

Should Christians Celebrate BIRTHDAYS?

Why does the Bible omit mention of the birthdates of such men as Abraham, Moses—and even Jesus Christ? Is the day of one's birth of any great importance? Here's the surprising answer!

by Kenneth C. Herrmann

SEARCH your Bible! How many birthday celebrations do you find? A Pharaoh in Egypt celebrates his birthday by hanging his chief baker (Gen. 40).

Herod, on his birthday, grants the request of the daughter of Herodias and orders John the Baptist beheaded (Matt. 14:6-10).

Only two definite birthday celebrations in the entire Bible!

The children of Job may have been celebrating the birthday of the eldest son, when, by God's express permission, Satan caused a great blast of wind to collapse the house upon them, killing all ten (Job 1:4-19).

Job had been concerned about these activities of his children. After their feasting "Job sent and sanctified them . . . and offered burnt offerings . . . for Job said, 'It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.'" Solomon with all his wisdom wrote, "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than . . . the house of feasting" (Ecc. 7:2).

Job actually *cursed* his birthdate saying, "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).

The Jews in Christ's day knew God's law forbids celebrating birthdays. Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century, declares: "Nay, indeed, the law does not permit us to make festivals at the births of our children . . ." (*Against Apion*, book II, §26).

No Date for Jesus' Birth!

It will come as a shock to many. Do you know that no mention of the date of Jesus' birth as a human being is found anywhere in the Bible? The traditional celebration of December 25 does not come from the Bible, but from paganism!

The day of Jesus' birth is unknown. But the day of His *death* (Nisan 14, A.D. 31) Jesus asked His disciples to observe annually—"in remembrance of Me." It is to show His *DEATH*—not His birthday or His resurrection—that Christ commanded His disciples to continue the annual observance of the Passover meal with the symbols of unleavened bread and wine (Luke 22:19, 20).

The original passover lamb was slain as a type of Christ's great sacrifice. The apostle Paul explained, "Christ OUR PASSOVER is sacrificed for us"—and then went on to explain further *the proper manner of our annual observance of the day* the Saviour died as our Passover Lamb (I Cor. 5:7, 8). What a contrast to the modern custom of birthday celebration! Not a single mention is ever made in the Bible of the exact date in terms of the month and day upon which any individual was born! Think of it! Isn't this strange when compared with the modern custom in which each takes pride in the attainment of another birthday?

Attached to This World

We live in a world today that is geared to the Roman calendar. We remember the date of our birth, pay our taxes and have our tombstones engraved with the day we die—*all in accord with a pagan Roman system of calculating time.*

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

The Roman calendar in use today is pagan in origin! It begins with January 1 in honor of the *birth* of the *new sun!* The sun is now dropping lower and lower in the southern portion of the sky. The days are becoming shorter, but on December 21 (according to the present Roman calendar) the southward move-

ment stops and a new year begins. January 1 is in honor of the return of the sun! As our ancestors worshipped the sun, so *our people today drink toasts to this pagan new year and make vows—New Year's Resolutions—in celebration of the return of the sun to its northern course.* Where do you find such a custom sanctioned in the Bible?

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 after Janus, Maia, Juno, etc. The days were not named but numbered on a complicated system involving Ides, Nones, and Calends. It was not until 321 A.D. that the seven-day-week feature was added, when the Emperor Constantine (*supposedly*) adopted Christianity. Oddly enough for his weekdays he chose pagan names which are still used." (From "Journal of Calendar Reform," Sept. 1953, footnote p. 128. Italics ours.)

Further study brings one to the realization that the entire Roman calendar is of pagan origin with the single exception of the seven-day-week feature. Ironically, the "Journal of Calendar Reform" would have men give up this feature also by adopting their World Calendar. This proposed calendar contains one day each year (two in leap years) that is not counted as a day of the week. The seven day cycle of the week which has persisted since creation *would then be broken.* The World Calendar has features which look right to men, but in adopting it the one remaining feature of keeping time God's way—the weekly cycle — would be lost. It

would be a totally heathen calendar.

In following this Roman calendar in our daily lives we make use of the *pagan names* attached to the days of the week and months of the year. *Sunday, Moonday, Tiwday, Wodensday, Thorsday, Friggasday, Saturnsday* are all titles given by the pagans to the seven days of the week. The single designation given in the Scriptures was the term Sabbath to the *seventh* day of the week; all others were termed *first* day of the week, *second* day of the week, etc.

WE ARE OBLIGATED TO MAKE USE OF THIS ROMAN CALENDAR in this present world but LET'S RECOGNIZE IT FOR WHAT IT IS.

Consider the tactics of our arch-enemy, Satan. His work of deceptions pervades every field of endeavor, every practice, every custom, everything we deal with in life. Think back. Doesn't January 1 completely overshadow in our minds the date God ordained for ancient Israel that a new year should begin. Probably only a handful of us took note at sunset on the evening of March 12 this year of 1959 that a new year was beginning. The calendar given by God to Moses has been perpetuated by the Jewish people though they observe the beginning of their civil year six months later in fall rather than follow the command of God to consider this spring date as the beginning of the new year. "This month shall be the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you" (Exodus 12:2).

What Is the Correct Attitude?

What is the correct evaluation of the day upon which we were born? The Bible merely states that "*the day of death . . . is better . . . than the day of one's birth*" (Ecc. 7:1). Yet our birth into this world *seems* to be an important day to us. Yes, the day we first drew a breath of air and began this physical life does have some importance. But we need to understand *why the day of death is BETTER*. How can this be? What wisdom had God given to Solomon to see a principle here that escapes us?

Notice the answer from the apostle Paul. Paul writes, upon nearing death, "I have fought a good fight [in overcoming his human nature in this 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* (the day of Christ's return; the *day of the resurrection of the dead*): and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (II Tim. 4:7, 8).

The day Paul began his carnal 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!*

A New Life Begins Upon Baptism

Consider another aspect in which death is given great importance. "If we have been *planted* (referring to our immersion in water at baptism) together in the *likeness of His* (Christ's) *death*, WE SHALL BE ALSO IN THE LIKENESS OF HIS RESURRECTION . . . *buried with Him by baptism into death . . .* we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:5, 4).

The day of our baptism is a day symbolizing *the death of our carnal self* and the beginning of a *new* life. When one repents, turns to God's true Way, receives God's Spirit and begins a new life—isn't this day more important than the day of his birth as a human baby?

If a man persists through his Christian life to "crucify the self," to put to death the carnal nature he was born with, and to grow with the new nature imparted to him at baptism—isn't *the day of his death, when his time of trial and testing is over*, more important than the day of his baptism, when that newly imparted nature from God was just beginning to grow?

The Christian life is, in a sense, a death of the carnal self at baptism and throughout the remainder of one's life. The Christian life is also a new life, a life that is *begotten* AT BAPTISM to grow for the remainder of our time of trial and testing—a *life that will be born* AT THE RESURRECTION!

Birthday Observance With a 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 the "unfortunate" individual who was

born on February 29 and could receive gifts and congratulations only once every four years? This single irregularity of February 29 in the Roman calendar affects but about *one individual in 1461*. But the irregularities of the calendar God gave *would affect the birthday observance of one person in every eight!*

The calendar *still in use* by the Jewish people today is fundamentally the *same* one God gave to 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 birthday observance is *the insertion of a 13th month* in the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th, and 19th years of a 19-year 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. Differing 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 privilege of setting aside birthdays!

God's people certainly knew the date of their birth, but they kept track of their age by calendar years, not birth dates. But for those who understood, the whole purpose of life was to prepare for and look forward to *a new birth*, to a resurrection from the dead.

Job looked forward to the time of his re-birth; "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 soon to occur]: and though after my
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skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25, 26). A better rendering of the Hebrew would be "yet *apart from this flesh* shall I see God."

Also in chapter 14, verses 14 and 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 that 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, this man understood the true values of life and looked *forward* to a *re-birth into life eternal* as spirit beings and members of the Kingdom of God. The patriarchs are still in their graves looking forward to *the only* birthday that *really* counts.

A New Birth Date

A child's life does not begin with birth. Rather, at birth the flesh is about nine months old and about ready to begin its training in the mastery of emotions, lusts and desires under the guiding hands of the parents.

Japanese count a man's age from the time of conception rather than birth.

A *single* Greek word is translated *both* BORN and BEGOTTEN in our English translations of the Bible according to the context. No distinction is made of the moment of birth. The single word *fathered* could have been used to carry the intended meaning in English. Preserving one's genealogy was important, but the date on which one was born was considered of little account.

Our present mortal existence is but one of dust kept alive by the breath of life, the oxygen we breathe in and which our bloodstream carries to all parts of the body. The moment of conception and of the birth of *this mortal life* are

of little importance *compared* to our *new birth* into God's kingdom.

In sharp contrast to the complete absence of any mortal man's birth date in the Bible, *we do find the command to commemorate the day* which pictures the first "harvest of souls"—the time when *immortal Sons of God will be born!* This day pictures not only our spiritual birthday but the day of conception as well!

We Must Yet Be Born Again!

"Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." "You must be *born* again." For Christians the moment of *conception* of this new life is the time *they receive God's Spirit as a begetting* to eternal Spirit life. Now turn to Acts 2. For many in 31 A.D., the time of spiritual conception was the Day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2.

For some it was then three years *after their repentance and baptism*; for others only months or days. It is not our baptism day then that is to be remembered year by year, but *the Day of Pentecost* which is set aside as *the memorial of conception of all God's children*, the moment of the beginning of their Spiritual life.

But conception only begins our life. *We must yet be born!* Paul writes, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth *until* Christ be formed in you" (Gal. 4:19). We must grow from conception, from the moment God implants His Spirit in us. We must be born immortal. That moment, then, will be the day of our new birth. This is the *day of birth* Satan would like to cover up by emphasis on the day of your birth into this *physical* life.

It is *the Feast of Pentecost*—which pictures the first harvest, the spring harvest—that pictures *the time Christians will be reaped into the Kingdom of God and freed from this mortal earthly body* in which they have been developing and growing to be like God. For those Christians in their graves it will be a moment of awakening. *They will come up out of their graves*, once children of the earth, but now children of God!

This is the birth you should be looking forward to—not looking backward each year to the time of your entry into this existence from the dust!