

More Thoughts About Christmas From a Messianic Jew

In part one of this series, I explained three things about Christmas: 1. The exact timing of the timing of Yeshua's birth is not in the Bible; 2. The pagan concept of Christmas; and 3. Just because the pagans using a symbol, it doesn't make it pagan.

Here are four more revelations about Christmas from this Messianic Jew:

4. As a Messianic Jew, I don't celebrate Christmas for two reasons. a. It simply doesn't mean to me what it means to others. I grew up seeing Christmas as the *Gentile Hanukkah*. I preferred eight days of gifts to one. Culturally there was no connection. After coming to faith, I never felt drawn to the custom.

b. For 1,900 the Church has presented Jesus, the Jewish Messiah to my people as someone completely and utterly non-Jewish. I wrote a book called *Identity Theft* to show the church how the Jewish roots of the gospel have been largely deleted. Some church fathers went so far as to say that God hates the Jews. Constantine, the first Roman emperor to embrace Christianity outlawed using Passover to celebrate the Resurrection of Yeshua (that is why there is Easter) in the most damning words.

"And, truly in the first place, it seems to everyone a most unworthy thing that we should follow the customs of the Jews in the celebration of this most holy solemnity, who, polluted wretches, having stained their hands with a nefarious crime are justly blinded in their minds.

"It is fit, therefore, that rejecting the practice of this people, we should perpetuate to all future ages the

celebration of this rite, in a more legitimate order, which we have kept from the first day of our 'Lord's' passion even to the present times. Let us then have nothing in common with the most hostile rabble of the Jews." (Council of Nicea, pg. 52.)

His actions further distance the body of Messiah from her Jewish roots.

The Crusaders, with crosses on their shields murdered thousands of Jews in cold blood—all in the name of Christ. The Inquisition, empowered by the Spanish Church, sent some 40,000 Jews packing because they would not be baptized. There have been countless pogroms and massacres from so-called Christians against Jews. And many "Christian" Germans joined the Nazi frenzy to liquidate Europe of its Jews.

I understand the difference between a cultural Christian and genuine follower of Yeshua. But most Jews don't. I live and breathe with a passion to see my people find life in the Messiah. So, why embrace a tradition—not commanded in the Bible—that only adds to the false idea that Yeshua is not for the Jews?

I am fighting a battle to show my people the truth of the gospel—that Yeshua, the Jew, lived in Israel, fulfilled the Jewish prophecies of the Messiah, had Jewish disciples, never started a new religion, died on Passover, rose on First Fruits[i] and birthed the body of believers on Shavuot (Pentecost). And that for the first 10 years the disciples only preached to Jews—not realizing that Gentiles could embrace the Jewish Messiah without first converting, and the message they preached was eternal life and forgiveness of sins through the sacrificial death of the Passover Lamb, the Jewish Messiah. **They never converted or stopped being Jewish.**

Celebrating Christmas, for me, would confirm the lie in the mind of many that I have betrayed my people. This was Paul's argument in 1 Cor. 10, where he said, all things are legal,

but if your freedom is communicating something that causes others to stumble, then it is not beneficial. Or, as he says in Romans 14:15, “Do not destroy by your food (in this case Christmas) someone for whom the Messiah died.”

5. Some believers would feel guilty not to celebrate Christmas. Many years ago when I was on the pastoral team of a Messianic congregation in the U.S., a woman came to me and asked, “Why don’t we celebrate Christmas at Beth Messiah?” She was married to a Jewish believer. She grew up with Christmas. She loved Christmas.

In fact, there are many people who would feel as if they were sinning if they didn’t celebrate Christmas—because for them, it is honoring Yeshua, as well as a time to be with family and friends. For them, to not celebrate would be to dishonor Him.

I told this woman something akin to what I wrote a few paragraphs above in point 4, making it clear that as a congregation we would never celebrate Christmas—it’s not who we are. But I added, “In your home, by all means celebrate how you feel best. No one is going to judge you. We have no Messianic police!” I know many Messianic couples where one spouse is not Jewish. For the non-Jews, often there is an emptiness by not celebrating something with which they grew up—that was pure and honoring to God. Several have told me that in recent years they have quietly celebrated. Given that my wife was raised in Israel, she too has no cultural ties to Christmas.

6. Can we talk about Santa and the commercialism of the holidays? Let me be clear, while it is not my place to judge people who partake in Christmas—I *do have serious issues with Santa!* You see I am fiercely loyal to the idea that if we celebrate, we do so to the glory of God. Santa Claus takes glory away from Yeshua. And the madness of shopping for Christmas, while good for the economy, is out of control! No longer do people shop to bless others, instead they run from

the Thanksgiving table, *to start the season of goodwill*, by fighting with others to get stuff for themselves. So don't confuse my grace towards Christmas by assuming that I embrace all things connected to the modern way in which it is celebrated.

It should be noted that the custom of gift giving didn't begin until the 1800s. And it does seem a strange way to celebrate someone else's birthday. Imagine if 100 people came to your birthday party and started exchanging gifts with each other and you got nothing? If anybody should receive a gift on Christmas, should it not be Yeshua—the One whose birthday we are celebrating? We can do that by supporting ministries that are doing the work of the kingdom.

7. More people find salvation on Christmas and Easter than any other specific days. Non-Jews are more likely to go to a congregation on that day than on other days. Many congregations take advantage of that and seek to reach those people with the Good News. One of my best friends and supporters came to faith on Christmas. I am certainly not going to condemn that. We do the same thing here in Israel on Hanukah and Passover. Last week we had over 100 visitors for our Hanukah concert and party.

There is a Lutheran Church in Jaffa. They will have a Christmas Eve celebration next week, where they will sing Christmas carols—the Biblical ones. Over one hundred Israelis will come to see it out of curiosity. And they will seek to share Yeshua's message in a tactful way by giving away books and DVDs about Yeshua.

Conclusion

My point here is simple and based on Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 10—where Paul teaches about freedom. So for those who love Christmas and celebrate it to the glory of God, great! But please do not judge me or my Messianic brothers and

sisters for not celebrating.

In 2001 we moved back home to Richmond, Virginia. A man who has become a dear friend, quizzed me about why I didn't (and don't) celebrate Christmas when I first met him. He couldn't wrap his head around the idea of a someone in fulltime ministry—a pastor even—who did not celebrate Christmas. *How can you love Jesus and ignore Christmas?*

Over the years he has come to a better understanding. And while he certainly doesn't judge me for not partaking, it doesn't stop him from continuing to enjoy Christmas for all the right reasons.

With that, I would like to wish you a Happy Hanukkah (that just ended), a Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year (that actually starts in the Spring).{eoa}

Ron Cantor is the director of Messiah's Mandate International in Israel, a Messianic ministry dedicated to taking the message of Jesus from Israel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Cantor also travels internationally teaching on the Jewish roots of the New Testament. He serves on the pastoral team of Tiferet Yeshua, a Hebrew-speaking congregation in Tel Aviv. His newest book is Identity Theft. Follow him at @RonSCantor on Twitter.

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