

Is Christmas a New Testament Holy Day? #4

Esther 9:17-22

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What is the real issue in whether we celebrate Christmas or not? For me the real issue is the sufficiency of Jesus and His Word to govern us in all matters of faith and worship (including holy days). Is Jesus Lord over my desires, my memories, my worship, my family/friends?

For if we ask the question, “Is Christ pleased with the religious celebration of Christmas?”, we must have some warrant for it from His Word. Our Lord Jesus must tell us if He is pleased with it in His Word. If He has not done so (and He has not), if there is no date mentioned for Christ’s birth (and there is not), if there is no command to celebrate Christmas (and there is not), and if there is no authorized example of Jesus, the apostles (or anyone) in the New Testament celebrating Christmas (and there is not), but to the contrary we find commandments not to add to or take away from His Word in matters of doctrine and worship (including holy days), then we are in effect saying that what Jesus has revealed in Scripture concerning worship/holy days is not enough. We are saying that we need more than what He has revealed in the Bible. And in so doing, we make ourselves wiser than God Himself (thinking we have a better plan for worship and religious celebration of Holy Days than Christ).

Jesus is the Beginning and End of our faith. He controls what we are to believe and how we are to worship (not the church, not pastors or elders, not the Pope, not individual consciences), but Jesus Christ alone speaking in the Bible is Lord of our conscience.

Last Lord’s Day, we began looking at certain objections offered in response to the non-celebration of Christmas. We will conclude today with a couple more. There are two days of Jewish celebration that were not specifically appointed by God through Moses and yet are claimed to be approved by God as annual Holy Days of worship: (1) The Feast of Purim (Esther 9:17-22); and (2) The Feast of Dedication (John 10:22-23).

I. The Annual Feast of Purim (Esther 9:17-22).

A. From this passage some would seek to find an instituted Holy Day of worship in the Old Testament that was not instituted by God in the Law under Moses (in other words, a brand new Holy Day).

B. The biblical/historical setting and origin of this annual feast of Purim occurred at a time when the Jews had been led into Babylonian captivity finally in 586 B.C. and then transferred to Persian captivity in 538/539 B.C. for their rebellion against God. During the reign of King Ahasuerus of Persia, certain enemies of the Jews sought the complete extermination of the Jews (led by Haman—a chief officer in Persia).

C. Haman plotted/planned the day when this would happen and obtained the unwitting signature of the King. But the Lord had raised up Queen Esther (a Jew herself) to defend God’s people and foil the plan of wicked Haman. The Jews were preserved by God, and the day celebrating their victory over Haman and their enemies was called Purim.

D. Was Purim a religious Holy Day like the Passover?

1. Purim does not appear to have been a religious celebration or Holy Day at all, but rather a civil/national celebration commemorating the victory of the Jews over Haman and his allies. Purim was specifically authorized by the civil magistrate alone—not by God, not by prophets, or by priests. It was instituted by Queen Esther and her cousin, Mordecai (Esther 9:29).

2. Furthermore, Purim is not called one of “the feasts of the Lord” (Leviticus 23:2,4,37,44) nor called a “holy convocation” (Exodus 12:16; Leviticus 23:3,7,8,21,24,27,35,36; Numbers 28:18,25,26; Numbers 29:1,7,12,) which was the case with Holy Days in the Old Testament.

3. Nor do we find any acts of corporate worship or religious ceremonies performed during Purim (as occurred on all other Holy Days), but rather it was to be a day of “feasting and gladness” (Esther

9:17-18), a day of “gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another” (Esther 9:19), and “days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor” (Esther 9:22).

4. Purim was not a day of rest from all servile work as were the “holy convocations” established by God (Leviticus 16:29; Leviticus 23:3,28; Deuteronomy 16:8), but rather Purim was established by the civil magistrate as a national holiday more like a Day of Independence (Esther 9:16,22). Thus, it ought not to be equated with Christmas, which is clearly a religious Holy Day (in fact, a special Holy Day of worship).

II. The Feast of Dedication (John 10:22-23).

A. The Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) is a Jewish feast that commemorates the rededication of the altar within the Temple by Judas Maccabeus (164 B.C.) after the Temple in Jerusalem had been desecrated and profaned by Antiochus Epiphanes, the Syrian king (Daniel 11).

B. It is also called the Feast of Lights because it is claimed that God miraculously kept the Menorah in the Temple burning for 8 days (though they only had oil for one day). As for the alleged miracle of the oil, it was not recorded for 600 years until it appears in the Jewish Talmud (which contains traditions of rabbis on how to interpret God’s Law).

C. Clearly, this Jewish feast was not authorized by God in Scripture, but was authorized by Judas Maccabeus about 250 years after the Book of Malachi was written. This becomes very important for many who believe God approves of Holy Days not instituted by Him in Scripture. “We don’t need God’s biblical authorization because Jesus approved of the celebration of the Feast of Dedication, and it was not authorized in Scripture.”

D. It should be noted that Jesus did not go at that season of the year to Jerusalem in order to celebrate the Feast of Dedication, but rather He went to Jerusalem in order to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:1-10). John chapters 7-10 detail various events that occurred during that visit (the woman taken in adultery, the healing of the man born blind, and various discourses of the Lord). While Jesus continued ministering to the people in Jerusalem after the Feast of Tabernacles (over the next couple months), the Feast of Dedication came.

1. The Lord’s mere presence in Jerusalem (or His walking in the exterior parts of the Temple (Solomon’s Porch was in the Courtyard of the Gentiles) at the time of the Feast of Dedication does not indicate Christ’s approval of that feast or His celebration of that feast.

2. In order to prove from Scripture that Christ positively approved of the Feast of Dedication, one must either cite a biblical text in which He celebrated the Feast of Dedication or stated His approval of it (or produce an example of the apostles celebrating the Feast of Dedication). For the text (John 10:22-23) is silent in regard to Christ’s approval of this feast or His celebration of the feast. His mere presence in walking within Solomon’s Porch (or the Court of the Gentiles where both Jews and Gentile were allowed) does not indicate Jesus went into the Temple proper (the Court of Israel) to worship or to celebrate the Feast of Dedication as a Holy Day.

3. God must positively authorize His own worship and religious Holy Days and record it in Scripture. Christ’s silence about celebrating the Feast of Dedication is not His approval of it.

4. Jesus likely remained in Jerusalem after the Feast of Tabernacles in order to minister to the Jews gathered there not in order to celebrate the Feast of Dedication (even as Paul went to Jewish synagogues, not because he approved of a Jewish religion without Christ, but to minister to the Jews who were gathered there).

5. I submit that this passage is not a warrant to celebrate a Holy Day (like Christmas) that is not instituted by God in Scripture. As noted in an earlier sermon, King Jeroboam instituted a Holy Day not authorized by God in Scripture, and God condemned it (1 Kings 12:33).

D. Application

1. "Although Christmas may be forbidden as a religious celebration in the Church, it is not forbidden to a family who celebrate it in the privacy of their own home."
 - a. It is true that the Church has no authority from Christ to bring the celebration of Christmas into its worship, and therefore, it is an abuse of authority for church officers to do so (Matthew 28:19-20; Colossians 2:23—will worship).
 - b. However, remember that the Pharisees were practicing in their homes a "tradition of the elders" (Mark 7) by sprinkling their hands, pots, pans, furniture with holy water as an act of worship which God had not commanded, and Jesus condemns it (Mark 7:7).
 - c. Although it is a step in the right direction to keep Christmas out of the Church altogether, it is also required that we not bring into our homes worship that is not authorized by God.
2. "Our Christmas celebration is not a religious Holy Day; it is simply a time of family celebration. We do not emphasize the giving of presents, Santa Claus, or Christmas trees. We emphasize Jesus ('Jesus is the reason for the season')."
 - a. If Jesus is the reason for the season, has Jesus given us a biblical reason to celebrate the season? If He hasn't given us the reason in Scripture, how do we know He wants us to keep the season?
 - b. We love our families. We enjoy family reunions. Let's just do so without the celebration of a Holy Day Jesus has not appointed. If all Christmas celebration is avoided and we can simply enjoy a family day together, eating a meal together, and doing family activities/games together, we would jump at the opportunity. This is perhaps the most difficult obstacle that most Christians find in not celebrating Christmas—the reaction of family/friends who become upset, hurt, and do not understand that you are only wanting to be faithful to Christ.
 - c. This is not easy (especially at first). But once family and friends realize this is not a mere preference, but a conviction you have from God's Word, it was my experience that my family looked for ways to include us without the Christmas celebration.
3. "You're just AGAINST everything—against Christmas trees, against gift-giving, against celebrations, against having fun and building family memories."
 - a. It is what we are **FOR** that is most important in our consideration of Christmas as a Holy Day, not what we are AGAINST.
 - b. **We are FOR** Christ the King who is fully God and fully man and who came to this earth by a miraculous conception and lived a perfect life, sacrificed His own life to save His people from their sins, rose again the third day, ascended into heaven, is seated as King at the right hand of God the Father, and is coming again to raise and judge the dead. We receive eternal life as a free gift through faith alone in Christ alone. **We are FOR** our blessed Savior/King—Jesus Christ.
 - c. **We are FOR** the Lordship of Jesus over all worship (including Holy Days) and over every area of our lives (not our lordship). **We are FOR** showing our supreme love for Him by keeping His commandments and not adding to or subtracting from what He has commanded. **We are FOR** Jesus as King having alone the authority in Scripture to appoint Holy Days (like the Lord's Day). Since He has not appointed Christmas as a Holy Day, we should not keep it.
 - d. God blesses us when out of supreme love for Him we make such decisions (realizing others may take offense). Let us love God first and supremely. Let us love others by doing for them what is right/good according to God's Word in humility not in haughtiness/pride in looking down on them. Pride will only drive others away, but love/patience in presenting the truth and practicing the truth will more likely be used by the Lord to draw others to the truth.