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## CHRISTIAN AWARENESS FELLOWSHIP

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NIGHT HALLOWMAS SABBAT SAMAN LORD OF THE DEAD HALLOWEEN FEAST OF THE DEAD SAMHAIN SABBAT

**By Tom Perkins and Jim Boren**

### THE HISTORY OF HALLOWEEN

Many of the practices associated with the modern celebration of Halloween are derived from the superstitious customs of an ancient pagan people of Northern Europe, called Celts. Their religion is known as Druidism. Halloween was the day on which the priests, called Druids, honored their dead. Druids taught that the souls of those who had died that year were confined in the bodies of animals until the New Year (which fell on November 1st, according to the Druid calendar). At that time the souls would be judged and could be freed to claim a "heavenly" reward, or remain in the body of an animal for another year.

On October 31st, the night before this judgment, it was believed the souls of the dead were free to mingle among the living. This religious day was called, "Samhain," by the Celts.<sup>1</sup> In order to provide for these ghosts, the Celts would heap tables with food of all kinds. At the end of the day, townspeople of some villages would dress up in costumes and masks, representing the ghosts they were paying tribute to, and march to the outskirts of the village. In so doing, they hoped to lead the ghosts away and avert any trouble the spirits might bring upon them. In other villages, the people would simply leave out food as an offering for the ghosts. In any case, the point of all this was to appease the ghosts during Samhain by offering them "treats." Should the villagers fail to adequately provide for the spirits, all sorts of evil could befall them. Their cattle might become sick and die, houses might burn down, people might become sick, or any of a number of calamities might be caused by disgruntled spirits.

Another practice associated with the observance of Samhain was the offering of animal or even human sacrifices to atone for the sins which were committed by the dead, and to help send them on their way to heaven. Humans were being sacrificed in this manner until well into the first century A.D. For hundreds of years after that, animal sacrifices continued, usually involving black cats or horses. Druids were well known for their gruesome sacrifices. Encyclopedia Britannica says, "*The Druids offered human victims for those who were gravely sick or in danger of death in battle. Huge wickerwork images were filled with living men and then burned; although the Druids chose criminals by preference, they sacrificed innocent victims if necessary.*"<sup>2</sup>

With the expansion of the Roman Empire and Christianity, Druidism was suppressed. By the Middle Ages, Halloween became known as a time when the followers of Satan were most active and enjoyed their greatest power. It was a time of great activity for those opposed to the Church. Many of their activities were specifically directed against Christianity: Mock communions were held, symbols of Christianity, such as the cross, were profaned in various ways (such as painting obscene versions of the symbols on Christian churches), and the devil and pagan gods were worshipped instead of God.

### NO ONE TODAY REALLY BELIEVES ANY OF THIS, DO THEY?

In modern America, it's true that many people simply regard the practices associated with Halloween as quaint remnants of a bygone era. Society is secularized and the only kind of "spirits" many people believe in come in a bottle. For such people, Halloween itself has no real meaning beyond providing a reason for a party or a chance to dress up their children in "cute" costumes. There are groups who celebrate Halloween as a religious holiday, such as Witches and Satanists. The *Arizona Daily Star* ran a front page article in which they interviewed practicing Witches.<sup>3</sup> Modern Witchcraft, or "Neo-paganism," has hundreds of followers in Tucson and celebrate Samhain as one of eight yearly holy days or "Sabbats." They often ignore historical accounts of Druidic sacrifices and instead describe Halloween as a joyful celebration of the change of seasons. One modern Witch writes: *Witches do exist, and we observe Samhain – Halloween – as a high holy day. We are keepers of an ancient tradition of celebration so deeply ingrained in our culture that Halloween has become an inter-faith holiday. We are happy to share our rich cultural traditions, and we're proud of our contribution to the ecumenical observance of this holiday.*

*Halloween is celebrated as the Witches' new year. As winter begins and we must seek the warmth and light from within rather than from without, it seems that Nature has taken us back to the womb, spiritually...Halloween is a time of year when it's difficult to distinguish life from death. Trees are losing their leaves to the season's chill, animals are tucking themselves in or taking themselves to warmer places, and everyone notices the fewer hours of daylight...Witches do not worship the devil...Witches are not Satanists...Occasionally, animal bones found in the country are used in ritual, but Witches do not kill or sacrifice any animals ritually or otherwise..."*<sup>4</sup> How different these modern witches are from their claimed predecessors!

### **WHERE DID THE NAME "HALLOWEEN" COME FROM?**

In the eighth century, Pope Gregory III decreed that the Catholic festival for all the saints in Heaven be moved from May to November 1st. In the ninth century, Pope Gregory IV made this feast a universal celebration of the Catholic Church. The feast came to be called All Saint's Day or All Hallow's (i.e. "all the holy ones") Day. The day before All Hallow's Day became known as "Hallow's Eve" or "Halloween." Ironically, the name "Halloween" has nothing whatsoever to do with the pagan festival itself, but rather with the Roman Catholic holiday which falls on the day after it. Unfortunately, this has given some Christians the impression that Halloween was originally a Christian festival. Nothing could be further from the truth.

### **SHOULD CHRISTIANS PARTICIPATE IN THE CUSTOM OF TRICK-OR-TREATING?**

Given the pagan origins of Halloween, many Christians wonder if they should participate in such activities at all. Should Christian children be allowed to go trick-or-treating? Should Christians give out candy to trick-or-treaters who come to their door? Should Christians just ignore the whole holiday? First, we need to acknowledge that these issues are a matter of honest disagreement between Christians today, and what you do should be sought in prayer. Some feel that it's just harmless fun and that it doesn't mean the same things to us that it meant to those who originated the practice. Many churches also provide alternatives to Halloween. Church sponsored "Harvest Parties" or "Fall Festivals" encourage children to dress up as Bible characters or neutral figures such as clowns, and to avoid evil and occultic overtones. Some pass out Christian tracts along with candy to trick-or-treaters, while others believe the occult and Pagan origins of Halloween render it unacceptable for Christian participation in any way.

### **WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?**

Even a cursory examination of God's Word reveals that Scripture condemns all practices connected with the origins of Halloween. Occultic practices such as witchcraft, magic and consulting the dead are strictly forbidden to God's people. In Deut. 18:9-14, God warns His people: *"When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee. Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God. For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for thee, the LORD thy God hath not suffered thee so to do."* (KJV)

In Exodus 22:18 we find that the penalty for such practices was death. Leviticus 19:31 warns that those who turn to mediums or spiritists *"will be defiled by them,"* and Leviticus 20:6 says that those who follow mediums and spiritists will be *"cut off"* from their people. The final state of these people will be the Lake of Fire (Rev. 21:8). It is abundantly clear from God's Word that He wants His people to have nothing to do with the practices of paganism. In addition to condemning the occultism which has perpetuated Halloween, Scripture also refutes the pagan view of death which spawned Halloween: namely, the idea that ghosts wander about the earth searching for their resting place. Luke 16 teaches that there is a great gulf fixed between the living and the dead -- a gulf which no spirit can cross. Some will still say it's only make-believe. But is this the sort of fantasy God would have us entertain and teach to our children? Instead of focusing on death, Witches and devils, the Bible tells us to avoid every appearance of evil (I Thes. 5:22).

### **NOTES**

1. Some writers identify Samhain (or Saman) as a god and "lord of the dead," not a day. See: *World Book Encyclopedia, Funk & Wagnals Encyclopedia, Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*. But most modern witches and neo-pagans consider Samhain a holy day or "Sabbat," not a deity.
2. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 1987 p. 233
3. *Arizona Daily Star*. Oct. 31, 1992 p. 1
4. O'Gaea, Ashleen. *Halloween: A Witch's View*. Campsight Coven, Tucson, AZ. 1991.