

# BIRTHDAYS

Are They Wrong to Celebrate?



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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from  
the *King James Version*.

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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 will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; 19 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”<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 Now it came to pass on the third day, *which* was **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 It came to pass after these things *that* **the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt. 2 And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers**, the chief butler and the chief baker. 3 So he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison, the place where Joseph was confined. 4 And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them; so they were in custody for a while. 5 Then **the butler and the baker of the king** of Egypt, who *were*

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confined in the prison, **had a dream, both of them, each man's dream in one night** and each man's dream with its *own* interpretation.

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 butler and of the chief baker among his servants. 21 Then **he restored the chief butler** to his butlership again, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. 22 But **he hanged the chief baker, 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 Now it came to pass on the third day, *which* was 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.

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

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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 1:1-4 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 shunned evil. 2 And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. ... 4 And **his sons would go and feast in their houses, each on his appointed day, and would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them.**

It is likely that the phrase “each on his *appointed day*” refers to their birthdays. On each of these days, the sons gathered together “to eat and 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 So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that **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 God in their hearts.” Thus Job did regularly.

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



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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 did **regularly [continually].**

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 Then an opportune day came when **Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief 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 when **Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced,** and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, “Ask me whatever you want, and I will give *it* to you.” 23 He also swore to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom.” 24 So **she**

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**went out and said to her mother, “What shall I ask?”** And she said, “The head of John the Baptist!” 25 **Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, “I want you to 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 And **the king was exceedingly sorry; yet, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her.** 27 Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison, 28 brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother.

Herod was “exceedingly sorru,” 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.

### ***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

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God commanded in the seventh were obvious offenses to God<sup>2</sup>. As a result, God destroyed Jeroboam's altars<sup>3</sup>. God also hates the way the people improperly observed His festivals even when they kept them on the correct dates<sup>4</sup>. **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 it<sup>5</sup>. 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, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:** 17 A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, 18 A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, 19 A false witness *who* speaks lies, And one 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 condemned either. In the end, it was his wife who used the celebration as an opportunity for evil.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Kings 12:26-33.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Kings 13:3-5.

<sup>4</sup> Isa. 1:14; Amos 5:21; 8:10; Mal. 2:3.

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

## 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 for 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 who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac. 4 Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 And Sarah said, “**God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me.**” 7 She also said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For **I have borne him a son** 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 But Abram said, “Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing **I go childless**, and the heir of my house *is* Eliezer of Damascus?” 3 Then Abram said, “Look, **You [God]**

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**have given me no offspring**; indeed 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 weaned<sup>6</sup>:

GENESIS 21:8 So the child grew and was weaned. And **Abraham made a great feast on the same 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 Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim Zophim, of the mountains of Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. 2 And he had two wives: the name of one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but **Hannah had no children.** 3 This man went up from his city yearly to worship

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<sup>6</sup> 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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and sacrifice to the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. Also the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, were there. 4 And whenever the time came for Elkanah to make an offering, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. 5 But to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, although **the LORD had closed her womb.** 6 And **her rival also provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the LORD had closed her womb.** 7 So it was, year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, that she provoked her; therefore **she [Hannah] wept and did not eat.** 8 Then Elkanah her husband said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? And why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?" 9 So Hannah arose after they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the tabernacle of the LORD. 10 And **she [Hannah] was in bitterness of soul,** and prayed to the LORD and **wept in anguish.** 11 Then she made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed **look on the affliction of Your maidservant** and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall 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 Then they rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD, and returned and came to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and **the LORD remembered her.** 20 So it came to pass in the process of time that **Hannah conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel,** saying, "Because I have asked for him from 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 Now **when she had weaned him**, she took him up with her, with **three bulls, 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 Then they slaughtered 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 child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. 28 “Therefore I also have lent him to the LORD;** as long as he lives he shall be lent to the LORD.” So they 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 “lent 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. I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation. 2 “No one is holy like the LORD, for *there is none besides You, nor 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] will be great in the sight of the Lord**, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. 16 “And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 “**He will also 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 just, 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 lived<sup>7</sup>. As one might expect, his birth was a time of great rejoicing:

LUKE 1:13-14 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. 14 “And **you will have joy and gladness, and many will 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 will 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 full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. 58 When **her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her.** ... 62 So they

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<sup>7</sup> Luke 7:28.



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made signs to his father—what he would have him called. 63 And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, “His name is John.” So they all marveled. 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue *loosed*, and **he spoke, praising God.** 65 Then fear came on **all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea.**

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 Elijah<sup>8</sup>. Even though most did not understand God’s purpose for him, his birth brought excitement to all:

LUKE 1:66 And all those who heard *them* kept *them* in their hearts, saying, “**What kind of child will this 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 1:67-79 Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: **68 “Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people, 69 And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David, 70 As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who have been since the world began, 71 That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us, 72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant, 73 The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: 74 To grant us that we, Being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, 75 In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. 76 “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, 77 To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins, 78 Through the tender mercy of**

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<sup>8</sup> Luke 1:17.

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**our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; 79 To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide 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 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 of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with **Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.** 6 So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. 7 And **she brought forth her firstborn Son,** and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. 8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and **the glory of the Lord shone around them,** and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then **the angel said** to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, **I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.** 11 **“For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.** 12 “And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, 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 on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”** 15 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem

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and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. 17 **Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child.** 18 And all those who heard *it* marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered *them* in her heart. 20 Then **the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen,** as it was told them.

The whole of the heavenly host were involved in announcing the birth of Jesus Christ<sup>9</sup> 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 keeping with the mind of God. The wisest man who ever lived said:

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

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PSALMS 127:3-5 Behold, **children are a heritage [inheritance] from the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward.** 4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, 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, But shall 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 nursing child?"** ...

Why would parents refrain from annually celebrating the "heritage 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 *is* their father.

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 daughters<sup>10</sup>.

Some might be reluctant to celebrate a child's birthday because they are concerned that it distracts from the worship, praise, honor,

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<sup>10</sup> Heb. 2:10.

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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 [Jesus Christ] and does not hate [love less] his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and 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 and if **children**, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that **we may also be glorified** together.

HEBREWS 2:10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in **bringing many sons to glory**, to make the Captain 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).
- 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).

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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 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, **how much more will 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 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 in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, **for joy that a human being 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 repents<sup>11</sup> 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 to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 **In this you greatly rejoice,** though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,

1 PETER 4:13 but **rejoice** to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, **you may also be glad with exceeding joy.**

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.**

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<sup>11</sup> 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 spots in **your love feasts**, while they feast with you without fear, serving *only* themselves. *They are* clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots;

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 family<sup>12</sup>, the Israelites when they finished the Temple<sup>13</sup>, and Boaz at the end of his harvest<sup>14</sup>. 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 will die; But the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for **the memory of them is forgotten**. 6 Also **their love**, their

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<sup>12</sup> Genesis 45-46.

<sup>13</sup> Ezra 6.

<sup>14</sup> Ruth 2:21; 3:7.

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hatred, and their envy **have now perished**; nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun. 7 **Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart**; for God has already accepted your works. 8 **Let your garments always be white, and let your head lack no oil.** 9 **Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you** under the sun, all your days of vanity; for **that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun.**

He also said, “A merry heart does good *like* 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 kingdom<sup>15</sup>.

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.

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<sup>15</sup> 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 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 If **any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go**, eat whatever [*lawful thing*] is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. ... 31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, **do all to the glory of God**. 32 Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, 33 just as I also please all *men* in all *things*, not seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of many, 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** 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.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> 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 Christ<sup>17</sup> 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 heaven<sup>18</sup>. 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 wishes<sup>19</sup>. 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

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<sup>17</sup> Matt. 2:11.

<sup>18</sup> Jer. 7:18; 44:19.

<sup>19</sup> <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 he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. 10 Therefore, **as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, 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 “heritage of the Lord” and “the fruit of the womb [that] is a reward.”<sup>20</sup> 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 But when He [*God the Father*] again brings the **Firstborn** into the world, He says: “**Let all the angels of God worship Him.**”

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared before God the Father in heaven as Firstborn from among the dead<sup>21</sup>. 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, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall 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

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<sup>20</sup> Psa. 127:3, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Rev. 1:5.

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you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall 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 names<sup>22</sup> and the entire angelic host worshipped Him:

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

PSALMS 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's] name alone is exalted; His glory is above the earth and heaven.**

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 general assembly and [ekklesia] of the firstborn [spiritual birthday] who are registered in heaven,** to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,

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!"<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Phil. 2:9-11.

<sup>23</sup> Matt. 25:21, 23.