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Religious Holidays or God's Holy days?

Does it matter to God?...

In the Bible, God has designated His Holy days, how come we don't observe them?

by James McBride

Hindu, Muslim, Jew, Christian - all of us have religious holy days that set us apart from each other. Indeed, the God we worship is identified by the pageantry of these days, which usually mark events associated with the Founder - the Christian Christmas and Easter for example, and the Muslim `Id-Mawlid marking the birth and death of Mohammed - or with other significant aspects of the faith.

But does it matter which days we observe?

Jesus Christ claimed that he was the sole route to God - the "way, the truth and the life". He claimed that there's no other way for mankind to receive salvation. Which days did he observe? Do they have relevance today? Do - *should* - Christians today observe them?

The clear evidence is that our modern Christian worship Days bear little resemblance to the worship God prescribed from the beginning. Nor were they observed in the Church Jesus Christ founded and began to build back around 31 A.D.! Nowhere in the Scriptures do you find God's people observing Christmas or Easter or Sunday or any of the so-called Saint's Days. Surprisingly, many are rooted in pre-Christian observances by the nations which had rejected God's one and only revealed religion.

Heathen days are utterly condemned by God: "Learn not the way of the nations", He said, "...for the customs of the peoples are false", wrote Jeremiah (10:1-3). He goes on to describe one of these abominable customs - and it sounds remarkably like Christmas! Read the whole chapter.

But the New Testament Church did observe specific Holy Days. And they were the Festivals God had ordained centuries before.

The manner of their observance has been modified, but God's revealed Holy Days remain. What are they?

God's Holy Days

It is God who determines how we worship Him. He is the sovereign Lord of all creation, and graciously benefits mankind for obedience to Him. Right from man's beginning He required a specific form of worship, evidenced by His rejection of Cain's unauthorized offering (Genesis 4:1-3).

Godly men and women throughout history have carefully worshiped as God required, thus identifying Him. All other forms are false!

However, when the nation of Israel divided after the death of King Solomon into the House of Israel and the House of Judah, the northern House of Israel deliberately chose to change the time of God's annual autumn Festival - and cut themselves off from God. Later, the House of Judah began worshipping the sun (Ezekiel 8:16-17), placing sun worship at the heart of government. The result was a God-appointed invasion by a foreign power and a seventy year exile for the entire nation. Certainly a warning for our own nation!

But did the coming of Jesus Christ change all that? Did he abandon the Holy Days which in fact he himself had appointed?. Did he change Sabbath for Sunday?

In fact, Jesus of Nazareth was careful to observe all the Holy Days revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures. The New Testament records His attendance at the seventh-day weekly Sabbath, Passover, Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Tabernacles and the Last Great Day - omitting reports of only two of the days: Trumpets and Atonement. All these days are listed in Leviticus 23.

Religious Holidays or God's Holy Days?

The Apostles, Too

A study of the New Testament writings also shows that the disciples of Jesus and the entire New Testament church continued to observe these same days.

To confirm this, read

- **Unleavened Bread** (includes the Passover): Acts 12:3, 20:6, I Cor 5:8
- **Pentecost**: Acts 2, 20:16, I Cor 16:8
- **Atonement**: Acts 27:9
- **autumn Festivals** are reflected in the book of Revelation (e.g., Rev. 8)

Only after the passage of a couple of centuries following the death of Jesus Christ was the church saddled with festivals imported from the pagan religion around them.

Prophesied Observance

The Scriptures also make clear that when Jesus Christ returns He will command the observance of these same Holy Days for all people! The prophet Zechariah describes the terrible consequences for a nation which refuses to keep the *Festival of Tabernacles* (Zech. 14), while Ezekiel (ch. 40ff) and Isaiah (66:23) promote the same concept.

But what about now?

Clearly, since the Apostles continued on with the observance of the seven annual Holy Days and the weekly Sabbath they have left a pattern for Christian worship that no-one aspiring to be a follower of Jesus Christ can ignore. These days mark out the true followers of the God of the Bible! They are the only form of authentic divine worship described in the Scriptures of the Old or the New Testament. All else, however well-intentioned, is vain, empty, frivolous.

No matter how diligently you may observe Christmas or Easter or Halloween or any of the unbiblical festivals and saints' days - Jesus Christ simply wouldn't recognize your actions as following his example!

Why are not all Christians careful to observe the weekly and annual holy days described in the Scriptures - and enjoined on all the people of God? The joyous observance of these *Festival Days* is not a "means of salvation" but a reflection of the only form of worship God has ever appointed for His people and for all mankind, (not just for the Jewish nation).

Were the Holy Days "done away"?

Some Bible readers latch on to Paul's Statement in Galatians 4:9-10 as evidence that he taught the Holy Days were "done away". What did he mean?

In the first place, why would Paul downgrade God's law - which he says is "holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12) - to being "weak and beggarly"? Elsewhere he wrote: "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law" (Romans 3:31).

And didn't Jesus himself tell us that "he that does [God's Commands] and teaches them shall be called great" (Matthew 5:19)?

Next - what were these "elements"? The answer is clear when we identify Paul's readers. They had, before conversion to Christ, "not known God" (v.8) and had been slaves let dumb idols. Clearly, these folk were not in the habit of obeying the laws of God! The elements, or rudiments, of their religious practices had been something that had severely restricted them - they were "in bondage". Not then obeying God's Law, which is liberating, helpful, a joy to keep (Deut. 4:6-8).

As the New Bible Commentary observes on v.10: "Pagan astrological mythology was being applied to the Christian [i.e., Biblical] holy days". The Gospel of grace freed men from self-serving, pagan religious practices.

Paul ardently observed the holy days revealed in the Scriptures!

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