

Pagan, Christmas and Easter

I have heard it said that you do not believe that Christmas and Easter are pagan holidays. Could you please explain?

Messianic Apologetics is a solution-driven ministry. In dealing with controversial subject matters, we try to deal in fair-minded and scholarly terms, demonstrating the testimony of people who have changed for the better spiritually, and not worse. As it relates to the holidays, for example, all too often during *Chanukah* in the Winter, and Passover in the Spring, we as Messianic Believers can spend too much time focusing on what our Christian brethren are doing in ignorance, and not focusing enough on the holidays that we are celebrating, and uplifting Messiah Yeshua in them.

It has been our observation that “pagan” is a buzzword that is used far too frequently by those in the Messianic community today. “Pagan” can be used by anyone to describe any Christian doctrinal practice, and oftentimes not in any clear Biblical, historical, or even rational context. Much of the usage of the word “pagan” is done emotionally, on the part of self-disenfranchised Messianics who errantly believe that mainstream Christianity has nothing, and/or has had nothing, to offer the Body of Messiah for centuries. Their pursuit is often to expose anything perceived as “pagan,” rather than becoming Scripturally compliant with the Word of God, and demonstrate to our Christian brothers and sisters the example of people who have changed for the better by becoming Messianic and Torah observant. If, however, Christians see that all we do is condemn them because they “do this” or “don’t do that,” they may want nothing to do with us, and perhaps rightfully so. We have to have the appropriate attitude in approaching them and be constructive and spiritually edifying, which sadly is not evident in some sectors of the Messianic community today.

As it relates to the Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter, we have addressed them in the articles “**The Christmas Challenge**” and “**What is the Problem With Easter?**” (appearing in the *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper* and *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper*, respectively). Let us state on the record that we do not encourage the celebration of these holidays, and are fully aware of their questionable origins. These are replacements for the *moedim* or appointed times of the Lord in Leviticus 23, that were officially established by the Roman Catholic Church, and many Protestants today thus celebrate them (albeit in ignorance). There are traditions associated with these two holidays that originate from paganism and not the Bible.

Nevertheless, we know that as a Messianic family when we were still Church-going Christians that when we celebrated Christmas and Easter, **we did not** worship Christmas trees and the Easter bunny. We celebrated these two holidays with the understanding that we were commemorating the birth of the Messiah and the resurrection of the Messiah. We did not know of their questionable origins. But the questionable origins we are talking about are *the traditions* of the Christmas tree, evergreen, mistletoe, the Easter bunny, and Easter eggs. All too often, when Christians see many Messianics’ attitudes related to these two holidays, they believe that what is in actuality being criticized and branded as “pagan” are the events of the birth of our Savior and His resurrection—as opposed to the traditions that have been commonly associated with them, whose origins are certainly not in the Bible.

Many Christians in ignorance celebrate Christmas and Easter without knowing how these two holidays came into being. We know as a family that God honored us in our ignorance for what we did, because in our minds we were celebrating the birth and the resurrection of Yeshua. But we also know that when we were shown the truth about the origins of these two holidays, that we were given a choice by Him and we had to change. We have changed, and now celebrate the Biblical holidays of Leviticus 23, emphasizing the Messianic richness that is in these festivals and what they teach us about God’s ongoing plan of salvation history. We have no intention of celebrating Christmas or Easter again. It is our choice, however, that in dealing with Christian friends and family, we show them what we should be doing from the Scriptures, and what they have missed out on by not celebrating

the Biblical holidays. Once you commit yourself to celebrating the Lord's appointed times, we have discovered that you will not want to go back to the human substitutions that are often made.

We believe that Christmas and Easter are holidays of a different variety than holidays such as Halloween. Halloween is a holiday that is obviously totally committed to the glorification of witches, goblins, ghouls, demons, and Satan. It can, in no uncertain terms, be called a pagan holiday. There are no Biblical overtones or undertones to it. Christians who celebrate Halloween need to be reprimanded for it, and there are a host of Christian apologetic ministries that speak against it.¹

Christmas and Easter are of a different variety because they do have Biblical overtones to them. We have to remember that when we speak about the origins of these two holidays, we must put ourselves in the position of those Christians who are celebrating them, thinking that they are religious holidays founded in Scripture, and are celebrating them *not* for the sake of the Christmas tree or Easter bunny—but to remember the birth of Yeshua and His resurrection. These are Biblical events worthy of our remembrance. However, the way that Christianity has chosen to remember them is improper, because we are not to follow the fallen ways of the nations (Deuteronomy 18:9).

In our dealings with Christians, it is our opinion that it is inappropriate to call Christmas and Easter “pagan” because such comments are easy to be misinterpreted as criticizing the events of Messiah's birth and resurrection, as opposed to the participation of traditions that originate in anything but the Bible. We call these holidays non-Biblical because it will force our Christian brothers and sisters into God's Word to see if their celebration is truly justified and based in the Bible. The Messianic community uses the word “pagan” far too frequently, and it is often because we do not feel spiritually and Scripturally sound to defend ourselves. Sadly, the word “pagan” is used as a crutch and a self-defense mechanism because some feel unsure of themselves, and are unable to adequately defend their beliefs from the Bible and history.

We believe that a much better way to answer the question, “Do you celebrate Christmas and Easter?” is to respond with a question: “Are Christmas and Easter listed among the appointed times of Leviticus 23?” This will force our Christian brethren back into the Word of God, as opposed to getting them unnecessarily offended. And if there is anything that the Messianic community desperately needs right now, it is a return to the Scriptures, and letting the Bible answer people, rather than insulting them *ad nauseum* with the term “pagan,” as is the case far too frequently.

¹ Consult the article “A Messianic Perspective on Halloween” by J.K. McKee (appearing in the *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper*).