

A Christian Look At

HALLOWEEN

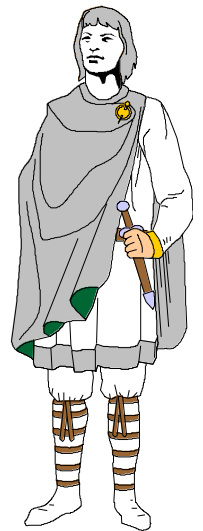
What is the second most popular holiday in America? During what season is more money spent on decorations, games and fun than any other time of the year, except for Christmas? Can you guess? Halloween, of course.

October 31 is the traditional day for trick-or-treating and dressing up as witches, ghosts, and goblins. Many Christians consider this holiday as nothing more than a time of fun and merriment for children, and adults who are kids at heart. In their minds, it is an innocent day of masquerade, and over indulgence in sweets. But the origins of this festival reveal to us the truly pagan and demonic sources of the celebration of Halloween.

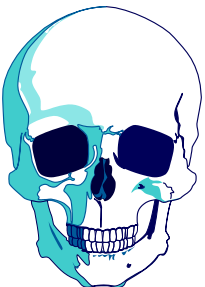
LOOKING INTO THE PAST

The people that originally honored this day were the ancient Celts of Europe. In the centuries before Christ there were numerous Celtic tribes spread across most of Europe. These tribes were eventually conquered by the Romans and forced into a smaller and smaller area of influence. Their final home was northwestern Europe, and the British Isles. They are the ancestors of the Irish, Scottish, Pictish and Breton peoples.

The Celts were pagans who worshipped dozens of gods and goddesses. They especially venerated one goddess as the Great Mother, the supreme deity in their pantheon. They also revered her consort, a horned hunting god, known by various names. Cernunnos was one of the names given this deity. The Celts divided their year into two parts based on honoring the Great Mother and the Horned God. The goddess, as supreme, ruled the time of summer. The Horned One was the ruler of the winter months.

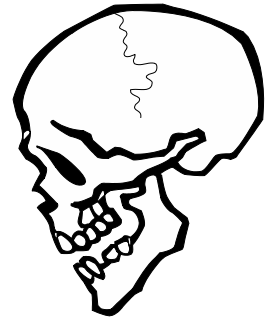


The two days that began these seasonal divisions were especially sacred days, and the Celts considered them as times of great supernatural power. On the first day of May was the feast of Beltane, the beginning of summer and the rule of the goddess. The first day of November was the first day of winter, and the beginning of the Celtic year. Why was this the new year? It was thought that it was at this season when everything died that the possibility of new life began. Thus, this was the most holy day of the Celtic year. This time was called the feast of Samhain (pronounced something like *sow-eeen*).



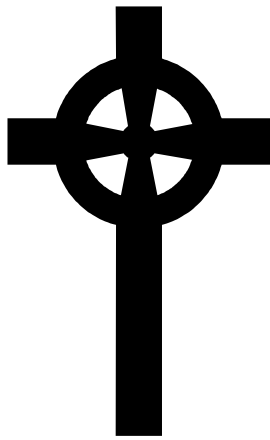
This festival was called Samhain because the Lord of Death, Samhain, was the special guardian of the day. This day, and the season were very important for the Celts. It was a time of remembering and honoring the dead. Since there was a recognition of death, and the renewal of life, it was for the Celts a time to celebrate fertility rites. It was also a period of special magical influence, a season of occult power, propitious for their spiritual leaders, known as Druids, to renew their mastery of occult forces.

The Celts, like many ancient peoples, began their day at sunset, and it lasted until the next day's sunset. So the Samhain festival officially began the previous evening (as we would look at it today). Thus, in our calendar, Samhain actually began at sundown on October 31. This night was thought to be particularly powerful for magic and occult practices. It was believed that the Lord Samhain left his domain in the underworld and led a host of dead spirits to roam the countryside. It was also thought that the usual barriers between this world and the next were largely diminished on this night. Thus, it was supposed to be common to see ghosts, fairies, goblins, elves and other kindred spirits abroad. Since the days were getting shorter, it was believed necessary to renew the power of the waning sun, so bonfires were set aflame on multitudes of high hills. There were also many divinatory rites, as people took advantage of the supernatural forces at work to foresee what the future held for them. And this was a season of dancing, wild merriment, pranks and jokes, and licentious sexuality.



THE CHURCH RESPONDS TO SAMHAIN

It was a common practice in the ancient Christian church that when it came in contact with such pagan practices it tried to “Christianize” them. For instance, with pagan festivals the church would usually provide a Christian alternative. As an example, with Christmas this was largely successful. But in the case of Samhain, the church failed. This is what happened.



The church had developed the practice of celebrating “All Saints Day” in May. This was a day to honor all Christian saints, to remember those who had died in the faith, especially Christian martyrs. To combat the influence of Samhain, the church moved All Saints Day to the first of November. Since this day honored all saints, that is all “holy ones,” it was called All Hallows Day. The night before All Hallows Day was appropriately called All Hallows Eve, or Hallows Evening. Gradually this name was shortened to Hallows E’en—and then Halloween.

The plan to substitute a day to honor the heroes of the faith for Samhain was a good one. But it didn’t work. Sadly, the practices of Samhain lingered on. The Celtic customs were never eradicated. Basically what happened was that Samhain was simply renamed Halloween, and remained the same pagan festival as before.

The last survivors of the Celtic tribes are mostly to be found in the west and north of the British Islands—in Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, and Ireland. These people preserved as folklore and tradition many of the customs and practices of the ancient Celts. When immigrants from these lands came to America, they brought their folk ways and customs with them, including the celebration of Halloween. This is especially evident in the Irish waves of immigration in the 19th century. It was mostly from these Irish immigrants that other Americans picked up the celebration of Halloween, with all its traditional practices.

HALLOWEEN CUSTOMS

There is almost no custom of Halloween that cannot be traced to Celtic paganism and the Samhain rituals. As we shall see in this section, even the most seemingly innocent traditions of Halloween usually have a sinister, even demonic, origin. From Jack O' Lanterns to black cats, all are rooted in the occult and magical religion of the Celtic people and their descendants.

Trick-Or-Treat

This practice harkens back to the Celtic beliefs about Samhain and his activities during this season. Samhain was supposed to travel abroad, followed by the spirits of the dead. The Celts believed that their ancestors would come to pay them a visit at this time. If they were not placated when they returned with Lord Samhain, then they would bring curses and misfortune to the living family members. Consequently, offerings of food were left on doorsteps to prevent this.



However, some authorities trace this practice to another source. There were great communal celebrations on Halloween. Revelers on their way to the Samhain festivities stopped along the way to receive gifts from the homes they passed. If the someone did not leave gifts for them, they would play tricks on that person, or even curse that home.

Jack O' Lanterns

As the Samhain revelers were traveling to their pagan rites, they would light their way with gourds, turnips or pumpkins that had candles in them, with holes for the light to escape—sort of a low tech flashlight. The holes in these lights would often be carved in the image of faces, to remind the worshipers of the spirits of the departed loved ones. They felt these ghostly beings were traveling with them, and would join them in the evening's ceremonies. Thus, we see one explanation for the jack o' lantern.



That the Celts would turn pumpkins and turnips into glowing heads is not surprising. Much Celtic religious practice focused on the head. Celtic warriors would cut off the heads of their vanquished foes. They would then display these gruesome trophies outside their homes. It is thought that the Celts believed in reincarnation, and thus by decapitating their enemies they would prevent them from entering another life.

There is another explanation for the jack o' lantern that is more poetic and magical. There are legends about a man named Jack who tricked the devil. Exactly how he tricked him varies from story to story. One has it that Jack placed a light inside a turnip and attempted to send the turnip to hell instead of himself. The devil was so angry at this attempted deceit that when Jack died he refused to allow him admittance to hell. Since Jack was not a righteous man, he could not get into heaven. So the legend tells us that he was doomed to wander the earth until Judgment Day, carrying his bizarre lamp. Thus he was Jack of the Lantern, or Jack O' Lantern.



Whether the origin of the jack o' lantern lies with the legendary Jack, or the historical celebrations of Samhain we do not know. However, whatever the explanation there is one obvious truth. The jack o' lantern is an evil symbol. If the historical explanation is true, it represents a belief in the reign of Samhain, Lord of Death, and his accompanying army of dead spirits. If the practice is traced to the legend of Jack, then it represents the plight of a damned and lost soul. Either way, this popular Halloween image

stands for death. Indeed, if you think about it, don't the macabre carvings made in a pumpkin shell cause it to closely resemble a skull. No wonder the *Encyclopedia Britannica* calls the jack o' lantern the "death's head."

Black Cats There are several explanations for why black cats are such popular symbols of Halloween. One explanation is that the Celts had a special reverence for cats. They believed that cats had once been humans but were changed into cats as punishment for evil deeds.



Other explanations involve belief in witchcraft. Being a night of occult power, Halloween is a time appropriate for witchcraft. One of the familiar legends about witches is their ability to "shape shift," that is, to change themselves into the form of an animal. This was usually a creature of the night, such as a wolf, an owl... or a cat. This shape shifting ability is also at the root of the legends of werewolves. Indeed, beliefs about werewolves and witchcraft are closely allied.

Witches were also believed to have spirits that attended them and aided them in their magical practices. These spirits were called familiar spirits, and they often took on animal shapes. A familiar spirit might appear as a frog, a fly, a bat, an owl or a dog. Very often they appeared as a cat, especially a black cat. So, the black cat actually is a demonic spirit.

Masquerade The wearing of masks and dressing up as animals is an ancient custom. The Celts did this in their Samhain rituals. The gods and goddesses they worshipped were often represented by different animals. For example, Cernunnos was depicted as a stag, or as a man with stag horns. The Celts felt that by dressing up in the skins of sacred animals they were calling on the spirits and powers of the animals/gods to aid them in their magical rituals. Wearing animal masks were also often part of pagan fertility rituals.



Divination Divination means to attempt to find out secret knowledge through supernatural, occult means. This often was predictive in nature. Divination is severely condemned in the Bible as an ungodly practice (see Deuteronomy 18:10-14). Halloween, being occultic and magical in nature, has its fair share of divinatory practices.

For example, the practice of bobbing for apples is grounded in magical practice. It was thought that the one who could retrieve an apple from under water would see a vision of his/her future spouse. In some places in the United States girls carry a lamp to a spring of water on Halloween. If they peer into the water, they are supposed to see an image of their future husbands.



Bonfires There is something especially fun about gathering around an open fire and sharing a good time of fellowship. And there is nothing wrong with this practice at all. However, the close link between Halloween and bonfires is due to the pagan origins of the holiday. We have already seen the burning of fires as an attempt to replenish the power of the sun. It should also be noted that the Celts ritually offered sacrifices to their gods. Usually these sacrifices were animals, but there is historical record that they were known to offer human sacrifices, especially at times such as Samhain. The sacrificial nature of these open fires is preserved in the name “bonfire,” which was originally a “bone fire.”

Ghosts and Ghost Stories



As the Samhain festival celebrants danced around their bonfires, they felt they could sense the presence of their departed family members. Indeed, so much of the ceremony and tradition of Halloween concerns death and the dead. It is not surprising then that ghosts are one of the most familiar images seen at Halloween. This is also a time when ghost stories are a popular tradition. But it all harkens back to the belief in Samhain, the Celtic god of the dead.

Other Symbols

When you think of Halloween, what images come to mind? In addition to the ones already mentioned, you could list things like: goblins, elves, gnomes, devils, vampires, ghouls, monsters, werewolves, wizards, skeletons, skulls, the Grim Reaper, owls, bats, rats, and spiders. The tradition of Samhain, Lord of Death, is even carried on with modern themes and concepts. For instance, images from horror movies, such as Freddie Kruger masks, are popular. Yet all of these are images of death, destruction, darkness, violence, harm and evil. There is nothing good, wholesome and godly about these creatures and these symbols.

HALLOWEEN & WITCHCRAFT

Witches and Witchcraft have always been thought of as being a part of Halloween. During Celtic times it was believed that evil witches prowled the earth in Lord Samhain’s train. And since this was a time of great occult energy, all witches were believed to use the Samhain rites to renew their strength.



Modern witches claim to be the contemporary counterparts to the ancient worshipers of the pagan religions. And there are many present day witches who base their faith and practice in the religion of the ancient Celts. They worship the Great Mother and the Horned God. And they honor the Samhain festival as sacred time of supernatural working. For these modern witches, it is the beginning of their religious year. They meet in small groups called covens and practice magic rituals to honor the turning of the year. Here they dance in circles and celebrate Samhain by creating a field of spiritual energy, with which they cast spells and work sorcery. They call this field of occult energy a “cone of power.” Some believe that the pointed hats that witches and wizards wear is a reminder of the cone of power raised in the coven.



Halloween is full of witchcraft images. We see the witch wearing her black, pointed hat and remember the cone of power raised by the coven. She is seen riding on a broom stick, and it calls to mind the magic staff, wand or rod that occult practitioners use in their rituals. We remember that the sword, knife or staff is also a phallic symbol and represents the power of the horned god. The Halloween witch is often seen



cauldrons.

riding her broom in front of the moon. This reminds us that witches do their work at night, during darkness—and that the goddess they worship is a moon deity. Indeed, the moon is a very common symbol for their goddess. Another symbol for this goddess is the cauldron. The Halloween witch may often be seen bending over her cauldron, brewing a magic potion. This notion is not just Hollywood hype. Witches do believe in concocting magic potions, ointments and powders. Also, cauldrons were often sacred objects to the Celts. Celtic myth often associated cauldrons with supernatural workings—and ritual sacrifice, for sacrificial offerings to the gods would be placed in

It should be noted that Halloween currently is a sacred and special day for modern witches. Indeed, outside of the United States the practice of celebrating Halloween is almost unknown in the rest of world today. The exception to this is among witches. For them, Halloween is very significant. This fact is seen in the following quotes from books written by, and for, the followers of modern witchcraft.

Halloween is called “a festival of the dead and the powers of darkness.”¹

It is noted as the “feast of the dead, the first day of the witches year.”²

“Hallowmas [Halloween] is the most solemn festival of the witches’ year. On November eve we honor the dead souls, bid farewell to the moon and welcome the sun to rule once more in her place...Perhaps on such a night it is easier to sense the unseen forces abroad, and only proper to pay them homage.”³



“*Samhain* (Halloween or November Eve) [is] the Celtic New Year, the day when the walls between the worlds were said to be thinnest and when contact with one’s ancestors took place.”⁴ Modern pagan witches are not the only ones to revere Halloween. Those who purposely and directly worship the Devil also honor this day. Consider this quote from *The Satanic Bible*:

“After one’s own birthday, the two major Satanic holidays are Walpurgisnacht [Beltane or May Eve] and Halloween (or All Hallows’ Eve).”⁵



A Biblical Perspective

What does the Scriptures have to say to us about these matters? First of all,

all occult activity of any kind is condemned in no uncertain terms. The Lord speaks in Deuteronomy 18:10-14 and denounces all magical and occult practices as being abhorrent and detestable in God’s sight. In this passage, the followers of the one true God are commanded to have nothing to do with these practices.

As seen above, Halloween is primarily concerned with death and dead spirits. It began as a festival of the dead, and this concept is still the predominant theme. To traffic with the dead is forthrightly condemned in the passage noted previously. An example of the dangers of dealing with the dead is found in the life of King Saul of Israel. As a result of his attempts to contact the dead prophet Samuel the Lord utterly rejected him. He not only lost his kingdom, he also lost his life (1 Samuel 28 and 1 Chronicles 10:13). There are a number of other passages that advise us to totally reject trafficking with the dead in any way. Some of these are Isaiah 8:19, Leviticus 19:31, Leviticus 20:6, 27 and 2 Chronicles 33:6.

Witchcraft is very specifically condemned in the Bible: Exodus 22:18, Deuteronomy 18:10-11, Micah 5:12, Galatians 5:20-21, Revelation 21:8 and Revelation 22:14-15. It is also important to observe that the association of witchcraft, idolatry and pagan worship is noted, and expressly condemned. Consider these verses: 2 Kings 21:5-6, 2 Kings 9:22, Nahum 3:4, and Malachi 3:5.

Some may argue that what occurs at Halloween is only innocent entertainment. These people assert that Halloween is only pretend, make believe. What is the harm in dressing up like a witch, pretending to be a devil, acting out casting a spell, or putting up pictures of ghosts, ghouls and black cats? If you do not believe in practicing witchcraft and sorcery, what’s the harm?

However, it must be remembered that to even *pretend* to do evil is a sin in God’s sight! We are commanded as believers to not even have the *appearance* of evil in our lives (1 Thessalonians 5:22). It must be emphasized an evil imagination is a dangerous thing. It was because of the *evil imaginations* of men’s hearts that God destroyed the entire world through the Flood (Genesis 6:5).

Halloween as it exists today is nothing more than a pagan festival that glorifies death and the occult. It is a season of celebrating the kingdom of darkness and the worse aspects of this world. Observing Halloween is something that should be unequivocally avoided by the faithful Christian.

REFERENCES

¹ Raymond L. Brown. *A Book of Witchcraft*, p. 66.

² Paul Huson. *Mastering Witchcraft*, p. 36.

³ Elizabeth Pepper and John Wilcock. *The Witches Almanac*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1972, p. 30.

⁴ Margot Adler. *Drawing Down The Moon*. Boston: Beacon Press, p. 110

⁵ Anton Szandor LaVey. *The Satanic Bible*. New York: Avon Books, 1969, p. 96.



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