

Here we are near the end of another year, in that season that is probably more intensely steeped in traditions than is any other. We would like to take this opportunity to explain some of the things that we believe and how we have arrived at the point in our walk with the LORD that we are at today. We are writing this letter to those that we love to share what the LORD is showing us. We know most of what we are about to share may conflict with what is traditionally held by mainstream Christianity. We hope that you will take the time to look up the scripture references we are including and prayerfully consider what we have to share.

A number of years ago the LORD began to convict us, or reveal to us, that much of today's religious beliefs are based on man's doctrines and not on the pure unchanging word of the LORD. He is showing us that much of what is believed and practiced today is very different from what was believed and practiced in the first century. The LORD of the Old Testament and the LORD of the New Testament are one and we do not believe He changes His word or intent to fit the time. We believe that the LORD cannot and will not change His word, to do so would make Him untrustworthy. If He changes one thing, how can we be confident that He won't change another? And ultimately, how can we be confident in our salvation if He is a Lord that changes.

We believe that the Father and Son and Holy Spirit are one and as such are Lord and Creator of all. We believe that salvation is by faith in all that He is and accepting Him as Lord/King/Ruler of our life. In the first chapter of John we see that In the beginning (Genesis 1:1/creation, before there was anything else) was the Word (Yeshua/Torah) and the Word was with God (Elohim) and the Word was Elohim. And nothing was created except what was created by the Word and all things that were created were created by Him (my paraphrase). In this we see that Yeshua (Jesus) is not someone that came along later and changed everything. He was here in the beginning and is the creator of everything and is the Word or Torah of Elohim, manifest in the flesh. To change the Word would be in effect to change himself and the LORD tells us that He never changes (Malachi 3:6). In this same passage the LORD says that if we will return to His ordinances (Torah/Commandments) He will return to us.

In Matthew 5:17, Yeshua tells us that He came not to abolish the Law and the Prophets (Old Testament) but to fulfill them. He is in the process of fulfilling the words of the Old Testament, but is far from being through. In verse 18, He goes on to tell us that until heaven and earth pass away (this has not happened yet) not the smallest letter (which is a yod in the Hebrew alphabet, it looks like an apostrophe) or stroke (a very small decorative mark on some Hebrew letters) shall pass away from the law (Torah), until all is accomplished. We know that heaven and earth still exist and that all has not been accomplished, therefore the law (Torah), down to the smallest decorative mark on the Hebrew letter, is still in effect. Verse 19 tells us that whoever annuls one of the least of these commandments (of Torah) will be least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. **This passage is a 'proof text'**; it is very clear in what it says and it is the words of Yeshua himself. We know that scripture does not contradict itself. Therefore if something appears to contradict, we must find out why! Usually we will find out that our understanding caused the appearance of a contradiction based on the doctrines we have learned or our culture.

Please don't take all this as saying that salvation is obtained through Torah obedience, it is not, and contrary to common opinion it never was, not even for the Jews. There is no where in scripture that salvation was reached through strict obedience to Torah. The only one to successfully keep all of Torah was Yeshua himself. The attempt to reach salvation through strict obedience to the Law is the true definition of legalism. The simple act of Torah obedience is an act of love in submission to our Lord, just like when a child obeys his parents. If we will look at Hebrews 11 we will see that the men of old were saved by faith just as we are today. If we will continue to study these men of old we will see that after they had faith, they were obedient to the LORD. Obedience always follows true faith. His Torah/teaching is to reveal sin to us. It allows us to sin less and less, and thereby become more and more like Him, though we will never completely reach that goal in this body. James 2:17 tells us that faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. What does this mean? It means that if we truly believe and have accepted Him as our LORD, there will be evidence of that in our obedience to His word (Torah). In John 14:15, Yeshua tells us that "If you love me you will keep my commands." Remember He is from the beginning and He is the Word. His commandments are not something new, they are the same as in the beginning. I John 2:3 states:

And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.

If we know Him as the Lord of our life we will keep His commandments. Verses 4-7 state:

The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps His word (Torah) in him the love of Elohim has truly been perfected.

By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked (Torah obedience). Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had since the beginning (see John 1 and Genesis 1); the old commandment is the word which you have heard.”

Any new commandment can only compliment or clarify the old; it can never change or do away with it. (see Galatians 3:15-18). Remember 1John5:3

For this is the love of Elohim, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

To not walk in obedience to His commandments is the very definition of sin.

1John3:4 “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.” And again in Matthew 7:21-23 we see that there will be people that call Him Lord, Lord, and prophesy in His name, and cast out demons in His name, and perform many miracles in His name. And yet He will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness. (see Strong’s Concordance reference number 458 and the word it is from 459 – lawlessness, apart from the Jewish law, which shows us this is in reference to Old Testament law or Torah.)

Therefore, the absence of law or Torah is sin! Romans 3:31 says, “Do we then nullify the law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary we establish the law.” (by believing and doing it.)

Now, let us look at who the Torah (so called Jewish law) really applies to. In Numbers15:14-16 the LORD is speaking to Moses and Israel and He tells them that there is one statute, one law, one ordinance for Israel and the alien (anyone that is not born into Israel - us) and that these are perpetual (forever-eternal) statutes. As you (Israel) are, so shall the alien (us) be before the LORD. (See also Leviticus 24:22, Numbers 9:14, Numbers 15:29) Romans 11:17 tells us that the wild olive branches (we) are grafted into the olive tree (Israel). If we are grafted in we can be confident that what applies to Israel applies equally to us, the grafted in wild olive branches (adopted brothers).

So how did we get where we are today? All of the first Christians were Jews or proselytes, prior to the apostles going to the Gentiles, and were Torah observant. They kept the Sabbath, the Feasts, kosher eating, and all of Torah to the best of their ability. Christianity was known as a sect of Judaism and is still occasionally known as Judeo-Christianity because of its roots or origins. However, as Gentiles began to get saved, they increasingly brought their pagan beliefs with them. They clung to their old pagan practices while not completely embracing all of Torah. Some of the Jews, on the other hand, were legalistic and became known as Judaizers. These Judaizers tried to say that circumcision was a prerequisite of salvation. This led to a conflict that was elevated to a council in Jerusalem composed of the apostles and elders.

Acts 15 recalls the meeting of this Jerusalem council and its outcome. Acts 15:19-21 really summarizes their conclusion. The Judaizers had tried to require the gentile believers to keep all of Torah as a prerequisite to fellowship. But, the council determined that the gentiles were to keep a minimal list of commandments, which included abstaining from idolatry, fornication, things strangled and blood. These seem easy enough to us but they actually were quite involved. The last two for example are related, and include much more than would be apparent to us or to the untaught gentile of that day. The basis for the prohibition of things strangled was that the gentiles would strangle their animals in order to retain the blood in the meat. Our modern slaughtering methods do essentially the same thing unless the animal is slaughtered by kosher methods. The reason for both prohibitions (strangled and blood) is that the life is in the blood. (Leviticus 17:10-14, Deuteronomy 12:23) These four prohibitions were imposed because they were the minimum requirement for the gentiles to fellowship with the Jews and to come into the synagogue every Sabbath. They continue to be a minimum requirement for new believers today. Acts 15:21 tells us:

“For Moses (Torah) from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is (present tense) read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

We can see several important points in this verse. First, the believers (first century Christians) were meeting on the Sabbath. Next, they were meeting in the synagogues as a part of Judaism. Finally, the council felt that if the new believers held to these minimum requirements, which would allow them to meet in the synagogues on the Sabbath that the new believers would hear Moses (Torah) preached and eventually learn the rest of Torah.

And so we see that the four prohibitions were a starting point of minimum requirements so that the new believers could turn to the rest of Torah. We also see that the intention of the council was for all believers to enter into a process of becoming submissive to the LORD's word, or in other words become Torah obedient. This applies to us today.

So, how did we get so far away from keeping Torah? The first century believers were instructed by Paul to let no person act as their judge in regard to food or drink (kosher) or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day – things which are (present tense) a shadow (allusion to) of what is to come; but the substance (reality) belongs to Christ (Colossians 2:16-17). It was in the context of early anti-Semitic persecution that Paul wrote this scripture to the Colossians to remind them that these things are (present tense) a shadow of the reality that is manifest in Christ and they would teach us of things to come as they relate to Him. But, persistent persecution continued to increase.

In 70AD the Temple was destroyed. It had been the focal point of worship for all Jews including the believers. The destruction of the temple and a series of wars began the process of spreading the Jew into the rest of the world and separating the believers from the non-believing Jews. The final Jewish war in 135AD was known as the BarKochba rebellion. In it the Jews, including the believers, rose up against Rome. The non-believers proclaimed the leader of the revolt, BarKochba, to be the Messiah. When this occurred, all the believers left the revolt and the non-believing Jews were overwhelmed by the Roman Army, leading to the downfall of the Jewish nation. The Roman Empire was very anti-Semitic and heavily persecuted anything that hinted of Judaism. With this persecution, there was more and more tendency away from what had been the norm among the first century believers. Near 300AD, Constantine became the Caesar of Rome. In his rise to power he adopted Christianity, which had spread throughout the Roman Empire as a national religion. He assembled the Council of Nicea in 325AD. He invited the Christian leaders from throughout the Roman Empire, but he purposefully left out all of the Jewish leaders. He then passed laws outlawing anything 'Jewish.' It was illegal for the Jews to raise their children as Jews or keep the Feasts or anything else considered to be Jewish. The Jews and the church were required, in essence, to be gentile. Gentile festivals of Easter, Lent, Christmas and Sunday were substituted for the biblical feasts. Constantine was essentially a world leader and so his mandates permeated the church of that time and have carried through to this day.

So, what about Christmas and its origins and the LORD's perspective of it. Most Christian Believers have been convinced that Yeshua (Jesus) was born on Christmas or December 25th. Some have been told that the ancient church decided that December 25th was the day that we should celebrate His birthday because we "don't actually know when He was born" or "Scripture does not tell us when He was born". Very few Christians realize that not very much has changed in the way Christmas is celebrated today from the way pagans observed the day (under a different name) centuries before the birth of Yeshua. The ancient pagans did not call it "Christmas", they called this mid-winter festival by its original pagan name -- the Saturnalia. In ancient times the winter solstice was celebrated in Babylon as the birthday of Tammuz (Dumuzi), the god of vegetation. This was the shortest day of the year, in the latter part of December (today the solstice actually falls on December 21). According to the pagans, the god Nimrod would visit the evergreen tree and leave gifts upon it. This festival became known as the Saturnalia, and friends and family would exchange gifts.

The winter solstice was also celebrated by the followers of Mithra as the "nativity" or "birth" of the sun. Mithra was the Persian sun-god, and his worship was widespread throughout the Roman Empire in the days of the early believers.

Constantine was a sun worshiper and remained so until his death. He even had a coin made that had him on one side and Mithra on the other. It was also about this time that Sunday worship became common, in reverence of the Sun. The largest pagan cult during this time in history celebrated December 25th as a holiday throughout the Roman and Greek worlds. This pagan cult, Mithraism, considered that December 25th was the nativity of the sun. Mithra was not the only pagan deity said to be born at this time of year. Osiris, Horus, Hercules, Bacchus, Adonis, Jupiter, Tammuz and other sun gods were supposedly born at the time of the winter solstice.

The Christmas tree was common in pagan Rome and pagan Egypt. In Egypt the tree that was used was the palm tree and in Rome it was the fir tree. The palm tree denoting the Pagan messiah, as Baal-Tamar, the fir referring to him as Baal-Berith. The mother of Adonis, the sun god and great mediatorial divinity, was mystically said to have been changed into a tree, and then in that state to have brought forth her divine son. Alaxander Hislop in his book THE TWO BABYLONS, (pg. 98) describes the relationship of the Christmas tree and the Yule log by stating

"Therefore, the 25th of December, the day that was observed at Rome as the day when the victorious god reappeared on earth, was held at the *Natalis invicti solis*, 'The birthday of the unconquered Sun.' Now the Yule Log is the dead stock of Nimrod, deified as the sun-god, but cut down by his enemies; the Christmas-tree is Nimrod *redivivus*—the slain god come to life again."

We might then ask, when is the birthday of our Lord? There is evidence that Messiah was born at Sukkot (Booths/Tabernacles) in 4 B.C.E. The key to calculating the date of the birth of Messiah is Luke 1:5 where we learn that Zechariah the father of Yochanon (John) was a priest of the course of Abijah. The priests became to numerous to all serve at the Temple all the time, so they were divided into 24 courses (1Chron. 24). Each course served for two weeks each year, once in the former rain (first half of the year) and once in the latter rain (second half of the year). There were also three weeks in which all the priests were required to serve, these were the three pilgrimage festivals (Dt. 16:16). 24 times 2 is 48 plus three is 51. 51 weeks is 357 days fitting nicely within the 360 day lunar year. The course of Abijah is the eighth course (1Chron. 24:10) which serves the tenth week during the former rain portion of the year (this is because during Passover and Shavuot (Pentecost) all of the priests serve together Dt. 16:16). Zechariah had his vision while serving in the course of Abijah in the tenth week (It will become apparent that he was serving his first course not his second as the timing will show as we progress). Thus Zechariah's vision took place during the 10th week of the year (The religious year beginning at Nisan/Abib-names of a month of the Biblical calendar-around 14 days before Passover). We must add two additional weeks before Yochanon (John) could be conceived, due to the purity laws (Lev. 12:5; 15:19, 25). So Yochanon was conceived in the 12th week of the year. He was born about 40 weeks later during the 52nd week of the year (12 + 40 = 52) which brings us to Passover. Thus Yochanon was born at Passover, the very time that Elijah (John came in the Spirit of Elijah-Matthew 3:3) was supposed to appear, according to Jewish tradition. Yeshua was conceived 6 months (about 25 weeks) after Yochanon's conception (Luke 1:36). This means Yeshua was conceived around the 37th week around Chanukah. This would mean the light of the world was conceived during the festival of lights. (Chanukah/Feast of Dedication is a Biblical Feast even though it is not one of the seven mandated Feasts. John 10:21 speaks of Yeshua being in the temple during Chanukah. For this reason we celebrate Chanukah, the time of Yeshua's conception, and the miracle of God's power and His provision to the Israelites during the Macabean revolt.) Yeshua was born 40 weeks later (around week 77 that is week 25 of the following year) this brings us to the time of the fall feasts. There are several clues that Yeshua was born at Sukkot, which typically occurs in the September/October time frame:

1. Bethlehem was "booked solid." This would not have been due to the census, which would have taken place over the period of a year. Every Jew was required to come to Jerusalem for Sukkot (Dt. 16:16) This would have over run Jerusalem as well as Bethlehem just five miles away.
2. Yeshua was born in a stable. The Hebrew word for "stable" is "sukkah" (as in Gen. 33:17) so it is likely that Yeshua was born in a Sukkah/booth.
3. The month of Tishri (in the Fall) also fits with the season of shepherds being out with their flocks by night, as they were when Yeshua was born. During winter the lambs are kept in shelters. (December in Israel is very cold and the shepherds would not remain out in the fields overnight.)
4. When the angels appeared to the shepherds they made a statement which closely echoes the ancient Sukkot liturgy "...behold, we have come to declare to you glad tidings of great joy." (Luke 2:10-11)
5. Sukkot is symbolic of God dwelling in a "tabernacle" (body?) with us.

Now in Mt. 2:7-8, 16 Herod kills all the children two and under. The fact that he killed such a wide range indicates that he did not know quite how long ago Messiah had been born. Yeshua's parents fled to Egypt until they heard Herod was dead. They were back in Bethlehem in time to perform Miriam's (Mary's) purification and Yeshua's dedication on the 40th day after Yeshua's birth (as required by Torah) (Luke. 2:22-38). By this time Herod had to be dead or they could not have come to the Temple in Jerusalem. Herod had to have died during the 40 days between Yeshua's birth, and his dedication 40 days later. Herod is known to have died in fall of 4 B.C.E. So Yeshua had to have been born in the fall (this rules out that Zechariah could have been serving during Abijah's second course of the year, since that would place Yeshua's birth in the Spring and not allow for Herod's death during the 40 days after his birth in the fall).

We cannot use the excuse "but we're celebrating Christmas for the kids". If we are to "train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he shall not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6) then why would we train him in the wrong way? The reason that Christmas will be hard to give up is because the adults have been "trained up" as they grew up in the tradition of Christmas and they can't break free. Our American society is geared to these holidays and it is almost impossible to avoid them. During December, the most common thing to do is "Christmas

shopping" and you can't enter a store without "Christmas" being in your face. Probably over 90% of social time is spent on Christmas gifts, Santa Claus, Christmas trees, decorating the house and all the other trappings of the "holiday". About the only time that the birth of our Lord is mentioned is in church. Look around your house; look around the places you shop. How much do you really see that points to the birth of our Lord? And even if it did, where is there a Biblical precedence for changing the LORD's appointed times? Look what happened to some of those that chose to do things their own way and at their own time. (Exodus 32:1-6, I Chronicles 13:1-12, I Samuel 13:5-14, I Samuel 15:1-26)

We believe that there is a Great Day coming when Yeshua will return to reign over the whole earth. Remember, Yeshua IS Jewish! Where is He going to Reign from? It will not be Rome or Greece. What Holy Days do you think we will be celebrating during that time? You can be sure, that we will not celebrate Christmas! Zechariah 14:16-19 tells us that all the nations will go to Jerusalem every year to celebrate the Feast of Booths (Succot/Tabernacles). This is one of the seven Biblically mandated Feasts. We should ask ourselves why the LORD would do away with His commandments and Feasts in this age if He is going to re-establish them when He returns to rule the earth.

We know this has been a very long letter and everything in it goes against what you have been taught and most likely against the doctrines that you personally hold to. However, we ask that you would earnestly seek the LORD in prayer with regard to what has been said here. Maybe you have felt the same tugging in your heart saying something is not quite right, as we have? Ask Him to reveal to you His true will as opposed to the doctrines of man, and try consciously to keep your personal bias from slanting the way you interpret scripture. Be as the Bereans and prove everything to yourself through study of His word (Acts 17:10-11). We would love to get together and share this more. We thank the LORD for you and we pray that He will continue to draw each of us closer to Him, and to each other in Him.

Shalom and may the LORD be with you and yours,
Johnny & Peggy