

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Christmas is one of the most revered celebrations of modern Christians. Along with Easter, in many ways it defines their beliefs. Most sincerely think they are honoring and worshipping God and Jesus Christ by keeping these days.

On the other hand, those who are opposed to this holiday usually note that, among other things, the birth of Jesus Christ was not in the winter and the Bible nowhere states that His birth is to be celebrated but, rather, His death.

However, the real reason that Christmas, and by extension all other 'religious' holidays, is wrong is much more primitive than the many intellectual arguments. Over the millennia, there have existed countless pagan religions, gods, and 'holidays'. A few are mentioned in some detail in the Bible, but in most cases God simply and vehemently condemns the gods of the pagan nations. Instead of addressing the evil of each pagan religious system, there is one specific incident in the Bible that is a stark example of why Christmas and other man-made 'feasts' are an abomination to God. That story is of the golden calf, which is seen by many as when the Israelites rejected God and turned back to worshipping pagan gods. Surprising as it might be, that is not what the Israelites did nor is it the reason God was so angry with them. Understanding what led to the golden calf is crucial because it almost led to the destruction of the whole Israelite nation (Exo. 32:10). It also is a warning against all days that men set aside to worship God. Read the main story of the golden calf:

EXODUS 32:1, 4-6 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us **gods [Heb. Elohim]** that shall go before us; for **as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.**" ... 4 And he [Aaron] received *the gold* from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and **made a molded calf.** Then they said, "**This is your god [Heb. Elohim],** O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" 5 So when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "**Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD.**" 6 Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

When reading these verses, people usually assume that the Israelites were making an image of an Egyptian god. While there were Egyptian influences going on, there is much more to the story. First of all, notice that the whole matter hinged on the fact that they were worried something had happened to Moses. Why would they be concerned about him? Because he was their MEDIATOR with God. They were so dependent upon him that, in their minds, it was actually MOSES who brought them out of Egypt (v1). They feared that Moses was dead and that was a serious matter because they utterly relied upon him for all communication with God. Recall that God had spoken to ALL the Israelites when they were at Mount Sinai. They were so filled with fear and terror that they said to Moses, "**You speak with us,** and we will hear; but **let not God speak with us,** lest we die." (Exod. 20:19).

By the time of the golden calf incident, the Israelites had heard God and witnessed many powerful miracles even though they repeatedly showed little faith that He would continue to provide for them. So, it would be surprising if the Israelites had forgotten about God a mere 40 days later.

If Moses had died on the mountain, the Israelites had a serious problem—how could know what God wanted them to do? So, they needed some other way to communicate with God. This is where they fell victim to their Egyptian influence and decided to make an image. However, it was not an image of a pagan god—verse 1 clearly says they wanted an image of ELOHIM, which most texts translate as “gods”. The Israelites obviously knew the names of the Egyptian gods but Elohim is NOT the name of an Egyptian god, it was the name of THEIR God!

Unconvinced? Then note what the Israelites said: “make us **Elohim**” (v1). They did not use the name of any Egyptian god; they said ELOHIM, the name of their God. Notice also what Aaron said after making the image: “This is **your god (singular) [Heb. Elohim]**, O Israel, **that brought you out of the land of Egypt!**” (Exod. 32:4). Again, Aaron named God. The Israelites were clearly NOT making an image of a pagan god.

Because the golden calf was an image of their God—Elohim—Aaron then dedicated it by having “a feast to the **LORD**” (v5). The word ‘LORD’ (all caps) in many translations comes from the Hebrew Tetragrammaton YHVH (Yehovah). Who was YHVH? Speaking to Moses, God said:

EXODUS 3:13-15 Then Moses said to God, “Indeed, *when* I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What *is* His name?’ what shall I say to them?” 14 And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ “ 15 Moreover God said to Moses, “Thus **you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘The LORD [YHVH] God [Elohim]** of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. **This is My name forever**, and this *is* My memorial to all generations.’

The “LORD God” is YHVH Elohim in Hebrew and it is the name God told Moses to tell the Israelites! So, the Israelites KNEW the name of their God and their golden calf was an image of THEIR God.

But why a calf? The word for *calf* (Heb. *`egel*) can also mean a young male ox, especially one that has not yet been tamed with a yoke¹. It is doubtful that the Israelites made an image of a helpless newborn calf to represent their God who was mighty and powerful. Instead, the image was of a young male ox in the prime of its strength that had never been tamed or put under a yoke. If you have ever seen pictures of oxen, they are large and powerful beasts. When provoked, a young and wild ox can be a frightful animal. The Israelites saw with their own eyes the power of God and, in their minds, He could not be tamed or defeated. A young wild ox is even how GOD described Himself²:

¹ Jer. 31:18.

² Also Num. 23:22.

NUMBERS 24:8 “God brings him [*Israel*] out of Egypt; **He has strength like a wild ox**; He shall consume the nations, His enemies; He shall break their bones And pierce *them* with His arrows.

Now the story of the golden ‘calf’ makes more sense. The Israelites needed to communicate with their God—YHVH Elohim—but Moses, their Mediator, was missing going on 40 days. In their minds, the solution was to make an image of Him. This was the method commonly used by the Egyptians and other nations to communicate with their gods. That God would communicate directly with them was something they still struggled to understand. Under the circumstances, they needed an image of YHVH Elohim and what better one than an all powerful and unbreakable young ox, just as God described Himself; the same One who brought them out of Egypt!

In all this, the Israelites had good motives or intentions, but making that image was a very serious mistake that cost the lives of 3,000 men³. They had not, at least in their minds, broken the first commandment (“have no other gods before Me”) but they obviously violated the second commandment:

EXODUS 20:4-5 “**You shall not make for yourself a carved image**—any likeness of *anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth; 5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. ...

Even though they made an image to YHVH Elohim and had dedicated it by declaring a feast day that included burnt and peace offerings (Exod. 32:5-6), God was furious. From the beginning, He had wanted a direct relationship with the Israelites. They were ALL to be His priests to the other nations:

EXODUS 19:6 ‘And you **[the children of Israel] shall be to Me a kingdom of priests** and a holy nation.’ These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

But the Israelites were too fearful of God so they demanded that Moses be their mediator and lost that direct relationship. Moreover, as a result of the golden calf, all the tribes except Levi were disqualified from being priests. The Israelites failed from the start to be—and do—what God commanded them.

With this understanding of the golden calf, it is easy to understand the real reason that Christmas is wrong. First of all, note that the primary centerpiece of Christmas is the evergreen tree. While there are mangers, etc., the universal symbol is the tree itself. What does it signify? While most who keep Christmas cannot answer that question, God actually describes Himself like an evergreen tree!

HOSEA 14:8 “Ephraim *shall* say, ‘What have I to do anymore with idols [*images*]?’ I [*the LORD*] have heard and observed him [*Ephraim*]. **I [*the LORD*] am like a green cypress tree; your fruit is found in Me.**”

³ Exod. 32:25-28.

The Christmas tree reflects God likening Himself to a cypress tree, just as the young ox portrayed YHWH Elohim. So, a Christmas tree is exactly the same as the golden calf—it is a violation of the second commandment.

Christmas is also a day that PEOPLE have made into a 'feast' to God—just as the Israelites did. In both cases God did not authorize those days to honor and worship Him. It does not matter that God characterizes Himself as an ox or an evergreen tree nor does it change anything if these days are dedicated by people in a feast with burnt and peace offerings. When God says NOT to make an image of anything in the entire universe or bow down to it, He means it! When He says to keep His Sabbaths and holydays, He means it! THIS is why Christmas is wrong—remember what God wanted to do to the Israelites! To ensure it never happened again, God later commanded:

DEUTERONOMY 12:29-32 “When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, 30 “take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’ 31 **“You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. 32 “Whatever I command you, be careful /take heed/ to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.”**

God warns to precisely observe ALL His commands regarding how He is to be worshipped and served. No one is to add to or take away from them, no matter how good their intentions! God is NOT pleased with Christmas or any other manmade 'religious' holiday. He has commanded His people to worship Him on the weekly Sabbaths and holydays and NO OTHER DAYS! And that still applies to today:

JOHN 4:23-24 “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will **worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.** 24 “God is Spirit, and **those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.**”

GOD tells us how to please Him, worship Him, and honor Him. No one is to add to what He has commanded or take away from it. To obey God REQUIRES a humble and contrite spirit:

ISAIAH 57:15 For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, With him **who has a contrite and humble spirit**, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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