

BIRTHDAYS

Are They Wrong to Celebrate?



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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from
the *King James Version* or
The Holy Bible in Its Original Order.

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“And he shall be a joy and exultation to you; and many shall rejoice at his birth.”

—Luke 1:14.

PREFACE

Religious topics can sometimes be controversial due to a lack of specificity in the Bible. The truth of God, by necessity, is inspired understanding of the spiritual law as directed by the Holy Spirit in us. By definition, that leaves room for interpretation of subjects that are absent from the Bible. God warned that “if anyone **adds** to these things, God shall add to him the plagues that are written in this book. And if anyone **takes away** from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the book of life...” (Rev. 22:18-19). Whenever a controversial topic arises, the very lack of biblical direction should give us pause before taking a stand. God desires all to learn to make righteous judgments and Jesus upheld this by teaching of the INTENT of the law in addition to the absolutes. Many have also fallen into the trap of adding to biblical law when they presume those things which are absent in God’s word is evidence to the contrary. History has shown us that when a church enacts rules and regulations regarding every aspect of living, the body of Christ becomes spiritually weak. This is usually a result of some who “lord over others”¹ their own interpretations of Scripture. Matters that are not clear in the Bible can be divisive. The Church is better served when they are left to the judgment of each member and topics are discussed in love and peace. In the end, God will judge us all.

¹ Luke 22:24-27; 1 Pet. 5:2-3.

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CHAPTER 1— CONTROVERSIAL BIRTHDAYS

All who consider the topic of birthday celebrations contend with a lack of clear biblical dogma. This is especially frustrating for those who are against celebrating birthdays but it certainly does not prevent some from taking a firm stance and touting scriptures as the basis for their belief. In most instances, the intent of proper hermeneutics is violated by inflicting personal bias on the surrounding context that, in most cases, has little to do with the mention of birthdays. Therefore, it seems appropriate to examine the scriptures and their context used to claim that birthdays are an inappropriate celebration.

Birthday Celebration of Pharaoh

There are three classic birthdays mentioned in the Bible that are the foundation for almost all anti-birthday rhetoric. The first of these was Pharaoh who reigned during the time that Joseph, son of Jacob, was living in Egypt.

GENESIS 40:20 And it came to pass on the third day, **Pharaoh's birthday**, that he made a feast for all his servants.

...

This was not the same Pharaoh who enslaved the ancient Israelites many years later. Three days prior to Pharaoh's birthday, Joseph had interpreted the dreams of the cupbearer and baker who were both imprisoned with Joseph at the time:

GENESIS 40:1-5 Now after these things it came to pass that **the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker had offended their lord, the king of Egypt. 2 And Pharaoh was angry against two of his officials**, against the chief of the cupbearers and against the chief of the bakers. 3 And he put them under guard in the house of the chief of the executioners, into the prison, the place where Joseph was confined. 4 And the chief of the executioners put Joseph in charge of them, and he served them. And they continued for

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days under guard. 5 And **they dreamed a dream, both of them—each man his dream in one night**, each man according to the interpretation of his dream—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who *were* bound in the prison.

Both the cupbearer and baker had committed serious offenses against Pharaoh (Gen. 40:1). As a result, he had them imprisoned while he considered an appropriate judgment for their crimes. During their incarceration, each had a dream that they told to Joseph. His interpretation was that the cupbearer would have his position restored and the baker would be killed by hanging. Whatever the motive, Pharaoh determined their judgment exactly as foretold by Joseph on the same day as his birthday.

GENESIS 40:20-22 ... And he [*Pharaoh*] lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer, and of the chief baker, among his servants. 21 And **he restored the chief cupbearer** back into his cupbearer office again. And he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand. 22 But **he hanged the chief baker, even as Joseph had interpreted to them.**

However, judgment was not the motive for Pharaoh's birthday celebration. Notice why he called for the feast:

GENESIS 40:20 And it came to pass on the third day, Pharaoh's birthday, that **he made a feast for all his servants.** ...

While some may think that Pharaoh's servants were personal laborers such as the cupbearer and baker, in ancient times the Pharaoh was the absolute authority so every person in Egypt was a servant to him. This is the case with Joseph who eventually became second only to Pharaoh (Gen. 41:38-45), a position that could hardly be called that of the role of a servant in modern terms. Likewise, Abraham's servant Eliezer of Damascus "ruled over all that he had" (Gen. 24:2), so he was the highest ranking official. In simple terms, it was a feast dedicated to the men of high position in Egypt and it was a day that Pharaoh recognized their service even if there were also political motives behind it.

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While it was during his birthday feast that Pharaoh pronounced a judgment of good for the cupbearer and death for the baker, there are a number of examples of the death penalty being handed down with no connection to a birthday. Does sentencing someone to death for a proven crime establish that particular day as evil? No! **Rendering a judgment on Pharaoh's birthday does not establish that day as good or evil especially since an offense was unquestionably committed.** Therefore, the events of that day do not assert whether a birthday is good or evil and certainly are not rationale to condemn all birthday celebrations.

Birthday Celebration of Job

The next instance of birthday celebrations involved the sons of Job:

JOB 1:1-2, 4 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was **Job**. And that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and turned aside from evil. 2 And there were born to him seven sons and three daughters. ... 4 And **his sons went and feasted in their houses, each one on his day.** And **they sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them.**

It is likely that the phrase “each one on his day” refers to their birthdays. On each of these days, the sons gathered together “to eat and to drink” with their three sisters! These were obviously family affairs and **not** debaucheries of drunkenness and sexual immorality. Scripture is completely neutral regarding their birthday celebrations; however, what happened next is often used to designate them as evil:

JOB 1:5 And when the days of feasting were concluded, **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 that my sons have sinned** and cursed God in their hearts.” ...

Here we find that Job sent for all of his sons after their feasting was concluded and, when they arrived, he offered burnt offerings

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for them all **in case** (“it may be that”) they committed any sin. They may or may not have committed a sin. Job was being cautious because he cared for them and he wanted his sons to be right with God. In any regard, the feasts were family affairs and neither God nor Job ever condemned them. So, in all this, **there is no evidence that their birthday celebrations were evil.**

Verse 5 that might also indicate the reason why Job did not attend. It says that Job sent for them and *then* rose up in the morning to sacrifice the offerings after they arrived. Whether that was the next day or several more, the wording suggests that the distance between them was somewhat considerable. Finally, notice how often Job sacrificed burnt offerings for his sons:

JOB 1:5 ... Thus Job **continually** did so.

Job sacrificed on their behalf continually. The Hebrew word literally means “day” but has the implication of *every day* or *continually*. Again, **Job sacrificed burnt offerings on behalf of his sons and in their presence solely for the possibility that they might have sinned AND he did it throughout the year,** not just on their birthdays. No one can associate birthdays with evil works or motives from these verses.

Birthday Celebration of Herod

The last birthday used to condemn celebrating them was that of Herod:

MARK 6:21 But an opportune day came when **Herod prepared a banquet on his birthday for his principal men, and for the chief captains and the important men of Galilee.**

Like Pharaoh, Herod held a celebration on his birthday, not for himself, but for his high-ranking officials and the important men of Galilee. What happened during the celebration is the point of contention:

MARK 6:22-25 And **the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced,** and *it* pleased Herod and those sitting with

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him at the banquet, and the king said to the young woman, "Ask me whatever you desire, and I will give it to you." 23 Then he swore to her, "Whatever you ask of me I will give to you, *up to half of my kingdom."* 24 And after going out, **she said to her mother, "What shall I ask?"** And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." 25 Then **she immediately returned to the king with haste and said, "I desire that you give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."**

During the banquet, Herod's daughter danced for him and he was "pleased" with the performance. From the scripture, it is not obvious whether the dancing had sexual overtones or Herod was just awed by his daughter's performance. The latter seems more likely since most fathers would not watch a daughter dance in a provocative manner. Regardless, neither position can be determined from the Greek. The important point, though, is that Herod was **not** pleased with his daughter's *request*:

MARK 6:26-28 Now although the **king was personally very sorrowful, because of the oaths and those who were sitting with him, he would not reject her request.** 27 Then without delay, the king sent a guardsman *and* ordered his head to be brought. 28 And he went *and* beheaded him in the prison, and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the young woman; and the young woman gave it to her mother.

Herod was "very sorrowful," which means intensely sad in the Greek. In fact, verse 26 states that he would have rejected her request if it was not for the oath he had made and the high-ranking officials that were in attendance. Herod obviously was not expecting such a turn of events during his birthday celebration, so birthdays cannot be portrayed as evil celebrations. The evil was perpetrated solely by his wife, Herodias, who held a particular hatred for John the Baptist and took advantage of the situation even though she was not even in attendance.

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The Bible Does Not Condemn Birthdays

God plainly tells us what He hates. For example, the festivals that Jeroboam introduced in the eighth month that substituted for those God commanded in the seventh were obvious offenses to God². As a result, God destroyed Jeroboam's altars³. God also hates the way the people improperly observed His festivals even when they kept them on the correct dates⁴. **The fact that some desecrate the holydays does not make them evil.** When God hates something or it is evil against Him, the Bible is unambiguous about it⁵. He calls such things "abominations" and they are clearly the foundation for several entire biblical books including Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, etc. At a personal level, God said He despises people who:

PROVERBS 6:16-19 **These six things the LORD hates; yea, seven are an abomination unto Him:** 17 A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, 18 A heart that plots wicked imaginations, feet that are swift in running to evil, 19 A false witness *who* speaks lies, and he who sows discord among brethren.

Throughout the entirety of the Bible, God never condemns any birthday celebrations; therefore, no one can claim that the examples of Pharaoh, Job's sons, or Herod are proof that birthday celebrations are evil. The truth is that the Bible never mentions any evil acts that occurred during the birthday celebrations of Pharaoh and Job's sons. Pharaoh rendered an appropriate judgment for a crime committed by the baker and nothing sinful was noted with the birthday celebrations of Job's sons that was unique or worse than their behavior the rest of the year. While Herod's celebration was marred by the death of John the Baptist, it was solely the result of his folly in uttering an oath during a weak (and, perhaps, joyous) moment. The dancing of his daughter is not specifically

² 1 Kings 12:26-33.

³ 1 Kings 13:3-5.

⁴ Isa. 1:14; Amos 5:21; 8:10; Mal. 2:3.

⁵ Also Exo. 20:5; Deut. 12:30-31; 16:22; Psa. 11:5; 45:7; Isa. 61:8; Zech. 8:17.

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condemned either. In the end, it was his wife who used the celebration as an opportunity for evil.

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CHAPTER 2— OTHER BIRTHDAYS

Opponents of birthdays rarely mention the birthdays of other biblical figures. This is quite an oversight for anyone to ignore the most obvious counterarguments and, for any biblical scholar, just a downright unacceptable method of exegesis. Throughout the Bible, the birth of a child was cause for rejoicing. And more than that, such events were cause for GREAT celebration. Several examples of this are appropriate.

Abraham & Sarah Celebrated the Birth of Isaac

The first is the birth of Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah:

GENESIS 21:1-7 And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said. And the LORD did to Sarah as He had spoken, 2 For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. 3 And Abraham called the name of his son that was born to him (whom Sarah bore to him) Isaac. 4 And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac, when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 And Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 And **Sarah said, “God has made me laugh, so that all who hear will laugh with me.”** 7 And she said, “Who could have said to Abraham *that* Sarah would suckle children? **For I have borne a son to him** in his old age.”

When Sarah gave birth, she rejoiced at the sight of her son. Her friends, who knew of her struggle with being barren, were happy for such a wonderful blessing from God (“all who hear will laugh with me”). While Abraham’s reaction was not mentioned, he had longed for a child for many years; so much so that he even reminded God of his childless state:

GENESIS 15:2-3 And Abram said, “Lord GOD, what will You give me since **I go childless**, and the heir of my house *is* this Eliezer of Damascus?” 3 And Abram said, “Behold, **You**

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[God] have given no seed to me; and lo, one born in my house is my heir.”

His desire was finally fulfilled in the birth of Isaac, which was obviously a very memorable day and cause for great celebration. At the very least, the birth of Isaac was such a joy that Abraham even celebrated when the child was weaned⁶:

GENESIS 21:8 And the child grew and was weaned, and **Abraham made a great feast the day that Isaac was weaned.**

The word “feast” literally means a *banquet with drinking*, and it is the same word used for the feasts of Job’s sons. So, the Bible describes the celebration of Abraham the same way as Job’s sons. The day that Isaac was weaned was an unforgettable and festive occasion—it was a “great feast” day. Scriptures do not condemn either the feasts of Job’s sons or Abraham’s feast for his son Isaac.

While this was for the weaning and not the birthday of Isaac, Abraham nonetheless celebrated the event. How could the day of his birth be less of an occasion for celebrating?

Hannah Celebrated the Birth of Samuel

Barrenness was not only a bitter condition, but it was also one of shame. Sarah was not the only woman in the Bible whose womb was closed up by God. Look at the grief it caused Hannah, wife of Elkanah:

1 SAMUEL 1:1-11 And there was a certain man of Ramathaim Zophim from the hills of Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite. 2 And he had two wives, the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the second, Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, but **Hannah had no children.** 3 And this man went up out of his city from

⁶ Scholars are in general agreement that weaning occurs when the child reaches three years old. Also, 2 Chronicles 31:16 and 2 Maccabees 7:27.

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year to year to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, *were* there. 4 And the time came that Elkanah offered, he gave portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and her daughters. 5 But to Hannah he gave one double portion, for he loved Hannah. However, **the LORD had shut up her womb.** 6 And **her foe also provoked her grievously,** in order to frustrate her because the LORD had shut up her womb. 7 And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her. And **she [Hannah] wept and did not eat.** 8 And Elkanah her husband said to her, “Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart grieved? *Am* I not better to you than ten sons?” 9 And Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh and after they had drunk. And Eli the priest sat upon the seat by the side post of the temple of the LORD. 10 And **she [Hannah] was in bitterness of soul,** and prayed to the LORD, **and wept sorely.** 11 And she vowed a vow and said, “O, LORD of hosts, if You will indeed **look upon the affliction** of Your handmaid and remember me, and not forget Your handmaid, but will give to Your handmaid a manchild, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.”

Being in “bitterness of soul” is a most miserable condition. Hannah longed for a son and turned to God for mercy and help in the time of her affliction, persecution, and shame. Her desire was so powerful that she was willing to give him up to temple service if God would only allow her to bear a son. Eventually, God granted her petition:

1 SAMUEL 1:19-20 And they rose up in the morning early, and worshiped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and **the LORD remembered her.** 20 And it came to pass when the time had come, **Hannah conceived and bore a son and called his name Samuel,** *saying*, “Because I have asked him of the LORD.”

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True to her promise and in spite of the fact that she had suffered hard and long for a son, Hannah gave him up to the temple service after he was weaned:

1 SAMUEL 1:24-28 And **when she had weaned him**, she took him up with her, with **three bulls and one ephah of flour, and a skin of wine**, and brought him to the house of the LORD in Shiloh. And the child was young. 25 And they killed a bull, and brought the child to Eli. 26 And she said, "O, my lord, as your soul lives, my lord, I *am* the woman who stood by you here, praying to the LORD; 27 **For this boy I prayed, and the LORD has given me my petition which I asked of Him.** 28 And **I have returned him to the LORD.** As long as he lives, he shall be given to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.

Hannah, Samuel's mother (not his father Elkanah), brought a sacrifice of three bulls, flour, and wine for the occasion, which were for thanksgiving and drink offerings. This was no small offering to celebrate the weaning of her son. She recognized that it was God who answered her heartfelt prayer so she wanted to give thanks before she "returned him [*Samuel*] to the LORD". Samuel was most likely about three years old when he was weaned and entered into the temple service. However, even after giving up her son to the temple service, notice how Hannah rejoiced over God answering her prayer:

1 SAMUEL 2:1-2 And **Hannah prayed and said, "My heart rejoices in the LORD, my horn is exalted in the LORD. My mouth is enlarged over my enemies because I rejoice in Your salvation. 2 There is none holy as the LORD, for there is none beside You. Neither is there any rock like our God.**

Given how she marked the day of Samuel's weaning and entry into temple service, it would not be surprising if she observed his birthday with the same joy and thanksgiving to God. She likely remembered the joy of God's blessing up until she died.

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Many Celebrated the Birth of John the Baptist

Of all men, aside from Jesus Christ, the praises of God could not have been greater than those for John the Baptist:

LUKE 1:15-17 For **he [John the Baptist] shall be great before the Lord.** And he shall never drink wine or strong drink in any form, but he shall be filled with *the* Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb. 16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to *the* Lord their God. 17 And **he shall go before Him [Jesus Christ] in the spirit and power of Elijah,** to turn *the* hearts of the fathers to *the* children, and *the* disobedient to *the* wisdom of *the* righteous, to make ready a people prepared for *the* Lord."

Such exultation is unique among all men. John the Baptist was portrayed as a simple man who wore a garment of camel's hair and lived in the wilderness eating locusts and honey. Yet, in no uncertain terms, Jesus Christ said he was the greatest prophet who ever lived⁷. As one might expect, his birth was a time of great rejoicing:

LUKE 1:13-14 But the angel said to him, "Fear not, Zacharias, because your supplication has been heard; and your wife Elizabeth shall bear a son to you, and you shall call his name John. 14 And **he shall be a joy and exultation to you; and many shall rejoice at his birth.**

The birth of John the Baptist was not only a personally joyous occasion for Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth, but also a fulfilled prophecy known by the Jews who not only looked for his arrival. It was indeed an event wherein "many shall rejoice." After his birth, neighbors and kinfolk and the entire countryside around Judea were caught up in the momentous event:

LUKE 1:57-58, 62-65 Now Elizabeth's time was fulfilled that she should give birth, and she bore a son. 58 And **her neighbors and kinfolk heard that the Lord had magnified His mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her.** ... 62

⁷ Luke 7:28.

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Then they made signs to his father *as to* what he desired him to be named. 63 And after signaling for a writing tablet, he wrote, saying, “John is his name.” And they were all amazed. 64 Then his mouth was immediately opened, and his tongue *was loosed*; and **he spoke, praising God.** 65 And fear **came upon all those who dwelt around them; and in the entire hill country of Judea, all these things were being talked about.**

John the Baptist was born with the mission to prepare the way for the Savior, Jesus Christ. He was to fulfill a specific service to God, similar in many regards to that of Elijah⁸. Even though most did not understand God’s purpose for him, his birth brought excitement to all:

LUKE 1:66 And all who heard *these things* laid *them* up in their hearts, saying, “**What then will this little child be?**” And *the* hand of *the* Lord was with him.

Zacharias was overcome with joy at the birth of his son John and he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to prophesy:

LUKE 1:67 And Zacharias his father was filled with *the* Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying, **68 “Blessed be *the* Lord, the God of Israel, because He has visited and has worked redemption for His people, 69 And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David; 70 Exactly as He spoke by *the* mouth of His holy prophets since the world began; 71 Salvation from our enemies and from *the* hand of all those who hate us; 72 To fulfill *the* promise of mercy made to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, 73 *The* oath that He swore to Abraham our father; to grant us *that*, 74 Being saved from *the* hand of our enemies, we might serve Him without fear, 75 *Walking* in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our lives. 76 And you, little child, shall be called *the* prophet of *the* Highest; for you shall go before *the* face of *the* Lord, to prepare His ways; 77 To give *the* knowledge of salvation to His people by**

⁸ Luke 1:17.

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the remission of their sins, 78 Through the deep inner compassions of our God; in which the dayspring from on high has visited us, 79 To shine upon those who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, to direct our feet into the way of peace.

There can be no condemnation of birthday celebrations here because even God was involved in celebrating the birth of John the Baptist to the extent that He provoked Zacharias to prophecy.

God & Angels Celebrated the Birth of Jesus Christ

No other man or woman ever had such adulations, especially from God, except for Jesus Christ. Of all human births, the most glorified, announced, and celebrated was that of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Most High God:

LUKE 2:4-20 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of *the city of Nazareth*, into Judea, to *the city of David* which is called Bethlehem, because he was from *the house and lineage of David* 5 To register himself along with **Mary, who was betrothed to him as wife, and was great with child.** 6 And it came to pass *that* during the *time* they were there, the days were fulfilled for her to give birth. 7 And **she gave birth to her son**, the firstborn, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. 8 Now *there* were shepherds in the same country, who were dwelling in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night; 9 And suddenly an angel of *the Lord* stood by them, and **the glory of the Lord shined round about them**; and they were seized *with* great fear. 10 But **the angel said** to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, **I am announcing to you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people;** 11 **For today, in the city of David, a Savior was born to you, Who is Christ the Lord.** 12 Now this *is* the sign for you: you shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." 13 And **suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,** 14 **"Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth among men** of goodwill." 15

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And it came to pass, as the angels were departing from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now as far as Bethlehem, and let us see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 And they made haste, *and* came and found both Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger. 17 **Now after seeing Him, they made known everywhere the proclamation that they had been told concerning this little child.** 18 And all those who heard were filled with wonder by the things that were spoken to them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary stored up all these sayings, pondering *them* in her heart. 20 And **the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen,** as it was said to them.

The whole of the heavenly host were involved in announcing the birth of Jesus Christ⁹ and glorifying God with the voices of an angelic choir.

One objection that is raised with the mention of this birthday celebration is that it was the birth of Immanuel ("God with us"), not a common person. Regardless, God the Father, and the heavenly host, rejoiced at the birth of His Son.

FACT: If birthday celebrations were evil, then God the Father certainly would not have announced and celebrated that of His Son!

Children Are a Gift of God

These examples absolutely prove that the birth of a child is cause for one of the greatest joys and celebrations. While these do not necessarily extrapolate to keeping it as an annual event, neither do they reject the idea. **If celebrating an annual birthday is wrong, then we must conclude that celebrating the day a child is born is also inappropriate.** However, that is neither biblical nor in

⁹ Jesus was born during fall festival season, most likely on the Feast of Trumpets.

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keeping with the mind of God. The wisest man who ever lived said:

PSALM 127:3-5 Lo, **children are the inheritance of the LORD; the fruit of the womb is a reward.** 4 As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man, so are the children of one's youth. 5 **Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them;** they shall not be ashamed, when they speak with their enemies in the gate.

Solomon said that children bring blessings and great happiness to parents, regardless of whether it is the initial birth or as the years go by. No parent ever forgets the birth of a child:

ISAIAH 49:15 "**Can a woman forget her suckling child?**" ...

Why would parents refrain from annually celebrating the "inheritance of the Lord" and "the fruit of the womb [that] is a reward"? What rational basis is there for anyone to claim that the joyous celebrations of the birth of children in the Bible is acceptable but annual birthday celebrations are evil? Love for a child does not wane as they grow older. Children and grandchildren are a gift of God:

PROVERBS 17:6 **Children's children are the crown of old men,** and the glory of children *are* their fathers.

Children are result of the strong desire of a husband and wife for a family. If they celebrate a wedding anniversary, why should they withhold from celebrating the birth of their children each year?

Praises of God

Clearly, God loves and desires children. He chose the name "Father" to define His *role* in a FAMILY and describe the **relationship** He desires with His children. God WANTS children. His work and focus is on becoming the Father of many sons and daughters¹⁰.

¹⁰ Heb. 2:10.

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Some might be reluctant to celebrate a child's birthday because they are concerned that it distracts from the worship, praise, honor, and glory due to God. Others could be trying to avoid putting a person above God. God should certainly always be first in our lives, but that does not mean that others cannot be "second":

LUKE 14:26 **If anyone comes to Me and does not /love less/** his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers and sisters, and, in addition, his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

Loving people "less" than God is the requirement but loving less does not mean having no love at all. God never says we cannot honor and praise others. In fact, God will glorify His own children:

ROMANS 8:17 Now if *we are* children, *we are* also heirs—truly, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer together with Him, so that **we may also be glorified** together with Him [*Jesus Christ*].

HEBREWS 2:10 Because it was fitting for Him [*Jesus Christ*], for Whom all things *were created*, and by Whom all things *exist*, in **bringing many sons unto glory**, to make the Author of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Does praising someone mean they are raised above God? No! Is it only God that is allowed to be praised? No! The Bible nowhere forbids giving praise and honor to other people when it is deserved. Even God honors and rewards people for being faithful and righteous. Notice the biblical record of some whom God praised:

- Noah was called "perfect in his generations" (Gen. 6:9).
- Abraham was called righteous (Gal. 3:6) and faithful (Rom. 4:16).
- Lot was called righteous (2 Pet. 2:7).
- Job was called "blameless and upright" above all people on the earth (Job 1:8).

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- God said David “kept My commandments,” “followed Me with all his heart,” and did “only what was right in My eyes” (1 Kings 14:8).

The list could go on. God praised Abel, Enoch, Asa, Hezekiah, Josiah, Zechariah, Joseph, Paul, and many more including women such as Sarah, the several Mary’s, and numerous others. In the end, many will hear perhaps the greatest praise of all, “Well *done*, good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21). No good father, especially God, withholds good things from children:

MATTHEW 7:11 Therefore, if you, being evil, know *how* to give good gifts to your children, **how much more shall your Father** Who *is* in heaven **give good things** to those who ask Him?

Our Father in heaven will give good things to his spiritual children whether it is praise or gifts or rewards. We are to love Him above all but it is obvious that God praises people for doing good and obeying Him because He loves us. Therefore, it is not wrong to encourage and show love toward children throughout their lives. No one should avoid annual birthday celebrations for others because of a reluctance to show love to someone who is a special part of our lives. As long as God is first, the rest is just letting the light of His love shine through us into a dark world.

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CHAPTER 3— BIRTHDAY PERSPECTIVES

Celebrate is defined as:

- To observe (a day or event) with ceremonies of respect, festivity, or rejoicing.
- To observe an occasion with appropriate ceremony or festivity.
- To perform a religious ceremony.
- To engage in festivities.

A celebration is an occasion for REJOICING. People rejoiced at the birth of Isaac, Samuel, John the Baptist, and, especially, Jesus who was glorified by the entire heavenly host. Just as the angels shouted for joy at the creation of the universe, their response to the birth of the Christ was not restrained. Celebrations for those we know and love are no different than celebrating God's feasts. He is creating eternal children so celebrations of life, including birthdays, are not evil. God intends for celebrations to be joyous times:

EZRA 6:22 And **they kept the Feast** of Unleavened Bread seven days **with joy, for the LORD had made them joyful.**

Notice that **it is God who gives us joy.** He is the one who motivates us. Children are an inheritance of God and He wants parents to rejoice, not just at the birth, but throughout the lives of their children. Jesus Christ reminded us of that as well:

JOHN 16:21 A woman when she is giving birth has grief because her time *of travail* has come; but after she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of **the joy that a child has been born** into the world.

Among Christians today, commonly celebrated life events include wedding anniversaries, baptisms, the number of Feast of Tabernacles kept, etc. Businesses have celebrations to recognize

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significant years of service for employees. The common theme to all these is bringing people together so they can show love, respect, and honor for someone while giving thanks to God. He is creating a family. Even the angels rejoice when one sinner repents¹¹ and is begotten by God. How much more will they (and we) celebrate when we become spirit beings? How can anyone claim that Scripture condemns birthday celebrations but not other important annual milestones such as wedding anniversaries, baptisms, etc? Notice what some of the apostles said about celebrations in their time:

1 THESSALONIANS 2:19 For **what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing?** *Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?*

1 PETER 1:3-6 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who, according to His abundant mercy, has begotten us again unto a living hope through *the* resurrection of Jesus Christ from *the* dead; 4 Unto an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and unfading, reserved in heaven for us, 5 Who *are* being safeguarded by *the* power of God through faith, for salvation *that is* ready to be revealed in *the* last time. 6 **In this you yourselves greatly rejoice;** though for the present, if it is necessary, you are in distress for a little while by various trials;

1 PETER 4:13 But to the degree that you have a share in the sufferings of Christ, **rejoice; so that, at the revelation of His glory, you also may rejoice exceedingly.**

The rejoicing in the day of our spiritual birth will be unrivaled. Just as many celebrated the birth of John the Baptist, Christians rejoice with one another because we are the begotten children of God and we will help lead many to Jesus Christ during His millennial rule.

There will always be some who will use birthday celebrations, or any other occasion, as an excuse for excessive revelry or personal gain. **Inappropriate behavior does not make all birthdays evil.**

¹¹ Luke 15:10.

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Those who act unseemly will do so regardless of whether it is a birthday or a holyday.

PRINCIPLE: Birthday celebrations that center on rejoicing with each other, praising God, and giving thanks to Him are righteous and good.

Love Feasts

Outside of birthdays and holydays, the Bible also talks of other celebrations. Jude mentions:

JUDE 1:12 These are subversive stains in **your love feasts**, feasting in person together *with you*; fearlessly they are feeding themselves. *They are* clouds without water, being driven by the winds; trees of late autumn, without *any* fruit, uprooted, twice dead;

Jude does not criticize the love feasts themselves but instead warns the believers against the ungodly who attend with them. This is a warning for any celebration whether it is a birthday or holyday. The purpose of these feasts was to show love toward one another. While the Bible does not link them to a specific day or event, they were nonetheless motivated by the desires of the believers to show love toward one another, rejoice, and give thanks to God. This is a natural result of God's Holy Spirit, one that should **not** be denied or stifled.

Other celebrations mentioned in the Bible are that of Joseph when he was reunited with his family¹², the Israelites when they finished the Temple¹³, and Boaz at the end of his harvest¹⁴. The latter was similar to Thanksgiving Day in the US and Canada. Solomon said celebrations were for the living:

ECCLESIASTES 9:5-9 For the living know that they shall die; but the dead do not know anything, nor do they have any

¹² Genesis 45-46.

¹³ Ezra 6.

¹⁴ Ruth 2:21; 3:7.

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more a reward; for **their memory is forgotten**. 6 Also **their love**, and their hatred, and their envy, **is long ago perished**; nor do they any longer have a portion forever in all that is done under the sun. 7 **Go your way, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart**; for God now accepts your works. 8 **Let your garments be always white; and let your head lack no ointment**. 9 **Live joyfully with the wife whom you love** all the days of the life of your vanity, **which He has given you** under the sun, all the days of your vanity. **For that is your portion in this life, and in your labor which you labor under the sun**.

He also said, “A merry heart does good like a medicine. ...” (Prov.17:22). The Bible never mentions that secular celebrations are wrong, whether they are birthdays or anniversaries. Christians in the Bible found reasons to celebrate with one another as do Christians today.

PRINCIPLE: Inappropriate behavior is wrong whether it happens at a birthday celebration or on a holyday. Bad conduct does not render a birthday celebration as evil anymore than it would if it were a holyday.

Birthdays are unique to each of us. Celebrations motivated by love and thanksgiving to God have the most significance when they are connected with a date that is distinct or special to that person. Celebrating a relationship loses much of the special quality of the occasion if it is *not* related to a day that is meaningful to the person. Celebrating an anniversary on any other day except when it actually occurred diminishes much of the meaning of it.

Believers count the number of years from the day of their baptism because their relationship with God is important to them. God not only rejoices when we are begotten but will rejoice when we are born into His kingdom. He has planned a great celebration for us and we can anticipate that day with excitement. Likewise, parents rejoice in the blessing of children. It is the parents who plan and arrange birthday celebrations for their children, not the other way around. They do it out of love for their child. This is no different

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with God—He has planned the greatest birthday celebration in history when His children are born into that spiritual kingdom¹⁵.

As a child grows, especially when they are young, each year produces tremendous changes. Children are always excited to reach another year of age because they are impatient to reach the next stage in their growth and maturity. They naturally want to be like their parents and are excited to reach the age of adulthood. In their eagerness, young children will many times tell their age in years AND months. Birthday celebrations, done appropriately, are a way for parents to show love and encouragement toward children, give thanks to God for them, and also teach their children to give thanks to God. Recognizing a child's growth and maturity over the last year is encouraging to them because they will have new opportunities and attain new levels of personal responsibility.

Birthday celebrations for a husband or wife are arranged by the spouse, whose motive is love. The spouse wants to demonstrate his or her love and is thankful to God for having someone special with whom they can share life and the blessings of God.

Celebrating the birthdays of the parents of adult children is especially meaningful as parents become more elderly. As people reach 70 and above, the stark reality is that the day of their death grows nearer so it is important for the family to make the most of their time together. For those who attain 80, 85, 90, and older, the likelihood that there will be another opportunity diminishes quickly. Reaching those ages is truly a blessing from God because they continue to be a part of the family. In many cases, the immediate family is dispersed around the country and birthdays are one of the few times everyone gathers together. Celebrating these milestones is important for the entire family.

Birthday celebrations are arranged **by others** for someone they love. For that matter, there is no difference in purpose, desire, or need between celebrating a wedding anniversary and a birthday.

¹⁵ Rev. 21-22.

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Properly done, birthday celebrations are NOT about glorifying a person or setting someone on a pedestal but about showing love toward them and praising God for giving us the time together.

Avoid Idolatry

Paul commands us to “do all things to the **glory of God**” (1 Cor. 10:31). However, the verses preceding set the context. In verse 14 we see that the topic is idolatry—whether or not it is a sin to eat meat sacrificed to idols. Idolatry is one of the primary arguments against birthday celebrations:

1 CORINTHIANS 10:27, 31-33 Now **if an unbelieving person invites you for a meal, and you desire to go**, eat all *lawful things* that are set before you, without asking questions for the sake of conscience. ... 31 Therefore, whether you eat, or you drink, or you do anything, **do all things to the glory of God**. 32 Be without offense to both Jews and Greeks, and to the church of God; 33 According as I also *seek to please everyone in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, in order that they may be saved.*

The all-important verse is 27. Believers were invited to a feast by *unconverted* people. The celebration could have been a wedding anniversary, a birthday, or a day like Thanksgiving Day. Even though scripture does not say, it is undeniable that Paul was talking about celebrations that did **not** pertain to the Sabbath or holydays but involved unbelievers. The fact remains that nowhere does the Bible condemn birthday celebrations. **God condemns idolatry.** But, then, that applies all things—holydays, Sabbaths, ballgames, dances, fun-shows, cars, houses, money, etc. If we “do **all** things to the glory of **God**”, how then can birthday celebrations be wrong? **Paul obviously did not condemn attending a celebration with unconverted people, so why would anyone condemn birthday celebrations among believers?** What are we commanded? To love one another as God loves us.¹⁶

¹⁶ John 15:12.

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The real issue is keeping idolatry out of birthday celebrations (and everything else). Giving cards and gifts are a way of expressing love. There are many examples of giving gifts in the Bible, including at the birth of Jesus Christ¹⁷ so gifts are not wrong in and of themselves. People give gifts during the Feast of Tabernacles to show someone they value and love them. Cakes also are not evil by themselves even though they were used in the worship of Ashtaroth, the queen of heaven¹⁸. This was Paul's point about meat sacrificed to idols—**inappropriate behavior does not make the THING or EVENT evil**. Evil is in the hearts of men. The key to all such things is to steer clear of idolatry. If something is idolatrous or a pagan practice, it is sin and must be avoided.

There are a few pagan customs that have infiltrated birthdays (and other celebrations). Making wishes after blowing out candles is one of them. The Greeks were said to make their round cakes in the shape of the moon, representing the goddess Artemis. Adding the candles caused it to shine like a full moon. The Germans later added the tradition of blowing out the candles and making wishes¹⁹. Obviously, the meaning behind the candles is very pagan and should be avoided along with any other idolatrous practices.

However, as we have opportunities to uplift and show love and honor toward someone, we glorify God because it is His love working in us. Special occasions provide *opportunities* to do these things. Birthdays are unique to each person. Birthday celebrations (minus any idolatrous practices) are occasions to spend time together in love for one another while at the same time letting God's light shine through us so that others might see the hope that lies within, especially to unbelievers.

On the other hand, we recognize Jesus Christ's death because it paid the price for our sins but it was His resurrection by which we

¹⁷ Matt. 2:11.

¹⁸ Jer. 7:18; 44:19.

¹⁹ <https://www.1800flowers.com>.

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have life! The Bible nowhere says to celebrate death, even that of Jesus Christ (Passover is a *proclamation* of His death—1 Cor. 11:26). Celebrating death is evil and is the basis for such paganism as Halloween. Death is the enemy of mankind. Birthdays are a way to celebrate *life*—living children, spouses, parents, and friends. After they are dead, there only remains the memory of them.

Summary

The birth and weaning of a child are obviously times of great celebration in the Bible. Moreover, Scripture is **not** biased against the annual birthday celebrations of Pharaoh, Herod, or Job's sons. Pharaoh held a banquet for the high-ranking men that served him. Even though the baker was executed on that day, he had committed a crime that led to his judgment. The birthday celebrations of Job's sons were never the reason for Job's offerings on their behalf. He was worried they may have cursed God or sinned in their daily lives so he performed sacrifices for them most days, not just on their birthdays. Finally, Herod's birthday celebration, as was the case with Pharaoh, was to honor his chief officials. Scripture is not specific about the dance routine performed by his daughter so whether or not it was a sensual one cannot be proven. (It seems unlikely that even Herod would have approved of such an act by his own *daughter*.) The subsequent murder of John the Baptist was the result of hatred in the heart of Herodias and Herod regretted having to do it.

If we view birthdays in light of how they are kept by this wicked world, then we are applying their evil to that which God says should be a time of *joy*. This world tries to make everything evil and, if given the opportunity, would corrupt even God's holydays just a Jeroboam did. However, believers are a product of God's work of agape love in us and that should be our motive for all we do. Celebrations for people we love are times to give thanks to God because they are a part of our lives. This applies to birthdays, wedding anniversaries, baptisms, etc., as well as the weekly Sabbath and holydays. If we sow evil and discord in them, then

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that is what we will reap. If we sow love and thanksgiving to God, then they are times to be embraced:

GALATIANS 6:8-10 For the one who sows to his own flesh shall reap corruption from the flesh. But the one who sows to the Spirit shall reap eternal life from the Spirit. 9 Now we should not lose heart *in* doing well because we who do not faint will reap in due time. 10 So then, **as we have opportunity, we should do good to all, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.**

Celebrations are opportunities to express love toward others and thank God for His blessings. Those who would condemn such things, lead miserable lives because they are avoiding opportunities to “do **good** to all”.

Birthdays are not the product of a wicked world— it was God who created birthdays when He made mankind. God said, children are an “inheritance of the Lord” and “the fruit of the womb is a reward.”²⁰ In other words, children are a gift of God. Beyond physical birthdays, there are spiritual ones as well. Is it unreasonable to think that the angels remember the day they were created? If birthdays are so abhorrent, then why did the angelic host of heaven celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the firstborn of the virgin Mary?

HEBREWS 1:6 And again, when He [*God the Father*] brought the **Firstborn** into the world, He said, “**Let all the angels of God worship Him.**”

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared before God the Father in heaven as Firstborn from among the dead²¹. He entered through the gates onto the sea of glass before God’s throne:

PSALMS 24:7-10 Lift up your heads, O you gates; and be lifted up, O you everlasting doors; that the King of glory may come in. 8 Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. 9 Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you everlasting doors; that the King of

²⁰ Psa. 127:3, 5.

²¹ Rev. 1:5.

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glory may come in. 10 Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah.

When He came before God's throne, His Father gave Him a name above all other names²² and the entire angelic host worshipped Him:

PHILIPPIANS 2:9-11 Therefore, **God has also highly exalted Him [Jesus Christ] and bestowed upon Him a name which is above every name;** 10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *beings* in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 And **every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.**

PSALM 148:2, 13 Praise Him [Jesus Christ], all His angels; praise Him, all His hosts. ... 13 Let them praise the name of the LORD, for **His [Jesus Christ] name alone is exalted; His glory is above the earth and the heavens.**

God certainly celebrated the resurrection BIRTHDAY of the Firstborn Son of the Most High—Jesus Christ!

Moreover, are not physical birthdays a shadow of the great spiritual birthday to come?

HEBREWS 12:23 [We are coming to] **the joyous [birthday] festival gathering;** and to **the church of the firstborn, registered in the book of life in heaven;** and to God, *the* Judge of all; and to *the* spirits of the just who have been perfected;

Just as physical children are our inheritance in this life, we are God's "inheritance"—children of His kingdom—on the day of our spiritual birth. **God's Book of Life in heaven is the registry of our birthday into His family and kingdom!** All who are written in it will hear Jesus Christ proclaim, "Enter into the joy of your lord!"²³

²² Phil. 2:9-11.

²³ Matt. 25:21, 23.