

Why Christmas' 'Pagan Roots' Shouldn't Keep You From Celebrating

Believers should not celebrate Christmas because it's a pagan holiday.

Really? Are you sure about that?

The declaration that Christmas is a pagan holiday is based on old, worn-out arguments rooted in anti-Roman Catholic sentiment more than good biblical and historical fact and research. The arguments against celebrating Christmas invariably trace back to the writing and teaching of the Puritans, who were in the heated struggle against the Church of England and the power struggle of the Reformation.

Although it is true Roman Catholicism paganized much of Christian worship and teaching, the Roman Catholic church certainly did not paganize all of Christianity. The foundational truths of the Christian faith have been restored. We certainly would not declare communion or water baptism to be pagan because they had been distorted by the Roman Catholic Church. Rather, we restored those most important ordinances of the church back to their biblical truth and practice. Is it accurate to say the celebration of the birth of Christ is rooted in paganism and therefore, it is inappropriate, even sinful, to celebrate Christmas?

The correct answer to that question is discovered in biblical and historical research that goes further back than the writings and teachings of the Puritans.

The study must go further than the fourth century A.D., when Pope Julius I declared December 25 to be the day for celebrating Christmas. The student must go to the time of

Christ Himself and to the prophets and Jewish writers before Him.

If Jesus is the Lamb of God and the Bread of Life, when and where should He be born?

Dr. Luke was a man of detail. This is greatly reflected in the manner in which he wrote the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Epistle of Acts. Luke takes great pain to accurately reflect the timing and location of Jesus' birth. Jesus was born during the reign of Caesar Augustus over the Roman Empire. It is curious, is it not, that the prophet Daniel declares the second coming of Jesus Christ will be during the reign of another ruler of the Roman Empire?

"After the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the troops of the prince who shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall come with a flood. And until the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall make a firm covenant with many for one week. But in the middle of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the offering to cease. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed destruction is poured out on the desolator" (Dan. 9:26-27).

Coincidence or divine plan that Jesus' first and Second Coming would be so placed? What does it say about His birth?

One of God's mysteries is found in the designation of Jesus as a Nazarene. He is also of the "house and lineage of David." How does someone from Nazareth come from the "House of David?" Dr. Sean Freyne (Director of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Studies and Emeritus Professor of Theology at Trinity College Dublin) in a recent interview with Hershel Shanks, Editor of *Biblical Archeology Review*, was asked.

"My sense would be no. He was born in Nazareth, I believe. He's never called 'Jesus of Bethlehem'; he is called 'Jesus of

Nazareth'" (*Biblical Archeology Review*, 36:06 Nov/Dec 2010).

Apparently, Dr. Freyne totally disregards the historical accuracy of Luke's account of the taxation and the trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Yet, Dr. Alfred Edersheim, a foremost authority on Jewish history, clearly documents the validity and accuracy of Luke's historical account and the journey taken by Mary and Joseph in his monumental volume, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*.

John the Baptist saw Jesus one day and declared, "The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29b). The next day, John say Jesus again and told two of his disciples, "Look, the Lamb of God" (John 1:36b). The Apostle Peter wrote, "but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:19). What is the significance of Jesus being the Lamb of God to the celebration of Christmas?

The concept of the lamb and the redemption of mankind has root in the deliverance of Israel out of Egyptian slavery to the Promise Land. The angel of death passed over the homes of all the Jewish people who butchered a lamb and placed its blood on the door casing of their house. The Lord God commanded Israel to remember and to celebrate the event of Passover every year. The choice of the lamb, the age of the lamb and the entire ceremony of butchering and eating the lamb is a picture of Jesus Christ.

It is not a coincidence Jesus Christ was arrested and crucified on Passover. Nor was it a coincidence His birth was in a cave on the edge of the fields of *Migdol Eder*, meaning "the tower of the flock" (Edersheim, p. 186). These were no ordinary fields. The shepherds who came to see the baby born in the stable cave were no ordinary shepherds. The sheep raised in these fields were for sacrifice at Passover.

Would these sheep and shepherds be out in the field on a

winter night of December? Dr. Edersheim addresses that important detail.

“The same Mishnic passage [that addresses the law of the shepherds and raising sheep for Passover] also leads us to infer that these flocks lay out all the year round [Ederseim’s emphasis] ... of such a coincidence, it is needless to speak” (p. 187).

“There is no adequate reason for questioning the historical accuracy of this date [December 25].The objections generally made rest on grounds, which seem to me historically untenable” (pg. 187, footnote).

Jesus, the Lamb of God sacrificed at Passover, was born in a stable on the fields where Passover Lambs were raised. He was attended by shepherds who only raised sheep for sacrifice on Passover. It would seem extremely appropriate that believers honor and celebrate the day the Lamb of God was born in Bethlehem’s stable. It is He “who takes away the sin of the World” (John 1:29b). {eoa}

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