

Is New Year'S Eve Pagan?

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You know we are in that time of year that true Christians dread—the Christmas season, when you find yourself humming along with the piped-in music at the store and you suddenly realize it is a Christmas tune. We have heard many messages over the years about the pagan origins of Christmas—I have given several myself—but I do not remember hearing anything about New Year's Eve celebrations. I did not find anything on our website, so maybe this message today will be useful and fill a small gap.

When I Googled "Is New Year's Eve Pagan?", the first three entries are from Worldwide [Church of God] splinter groups. Two of these three have the same article, but with different graphics. One does not give credit to where the article came from; the other one does. It is an article by William Ellis. It appeared in the December 1964 *Plain Truth* magazine entitled, "The Truth about New Year's," and it is a very well written article. Even though written 51 years ago, it holds up well. I'm going to quote from it a little bit later.

I also ran across an online forum where someone titled their entries, "True Christians should not celebrate New Year's because it is pagan to the core." They did not cite this same *Plain Truth* article with a link. Now some comments that followed this post agreed, but let me read one that did not. This person was very indignant, and he or she said,

There is nothing wrong with going to church for a watch night service to bring in the New Year in the House of God. In our current calendar, the New Year is January 1st. While it makes no sense for a New Year to start in the middle of winter, it is what it is, and we can't change the calendar now. This is not the biblical days, when the New Year started in March. We live in the USA and the New Year begins January 1st here. As long as your [sic] are not involved in drunkenness, lewd behavior, your [sic] doing nothing wrong.

So, where does the celebration of New Year's Eve come from? And is it wrong to participate, as long as we are not involved—as they said—in drunkenness and lewd behavior? Well, let us first establish when the New Year really begins according to God. He says,

Exodus 12:1-2 Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of

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Egypt, saying, "This month [speaking of Abib or Nisan] shall be unto you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.

So for 2016, the New Year begins April 9. God makes note of this; He tells us when it is, but only as a time marker. Two weeks after the year begins, we have Passover and then the Days of Unleavened Bread. It's like the new year is mentioned just in passing. Nowhere does God tell us to throw a party, get drunk or worse. So how did that come about?

Mr Ellis, in his *Plain Truth* article, quotes from a book, "4,000 Years of Christmas." It is by Earl Count. Let me quote a little passage here:

Mesopotamia is the very ancient mother of civilization. Christmas began there over 4,000 years ago as the festival which renews the world for another year. The twelve days of Christmas, the bright fires, and probably the yule log; the giving of presents; the carnivals with their floats; their merry making and clownings; the mummers who sing and play from house to house; the feasting; church processions with their lights and song—all these and more began there centuries before Christ was born, and they celebrated the arrival of a New Year.

I was not familiar with this book "4,000 Years of Christmas," and the *Plain Truth* article is from 1964, so I wondered if this book was still around—and indeed, it is. Earl Count was an Episcopal priest who died in 1996 at the age of 97. His book, "4,000 Years of Christmas," was first published in 1948. His widow, Alice, updated the book; it was reissued in hard cover in 1997. It is readily available on Amazon. Some of the reviews on the Amazon website are pretty interesting—worth the time, if you want to read them.

This book gives the history of the paganism involved. The writers did not intend it is an exposé of the pagan aspects of Christmas. They clearly acknowledged them. They admit them right up front. Rather, they set out to show that the "Christian" side of Christmas won the war, you might say, over the pagan side. Let me read this sales blurb Amazon uses to describe the book:

What if our entire civilization could write its own memoirs and tell the complete story of Christmas past? Surprisingly, the tale would not begin in Bethlehem but 2,000 years earlier, in the cradle of civilization. It would be a nostalgic story involving Christians and non-Christians alike. Babylonians,

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Greeks and Romans, whose ancient customs became part of the Christmas celebration, would people its pages. We would see early Europeans hanging fur sprigs and winter greenery to renew life and protect against the cold blasts Arctic wind. People who had not yet learned of the Christ child would be burning Yule logs. Of course, the most important chapter in these memoirs would take place in a manger surrounded by wise men and marked by a brilliant star.

Now, I do not want to take off on a Christmas tangent, but the two—Christmas and New Year's—are connected. The ancient Romans celebrated Saturnalia, which lasted a week, in which drunken revelry, role reversal, gift giving, and human sacrifice were done in honor of the deity Saturn. On page 28 of "4,000 Years of Christmas," Mr. Count says,

The first day of the Saturnalia shifted during the lifetime of Rome. It began around the middle of December and continued until January 1st. In its midst was December 25th, the day (as the Romans calculated) when the Sun was at its lowest ebb.

Keep in mind, the publisher described this book as "a charming story of our Christmas traditions."

So how did this pagan celebration containing both Christmas and New Year's morph into a "Christian" one? Around 375 AAD, the Roman Emperor Constantine imposed what he called "Christianity" on his empire. Let me go back to Earl Count's book one more time:

There were many immigrants into the ranks of the Christians by this time [talking about the time of Constantine]. The church fathers discovered, to their alarm, that they were also facing an invasion of pagan customs. [I think he cut him a little slack here.] The habit of Saturnalia was too strong to be left behind. At first the church forbade it, but in vain. The church finally succeeded in taking the merriment, the greenery, the lights and the gifts from Saturn and giving them to the Babe of Bethlehem. The pagan Romans became Christians, but the Saturnalia remains.

Now, another section from the *Plain Truth* article that buttresses what Mr. Count has said here. William Ellis says,

During the Middle Ages, many of the ancient Roman customs were maintained and augmented by the incoming heathen rites of the Teutonic peoples. It was during this period that the customary Yule log and mistletoe were added to the popular New Year's festivities. The Yule log is a carryover from the bonfires of sun worship. Mistletoe is a parasite used in Druid rites as a symbol of sex worship. As Teutonic customs were added, the date of New Year celebrations would temporarily change to March 25 to coincide with the Germanic spring rites of fertility. Finally, Pope Gregory reinstated the ancient pagan Roman day of January 1st. He imposed it on the whole Western world in 1582, when his Gregorian calendar reforms were accepted. All Roman Catholic countries accepted change at once. Sweden, Germany, Denmark and England, the strongholds of Druid customs, finally acquiesced to Rome in 1700s.

This Pope Gregory, aside from his other faults, was an anti-Semite of the first order. It is an interesting place for this article to be found, but in the *U.S. News and World Report*, there was an article they ran back in December of 1996 that explains some things about Pope Gregory that I, for one, had never heard.

First let me read this sentence: "As Christianity spread, pagan holidays were either incorporated into the Christian calendar or abandoned all together." I read that because I think they are cutting them way too much slack. "Abandoned altogether"? I think they are being very generous. I suspect there were very few pagan holidays that were "abandoned altogether."

But according to this article, on New Year's Day, 1577, Pope Gregory decreed that all Roman Jews, under pain of death, must listen attentively to the compulsory Catholic conversion sermon given in Roman synagogues after Friday night services.

On New Year's Day, 1578, Gregory signed into law a tax, forcing Jews to pay for support of a house of conversion convert Jews Christianity.

On New Year's, 1581, Gregory ordered his troops to confiscate all sacred literature from the Roman Jewish community. Thousands of Jews were murdered in the campaign.

So throughout the Medieval and post-Medieval periods, January 1st—supposedly the day on which Jesus was circumcised (and that math is a little shaky)—is supposedly the day that Judaism died and Christianity took over. It was reserved for anti-Jewish activities: synagogue- and book-burning, public torture, and simple murder.

Now, Pope Gregory was not the first pope to use New Year's as a time of Jewish persecution. If you go back 1200 years earlier to 324 AAD, Pope Sylvester convinced the Emperor Constantine to prohibit Jews from living in Jerusalem. The following year, at the council of Nicea, Sylvester arranged for the passage of a host of viciously anti-Semitic legislation. All Catholic saints are given a day—Sylvester is a "saint"—on which Christians celebrate a tribute to their memory. Guess which day is "Saint Sylvester Day"? December 31st. So, throughout Europe and the nation of Israel, the Jewish people of that part of the world, call New Year's Eve "Sylvester." To me, it shows something of the dark humor that the Jews are capable of.

I had no idea of the depth of perversion that surrounds this pagan celebration. "Let's ring in the new year by killing some Jews, burning some synagogues, and getting drunk because the earth is renewed and the sun is reborn. And, we will do some kissing as well." Let us not forget the kissing. At midnight on New Year's Eve, you get to kiss people, be they someone you know or strangers—whatever. It is another holdover from the Roman Saturnalia, and it is all part of the sexual part of pagan celebrations. The pagan celebrations always seem to bring sex into it somewhere.

So the old man [old year] departs and a baby in a diaper [new year] takes over. That makes a lot of sense. And also, do not forget, when you are hung over on New Year's Day, you are supposed to eat some lucky food: greens, beans, noodles, and grain. I found that if you slurp the noodles, it brings more luck. I do not know why. Fruit and cake are also lucky. Maybe that is where fruitcake comes from—I did not check that out. Fish and pork [are luck too]. Now, pigs are a lucky symbol because they "root forward"—I kid you not. That is why pork is lucky—because pigs root forward.

In the south—and I have lived here all my life and I have never run into this—there is a traditional dish eaten on New Year's Eve called Hoppin' John. It is a mix of greens, beans, and pork. So yum, yum! Give me some of that. And we are the crazy ones for keeping God's holy days.

New Year's Eve is a pitiful excuse, really, for a holiday. I have been to one New Year's Eve party in my life (that I am aware of). It was thrown by a deacon in the old Worldwide Church of God. I was home from college for winter break in 1973, 1974—I do not really remember; the details are a little fuzzy. I was not interested in doctrine at that time—not any kind of doctrine; I know I remember that. And I suppose there must have been some sort of liberality running through the church at that time. I just do not remember. I do not know why this deacon felt it was fine to throw this party. But I remember that most of the Who's Who of the Nashville church was there. And this deacon later

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became an elder, so again, I do not know how this all came to be. He is long gone from the church. But I do remember it was a horrible night. I am not going to go into details; they are firmly fixed in my mind. Lots of drinking. There was just an overall, over-the-top effort to force a good time by these people. And it was bad fruit. Just terrible. It was a houseful of supposedly Christian people trying to out-pagan the pagans.

Even if God did not warn us against this kind of thing, the byproduct of New Year's Eve celebrations should keep us away. Again, the fruit is horrible. At the minimum, a hangover. But more often, it is much worse. Adultery, drunk driving, accidents, yes, not to mention the baggage of anti-Semitism that goes with it. Common sense alone should tell us to stay far away from these pagan rituals, but God also make it plain how He feels. He says in Jeremiah 10:2, "Don't learn the ways of the heathen." Well, we very clearly see from this Episcopal priest who wrote this book, "4,000 Years of Christmas" that it is a pagan holiday. It is the way of the heathen.

In Leviticus 18:3, God said to the children of Israel, "Don't follow the customs of Egypt where you used to live, or those of Canaan where I am bringing you." That is pretty plain. But of course, that is the Old Testament. A lot of people say, "That's all fine and good; it is interesting stuff, but it doesn't apply." We know that is wrong, but let us turn to the New Testament to confirm the Old. Let us go to Mark 7:7. Christ quotes from Isaiah 29:13:

Mark 7:7 In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrine the commandments of men.

At the beginning, I quoted a person that was writing in that blog, saying there was nothing wrong with going to a "Watch Night" service on New Year's Eve because "we do not live in Bible times. We live in the old U. S. A."—and obviously God allows us to change with the times (at least in this person's mind). Perhaps their Bible does not include Malachi 3:6, where God says, "I am the Lord; I change not." Or maybe Hebrews 13:8, which says "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."

There is nothing good about New Year's Eve. It is pagan to the core. It falls in the dead of winter (in the Northern Hemisphere). It began as an adjunct to Christmas, celebrating the rebirth of the sun. And then you add to this pagan fertility rites, human sacrifices, and later an excuse to kill Jews, burn their homes and synagogues. And what is it today? It is an excuse to get drunk and act the fool.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world [again, how plain could

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God possibly make it?], but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Go towards the back of the Bible a little farther, to I John 2:15:

I John 2:15 (*Good News Bible*) Do not love the world or anything that belongs to the world. If you love the world, you do not love the Father.

And to finish up in Revelation 18:1-5. I mean, there are all kinds of verses we could read through, but these seemed to sum it up very well for us.

Revelation 18:1-5 (*Good News Bible*) After this, I saw another angel coming down out of heaven. He had great authority and his splendor brightened the whole world. He cried out with a loud voice, "She has fallen! Great Babylon has fallen." She is haunted by demons and unclean spirits. All kinds of filthy and hateful birds live in her, for all the nations have drunk her wine, the strong wine of her immoral lust. [Sounds a little bit like a New Year's Eve party.] The kings of the earth practiced sexual immorality with her and the merchants of the world rich from her unrestrained lust." Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out, My people, come out from her." [Twice He says, "Come out from her."] You must not take part in her sins. You must not share in her punishment.