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## **DID JEREMIAH PREACH AGAINST CHRISTMAS TREES?**

When I was about 15 years old, I read a booklet which said the Bible mentions Christmas trees<sup>o</sup> that the prophet Jeremiah condemned their use as *idolatry*! Were Christians who decorated with a Christmas tree committing idolatry? Because the Bible says no idolater will enter the kingdom of God, this was a serious charge.

In the Tenth Chapter of Jeremiah, we read the following words from the King James Version:

oFor one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree<sup>i</sup> o(Jer. 10:1-14).

For any who suppose this passage refers to Christmas trees, consider these five points:

**First**, the word oworkman.o The KJV says: oOne cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the *workman*.o Some immediately picture a lumberjack going into the forest to cut down a Christmas tree. But this is not the intended meaning. A oworkman.o was one who took materialo in this case the wood *from* a treeo and formed it into an IDOL. Later in this passage, the oworkman.o is portrayed as plating an idol with silver and goldo clearly not a lumberjack.

The same word appears in a parallel passage about making an idol with wood from a tree: oHe<sup>i</sup> chooses a *tree* that will not rot; he seeks unto him a cunning *workman* to prepare a graven imageo (Isa. 40:19,20).

**Second**, notice that the tool the workman uses is called an oax.o Though the word ax (or axes) appears 18 times in the King James Version, the word here translated ax is a different word! It is not the ax that a lumberjack would use to cut down a tree, but is a carving tool. The workman would use this tool to form an idol from the tree already cut down. Some translations, more correctly, use the word chisel: oi they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chiselo (NIV).

**Third**, the idol described in Jeremiah 10, was carved from the ostocko of a tree (margin: owooden idol,o verse 8). Positioned oupright as a palm tree,o it was fastened with onails and hammerso so it would not fall over (verses 4,5). While this would also be true of a Christmas tree, what is described here is a wooden idol in a standing position. Being lifeless, it cannot stand on its own, and must be fastened down to avoid falling over.

**Fourth**, the prophets commonly pointed out the absurdity of believing in oidols<sup>i</sup> the work of meno hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: they have

ears, but they hear not; noses have they, but they smell not: they have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not<sup>i</sup> (Psalms 115:4-7).

So here, the idols Jeremiah described, ospeak notoo implying a mouth, but no speech. This would be pointless if Jeremiah was speaking of a Christmas treeo no one expects a Christmas tree to talk! These idols apparently had legs, yet could not walk. They must be carried, obecause they cannot goo (Jer. 10:5). Had Jeremiaho subject been a Christmas tree, his whole argument would break down: everyone realizes a Christmas tree must be carriedo no one supposes a Christmas tree should walk.

**Fifth**, these idols were dressed in clothing: oi blue and purple is their clothingo (Jer. 10:9). A Christmas tree may be decorated, but no one puts clothing on ito not blue, purple, or any other color of clothing. Jeremiah comes right out and uses the term ograven [carved] imageo (Jer. 10:14)o not a Christmas treeo but an idol carved in the likeness of a man.

Isaiah described the same thing (Isa. 44:9-15). Though the wood from a tree can be carved into the shape of an idol resembling a man, it is merely a lifeless idol. oThere is no breath in themo (Jer. 10:14). Again, the subject could not be a Christmas treeo no one supposes a Christmas tree has breath! (cf. Hab. 2:18,19).

By simply applying sound, recognized, basic rules of biblical interpretation, it is clear that Jeremiah described idol worship, *not* the use of a Christmas tree as a seasonal decoration.

There is evidence that the custom of decorating with a Christmas tree, *as we know it*, extends back 500 years to Europe and especially Germany. The custom originated among Christians. They were not reprobates trying to inject paganism into the church. Fruit or round decorations placed on the tree, to them, spoke of the fruit on the Tree of Life in Scripture. The traditional star at the top represented the star that guided the wise men to the place of Jesuso birth.

There are some, of course, who suppose they oknowo what the star *really* stands for: the star is the symbol of an ancient pagan god (Amos 5:26). Some who are quick to brand anything linked with stars as having some occult origin, need to remember that even Jesus is called a oStaro (Num. 24:17; Rev. 22:16).

While it is commendable that people do not want anything opagan,o unless this concept is kept in balance, it could lead to some strange extremes. If one became too strict about such things he might not want to own a Mercury or Saturn automobile, nor would he ride on a train with the name Zephyr, since Mercury, Saturn, and Zephyr are names of pagan deities!

There are some who suppose something as innocent as the pointed *arrow* on a highway sign is pagan<sup>o</sup> that it has come down to us from ancient mythology about Cupid, the little love-god with his arrows!

Many customs, words, concepts, and styles of one civilization pass on down and influence another. If some of these had pagan or idolatrous significance at some other time or place, one would have to ask: Do they have that meaning *now*?

One could show from Scripture that having a person's image like Caesar's on money was a custom among the pagan Romans (Matt. 22:20,21). But does anyone throw away his money just because it has an image on it?

It is well-known that some of the names we use for days of the week and months have come from pagan times. But they are now *common* terms and no longer have any pagan significance. Not understanding this, occasionally there have been people who use numbers for the days of the week and suppose using Jewish names for the months is better. But even the Jews, following their captivity in Babylon, used names for some months that were Babylonian. The month originally called Abib, was later called Nisan (cf. Exod. 13:4; Esther 3:7). Even the month Tammuz is in the Jewish calendar, though Jewish people do not worship Tammuz.

If we quit using words that once had some pagan linkage, many sentences would be incomplete. There are *hundreds* of common words we use like *cereal* (from Ceres, goddess of grains); *janitor* (from Janus, god of doors); *museum* (from the Muses, the nine daughters of Zeus who presided over learning and the arts); *etc., etc.*

Names for planets, like Saturn, stem from pagan times. But no one today supposes the planet is a god. The term *Saturday* is in common use, but no one who may attend a church service on Saturday (or any other day) worships Saturn. No one is even tempted to do so! So using a name like this retains no pagan meaning and *is not wrong*.

The *Pleiades*, in mythology, were the seven daughters of Atlas who were transformed by Jupiter into a group of stars when they were pursued by Orion. *Orion* was a giant hunter slain by Artemis, figured in the stars by a man with a sword, three stars on a line forming his belt. The *Great Bear* and *Mazaroth* were linked with the signs of the Zodiac.

*Nevertheless*, the book of Job even represents the LORD as saying: *Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades, or loose the belt of Orion? Can you bring out Mazaroth in its season? Or can you guide the Great Bear with its cubs?* (Job 38:31,32 NKJV). By such wording, these terms were used to make a point without in any way implying that the LORD endorsed pagan astrology!

When we hear that a word is not found in the Bible as Bible believers we take note. But an omission like this does not, in itself, made something right or wrong. (Some people thought they should not eat *tomatoes* because the word is not in the Bible!) Many things we do are not spelled out in the Bible, nor do they need to be. Christians who suppose they need *chapter and verse* from the Bible for *everything* they do, may be surprised to learn that the words *chapter, verse, and Bible* are not in the Bible!

According to *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, the word *Bible* is derived from Byblos, a Phoenician city that was for centuries a center of Adonis worship similar to that of Tammuz. So, what are we to do? Waste time preaching against the word *Bible*?

Please understand, it is not our intent to make light of anyone's sincere beliefs. Our policy is *malice toward none*, and charity for

all. But years in the ministry have taught some valuable lessons. When too much emphasis is placed on side issues that really prove nothing, are fruitless and divisive, it is time to reconsider. Making things out to be *pagan* that are no longer *pagan* or may have never been *pagan* distracts from the true message of the gospel.

Some who are so opposed to observing Christmas, their efforts at non-observance may become an observance in itself!

Jeremiah spoke against an *idol* made from a tree *not the tree itself*. In Scripture, trees are often used as an object of beauty or blessing (Exod. 15:25; Isa. 60:13; Psa. 1:3; Pro. 3:18, etc.) It is not our purpose to tell someone to decorate with a Christmas tree or not too. If someone feels he should not have a Christmas tree, let him follow his conscience. If another chooses to decorate with a Christmas tree, he should not be condemned for this.

Any celebration that involves millions of people including Christians and non-Christians will produce some abuses. Admittedly, Christmas is no exception. People have sometimes tried to outdo each other in gift giving. They have made unwise use of credit cards. We hear that Christmas is too commercialized. Some have pointed out *X* in Christmas things like *Xpense, Xcess, Xasperation, Xhaustion, Xhibition, Xtravagance, Xcuses, and Xchanges!* True.

There are some seeming differences in the two main accounts of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus given in Matthew and Luke. This is true even today when two different people describe an event. Often such accounts can be harmonized if all the details are known.

When the wise men came to the place where Jesus was, only *his mother* is mentioned as being present with him (Matt. 2:11). But this would not prove Joseph was not there. Caution is always in order when using arguments from silence!

It is commonly assumed that when Joseph and Mary (who was *great with child*), arrived in Bethlehem it was *at the last minute* and, consequently, there was no room in the inn. But Luke 2:6 says, *and so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered,* implying they could have been there days ahead.

The shepherds were *in the same country,* but apparently not right at Bethlehem, for they said, *Let us now go even unto Bethlehem* (Lk. 2:8, 15).

While we do not know all the *details* surrounding the birth of Jesus, we believe he WAS BORN and *lived* 2,000 years ago. And *today*, he wants to LIVE in us! Not just *one* day a year, but *every day!* CHRIST IN YOU THE HOPE OF GLORY (Col. 1:27).

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**My special thanks to those who send offerings for the support of this ministry—some do so every month. I am grateful to God and to you for this!**

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