

THE ANSWERS TO

## *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.

● Every year newspapers and magazines comment that Christmas is not Christian in origin. Is this true?  
G. O., England

The common assumption is that Christmas commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ.

But consider, for a moment, what Catholic, Protestant and secular historians say:

States 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. 3, p. 724).

A reputable Protestant encyclopedia adds: "The observance of Christmas 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*, M'Clintock and Strong, v. 3, p. 276).

But, adds the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "by the time of Jerome and Augustine [mid-fourth century], the December

feast is established" (vol. 3, p. 725). The exact year the Church instituted Christmas to be kept for the first time was 354 A.D. Before this time, the Church at large did not keep any commemorative celebration on December 25 in honor of Christ.

The New Testament record indicates Jesus could not have been born in late December. The exact day of His birth is not known, since the apostles never celebrated His birthday. All the historical evidence points to autumn as the time Jesus Christ was born. (For the full proof, write for the free article entitled: "When Was Christ Born?")

Further, the first celebrations of December 25 were observed by *non-Christians* long before Christ was ever born.

In Great Britain, for example, "the 25th of December was a festival *long before the conversion to Christianity*," states the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

#### Pagans Observe December 25th

In ancient Syria and Babylon — among other Eastern countries — the December 25 celebration was well-known and commonly observed by the heathen populace. It did not, of course, bear the name "Christmas" at that time. That was added later.

In the Christianized Roman Empire, Christmas was *first* proclaimed and kept as a Christian church festival by Pope Liberius in 354 A.D. — 357 years after the birth of Christ. Before this time, only the heathen segment of the Roman population celebrated December 25.

But how did the ancient Romans come to celebrate this day?

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 was Jupiter. His festival fell in September of each year.

But in 273 A.D. *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. 2, p. 1).

Aurelian "created a *new worship*, that of the 'Invincible Sun,'" writes Franz Cumont (see *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*, p. 114).

Notice in particular that this heathen sun-festival was celebrated on December 25, the very same day on which a Christian world 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 honor the outmoded Jupiter, the Roman masses now kept a December 25 festival to honor the new SUN-god, *Baal*.

By introducing such a jovial 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 that 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 these areas and were actually Eastern in race and temperament. 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. So great was the influx of these Eastern peoples that by the time of Tacitus, famous first-century Roman historian,

many of Rome's military men and senators were actually of foreign, Oriental blood.

"By far the larger part — perhaps ninety percent — had *Oriental blood* in their veins," says Professor Frank (see "American Historical Review," July 1916). Of this Eastern *racial* element another historian says, "The native Roman and Italian population steadily dwindled and the *gaps were filled by NEW RACES*" (read *Foreign Groups in Rome During the First Centuries of the Empire*, vol. 20, pp. 188-89).

#### Pagans Bring Own Religion

The people comprising these new races — who had left their Eastern lands and made Rome and Italy their new homeland — were Babylonian *sun-worshippers*. And they *brought their brand of religion with them*. These people had a great influence on Rome changing her religion. Notice what Hastings says, "Some of the most powerful divine invaders who came from the East to conquer the West were *solar divinities*. Also . . . philosophers and mystics had preached the divine nature of the sun and other celestial bodies. Immigrants 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. 8, 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. Since a vast number of Romans were at this time Eastern in origin anyway, it was so much an easier task to install this new Babylonian sun-worship within the Roman Empire.

And that, as history records, is exactly what transpired.

But why did the pagan Romans worship the sun on this one particular day — December 25? Here is why!

"In the Julian 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 ed.).

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

During this same period in Roman history, the Persian form of sun-worship was also introduced to Rome by her soldiers who had spent time in the eastern provinces. This Persian festival was celebrated in honor of Mithra, the sun god.

Concerning this Eastern festival, Franz Cumont states that "the sectaries — priests — of the Persian god . . . celebrated the *birth of the Sun on the 25th of December*" (*Mysteries of Mithra*, pp. 190-192). Cumont also describes how it 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. No doubt 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 ed.).

It may sound shocking, but the heathen observed a festival on December 25 — *long before* Christ was born. They also worshipped a "mother-and-child." Only with them the mother was the queen of heaven and the child the sun-god reincarnated.

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.

Why, then, did the 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.

He was encouraged by the Church to uproot what the Church considered to be pagan, idolatrous feasts. The December 25 festival was one of them. It had to go.

However, this prompting met with failure. There was little the emperor or the Church leaders could do about it.

Consulting with the emperor, the Church 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. It was hoped that such a move would prevent these baptized heathen from observing any pagan festivals, particularly the December 25 one.

#### Pagans Still Worship Sun-God

But the program backfired! The heathen element within the Church still adhered to their own sun-worship religion. They would still — each December 25th — join the 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 in the hope that these edicts would deter and prevent the pagan population of Rome from observing this sun-god festival.

But Constantine refused, and for a good reason. He was afraid of Rome's pagan population turning against him if he became too strict in forcing the populace to practice only the Christian customs. He did not want, under any circumstance, for 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.

Constantine's advice for the Church was to "meet the heathen half way." 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 — it followed Constantine's advice and compromised

with the heathen population of Rome.

The Catholic writer Aringhus acknowledges the *conformity* between the pagan and Christian form of worship. He further states that the leaders of the Church "found it necessary, in the conversion of the Gentiles, to dissemble, and WINK at many things, and *yield to the times*" (see Taylor's *Diegesis*, p. 237).

How the problem was resolved is stated very aptly by Dr. Hooykaas: "The Church was always anxious to *meet the heathen half way*, by allowing them to retain the feasts they were accustomed to, and giving them a CHRISTIAN DRESS, or attaching a new Christian significance to them" (*The Bible for Learners*, vol. 3, p. 67).

Not being able to abolish the customs of the heathen, the Church tried to "purify" those customs and festivals the pagans enjoyed so much. But how were they going to "purify" the December 25 celebration?

The Church decided to counteract the pagan's celebration of the sun-god on December 25 by adopting it as its own!

History records for us that "there can be little doubt that the Church was anxious to *distract* the attention of Christians from the old heathen feast days by *celebrating Christian festivals ON THE SAME DAY*" (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, James Hastings, vol. 3, p. 60).

This is exactly what happened in 354 A.D. when — for the very first time — the Church celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ *on December 25*, the exact date the pagans were still using in keeping their idolatrous festival to their sun-god. The Church felt that in this way she would be able to persuade the pagans to worship "the true Sun," Jesus Christ, instead of the literal sun.

Thus we see that the Church — to get the heathen to forsake their idolatrous ways — felt compelled to *employ their customs* and manners in worshipping Christ. No longer were the pagans to observe a December 25 celebration to honor the sun-god Baal. Now they were to honor and worship God's Son on that day, using their own heathen customs and methods.

And that is the origin of Christmas.