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A Messianic Perspective on Halloween

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*In all likelihood, while purchasing decorative items for Sukkot
you saw Halloween objects on an adjacent shelf.*

By mid-to-late Summer, you can now go to your local store while grocery shopping and see it advertised. You can now buy your decorations and costumes for this holiday much earlier than ever before. The advertising and marketing involved for this holiday is beyond that of what Christmas was in the past. Halloween has become a very formidable holiday, a huge money maker for confectioners and the entertainment industry alike. It has also been responsible for many people being introduced to the occult and considering witchcraft and spiritism as legitimate forms of one's expression of faith—perhaps even allowed by God and encouraged by the Church.

Of all the holidays that are celebrated in the United States, Halloween happens to be one that many evangelical Christians have spoken out against because of its strong connections to the occult, and indeed to Satanism. **This is to be commended.** But this does not include all Christians.

Many of us who are Messianic were once part of the conservative Christian community. It might be more easily said that we are even *more conservative* now, then when we were involved in mainstream Christianity. Not only do we not celebrate Halloween, but we do not even celebrate Christmas or Easter. Instead, we keep the Biblical holidays of Leviticus 23 that our Heavenly Father ordained for His people.

But why do we not celebrate Christmas or Easter? Are they not supposed to be commemorative of the birth of the Messiah and His resurrection? What is so non-Biblical about His birth or His resurrection? There is nothing non-

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Biblical about His birth or resurrection. Yet perhaps the key for those who do not understand why we do not celebrate these two seemingly "good" holidays, is a proper handling as to why we should not celebrate Halloween. Certainly if our purpose is to be in compliance with God's Word, then why do we not celebrate Halloween?

What is Halloween?

I recognize that many of you reading this may not live in the United States, and as such may be totally ignorant as to what Halloween even is. (Of course you may have your own similar holidays that need to similarly be reevaluated.) For those of you who are unaware of what Halloween is, or perhaps do not know what its customary description is, this is the official entry for Halloween from *Funk & Wagnall's New Encyclopedia*. You may find it quite revealing:

HALLOWEEN, name applied to the evening of October 31, preceding the Christian feast of Hallowmas, Allhallows, or All Saints' Day. The observances connected with Halloween are thought to have originated among the ancient Druids, who believed that on that evening, Saman, the lord of the dead, called forth hosts of evil spirits. The Druids customarily lit great fires on Halloween, apparently for the purpose of warding off all these spirits. Among the ancient Celts, Halloween was the last evening of the year and was regarded as a propitious time for examining the portents of the future. The Celts also believed that the spirits of the dead revisited their earthly homes on that evening. After the Romans conquered Britain, they added to Halloween features of the Roman harvest festival held on November 1 in honor of Pomona, goddess of the fruits of the trees.

The Celtic tradition of lighting fires on Halloween survived until modern times in Scotland and Wales, and the concept of ghosts and witches is still common to all Halloween observances. Traces of the Roman harvest festival survive in the custom, prevalent in both the U.S. and Great Britain, of playing games involving fruit, such as ducking for apples in a tub of water. Of similar origin is the use of hollowed out pumpkins carved to resemble grotesque faces and lit by candles placed inside.¹

As you can see from this secular source, there are absolutely no Biblical origins for Halloween at all. Some say that Halloween developed due to superstitions surrounding the day before All Saints' Day, a Catholic holiday that honored the saints. These believe it is inappropriate to celebrate Halloween, but that it is appropriate to celebrate All Saints' Day. But even All Saints' Day has questionable origins. Susan Richardson, author of *Holidays*

¹ "Halloween," in *Funk & Wagnall's New Encyclopedia*, 29 vols. (Rand McNally, 1990), 12:348-349.

and *Holy Days*, states, that this “holy day began in the Roman church when Pope Boniface IV consecrated the Pantheon in Rome in A.D. 609. Formerly the temple to all the old Roman gods, he dedicated it to the Virgin Mary and all the martyrs.”²

It should be noted that Roman Catholicism has historically taken many practices of the heathen and reinterpreted them, giving them Biblical meanings. This started before the formal formation of the Catholic Church, as post-Apostolic Christianity was a persecuted religion in the Roman Empire, and was dominated by non-Jews who had either been former pagans, or who certainly had extended connections via family and friends. Many of these people wanted to do their best to be “accepted” by the heathen around them, largely to avoid persecution. They frowned on the Biblical holidays and appointed times, considering them outdated and possibly even cursed of Judaism, likely created by the widescale animosity afforded them by the Synagogue,³ and would instead celebrate the holidays of the pagans surrounding them and give them Christian overtones. Consider the words of Tertullian, a mid-Second Century Christian leader, responding to some of the Jewish hostility to the Church:

But if we have no right of communion in matters of this kind with strangers, how far more wicked to celebrate them among brethren! Who can maintain or defend this? The Holy Spirit upbraids the Jews with their holy-days. “Your Sabbaths, and new moons, and ceremonies,” says He, “My soul hateth.” By us, to whom Sabbaths are strange, and the new moons and festivals formerly beloved by God, the Saturnalia and New-year’s and Midwinter’s festivals and Matronalia are frequented—presents come and go—New-year’s gifts—games join their noise—banquets join their din! Oh better fidelity of the nations to their own sect, which claims no solemnity of the Christians for itself! Not the Lord’s day, not Pentecost, even if they had known them, would they have shared with us; for they would fear lest they should seem to be Christians. *We* are not apprehensive lest we seem to be *heathens!* If any indulgence is to be granted to the flesh, you have it (*On Idolatry* 14).⁴

² Susan Richardson, *Holidays & Holy Days* (Ann Arbor: Servant Publications, 2001), 106.

³ Consult the benediction against heretics, actually seen in the Jewish siddur until this very day (Hertz, *Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, 283; Scherman, *ArtScroll Siddur Ashkenaz*, 107), followed by a summary of early Christian remarks toward the Jewish people seen in “Jew, Jews,” in David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), pp 374-378.

⁴ *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, P. Schaff, ed.; [Libronix Digital Library System 1.0d: Church History Collection](#). MS Windows XP. Garland, TX: Galaxie Software. 2002.

For some further sentiments, consult “Sabbath,” in Bercot, pp 571-572.

In spite of some of Tertullian’s negative words about the appointed times, we still must remember that he was a major Christian apologist of the Second Century, and was responsible for

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This reinvention of pagan holidays and festivities is something that is expressly prohibited by Scripture. Deuteronomy 18:9 instructed the Ancient Israelites, “When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations.” The Hebrew verb *lamad* (לָמַד) specifically means, “exercise in, learn” (*BDB*).⁵ Biblical history shows us that the Ancient Israelites did not heed this warning and were judged by God because of their sin. Notice what the prohibition against learning the ways of the heathen specifically condemns:

“There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you” (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).

Going down the list of items, each one of these things, in some way or another, is related to what goes on at Halloween today. There is no indication given in the Scriptures—*at all*—that these sorts of things may be “reinterpreted” and given new meanings. On the contrary, we are to stay away from these things and have nothing to do with them. And in total fairness, these sorts of things were not only reinterpreted by Christianity, but Judaism is also not exempt from adopting things of occultic origin. Jewish mysticism or Kabbalah has close parallels with the occult and with practices expressly forbidden in the Torah.

How have Christians handled Halloween?

Many evangelical Christians rightly oppose the celebration of Halloween, because of its many obvious connections with the occult, witchcraft, and indeed Satanism. Richardson gives a more detailed handling of the origins of Halloween and how it developed into a popular holiday today:

Over the years, Halloween has become one of the most troublesome holidays for Christians to celebrate. We get the name *Halloween* from “All Hallow’s Eve” or the evening before All Saints’ Day. While it is usually considered Druidic in origin,

refuting many of the Gnostic heresies that were circulating during this time. Tertullian’s words against the Biblical holidays must be tempered with the understanding that the Jewish Synagogue was largely hostile to the Christian Church, and as a result these statements were, to some degree, reactionary.

⁵ *BDB*, 540.

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additional customs blended into the observance from Roman tradition.

The Celtic tribes considered November 1 as New Year's Day. When the Romans conquered Britain and began imposing their customs, three celebrations fell on the same day: festivities for the Roman sun god, the goddess Pomona, and Samhain (pronounced Sow'en). Most of the traditions remained Celtic, but sacrifices to the sun god also became a part of the celebrations. . . .

Roman worship of Pomona also shaped the festivities. She was the goddess of orchards and the harvest. The festival in her honor featured apples, nuts, grapes, and other fruits. These features have come down to today in the form of apple bobbing and, until recently, using nuts to tell fortunes. . . .

By the Middle Ages, people had accepted the idea of All Hallows Eve as the favorite time of witches and sorcerers. The idea of witches flying on broomsticks developed during this time period, with All Hallows' Eve being the most important of the witches' sabbaths.

The roots of modern Halloween parties go back to this time. To avoid facing evil alone, people gathered together and told of strange or spooky experiences to pass the time and they played traditional games such as bobbing for apples.⁶

There is much more that could be said about some of the origins of the practices of what is today Halloween, but you should get the impression that these ideas were anything less than Biblical, and they developed from a blending of ancient pagan religion and superstition—and indeed ignorance of the Scriptures. Richardson goes on to say that "American observance of Halloween came fairly late, as most early settlers were Protestant. They left saints' days behind them along with any folk customs attached to them. . . . That changed with the Irish potato famine and the resulting wave of immigration in the 1840s. Most of the immigrants were Catholic, bringing both the religious observances and the folklore remnants of Samhain with them."⁷

In recent days, Halloween has been largely downplayed to be a fun time for small children, who dress up in costumes and go from house to house "trick or treating" for candy. This custom arose in ancient times as well, as people from house to house would try to appease the local spirits. We have the advantage—especially since the time of the Protestant Reformation—to

⁶ Richardson, pp 99-100.

⁷ Ibid., 100.

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have the Scriptures available to us, so that we might see what the Bible has to say about participating in these ways of the nations. The Protestant settlers of America were right in not participating in All Saints' Day, nor in the superstitious ways of the Celts. Obviously, they did not have the knowledge we Messianics have today about the Hebraic Roots of our faith and in following more of God's Torah, but they were right in avoiding the obvious evil that Halloween is. But over time people compromised their faith—and all in the name of "fun."

There have been many evangelical Christians in the past few decades who have rightly taken a very hardline stance against Halloween. They offer tracts to people when they come to their house "trick or treating" on October 31, which tells them the origins of Halloween and why we should not be celebrating it. **These Christians are to be commended.**

But this does not include everyone. Many other Christians have compromised themselves and have tried to create "Halloween alternatives." Richardson describes, "Some Christians decide to 'overcome' the pagan and secular trappings of Halloween in a manner similar to the way the Church 'overcame' pagan festivals with All Saints Day. Many churches have 'Harvest Festivals,' where children may dress as farm animals or farmers."⁸ *These churches send a very mixed message.*

It is readily admitted by Christian apologist Hank Hannegraaf that Halloween "was a celebration of Druid priests from Britain and France and commemorated the beginning of Winter. It was a night on which the veil between the present world and the world beyond was pierced. The festivals were marked by animal sacrifices, offerings to the dead, and bonfires in recognition of departed souls. It was believed that on this night demons, witches, hobgoblins, and elves were released en masse to harass and to oppress the living. For self-preservation many Druids would dress up as witches, devils, and ghouls, and would even involve themselves in demonic activities and thus make themselves immune from attack."⁹ Yet in spite of these confessions, Hannegraaf does not frown on Christian celebration of Halloween.

Christians who believe in the final authority of the Bible—which tells us not to participate in or practice the ways of the heathen—should be ashamed of themselves for either participating in, or providing an alternative to Halloween. Providing an alternative to Halloween only adds to the problem, because it legitimizes Halloween and promotes the false concept that the

⁸ Bob and Gretchen Passantino (1999). *What about Halloween? Christian Research Institute*. Retrieved 18 September, 2003, from <<http://www.equip.org>>.

⁹ Hank Hannegraaf (1989). *Halloween: Oppression or Opportunity? Christian Research Institute*. Retrieved 18 September, 2003, from <<http://www.equip.org>>.

power of Messiah Yeshua cannot fully overcome Satan and his evil ways. If there is anything that Believers should be doing on October 31—we should be holding prayer meetings and vigils so that we might lift those who are deceived up to the Lord for repentance, salvation, or *both*. We should not be partying and “having a good time” on a date that has significance to pagans and Satanists.

What do Messianics need to learn from Halloween?

As our Heavenly Father restores His people in this hour, and the Messianic movement grows, we need to understand that all of us have picked up religious baggage. Some of this baggage is absolutely unacceptable and is of occultic origin. The Lord said that Israel was to be dispersed because of its idolatry and their failure to remain true to Him:

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will surely perish quickly from the land where you are going over the Jordan to possess it. You shall not live long on it, but will be utterly destroyed. The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD drives you. There you will serve gods, the work of man's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell” (Deuteronomy 4:26-28).

The problem that we have today in the restoration process is that there are too many who have failed, or are failing, to repent from past errors. The Church has made the error of “Christianizing” pagan festivities under the guise of evangelism. Many Christians think you can take a day like Halloween—which historically was both a Celtic and Roman day of worshipping demonic beings—and then actually turn Halloween into a time for evangelism so that the heathen might be “open to the gospel.” Just dress up as a Bible character when you go trick or treating. But there is nothing holy or edifying about witches, demons, ghosts, necromancy (communicating with the dead), or placing spells or curses on people. *It is glorification of Satan.*

It is one thing to take the month of October and become informed about the reality of what the enemy is doing, and know about the stark horrors of Hell and the Lake of Fire that await those who refuse to repent.¹⁰ As people of light, we must be equipped to confront the darkness! But it is another thing to focus one’s attention on scaring people for the sake of fun. Would Yeshua scare people for fun?

At the same time while we have had Christians “cleansing” things like Halloween, Judaism too has some problems. While you may not find Judaism taking pagan festivities and reinventing them, it is absolutely true that there

¹⁰ For a further discussion, consult the publication *Why Hell Must Be Eternal* by J.K. McKee.

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are Jewish practices today—albeit fringe Jewish practices—that are not Biblical and stem from the occult. Writings such as the Zohar, the quintessential Medieval writing on Jewish mysticism, and the phenomenon known as Kabbalah, are things that have developed in Judaism which must be dispensed with. While it is often claimed that the Jewish Kabbalah is nothing more than the “hidden level” of Scripture interpretation, references to neither Kabbalah nor the Zohar can be found *anywhere* in the Bible itself, as they date from a millennium or more after the broad New Testament era.¹¹

The Zohar is not an historical work on Jewish tradition like the Mishnah or Talmud, and dates from *too far beyond* the Biblical period to even be considered a tertiary external source able of consideration. Kabbalah has become for Jews who do not know Messiah Yeshua as a counterfeit Holy Spirit. It is likely that some of the practices of what is today known as Kabbalah originate from the kinds of things in which the witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28:7-25) or Simon the magician (Acts 8:9-25) participated. As you recall, Simon wanted to purchase the Holy Spirit with money, yet the Holy Spirit *is freely available* to all who know Yeshua as their Personal Savior. Sadly, as the Messianic movement grows today, some non-Jewish Believers are being sucked into the demonic deceptions of Kabbalah. Is it because, just like Simon the magician, they are trying to “buy” the Holy Spirit and something is missing in their hearts? The parallels between Kabbalah and the witchcraft that goes on at Halloween can be striking.

Fortunately, many have not been utterly deceived, and are striving to attain for an unadulterated and pure faith in the Lord God of Israel. While Israel was prophesied by Moses to abrogate the covenant and be scattered into the nations, it is likewise prophesied that they will seek the Lord and that He will remember the covenant. We will all one day fully return to the relationship that our Heavenly Father wanted with His people, as we strive to be as Scriptural as possible, and fully return to His purpose:

“But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find *Him* if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice. For the LORD your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them” (Deuteronomy 4:29-31).

Halloween: Pagan—Christmas and Easter: Non-Biblical

As many during the month of October prepare their Jack-O-Laterns and then dress up as witches, goblins, and ghouls, we have to consider what we

¹¹ Consult the article “The Effect of Mysticism and Gnosticism on the Messianic Movement” by J.K. McKee (appearing in *Confronting Critical Issues*).

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can learn as Messianics from Halloween. **Without question, Halloween is a pagan holiday and Believers in Messiah Yeshua have absolutely no business participating in it.** There is nothing edifying whatsoever about Halloween and there are no edifying Biblical parallels with it. There is no way that Halloween can be taken and then “reinterpreted” and given a Biblical meaning. Witchcraft is witchcraft. Demons are demons. Sin is sin.

There is even no way to Biblically justify Halloween as an “extra-Biblical” holiday. Halloween is not like national holidays such as the Fourth of July, Guy Fawkes Night, or *Yom HaAtzmaut* (Israeli Independence Day)—holidays that are customarily celebrated with fireworks, military parades, and air shows. Halloween is a holiday that glorifies demons, death, and damnation. Halloween is *not* uplifting to born again Believers.

Now, with this said, can we conclude with 100% accuracy that Christmas and Easter are pagan holidays, as many of today’s Messianics ardently and forcefully state? Unlike Halloween, Christmas and Easter, in the religious context, are supposed to commemorate the birth and resurrection of Yeshua—events that are in the Bible. We are not here to defend what happened in the past when Christians of the Second, Third, and Fourth Centuries took the holidays of the heathen around them and then reinterpreted them with Biblical meanings. Without a doubt, much of this occurred with anti-Semitism in mind and a defiance to not celebrate the appointed times of Leviticus 23. But at the same time, we must also know that there were people who did this in ignorance, thinking that they were doing God a service, and they wanted to reach out to the heathen and evangelize them. Only God Himself knows their hearts for certain, and it is not our place to judge their salvation.

Today, on the other hand, is something different. Unlike centuries ago, we have readily available access to tools and information that neither the early Catholics, who made the changes, nor the Protestant Reformers, who tried to return to the Scriptures, had. The Scriptures are being opened up to us like never before. Those of us who are true to God’s Word have rightly protested against the pagan holiday of Halloween. There is nothing Biblical about it. **Conservative Christians readily admit this.**

However, place yourself in the position of the same Christian. This person can see nothing wrong with Christmas or Easter. Why? Because in this individual’s mind, he or she is celebrating the birth and the resurrection of the Lord Yeshua. When people say that these are pagan holidays, it is assumed that you are speaking against the Biblical accounts of Luke 2 and the empty tomb, and not the traditions commonly associated with them.

If today’s Messianic Believers want to be more effective in getting people to reconsider Christmas and Easter—we have got to learn to say that these are **non-Biblical holidays**, so we do not give the wrong impression to people.

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We have to put ourselves in their position and endeavor to be constructive. We have to encourage them to celebrate Biblical holidays like Passover, Unleavened Bread, or Tabernacles in a way that brings glory and honor to the Lord.

To the skeptical reader who still thinks that Halloween is "OK" because it is just for "fun," consider the Apostle Paul's words in Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things." **Does Halloween fit this criteria?** Does focusing on witchcraft and the occult bring honor and glory to our Heavenly Father?

Be aware that you will have to give an account before your Creator as to how you answer these questions. Answer consistent with Scripture, and not with what you want to do.