

HOW and WHEN Church Festivals were Changed

Here is the astonishing eye-opening history, thoroughly documented, now published for the first time.

by Herman L. Hoeb

FOR CENTURIES a continuous and violent controversy has raged over the observance of religious days. This controversy *still exists today*.

Multitudes of conflicting sects claim that Sunday, with its eucharist, communion or Lord's supper, is a divinely instituted day for Christians.

Controversy exists over Easter, Christmas, saint's days, Pentecost or Whitsunday, All Souls' day, the feasts of the Annunciation, the Assumption and others as sacred occasions. Are all, some, or none of these, "Christian" institutions?

This problem is vitally important. It involves the *fundamental* teachings and traditions of opposing religious denominations which claim to follow Jesus Christ. For centuries the Catholic Church deemed it *essential to salvation* that many days and feasts be held sacred. Protestants are in great confusion as to exactly *which* days are obligatory and *how* these days came to be observed. A few affirm the sanctity of the Sabbath but reject the Holy Days given by God to His people.

But the disagreement is not simply among the millions who believe it is essential to observe special days. There are thousands of individuals and groups which maintain that it is absolutely wrong to celebrate *any day whatever*. Certain other sects, which pass tracts on street corners, contend that *it does not matter* which days are to be regarded as sacred.

The Scripture CANNOT SUPPORT *each of these contradictory ideas*.

What is the truth?

WHY Churches Disagree

Certainly the contradicting tracts, pamphlets and books cannot all be correct. False teaching *must* have crept into Christianity at some time *since* Jesus founded the original, true church.

Every sect admits this.

Each believes that at some particular time certain teachings contrary to its particular tenets crept into Christianity. *When* did these errors arise and *by*

whom? What denominations are teaching error today? What is the "faith which was once delivered unto the saints"? (Jude 3) These are questions that must be answered!

How to Find the TRUTH

It is our purpose to examine and explain the historical records of the Bible. Scripture gives the only inspired account of the practices of the early church because *it was written by the inspired leaders of that church*. The letters of Paul were recognized by Peter to be inspired "scripture" (2 Peter 3:16).

Then the councils and early writings of the Catholic Church must be searched to reveal the practice *and heresies* of so called Christianity in the *following centuries*. This is one of the most misunderstood portions of history *ever to be recorded*. Most Catholics and Protestants never learn what occurred in those early church councils.

Also the findings of secular history, which are often disputed by certain sects, will aid in determining exactly what teachings bear the stamp of Biblical truth, and which are errors and superstitions veiled under the name of Christ.

Too often it is the policy of certain church teachers to *confuse* people. Ministers KNOW that if they can keep their followers confused, that they will *continue in the religious customs learned from childhood*. These leaders know that human beings are not inclined to change religious beliefs when their minds are in confusion. Churches perpetuate faulty creeds rather than allow their adherents to examine with an open mind the following facts of Scripture and history.

But no one needs to remain in doubt or ignorance. *The facts can be known*. To neglect these facts is tantamount to rejecting the Bible revelation.

The time has come to present the truth, from whatever source it may be obtained. Instead of seeking to prove special preconceived arguments, the declaration of the apostle Paul must be fol-

lowed: "*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good*" (I Thess. 5:21).

Common Teachings False

The vast numbers of pamphlets and books written on the observance of religious days are utterly lacking in truth. They deceive the people because most readers are unable to distinguish the true facts from the "wished-to-be-believed" facts or preconceived notions. False doctrines are often due to unwillingness on the part of many writers to examine *all* sources of information. The reason for this lack of *all* the facts is the fear that creeds and dogmas will not stand the full light of penetrating research.

Modern critics follow the trend of the age. They do not accept or trust the Scripture as the revelation of God to man. That is why they have not presented the correct answers with all their scholarship and abundance of facts. They grope in the darkness of conflicting historical evidence without any sure foundation.

Even those *few* books which contain PART of the truth are highly inadequate. Half the truth can be as misleading as total error, for the very reason that it seems to be *so near* the truth.

HOW to Learn the Whole Truth

Where did Christians acquire the custom of observing Christmas, Easter, the Assumption, Halloween and other days?

The only way to understand the truth about church days and festivals is to find the *origin* of the present differences of practice. The very beginning of human civilization is involved. Strange as it may seem, *the observance of days did NOT start with the church in the New Testament*.

Without examining ancient civilization, and the days held sacred by heathen nations, it is *impossible* to arrive at the correct conclusions. Why? Here is the answer!

"Many of the holy days in the religious calendar of Christendom were borrowed,

as is well known, from the public festivals, of ancient nations" (Webster, *Rest Days*, page 306).

The question of *tradition* must be examined. Catholics and even many Protestants acknowledge that Christian practice cannot be understood without it. Many Protestants hold that the Bible should be the only standard. By others, tradition is accepted in determining church festivals. *If* tradition, then *which* traditions are correct? There is much disagreement on this point between Protestants and Catholics. The former accept only a small portion of the multitudinous traditions of the Catholic Church.

Did Jesus give the apostles the right, as Catholics believe, *to introduce different days* from those He Himself observed? *How far* are Christians expected to follow the example of the life of Jesus?

Was Paul commissioned by Jesus *to alter* the days that the Gentile churches were to hold sacred?

The Protestant attitude is that the Catholic church has *not* preserved the truth of the Bible whole and inviolate. The reformers supposedly purified the faith.

Then, *why all this disagreement among Protestants?* Are they really continuing false practices instead of the "faith once delivered"?

Also bear this in mind. The practice of the Christian world has *never* been the same through all ages. The Bible teaches that it *does matter* what one believes. We must know *once and for all time*, exactly what festivals the Bible declares to be right, and which traditions, if any, are to be followed.

The Church in the Heathen World

The early church developed under the guidance of the apostles during the decades when the Roman Empire was at its full power. She had to meet the great Roman civilization with its civil, social and religious customs that were often diametrically opposed to the teachings of Jesus. To convert men and women steeped in heathen rites necessitated the power of God and an understanding of the ideas of the surrounding heathen world.

What was that world, *with its heathen holidays*, really like? Did the church meet it with *compromise*?

No one can fully understand today *how* the early Christians dealt with paganism until it is first grasped what those pagan customs were and how they developed. What was basically wrong with heathenism?

Origin of Heathenism

Modern evolutionists and skeptics picture heathen ideologies as the *pro-*

gressive cultural acts of man as he developed beyond his bestial tendencies. Nearly every child has been indoctrinated in the first years of grammar school with fascinating stories supposedly explaining his own "primitive" ancestors' superstitions when the magnitude of creation was first visualized.

If the truth would be known, civilization did not develop in this way. Rather, the overwhelming evidence of history and archeology verifies a different—a surprising—account of the origin of heathen civilization. It began forty-two centuries ago with Nimrod and his associates in the Middle East. Not tens of thousands of years previously, as evolutionary theories purport to explain.

The apostle Paul, in the first chapter of Romans, gives a precise, vital summary of the *real* beginning of heathenism—those customs that surrounded the early church in the days of the Roman Empire. Here is what he writes about the wise and dignified ancients and pagan philosophers:

"Because that, *when they knew God*, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise they became fools, and *changed* the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man . . . Who *changed the truth of God into a lie*, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator . . . And even as *they did not like to retain God in their knowledge*, God gave them over to a reprobate mind . . ." (Romans 1: 21-32).

Here is the origin of Roman society!

It was developed by men who "knew God." Who "changed the truth of God into a lie." Who "did not like to retain God in their knowledge." *God was NOT unknown* by the ancients.

Notice that the apostle Paul pictures the founders of civilization as doing this in their human wisdom. They wanted to glorify God *in their own way*. It *seemed* right to them. Paganism is not a society of deliberate evil, but of what *appears* to be right to the *natural* man. Heathenism is what men *want* to do, not what they *ought* to do. It is a mixture of good and evil.

There was not a single phase of life that remained untouched by human contamination—the desire on the part of human beings to develop a society *in opposition to God's way*. Heathen customs ever since the building of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11) have affected the social, political, economic and religious life of *all people to this very day*. The great men who founded ancient civilizations "liberated" men from God. They received in return honor and

even worship as mighty leaders "before" or "in place of" the Lord (Genesis 10: 9). They were later deified as "gods," says Alexander Hislop, in *The Two Babylons*.

Because the ancient founders of civilization didn't want to retain God in their knowledge, their understanding became perverted. They garbled and perverted stories of the creation, of the garden of Eden and life before the deluge. These traditions were combined with the lives of those heroes and became the myths of antiquity. Modern sceptics believe *mythology* "is man's first effort to know his God" (Bullfinch's *Age of Fable*, p. ix). In reality it is the *degraded* and corrupted remains of the recorded episodes and exploits of men who, knowing God, turned the truth of God into a lie! These deified heroes were soon clothed with the splendor of the stars and planets that were symbolic of their attributes. Thus the heavens bear the names of heathen deities or heroes to this day.

The Heathen Knew About the Sabbath!

The Bible records the fact that ancient nations at one time knew of God *before they descended into gross idolatry* with the rebellion at the tower of Babel. *They knew* He was the Creator.

One of His acts in being Creator, according to the second chapter of Genesis, was the hallowing of the seventh day. "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made" (Genesis 2:3).

Jesus declared to the Pharisees that the Sabbath was made for *man*. Not the Jews alone, but for man and hence at man's creation. Man was not made to serve the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was made to be a blessing *for man* (Mark 2:27). In declaring His law, God told the Israelites to "*remember* the Sabbath day, to *keep* it holy. . . . For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it" (Exodus 20:9-11). The Sabbath day that God blessed according to Genesis 2 was the *seventh day*. It was hallowed *at creation for man*, not just Israel only.

Now, the Bible declared that the Sabbath was *from the beginning*, not just from the time of Moses. Since Paul says that the heathen originally knew God, but turned the truth into a lie afterward, then there ought to be some record wherein the ancient heathen nations *recognized that at creation, long before Moses was born*, God set apart the seventh day as a rest or holy day. Is there such a record?

Yes!

In the library of Asshur-bani-pal of Assyria, many clay tablets have been found relating the *epic of creation* according to the limited knowledge of the Babylonians. One of these tablets reads: "On the seventh day He appointed a holy day, and to cease from all business He commanded" (Henry H. Halley, *Pocket Bible Handbook*, p. 64).

Here is absolute proof from the ancient records collected by this Assyrian King that the Babylonians knew God set apart the seventh day as a holy day at Creation, not at the time of Moses.

But how long did they observe or preserve the knowledge of it?

Heathen Lose Sabbath

It has long been the fancy of sceptics and critics that *Moses* derived the Sabbath from ancient Babylonia. This idea has been almost totally abandoned as more truth comes to light. *God* gave the Sabbath to the world at creation, but the world after the deluge *lost it*. Within a few generations the seventh day, which was originally ordained for joy and rest from physical labor, became a day of superstition in the *few* heathen nations in which it was remembered.

Here is what happened. The Sabbath was disassociated—separated from the *true* week—according to most modern scholars. It became connected with the month. The early Babylonians divided "the first 28 days of each month into four weeks terminating respectively on the 7th, 14th, 21st, and 28th day, and by making the first week of the new month always begin with the new moon." The seventh day of each Babylonian week was called a *shabattum*, the pagan corruption of the *Sabbath*. Kings, doctors and others were to refrain from certain labors as displeasing to the deity on the 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th and certain other days of each month. (*Encyclopaedia Biblica*, T. K. Cheyne and J. Sutherland Black, editors, pp. 5290, 4179.)

Thus the true Sabbath was changed into periods of ill omens. And no wonder! The heathen originally knew the just "judgment of God" against those who violated His laws (Romans 1:32). When once the true Sabbath was changed, God became the Unknown One. Displacing Him from their minds, the nations began to fear their herogods *on days they made for themselves*. With passing centuries all semblance of the true Sabbath was lost to the heathen, although many near eastern nations did preserve a corrupt *form* of a seven day week.

Of this preservation of a form of the *week* among *middle eastern* nations, *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, page 745, says: "Its antiquity is so great, its observance so widespread . . . that it must probably

be thrown back as far as the creation of man. The week and the Sabbath are thus as old as man himself."

The Roman civilization at the time of the early church was just beginning to recover a knowledge of the week and of the Sabbath (through the dispersed Jews). The Romans had previously departed so far from God that they lost the week. Any period of time less than a month was measured by the lunar *ides*, the *kalends* and the *nones*. (Webster, *Rest Days*, p. 170.)

True Origin of "Church" Festivals

The early Christians encountered scores of festivals in the Roman Empire. These days had their idolatrous beginning two thousand years prior in Mesopotamia, where the original Babylon was located. Pagan feasts with their many customs were *commemorative* festivals ordained to the honor of the heroes who founded human civilization contrary to the ways of God, and who formed their own religious beliefs by turning the truth of God into a lie.

These holidays depicted episodes in the lives of the apostates Nimrod, Semiramis, Tammuz and others. Under the influence of Satan, they organized a counterfeit plan of redemption to deceive the world in order to acquire power for themselves. This Babylonish system of religion and government was secretly explained by the ancient *mysteries* against which Paul warned the true church (2 Thessalonians 2:7). This ancient pagan system had to be mysterious. The patriarchs were still alive. *The truth of God was known*, as Paul states, (Romans 1:25). *The truth had to be turned into a lie with stealth*.

The glory of the planets and stars was soon connected with the "glorious" exploits of these leaders whose names are still affixed to them (Deut. 4:19). *Hence the pagan commemorative festivals were associated with the movements of the heavenly bodies very early in history*. Nimrod became Baal the sun-god, mentioned so frequently in the Old Testament. *This sun-worship covered all nations of heathendom*.

The Family of Nimrod

The death of Nimrod and his traditional rebirth through Tammuz, the son of the Queen of heaven, according to the lying mysteries, was commemorated at the winter solstice when the "rebirth" or annual rising of the sun occurs in the heavens. This festival of Babylon even reached Rome where it was called the Saturnalia (December 17-24) and preceded the Brumalia (December 25). Associated with this festival were evergreen trees, the fir in Rome and the palm in Egypt, and the giving of gifts,

says Hislop in *The Two Babylons*, p. 97.

Why do these peculiarly pagan customs now prevail among Christians at the same time of year?

Yes, why? Did the original pure church which abhorred idolatry finally graft idolatrous customs into the church?

Together with Nimrod was Semiramis, his wife, the self-appointed Queen of heaven. In the Old Testament she is termed *Ashteroth*; in Assyria she was called *Ishtar*; by the pagan Germans, *Ostara*; by our Anglo-Saxon ancestors, *Eastre* (Hislop, pp. 103-113). At Rome, where her name was Cybele, spring festivals were held in her honor, accompanied by the customary use of buns and dyed eggs (Hislop, p. 108).

Today *these* same customs prevail in Christendom at the same time of year. Why? Are these customs part of the faith once delivered? Or were they added afterward in an apostatizing church age? The truth of history which will follow makes the answer to this question so plain that there shall be no doubt in anyone's mind.

Tammuz, an illegitimate son of Semiramis, became the great mediatorial son of the sun-god, supposedly begotten of the spirit of Nimrod after his death. Semiramis and Tammuz were the original *Mother and Child* which have become so prominent in Catholic worship. After the death of Tammuz, "a Lent of forty days was held in the spring" in the Roman Empire, as elsewhere, in commemoration of him (Hislop, p. 105). The prophet Ezekiel saw this very idolatrous practice occurring in Jerusalem (Ez. 8:14).

By whose authority is this same forty day period of Lent celebrated in so many churches in honor of the death of Christ instead of Tammuz? Did Paul teach this adaption of idolatrous customs? Or did he forbid it? How did the original true church in the days of the apostles regard these days *that were then celebrated* by the pagans in the Roman Empire?

Hundreds of Festivals

The major feasts just mentioned were but a minute number of the hundreds of idolatrous and licentious occasions observed in the pagan world into which the early church spread. Most festivals had their real origin in Babylon from whence they travelled eastward and westward engulfing all civilization.

These holidays, now found in Christendom, were Satan-inspired memorials of pagan traditions—memorials which anticipated by two thousand years the beginning of the true plan of God. The average Roman, of course, saw no harm

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in these superstitious, idolatrous celebrations. But the early true church recognized *the abomination in which God held them* (I Peter 4:3).

In coming issues the history of these feasts will be presented. Read how professed Christians *changed their attitude toward these occasions and accepted them into the church.*

Also read why God chose to reveal to Israel His Sabbath and annual Holy Days. There is a great deal of confusion concerning the special purpose which these festivals serve in New Testament times. It is little understood. Just as the heathen, under the universal influence of Satan, counterfeited the plan of God, *which they already understood basically*, they also anticipated the true Festivals of God for his church by inventing many of their own!

To be continued in next issue