

# Should Christians Celebrate Birthdays?

**P**aper plates and party hats lay strewn across the kitchen table. Some plastic forks and a few napkins have ended up there also. A now-empty ice cream carton sits on the sink. On the table, crumbs on a large plate are all that remain of a chocolate cake. Eleven icing-smearred, pastel-colored candles are stacked beside the cake plate.

In the living room, brightly colored wrapping paper lays crumpled on the floor amid several boxes of different sizes and shapes. New clothing is laying across a chair arm. In the chair sits a middle-aged woman wearing an exhausted smile as she watches her son and his friends through the window. Out in the street, the happy, excited cries of a dozen adolescents break the afternoon as they fight over who will have the next turn riding the new bicycle.

A joyous, harmless celebration? After all, it is only a child's birthday party. But would such a scene ever occur in the home of a member of the Church of God?

## The biblical record

Search your Bible! It reveals God's attitude as opposed to your own human reason or some idea you have allowed Satan to pump into your mind. How many birthday celebrations do you find in God's Word? Only two.

At the first, an Egyptian pharaoh marked the day of his birth by hanging his chief baker (Gen. 40:20-22).

At the second, Herod granted the request of Herodias' daughter and had John the Baptist beheaded (Matt. 14:6-11).

The children of Job may have been holding birthday celebrations when they partied together, "And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and

called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them" (Job 1:4).

Notice how perfect, upright Job viewed these "harmless" celebrations and reacted to them: "And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts" (verse 5).

It was at one of these very feasts that, by God's express permission, Satan caused a blast of wind to flatten the house Job's children were in, killing all 10 of them (verses 18-19).

Job himself actually cursed his own birthday; "Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived" (Job 3:3).

Notice the record of the first century historian Josephus:

The Jews in Christ's day knew God's attitude toward birthday celebrations. "Nay, indeed, the law does not permit us to make festivals at the births of our children" (Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, Book II, section 26).

## What about Christ's birthday?

But what about the most important holiday in traditional Christianity — Christmas — the celebration of the supposed "birthday" of Christ? Search your Bible again! You will find no mention of the exact date of Christ's birth anywhere in its pages — and no command from God Almighty to observe any such day. The traditional celebration of Dec. 25 does not come from the Bible, but from paganism, as any knowledgeable person must admit and any encyclopedia will show. (For more

information, write for our free booklet, *The Plain Truth About Christmas*.)

The day of Jesus' birth is unknown. But the day of His death is known (Nisan 14, A.D. 31), and His true followers are commanded to observe that day annually in remembrance of Him.

Christ instructed His disciples to show His death by keeping the yearly Passover and partaking of the symbolic unleavened bread and wine (Luke 22:19-20). Paul shows that, just as the original Passover lamb was slain as a type, "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). Paul went on to explain the proper manner in which to annually observe the day our Savior died as our Passover lamb (verses 7-8).

But most of the world has utterly refused to keep the true Holy Days God ordained. The world has instead followed its own ideas, under Satan's deceptive influence, and produced the mishmash of confusing and conflicting religious beliefs we see around us today. (Write for our free booklet, *Pagan Holidays or God's Holy Days — Which?*)

In response to man's Babylon of religious anarchy, God thunders: "Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear" (Isa. 1:14-15).

That's what God thinks of worldly customs and celebrations!

## The Roman calendar

We live in a world that is geared to the Roman calendar. We remember the dates of our births, pay our taxes and have our tombstones engraved

with the day we die in accord with a pagan system of calculating time.

"But isn't our Roman calendar of Christian origin?" some in the world might ask. "Doesn't it have the approval of almost all the Christian sects?"

History answers: "Our [Roman] calendar is not Christian in origin. It descends directly from the Egyptians, who originated the 12-month year, 365-day system. A pagan Egyptian scientist, Sosigenes, suggested this plan to the pagan emperor Julius Caesar, who directed that it go into effect throughout the Roman Empire in 45 B.C. As adopted it indicated its pagan origin by the names of the months — called Janus, Maia, Juno, etc.

"The days were not named but numbered on a complicated system involving Ides, Nones and Calends. It was not until A.D. 321 that the seven-day-week feature was added when the emperor Constantine adopted [a false version of] Christianity. Oddly enough, for his weekdays he chose pagan names, which are still used" (*Journal of Calendar Reform*, September, 1953, page 128).

Men have even applied pagan names to the seven days of the week: *Sunday, Moonday, Tiwsday, Wodensday, Thursday, Friggasday* and *Saturnsday*. The single designation given in Scripture was the term "Sabbath" to the seventh day of the week; all others were called the first day of the week, the second day of the week, etc.

In this present world, we are obligated to make use of the Roman calendar, but let's recognize it for what it is. The very calendar the world uses to celebrate its "birthdays" is erroneous to begin with!

#### **Birthdays with God-given calendar?**

The calendar given by God to Israel in the time of Moses was not at all adapted to birthday celebrations. Have you pitied (or perhaps envied!) the individual who was born Feb. 29 and, technically, could receive gifts and congratulations only once every four years? This single irregularity of the Roman calendar affects only about one individual in every 1,461. But the irregularities of the calendar God gave would affect the birthday

observances of one person in every eight.

The calendar still in use by the Jews is fundamentally the same one God gave Moses for the children of Israel. But why isn't this calendar suitable for birthday observance?

The Roman calendar has a single month, February, that varies in length according to a simple one-year-in-four pattern. God's sacred calendar, committed to the Jews for preservation to our time, has three months that vary in length from 29 to 30 days after a rather complicated pattern. Three times as many people are affected.

A still greater deterrent to annual

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birthday observance is the insertion of a 13th month in the third, sixth, eighth, 11th, 14th, 17th and 19th years of a 19-year time cycle. Imagine the confusion of attempting to schedule birthday parties!

It is true that some Jewish people, following pagan customs, attempt to use this ancient calendar to observe their birthdays. A rather intricate set of human rules governs whether to move the celebration ahead or back one day, or back one month in the absence of the 13th month. Different regulations are applied and the practice is not uniformly followed by all.

What wisdom prompted God to give mankind such a calendar?

It certainly discouraged the practice of observing birthdays and other anniversaries. The net result was to deprive mankind of the opportunity to set aside birthdays. God's people

certainly knew the date of their births, but they kept track of their ages by calendar years, not birth dates.

However, for those who understood, the whole purpose of life was to prepare and look forward to a new birth — to a resurrection from the dead.

#### **The correct attitude**

To this world, the day of a person's birth is important. But the Bible makes a seemingly cryptic statement that "the day of death [is better] than the day of one's birth" (Eccl. 7:1). How can this be?

Paul gives us the answer. Writing near the time of his death, he said, "I have fought a good fight [in overcoming in this human life], I have finished my course. I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (II Tim. 4:7-8).

The day Paul began this life as a baby could hardly be compared in importance with the day he, at death, made certain his reward by enduring the problems and trials of a Christian life to the end.

Job looked forward to the time of his rebirth: "I know that my redeemer [Christ] liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth [referring to Christ at His Second Coming]: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25-26).

Notice chapter 14, verses 14-15: "If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee [referring to the time when Christ will call, and all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come forth in a resurrection]: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands."

Instead of looking backward to a physical birth into this temporary life where we are composed of dust, Job understood the true values of life and looked forward to a rebirth into life eternal as a spirit being and member of the Family of God in the Kingdom of God.

This is the event you should be looking forward to as well. □