conception of birthday celebrations appears to have remained the predominant view, even among even Roman Catholic churchmen, up to the end of the third century.¹⁹ See Tables 1 through 3, below.

Table 1. The Early Church of the first century did *not* Celebrate Christmas

Q- "Did the Early Church of the first century (c. 34 AD to 99 AD) celebrate Christmas?"²⁰

A- "No, the Early Church (1st Century, c. 34-99 AD) did not celebrate Christmas; there are no records of a feast for Jesus' birth during this period, *as early Christians generally shunned birthday celebrations as pagan* and instead focused on Jesus' death and resurrection, with Christmas emerging as a recognized feast much later, primarily in the 4th century.

"Why No Christmas in the 1st Century:

¹⁸ Origen, in Levit., Hom. VIII, in Migne P.G., XII, 495 (Thurston H. Natal Day. Transcribed by Thomas M. Barrett. Dedicated to Margaret Johanna Albertina Behling Barrett. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume X. Copyright © 1911 by Robert Appleton Company. Online Edition Copyright © 2003 by K. Knight. Nihil Obstat, October 1, 1911. Remy Lafort, S.T.D., Censor. Imprimatur. +John Cardinal Farley, Archbishop of New York.

¹⁹ See, generally, Bob Theil, "Did Early Christians Celebrate Birthdays? NO, only the Pagans did!" <https://www.1stcenturychristian.com/Birthdays.html>.

²⁰ Disclaimer: For ease of presenting the information contained in this Essay, I have organized many of the key concepts in a "Question" and "Answer" box, whereby I have plugged in the Question in Google and, subsequently, retrieved composite answers from "AI Overview" and other data. The Reader is hereby invited to conduct independent research into these information provided in these "Question" and "Answer" boxes.





- **Pagan Association:** Birthdays, in general, were seen as pagan customs, and early Christian leaders like Origen explicitly opposed them, focusing instead on martyrs' death dates (natalitia).
- **Focus on Resurrection:** The early church emphasized Jesus' death and resurrection (Easter) as the pivotal events, not his birth.
- **Lack of Evidence:** Writings from early figures like Irenaeus and Tertullian show no mention of a nativity celebration, notes Biblical Archaeology Society.

Table 2. The Early Church of the second century did *not* Celebrate Christmas

A- "Did the Early Church of the second century (c. 100 to 199 AD) celebrate Christmas?"²¹

Q- "The Early Church of the second century (c. 100-199 AD) did **not** widely celebrate Christmas, as the commemoration of Jesus' birth was not a major feature of the Christian calendar at that time. The primary annual Christian holiday was Easter, which celebrated the resurrection.

Reasons for No Christmas Celebration in the 2nd Century

- **Opposition to Birthdays:** The celebration of birthdays was generally considered a pagan practice, a custom associated with figures like the Pharaoh and Herod in the Bible, not with Christian saints or martyrs. Church fathers like Origen of Alexandria explicitly argued against celebrating birthdays.²²

²¹ Ibid.

²² See, e.g., *Origen*, in *Levit.*, Hom. VIII, in Migne P.G., XII, 495, supra. (Origen writing "...of all the holy people in the Scriptures, no one is recorded to have kept a feast or held a great banquet on his birthday. It is only sinners (like Pharaoh and Herod) who make great rejoicings over the day on which they were born into this world below").





- **Focus on Martyrdom and Resurrection:** Early Christians primarily focused on commemorating the deaths of martyrs and the resurrection of Jesus (Easter), considering the date of death as the entry into heaven.
- **Lack of Consensus on Date:** There was no agreement on the exact date of Jesus' birth, and the Gospels do not provide a specific date.

Table 3. The Early Church of the third century did *not* Celebrate Christmas

Q- Did the Early Church of the third century (c. 200 to 299 AD) celebrate Christmas?²³

A- No, the Early Church (c. 200-299 AD) generally **did not celebrate Christmas**; the focus was on Easter (death/resurrection), and birthdays were often seen as pagan. While some early Christian writings from the 2nd century mention December 25th or the Incarnation, widespread celebration of Jesus' birth as Christmas didn't solidify until the 4th century, particularly after Emperor Constantine, coinciding with pagan festivals like Sol Invictus.

Key Points:

- **Focus on Easter:** The early church prioritized Christ's death and resurrection, celebrated at Easter, as the central event.
- **Birthday Avoidance:** Celebrating birthdays, including Jesus', was considered a pagan custom by many early figures like Origen.²⁴

²³ Disclaimer: For ease of presenting the information contained in this Essay, I have organized many of the key concepts in a "Question" and "Answer" box, whereby I have plugged in the Question in Google and, subsequently, retrieved composite answers from "AI Overview" and other data. The Reader is hereby invited to conduct independent research into these information provided in these "Question" and "Answer" boxes.

²⁴ See, e.g., *Origen*, in *Levit.*, Hom. VIII, in *Migne P.G.*, XII, 495, *supra*. (Origen writing "...of all the holy people in the Scriptures, no one is recorded to have kept a feast or held a great banquet





- **Emergence in the 4th Century:** The first clear record of Christmas as a major holiday on December 25th appears around 336 AD.
- **Pagan Influence:** The December 25th date likely coincided with existing Roman winter solstice festivals (like Saturnalia or Sol Invictus) to help transition people to Christianity.
- **Early Mentions:** Some 2nd-century texts, like Theophilus of Alexandria, hint at December 25th as a date for Jesus' birth, but it wasn't a universal feast.

In summary, while seeds were sown in the 2nd century, Christmas as we know it was largely absent and even discouraged in the first three centuries, becoming prominent only later.

II. The Early Church of the First Three Centuries and the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah)

The Early Church of the first three centuries following the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Christ did not celebrate birthdays or Christmas. At the same time, this Early Church—both the predominantly Jewish synagogue-churches and the predominantly non-Jewish churches—continued to follow Jewish law and practice, and particularly the sacred canon of the Tanakh (Septuagint), or the Greek Old Testament—which contained several books which we today call the Apocrypha (e.g., First and Second Maccabees).

For an in-depth discussion of how the Christian Church of the first, second, and third centuries developed its Christocentric hermeneutics, I direct the reader of this article to David S. Dockery's *Biblical Interpretation*

on his birthday. It is only sinners (like Pharaoh and Herod) who make great rejoicings over the day on which they were born into this world below").





*Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church.*²⁵ Notably, for the Early Church of the first century, the Old Testament was the only available sacred canon of Scripture. For instance, when the Apostle Paul had written in his second letter to Timothy that “[a]ll scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,”²⁶ his reference was to the Old Testament. As Professor Dockery has written, the Early Church during the first century was “dependent upon hermeneutical practices established in late Judaism, but they adapted the methods to the church with the addition of a Christological focus.”²⁷

The initial challenge to the young church was that of its relationship to Judaism and especially to groups of Jewish Christians known as Judaizers. The first church council was called to wrestle with this issue (cf. Acts 15). The issue was larger than whether Christianity was a sect of Judaism or an autonomous movement. Rather, it had to do with how Christians, and especially Gentile Christians, were to relate to the laws and rituals of Judaism....

The challenge for the early church was to demonstrate how the old testament was to be interpreted, clearly showing the superiority of the New Testament to the Old in a way that the church could still call the Old Testament its Scriptures without being bound to the law of the Old Testament. Two answers were proposed: (1) the typological approach of Justin Martyr, in chapter 40 in his Dialogue with Trpho, and (2) the imaginative

²⁵ David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992).

²⁶ II Timothy 3: 16.

²⁷ Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now*, supra, p. 44.





allegorical approach advanced by Origen and the Alexandrians.²⁸

The second century of the Early Church “saw the rise of a normative canon, an authoritative bishop, and an accepted rule of faith. Beginning with Ignatius and progressing with Justin [Martyr], Irenaeus, and Tertullian, there developed the contention that if anyone wished to know the true meaning of Scripture, he or she must interpret the texts under the guided authorities of the rule of faith and the bishops or presbyters of the church.”²⁹

Thus, the Early Church of the second century contained several theological heavy weights, including especially the theologians from the school at Alexandria, Egypt. Foremost amongst this group was Origen of Alexandria (184 – 253 AD), whom I have previously mentioned.³⁰ But Origen’s genius had been built upon the work of an Alexandrian Jew named Philo Judaeus of Alexandria (20 BC – 40 AD), who was a contemporary of Christ and the Apostles. Philo’s work connected Greek philosophy to the Hebrew Scriptures in a manner the prefigured “John (John 1:3), where the Logos, the Word, is the agent in creation....”³¹ Likewise, Clement of Alexandria³² demonstrated a similar genius.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 55-56.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 72.

³⁰ See, e.g., *Origen*, in *Levit.*, Hom. VIII, in Migne P.G., XII, 495, supra. (Origen writing “...of all the holy people in the Scriptures, no one is recorded to have kept a feast or held a great banquet on his birthday. It is only sinners (like Pharaoh and Herod) who make great rejoicings over the day on which they were born into this world below”).

³¹ Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now*, supra, p. 44.

³² “Clement of Alexandria” *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clement_of_Alexandria stating:





“Clement affirmed the highest possible view of the Mosaic law because it was the teaching of the divine Word, the Logos, himself. The law is not the cause of sin but a revealer of sin when the law is disobeyed. It is not contrary to the gospel but in harmony with it, and therefore binding upon all. Thus, according to Clement, the Mosaic law was the source of the laws formulated by Plato.”³³ With regards to Christ’s birth, Clement opined that his actual birth date was probably around Spring time (April or May); but that it could be commemorated around the time of the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah). Clement also considered the celebration of the births of gods or deities to be pagan in substance and origin.³⁴

Titus Flavius Clemens, also known as Clement of Alexandria (Ancient Greek: Κλήμης ὁ Ἀλεξανδρεὺς; c. 150 – c. 215 AD), was a schematic Christian theologian and philosopher who taught at the Catechetical School of Alexandria. Among his pupils were Origen and Alexander of Jerusalem.

A convert to Christianity, he was an educated man who was familiar with classical Greek philosophy and literature. As his three major works demonstrate, Clement was influenced by Hellenistic philosophy to a greater extent than any other Christian thinker of his time, and in particular, by Plato and the Stoics. His secret works, which exist only in fragments, suggest that he was familiar with pre-Christian Jewish esotericism and Gnosticism as well. In one of his works he argued that Greek philosophy had its origin among non-Greeks, claiming that both Plato and Pythagoras were taught by Egyptian scholars.

Clement is usually regarded as a Church Father. He is venerated as a saint in Coptic Christianity, Eastern Catholicism, Ethiopian Christianity, and Anglicanism. He was revered in Western Catholicism until 1586, when his name was removed from the Roman Martyrology by Pope Sixtus V on the advice of Baronius. The Eastern Orthodox Church officially stopped any veneration of Clement of Alexandria in the 10th century.[citation needed] Nonetheless, he is still sometimes referred to as "Saint Clement of Alexandria" by both Eastern Orthodox and Catholic authors.

³³ Ibid., p. 85.

³⁴ See Tables 4 and 5.





The point here is that the Early Church of the second century, with its intellectual leadership centered in Alexandria, Egypt, was a highly sophisticated, cosmopolitan church.

I find it noteworthy that both Clement of Alexandria (150 – 215 AD) and Origen of Alexandria (184 - 253 AD) explicitly rejected the celebration of birth dates as pagan; and that Clement of Alexandria explicitly held that the Feast of Dedication (i.e., Hanukkah) prefigured Christ's birth, the "Light of the World."³⁵

Table 4. Clement of Alexandria Connected Christ's Birth to the Feast of Dedication

Q- Did Clement of Alexandria connect Jesus's Birth (May) to the Feast of Dedication (December)?³⁶

A- Yes.

³⁵ There is some conflict in Clement's writings. Other sources suggest that Clement believed Christ's date of birth was between April 25th and May 31st. See, e.g., "Clement of Alexandria" *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clement_of_Alexandria ("In an attempt to demonstrate the primacy of Moses, Clement gives an extended chronology of the world, wherein he dates the birth of Christ to 25 April or May, 4-2 BC, and the creation of the world to 5592 BC.") See, also, Simon Peter Sutherland, "Clement of Alexandria on the Birth of Jesus at Nisan," <https://simonpetersutherland.com/2017/03/09/clement-of-alexandria-on-the-birth-of-jesus-at-nisan/#:~:text=So%20if%20you%20compare%20the,Reply>, quoting Clement of Alexandria as having written:

Therefore, from the birth of Christ to the death of Commodus are a total of one hundred ninety-four years, one month, and thirteen days. There are those who have calculated not only the year of our Lord's birth, but also the day. They say that it took place in the twenty-eighth year of Augustus, on the twenty-fifth day of Pachon [May 20] ... Others say that He was born on the twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth day of Pharmuthi [April 19 or 20]

³⁶ Disclaimer: For ease of presenting the information contained in this Essay, I have organized many of the key concepts in a "Question" and "Answer" box, whereby I have plugged in the Question in Google and, subsequently, retrieved composite answers from "AI Overview" and other data. The Reader is hereby invited to conduct independent research into these information provided in these "Question" and "Answer" boxes.





"Clement of Alexandria, around A.D. 200, connected Jesus' birth to the Jewish **Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah)**, suggesting the Nativity happened during this "Feast of Lights" (around December) rather than the traditional May date he also noted, seeing Jesus as the true Light fulfilling the temple's dedication miracle, linking His birth to divine illumination and spiritual understanding in his writings like the *Stromata*. He discussed the timing of Christ's birth and passion with great detail, focusing on light and spiritual meaning, not just historical dates.

Key Insights from Clement:

- **Connection to Light:** Clement saw Jesus' birth as coinciding with the Feast of Lights (Hanukkah), a celebration of the miraculous oil burning in the Temple, symbolizing Jesus as the true Light entering the world, as described in John's Gospel.
- **Spiritual vs. Literal Dates:** While he mentioned specific calendar dates (like 25 Pachon/May 20 for birth) for certain groups, his deeper interest lay in the *spiritual significance* of these dates, aligning Christ's arrival with the themes of divine revelation and light.
- **Stromata (Miscellanies):** In his major work, *Stromata*, he discusses these timings, emphasizing that the true understanding (Gnosis) comes from grasping the spiritual realities behind the events, not just historical facts.
- **Focus on the "Gnostic" Christian:** For Clement, a true "**Gnostic**" Christian understands that **the dedication of the Temple** foreshadows Christ, the true Temple, and that His birth brings the eternal light, making the *spiritual* dedication far greater than the physical one.

"In essence, Clement used the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) to highlight Jesus as the ultimate source of spiritual light, fulfilling the prophecy of the miracle of light celebrated by the Jews, making it a significant moment for the burgeoning Christian faith."

Table 5. Clement's Date of Pachon 25 Corresponds to Jewish Month of Kislev (Casleu)

How Does the Egyptian month Pachon (i.e. May) Relate to the Jewish Month Kislev (Casleu)(i.e., December)?





Q- Did Clement of Alexandria calculate the birth of Jesus to have occurred in the Egyptian month of Pachon?³⁷

A- Yes, the relevant passage is found in Book I, Chapter 21 of Clement's work *Stromata* (i.e., Miscellaneous), in which he writes: "And there are those who have determined not only the year of our Lord's birth, but also the day; and they say that it took place in the twenty-eighth year of Augustus, and in the **twenty-fifth day of Pachon**".

"Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215 AD) does not provide a specific theological treatise on the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah); however, his chronological writings in the *Stromata* (Miscellanies) are foundational to **later theories linking the feast to the birth of Jesus**.

1. Connection to the Birth of Jesus

"Clement is the first Church Father to record diverse opinions on the exact date of Christ's birth. While he does not explicitly name December 25, scholars like Alfred Edersheim and Dr. Cassel argue that Clement's data points toward a "Feast of Lights" (Dedication) context.

"The Date of **Pachon 25**: Clement notes that some assigned the Nativity to the 25th of Pachon (May 20) in the 28th year of Augustus.

"The 9th Month Link: Modern scholars often calculate that the **25th day of the 9th Egyptian month (Pachon)** corresponds symbolically or chronologically to the **25th day of the 9th Jewish month (Kislev)**, which is the **start of the Feast of Dedication**.

"Pachons & Kislev: While Hanukkah is 25 Kislev, the Coptic calendar's Pachons (around May) isn't the key date; rather, **it's the association** with the 25th of Kislev (Hanukkah) and the winter solstice timing (Dec 25) that connects the themes of dedication, light, and the birth of Christ.

"In essence, scholars see **a deliberate, symbolic alignment** by early Christians, connecting Jesus' birth to the existing Jewish celebration of dedication and light (Hanukkah) and the Roman winter solstice...."

³⁷ Disclaimer: For ease of presenting the information contained in this Essay, I have organized many of the key concepts in a "Question" and "Answer" box, whereby I have plugged in the Question in Google and, subsequently, retrieved composite answers from "AI Overview" and other data. The Reader is hereby invited to conduct independent research into these information provided in these "Question" and "Answer" boxes.





"Theology of Light: Clement's emphasis on Christ as the "True Light" in works like the *Protrepticus* (Exhortation to the Greeks) aligns with the Hanukkah theme of rededicating the temple through the miracle of light."

The Early Church of the second and third centuries thus understood that Christ's date of birth was not in December, or on the 25th of December – but rather in April or May! Nevertheless, this Early Church never resolved to celebrate Christ's birthday in April or May, because this Early Church followed Jewish law and custom, which treated birthday celebrations as pagan, idolatrous, and sinful.

Meanwhile, Clement of Alexandria and others considered the "light" celebration in the Feast of Dedication to represent the birth of Christ, since Christ himself is the "Light of the World." The menorah that is used in the Feast of Dedication thus came to represent Christ, or the birth of Christ, who is the "Light of the World."

Table 6. The Menorah as a Symbol of Jesus Christ

Q- Did the Early Church Consider the Menorah in the Feast of Dedication to Represent Jesus Christ?³⁸

A- "Yes, the Early Church, especially through the Gospel of John, **strongly associated the lights of the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) with Jesus Christ as the true Light of the World**, fulfilling the festival's themes of divine presence, dedication, and light overcoming darkness, even as early Christians also linked "light" symbolism to baptism and Epiphany.

"Key Connections:

"John 10: Jesus attends the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) in Jerusalem, where He declares, "I and the Father are one," linking Himself directly to the

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divine light celebrated during the festival, says Jews for Jesus and Associates for Biblical Archaeology.

“The ‘Light of the World’: Jesus’ self-proclamation as the ‘light of the world’ (John 8:12) resonates with the Hanukkah lights, symbolizing His role as the true Messiah and source of spiritual illumination, points Answers in Genesis and Logos Bible to.

“Fulfillment of Themes: The miracle of the oil during Hanukkah (the menorah burning for eight days) prefigures Christ, the divine oil/light, who provides eternal spiritual light and cleansing, according to Answers in Genesis and Patrick Henry College.

“New Temple/New Light: Jesus presented Himself as the new Temple and the ultimate light, fulfilling the rededication of the old Temple, note The Gospel Coalition and Jews for Jesus.”

The Early Church of the first three centuries, and today’s Messianic Jews, continue to associate the Jewish Feast of Dedication to Christ – whether as connecting the candle lights to Christ who is the “Light of the World” or the Feast of Dedication to the birth of Christ. With the firm understanding that Christ was born around the 25th day of Pachon (i.e., April or May), the Early Church (as do orthodox Messianic Jews) did not celebrate birthdays and thus did not celebrate any type of festival devoted to Christ’s birthday.

III. The Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) and Christ’s Birth

Messianic Jews thus follow the custom and practice of the Early Church of the first three centuries, which acknowledges Christ’s actual birth as having taken place in late April or May, but used the Feast of Dedication (late November or December) as an appropriate time in the





Jewish calendar (i.e., the month of Kislev or Casleu) to commemorate Christ's birth in connection with the Feast of Dedication (i.e., Hanukkah).

The Feast of Dedication, which the whole congregation of Israel ordained in circa 165 BC, is scheduled to begin on the 25th day of the month of Casleu according to the Jewish calendar, which dovetails with the months of late November and December on the Gregorian calendar utilized in the United States and the West. This same Feast of Dedication was recorded in the first two books of Maccabees, which were included in the Old Testament canon, and received in the canonized Scriptures of the Early Church.³⁹ Hence, orthodox Jews, Messianic Jews, and the Early Church during its first two centuries of existence, continued to celebrate the Feast of Dedication.

Table 7. The Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) in the Book of First Maccabees

The Book of First Maccabees (The First Feast of Dedication)

"And Mattathias cried throughout the city with a loud voice, saying, Whosoever is zealous of the law, and maintaineth the covenant, let him follow me....⁴⁰

"Then his son Judas, called Maccabeus, rose up in his stead... Judas answered, It is no hard matter for many to be shut up in the hands of a few; and with the God of heaven it is all one, to deliver with a great multitude, or a small company: for the victory of battle standeth not in the multitude of an host; but strength cometh from heaven. They come against us in much pride and

³⁹ The story of the Feast of Dedication is taken from the book of the First Maccabees, as briefly summarized in the opening Scripture. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, which is called the Septuagint, includes the books of the First and Second Maccabees. For this reason, Augustine of Hippo, who is a founding father of the Western Church, included these books in his listing of canonized Scriptures. Accordingly, as an Augustinian theologian, I too have adopted the First and Second Maccabees as "canonical."

⁴⁰ I Maccabees 2:27.





iniquity to destroy us, and our wives and children, and to spoil us: but we fight for our lives and our laws....⁴¹

“Then said Judas and his brethren, Behold, our enemies are discomfited: let us go up to cleanse and dedicate the sanctuary....⁴²

“They made also new holy vessels, and into the temple they brought the candlestick, and the alter of burnt offerings, and of incense, and the table. And upon the altar they burned incense, and **the lamps** that were upon **the candlestick** they lighted, that they might give **light in the temple**....

Then all the people fell upon their faces, worshipping and praising the God of Heaven, who had given them good success.... Thus was there very great gladness among the people, for that the reproach of the heathen was put away.

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.⁴³

-- I Maccabees, Chapters 2 through 4

Notably, the first Christians, who were almost all Jewish, associated Jesus of Nazareth as being that “lamp,” “candlestick,” and “light” which illuminated the rededication of the Temple, which the Feast of Dedication commemorates. Hence, even today, Messianic Jewish Christians, who participate in the Feast of Dedication, consider the “light” which emanates from the menorah to represent Jesus Christ, who is the “Light of the World” – thus echoing the allegorical theological assessments of Clement and the school at Alexandria.

⁴¹ I Maccabees 3: 18-21.

⁴² 1 Maccabees 4: 36.

⁴³ 1 Maccabees 4: 55-59.





Thus, in keeping with the custom of the Early Church at Jerusalem, today's Messianic Jews continue to celebrate the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah). And some Messianic Jews connect the Feast of Dedication to the Christmas holiday, and even opt to commemorate the birth of Christ through keeping this Feast of Dedication.

Table 8. Messianic Jews use Feast of Dedication to Commemorate Christ's Birth

Q- Do some Messianic Jews use the Feast of Dedication to Commemorate the Birth of Jesus Christ?⁴⁴

A- "Yes, Messianic Jews celebrate Hanukkah (Chanukah) because it's seen as a powerful symbol of God's redemptive work, the miracle of light, and a foreshadowing of Yeshua (Jesus), the "Light of the World". They observe traditional customs like lighting the menorah, eating oily foods, and playing dreidel, while focusing on themes of dedication, God's faithfulness, and *Yeshua's coming as the ultimate light, sometimes choosing to celebrate His birth during Hanukkah instead of Christmas.*

"Why it's significant for Messianic Jews:

- **"Light & Messiah:** They connect the miracle of the oil lasting eight days to Yeshua, who declared, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).
- **"Feast of Dedication:** They see it as a call to rededicate themselves to God, mirroring the Maccabees' rededication of the Temple.
- **"Biblical Feasts:** Many Messianic Jews observe biblical festivals, believing Yeshua and the early apostles did, viewing them as prophetic pictures of the Messiah.

⁴⁴ Disclaimer: For ease of presenting the information contained in this Essay, I have organized many of the key concepts in a "Question" and "Answer" box, whereby I have plugged in the Question in Google and, subsequently, retrieved composite answers from "AI Overview" and other data. The Reader is hereby invited to conduct independent research into these information provided in these "Question" and "Answer" boxes.





- **“Hope & Miracles:** It symbolizes God's enduring promises, faithfulness, and the restoration He brings, notes FIRM Israel.

“How they celebrate:

- **“Menorah Lighting:** Lighting the *chanukiah* (candelabrum) nightly, often reciting blessings that include Yeshua.
- **“Scripture Reading:** Reading passages from the Old Testament and New Testament (like John 10) that connect to Hanukkah themes, say Jewish Voice Ministries International and Life in Messiah.
- **“Traditional Foods:** Enjoying foods fried in oil, such as *latkes* (potato pancakes) and *sufganiyot* (jelly doughnuts).
- **“Connecting to Christmas:** Some *use Hanukkah to celebrate Yeshua's birth, as it falls near Christmas, viewing it as a more spiritually grounded celebration of the ‘Light.’*”

Nevertheless, we must note that the association of Christ's birth (late April/May) to the Feast of Dedication (late November/December) is a form of “priest craft” that was neither instituted by Christ himself nor deemed mandatory as a formal sacrament of the Early Church. Using the allegorical methods of the Alexandria school of the second and third centuries, the Feast of Dedication's “light” came be associated with Jesus, who is the “Light of the World,” but not explicitly a birthday celebration.

Jesus taught in Jerusalem during the established Jewish feast days.⁴⁵ In the Gospel of John, for instance, Jesus is associated with the Feast of Dedication,⁴⁶ where He taught that God the Father and God the Son are

⁴⁵ See, e.g., John 7: 1-53 (Jesus taught in Jerusalem as the Feast of the Tabernacles (Sukkot)).

⁴⁶ John 10: 22-42.





one.⁴⁷ Since the Gospel of John implies that Christ himself kept the Feast of Dedication (i.e., Hanukkah), we too may safely conclude that Christians, too, ought to keep the Feast of Dedication and to not reject it as an obsolete Jewish holiday.

IV. The Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) has a More Historical Nexus to the Birth of Christ than Does Christmas

The Christmas holiday must thus be fairly examined in light of the history of the Early Church during its first four centuries of existence.

The first recorded Church council occurred in Jerusalem in order to discuss whether the newly-admitted Gentiles must be circumcised and thus adhere to all of the law of Moses (Acts 15). While it was widely reported that the Apostle James, who spoke on behalf of the entire counsel, gave reasons for why the Gentiles did not need to be circumcised, there has been some debate as to whether this early counsel only desired to make it easier for the Gentiles to join the church (i.e., baptism, receipt of the Holy Spirit) without unnecessary, onerous burdens (e.g., circumcise), while gradually affording newly-converted Gentiles to learn more and more about the Law of Moses over time. This argument is based upon the Apostle James's assertion in Acts, to wit:

But that we write unto [the Gentiles], that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every

⁴⁷ John 10: 30 ("I and my father are one").





city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.⁴⁸

As a Messianic Jew (and a Primitive Baptist), I accept this position. The only “bible” then in existence was the Old Testament (i.e., the Septuagint), which contained the books of the Maccabees (including the Feast of Dedication). Here the Apostle James, while speaking for the whole church counsel at Jerusalem, held the Gentiles be allowed to join the church under more lenient standards (i.e., without circumcision) because over time they would eventually learn, and incorporate, the standards contained in the Law of Moses over time (including perhaps the circumcision of their children upon the 8th day of birth).

The Early Church—especially during the first three or four centuries of its existence—did not treat the Jewish customs and laws with disdain, particularly those explicitly mentioned in the Old Testament and which Christ himself practiced. This would have included the absence, or prohibition, of birthday celebrations within Jewish law and custom. But, as the Apostle Paul soon learned, dealing with the Gentiles and their customs proved to be one of the major hurdles of ministry to the Gentiles.⁴⁹ On the one hand, the Gentiles appeared to be more receptive to the Gospel than the Jews, and since the Gentiles far outnumbered the Jews, the Early Church rapidly became a “Gentile” institution with Jewish history and custom.⁵⁰ On the other hand, Jewish converts were still encouraged to remain a part of the Jewish nation and to keep the law of Moses.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Acts 15: 20-21.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Acts 17: 16-34 (The Apostle Paul addressing the Men of Athens, Greece).

⁵⁰ See, generally, the Book of Acts.

⁵¹ Acts 21: 17-26.





This system of accepting both Gentiles and Jews into the Early Church under two separate tracks eventually broke down in the fourth century, because the Roman emperor Constantine became interested in the new Christian religion, legalized it, and, subsequently, organized and reshaped it into religious suitable to the Roman empire. When this occurred, the Gentile leadership took control of the Early Church – making it less Jewish and more Gentile.

In order to appease the masses of Gentiles who worshipped all sorts of pagan gods and mysteries, the Early Church of the fourth century, primarily under Constantinian influence and leadership, developed a form of “priest craft” which enabled the Early Church to convert old pagan temples into churches; to convert old pagan ecclesiastical offices into bishoprics; and to convert old pagan festivals into Christian holy days.

It has been reported that several Popes were masters at doing this – including Pope Julius I and Pope Gregory the Great. Under their leadership, many pagan religious institutions, ecclesiastical offices, and religious festivals – all of which had been instituted and organized under well-crafted Roman law and administration – became Christian-Catholic institutions, offices, and festivals. It was believed that this process was harmless but necessary – otherwise the masses of pagans throughout the Roman empire could not easily accept or grasp the new Christian religion.

This is, in fact, precisely how the Christmas holiday (December 25th) became part and parcel of the Christian religion and the Early Church. The Early Church – *through priestcraft* – extracted the Christmas holiday from ancient pagan traditions that were organized around the winter solstice and, later, the Roman celebration of Saturnalia (December 17-23) and the Sun God (Sol Invictus, or the unconquered sun)(December 25th).





Table 9. The Early Church in the Fourth Century created the Christmas Holiday

Q- Did the Early Church of the fourth century (c. 300 to 399 AD) celebrate Christmas?⁵²

A- “Yes, the Early Church in the fourth century (starting around 336 AD) began celebrating Christmas on December 25th, but it wasn't a major festival initially; for the first three centuries, many Christians didn't celebrate Jesus' birth at all, focusing more on his death/resurrection, though the date was formalized in Rome under Emperor Constantine, merging with existing winter solstice celebrations.

“Before the 4th Century (c. 300 AD):

- **No Celebration:** For the first few centuries, most Christians didn't celebrate Jesus' birth as a specific feast day, viewing it as a pagan practice or focusing on martyrs' deaths.
- **Pagan Roots:** December 25th was associated with Roman pagan festivals like Saturnalia and Sol Invictus, notes from [Findmypast](#).

“The 4th Century Shift (c. 300 - 399 AD):

- **“Legalization of Christianity:** Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in the Roman Empire in **313 CE** with the Edict of Milan, a decree that granted religious tolerance to all faiths, officially ending state-sponsored persecution of Christians and allowing them to practice openly.
- **“Formalization:** The first recorded celebration of Christ's birth on December 25th in Rome was around 336 AD, under Emperor [Constantine](#).

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- **“Integration:** The Church began to Christianize existing winter festivities, incorporating Christian meaning into popular dates.
- **“Pope:** Later, Pope Julius I (337-352 AD) officially established December 25th as the annual date for celebrating Jesus' birth in Rome, solidifying the practice.⁵³
- **“Eastern vs. Western Church:** The Eastern Church initially focused on January 6th (Epiphany) for both Christ's birth and baptism, with the December 25th date gradually adopted in the East later in the 4th century.
- **“Official Religion of Roman Empire:** Emperor Theodosius I made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire in **380 CE** with the **Edict of Thessalonica**, which established Nicene Christianity as the state church and mandated adherence to its doctrines, effectively making it the sole legal religion and persecuting other Christian groups as heretics.”

I do not here write to criticize every decision which the Early Church made in this regard. My purpose now is to point out the historical facts relating to the foundations of the Christmas holiday, and to explain why that holiday is far less “Christian” than most people believe, even though its encouragement of peace on earth and love for all mankind remains laudable. The Early Church of the fourth century – that is to say, the Roman imperial rulers who wished to embrace the Christian religion – had to confront a pre-existing Gentile civilization that had not known either the law of Moses or the Christian religion. That Gentile civilization knew

⁵³ See, also, Ed Bointano, “Saturnalia and the History of Christmas,” stating “Pope Julius I chose December 25, 336 AD as the date when Christmas was first celebrated in an effort to adopt and absorb the traditions of the pagan Saturnalia festival.””

<https://travelingboy.com/travel/saturnalia-history-christmas/>





paganism – amongst which were the festivals organized around the winter solstice.

A solstice is the time when the Sun reaches its most northerly or southerly excursion relative to the celestial equator on the celestial sphere. Two solstices occur annually, around 20–22 June and 20–22 December. In many countries, the seasons of the year are defined by reference to the solstices and the equinoxes.⁵⁴

The Roman Catholic Church – both the Eastern and Western churches combined – grappled with civilizational facts then predominant among the Gentiles. And there were, for example, a variety of winter solstice traditions among the Gentiles in the ancient world.

Table 10. The Winter Solstice among Many Gentile Civilizations and Religions

Q- Is Christmas holiday of December 25th linked to the Winter Solstice among the pagan Gentiles? ⁵⁵

A- Yes.

“The **Winter Solstice** celebrates the rebirth of the sun, featuring various sun deities like the Roman Sol Invictus (Unconquered Sun) and the Persian Mithras, **often linked to the December 25th** date for their ‘birthdays,’ marking the return of longer days, alongside Norse gods like Freyr and figures like the Anglo-Saxon Odin, all symbolizing renewal and the sun's increasing power.

“Key Sun Gods & Deities Associated with Winter Solstice:

⁵⁴ “Solstice,” *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solstice>.

⁵⁵ Disclaimer: For ease of presenting the information contained in this Essay, I have organized many of the key concepts in a “Question” and “Answer” box, whereby I have plugged in the Question in Google and, subsequently, retrieved composite answers from “AI Overview” and other data. The Reader is hereby invited to conduct independent research into these information provided in these “Question” and “Answer” boxes.





"Sol Invictus (Roman): The "Unconquered Sun," a powerful sun god whose cult celebrated his birth around the solstice, influencing later Christian traditions.

"Mithras (Persian/Roman): A solar deity whose resurgence at the solstice marked the increase in daylight, a major mystery cult in Rome.

"Sol (Norse): The Norse sun goddess (often called Sol, though sometimes conflated with male figures), whose rebirth was celebrated, notes Study.com.

"Ra (Egyptian): Though linked to the solstice's lowest point, Egyptians celebrated the sun god Ra's "rebirth" as the sun began its ascent, explains Reddit users.

"Other Deities & Traditions:

"Freyr (Norse): God of fertility, honored during Norse solstice celebrations (Yule).

"Odin (Norse): Honored during the Scandinavian festival of Jul (Yule).

"Saturn (Roman): Celebrated during the week-long Roman festival of Saturnalia around the solstice, focusing on revelry and gifts.

"These deities and festivals represent the universal human response to the winter solstice – celebrating the sun's return and the promise of longer, brighter days after the year's shortest day, according to Agway of Cape Cod."⁵⁶

The specific winter solstice commemoration most relevant to, or influential upon, the Early Church, was that of celebration of Sol Invictus on December 25th. The reason for this is that before Emperor Constantine converted to the Christian faith, he believed in, and celebrated, both the festival of Saturnalia and the sun god Sol Invictus.

⁵⁶ Ibid.





Table 11. *Emperor Constantine Coin, with Constantine's facial image on Front, and sun god Sol Invictus on Back, circa 315 AD.*



Coin of Emperor Constantine I depicting
Sol Invictus with the legend SOLI INVICTO COMITI, c. 315

In 274 AD, the December 25th festival became an add-on to the pre-existing 7-day festival of Saturnalia (December 17th – 23rd), which had existed in ancient Rome since 497 BC. The Saturnalia festival had feasting, gift-giving, and role reversals whereby the rich served the poor. The festival became part of this winter festival in 274 AD, making December 25 the day on which Sol Invictus would be worshiped and celebrated.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ "Sol Invictus," Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sol_Invictus, stating:

Festival of Dies Natalis Solis Invicti

According to some scholars, the emperor Aurelian instituted in AD 274 the festival *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti* ('birthday of the Invincible Sun') on 25 December, the date of the winter solstice in the Roman calendar. In Rome, this yearly festival was celebrated with thirty chariot races. Gary Forsythe, Professor of Ancient History, says "This celebration would have formed a welcome addition to the seven-day period of the Saturnalia (December 17–23), Rome's most joyous holiday season since Republican times, characterized by parties, banquets, and exchanges of gifts". Before Aurelian, the Calendar of Antiochus of Athens, c. second century AD, had marked 25 December as the 'birthday of the Sun' but did not refer to any religious festival being held on that date. Around AD 238, Censorinus had written in *De Die Natali* that the winter solstice was the 'birth of the Sun.'





Table 12. Sol Invictus, the official sun god of the late Roman Empire

Sol Invictus (Roman), instituted c. 274 AD

Sol Invictus ("Unconquered Sun") was the official sun god of the late Roman Empire, elevated to a supreme deity by Emperor Aurelian in 274 AD to unify the empire, often depicted as a radiant youth driving a chariot, and his December 25th festival (*Dies Natalis Solis Invicti*) marked the winter solstice and influenced the date for Christmas. This cult merged Eastern solar traditions (like [Mithraism](#)) with Roman ones, symbolizing imperial power and eternity, remaining influential until Christianity's rise.

Key Aspects of Sol Invictus:

- **Origin & Elevation:**

Though solar worship existed, Aurelian established Sol Invictus as the empire's chief god, building temples and creating a priestly college for him.

- **Syncretism:**

He absorbed traits from other deities like Helios, Apollo, and Mithras, making him a universally appealing deity for the diverse empire.

- **Imagery:**

Often shown with a sun-ray crown, driving a chariot, symbolizing eternal power and victory, and frequently appeared on coins.

- **Festival:**

His feast day, *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti* (Birth of the Unconquered Sun), celebrated on December 25th, coincided with the winter solstice (the point of shortest day, longest night, and rebirth of the sun).

- **Legacy:**

The cult provided a powerful symbol of unity and was a significant precursor to Christianity's eventual dominance, with early Christian art sometimes adapting Sol's imagery for Christ.

In summary:





Sol Invictus was a powerful, unifying late Roman solar deity whose cult, established by Emperor Aurelian, promoted imperial strength and provided a rich symbolic backdrop for the transition to Christianity, influencing its major festivals like Christmas.

The Early Church up to the middle of the fourth century did not celebrate the “birth of Christ” because it did not celebrate birthdays. During this period, the Early Church would have acknowledged and commemorated the birth of Christ in the Jewish fall festival known as the Feast of Dedication. However, after the Roman emperor Constantine himself converted to the Christian religion and created the Nicene church, both Jewish custom and law (including the Jewish festivals) were held in suspense, and they were submerged and subordinated to Roman law. This Roman law, without question, governed both government administration and religious administration. Hence, Roman religious administration suppressed many of the Jewish laws and customs which the Early Church (particularly the Messianic Jews) had embraced. To thus convert the common peoples of the Roman empire, Constantine and his newly-appointed bishops instituted a policy of “priest-craft” whereby the old pagan temples, rituals, and festivals would be “baptized” (i.e., cleansed) and converted into “Christian” temples, rituals, and festivals. This is, in fact, how Saturnalia and the celebration of Sol Invictus on December 25th became the Catholic mass or feast day known as Christmas.





Table 13. The Roman Catholics Converted Sol Invictus Day into Christmas Day

Q- Did the Roman Church Covert Pagan Festivals to Christian Holidays?⁵⁸

A- “Yes, the Roman Catholic Church adopted and reinterpreted many pagan festivals and customs to help convert pagans, strategically placing Christian holidays on the same dates as major pagan celebrations like the winter solstice (Saturnalia/Yule) for Christmas and Samhain for Halloween (All Saints' Eve) to ease the transition to Christianity by making celebrations familiar, while shifting focus to Christian meaning.

“Examples of Pagan Roots in Christian Holidays:

“Christmas (December 25th): Placed near the winter solstice, coinciding with Roman festivals like Saturnalia and the Mithraic "Birthday of the Unconquered Sun," to absorb pagan celebrations of the returning light.

“Halloween (October 31st): The Catholic Church moved All Saints' Day (All Hallows' Day) to November 1st, making October 31st "All Hallows' Eve" (Halloween) to counter the Celtic festival of Samhain, which marked the end of summer and harvest.

“Easter & Vernal Equinox: Easter's timing, linked to the spring equinox, incorporated older traditions related to rebirth and fertility, notes this Quora post.

The Church's Strategy:

“Assimilation: Early Church leaders recognized pagan festivals were deeply ingrained in culture and adapted them, a strategy encouraged **by figures like Pope Gregory the Great (c. 597 AD) to "baptize" existing customs.**

“Familiarity: By aligning Christian holidays with established dates, the Church made it easier for new converts to transition without giving up all familiar celebrations, hoping the old meanings would fade over generations.

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“Reinterpretation: The goal was to redirect the focus from pagan deities and practices to Christian figures and events, transforming them rather than simply banning them.

“While some argue this was purely manipulative, historians point out that it was a complex, gradual process of cultural integration to facilitate the spread of Christianity across the Roman Empire.”

Table 14. The Pagan Roots of the Christmas Tree

Q- Does the Christmas tree have pagan origins?⁵⁹

A- “Yes, the Christmas tree has **deep roots in pagan traditions**, with ancient peoples using evergreen boughs and trees to celebrate winter solstice, symbolizing life and renewal, but the modern custom of decorating a full tree inside the home developed later in 16th-century Germany with Christian traditions, notably Martin Luther adding candles, eventually blending these old symbols into the Christian holiday.

“Pagan & Pre-Christian Roots:

- **“Evergreens as Symbols:** Pagans in Europe used evergreen plants like firs and holly to decorate homes and temples during the dark winter months, seeing them as signs of life, fertility, and protection against evil spirits as the sun returned.

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- **“Winter Solstice:** Cultures like the Romans during their Saturnalia festival (honoring Saturn) and Germanic tribes (Yule) decorated with evergreens to welcome the rebirth of the sun and the coming spring.
- **“Norse & Celtic:** Some traditions involved sacred trees, like Yggdrasil, or decorating with apples and candles during winter celebrations.

Transition to Christianity:

- **“Christian Adaptation:** As Christianity spread, it often incorporated existing customs, transforming pagan symbols into Christian ones.
- **“St. Boniface Legend:** A legend says St. Boniface chopped down a sacred oak to Thor and used a fir tree to represent the Holy Trinity and eternal life to German tribes.
- **“German Origins:** The specific practice of bringing full trees indoors and decorating them began in 16th-century Germany, evolving from medieval ‘Paradise Trees’ used in Adam and Eve plays.

Modern Popularization:

- **“Martin Luther:** He is credited with adding candles to trees in the 1500s, linking them to endless life in Christ.
- **“Victorian Era:** The trend became widespread in the English-speaking world after Queen Victoria and German Prince Albert popularized them in the 1840s.

“So, while the modern Christmas tree is a Christian tradition, its symbolic use of evergreens stems directly from ancient pagan winter celebrations.”





Table 15. The Pagan Roots of Christmas Gift-Giving

Q- Does the Christmas “gift-giving” have pagan origins? ⁶⁰

A- “Yes, Christmas gift-giving has significant roots in pagan winter solstice festivals like the Roman **Saturnalia**, where exchanging simple gifts (tokens, root crops) was common, a tradition later adopted and reinterpreted by early Christianity to align with the gifts of the Magi and the generosity of St. Nicholas (Santa Claus). Early Christians integrated existing popular customs, including feasting and gift exchange, from these pagan celebrations to make the new Christian holiday more appealing and easier to adopt.

Pagan Roots (Saturnalia & Yule)

- **Saturnalia:** A Roman festival in December honoring the god Saturn, involving feasting, merrymaking, and gift-giving (wax models, dice, candles, honeyed cakes).
- **Winter Solstice:** Germanic Yule traditions also involved feasting, greenery, and gift-giving during the darkest days of winter, celebrating the sun's return.

Christian Adaptation

- **Incorporation:** Early Church leaders adopted popular practices from these festivals, including gift-giving, to ease the transition to Christianity.
- **Magi:** The biblical story of the Three Wise Men bringing gifts (gold, frankincense, myrrh) to baby Jesus provided a Christian narrative for the practice.
- **St. Nicholas:** The tradition was further shaped by St. Nicholas of Myra, a 4th-century saint known for secret gift-giving, becoming the basis for Santa Claus.

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Evolution

- The practice evolved, with gift-giving sometimes shifting to St. Nicholas Day (Dec 6) before moving back to Christmas Day, especially after Puritan bans on Christmas festivities.

In essence, while the core Christian meaning of Christmas is distinct, many of its beloved customs, including gift exchange, are a blend of ancient pagan traditions creatively repurposed within a Christian framework.

Therefore, I have concluded that the Christmas holiday has less connections to the historical Jesus and his birth than do the **Feast of the Dedication** (Chanukah; Hanukkah), 25 Kislev [Nov. -December), – or any of the other major festivals of the Old Testament, including:

- a. *Feast of Passover* (Pesach), 14 Nissan [March or April];
- b. *Feast of Unleavened Bread* (Hag HaMtzot), 15-21 Nissan [March or April];
- c. *Feast of First Fruits* (Reishit), 16 Nissan [March or April];
- d. *Feast of Weeks* (Pentecost; Shavot), 6 Sivan [May or June]; and,
- e. **Feast of Tabernacles** (Sukkot; Booths), 15 Tishrei [Sept. or Oct].

Unlike the Christmas celebration, Jesus of Nazareth expressly participated in each of these Jewish feast days. The first Apostles, including Paul, kept them; and it was the expressed belief of the Early Church of the first three centuries that Christ himself was prefigured in, and fulfilled, each of these Jewish feast days. Therefore, the Early Church did not believe that Christ's fulfillment of these Jewish feast days had abrogated and annulled them. Hence, for instance, as I have previously demonstrated, the Early Church of the second century, as reflected in the writings of Clement of Alexandria,





believed that Hanukkah (i.e., the Feast of Dedication) represented Christ as the “Light of the World,” and it continued to commemorate this holy day as a Christian festival.

We may thus rightfully conclude that the Feast of Dedication (i.e., Hanukkah) is more much more historically and biblically “Christian” than “Christmas.” The former (i.e., Hanukkah) is clearly biblically authorized, while the later (i.e., Christmas) clearly is found no where in the Sacred Scripture.

V. Why did the Early Church of the Fourth and Fifth Centuries Accept the Christmas Holiday?

The Roman Catholic Church – both the Western and Eastern churches – embraced the Christmas holiday for cultural reasons – as well as for biblical ones.

To the Gentile Christians, the Holy Spirit had made the “unclean” foods and rituals of paganism “clean” through the redemptive blood of Christ Jesus. As I have alluded to in my introduction, the Roman Catholic Church needed some form of spiritual “milk” to introduce large segments of pagan populations to the Christian faith.

How far this could go remained to be seen.

The Protestant Reformation, which occurred more than twelve centuries later, would have a lot to say about whether the Roman Catholic Church [and perhaps its other sister orthodox Churches] had gone too far in incorporating pagan customs, rituals, and festivals [including even Roman civil law and Roman hierarchical ecclesiastical structure] into the Christian religion, in order to provide proverbial spiritual “milk” to the pagans.





The one Christian theologian of the fourth and fifth centuries whose theological views I rely upon and respect the most is Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 AD). While researching the theological issues presented in this paper, I especially wanted to know what Augustine thought about the newly-established Christian holiday. In my mind, if Augustine accepted it, then I was so inclined to accept Augustine’s theological conclusions on the matter. If Augustine rejected it, I was all the more inclined to also reject it. As I am a Puritan theologian who leans more towards Augustine than Calvin, I tend to lean heavily in favor of Augustine’s judgments on difficult theological questions.

But in Augustine’s theology, I did not find what I thought I would find. Instead, I found another “independent” assessment of the December 25th date – something different and new. For instance, Augustine believed that the December 25th date was a plausible day to celebrate Christ’s birthday, since there had been up to his time a plausible theological debate which had concluded that the virgin Mary had conceived during March or April, making December the likely period of Christ’s birth. Relying on this assessment, Augustine thus concluded that the December 25th date was a plausible date for the celebration of Christmas. Augustine also argued that the proximity of Christmas to the pagan celebration of the of Sol Invictus was immaterial or a coincidence.

Table 16. Did Augustine of Hippo Accept the Christmas Holiday

Q- Did Augustine of Hippo Oppose December 25th as Proper Date for Christ’s Birth and Celebration?⁶¹

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A- “No, Augustine of Hippo (4th-5th century) did not oppose December 25th as Christmas; rather, he wrote about it, linking it to calculations placing Jesus's conception on March 25th (the Annunciation/spring equinox) and affirming the date as a holy celebration of Christ, even as it coincided with the Roman Sol Invictus festival. He viewed it as a significant Christian day to celebrate God's humility and truth, contrasting it with pagan worship of the sun, though he sometimes discussed it as a commemoration rather than a sacrament.

“Augustine's Views on December 25th:

- **“Affirmation:** He explicitly mentioned holding December 25th holy, stating, "We hold this day (December 25th) holy, not like the pagans because of the birth of the sun, but because of him who made it".
- **“Calculation:** Augustine supported the theological calculation that Jesus was conceived on March 25th (the traditional date of the Annunciation and often linked to creation/crucifixion) and born nine months later on December 25th.
- **“Context:** He wrote about the Donatists (a dissident North African group) celebrating Christmas on December 25th, suggesting the practice predated Constantine and was rooted in older traditions, not just a pagan co-option.
- **“Spiritual Meaning:** He emphasized that this day marked "Truth sprang out of the earth, and the Day of Day was born to bring light into our day," urging Christians to rejoice in God's humility.

“In essence, Augustine was a key figure in solidifying the celebration of Christmas on December 25th, offering theological justifications and celebrating its spiritual significance, even while acknowledging its proximity to pagan festivals like Sol Invictus.”

Thus, in Augustine’s theology, Christ and the church had conquered Caesar and the Roman empire – the “unconquered sun god” and been





replaced with the true “Sun of Justice.”⁶² But, quite honestly, this is one of the rare moments in my theological assessment where I find myself in disagreement with Augustine on this point; and, here, I believe that Augustine’s role as a Catholic bishop prevented him from articulating an opposite position. It is likely that Augustine believed that a concession was necessary here for the overall good of the Church.

Ultimately, what Augustine insisted upon was a Christmas holiday that was truly spiritual and truly holy – even if it had pagan foundations. For instance, while Augustine considered the Christmas holiday to be a legitimately “Christian” means to honor the birth of Christ, his theology on Christmas overwhelming admonishes the Christian faithful to keep the day holy. Augustine says nothing of decorating trees, cooking meals, giving gifts, family gatherings, festive drinking, partying, and engaging in sports and games – all activities which the Christmas celebration has customarily inherited from Saturnalia and the Sol Invictus festivals. For Augustine, such raucous “Christmas” activities were to be exchanged with prayer and fasting and true worship of the Son of God.⁶³ Like the Early Church and the

⁶² See Augustine’s *Sermon 191* (“Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, the true Sun of Justice”).

⁶³ Ibid. Augustine offers his opinion on how Christians should think and act on Christmas as follows:

Do not consider yourselves sterile because you remain virgins, for that holy integrity of the flesh conduces to fertility of the soul. Do as the Apostle directs. Since you do not ponder over the things of the world, wondering how you may please husbands, think about the things of the Lord and consider how you can please Him in all respects, so that you may have offspring, not of the flesh, but of the soul, that is, of virtues. Finally, I address all here present; I speak to all; I include in my exhortations the whole Church, that chaste virgin whom the Apostle speaks of as espoused to Christ. Do, in the inner chambers of your soul, what you view with amazement in the flesh of Mary. He who believes in his heart unto justice conceives Christ; he who with his mouth makes profession of faith unto salvation brings forth Christ. Thus, in your souls, let fertility abound and virginity be preserved.





Apostle Paul, Augustine of Hippo appears to have had faith in the work of the redemptive power of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentile believers within the Church. For it is this Augustinian conception of Christmas as a most venerable of holy days, that we present-day Messianic Jews join with the entire world of Christendom in the commemoration of Christ's birth of December 25th. We Messianic Jews do this out of respect towards all of the Christian faithful within the body of Christ! We Messianic Jews do this out of Christ's commandment to love (John 13: 34-35). And we Messianic Jews do this in the spirit of ecumenical compromise and toward the ecumenical unity of the whole body of Christ (Jew and Gentile).

VI. Why did the Puritans Reject the Christmas Holiday?

I now return briefly to my mother's decision to boycott the Christmas holiday during the early 1980s. I cannot help but to think that she had been acting from Puritan instincts. When I became an adult and learned about why the Puritans outlawed the Christmas holiday during the seventeenth century, I more fully understood what my mother was thinking when she boycotted the Christmas holiday during the early 1980s.

Today, I acknowledge myself as a Messianic Jew. And we Messianic Jews are also closely aligned theologically and spiritually with the English Puritans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who opposed the Christmas holiday. I recognize that these English Puritans lived more than twelve hundred years after the death of Augustine of Hippo; and by that time, the Puritans had witnessed ecclesiastical abuses and awful subterfuges within of the Western Church and which Augustine could not have foreseen. Not only did the English Puritans object to the abusive commercialization of the Christmas holiday, but they also objected to its pagan Roman history, influences, and symbols. Just as the Jews had sought to purify the Second Temple from corrupt Hellenization (i.e.,





history of the Hanukkah festival), so too did the English Puritans desire to purify the Church of England from its corrupted Roman and pagan practices. The Puritans believed that Christmas was one of the corrupted Roman and pagan practices within the Church of England and that, as such, Christmas should be abolished.

Table 17. The English Puritans Abolished the Christmas Holiday

Q- Did the English Puritans oppose the Christmas festival as not having a Scriptural or Biblical foundation?⁶⁴

A- “Yes, English Puritans strongly opposed the Christmas festival, viewing its traditions as pagan, Catholic, and scripturally baseless, leading them to ban celebrations in England (1644-1660) and the Massachusetts Bay Colony (1659-1681) through laws that fined people for feasting or taking the day off, effectively making it a workday. They saw Christmas revelry, drinking, and elaborate customs as sinful distractions and dishonoring to God, preferring simple, Bible-focused worship.

“Reasons for Puritan Opposition

- **“Lack of Biblical Basis:** Christmas traditions like feasting, caroling, and gift-giving weren't commanded in the Bible, so Puritans felt they couldn't be justified.
- **“Catholic & Pagan Roots:** They associated Christmas with Papist (Catholic) idolatry and older pagan winter solstice festivals, which they wanted to purge from Christian practice.

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- **“Spiritual Disorder:** They believed the holiday led to drunkenness, rowdiness, gambling, and general debauchery, which they saw as spiritually crass and socially disruptive.
- **“Dishonoring Christ:** Figures like Cotton Mather argued that the excesses of Christmas actually dishonored Jesus more than any other time, according to a Fraunces Tavern Museum article.

“Actions Taken

- **“England:** In 1644, the Puritan-controlled Parliament banned Christmas services and celebrations, enforced by soldiers who stopped festivities and confiscated food.
- **“Massachusetts Bay Colony:** They made celebrating Christmas illegal in 1659, fining anyone caught observing it.

“Outcome

- “Despite Puritan efforts, public desire for celebration persisted, leading to riots and continued secret observance, notes a post from the Fraunces Tavern Museum.
- “After the English Restoration in 1660 and when Puritan power waned in New England, Christmas traditions gradually returned, says the Fraunces Tavern Museum.
- “Modern Puritan and Presbyterian ‘orthodox’ theology is unchanged, although “liberal” practices have crept into many of these denominations.”⁶⁵

The English Puritans were also a part of a larger Protestant movement that sought to reform the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England. Some Protestant reformers, such as Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) and John Calvin (1509 – 1564) did not wish to abolish

⁶⁵ See, e.g., “Christman: No Celebrating Allowed?” [*Presbyterians Today*, Nov. 21, 2021] <https://pcusa.org/news-storytelling/news/2021/11/11/christmas-no-celebrating-allowed>





Christmas – they simply wished to reform it, to keep it holy. Other Protestant reformers, such as Ulrich Zwingli (1484 -1531) wished to abolish Christmas altogether.

Table 18. Martin Luther Adopted the Christmas Holiday almost Intact from the Roman Catholic Church

Q- Did Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) celebrate the Christmas Holiday? ⁶⁶

A- “[Yes,] Luther, the fieriest, funniest and most charismatic of the three Reformers loved celebrating Christmas and he often preached upon the birth of Christ as 25th December drew near.

“Given that Luther embraced the normative principle of worship, namely, that **all that the Bible does not prohibit may have a place in the church, the German felt entirely justified upon celebrating the incarnation of the Son of God in a special way at least once a year.**

“In his sermon entitled ‘To Us a Child Is Born’ (preached on 25th December, 1531), Luther honed in upon the faith of the shepherds who, ‘in spite of what their five senses told them [...] concluded: this is the King, the Saviour, the great joy of the people. **There was nothing great in the hearts of those shepherds save for the words of the angel.** In fact, they were so great that except for them the shepherds saw nothing else. They were filled with those words just like drunkards and they made them known without being in the slightest bit concerned about what the great lords in Jerusalem and the Sanhedrin would have to say. On the contrary, without an inkling of fear, they preached of the poor Christ.’

The sermon, which was characterized by a sweet pastoral spirit, makes much of the perfect righteousness of Christ as the source of a Christian’s justification before God. ‘In and of myself I am a sinner,’ preached the German, ‘but in Christ, in baptism and in the Word, I am holy.’ That is the real message of Christmas. He who is Wonderful and Counsellor cleanses us from all sin by means of his expiatory death and resurrection.

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"Luther took advantage of the festive season to declare the Good News that had so enthralled the Bethlehem shepherds."⁶⁷

Table 19. John Calvin Opposed the Christmas Holiday as it Existed in the Roman Catholic Church but Permitted a Reformed Version of Christmas

Q- Did John Calvin (1509 – 1564) oppose the Christmas Celebration?⁶⁸

A- "Yes, John Calvin opposed the *official, mandated* celebration of Christmas on December 25th, viewing it as a superstitious, non-biblical human invention**, though he personally acknowledged Christ's birth and preferred focusing worship on the Lord's Day (Sunday), criticizing the day's *excess* and *pagan associations*. He argued against creating special holy days not commanded in Scripture, leading to Genevan authorities *banning* the holiday in 1550, making December 25th a normal workday.

Calvin's Key Stances:

- **Regulative Principle:** He believed worship should only follow what the Bible explicitly commands, and since Christmas isn't commanded, it's unlawful.
- **Superstition vs. Edification:** He feared the day fostered superstition, making people think it holier than other days, and that the world's enjoyment of it proved it wasn't truly biblical.

⁶⁷ Will Graham, "Luther, Calvin and Zwingli on Christmas: What did the three main Reformers think about Christmas?" <https://evangelicalfocus.com/fresh-breeze/2144/luther-calvin-and-zwingli-on-christmas>

⁶⁸ **Disclaimer:** For ease of presenting the information contained in this Essay, I have organized many of the key concepts in a "Question" and "Answer" box, whereby I have plugged in the Question in Google and, subsequently, retrieved composite answers from "AI Overview" and other data. The Reader is hereby invited to conduct independent research into these information provided in these "Question" and "Answer" boxes.





- **Genevan Context:** While he wasn't against the *idea* of celebrating Christ's birth, *he fought against the formal holiday in Geneva, which had become associated with excess.*
- **Compromise & Sermons:** He eventually allowed the *recitation* of the Nativity story on the closest Sunday but condemned the actual observance of December 25th as a holy day, calling those who came to sermon that day "rabid beasts".

In summary: Calvin opposed the *institutionalized, official* celebration of Christmas on the 25th, seeing it as a move away from pure worship, but he affirmed the *importance* of remembering Christ's birth, just not on a specific, man-made holiday.

Table 20. Ulrich Zwingli Opposed the Christmas Holiday as Unbiblical

Q- Did Ulrich Zwingli (1484 - 1531) Celebrate Christmas? ⁶⁹

A- No. "According to van Dellen and Monsma, Zwingli got rid of every ecclesiastical festive day in Zurich. **Given that Zwingli embraced the regulative principle of worship, that is, churches should only do that which is explicitly commanded in Scripture, he opposed any celebration which was not mentioned in the Bible.** This conviction, of course, is one of the key differences between Lutheran and Reformed churches.

"It was this same belief regarding the regulative principle that led the Scottish Presbyterians and English Puritans to do away with Christmas celebrations. When the

⁶⁹ **Disclaimer:** For ease of presenting the information contained in this Essay, I have organized many of the key concepts in a "Question" and "Answer" box, whereby I have plugged in the Question in Google and, subsequently, retrieved composite answers from "AI Overview" and other data. The Reader is hereby invited to conduct independent research into these information provided in these "Question" and "Answer" boxes.





Protestant Oliver Cromwell served as Lord Protector of England, Scotland and Ireland between 1653 and 1658, Christmas was outlawed on a national scale.”⁷⁰

The history of the Christmas holiday is thus confusing and mind-boggling. On the one hand, a very credible theological argument can be made – and has been made by esteemed theologians such as Augustine and Luther – that the Christmas holiday is a very important and legitimate way to celebrate the birth of Christ. On the other hand, there are many reasons to doubt the historical origins of Christmas, and to question the present-day commercial effects of the Christmas holiday.

The pros (i.e., legitimate holy foundations of the Christmas holiday) and cons (i.e., the commercialized, pagan, and ungodly foundations of the Christmas holiday) are difficult to reconcile. The esteemed Anglican philosopher and theologian C. S. Lewis put it this way, the Christmas holiday (the holy mixed with the profane) has become a “racket.”

It seems to me that the Christmas season is not a time of hope, peace, joy, or love – not in the expectant sense of advent promise. C.S. Lewis says that he sent no cards out and gave no presents (except to children) because of the ‘commercial racket’ that is Christmas. In another letter Lewis qualifies the season as a nightmare. Yes, Father Christmas does show up in Narnia to provide needed gifts for the journey, and perhaps Lewis uses this encounter to reclaim some sense about the holiday. It is the commercialization of ‘the season to be jolly’ that discounts the

⁷⁰ Will Graham, “Luther, Calvin and Zwingli on Christmas: What did the three main Reformers think about Christmas?” <https://evangelicalfocus.com/fresh-breeze/2144/luther-calvin-and-zwingli-on-christmas>





lowliness of the manger and the truth that it should make us low also.⁷¹

In *Xmas and Christmas: A Lost Chapter from Herodotus*, Lewis gives a satire of the observance of two simultaneous holidays in "Niatirb" ("Britain" spelled backward) from the supposed view of the ancient Greek historian Herodotus (484–425 BC). One of the holidays, "Exmas", is observed by a flurry of compulsory commercial activity and expensive indulgence in alcoholic beverages. The other, "Crissmas", is observed in Niatirb's temples. Lewis's narrator asks a priest why they kept Crissmas on the same day as Exmas. He receives the reply:

‘It is not lawful, O Stranger, for us to change the date of Crissmas, but would that Zeus would put it into the minds of the Niatirbians to keep Exmas at some other time or not to keep it at all. For Exmas and the Rush distract the minds even of the few from sacred things. And we indeed are glad that men should make merry at Crissmas; but in Exmas there is no merriment left.’ And when I asked him why they endured the Rush, he replied, ‘It is, O Stranger, a racket’”

Perhaps this is why whenever a Jew converts to the Christian religion and becomes a “Christian” or a “Messianic Jew,” he or she should strongly consider keeping the Feast of the Dedication instead of the Christmas holiday. Perhaps this is also why most Christians might be better off joining with Messianic Jews in honoring the birth of Christ by celebrating the Feast of Dedication rather than Christmas.

⁷¹ “The Christmas Racket,” *Official Website of C. S. Lewis* <https://www.cslewis.com/christmas-racket/>.





Table 21. Messianic Jews and the Christmas Holiday

Messianic Jews and Christmas

"Messianic Jews have varied views on Christmas; many do not celebrate it as a traditional holiday due to its non-Jewish origins and association with Christian persecution, preferring to focus on Jewish festivals like Hanukkah (the Festival of Lights) as symbolizing Jesus's coming, while others, especially from interfaith backgrounds, blend traditions, celebrating both Christmas and Hanukkah to honor Yeshua's birth, focusing on the spiritual meaning rather than cultural aspects.

"Reasons Some Messianic Jews Don't Celebrate Christmas:

- **Lack of Biblical Mandate:** They believe Jesus and the early believers didn't celebrate it, as it's not commanded in the New Covenant (Brit Hadasha).
- **Pagan Roots Concerns:** Some are wary of pagan connections often attributed to December 25th celebrations.
- **Focus on Jewish Roots:** They emphasize Jewish holidays, seeing prophetic meaning in them that points to Yeshua (Jesus).

"How They Honor the Messiah's Birth:

- **"Hanukkah:** Many Messianic Jews celebrate Yeshua's birth during Hanukkah (Festival of Lights) because of its symbolism of light and God's deliverance, aligning with Yeshua as the "Light of the World."
- **"Focus on Yeshua's Coming:** The season becomes an opportunity to share the good news of Jesus, the Messiah, without the commercialism of Christmas.

"Those Who Do Celebrate (or Participate):





- **“Interfaith Backgrounds:** Messianic Jews from mixed Jewish/Christian families often continue celebrating Christmas.
- **“Spiritual Focus:** Some see the holiday as a chance to focus on the incarnation of God, even if they don't adopt all Christian traditions like trees or specific parties.

“In essence, there's no single answer; it's a personal choice, but many lean towards Jewish observances to maintain their heritage while honoring Yeshua.”

CONCLUSION

When the Early Church was first established, Jewish law and custom, which that church embraced, had long held that birthdays were ungodly pagan holidays that should not be celebrated. This situation reflected the state of the Early Church during the first three centuries of its existence. That said, the theological argument that the Christmas holiday – which is a birthday celebration – stems from ancient Hebrew or Jewish origins, or that it is biblical, is highly problematic. For this reason, it is quite clear that the foundations of the Christmas holiday as we know it stem from a non-Hebrew, non-Jewish, and non-Biblical source. In this paper, we have traced that source to the pagan roots of the Roman empire. Therefore, the Christmas holiday is far more “pagan” and “ancient Roman” than it is “Hebrew” and “ancient Christian.”

Moreover, the Early Church of the second and early third centuries had calculated Christ's birthday to have occurred in late April or May. Nevertheless, because the Early Church also correlated Christ's birth with the Jewish Feast of the Dedication (“Festival of Lights”), which occurred in late November and December, it was open to celebrated or commemorating Christ's birth in December. But this shift from April or May to December was not a theological admission that Christ's birthday





was on December 25th – this usurpation came much later when the Roman Catholic Church sought a means to “sanitize” and to “baptize” the winter solstice festivals of Saturnalia and Sol Invictus and to make them “Christian.”

In this paper, however, I have pointed out the present-day Messianic Jews still adopt the original viewpoint of Clement of Alexandria and of the Early Church during its first three centuries before the Romans invented the Christmas holiday. At the same time, I have also explained why a “middle ground” of compromise between the Roman position and the Messianic Jewish position also seems reasonable and plausible.

Today, however, where the Christmas holiday has become overly commercialized and has lost its authentic focus on Christ, the Feast of Dedication (i.e., Hanukkah) – which is utilized by most Messianic Jews as the means whereby they commemorate the birth of Christ – remains a theologically viable and legitimate alternative for every individual Christian – such as my mother during the early 1980s – seeking an alternative to the Christmas holiday.

At the same time, I have also explained in this paper that every Christian and Messianic Jews should honor and respect how the Christmas holiday is practiced and carried out annually by and amongst fellow Christians. This basic accommodation ought to be made in the ecumenical spirit of peace and good will among all of the Christian faithful – i.e., the entire body of Christ (Jew and Gentile alike).

Simultaneously, in the spirit of the Maccabees and of the 16th-century Puritans of colonial New England, every sincere and faithful Christian should continue to reject those portions the Christian holiday that promote what British philosopher C. S. Lewis has described as ungodly commercialism – i.e., the excessive focus on gift-giving, drinking, partying,





and unproductive secular “Christmas” gatherings that do not honor or promote Christ as the “*Light of the World.*”

Happy and Blessed Holidays!

--- The End ---





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