

# Bible Mini-course

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## ***Lesson 18 — Christmas: 4,000 Years of Tradition***

The biggest Christian holiday of the year, the gold standard against which all secular holidays are measured, should have overwhelming biblical approval and support. But where is it?

(The answers to the questions below are on the reverse.)

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1. What is incorrect about the following statement: "Three wise men visited the infant Messiah in a manger to honor the day of His birth."
  - a. Three wise men visited the infant Messiah.
  - b. The Messiah was in a manger when visited by wise men.
  - c. The wise men appeared before the Messiah to honor His birth.
  - d. All are incorrect.
2. Christmas is found in the New Testament and is mentioned by all early Church fathers.
  - a. True
  - b. False
3. The date for Christmas was derived from the winter solstice and beliefs surrounding it.
  - a. True
  - b. False
4. The adoption of many traditions now associated with Christmas relate directly to pagan converts and church tolerance.
  - a. True
  - b. False
5. According to Persian custom, what similarity (ies) did Mithra share with the New Testament Messiah?
  - a. Both were born on December 25
  - b. Both returned to heaven
  - c. Both promised a resurrection
  - d. b and c
6. What similarity (ies) did the Roman festival of Saturnalia share with today's Christmas observance?
  - a. Giving of gifts
  - b. Burning of candles
  - c. Elaborate meals
  - d. All of the above
7. From evidence in the New Testament, Yahshua was likely born during what season?
  - a. Spring
  - b. Summer
  - c. Fall
  - d. Winter
8. Which Christian sect opposed the observance of Christmas?
  - a. Puritans
  - b. Anglicans
  - c. Jesuits
  - d. Amish
9. Which Christian sect(s) do not observe Christmas on December 25?
  - a. Protestants
  - b. Orthodox Greek Catholics
  - c. Armenians
  - d. Episcopalians
10. Which prophet warned of a heathen custom with striking resemblance to today's Christmas tree?
  - a. Isaiah
  - b. Jeremiah
  - c. Ezekiel
  - b. Daniel
11. The tradition of Santa Claus is derived from what patron saint?
  - a. St. Claus
  - b. St. Santa
  - c. St. Nicholas
  - d. St. Augustine
12. While Christmas is absent from the New Testament, what days of worship are clearly found?
  - a. Feast of Unleavened Bread
  - b. Feast of Weeks (Pentecost)
  - c. Feast of Tabernacles
  - d. All of the above



# Score Yourself

1. **d.** Scripture mentions no specific number of wise men. Yahshua was in a house when the wise men came (Matt. 2:11). Herod's edict to murder all children two years and under indicates that the Messiah could have been as much as two years old (Matt 2:16). The wise men came to honor the King of the Jews, not celebrate His birthday (Matt. 2:2).
2. **b.** Christmas is absent from the New Testament and from the writings of the early fathers. "The observance of Christmas is not of divine appointment, nor is it of N.T. origin. The day of [Messiah's] birth cannot be ascertained from the N.T., or, indeed, from any other source. The fathers of the first three centuries do not speak of any special observance of the nativity" (*Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, 1981, Vol. 2, p. 276).
3. **a.** The date of Christmas was derived from dates honoring the birth of the sun. Long before Christmas, pagans honored the birthday of a well-known Iranian or Persian deity, "December 25...was adopted by the church as Christmas, the nativity of [Yahshua], to counteract the effects of these [pagan] festivals" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed., vol. 7, p. 202). German and Celtic tribes commemorated the return of the sun by a festival of yule, which, like other pagan celebrations, became adopted into Christmas (*The Encyclopedia Americana*, 1959, Vol. 6, p. 622, Christmas).
4. **a.** The early church synchronized many idolatrous doctrines of foreign neighbors still practiced today, including Christmas rituals. "The influx of pagans into the church through the mass conversion movements of the era contributed to the paganization of worship as the church tried to make these Barbarian converts feel at home within its fold..." *Christianity Through the Centuries*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, pp. 152-153).
5. **d.** In *Mystery Religions in the Ancient World*, Mithra was believed to be "the creator and orderer of the universe, hence a manifestation of the creative Logos or Word. Seeing mankind afflicted by Ahriman, the cosmic power of darkness, he incarnated on earth. His birth on 25 December was witnessed by shepherds. After many deeds he held a last supper with his disciples and returned to heaven. At the end of the world he will come again to judge resurrected mankind..." (p. 99). It is easy to see how the early Church was able to meld Mithraic rites into its own theology to attract everyone.
6. **d.** Many of today's Christmas traditions are rooted in a 2000-year old Roman celebration known as Saturnalia. According to *The Encyclopedia Americana*, "Saturnalia, a Roman feast celebrated in Mid-December, provided the model for many of the merry-making customs of Christmas. From this celebration, for example were derived the elaborate feasting, the giving of gifts, and the burning of candles. Lights also played an important part in most winter solstice festivals..." (1959, Vol. 6, Christmas, p. 622-623).
7. **c.** Yahshua was likely born in the fall. Luke's account says shepherds were watching over their flocks by night. Scholars have expressed doubt that shepherds would have been watching over their flocks in the cold winter, including **Adam Clarke's Commentary**, "...our [Savior] was not born on the 25th of December, when no flocks were out in the fields; nor could He have been born later than September, as the flocks were still in the fields by night," (note on Luke 2:8). Luke 2:1-7 states that Joseph was returning to Bethlehem from a required Roman census at the time of the Messiah's birth. December is not conducive to travel. John the Baptist was six months older than Yahshua (Luke 1:26). According to the **Companion Bible**, John was likely conceived in the third Hebrew month, June 13-19 (Luke 1:5, 1Chron. 24:10). (Appendix 179, Section III). If John the Baptist was conceived in the month of Sivan, Yahshua was likely born in the seventh month (September/October), possibly during the Feast of Tabernacles.
8. **a.** The Puritans were so ardently against Christmas that with their influence the English Parliament in 1643 outlawed Christmas altogether, along with the saints' days (**Celebrations**, p. 312).
9. **b., c.** One might assume that Christianity would be united on the date for one of its most sacred observances; however, because of the lack of evidence to support the actual date of the Messiah's birth there are numerous dates observed by different sects. "While Roman Catholics and Protestants generally observe Christmas on December 25, Orthodox Greek Catholics observe it on January 6 and the Armenian church on January 19" (**A Book About the Bible**, 1945, p. 23).
10. **b.** The prophet Jeremiah admonished Israel not to learn the ways of the heathen, which included a warning against tree worship, which has striking resemblance to today's Christmas tree (Jer. 10:2-5). Tree worship has a long and ancient history, which can be found in almost every part of the world. "...tree worship is well attested for all the great European families of the Aryan stock. Amongst the Celts the oak-worship of the Druids is familiar to everyone. Sacred groves were common among the ancient Germans, and tree-worship is hardly extinct among their descendants at the present day" (James Frazer, **The Golden Bough**, p. 58).
11. **c.** According to the **Encyclopedia Americana**, the tradition of Santa Claus is a "corruption of St. Nicholas, the patron saint of children. Under this name he is especially associated with the giving of presents at the Christmas season" (1959, Vol. 24, p. 278, Santa Claus).
12. **d.** While Christmas is completely absent from the New Testament, there are numerous passages showing that the Messiah and His Apostles observed the Holy Days that were originally ordained by Yahweh in the Old Testament (Mark 14:1; Acts 20:6; 1Cor. 5:8; Acts 2:1-4; Acts 20:16; John 7:2, 10). Observing the days actually in the Bible offers blessings for obedience, while man's days lack anointing.