

# Culture

## READING

2 Kings 22

Romans 14

1 Corinthians 8

Acts 15

*In the West we celebrate*

*Yeshua's birthday. Why?*

*Why do we have a tree? Why*

*do we give gifts? Why is it in*

*December?*

*Why do we do it at all?*

The TV comedy “3rd Rock from the Sun” tells the story of a group of aliens who come from some far off planet to visit Earth. Each episode is about funny situations they get themselves into because of their misunderstanding of our Western culture.

Until you see an alternative to your culture you rarely question it. You usually just go along with “that’s how we do it”. Watching 3rd Rock gives you an opportunity to think, “Do we really do that?”. And if you’re willing... “Why?” And if you’re really serious about your life... “Should I do that?”

I lived in the USA for a few years. The culture was different there, but it was still very similar to where I grew up. I didn’t have to change much to fit in. I lived in Japan for a few years too. Culture there is totally different. I had to change a lot to fit in. And some of that I kept when I returned to my own country. Their way was better.

Like when they see that you look a bit lost. Instead of ignoring you like most Westerners would, and instead of pointing and telling you how to find it like nice Westerners would, they take you there. Even if it’s a few blocks back the way they came. I like that.

So, let’s look at some of our cultural “issues”.

In the West, (and increasingly in Asia), we celebrate Yeshua’s birthday.

Why?

Why do we have a tree? Why do we give gifts? Why is it in December?

Why do we do it at all?

When it comes to culture, we have to question everything. If we end up deciding it’s a good thing, then OK, but let’s be real about our Christianity and ask the questions.

It certainly wasn’t in December. There definitely was no pine tree there, with or without decorations and candles. If the gifts are based on the gifts the magicians gave Yeshua, then why do we give them to each other and not give gifts to Yeshua every year, especially if it’s **his** birthday? Would you come to my birthday party and bring a gift for yourself and not one for me?

The Bible certainly doesn’t tell us to celebrate it. In fact, if anything in Romans 14 Paulus is saying we shouldn’t have any special days.

There is more information in this article [Traditions](#) about where Christmas came from and why it was a week before the end of the year. But in reality it is a man made tradition which reinforces the stereotype of Yeshua as a baby and fuels consumerism.

If there wasn’t already a Christmas, would you be pushing to start it as a tradition? Why?

And once we question celebrating Yeshua’s birthday, let’s keep asking questions of our culture and ask, “Why do we celebrate your birthday?”

I can completely understand parents celebrating the birth of their child. Once, when they’re born. But why do we keep doing that every year? Where did this come from? Have people always done this?

Turns out they haven’t. Turns out it was mostly something kings and rich people did.

Basically to say, “I’m special.”

So once a year we tell our children that it’s OK to be self centred and to be more special than everyone else. Once a year we spend more and more as consumers, reinforcing our materialistic culture and propping up our retail businesses buying more stuff we don’t need.

There is a whole other side to this argument about how birthdays are used in astrology and the occult. But let’s leave that for another time. Just from a cultural point of view. Why do we want to celebrate our birthday? What are we saying when we do?

And if our culture didn’t have birthday parties, would we be pushing to get everyone doing it as a tradition? Why?

We need to be ruthless with this. We need to question everything.

Why do we do church the way we do? Why do we sing? Why do we have sermons? Why do we pray the way we do? Why do we arrange the seats the way we do? Why do we eat the food we eat at church? Why do we build churches the way we do?

Not all the answers will be bad. Not everything has to change. But like King Josiah in 2 Kings 22 did when they found the book of the Law in the temple which had become filled with things which shouldn’t have been there - we have to go back to the book and ask the questions. And we have to make the changes so we align once again with the book, with the way God said it should be, and ruthlessly throw out our traditions if they are wrong.

Examine **everything**. Be willing to let go of **anything**.  
God, not culture.