

International Teaching Ministry of Douglas Jacoby



International Bible Teaching Ministry Update 2004 Issue 06

"Challenging men and women of faith to think"

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NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2004 TEACHING MINISTRY UPDATE

This is the final international teaching ministry bulletin of the year. The Jan-Feb 2005 bulletin will be sent out in six weeks. Happy Holidays to all!

I. AIM Developments

The Athens Institute of Ministry will resume in January, with O.T. Survey and Interpretation. Sherwin Mackintosh will also join us for a session on Worship and Music. We are now pursuing the opening of West Coast AIM, with sessions to be held in Los Angeles starting in spring 2005. Full details will be available at the website in a few weeks' time.

II. Biblical Manuscripts Weekend

In May a special manuscripts weekend will be held in Ann Arbor, Michigan, site of the largest Papyrus collection in the western hemisphere! In addition to viewing the biblical manuscripts--some of which go back to the 100s--there will also be several powerpoint presentations and lessons on how the Bible came together. While a good number are expected to attend from the midwest churches, others are also welcome. Cost: \$40.

III. Teaching trips

Teaching trips in these last two months included Rome, London, Fayetteville NC, and Osaka. As always, it is a pleasure and an honor to see Christians around the world striving to go forward in faith. In January I will visit Accra, Ghana. Thanks to all of you whose contributions have made this trip possible! As well as Hong Kong, Manila, Atlanta, and of course Athens, Georgia. Please say a prayer for me when you can, that my teaching will edify, inspire, and truly serve to root Christians in the word.

IV. New teaching materials

In 2005 I will be recording several new audio teaching series: Psalms, The Pastoral Epistles, and New Testament Survey. N. T. Survey, the first of the new series, is slated to be released in March. In addition, my wife Vicki will record a series from Ruth early in the new year. Besides teaching series, a number of individual messages will also be available at the website sometime in January.

V. 2005 Biblical Study Tour: ATHENS, Greece!

The city for our next Biblical Study Tour has been chosen: Athens! In addition, the schedule for the 11th annual ITS has also been posted.

Finally, in keeping with the season, I am re-presenting my 1986 article on the origins of Christmas. Until February, God bless.-

D.J.

CHRISTMAS ORIGINS: "THE MAN WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD"

I remember the night. It was chilly, especially for Florida, and Dad had a fire burning in the hearth. Even as a seven year old, I realized that this spelled certain doom for the jolly man who later that night would squeeze down the chimney. I mustered the courage to ask Dad, "Is there really a Santa?" I was devastated. Doubts soon began to flood my mind as to the existence of "the Stork," the Easter Bunny, even of God himself. I later years I learned that Santa Claus (alias Father Christmas, Saint Martin, der Weihnachtsmann, P're No'l) was merely a corruption of Saint Nicholas, a Roman Catholic bishop of the 4th century. His attributes (red suit, reindeer, residence at the North Pole) derive from a blend of pagan legends with traditions about the saints. Good heavens!
25 December?

When was Jesus born? Does anyone really know? Early Christians were unsure. Cyprian thought 28 March, Clement of Alexandria guessed 20 May, Hippolytus supposed 2 June. If these early Christian writers (3rd century), who lived close to the time of Christ, had to guess the date of his birth, how is it that we know better?

The Shepherds

According to Luke 2:8, the shepherds were "living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks at night. "But what is Israel like in late December, the time traditionally assigned to "Christmas"? It is cold. It is the rainy season (Ezra 10:9, 13, Song 2:11). The shepherds would not be found dwelling in the fields in the winter season, and certainly not at night. It is therefore unlikely Jesus was born after Halloween! Whence then the notion that he was born 25 December?
Roman History

In 274 AD the Emperor Aurelian, influenced by the Persian cult of Mithras, designated 25 December as the "birthday" of the sun god, " Sol Invictus " the invincible sun. (In Mithraic tradition, the deity was born 25 December, and celebrated for twelve days. Sound familiar?) In some circles worship of the sun became identified with worship of the Son (see Malachi 4:2). Then in 354 Liberius of Rome ordered Christmas celebrated. This was popular among the Romans, who had already been celebrating the Saturnalia (12-24 December) as well as the Brumalia (25 December)--times of merrymaking and exchanging presents. Houses were decorated with greenery and festal lights. Gifts were given to children and the poor. Yes, Christmas has pagan origins. On top of all this, it is not even the actual birthday of Christ!
Teutonic History

As with the Romans, the Teutonic peoples too had their celebrations of the winter solstice. The idea was that the sun god was dying or dead, and there certain things one should do to assist it on its way, thus speeding the recovery of the world from its winter torpor. As the days lengthened after around 22 December, there was great rejoicing and partying. Thousands of years of Teutonic history make their contribution to the customs of Christmas, and these customs spread with the people into Central Europe , Gaul , and Britain . At the Yuletide, special cakes were consumed, Yule logs were burnt as an incentive to the waxing sun, fir trees were adorned with lights in honor of the tree spirits, special greetings and gifts were exchanged, many went a-wassailing, and of course there was the mistletoe, under which one stood and began (only a kiss, mind you) the headlong rush into a night of pagan revelry (1 Peter 4:3)! Remember that all of this was going on long before Christ was born.

Shopping Sprees

What would Christmas be without the frenzied shopping that characterizes our society? Listen to Libanius, a 4th century Roman writer, as he describes the scene in pre-Christian Rome : " Everywhere may be seen well-laden tables. The impulse to spend seizes everyone. He who through the whole year has taken pleasure in saving, becomes suddenly extravagant... a stream of presents pours itself out on all sides." Yes, Christmas "spirit," often sustained by big business to sell merchandise, is nothing new, but rather an ancient and time-honored tradition.

Closing considerations

We have seen that "Christmas" is essentially 100% tradition--and non-Christian at that! Yet traditions are condemned in the Bible only if they directly contradict the word of God (Mark 7:6-8). Jesus commanded us to remember his death, yet there is no harm in commemorating his entrance into the world. As one of the few who understands the true origins of this holiday, you can now enjoy the season in a more enlightened manner. So be of good cheer!

Merry Christmas!