

THE BIBLE ANSWERS

Short Questions

FROM OUR READERS

HERE are the *Bible* answers to questions which can be answered briefly in a short space. *Send in your questions.* While we cannot promise that all questions will find space for answer in this department, we shall try to answer all that are vital and in the general interest of our readers.

● Should a Christian observe Christmas? How did Christmas originate?

O. M., London, England

Look at the FACTS of history.

Did you know that in Great Britain, for example, "the 25th of December was a festival *long before the conversion to Christianity*"? (See the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.)

That in the Roman Empire, Christmas was *first* proclaimed and officially celebrated as a Church festival by Pope Liberius in 354 A.D.—more than 350 years after the birth of Jesus Christ?

Says the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Christmas was *not* among the earliest festivals of the church. Irenaeus and Tertullian [writers who lived around 200 A.D.] omit it from their lists of feasts . . ." (Vol. III, p. 724).

"The observance of Christmas," comments a Protestant encyclopedia, "is *not* of Divine appointment, *nor* is it of *New Testament origin* . . . The fathers of the first three centuries do not speak of any special observance of the nativity." (*Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, McClintock and Strong, Vol. III, p. 276.)

But, adds the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "by the time of Jerome and Augustine [mid-fourth century], the December feast is established" (Vol. III, p. 275).

These are the facts of history!

Contrary to popular belief, Christmas does *not* commemorate the birth date of Jesus Christ. The early Christian church never kept it.

Then how did Christmas come to be considered a "Christian Holiday"?

Turn back the pages of history for a moment. Here's what happened.

For more than 250 years after the birth of Christ, pagan Rome indulged in the worship of many gods. The primary Roman deity during this period, however, was Jupiter. His festival fell in September of each year.

But in 273 A.D. something extraordinary occurred. *Jupiter was dethroned* and another chief deity became the supreme god of pagan Rome. It was the sun-god *Bel* or *Baal*. The emperor responsible for introducing this *new form* of pagan worship into the Roman Empire was Aurelian. Here is what history tells us about him.

"Emperor Aurelian made the Babylonian *Baal* chief god of the empire, under the name of 'Sol Invictus' [the unconquerable sun], in 273 A.D. His FESTIVAL WAS ON DECEMBER 25." (*Grosse Brockhaus*, Vol. III, p. 1.)

Notice in particular that this heathen sun-festival was celebrated on December 25, the very same day on which a professing "Christian" world now celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ.

With the introduction of the December feast began a new era in the religion of pagan Rome. Instead of keeping a September festival to honour Jupiter, the Roman masses now kept a December 25 festival to honour the new sun-god, *Baal*.

But why did the pagan Romans worship the sun on that particular day—December 25?

"In the Julian calendar [a pagan Roman calendar] the twenty-fifth of December was reckoned the winter solstice, and it was regarded as the nativity of the sun, *because* the sun begins to lengthen and the power of the sun to increase from that turning point of the year." (*Golden Bough*, Frazer, p. 358, abridged edition.)

That turning point of the year was a time of great jubilation, a time of idolatrous, heathen merry-making. The masses enjoyed it. Often it would degenerate into a drunken debauchery with unrestrained sensual pleasures.

By introducing such a festival in Rome, Emperor Aurelian gave the pleasure-mad Romans something to look forward to each season. Once introduced, this pagan sun-worship festival caught on like wildfire.

But what circumstances led the Roman head of state to depose Jupiter and replace him with the sun-god Baal? Here is what happened!

During his life, Aurelian had become interested in the religions of the East—of Persia and Babylon. At the same time many Romans considered Jupiter as *old-fashioned* and consequently were not fervently behind the old State religion. This influenced the emperor to look for another religion—a religion which would be *more attractive* and *more appealing* to the Roman populace.

Aurelian then made a journey to the East—to the areas of Babylon and Syria. He chose these areas because a vast number of the Romans had come from there. During the centuries preceding his reign, a *massive* East-to-West movement of peoples had taken place. Babylonians, Syrians, Samaritans and Persians flocked into Rome as slaves or immigrants.

"By far the larger part—perhaps ninety percent—had *Oriental blood* in their veins," says Professor Frank (see "American Historical Review," July 1916).

The people comprising these new races—who had left their Eastern lands and made Italy and Rome their new homeland—were Babylonian sun-worshippers, And they brought their brand of religion with them. "Immigrants

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from the East, and Romans, especially soldiers who had resided there, brought the religion of the sun with them" (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. VIII, p. 59).

Consequently, when the Roman Emperor Aurelian ousted Jupiter and replaced his worship with that of the sun-god, the masses in Rome and Italy welcomed this new and yet familiar form of worship. It was an easy task to install this new Babylonian sun-worship within the Roman Empire.

And that, as history records, is exactly what took place!

Aurelian, returning from his trip to the East, decreed that Jupiter be ousted and Baal-worship instituted. "Romans" were no longer to observe a September feast to Jupiter. Rather, they were commanded to celebrate a December 25

festival to Baal. The year was 273 A.D. It was at this time that Aurelian "created a new worship, that of the 'Invincible Sun,'" writes Franz Cumont (see *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*, p. 114).

Although the East—from which this new worship came—had been observing this December festival for hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, it was not until the year 273 A.D. that this festival was widely celebrated in Rome and the West.

Frazier describes how the pagan feast of Baal was celebrated, especially in Syria and Egypt. "The celebrants retired into certain inner shrines, from which at midnight they issued with a loud cry, 'The Virgin has brought forth! The light is waxing!' The Egyptians even represented the *new-born sun by the image of an infant* which on his birthday, the winter solstice, they brought forth and exhibited to his worshippers. The Virgin who thus conceived and bore a son on the twenty-fifth of December was the great *Oriental goddess*, whom the Semites called the Heavenly Virgin or simply the Heavenly Goddess" (*The Golden Bough*, p. 358, abridged edition).

Unbelievable though it may sound, the heathen observed a festival on December 25—*long before* Christ was born! They also worshiped a "mother and child." Only with them the mother was the ancient pagan queen of heaven and the child the sun-god Baal re-incarnated.

But why, then, did a so-called Christian world choose the date of December 25 to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ?

About half a century after the wor-

ship of the sun-god Baal was established in Rome, Emperor Constantine was "converted" to Christianity. Now a "Christian" instead of a pagan, the emperor was encouraged by the professing Christian Church to uproot what she then considered to be pagan, idolatrous feasts. The December 25 festival was one of them. It had to go.

This promptly met with failure. The December 25 celebration was too deeply rooted. It was unthinkable to give it up. The Roman population was heathen and heathen it was to remain. And there was little the emperor or the church leaders could do about it, *unless . . .*

. . . Unless they compromised!

Church leaders, desirous to add multitudes of new members, thought of a scheme. Consulting with the emperor, they influenced him to pass a law by which all Roman slaves would be given their freedom *if* they would embrace Christianity. This fantastic offer induced vast numbers of pagans to be baptized into the professing Christian Church. It was hoped that such a move would prevent these baptized heathen from observing any pagan festivals, particularly the December 25 one.

But the scheme backfired! The heathen element within the Church still adhered to their superstitions. They still—each December 25th—joined the pagan masses of Rome in celebrating the festival of the sun-god.

The church faced a seemingly unsolvable dilemma. Repeatedly she requested the "Christian" emperor Constantine to pass strict decrees to deter the pagan population of Rome from observing this sun-god festival.

But Constantine refused! He was

afraid of Rome's pagan population turning against him if he became too strict. He did not want, under any circumstances, both factions to fight each other, thus jeopardizing the stability and unity of the empire. Constantine's method of solving this problem was to bring both factions together—to appease both sides. (See Draper's *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science*, pp. 46-49.)

Constantine's advice for the "Christian" church was to "meet the heathen halfway." To allow them to retain the feasts they were accustomed to. "Don't make it harder, but easier for the heathen to be converted to Christianity!" was the sage advice of the emperor.

And the Church did so.

The Church decided to counteract the pagans' celebration of the sun-god on December 25 by instituting a man-made celebration supposedly in honor of Jesus Christ, the true "Sun of Righteousness."

This is why, in 354 A.D., for the very first time the Catholic Church officially celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ *on December 25* under Pope Liberius.

Thus the Church dressed up paganism in Christian clothes.

But that is exactly what God Almighty *condemns* in His revealed Word. "Thus saith the Eternal, *Learn not the way of the heathen . . . for the customs of the people are vain . . .*" (Jeremiah 10:1-2). If the Eternal God wanted us to keep Christmas, He would have commanded it!

God warns His people *not to borrow and use pagan customs* or festivals to worship Him in that way. "Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following [the heathen] . . . and that thou *enquire not* after their gods, saying, *How did these nations serve their gods?* even so will I do likewise" (Deut. 12:30).

Here God warned His people not to worship Him by means of *pagan customs and pagan feasts*. "THOU SHALT NOT DO SO UNTO THE ETERNAL THY GOD" (V. 31). That is the stern warning of the Almighty.

Will you heed?

The choice is yours!