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Christmas: Its forgotten origin

Why did the church in Rome wait over 300 years before it decided to celebrate Christmas?

It's a fascinating but strange series of events that led to the very first Christmas celebrations in AD 354, over 300 years after the beginning of the Christian church. It may come as a surprise to our *Beyond Today* readers to learn that the Church at Rome was the first church in Christendom to begin celebrating the birth of Christ on December 25 – but not until the mid fourth century.

Why the long wait? And was it ever the right decision to countenance a December 25 celebration? The answers may surprise you.

A date already assigned

The Bible doesn't provide an exact date for Christ's birth, and His disciples never celebrated Christmas. December 25 was already spoken for by the pagan population of Rome, long before Jesus was born. His nativity was never biblically sanctioned to be observed on Decem-



Sol Invictus – Unconquered Sun was the official god of the later Roman Empire.

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ber 25 or on any other day. It remains a matter of historical fact that in no city of the Roman Empire was Christmas celebrated before AD 354.

In pre-Christian times and for over 200 years

into the Christian era, the prime deity the Romans worshipped was Jupiter (previously worshipped by the Greeks as Zeus). By the end of the second century, the adoration of Jupiter, Saturn, Janus and other lesser deities became old fashioned, appealing to the masses less and less. Many in the pagan population found the old religion increasingly outdated. Instead, they were looking for something more modern, more up to date, more “exciting.”

Invaders from the East

During the 200 years before and for 300 years after Christ, Rome in particular saw the influx of numerous

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migrants from the East. These immigrants brought their religious beliefs with them – seemingly more popular than those offered by the West. Most popular was the worship of the unconquerable sun, Sol Invictus.

Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics states, “Some of the most powerful invaders who came from the East to conquer the West were solar divinities, philosophers and mystics (who) had preached the divine nature of the sun and other celestial bodies. Immigrants from the East, and Roman soldiers who had resided there, brought the religion of the sun with them” (volume 8, page 59). The date celebrating the sun god was December 25. It was most prevalent in Syria and Persia, but found new admirers in the West.

Deposing the former gods

When Christ lived on Earth, the unconverted Romans were still celebrating Saturnalia around the time of the winter solstice (December 21). A time of trepidation, it was the shortest day of the year, with the worshippers hoping that the sun would return for another season. By December 25, it became obvious that the sun had begun to rise in the sky, assuring another year for the superstitious Romans. Celebrations, called Brumalia, were deemed to be in order. Although associated with the sun, the festivals didn't seem to be as welcomed as the later Sol Invictus celebrations, also observed on December 25.

Elagabalus, after becoming Roman emperor in AD 218, tried to oust Jupiter from his position of supremacy amongst Roman deities. Elagabalus contains the name of another eastern sun god, Baal. In earlier times, some of the Israelites had worshipped Baal in defiance of the God who had rescued them from Egypt. This Roman emperor's attempt to depose Jupiter, however, was premature. Barely 50 years had passed before another Roman emperor, Aurelian, was more successful. After spending much time in the East, the emperor dethroned Jupiter and replaced him with the sun god, Sol Invictus, in AD 273.

A further almost 50 years later, Constantine the Great became Roman emperor. He supposedly converted to Christianity in the early part of the fourth century whilst much of the Roman Empire consisted of people who were still pagan in their religious outlook. They had been celebrating December 25 for centuries prior to Constantine. Although for political reasons the emperor desired a Christianised empire, the population in Rome was steeped too deeply in their pagan religions.

The changeover came a few decades after Constantine's death. In AD 354 the decision was made by the civil and religious leaders to celebrate Christ's birth on the very day on which the pagan populace of Rome worshipped the unconquerable sun, Sol Invictus. Christ evidently had to share the same day with their sun god and with customs of which He would never approve and which ultimately dishonour Him. This practice is called syncretism.

Other main centres of Christendom followed the Roman example, with the city where Christ gave His life, Jerusalem, waiting an extra century before they convinced themselves that Christmas in the holy city could be celebrated on December 25.

The biblical verdict on Christmas

What was done in Rome violated plain Scripture, as we read in the Pentateuch section of the Bible. Moses reminded the children of Israel to “. . . take heed to yourself that . . . you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’ You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way” (Deuteronomy 12:29-31). Can anything be clearer? In verse 32 we are told, “Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it, you shall not add to it nor take away from it.”

That divine instruction has always been heeded down through the ages by the Church Jesus established. Jesus Christ deserves more than being supposedly “honoured” on a date on which pagans had worshipped their false gods from time immemorial.

A better option – holy days, divine in origin

There was never a need to associate Christ with any pagan feasts. The Bible provides us with holy days and festivals that are free from any such entanglement. God has ensured that we are able to worship Him with days of divine origin, furnishing His people with seven special holy days in three seasons of the year (spring, early summer and autumn). They depict the seven stages of His plan of salvation, revealing how Jesus Christ plays an essential part in each one.

These holy days can be found listed in Leviticus 23. Beginning with the weekly Sabbath, God declared, “These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times” (Leviticus 23:4). Man's attempts to declare non-biblical festivals “Christian” cannot make them “holy.” Only God has that authority.

Prior to observing the seven holy days, the Church Christ established has always commemorated the death of Jesus by keeping the Passover. The apostle Paul told his followers: “For indeed, Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7). It is sad that many professing Christians have opted to ignore identifying Christ as their Passover Lamb.

To learn more of the Holy Days God instituted and claims as His, please request or download our booklets *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Observe?*, *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind* and *The Church Jesus Built*.

Gerhard Marx

“Do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’ You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way” (Deuteronomy 12:30-31).

As the heart determines

A poor widow's gift to God provides a valuable example for us all.

Scripture relates several occasions when Jesus Christ expressed surprise at the varying attitudes of the people amongst whom He lived whilst in human form. He marvelled at the unbelief of those in His own country (Mark 6:1-6), and He was grieved by the hardness of heart of religious leaders (Mark 3:1-5). Conversely, the response from the Roman centurion amazed Him (Matthew 8:9); the faith of the Canaanite woman drew a positive response to her request (Matthew 15:22-28); and the woman with the flow of blood was encouraged (Luke 8:43-48).

As Christ's disciples, we are already going through a kind of reset. Selflessness is a major part of this. It is an attitude that God's word encourages us to embrace.

An amazing example

The first three verses of Luke 21 describe an event which Christ drew to the attention of His disciples. "And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So He said, 'Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all.'"

Christ describes this woman with just two words, "poor widow." These two words reveal a great deal about her, disclosing both her social and economic standing in the community. She was at the very bottom of the ladder. The example of the "widow putting in two mites" highlights a woman who, although poor, truly gave from her heart. Had she chosen, she may have dropped one mite into the treasury and kept the other for herself. Instead, she let go of all. What a powerful example of selflessness.

This woman may have given very little in comparison to the offerings of others, but Christ noted that "she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had" (verse 4). As a percentage of her possessions, it was nearly everything.

As God blesses

Jesus is not condemning those who are able to give from their abundance. Neither is He saying we must give every penny we possess. However, with wealth there is a danger that we may offer casually or fail to consider fully the reasons we decide what to give. The monetary value of our offering is not the most important aspect of giving. What is most important to God is that we give from our heart.

In the Old Testament, ancient Israel was instructed that "every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you" (Deuteronomy 16:17). How might we assess the blessing of God? Has He been generous to us? This is a very serious consideration.

The apostle Paul offered similar advice: "But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:6-7).

"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19).

Lives of service

Disciples of Christ are called to serve and the cost of effective service is self-sacrifice (Romans 12:1). This suggests giving up time or possessions for the sake of something or someone of greater value. In our case, that Someone is Jesus Christ. What God the Father has given to us can never be repaid.

Offerings support God's work, showing appreciation for what He's done. Reader and viewer feedback reveals that God is touching lives through the Gospel message. Giving is an opportunity to delight God and to demonstrate that we have the same concerns He does, especially when we give from the heart!

The widow put her entire livelihood into the treasury, costing her all she had. She was wholly committed to the work of God and wanted nothing to stand between her and the Almighty. What do we prioritise? Our earthly treasures or our relationship with God? The Bible shows He desires to know where our heart lies.

Christ advised in the Sermon on the Mount: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19).

Ademola Adesupo

God's glory declared

Scientific discoveries support order and design in the early universe.

Science and religion are often pitted against one another as competing explanations of the natural world. However, recent scientific observations overturn the leading theories of galaxy formation, and instead support the concept of a Master Designer.

Many scientists are atheists, so to them time is the answer for everything. "Given enough time," they claim, chaos and disorder can become organisation and order. For example, the current theory of the origin of the universe is that approximately 13.8 billion years ago, an infinitely small, hot and dense point concentrated all the matter and energy, known as a singularity, and colloquially referred to as the Big Bang. From this point, the universe exploded into existence, expanding (at an accelerating rate) to this day.

Widely held scientific theories posit that the universe started with disorder and chaos and then became structured and orderly over billions of years. However, the more we learn through the scientific method of observation, the more we see organisation, order and design from the beginning.

Widely accepted model of galaxy formation

According to what is termed the "bottom-up" theory, the first stars would have formed 400 million years after the Big Bang, but mature spiral galaxies wouldn't have formed for billions of years as they supposedly grow through repeated mergers of smaller galaxies until they reach their current size. For example, the oldest known spiral galaxy (BX442) is believed to have formed two billion years after the Big Bang. By contrast, our Milky Way galaxy formed eight billion years after the Big Bang.

Due to the finite speed of light and the vast distances between galaxies, when light reaches earth, we view what these galaxies looked like billions of years ago instead of how they appear today. For example, it takes approximately eight minutes for light to reach earth from the sun. The light from Alpha Centauri, the closest star system to earth, takes about four years to travel to our solar system.

Based on this fact about light and the prevailing theory of galaxy formation, the most distant galaxies that can be observed (appearing how they looked closer to the time of the Big Bang) should be smaller, have fewer stars, and be less well-structured than mature galaxies.



A spiral galaxy – just one of many wonders in the universe

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New information challenges current models

Over the past year, scientists have used the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) to observe the light travelling from distant galaxies to see if the observations confirm the leading theories in galaxy formation. In April this year, an international team of astronomers led by Durham University, UK, used the JWST to find evidence that early galaxies were less chaotic and more developed than the "bottom-up" model would predict. Mature and stable disc and spiral galaxies, such as our Milky Way galaxy, have elongated strips of stars referred to as "bars." Previous studies using the Hubble Space Telescope have detected bar forming galaxies five to six billion years after the Big Bang. Using the JWST, researchers have new evidence that stable galaxies formed two to six billion years after the Big Bang – much sooner than their current model would have predicted.

Lead author and astrophysicist, Zoe Le Conte, said in a statement, "Galaxies in the early Universe are maturing much faster than we thought. This is a real surprise because you would expect the Universe at that stage to be very turbulent with lots of collisions between galaxies and a lot of gas that hasn't yet transformed into stars.

"However, thanks to the JWST we are seeing a lot of these bars much earlier in the life of the Universe which means that galaxies were at a more settled stage in their evolution than previously thought.

"This means we will have to adjust our views on early galaxy evolution."

In other words, these stable and mature galaxies shouldn't exist this soon after the Big Bang according to

the most widely held theories about the evolution of the universe.

Furthermore, the JWST was used to break yet another record in viewing the most distant, and earliest pair of galaxies JADES-GS-z14-0 and JADES-GS-z14-1, whose red shift indicates that these galaxies are 13.4 billion years old, a mere 300 million years after the Big Bang.

“The size of the galaxy clearly proves that most of the light is being produced by large numbers of young stars, rather than material falling onto a supermassive black hole in the galaxy’s centre, which would [make it] appear much smaller”, said JADES team leader Daniel Eisenstein from the Harvard & Smithsonian’s Center for Astrophysics (CfA).

These findings pose an issue for scientists who believe in the “bottom-up” model and unaided evolution of the

Psalm 19:1 proclaims, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.”

universe. Either the rapid formation of massive galaxies in the early universe points to an established process of galaxy formation, e.g., order and design perhaps at the hands of a Master Designer, or scientists double down on their beliefs and propose “more time” as a possible explanation for these young but impossibly mature galaxies. As expected, a new theory doubles the age of the universe and now posits that the Big Bang could have occurred 26.7 billion years ago.

Order and purpose in God’s creation

Do these new scientific discoveries courtesy of the JWST align with God’s word? Yes! Psalm 19:1 proclaims, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.” There is an orderliness and fine-tuning of the universe and our solar system that creates the parameters for intelligent life to flourish on Earth.

We see evidence of order and design everywhere in nature and life. Our Creator’s invisible attributes can be inferred even without reference to the scriptures (Romans 1:20). Design implies a Master Designer and thus we see order and design in:

- The mathematical structure underlying the universe (e.g., fine-tuning)
- Mutualistic symbiosis (e.g., flowering plants and pollinators)
- The diversity of life
- DNA (e.g., information that is similar to a com-

plex computer code)

- Moral order and ethical principles
- Biogenesis (life can only come from life). Abiogenesis – the idea that life arises from non-living matter – is mathematically improbable regardless of how much time is allowed

Isaiah 45:18 states, “For thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited: ‘I am the LORD, and there is no other.’”

How are we to understand the mind and power of a Master Designer who created the universe? Why is such a powerful Being concerned with humans? He is in the process of reproducing Himself, with a desire that many humans join His family. He doesn’t wish any to perish (2 Peter 3:9) but to be changed from physical flesh to eternal spiritual beings (1 Corinthians 15:52). What a wonderful future God has planned for us!

Mark Mirigian

Continued from page 6

conundrum, including the Catholic theologian Origen (AD 186-254) and Flemish scholar Hugo St Victor (AD 1097-1141). Further historical examples can be found on pages 62-63 of our study aid *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* and on pages 16-17 in *Is the Bible True?* All these clues indicate that the earth is far older than 6,000 years, although the Bible suggests that the current re-creation suitable for humans and mammals only dates back that far.

Based on 2 Peter 3:8, which states “But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day,” it can be deduced that the seven literal days of Creation symbolise 7,000 years. Hebrews 4:1-11 and Revelation 20:1-6 connect the still-future 1,000 year reign of Christ to God’s inauguration of the Sabbath day rest (Exodus 20:11). That leaves the first 6,000 years between Eden and Christ’s return as a time for man to try to govern himself, with very few choosing to follow the instructions God provided.

Today the earth is returning to a state of *tôhû* and *bôhû* as Satan seeks to destroy it – along with all its human inhabitants. Christ promised that our Heavenly Father would not allow this and would send Him to intervene for the sake of His disciples – His “elect” (Matthew 24:22; see also Revelation 11:18).

To study further please request *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest, Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* and *Is There Really a Devil?*

Creation: Fitting clues together

How scientific observations can be reconciled with the Bible.

Genesis 1:1-2 introduces the account of the creation of the earth thus: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.”

The original Hebrew wording, combined with a comparison to other passages of Scripture, has led some to conclude that a considerable time interval is indicated between these two verses. If this is indeed intended, there is no discrepancy between the Bible record and scientific determinations that the earth is up to several billion years old. If, on the other hand, there is no such gap, then the earth itself must be only around 6,000 years old – which most scientists consider an impossibility.

So, what are the options and which other passages shed light on this question?

Created perfect

The word translated “created” in Genesis 1:1 is *bârâ’*, meaning “to cut out, . . . pare down, to plane and polish” in the sense of “to make smooth . . . to fashion” (*Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*). This sounds like a finished product. Yet in verse 2, the earth is described as “without form” from *tôhû*, which means to “lie waste, a desolation” and “void” from *bôhû* denoting “an undistinguishable ruin: – emptiness . . . desolation” (*Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, numbers H8414 and H922).

Throughout Scripture clues hint at what caused this chaos. The time needed for the events to occur suggests the earth is very much older than 6,000 years.

God states in Isaiah 45:18 that He did not create the world in *tôhû*. This is confirmed in the book of Job, where



Apart from the effects of tsunamis and strong storm surges the sea remains within its set boundaries.

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He challenged the patriarch regarding the foundations of the earth and the boundaries He had set for the waves of the sea (Job 38:1-11). At this time all the “morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (verse 7). “Morning stars” refers to the angels God had previously created. Among these was the archangel Lucifer (described in Ezekiel 28:11-19). Lucifer received charge of the earth and authority over it, later offering it to Christ, Who did not dispute his claim (Luke 4:5-7).

Lucifer’s name changed

Pride grew in Lucifer until he desired to be like God (Isaiah 14:12-14). Dissatisfied with his assigned throne on earth, he convinced a third of the angels to follow him in rebellion against his Maker (Revelation 12:4). Defeat ensued and he was renamed Satan meaning “Adversary.” Scripture is silent on the time taken to achieve

Today the earth is returning to a state of *tôhû* and *bôhû* as Satan seeks to destroy it – along with all its human inhabitants.

this deception and on the duration of the conflict. Of its conclusion, Christ remarked: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). This concurs with Isaiah 14:12. Damage to the physical universe and the earth itself would have been immense.

Thus, by verse 2 of Genesis 1, the waves no longer remained within their boundaries and instead water covered the earth. The word translated “was” in verse 2 is sometimes translated *came to pass*, as in Genesis 4:3, and *became*, as in the case of Lot’s wife (Genesis 19:26). Because of this sense of a change in state or an event occurring, at least two Bible versions include “became” as an alternative translation in their margin references to Genesis 1:2 (New International Version and The Companion Bible). The *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary* postulates this belief. See also the *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance* number H1961.

A long-recognised dilemma

Several early Hebrew scholars recognised this

(Continued on page 5)



Q Pictures and statues of Christ often show Him with long hair. Given 1 Corinthians 11:14, I wonder if this a true depiction?

FAQ

A Since there aren't any actual sketches or portraits of Christ, religious artists have simply created from their imagination a figure who reflects their ideas and beliefs. These portraits have been passed down through the centuries without people questioning their accuracy. Clues within the Bible provide a framework for what Christ might have looked like, and that evidence stands in stark contrast to the typical portrayal of Jesus as weak, effeminate and having long hair. Artists who thus depicted Christ may have used a softer image to convey gentleness, but clearly disregarded biblical evidence.

Scripture shows that Christ was able to blend in with the crowds, so His physical appearance was not remarkable in any way. The Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 53:2 says: "He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him." It's noteworthy that He was so much like any common individual of the day that it was necessary for Judas to identify Him to the soldiers who came to arrest Him.

Christ's legal father, Joseph, was a carpenter, and it's logical to assume that Jesus worked with him while a young boy. Since the Bible doesn't mention Joseph after Christ's twelfth year, it's likely that he died when Jesus was still a youth. As the oldest son, Jesus probably managed Joseph's business until beginning His ministry. To do the work of a carpenter, one would generally need to be a strong and rugged individual. The Greek word from which "carpenter" is translated also means a craftsman. So Jesus likely did much more than carpentry work, including woodworking and general contracting.

Images of Roman leaders of Christ's era show them with short hair, cut in a style that would have no hair covering the ears, forehead or back of the neck. Presumably

this was representative of male grooming at the time of Christ and therefore reflects His appearance, as does 1 Corinthians 11:14, "Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him." You might be interested in our booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*.

Q What did God mean when He said, "Let us make man in our image"? (Genesis 1:26).

FAQ

A Scripture uses the word for image in many ways, including denoting a statue, an idol or a copy (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, 1985, "Statue"). Likeness means "the original after which a thing is patterned" (*Vine's*, "Likeness"). "Likeness" is a more general term [than image], indicating resemblance in any quality, external or internal" (*ibid*).

The creation of all living creatures was introduced with the phrase "Let the earth bring forth . . . after its kind" (Genesis 1:21, 24-25). The introduction of man seems to break the pattern, as it does not say, "The earth will bring forth man after mankind." However, the pattern isn't broken at all. Rather, God announced, "Let us make man after Our image, according to Our likeness" – to resemble God in form and shape.

Additionally, He endowed man with the ability to think, to create and to dominate the rest of creation. These are godlike qualities, superior to any other creature.

Matthew Henry's Commentary on Genesis 1:26 says, "Man was not made in the likeness of any creature that went before him, but in the likeness of his Creator." True, there is a great gulf between God making man in His form and shape, with godlike abilities, and His making man in His substance – spirit – with His holy, righteous character. This relates to the marvellous plan God has for mankind, explained in our booklet *Why Were You Born?*

Let the Bible answer...

What does the Bible teach about the Day of the Lord?

This is the time of God's judgement upon the earth: Isaiah 2:12-21; 13:6-16; 34:8; Ezekiel 30:1-4; Zechariah 14:1-4; Malachi 4:4-6; Acts 2:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3; Revelation 1:10; 6:15-17; 16:12-16.

It is not a day to be desired: Amos 5:18-20.



Letters From Our Readers

Valued doctrines

Your teachings are hard nuts to crack but they are true. One cannot rush through them. I am currently on *Why Were You Born?* Thanks for your insightful write-ups.

Reader in Borehamwood

It is so comforting knowing that these much-valued readings are available to us, enlightening us and encouraging us to learn more.

Reader in Carlisle

Thank you for setting out biblical truth so clearly in your magazine and other writings.

Reader in County Down

Many thanks for these inspired booklets. I also give them out to others. Please send me two copies of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* booklet. Truly history written in advance.

Reader in Southsea

I wait for the magazines. They

explain many things to me, I treasure them and keep all copies to look back sometimes.

Reader in Wolverhampton

The booklets are all a great read.

Reader in Arbroath

Grateful for literature

I really love the topics and appreciate the issues.

Reader in London

Thank you so much for your resources and guidance. It really helps me and for that I am very grateful.

Reader on the Wirral

I'm really enjoying the reading and would like to read more.

Reader in Peterborough

Editor's comment: We have sent you the booklets you requested and hope you find them helpful.

Thank you for the blessings that your writings bring our family.

Family in Bargoed, Wales

Thank you for mailing the *Beyond Today* magazine to me regularly. The articles are very uplifting.

Reader in London

I thoroughly enjoy reading *Beyond Today*. Please keep me on your subscription list.

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Online outreach

I find your website to be of great interest. I have downloaded/printed many booklets. I enjoy watching the sermons. Thank you.

Reader in Swansea

Foundational learning

I'm really enjoying this [*Bible Study Course*]- it challenges my thinking and my brain.

Student in Norwich

Our literature can be downloaded from our website at www.ucg.org or requested from the address at the bottom of the front page.

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Jesus Christ instructed His disciples that as they had freely received they were to freely give (Matthew

10:8), so we supply our literature free of charge, making Christ's message available to all. Our gratitude goes to those who assist financially in this aspect of the Church's work.

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