

Should We Celebrate Birthdays?

As diligent seekers of Yahweh's truth we come upon this question often: "Are birthdays appropriate to celebrate?" The answer can be somewhat different depending on to whom you speak. The Bible seems clear on the subject, so why do some of those who follow Yahweh still participate?

Etymology

There are many words that have similar meanings to the root word "birth" or "birthday." Note the following related words and phrases. Become familiar with them, and see how often they appear in the Bible: birthday 3, birth 14, each on his day 1, beget 201, bare 110, born 79, bring forth 25, bear 23, travail 16, midwife 10, child 8, delivered 5, borne 3, labour 2, brought up 2 (this list depends on which version of the Bible you read).

We will focus on the first two words, birthday, birth, and the phrase from Job 1:4 "each on his day" will also be important. *Strong's Concordance* has at least 3 different entries for the word "birthday" (#'s 3117, 3205 and 1077). #3117 Hebrew *Yowm*: can mean in the daylight hours or from sunset to sunset. #3205 Hebrew *Yalad*: literally means to give birth, to bear, bring forth. #1077 Greek *genesis*: birthday ceremonies, birthday.

From The Beginning

Looking to the first account pertaining to birth in the Scriptures we see in Genesis 3:16 Yahweh Elohim speaking to Eve, *Unto the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."*

We must have a clear idea of the tone set by the Scriptures from the very beginning. In reference to "in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children," it is a vivid illustration of how Yahweh punished Eve and women following her for the sin committed in the Garden. Bear in mind that this study is not meant to place a negative stigma on the blessing of children given to us by our Heavenly Father, as Yahweh tells us in Scripture:

Lo, sons are a heritage from Yahweh, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate, Psalms 127:3-5 RSV.

Pharaoh's Birthday

Further ahead in Genesis 40 we have the account of Joseph and the chief of the butlers and the chief of the bakers. Joseph was given inspiration from Yahweh to interpret their dreams:

They said to him, "We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them." And Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to Elohim? Tell them to me, I pray you." So the chief butler told his dream to Joseph... Genesis 40:8-9 RSV.

Most of us remember how Joseph interpreted (from the dream) the innocence of the cup bearer and the baker's guilt. As we move down to verse 19 of Genesis 40 pay careful attention to the prediction of Joseph for the baker:

...within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you! —and hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat the flesh from you.

The prediction comes to pass, and on a very special day to Pharaoh, we read on in verse 20:

On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants, and lifted up the head of the chief butler and the head of the chief baker among his servants. He restored the chief butler to his butlership, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand; but he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them.

Why is it important to place emphasis on these Scriptures referring to Pharaoh, on his birthday, and the lifting of the heads of the butler and baker? We will see later in this study the correlation between death and celebration of one's self being born.

Pagan Roots

This excerpt was borrowed from an educational resource website (teacherlink.ed) for teachers. The books bulleted at the end of the quotes are part of the bibliography:

“Celebrating birthdays is a very old custom. Ancient people did not know the exact day of their birth, yet measured time by using the moon and the seasons. As humans began to learn more about the earth's natural time gauge, calendars were developed. Calendars made it easy for people to keep track of and celebrate important events each year. Birthdays were some of the special events that people noted on their calendars.

“Many of the symbols that we associate with birthdays had their roots hundreds of years ago. There are a few explanations as to why we have birthday cakes. Some say it is because the Greeks used to take cakes to the temple of the goddess of the moon, Artemis. They took her round cakes to represent the full moon. Another view is that the tradition of the birthday cake started in Germany. A [piece of] bread was made in the shape of the baby [Yahshua's] swaddling clothes. Geburtstagorten is another type of German cake that was said to have been used for birthdays. It was a layered cake that was much sweeter than the bread type cake.

“Another symbol that is closely tied to the birthday cake is the custom of putting candles on the cake. The Greek people who took their cakes to Artemis placed candles on the cake because it made the cake look as if it was glowing like the moon (Gibbons, 1986). The Germans were known as good candle makers and started to make small candles for their cakes. Some people say that the candles were put on for religious reasons. Some Germans place a big candle in the center of the cake to symbolize the ‘light of life’ (Corwin, 1986). Others believed that the smoke from fires would take their wishes up to heaven. Today many people make silent wishes as they blow out their candles. They believe that blowing out all the candles in one breath will bring good luck.

“A gathering or party is usually held so that the birthday person can have their cake and blow out the candles. The very earliest parties were held because people thought that evil spirits would visit them on their birthdays. They stuck close to their friends and family so that the evil spirits would not bother them. Later on, parties were gatherings where friends and family members would give gifts or flowers to the person having the birthday. Today lots of birthday parties are for fun. If people cannot visit someone on their birthday they often send them a birthday card. The tradition of sending birthday cards was started in England about 100 years ago (Motomora, 1989).

“Many birthday traditions deal with luck. A good luck birthstone, good luck flower, and a good luck color have been assigned to each month of the year. Birthday presents dealing with these good luck symbols are often given as gifts. The common birthday symbols have been taken from numerous countries. Yet, each country still has customs and traditions unique to themselves. Some countries have uncommon customs that are very different from the current American view of birthdays. Many birthday celebrations are centered around religious ceremonies or themes. Each country, people, and region have their own set of customs. The following are examples of only a few types of celebrations. Japanese children celebrated their birthdays on January first. An individual would celebrate his birthday on January first if his birthday was February 19th, October 31st, or any other day of the year. Today, most Japanese children celebrate their birthdays on their

true birthdays.

“In Korea one of the most important birthdays is a child’s first birthday. The children are dressed in special clothes and are taken in front of a large gathering of friends and family members. There is a big feast and the guests leave money for the new one-year-old child. The child’s future is told by the items the birthday child picks up.

“Hindu children celebrate their birthdays only until they are 16 years old. Their birthday is very religious. They take flowers to the temple and the child receives a blessing from a priest. The birthday child does not even have to go to school on his birthday.

“Many of the common birthday symbols come from Germany. The children in Germany have birthday cakes, parties, and blow out candles. However, children may celebrate their birthdays differently depending upon which part of Germany they live. The parties in south Germany are usually quiet celebrations where the child is the center of attention for the day. In many countries children are named after saints. In these countries the birthday celebration usually comes on the name day, the feast of the child’s patron saint (Price, 1969). On this special day the focus should first be on the saint and then on the child. Some children get to celebrate on name day and on their own birthday.”

Source information:

- Corwin, J. H. (1986). *Birthday Fun*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Gibbons, G. (1986). *Happy Birthday*. New York: Scholastic.
- Motomora, M. (1989). *Happy Birthday!* Milwaukee, WI: Raintree Publishers.
- Price, C. (1969). *Happy Days*. New York: *United States Committee For UNICEF*.
- (no author) (1989). *Children’s Songbook of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*.
- S.L.C., UT: *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*.

Looking at some of the historical references here, we find it is often stated that children celebrate birthdays for religious reasons. They even say that the origins of the “birthday cake” was modeled after the baby Messiah’s swaddling clothes. This association to the Messiah Yahshua is curious at best. The other “religious” references all point to pagan religions and pagan traditions and can be considered to further prove our point.

While researching the same education resource website, one can find an interesting plan for the teacher. Here is an excerpt from that plan, pay close attention to the last sentence:

“F. Hands-on (Book making). Have students begin to make their own personal birthday books. Title the book, *My Special Birthday*, let the students fill in their name and birth date on the front cover. Have the students write about and draw a picture of their family birthday tradition. The number of pages needed will vary with individual students. Instruct each student to make a page showing their good luck birthstone, good luck flower, and good luck color.”

This is nonsense being taught in some of our nation’s public schools. Brethren, be warned that it is important, if your child attends a school like the one who uses these resource websites, that you must educate him/her on the errors in their teaching curriculums.

Ties To Satanic/Occultic Religions

The Satanic Bible (Anton Szandor LaVey, *(Air) Book of Lucifer – The Enlightenment*, Avon Books, 1969, Ch XI, *Religious Holidays*, p. 96) has the following to say about birthdays:

“The highest of all holidays in the Satanic religion is the date of one’s own birthday. This is in direct contradiction to the holy days of other religions, which deify a particular god who has been created in an anthropomorphic form of their own image, thereby showing that the ego is not really

buried.

“The Satanist feels: ‘Why not really be honest and if you are going to create a god in your image, why not create that god as yourself.’ Every man is a god if he chooses to recognize himself as one. So, the Satanist celebrates his own birthday as the most important holiday of the year. After all, aren’t you happier about the fact that you were born than you are about the birth of someone you have never even met? Or, for that matter, aside from religious holidays, why pay higher tribute to the birthday of a president or to a date in history than we do to the day we were brought into this greatest of all worlds?”

“Despite the fact that some of us may not have been wanted, or at least were not particularly planned, we’re glad, even if no one else is, that we’re here! You should give yourself a pat on the back, buy yourself whatever you want, treat yourself like the king (or god) that you are, and generally celebrate your birthday with as much pomp and ceremony as possible.”

Concerning the Assyro-Babylonian Religion, a portion of a Historical/Biblical article by Wade Cox has this:

“Strange as it may seem, our methods of measuring the hours and the place of man in that time scale comes from the Babylonian sexagesimal unit; i.e. sixty. Thus there were sixty minutes in an hour and sixty seconds in a minute. The Assyro-Babylonians sought to maximise the race by ensuring that births took place at the correct times in the luni-solar cycle. The births were matched to the phases of the moon, so it seems, and the calculations of the phases were placed on tables which we have today (cf. *The Encyc. Of Religion and Ethics (ERE)*, art. Birth (Assyro-Babylonian), Vol. 2, p. 643). These calculations appear to be centered on the worship of the Goddess Ishtar or Easter. The tables show complex mathematical capacities in the calculation of the lunar phases and the solar horoscopes cast from the dates of birth as well as the placement of lunar and solar eclipses (cf. *ibid.*). The moon was important but less important than Ishtar as Venus and she seems to be at once distinct from the consort of Merodach, Zer-panitum, who bore the name Eru’a or conception. In the bilingual account of the Creation she appears as Aruru, meaning the one who formed, with Merodach, the creator of all things, the seed of mankind.

“As Ishtar-Zer-panitum (for Zer banitum), called also Mah or Mami, she was the seed creatress which is often turned into Sar-panitum meaning the Bright one (hence Venus). She was a fertility goddess known by various titles such as the mother who openeth the loins (Amu-du- bat=ummu pitat burki); Nagar-Sagar, the framer of the fetus; Sasuru, the goddess of the fetus, Nintur, the lady of the womb, Nin-zizna=belit binti, the lady of birth; Nin-Dim, the lady of procreation etc. This explains how the same deity can have different names from place to place and yet be regarded as the same deity, such as the reference to Diana of Ephesus in dealing with the temple of the fertility goddess there.

“Merodach himself was also seen as a deity of birth with his spouse perhaps because he was regarded as begetter of the gods. However, the ERE considers that the theory of reflected power may be more correct because Merodach gained this title only after Babylon, of which he was patron, rose to power and the older gods became his manifestations. He is known in this instance as Tutu (rendered mullid ilani, mudil ilani (ERE, *ibid.*)). In connection with birth the Babylonians also practiced fertility drugs and contraception by plants and stones (*ibid.*).

“We know beyond doubt from tablets of later date that the hour of birth was carefully noted and the horoscopes were cast, based on careful notations of celestial observations. From tablet K 1285 we deduce that ceremonies were carried out in the Temple of Ishtar, or Istar (Easter), at least for children of people of note. In this tablet she is addressed as Queen of Nineveh (*ibid.*, p. 644).

“Certain days of the month were auspicious and from the time of the dynasty of Babylon (ca. 2000 BCE) names such as son of the twentieth day (Mar-umi-esra) are found. We know that the 20th of the month was the festival of the sun god Samas or Shamash from which the name Shamus

is derived. This seemed to be related to the Victorious shining of the sun (seemingly particularly after eclipses).” Excerpt from *Birthdays* (No. 287) Christian Churches of God (www.ccg.org).

“Each On His Day”

You will notice the above subject heading has quotation marks around a phrase. The phrase is taken from Job 1:1-5, *There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared Elohim, and turned away from evil. There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she-asses, and very many servants; so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each on his day; and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed Elohim in their hearts. Thus Job did continually.* (RSV)

Many scholars admit that the phrase “each on his day” most likely refer to Job’s sons’ and daughters’ birthdays. It was customary for some to have great parties and revelry, especially in pagan customs, on the day of their birth. Why then were Job’s children participating in such practices? He, being a righteous man, would not join in with the merry-makers. Nowhere in the Scriptures does it say that he participated; on the contrary, he had to sanctify their potential despicable acts with burnt offerings. He justified the offerings by saying “It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed Elohim in their hearts.” We can infer that Job did not have control over these children. It can be inferred in the Scriptures that the sons and daughters did not live with him because it reads in verse 4, “...and they would send and invite...,” then again in verse 5, “Job would send and sanctify.” The meaning here for the word “send” would accurately be implied as “to send for” or “send for.” In other words, someone would go and get the individuals for whatever reason.

Job was a righteous man so his own household would have probably been in order. It is also interesting to note that these children who “could have cursed Elohim” during one of their birthday feasts were the same children Yahweh let Satan kill in following verses:

Now the day came when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house, and a messenger came to Job, saying, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys grazing beside them, and the Sabeans swooped down and carried them all away, and they killed the servants with the sword! And I—only I alone—escaped to tell you!" While this one was still speaking, another messenger arrived and said, "The fire of Elohim has fallen from heaven and has burned up the sheep and the servants—it has consumed them! And I—only I alone— escaped to tell you!" While this one was still speaking another messenger arrived and said, "The Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels and carried them all away, and they killed the servants with the sword! And I—only I alone—escaped to tell you!"

While this one was still speaking another messenger arrived and said, "Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house, and suddenly there came a great wind across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they died! And I—only I alone—escaped to tell you!" Job 1:13-19 **Net Bible**.

Our Day Of Death Better Than Our Day Of Birth

It’s important to learn from the Scriptures that our day of death is more significant than our day of birth. We read of this in Ecclesiastes 7:1:

A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one’s birth, KJV. We read on, It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for

by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity, Ecclesiastes 7:2-6 KJV.

Matthew Henry's Commentary has this to say about verse 1: "That, all things considered, our going out of the world is a greater kindness to us than our coming into the world was: *The day of death* is preferable to the *birth-day*; though, as to others, there was joy *when a child was born into the world*, and where there is death there is lamentation, yet, as to ourselves, if we have lived so as to merit a *good name, the day of our death*, which will put a period to our cares, and toils, and sorrows, and remove us to rest, and joy, and eternal satisfaction, *is better than the day of our birth*, which ushered us into a world of so much sin and trouble, vanity and vexation. We were born to uncertainty, but a good man does not die at uncertainty. *The day of our birth* clogged our souls with the burden of the flesh, but *the day of our death* will set them at liberty from that burden..."

Although Matthew Henry may have been a little confused about our after-death life, along with the concept of the "soul" in other areas of his commentary, he makes a respectable point about the comparisons of death and being born.

A Gift For Herodias And Her Daughter

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Yahshua, and said unto his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him." For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias sake, his brother Philip's wife. For John said unto him, "It is not lawful for thee to have her." And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod. Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, "Give me here John the Baptist's head in a charger." And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her. And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison. And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother. And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Yahshua, Matthew 14:1-12 KJV.

Here is a graphic example of the raucous behavior to be expected at the celebration of one's birth. The Scriptures say that Herod was sorry for his decision but for the sake of keeping an oath, John The Baptist would be beheaded. Notice how calculating Herodias was in telling her daughter to specifically ask for this gift. It must have been well known that the King would do special favors on his birthday, even to kill a human being for entertainment or revenge. Looking back to the Scripture in Genesis containing the account of Joseph, Pharaoh, and the baker, one could ascertain that the custom of killing on one's birthday was common practice for royalty. Mark 6:21 gives us confirmation of the Matthew account and reaffirms that this must have been commonplace on royalty birthdays to kill a human being:

And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee; And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, "Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee." And he sware unto her, "Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom." And she went forth, and said unto her mother, "What shall I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, "I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist," Mark 6:21-25 KJV.

Our Spiritual Death And Life

Our birth can be a joy and a blessing from Yahweh. Were we ever told to, or is it implied, that we should celebrate the day of our birth? Of course not. If we entertain the idea of these traditions being acceptable then we must look deeper into Scripture. Verses that come to mind when speaking of such traditions are as follows:

And He said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites," as it is written, "'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me; in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' You leave the commandment of Yahweh, and hold fast the tradition of men." And He said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of Yahweh, in order to keep your tradition!" Mark 7:6-9 RSV.

Although these verses aren't specifically about birthday celebrations, we definitely see how Yahshua felt about non-Biblical tradition. The Scriptures support the knowledge of our spiritual birth being much more meaningful than our physical birth. Dying to our sinful nature and having the opportunity of life-everlasting through the Messiah and baptism is what's important.

Remembering Yahshua's Death

Although there was a great herald at the time of the Messiah's birth, Yahshua clearly pointed out that His death is to be remembered:

For I have received of Yahweh that which also I delivered unto you, that the Sovereign Yahshua the same night in which He was betrayed took bread: And when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, "Take, eat: this is My body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me." After the same manner also He took the cup, when he had supped, saying, "This cup is the new testament in My blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me," 1 Corinthians 11:23-25 KJV.

If the adversary tempts you to participate in the celebration of one's birth or even in the false celebration of the Messiah's birth (i.e. Christmas), remember 1 Corinthians 11:23-25, that you may walk away from that temptation knowing full well that you are doing Yahweh's will.

Upon Reflection

The Bible is also clear, by example, that our physical age is important. We see the genealogies of key characters and often their ages. We suggest that if you feel compelled to track your age and your children's ages that you keep an ongoing detailed account. You may even want to have your child write down his age on the day of his birthday and have him summarize his religious advancements. This, combined with educating him on why the "world" celebrates birthdays and holidays, should help him towards a closer walk with Yahshua.

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