

# HISTORY OF HALLOWEEN

By, Richard Samuel

Some of our current holidays with their traditions have their roots traceable to ancient heathen religious festivals. What started out as Almighty God's Appointed Set (Sacred) Times, that were shadows and a foretelling of the time of Messiah to come, instead became over time buried under the heathen traditions of men.

One of God's appointed set times to meet with him (Passover/Unleavened Bread/First Fruits) was replaced it with an ancient pagan fertility festival surrounded by rabbits, colored eggs and the eating of pork (ham). The date associated with the drunken festival of debauchery (Saturnalia), became the day to celebrate the birthday of Jesus. And then there is Halloween ...

There is nothing wrong with celebrating Christmas on December 25<sup>th</sup> and having Easter egg hunts with your children or grandchildren on Easter, or dressing up in costumes and enjoying sweet treats on Halloween. Most of us have cherished memories associated with these holidays and the special time we spend with family and friends. But it should be brought to light where these customs originated and more importantly, what they have replaced.

## Halloween

Halloween was not celebrated in the United States until the mid-1800's. At that time thousands of Irish immigrants flooded into New York fleeing the Irish Potato Famine of 1845-46. These immigrants brought with them an old Druid Holiday they called Samhain (pronounced "Sowen,") a Celtic holiday which marked the end of the harvest and the end of summer. Samhain is sometimes also regarded as the Celtic or Druid New Year. These groups believed this was a very important day to celebrate, as this was the day when two worlds, the living and the dead, came together. Spirits of the underworld were also believed to be mischievous and cause trouble on this day.

To better understand Halloween's roots it is best to go back into history and take a look at the Druids and Celtic people. The Druids were the pagan priests of the Celts. They were idolaters, occult practitioners and witches of sorts.

From the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica:

"Halloween and its former attendant ceremonies long antedate Christianity. The two chief characteristics of ancient Halloween were the lighting of bonfires and the belief that of all nights in the year this is the one during which ghosts and spirits from the underworld are most likely to wander over the earth.

Further, it was a Druidic belief that on the eve of this festival Samhain, the Lord of Death, called together the wicked souls that within the past twelve months had been condemned to inhabit the bodies of animals. Thus it is clear that the main celebration of Halloween was purely Druidical, and this is further proved by the fact that in parts of Ireland the 31<sup>st</sup> of October was, and even still is known as Oidhche Shamhna, "Vigil of Samhain."

The Druid Lord of Death was called Saman, Shamhan, Samanam Shamhain or Samhain. In the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, it identifies the holiday for the Druid Lord of Death as "The Vigil of Samhain."

The pagan worship day of Samhain evolved into Halloween. But what of their Lord of Death? You have probably seen a modern day version of him without even knowing it. This pagan god was shown as a ghostly, skeleton holding a sickle in his hand. He later came to be known as "The Grim Reaper."

**Deuteronomy 12:31** You must not worship the LORD your God in their way, because in worshipping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifice to their gods.

The earliest celebrations on the eve of October 31<sup>st</sup> – November 1<sup>st</sup> were held by the Druids in honor of Samhain, Lord of Death. November 1<sup>st</sup> was the Celtic New Year. At that time of year temperatures were dropping, the tree leaves were falling, and it was getting darker sooner and staying darker longer.

**The *Irish English Dictionary*, published by the *Irish Texts Society*, defines Samhain as follows:**

"Samhain, All Hallows' Eve, the feast of the dead in Pagan and Christian times, signaling the close of harvest and the initiation of the winter season,

**J.C. Cooper, author of *The Dictionary of Festivals* identifies Samhain as:**

"Samhain or Samhuinn: (Celtic). 31 October, Eve of 1 November, was the beginning of the Celtic year, the beginning of the season of cold, death and darkness."

***Scottish Radiance* writes about Samhain:**

"The Celts believed, that during the winter, the sun god was taken prisoner by Samhain, the Lord of the Dead and Prince of Darkness...On the eve before their new year (October 31), it was believed that Samhain called together all the dead people."

The Druids and Celts believed that on the eve of the Vigil of Samhain, October 31<sup>st</sup>, the Lord of Death called together the wicked souls that within the past twelve months had been condemned to inhabit the bodies of animals in punishment for their evil deeds. This demon god then allowed them to return to their former homes to visit the living. Supposedly, to appease the Lord of Death and keep the spirits from harming the people, Druid priests led the people in worship ceremonies

in which horses, cats, black sheep, oxen, human beings and other offerings were rounded up, stuffed into wicker cages and then burned to death.

Druid ceremonies mainly centered on sacrifice, and are outlined in the Posidonian sources and in Pliny. Strabo also writes of human sacrifice by shooting to death by arrows, or by impaling, and the burning of human and animal victims. Rome's Caesar likewise describes these great figures (*immani magnitudine simulacra*) where living men and women were set on fire. Tacitus is specific on British Druids: "They deemed it indeed a duty to cover their altars with the blood of captives and to consult their deities through human entrails."

In the book, *The Celts*, Gerhard Herm writes of the Celtic people: The inhabitants employ a very surprisig and incredible custom when they want to know matters of great importance. They consecrate a human being to death, drive a dagger into his belly, above the abdomen, and draw conclusions about events to come from the squirming of the victim and the spurting of his blood. They have been practicing this custom since time immemorial.

From the writings of Julius Caesar, we have this account. In the century preceding the birth of Christ, Caesar conquered the Britons and he records very carefully the account of the Druid Priests:

"All Gallic nations are much given to superstition ... they either offer up men as victims to the gods, or make a vow to sacrifice themselves. The ministers in these offerings are the Druids, and they hold that the wrath of the immortal gods can only be appeased, and man's life redeemed, by offering up human sacrifice, and it is a part of their national institutions to hold *fixed solemnities* (Ceremonies) for this purpose."

Samhain, the forerunner of Halloween, was one of the days when human sacrifices were offered to pagan gods. The Druid priests and Celtic people would gather together on these pagan worship days either in a grove of trees, or in a stone circle. There are many stone circles in the British Isles and in Western Europe. The most famous surviving stone circle is Stonehenge, located on the Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire England. It has been concluded by many archeologists, that human sacrifice was common at this ancient Druid site, because within a few miles of this site there are over 350 funeral mounds that contain the remnants of countless sacrifices.

### **The Nimrod – Druid Connection**

**2 Chronicles 33:6** He sacrificed his sons in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnon, practiced sorcery, divination and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger.

**Leviticus 18:21** Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.

If you've wondered where the pagan worship rituals of the Druids originated, it turns out that they go all the way back to the time of Nimrod that you can read about in the biblical book of Genesis. Nimrod built the city of Babel ... or Babylon. He conceived what he wanted which was a one world government model in rebellion against God where Nimrod would rule. His city of Babel (Babylon) was built in the land of Shinar, which today is known as the land of Iraq. Nimrod's goal was to build his city and institute a pagan worship system that rejected Almighty God. The primary false god worshipped at the time of Nimrod was Baal (Syrian & Phoenician), Bel (Assyrian), Moloch or Molech (Ammonites), Ra or Re (Egyptian) to name just a few. Here is why that is important.

The American Book of Days says, "Many of Halloween's customs are derived from the ancient Baal Festivals. Other customs originate from the taking of omens from the struggles of victims in the fires of druidic sacrifices." Alexander Hislop wrote, "The worship of Bel (Moloch) and Astarte was very early introduced into Britain along with the Druids, the priests of the groves. From Bel, the 1<sup>st</sup> of May is still called Beltane in the Almanac; and we have customs still lingering at this day among us, which prove how exactly the worship of Bel or Moloch had been observed." His reference to "lingering customs" refers to Halloween.

Back to Nimrod ...

It is important to know that Nimrod incorporated into his worship system the grisly practice of human sacrifice and cannibalism. Hislop wrote, "The priests of Nimrod or Baal were necessarily required to eat the human sacrifices; and thus it has come to pass that Cahna-Bal (cahna meaning *priest* and Bal referring to *Baal*), the Priest of Baal is the established word *cannibal* in our own tongue for a devourer of human flesh." Hislop further writes, "The god whom the Druids worshipped was Baal, as the blazing Baal-fires show and children were offered in sacrifice to Baal." That is the same thing that the early Baal (Moloch) worshipers did.

**Jeremiah 19:4-5** For they have forsaken me and made this a place of foreign gods; they have burned incense in it to gods that neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah ever knew, and they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent. They have built the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as offerings to Baal—something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind.

**From Rome to the present:** The Romans adopted the Celtic practices as their own and practiced them for many years. But in the first century AD, Samhain was assimilated into celebrations of some of the other Roman traditions that took place in October, such as their day to honor Pomona, the Roman goddess of fruit and trees. The symbol of Pomona is the apple, which some believe explains the origin of our modern day tradition of bobbing for apples on Halloween. The thrust of the practices also changed over time to become more ritualized. As belief in spirit (demonic) possession diminished, the practice of dressing up like hobgoblins, ghosts, witches and the devil took on a more ceremonial and festive role.

**Trick or Treat:** The custom of trick-or-treating is thought to have originated not with the Irish Celts, but with ninth-century European custom called Souling. On November 2, All Souls Day or sometimes called; Day of the Dead, which is an early Romanist holiday, where poor Roman Catholics would walk from village to village begging for “soul cakes,” made out of square pieces of bread with currants. The more soul cakes the beggars would receive, the more prayers they would promise to say on behalf of the dead relatives of the donors. At the time, it was believed that the dead remained in a place called Limbo or Purgatory for a time after death, and that prayer, even by strangers, could expedite a soul’s passage to heaven. This over all concept has pagan roots that eventually grew into the Catholic religion as doctrine, which is not biblical at all!

In these present times, Halloween can be fun holiday for our kids (and many adults) when they dress up in their favorite TV, book or movie superhero costumes. Halloween parties at school, work and homes is common. But unfortunately, at the same time, much of the focus of Halloween for many is still centered on horror, mutilation, death, devils, ghosts, witches, evil and the occult. Present day adults who practice witchcraft still lay claim to Halloween as their special holiday as the day to worship their pagan gods and goddesses and Satan with demonic rituals.

For Christians who wish to further consider their participation in the celebration of Halloween, please read the following article:

## Christians and Halloween

Nathan Busenitz October 30, 2015

<https://www.tms.edu/preachersandpreaching/christians-and-halloween/>

As a church history professor, October 31st is one of my favorite holidays. That’s because it is Reformation Day; and this year will mark 498 years since Martin Luther nailed his *95 Theses* to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany in 1517.

To be honest, I would much rather talk about Reformation Day than Halloween. But most of American society does not share my passion for church history. For them, October 31st is all about Halloween traditions and festivities.

Due to its pervasive nature in American culture, Christians often wonder how they should respond to this October holiday. Is it permissible for believers to participate in certain activities related to Halloween, or should they try to avoid it completely?

In answering such questions, I believe there are two primary considerations Christians ought to keep in mind.

**1. First, believers should avoid any activity that is prohibited by Scripture. Consequently, they ought to abstain from anything that smacks of immorality, debauchery, or Satanic worship.**

Though some Halloween traditions have pagan roots, American culture has largely turned Halloween into a secular (i.e. non-religious) holiday. Even so, Christians ought to apply biblical discernment carefully as they consider to what extent they will participate in any Halloween-related activities.

In our unbelieving society, there are those who use Halloween as an opportunity to celebrate sexual sin, drunkenness, grotesque depravity, and even demonic activity. Because Scripture clearly forbids those things, Christians should have nothing to do with anything that promotes or induces such behavior.

As believers, we are called to flee from the sinful deeds of darkness, not revel in them. So any type of Halloween costume, activity, or party that celebrates those things should be totally avoided. Many Scripture passages could be cited to make this point. [Ephesians 5:8–12](#) is one such place:

For you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret.

The Scriptural mandate is unmistakable: Stay far away from anything that is idolatrous or immoral (cf. [Rom. 13:12–14](#); [Gal. 5:19–21](#); [Eph. 5:18](#); [1 Thess. 1:9](#); [4:3–8](#); [1 Pet. 4:3–6](#); etc.).

It should also be noted that, as believers, we do not share our culture’s morbid fascination with fear and death, because in Christ we have been set free from bondage to such things ([Heb. 2:15](#)). Consequently, Christians should not join with our unbelieving society in celebrating violent, ghoulish, or macabre themes. Moreover, our culture’s preoccupation with the “spooky” and the “scary” desensitizes their hearts and diverts their attention away from that which is truly terrifying: namely, the judgment of God that awaits all who die apart from Christ ([Heb. 9:27](#); [10:31](#)).

On the other hand, not every tradition associated with Halloween in American culture is inherently evil. For example, there is nothing in Scripture that forbids children from dressing up in innocent costumes and gathering candy from well-meaning neighbors. So how should Christians think about those kinds of things?

That brings me to a second point:

**2. When it comes to those things not specifically prohibited in Scripture, Christians ought to apply biblical principles in order to make wise, God-honoring decisions.**

A great place to find these principles is in passages like Romans 14–15 and 1 Corinthians 8–10, where the apostle Paul gives instruction to those who were wondering if it was acceptable for believers to eat food offered to idols. These principles are often discussed under the category of Christian liberty.

Though the situation is not a direct parallel, the principles Paul articulates in these passages provide a helpful paradigm for applying biblical wisdom to these kinds of situations.

The foremost of these principles might be stated in the form of three questions:

**A) Will participating in this activity dishonor Christ?** In [1 Corinthians 10:31](#), Paul wrote, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” The implications of that statement are universal and all-encompassing. Stated negatively, Christians should not participate in anything that would bring dishonor or reproach on the name of Christ.

Stated positively, believers should only do that which can be done for God’s glory. We should not merely attempt to avoid His disapproval, but should actively seek to please Him in all we do ([2 Cor. 5:9](#)). Consequently, as we think about how to approach Halloween or any other holiday, we ought to be looking for opportunities to serve Him and advance the truth of His gospel.

**B) Will participating in this activity violate my conscience?** In these same chapters, Paul makes it clear that it is a sin to violate one’s conscience (cf. [Rom. 14:22–23](#); [1 Cor. 8:7](#)). So, if an activity—even one that some believers might find acceptable—violates a person’s conscience, that person should avoid it.

**C) Will participating in this activity tempt fellow believers to sin?** Paul emphasizes that believers need to be careful, in practicing their Christian liberty, not to cause a weaker brother or sister to stumble ([1 Cor. 8:12–13](#)). In other words, we need to be aware of the fact that other Christians might have more sensitive consciences than we do. Accordingly, we should avoid putting them in situations where—by following our example—they might fall into sin by violating their conscience.

A friend of mine who works in the Spanish ministry at our church recently helped me think about the implications of this principle within a multi-ethnic environment. For non-Hispanic Americans, it can be easy to think about Halloween only through the lens of secular American culture. But for many believers from Latin American backgrounds, October 31st is closely associated with the Day of the Dead and its clearly unbiblical practices. As a result, these believers might find the celebration of Halloween to be a stumbling block, even if other Americans would not.

By simply being aware of those kinds of cultural issues, especially in multicultural church contexts, Christians can demonstrate biblical sensitivity and love to fellow believers from ethnic backgrounds that are different than their own.

It is also important to note, of course, that many churches offer excellent alternatives to Halloween—from Reformation Day celebrations to Harvest Festivals to things like AWANA’s Fairmont Fair. In other words, choosing not to celebrate Halloween does not require turning out the lights and sitting quietly in the back room of the house hoping no one rings the doorbell.

Nonetheless, in answer to the question—“Is it permissible for Christians to participate in any Halloween-related activities?” —the bottom line is this: By avoiding that which is sinful and by applying biblical wisdom to that which is not (using biblical principles like the three delineated above), believers can approach the Halloween season in a way that is both faithful to God’s Word and filled with wholesome fun for them and their families.