

Merry Mithras, by any other name;

For hundreds of years before Christ, people worshipped the sun. In the north as winter approached the people, fearing that the sun had forsaken them they offered sacrifices and worship and it always seemed to work because the sun god relented and the days started to get longer. This time of *solstice* became memorialized with its own official season culminating with an observation of the longest day of the year with the *solstice* celebration. In different parts of the world this celebration took on different forms. In the north according to the Wicca tradition the holiday is called **Yule** or **Yuletide**. The Yule log, a log brought into the house during this season, made way to the **Yule tree**. This was an evergreen cut down and not a potted plant. The tree like the Yule log represented eternal life. The evergreen was used by the Celts and the Egyptians alike. Even in Asia the evergreen was used in worship as a symbol of life continuing on even when other trees looked dead the hope of life could still be seen in its green branches. In Wicca, called the "**Old Religion**", the major characters worshipped are Mother Nature, Father Time and the Baby Sun God. Sounds familiar doesn't it.

O' Christmas Tree O' Christmas Tree

Some how we think that our cherished evergreen is a symbol of God's everlasting life or the "tree of life" of the Bible. In fact this tree (the one we decorate and put our presents under) is described as a pagan act and symbol in our Scriptures.

Jeremiah 10:1 *Hear ye the word which the LORD speaketh unto you, O house of Israel:*

Jeremiah 10:2 *Thus saith the LORD, **Learn not the way of the heathen**, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them.*

Jeremiah 10:3 ***For the customs of the people [are] vain: for [one] cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe.***

Jeremiah 10:4 ***They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not.***

Jeremiah 10:5 *They [are] upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also [is it] in them to do good.*

The "signs of heaven" that scared the heathen was the waning of the sun. The days got shorter and the nights longer and the heathens thought their beloved sun god was mad at them

The Saturnalia

Probably the most influential winter solstice celebration on the early church in Antioch was the *Saturnalia*. This celebration spread from Greece to Rome and influenced the entire area where Christianity was trying to take a foothold. The worship in Greece of the god Saturn (the seed sower) the god of agriculture took place in December from the 17-23rd. It was a time of care free merry-making. Gifts were exchanged and even slaves were temporarily set at liberty. This celebration was overseen by the "**Lord of Misrule**" in the Roman Empire.

Merry Mithras

In Persia, Mithras, the god of lights (associated with the sun), and his worship Mithraism, competed with Christianity directly. Mithras' birthday was also celebrated at the same time as the late winter solstice, December 25th.

These pagan holidays and the worship of their gods (many with mother and son deities), became a much looked forward to time in the Roman Empire because they were so much fun. A time of drunkenness and sexual immorality where many wore masks to hide their identity. A time when slaves, commoners and dignitaries alike mingled and exchanged favors. It can be compared to the Mardi Gras in New Orleans and Festival in Rio all rolled into one.

At the time of the early church the church at Jerusalem came under tremendous persecution. Some of the leaders decided to flee the country to keep from being stoned or crucified. Among these Bishops was Nicolas one of the seven of Bishops of Jerusalem. Nicolas made his way to Antioch and stayed there to lead a congregation there. These followers became known as the Nicolaitans. This cult practiced the doctrine of Gnosticism. and enjoyed the finer things of life; delicious foods, good wine, carnal and sensual pleasures. They embraced the speculations of Pythagoras and Plato and adjusted scripture to these teachings. Knowledge rather than faith was the key to salvation and few people qualified. This doctrine was open to the influence of the natural sciences. Earth, wind, fire, astronomy, astrology and the like were the fare of social discourse. It is no wonder that Jesus shows his displeasure at this cult in his letters to the Churches in the Book of Revelation.

Revelation 2:6 *But this thou hast, that thou **hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.** 2:7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*

Revelation 2:14 *But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. 2:15 So hast thou also them that **hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.***

One of the letters is addressed to the church at Ephesus and the other to Pergamos. The near proximity of Antioch to these cities is the main reason for the obvious friction between these churches and the cult of Nicolas. What practices were being taught by the Nicolaitans? Whatever it was caused Christians to fall prey to grievous sin. A true stumbling-block of subversion.

Young's literal reads as follows:

Revelation 2:14 `But I have against thee a few things: That thou hast there those holding the teaching of Balaam, who did teach Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the sons of Israel, **to eat idol-sacrifices, and to commit whoredom; (2:15) so hast thou, even thou, those holding the teaching of the Nicolaitans -- which thing I hate.**

Darby's 1890

Revelation 2:14 But I have a few things against thee: that thou hast there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a snare before the sons of Israel, **to eat [of] idol sacrifices and commit fornication.** 2:15 So thou also hast those who hold the **doctrine of Nicolaitanes in like manner.**

The conflict was definitely over these celebrations of Saturnalia that included feasting, drinking, gift giving and fornication which were never given up and eventually legitimized by the Catholic church under Constantine . Eventually the date was changed to December 25 by Pope Julius I in the fourth century.

When Jerusalem heard that Jesus' birth was to be celebrated on December 25, the day they knew as the official Roman Empires' traditional celebration of Mithras' birth, they rioted in the streets and considered it blasphemy.

Don't do as the heathen do.

Ezekiel 20:30 Wherefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Are ye polluted after the manner of your fathers? and commit ye whoredom after their abominations?

Ezekiel 20:31 For when ye offer your gifts, when ye make your sons to pass through the fire, ye pollute yourselves with all your idols, even unto this day: and shall I be enquired of by you, O house of Israel? [As] I live, saith the Lord GOD, I will not be enquired of by you.

Ezekiel 20:32 And that which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone.

Ezekiel 20:33 [As] I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you:

Ezekiel 20:34 And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out.

Ezekiel 20:35 And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face.

Matthew 6:7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen [do]: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

2 Kings 16:3 But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel.

2 Kings 16:4 And he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under **every green tree.**

The words "every green tree" refer to a specifically selected lush green tree (evergreen) for the purpose of appeasing gods. Where gifts are placed at the foot of the tree which is usually decorated. This is a reference to the pagan ritual of what we now call the Christmas tree, where gifts are offered even to this day.

2 Kings 17:10 And they set them up **images** and groves in **every high hill**, and under **every green tree**:

2 Kings 17:11 And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as [did] the heathen whom the LORD carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger:

2 Kings 17:12 For they served idols, whereof the LORD had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing.

2 Kings 17:13 Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, [and by] all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments [and] my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets.

2 Kings 17:14 Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God.

2 Kings 17:15 And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, **and went after the heathen that [were] round about them, [concerning] whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them.**

2 Kings 17:16 And they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made them molten **images**, [even] two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal.

2 Kings 17:17 And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.

2 Kings 17:18 Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only.

2 Kings 21:2 And he did [that which was] evil in the sight of the LORD, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel.

2 Kings 21:3 For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.

2 Chronicles 28:2 For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also **molten images** for Baalim.

2 Chronicles 28:3 Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.

2 Chronicles 28:4 He sacrificed also and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under **every green tree**.

Jeremiah 10:1 Hear ye the word which the LORD speaketh unto you, O house of Israel:

Jeremiah 10:2 Thus saith the LORD, **Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them.**

Jeremiah 10:3 For the customs of the people [are] vain: for [one] cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe.

Jeremiah 10:4 They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not.

Deuteronomy 12:2 **Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods,** upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under **every green tree**:

Deuteronomy 12:3 And ye shall **overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire;** and ye **shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place.**

Deuteronomy 12:4 Ye shall not do so unto the LORD your God.

1 Kings 14:22 And Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done.

1 Kings 14:23 For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on **every high hill**, and under **every green tree**.

1 Kings 14:24 And there were **also sodomites** in the land: [and] they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD cast out before the children of Israel.

Isaiah 57:4 Against whom do ye sport yourselves? against whom make ye a wide mouth, [and] draw out the tongue? [are] ye not children of transgression, a seed of falsehood,

Isaiah 57:5 Enflaming yourselves with idols under **every green tree**, slaying the children in the valleys under the cliffs of the rocks?

Isaiah 57:6 Among the smooth [stones] of the stream [is] thy portion; they, they [are] thy lot: even to them hast thou poured a drink offering, thou hast offered a meat offering. Should I receive comfort in these?

Isaiah 57:7 Upon a lofty and high mountain hast thou set thy bed: even thither wentest thou up to offer sacrifice.

Isaiah 57:8 Behind the doors also and the posts hast thou set up thy remembrance: for thou hast discovered [thyself to another] than me, and art gone up; thou hast enlarged thy bed, and made thee [a covenant] with them; thou lovedst their bed where thou sawest [it].

Jeremiah 2:19 Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that [it is] an evil [thing] and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear [is] not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts.

Jeremiah 2:20 For of old time I have broken thy yoke, [and] burst thy bands; and thou saidst, I will not transgress; when upon **every high hill** and under **every green tree** thou wanderest, playing the harlot.

Jeremiah 2:21 Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?

Jeremiah 2:22 For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, [yet] thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord GOD.

Jeremiah 3:4 Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father, thou [art] the guide of my youth?

Jeremiah 3:5 Will he reserve [his anger] for ever? will he keep [it] to the end? Behold, thou hast spoken and done evil things as thou couldest.

Jeremiah 3:6 The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen [that] which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under **every green tree**, and there hath played the harlot.

Jeremiah 3:13 Only **acknowledge thine iniquity**, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under **every green tree**, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD.