

Christmas Trees?

By Bob Young

During my years in full-time ministry, few Christmas seasons went by without someone raising the question of Christmas trees.

What does the Bible say about Christmas trees? First, the short answer is that the Bible never mentions Christmas trees. The phrase does not appear in any version of the Bible. Second, does the text of Jeremiah 10 set forth a principle that forbids Christians using Christmas trees? The study of any Bible text always begins with establishing the context. What is the context of Jeremiah 10? Jeremiah 10 is a passage about idolatry. The passage focuses on the superiority of God above all gods and shows the inconsistencies of idolatry. Isaiah 44 provides a parallel passage more than a century before Jeremiah wrote. One should read the entire context of Jeremiah 10 — not just vv. 3-4. Jeremiah 10 exists in the context of Jeremiah's Temple Sermon, a sermon that teaches against false sources of hope or confidence.

The context of Jeremiah 10 makes clear that what is being considered is idolatry. To consider possible applications today, one must ask questions such as, "Does one set up a Christmas tree as an idol or as something to be worshiped? What is the purpose of the tree?"

An interesting history of the Christmas tree appears on the website: ["biblicalstudies.com"](http://biblicalstudies.com).

Green trees were often used in ancient Egyptian and Roman religious festivals, but the Christmas tree is a relatively recent tradition. Not until the sixteenth century did the practice become widespread. An old "miracle play" given in preparation for Christmas featured a fir covered with apples in a story concluding with the promise of Christ's return. Martin Luther is credited for the first lighted tree. Tradition has it that he saw bright stars twinkling through the branches of a fir tree one night while he was walking home. He cut a small tree and placed lighted candles on its branches to imitate it. It became a permanent fixture in his Christmas celebrations. Eventually, the practice worked into the celebrations of others, and now, of course, it is solid tradition.

An additional factor to be considered in the study of Jeremiah 10 is that this passage, the one which is most often used to argue against Christmas trees, is an Old Testament (old covenant) passage, valuable for learning and admonition, but not binding under the new covenant. While the Old Testament provides principles and examples, one must be careful about drawing unwarranted parallels. Certainly, idolatry is always wrong. The question ultimately comes down to the meaning and purpose of the Christmas tree and whether one intends to worship the Christmas tree.