

ASSOCIATED BIBLE STUDENTS

“WEEPING MAY ENDURE FOR A NIGHT, BUT JOY COMETH IN THE MORNING.” PSALMS 30:5

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MYTHS, LEGENDS & IDOL WORSHIP

“What concord hath Christ with Belial? ...And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?
...Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate... touch not the unclean thing...” 2 Corinthians 6:15-17

PART TWO

As is true of most cultural changes, they are adopted gradually from generation to generation, until, almost imperceptibly, their origins are forgotten, and they become the unquestioned moral and religious standard. Today, many standards unheard of just one generation ago, are defended with passion, and all those not in harmony with their acceptance are considered politically incorrect and out of touch with reality.

Have false doctrines and practices crept into the church that go unquestioned today? Are these passionately defended, even though they have no basis in Scripture? Indeed, there are many, and these bring dishonor to our heavenly Father. The previous issue of this newsletter sheds light on the origins of these diversions from the *old paths* spoken of in Jeremiah 6:16. Just as the Israelites were influenced by *mythology, legends and idol worship*, in like manner, the early Christian church strayed from the true worship, and these influences persist to this day.

The Christian church had been given sufficient warning through Old Testament examples as to what would happen if it allowed the world to enter into its affairs. The downfall of Israel in the time of her kings was that she mingled with the people of the land—allowing their pagan practices to pull down the standards which God had set for her. So too, this failure to be sanctified or set apart from the people of the land, caused the church to stumble into serious errors. Jesus taught: “*While men [the Apostles] slept, his enemy [the devil] came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.*” (See Matthew 13:24-30, 38) Who are these tares? Jesus said they are *children of the wicked one*—the worldly minded who promote false teachings, thereby diverting from the true path of Christianity.

POWERFUL MEN IMPOSING THEIR WILL

From the beginning of time, mankind has been manipulated and overpowered by those of great charisma and influence. As we read in *Part One* on this subject, Nimrod and his mother/wife, Semiramis, were two such individuals who had a major negative impact upon the faith of God’s people soon after the Flood. Likewise, thousands of years later, men of influence captivated the early church with their assertive wills, changing the course of Christian history.

For a short time, the early church remained relatively sanctified—

set apart from the world. However, as John the Revelator prophesied, defection from the Apostolic teachings would soon overcome the faith of many. Within only two centuries, the young church, instructed by the Apostles to think for herself with the help of God’s Word, began to be ruled by aggressive, power-hungry men. These claimed a superior spiritual insight and sanctity, expecting a reverence, privilege and authority over the general congregation.

In his message to John, Jesus called these men *Nicholaitanes*. (Revelation 2:6, 15) This Greek word *Nicholaitanes* has the same meaning as *Balaam* in the Hebrew. For greed, Balaam enticed Israel

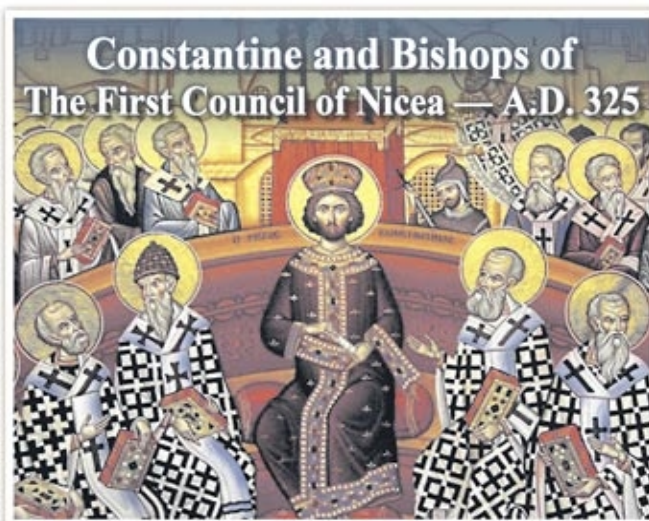
into sin by compromising with the people who knew not God. (Numbers 22-24, 2 Peter 2:15) Thus, false gods were introduced to the Israelites, and in like manner, Nicolaitanes of the second and third centuries introduced compromising errors into the Christian church.

By the fourth century, a weak-willed and uneducated church, relinquished her democratically organized congregations to these dictatorial Nicolaitane church leaders. This development of a hierarchy—a *clergy/laity* system—spelled disaster for the early church. The responsibility for decision making and doctrinal authority was taken completely from

the congregation, and was left totally in the hands of domineering church leaders. Finally, the congregation was forbidden to look into the deep things of God, and the writings of His inspired men were replaced by church creeds and traditions. Those who remained true to *the faith once delivered to the saints* were but a *little flock*—a minority without voice or respect in the church. Jude 1:3, 11-13

CONSTANTINE, THE GREAT COMPROMISER

In A.D. 312, the pagan emperor Constantine recognized that his empire was faltering; and as with many politicians, he found it expedient to embrace Christianity to strengthen his power. Many historians consider Constantine’s conversion a great victory for Christianity, and it certainly was, in a political sense—but, though swelling the numbers of converts, it was not a victory in advancing the one true faith. Constantine knew that he needed to allow certain pagan practices to keep his empire together, and those who went along with his compromising positions soon found themselves in a self-serving and politically controlled church organization.



Christians, weary of bitter persecution from pagan-controlled governments, were eager to adapt to their new Christ-friendly environment. The warnings of Jesus and the Apostles to keep sanctified by the truth through the Word of God were abandoned to what was expedient and politically popular. (John 17:17) As a result, doctrines began to be developed which were a blend of pagan customs and Christian practices. Almost imperceptibly, the sleepy church was consumed with *traditions of men*, and those who opposed these traditions were either threatened with or endured harsh persecution. “*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine... they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.*” 2 Timothy 4:3, 4 (NAS)

ICONS AND IDOLATRY BROUGHT INTO CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

The Nation of Israel was told by God: “*Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image... Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them...*” (Exodus 20:3-5) Although the Christian is not bound by the Law of the Jews, this commandment is still a God-honoring practice, for the writings of Paul contain several warnings to “*flee from idolatry.*” 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5

Alexander Hislop, in his scholarly treatise *The Two Babylons*, wrote of this influence upon the early church: “*In Greece, the superstitious regard to relics, and especially to the bones of the deified heroes (such as the Trojan Hector), was a conspicuous part of the popular idolatry.*” (Chap. V, Sec. II) Archeological finds in Roman catacombs confirm that the veneration of relics and icons among Christians had a beginning well before the fourth century compromises of Constantine. Religious medallions and statues were said to miraculously keep one safe from harm. Official Roman Catholic doctrine claims that praying in front of an image of a saint is not worshipping a *thing*, but is simply a representation of the real saint to whom the person is giving due praise: “*That the honour which is given to them is referred to the objects (prototypa) which they represent, so that through the images which we kiss, and before which we uncover our heads and kneel, we adore Christ and venerate the Saints whose likenesses they are.*” (Council of Trent, Sess. XXV, de invocatione Sanctorum). Observation of common use of St. Christopher medals and Virgin Mary statues would suggest a more *superstitious* reverence, however—that these icons actually provide protection, and without these icons, protection is withdrawn. After examining these Roman Catholic traditions, Hislop concluded that “*the grand objects of her worship, her festivals, her doctrine and discipline, her rites and ceremonies, her priesthood and their orders, have all been derived from ancient Babylon.*”

There are no references in Scripture which even remotely suggest the practice of *venerating saints*, let alone creating objects of their likeness before which we should show homage. To the contrary, hear the stern warning of the Apostle Paul who equates idolatry with other *works of the flesh*: “*Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft...*” (Galatians 5:19-21; See also 1 John 5:21) Anything which draws worship and adoration away from God and His beloved Son is to be avoided.

PILGRIMAGES TO HOLY PLACES

Alexander Hislop further informs us of the ancient pagan practice of pilgrimages whereby “*they consecrated the very ground*

in which they [the dead demi-gods] were entombed... If the places where the relics of Osiris were buried were accounted peculiarly holy, it is easy to see how naturally this would give rise to the pilgrimages so frequent among the heathen. One of the favorite ways [for certain Christians] of washing away sin was to undertake a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Jago di Compostella in Spain, or the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Now, in the Scripture there is not the slightest trace of any such thing as a pilgrimage to the tomb of saint, martyr, prophet, or apostle.” (Chap. V, Sec. II)

The New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia itself declares the clear pagan origins of pilgrimages: “*Pilgrimages may be defined as journeys made to some place with the purpose of venerating it, or in order to ask there for supernatural aid, or to discharge some religious obligation... divine beings who controlled the movements of men and nature could exercise that control only over certain definite forces or within set boundaries. Thus the river gods had no power over those who kept away from the river, nor could the wind deities exercise any influence over those who lived in deserts...*” (www.newadvent.org)

Although pilgrimages *seem* innocent enough, the Lord saw that men were very prone to image worship, and He purposefully did not reveal the location of Moses’ burial sepulchre. Indeed, Jesus’ body does not remain with us for the same reason that God saw in fallen man the tendency to worship objects rather than Himself. There is no mention in Scripture of the faithful having made pilgrimages to receive miraculous powers or insights.

THE MYSTICAL SACRED HEART

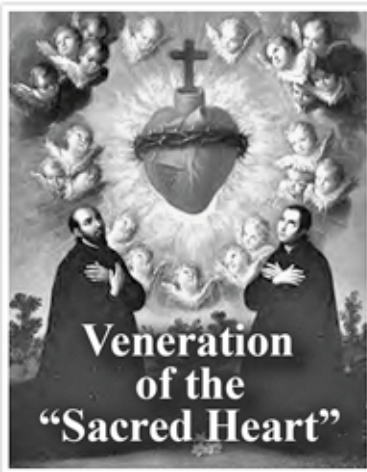
Again, Hislop’s *Two Babylons* brings out yet another pagan practice: “*As the ancient Babylonian system appeared in Egypt, there also a ‘Sacred Heart’ was venerated. The ‘Heart’ was one of the sacred symbols of Osiris when he was born again... in the arms of his mother Isis. In Greek mythology Dionysius [i.e., Bacchus], whose heart was snatched away by Minerva and preserved, by a new regeneration emerged... restored to life.*” (Chap. V, Sec. IV)

This peculiar sacredness of the regenerated heart of Bacchus represented to the pagans the incarnation of Nimrod as Bel, who, as seen in *Part One* of this lesson, was the *god of the sun*. As the *sacred heart* was represented as a heart surrounded by flames, so, too, the *Sacred Heart* of Rome is actually worshiped as a flaming heart—another form of worship *borrowed* from paganism.

PAGAN ORIGIN OF EASTER

The origin of *Easter* dates as far back as ancient Babylon. As we learned in *Part One*, Semiramis took the form of the *queen of heaven*, *Astarte*. Babylonians believed that an enormous egg fell from heaven into the Euphrates River, and from this egg the goddess *Astarte* [Semiramis] was hatched. Thus, the egg came to symbolize the *goddess of Spring*. The idea of a mystic egg eventually spread from Babylon to pagan Rome where, each Spring an *Easter* egg would lead processions in honor of the *Mother Goddess*. *Astarte* was worshiped throughout various cultures under such names as *Estera*, *Venus*, *Aphrodite* and *Diana*—all associated with fertility and the pagan festival of Spring.

Another association with the pagan festival of Spring is the celebration of the death of *Tammuz*. After the death of her husband/son Nimrod, Semiramis gave birth to an illegitimate son. She claimed that this son, *Tammuz*, was Nimrod, supernaturally conceived, having no human father, and that, at his death, he was the *seed*—the *savior* promised by God in Genesis 3:15. God saw this festival that memorialized the death of *Tammuz* as a perversion of the faith of His people, Israel: “*Thou shalt see*



greater abominations that they [the Israelites] do. Then He brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord's house which was toward the north; and behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz." Ezekiel 8:13, 14

PAGAN ORIGINS OF CHRISTMAS

It is now widely recognized among Christians that the 25th day of December is not the true day of the birth of our Lord Jesus. The beginning of October is more nearly correct for his birth, and April for his death on the cross and birth as a *New Creature*. So, how did the birth of Jesus become associated with the end of December?

It is commonly held that Isis, the Egyptian title given to Semiramis, gave birth to a *yule*—Babylonian word for *little child*—about the time of the winter solstice. A winter festival was commonly observed by pagan countries in honor of the birth of this false messiah, Nimrod. One of his titles meaning *Lord of the Covenant* is referred to in Judges 8:33: "*the children of Israel turned again... and made Baal-berith their god.*" Around the time of Constantine, the same festive day was adopted by the church in order to conciliate pagan adherents and to swell the numbers of Christianity. (Wilkinson, *Egyptians*, Vol. IV, 405)

The Christmas tree, so popular today, was equally common in pagan Rome and pagan Egypt in celebration of their risen god. It was claimed that Nimrod, who had been slain, came to life again as a tree. Thus, the people of Rome used the fir tree in their festival—Baal-berith differing by only one letter from Baal-bereth—*lord of the fir tree*.

PURGATORY AND DEPICTIONS OF THE DEVIL

It is curious that the popular representation of the devil shows him with horns, hoofs and a tail, whereas the Bible describes Satan as having been created with "*the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.*" (Ezekiel 28:12 NAS) Therefore the popular depiction is not Biblical, but more likely based upon Nimrod, depicted in a hieroglyph as half man, half beast—wearing not only the two horns of the bull, but its hind legs and tail, as well.

The god Tammuz—the reincarnated Nimrod—for whom the women of Israel lamented annually (Ezekiel 8:14), is connected with fire worship and the purification of dead souls before they entered the after life. The name *Tammuz* is derived from *tam*—*to perfect*, and *muz*—*to purge* clean by burning. This place of purging was adopted by the compromising early church and called *purgatory*. Although an unscriptural concept, *purgatory* became a lucrative convenience for the corrupt church—charging indulgences for the dead to limit time spent in punishment.

ORIGIN OF MARY WORSHIP

Early Christian writers vigorously protested the pagan custom of raising men to the rank of gods or demigods. However, by the fourth century, Mary, the apostles, martyrs, and angels had been substituted for the pagan gods and goddesses in an effort to facilitate the forced conversion of hordes of unbelievers. When, as often happened, a pagan temple was appropriated for Christian purposes, some of its previous pagan divinities, heros, iconic images and practices were purposefully retained.

Other than our Lord Jesus, the Bible does not authorize veneration of the dead. The early church did not worship Mary. In fact, *The New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia* admits: "*We do not meet with any clear traces of the cultus of the Blessed Virgin in the first Christian centuries.*" The cult of the Virgin Goddess Diana may have contributed to the worship of the Virgin Mary, for one of the earliest churches in honor of Mary arose at Ephesus on the site of the famous temple of Diana. It is no

coincidence that in the same city in A.D. 431 a synod was held which first officially designated Mary as *the Mother of God*.

While in Roman Catholicism the principal subjects of devotion are the *Madonna and child*, so too, in ancient Babylon the popular worship was to Semiramis (*the queen of heaven*) and her son Ninus. The pagan influence which proceeded forth to the world from Babylon, provided the template for the universal adoration of the *Mother and Son*. In Greece they were worshiped as Ceres the great mother, with the babe at her breast or as Irene the goddess of peace, with the boy Plutus in her arms; in Pagan Rome as Fortuna and Jupiter the boy; in Asia as Cybele and Deaius; in Egypt as Isis and Osiris, whose very names signify *the woman and the seed*—all being the exact counterpart of the Madonna and child, devoutly revered in Papal Rome as the *queen of heaven and her divine seed*.

TRINITIES

The concept of a *trinity*—*god in three persons*—was born in ancient Babylon. The first person was *the Great Invisible*; second was *the Spirit of God Incarnate* in the human mother (Semiramis); and third was *the Divine Son* (Nimrod). Triads of gods also appeared in the ancient cultures of Sumer, Egypt, India, Greece and finally Rome. In Roman mythology, Minerva, the "*offspring of the brain of Jupiter*" was regarded as the embodiment of divine thought, Jupiter was the creator, and Juno was his representative. (McClintock & Strong, Vol. 6: *Minerva*) The Sumerians worshiped Anu (the Father), Enlil (the god of earth) and Enki (the lord of wisdom). The Egyptians worshipped Amun who was really three gods in one: Re was his face; Ptah his body and Amun his hidden identity "*combined as three embodiments or aspects of one supreme and triune deity.*" W. Durant, *Oriental Heritage*, 201

The early church did not have the concept of a *trinity*. Their Jewish heritage would have naturally been opposed to such a polytheistic idea. Abraham was called out of *Ur of the Chaldees*—the ancient Babylonian empire—but he never embraced these pagan concepts. (Genesis 11:31) His descendants, the nation of Israel, were given the command of God: "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD.*" (Deuteronomy 6:4). Even the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* admits that the doctrine of the *Trinity* is not taught in the Old Testament. (Vol. XIV, 306) Yet, because of familiarity with many pagan triads of gods, the doctrine of the *Trinity* rose to prominence among Christians by the fourth and fifth centuries. Strong belief led to action. "*Probably more Christians were slaughtered by Christians in these two years (A.D. 342-3) than by all the persecutions of Christians by pagans in the history of Rome.*" W. Durant, *Age of Faith*, 8

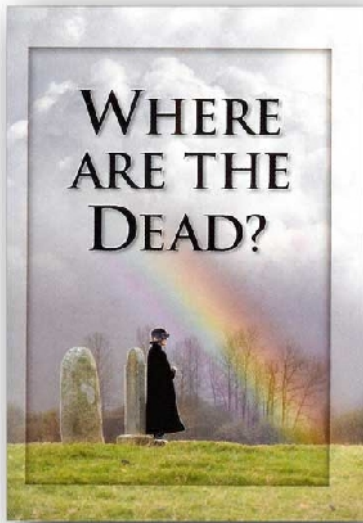
TRUTH REFUTES THE TRADITIONS OF MEN

It is understandable that Christians, without the aid of Bible study tools, have followed long-held teachings and practices. But now, in this age of enlightenment, sincere followers of Christ need to question whether these traditions have a Biblical basis and are truly God-honoring. We do well to heed the words of Jeremiah: "*Thus saith the Lord, learn not the way of the heathen... For the customs of the people are futile...*" (Jeremiah 10:1-4) Leaving behind false traditions, and conforming our beliefs to the "*faith once delivered to the saints*" may bring contempt by those who have not examined these matters. But we are to remember that God loves those who value truth above all else. "*You were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light... trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.*" Jude 1:3; Ephesians 5:8, 10



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