

FAQ

FROM THE MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS ARCHIVES (2000-2018)

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MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.net

Frequently Asked Questions

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Abbreviations and Special Terms

The following is a list of abbreviations for reference works and special terms which are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as TWOT for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

- ABD: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*
AMG: *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament*
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament
Ara: Aramaic
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)
b. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.
BDAG: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)
BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.
CGEDNT: *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Barclay M. Newman)
CGL: *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (2021)
CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Holladay)
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)
CJSB: Complete Jewish Study Bible (2016)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls
EDB: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*
EJ: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)
Ger: German
GNT: Greek New Testament
Grk: Greek
HALOT: *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner)
HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)
Heb: Hebrew
HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
IDBSup: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*
ISBE: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*
IVPBBC: *IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)*
Jastrow: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Marcus Jastrow)
JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
JETS: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
KJV: King James Version
Lattimore: The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore (1996)
LITV: *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green (1986)
LES: *Lexham English Septuagint* (2019)
LS: *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott)
LSJM: *Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie)
LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
LXX: Septuagint
m. Mishnah
MT: Masoretic Text
NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*
NEB: New English Bible (1970)
Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*
NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)
NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*
NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*
NIV: New International Version (1984)
NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)
NJSB: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
NT: New Testament
OT: Old Testament
REB: Revised English Bible (1989)
RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)
t. Tosefta
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TLV: Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version (2014)
TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)
TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition
v(s). verse(s)
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
Vul: Latin Vulgate
YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)
WMB: World Messianic Bible (2020)

Pagan, Christmas and Easter

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

Messianic Apologetics is a solution-driven Messianic ministry. In dealing with Messianic theology, spirituality, and 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 people can spend too much time focusing on what our evangelical Protestant brothers and sisters are doing in ignorance, and not focusing enough on the holidays which we are celebrating, and uplifting the Messiah in them.

It has been our observation that “pagan” is a buzzword which is used far too frequently by many of those in the Messianic community today (and certainly in the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement). “Pagan” can be used by anyone to lambast any Christian doctrine or belief—and often 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 those who feel self-disenfranchised, and 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 evangelical brothers and sisters the example of people who have changed for the better by becoming Messianic and Torah obedient. 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 our faith community today.

As it relates to the traditional Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter, our ministry has addressed them in the articles “**The Christmas Challenge**” and “**What is the Problem With Easter?**” Let us state on the record that we do not encourage the celebration of these holidays, and are fully aware of questions surrounding them. These are replacements for the *moedim* or appointed times of the Lord in Leviticus 23, which 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 which may originate from paganism, or at least from syncretism, 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 the Messiah and the Messiah’s resurrection—as opposed to the traditions which have been commonly associated with them, whose origins are certainly not in the Bible.

Many Christian people 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 likely origins of these two holidays, that we were given a choice by Him and we had to

Pagan, Christmas and Easter

change. We have changed, and now celebrate the Biblical holidays of Leviticus 23, emphasizing the Messianic richness which 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 evangelical friends and family, we show them what we believe God's people 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 which are often made.

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

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 sincere Believers 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 Jesus and His resurrection. These are Biblical events worthy of our remembrance. However, the way which Christianity has historically chosen to remember them, we believe to be improper.

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 which 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. Many people in the Messianic community (and certainly the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement) use the word “pagan” far too frequently, and it is often because they do not feel spiritually and Scripturally sound to defend themselves. 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 hopefully force fellow Believers back into the Word of God, as opposed to getting them unnecessarily offended.