

## **The Roots of Christmas Traditions**

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The roots of some of the practices associated with Christmas go all the way back to a man named Nimrod. We read of him in Genesis 10:8-12:

<sup>8</sup> Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. <sup>9</sup> He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD." <sup>10</sup> And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. <sup>11</sup> From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, <sup>12</sup> and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (that is the principal city).

According to Genesis 10:8-12, Babylon was founded by Nimrod, the son of Cush. He is described as a "mighty hunter", indicating that he was a bold man, and of great strength. Josephus, the famous Jewish historian, informs us that Nimrod taught men not to ascribe their joy to God, but instead to ascribe it to him or to their own courage. This indicates that he taught men both false worship, and also a false sense of independence from the Creator. Josephus also informs us that Nimrod turned men away from the fear of God, and brought them into constant dependence on his own power. We are further informed, that after the flood, Nimrod challenged God to drown the world again, and that he would build a tower too high for the waters to reach, and that he would avenge on God for destroying their forefathers! Nimrod can clearly be described as an antichrist. After the flood, Nimrod became the instigator of rebellion against God.

The rebellion and false religion that started at Babylon eventually spread throughout the world. This is shown in Jeremiah 51:7:

<sup>7</sup> Babylon was a golden cup in the LORD's hand,  
That made all the earth drunk.  
The nations drank her wine;  
Therefore the nations are deranged.

According to ancient tradition, Nimrod was born towards the end of December, and had a wife called Semiramis.

According to the Forerunner Commentary, After Nimrod's death (c. 2167 BC), Semiramis promoted the belief that Nimrod was a god. She claimed that she saw a full-grown evergreen tree spring out of the roots of a dead tree stump, symbolizing the springing forth of new life for Nimrod. On the anniversary of his birth (at the end of December), she said that Nimrod would visit the evergreen tree and leave gifts under it. (This seems to be where the Christmas tree comes from!)

A few years later, Semiramis bore a son. This son was given the name of Horus (also known as Gilgamesh). Semiramis claimed the spirit of Nimrod visited her, and had made her pregnant. She said that Horus was the reincarnation of Nimrod. And so it came to pass that Babylonians began to worship a goddess mother and her son.

Another name by which Nimrod is known is 'Saturn'. Interestingly, in Chaldee (the Babylonian language), the name 'Saturn' has the numeric value of 666.

According to ancient tradition, Saturn (Nimrod) hid in Italy after being chased by his pursuers. The place where he hid was called 'Saturnia', before it later became known as 'Rome'.

It is said that Saturn civilised the people of ancient Rome/Saturnia, and taught them the arts of agriculture. Therefore, in Roman religion and mythology, Nimrod, or Saturn, is known as the god of harvests or the god of agriculture.

From 217 BC, the Romans held a festival in honour of Saturn called Saturnalia. This festival began on Dec. 17<sup>th</sup> and ended on Dec. 25<sup>th</sup>. In this festival, there was much merry making, gifts were exchanged, schools and courts were closed, war was outlawed, homes were decorated with lights and trees, and slaves and masters ate at the same table. (This is where some other Christmas traditions find their origin).

By 230 AD, it seems that some Christians were also participating in these pagan practices. Tertullian, a leader of the early church, who observes that Christians were observing the festival of Saturnalia, evidences this. In about 230 AD, he lamented over this situation saying:

"By us, who are strangers to Sabbaths, and new moons, and festivals, once acceptable to God, the **Saturnalia**, the feasts of January, the Brumalia, and Matronalia, are now frequented; gifts are carried to and fro, new year's day presents are made with din, and sports and banquets are celebrated with uproar; oh, how much more faithful are the heathen to their religion, who take special care to adopt no solemnity from the Christians."

The Bible does not tell us the exact date of Christ's birth. However, in the fourth century AD, Pope Julius I is said to have established the 25<sup>th</sup> December as Christ's birth date. As Christmas was celebrated, it seems that the celebration also absorbed some of the customs of the Saturnalia festival, such as the merry making, the exchanging of gifts, and the decorations.

In light of the above information and with reference to celebrating Christmas, a logical question to ask is, "...what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).

In order to answer this, let us consider a very terrible thing that happened many years ago on the 25<sup>th</sup> December.

In 167 BC, on December 25<sup>th</sup>, the Syrian ruler - Antiochus Epihanes – took over the Jewish Temple, and established there the worship of himself instead of the worship of God. Thus was the Temple defiled on that day. Today, during the Christmas season, there is much defilement through covetousness and drunkenness. People spend money that they do not have in order to put gifts under the tree, which has questionable origins.

However, Antiochus Epihanes' defilement of the temple only lasted three years. He did not consider the tenacity of some of the Jews. A movement formed and a guerrilla revolt, led by Judas Maccabaeus drove him out. On the 25<sup>th</sup> December, 164 BC (exactly three years to the day after it was defiled), the Temple was cleansed and consecrated. The worship of God was restored.

Today, we need another Maccabaen revolt! Let it be known that the 25<sup>th</sup> December belongs to God and not to Nimrod. The Bible says,

24 This *is* the day the LORD has made;  
We will rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:24)

Like every other day, the 25<sup>th</sup> December has been made by God. We need to take back the 25<sup>th</sup> December, and the Christmas season, and establish the true worship of God through Jesus Christ.

At the same time, the Christians is certainly not under any obligation to celebrate Christmas. Nowhere in the Bible is the Christian commanded to observe such a festival.

What about having a Christmas tree etc? Is this permissible for Christians? The purpose of this article is not to lay down a law of what you can and cannot do at Christmas. The Bible says,

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (Galatians 5:18)

If you are a Christian, then you have the Holy Spirit, and you have a conscience. This article has provided you with information about the roots of some of these things so that you can make an informed decision with good conscience toward God, about what you do or do not do at Christmas.

May God's Spirit continue to lead us into all truth. And let us use every opportunity to tell other the good news about Jesus. Peace be with you all.