

# Is Christmas in the Bible?

The holiday of Christmas is celebrated throughout the world as the birthday of Jesus Christ. Christmas is held on December 25 according to the Roman calendar.

But is Christmas in the Bible? Does God command us to keep Christmas as a holy day? If we keep Christmas even if it is not in the Bible – is it sin? If Christmas is NOT in the Bible, then where did the holiday come from?

We will answer these questions in this booklet.

## Is Christmas in the Bible?

The short answer to this question is “NO.” Nowhere in the Bible can you find the word Christmas and nowhere in the Bible can you find any commandment to observe the birth day of Jesus the Savior. Instead, the Bible commands us to observe the day of Jesus’ death at the Passover<sup>1</sup>. (**Luke 22:15-20**)

- A. NO word “Christmas” in the Bible.
- B. NO Commandment to observe or celebrate the birth day of Jesus.

Certainly, the birth of Jesus is recorded in the Gospel accounts in the books of Matthew and Luke. Each of these Gospel writers gives us clear and detailed information as to the events surrounding the birth of Jesus<sup>2</sup>.

But even though the Bible carefully tells us details about Jesus’ birth, **nowhere in the Holy Bible can we find a commandment from God to observe the birth of His Son Jesus.**

*“The fathers {Church Historians} of the first three centuries do not speak of any special observance of the nativity {birth of Jesus}. No corresponding festival was presented by the Old Testament ... the day and month of the birth of [the Messiah] are nowhere stated in the Gospel history, and cannot be certainly determined,<sup>3</sup>”*

---

<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 23, Luke 22:15-20

<sup>2</sup> Matt 1, Luke 2,

<sup>3</sup> Christmas, Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature, by Rev. John McClintock and James Strong, p. 276.

The word "Fathers" in the above quotation means the early church writers and historians.

If Christmas had been commanded by Jesus and then the commandment not written down in the Bible, then the Christian Church that existed during the two centuries after the death of the Apostle John (about 100 - 300 A.D.) would have known about such a command by Jesus and would have been faithfully observing Christmas. But there is no record or evidence in church history that records the Early Christian Church observing the birthday of Jesus.

Even the Catholic Encyclopedia shows that the early Church had no holy day called Christmas:

*Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the Church. Irenaeus and Tertullian omit it from their lists of feasts;<sup>4</sup>*

The plain fact is that the Early Church did not observe any celebration or holiday about the birth of Jesus Our Savior.

**Historical Fact:** Christmas was NOT celebrated by the early Christian Church. Christians did not celebrate Christmas until it began to be celebrated by the Roman church in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. That is over 300 years after Jesus was born.

### **Is December 25 the day Jesus was born?**

Most of the world celebrates Christmas as the day of Jesus' birth on December 25. Can this date be proven in the Bible?

The short answer is "NO."

*"it is important to note that the date of December 25 is totally devoid of Biblical meaning and is grossly inaccurate as far as the actual time of Christ's birth."<sup>5</sup>*

---

<sup>4</sup> **Catholic Encycloedia**, section under heading of Christmas entitled Early Celebration, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03724b.htm>

<sup>5</sup> **The Meaning, Celebration and Date of Christmas**, by Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi, p.15

The word Christmas comes from two Old English words *Cristes and Maesse*. Joined together it means “the Mass of Christ.” *Christ Mass is first found in use in the year 1038 A.D, almost a thousand years after the time of the Apostolic 1<sup>st</sup> Church.*

There is no evidence inside or outside of the Bible that can prove that Jesus was born anywhere near December 25. In fact, Bible scholars agree that the Bible evidence shows that He was born sometime in the month of September or October.

### **Jesus born in Bethlehem at time of Roman Census**

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, not in Nazareth where Joseph and Mary were living. Why would Joseph take a pregnant Mary all way to Bethlehem? What was the purpose of such a journey?

First of all, there is the prophecy of the birth of Jesus in the book of Micah:

#### **Micah 5:2**

*But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*

But the event that caused Joseph to take his family to Bethlehem was the decree of Roman Emperor Augustus.

#### **Luke 2:1-5**

*And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. This taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.*

Emperor Augustus decreed that all of the Empire should be counted in a census. Joseph was a descendant of King David, so the law required him to return to the city of David’s birth, which was Bethlehem. This was the reason Joseph traveled all the way from Galilee to Bethlehem near Jerusalem. The Roman rulers would

not have chosen the middle of winter (December) to command the people of Judea to travel in the cold and rainy weather. Instead the regular time for travel was during the time of September or October because this was the time of Succoth (the Feast of Tabernacles) which was one of the three annual pilgrimage feasts<sup>6</sup> when many would travel to Jerusalem to keep the Feast and worship before the cold weather set in.

### **Shepherds in the fields at night near Bethlehem.**

The Bible tells us that, at the time of Jesus birth, there were shepherds out in the fields watching their sheep at night. This could not have occurred during the very cold season of December and January. Shepherds would have taken their sheep in out of the fields and would not have them outside during the cold, rainy nights. They would have taken the sheep in by early October before the winter season began.

*“The Bible itself tells us that December 25 is an unlikely date for His birth. Palestine is very cold in December. It was much too cold to ask everyone to travel to the city of their fathers to register for taxes. Also the shepherds were in the fields (Luke 2:8-12). Shepherds were not in the fields in the winter time. They are in the fields early in March until early October.”<sup>7</sup>*

So Jesus could not have been born in December when the sheep would not be outside because of very cold and wet weather.

### **Birth of John the Baptist**

The birth of John the Baptist provides more Biblical evidence for the time of year that Jesus was born. John the Baptist was Jesus’ cousin. John’s mother Elizabeth was a first cousin of Jesus’ mother Mary.

John’s father Zacharias was a priest who served in the Temple in Jerusalem. Luke tells us that while he was serving in the Temple, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and announced that he would have a son and told him to name him “John.”<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Exodus 23:17

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/was-jesus-born-on-december-25-faq.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Luke 1:5-20

Zacharias did not believe Gabriel, so he was struck dumb and could not speak until the birth of John. Soon after his duties at the Temple were complete, Zacharias returned home and soon after, his wife Elizabeth became pregnant with John.

This passage in Luke that tells us that Zacharias was a priest after the course of Abijah gives us a powerful clue as to the time of year of the birth of Jesus.

King David divided the priests into 24 courses of duty in the Temple in Jerusalem<sup>9</sup>. It was his son Solomon who built the Temple, but King David prepared many things for the Temple service. Each course served in the Temple for eight days – Sabbath to Sabbath, with the first course starting the first week of the first month of the Hebrew Calendar. The course of Abijah which was Zechariah's course of service at the Temple, would serve twice every year. Also, all courses had to be on duty for the three annual Feast seasons of Passover, Pentecost and Feast of Tabernacles.

Now we must count. The first week of the first month (*called Nisan or Adar*) of the Hebrew calendar begins each year during the Roman (*Gregorian*) months of March or April. Then if we count 7 weeks to match the Abijah Course when Zechariah served in the Temple, we arrive at May or June. This was when Gabriel appeared to Zechariah in the Temple and announced that Zechariah and Elizabeth would conceive John.

Zechariah finished his course and went home. Soon after, Elizabeth conceived (sometime in May or June). When Elizabeth discovered she was pregnant, she withdrew from public activity (the Bible said that she hid herself for 5 months<sup>10</sup>.) Then in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary announcing that she would become pregnant with Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. He also told her that her cousin Elizabeth was pregnant with John<sup>11</sup>. Now we can see that Jesus was conceived 6 months after John's conception. This would have been either November or December when Jesus was conceived. Now, all we do is count 9 months from November or December, and we arrive at late August or September when Jesus was born.

---

<sup>9</sup> 1 Chron 24:7-19

<sup>10</sup> Luke 1:24

<sup>11</sup> Luke 1:36

So, by using the Bible to prove the Bible, we can see clearly that Jesus was born nowhere near December, but instead in August or September. This would be in the fall around the fall Holy Days of God, and not the middle of wintertime in Judea.

**FACT:** Jesus was born in the Fall or Autumn during the month of August or September and NOT in December.

### History Records the Approximate Time of the Birth of Jesus

Church historians named Iranaeus and Eusebius, wrote histories about the time of Jesus' birth. When the writings of these two church historians are put together with the clues given by Luke, it show that Jesus was born in the fall (September or October) of 2 B.C. – **NOT** in December.

**Iranaeus** was the bishop of Lugdunam, which today is the city of Lyons, France. He was born about 100 years after Jesus. He wrote that Jesus was born in the 41st year of Roman Emperor Augustus' reign. By calculating when Emperor Augustus began his reign, we can calculate the time of Jesus' birth.



Figure 1: Iranaeus of Lyons

Since Augustus began to reign as Emperor in the Autumn of 43 B.C., then this would be evidence that Jesus was born after the Autumn of 2 B.C.<sup>12</sup>

**Eusebius**, Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, was a student of Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna (located in what today is Turkey). Polycarp, in turn, was a disciple of the Apostle John. Eusebius lived from 264-340 A.D. He is a famous church historian. In fact, he is called the “Father of Church History.” Eusebius also wrote that the birth of

Jesus was in the 42<sup>nd</sup> year of Augustus (Autumn 2 B.C. until the Autumn 1 B.C ). But he also adds that the Savior's birth occurred in the 28<sup>th</sup> year since the subjugation of Egypt by Rome after the death of Pharaoh Cleopatra and her lover Marc Antony, which occurred in the Autumn of 30 B.C. The 28<sup>th</sup> year would then be from the Autumn of 3 B.C. until the Autumn of 2 B.C.

<sup>12</sup> Remember, B.C. dates are counted backward.

Therefore, the matching time that agrees with both Iranaeus and Eusebius together for Jesus' birth would be the **Autumn of 2 B.C.**

Both the Bible and history show that Jesus was not born on December 25.

So, if Jesus was not born on December 26, why did the Roman church decide to make this date the day to celebrate the Savior's birth?

The answer will surprise you.

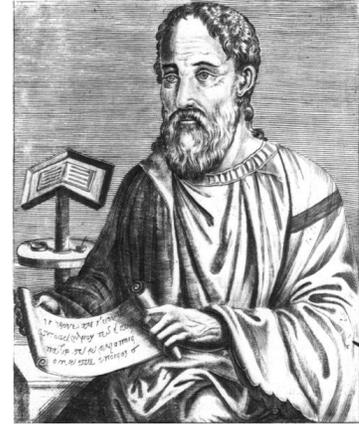


Figure 2: Eusebius of Caesarea

### Birthday of the Sun god

The Romans worshipped many false gods. The chief god worshipped in Rome at the time of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Christian Church was Sol Invictus – the Sun god (Also called Mithras or Jupiter). This false god was introduced into Rome by a young Syrian man named Varius Avitus who later became Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus (Elagabalus) at the age of 14. He was well known in history because of his sinful life of sodomy and debauchery<sup>13</sup>. During his youth in Emesa, Syria, Elagabalus was High Priest of the Syrian sun god *El Gabal*. El Gabal was another name for Baal, the false god that the Israelites worshipped instead of the True God.



Figure 3: Roman Emperor Elagabalus

Emperor Elagabalus reigned from 218 A.D. until his assassination in 222 A.D. Elagabalus brought a black stone that represented the Syrian sun god El Gabal (Baal) to Rome and made El Gabal the chief god of the Romans. Elagabalus took the name of his false god and considered himself the human incarnation. El Gabal was assimilated with the Roman sun god known as *Sol Invictus* (the Invincible Sun).

<sup>13</sup> Historians Gibbon, B.G. Niebuhr

*Sol Invictus* ("Invincible Sun") became the official sun god of the later Roman empire. In 274 Emperor Aurelian made it an official cult alongside the traditional Roman cults<sup>14</sup>.



Figure 4: Sol Invictus - the Roman Sun God



Figure 5: Emperor Aurelian in his radiate crown, on a coin struck at Rome, 274 A.D.

The sun god was very popular in Rome during the third and fourth centuries A.D.

*"In 274 A.D., the Romans designated December 25 as the birthday of the unconquered sun, being the time when the sun begins noticeably to show an increase in light, resulting in longer daylight hours<sup>15</sup>.*

<sup>14</sup> [Wikimedia.org, article: sol invictus](https://www.wikimedia.org/wiki/Sol_invictus)

<sup>15</sup> [www.truthorthradition.com](http://www.truthorthradition.com)

Emperor Aurelian promoted the worship of the sun as chief god of the Romans and made December 25 the birthday of the sun god.

About this time, another cult that worshipped Mithra was introduced into Rome by soldiers returning from wars with Persia. This Persian cult of Mithras was also mixed together with sun god worship. Mithras was even given the title “unconquerable sun god”. Since Mithras was also a sun god, it was easy to join the two – Roman and Persian – together to form one sun god.

*Adapted for Roman taste, the most popular Romanised form of Mithraism was Sol Invictus, the Unconquerable Sun, whose re-birth was celebrated as the climax of the mid-winter Saturnalia, on 25th December...<sup>16</sup>”*

**“Christianity borrowed and then replaced Mithraism, which was the main religion in Persia and Rome. Followers of Mithraism used to worship the Sun-god "Mitra" or "Mithra". It was the birthday of Mithra, 25 December (winter solstice), that was taken by the early Christians as the birthday of Jesus as a need and urgency by the early Christians to compromise with existing traditions.<sup>17</sup>”**

The Church in Rome was led astray by false teachers who accepted into Christianity false ideas from Pagan worship practices. The false practices were transformed into Christian practices. December 25, the birthday of the sun god Sol Invictus and the sun god Mithras was made the birthday of Jesus the Sun of Righteousness.

*By 336 A.D., the church in Rome was adapting this festival, spiritualizing its significance as a reference to Jesus Christ and calling it the ‘Feast of the Nativity of the Sun of Righteousness.’ Attempting to Christianize and incorporate the pagan traditions of antiquity, the church in Rome adopted this midwinter holiday celebrating the birth of the sun god as one of its own observances, somewhat changing its significance, but retaining many customs of the pagan festival. As the Roman church spread its influence religiously and militarily, this holiday of December 25 became the most popular date in Christendom to celebrate the birth*

---

<sup>16</sup> Article: Is 25th December the correct date for celebrating Christmas ?, Dec 24, 2004 , Hindu World Wide Web - News

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

*of Jesus Christ. A special mass was established for Christ, hence, the name, 'Christmass,' abbreviated 'Christmas.'*<sup>18</sup>

The pure worship of Jesus Christ as practiced in the first two centuries of the Christian Church became increasingly mixed with the practices and symbolism of the Pagan cults of Rome. This adoption of Pagan practices into Christianity included the selection of December 25 as the birth date of Jesus.

### Emperor Constantine and Christmas



Figure 6: Byzantine mosaic of Constantine the Great

Constantine 1 was a worshipper of the Roman false gods, especially the sun god Sol. He became Emperor of Rome in 312 A.D. after winning a great battle near the Tiber River. Before the battle, he claims to have seen a vision in the sky. The vision was of the sun with a cross in it and the words, “by this sign you shall conquer.” After his victory, he became a champion of the Christian religion. He still continued his worship of Jupiter and other false gods until he was baptized on his deathbed in 337 A.D.

*Either as a means to unify his empire, or to make converting to Christianity easier, Constantine sought to blend Christian and pagan traditions. At that time, two prominent pagan winter festivals were celebrated. The first, starting on December 17 and lasting seven days, honored Saturn, the Roman god of agriculture. The second, starting on December 25 and lasting through January 1, commemorated the birth of Mithras, the Persian god of light. Constantine merged many of the traditions from these festivals with the Nativity story in the Bible and Christmas was born. From its beginning, Christmas was a holiday (or holy day), gifts were exchanged, families and friends gathered to feast, and a birth was celebrated; just like in the Roman and Persian festivities<sup>19</sup>.*

<sup>18</sup> [www.truthorthat.com](http://www.truthorthat.com)

<sup>19</sup> [www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/emperor-constantine-faq.htm](http://www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/emperor-constantine-faq.htm)

The way the Saturnalia was celebrated with feasting, gift giving, lighting of candles and depiction of the birth of a man child sounds exactly like Christmas is celebrated today. And no wonder since the pagan practices of Saturnalia were introduced into Christianity by the Roman church with the help of Constantine the Great.

After Constantine, Roman Emperors continued to favor Christianity over the Pagan religions. As Christianity gained acceptance in the Empire, the worship of Mithras and Sol fell out of favor and were finally banned.

*“Theodosius made worship of Mithras punishable by death. The god had fallen – but the imagery and iconography of Mithras were expropriated wholesale by the more comprehensive and favoured cult of Christ.<sup>20</sup>”*

The old Pagan cults died out, but the Christianity from that time forward was a mixture of the truth of the Bible and false Paganism.

### **What Does God Think About Mixing Pagan Practices With Christianity?**

Many people who are educated in history know that Christmas is a Pagan holiday. They know that Jesus was not born on December 25. But they say that it is acceptable to observe Christmas because we are honoring Jesus and not the sun god or Baal.

What does God think?

#### **Jeremiah 10:2-5**

*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 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.*

*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.*

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

This is what the Pagans do. God condemns mixing worship of Him with the worship of false gods.

When Israel came out of Egypt, they decided not to wait for Moses to come down from Mt. Sinai, but to make a god to lead them instead. They went to Aaron, the High Priest of God, and asked him to help. He collected gold and made the golden calf.

After he made the gold cow idol, what did he do next?

**Exodus 32:4-5**

And he received *them* at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These *be* thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

And when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, *Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD.*

Notice that Aaron proclaimed a feast to the True God (The Lord) – but the people were giving their worship to the false idol – the golden calf.

What happened to the people who were mixing the worship of the True God with the worship of the false god?

**Exodus 32:9-10**

And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it *is* a stiffnecked people:

Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.

If it had not been for Moses' humble pleadings asking God to spare them, all the Israelites would have been destroyed by God. Instead God commanded plagues to be on them and some were killed.

**Exodus 32:35**

And the LORD plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made.

A Christian who truly wants to honor and worship the True God cannot mix Pagan practices that honor a false god and expect God to accept their worship. Instead

people who do such worship practices could well earn the anger of God and become victims of plagues.

Christmas is a Pagan holiday, NOT a Holy Day of God and His Son Jesus Christ. To try to worship the True God with Pagan ways is an insult to God and anyone who does this will not be accepted by Him.

Do not mix Paganism with the Truth of God's Holy Word.

For questions or for further contact, please write:

Church of God in Asia  
213/1 Mu3, Baan Mae Sa Luang  
T. Mae Sa, A. Mae Rim  
Chiang Mai 50180  
Thailand

©2013 Church of God in Asia

Figure 1: Iranaeus of Lyons, Public Domanin

Figure 2: Eusebius of Caesarea, Public Domain

Figure 3: Sol Invictus Disc: Courtesy © Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons

Figure 4: Emperor Elagabalo: Courtesy © Giovanni Dall'Orto / Wikimedia Commons

Figure 5: Emperor Aurilian in Radiant Crown, Courtesy © Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.

Figure 6: Mosaic of Emperor Constantine I, Courtesy © Zenodot Verlagsgesellschaft mbH / Wikimedia Commons