



Church of God Ministries

Spanish Fort, Alabama

Should a Christian Celebrate Birthdays?

Do the Scriptures actually prohibit the observance and remembering the anniversary of one's birth?

When we look into the Living Word of God, the Holy Bible, (which is where we should always turn first when seeking truth) what do we find regarding such?

The Bible reveals that celebrating our physical birth is not an issue of primary importance to God. He is far more concerned with the development of spiritual character within us and our being born into His Kingdom (Ecclesiastes 7:1; Revelation 21:7; Romans 2:7; John 12:24-25).

It is evident that God does not want His people to mimic the world in a self-serving and "it's all about me" approach. This certainly includes what one thinks about and how one treats the anniversary of one's birth.

It is good to consider, however, that there is a difference between a simple acknowledgment that someone is a year older and observing the fact with a huge celebration. The date of one's birth is not "pagan". The fact that someone is a year older is not pagan. The giving of gifts or a celebration is not of pagan origin.

Birthday celebrations are only mentioned a couple or three times in Scripture. There is an unclear allusion to possible birthday celebrations in the book of Job. "*His [Job's] sons regularly went to one another's houses, and every one on his day gave a feast: and at these times they sent for their three sisters to take part in their feasts with them.*" (**Job 1:4**) after the days of feasting were over, Job summoned his children and offered burnt offerings with the comment, "*It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.*" (V.5) It does not say that anything wrong or sinful was actually done.

In **Genesis 40:20** we find that on his birthday Pharaoh held a feast to which he invited his servants. He made note of or brought attention to both "*the chief butler and of the chief baker.*" We are told that Pharaoh "*restored the chief butler to his butlership again, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. But he hanged the chief baker. . .*" (Vv. 21-22) We are not told *when* these events took place. The baker may have been hanged sometime after the actual birthday celebration.

Another birthday celebration mentioned in Scripture is that of Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. **Mark 6:21** records that "*Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief men of Galilee.*" His wife Herodias obviously was smarting from the rebuke of John the Baptist who "*had said to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your*

brother's wife." (Mark 6:18) Then we are told, "*Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not*" (Mark 6:19). It seems likely that it was Herodias who sent her daughter in to dance before Herod and the others on his birthday. After Herod made an offer to give her basically anything she asked, she conferred with her mother. Her mother asked for the head of John the Baptist to be brought in on a platter. Herod had John beheaded in prison and the head was brought to Herod and Herodias and her daughter (Mark 6:22-29). Herod did not initiate the gruesome events on his birthday. His illegal wife Herodias did.

Some develop from these examples "a doctrine" that birthdays are unbiblical. But, there were other factors on these occasions, too. So, it's inappropriate to use these texts to "prove" that one shouldn't celebrate birthdays. We should be very careful to not proof text, or misalign scripture with any teaching.

The Scriptures record the age of many individuals at the time of the birth of a child and also at the time of death. They must have kept track of the anniversary of their birth. The full-time service of the Levites, appointed to serve God in various ceremonies, was specified to begin at age thirty (**Numbers 4:35-47**). They would have needed to take note of the birthdays or birth anniversaries right?

There are a number of milestones in life which are significant. A person's reaching teenage or becoming old enough to drive. Arriving at a significant age whether it be twenty-one, fifty, or eighty or more are all events which are perfectly proper for family members and friends to acknowledge. Honoring one's age can have significant respectful and joyous outcome.

While the celebration of a birthday is not a matter of sin or righteousness, the *manner in which it is celebrated* can be. So, each individual must evaluate the circumstances and determine whether or not to celebrate a birthday or participate in a birthday celebration.

On the other hand, a celebration that expresses God's standards and is wholesome is not denounced by the Bible. A birthday celebration that would encourage or produce family closeness, and show appreciation and love for the individual, could be such a celebration.

Again, each individual and family must decide based on personal decision and feelings, whether and how to observe the anniversary of one's birth.

If we may be of further help in any way, please let us know.