Should Christians Celebrate Christmas?

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Isaiah 9:6 KJV

“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”
1 John 15:12,13 NKJV

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.”
Revelation 22:12 NKJV

“You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word.”
Psalm 119:114 NKJV
Most Christians around the globe observe December 25 as a holiday to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ. (Of course, even many non-Christians now celebrate this festival with gift giving and social gatherings.) Yet the exact date of Jesus’ birth is unknown, and as the origins of Christmas understood by most people are being called into question, some are beginning to wonder if Christians should participate in the many customs surrounding this most popular holiday in the Western world?

First, it is clear that the Bible does not contain a command to keep Christmas as a sacred day, such as with the Sabbath in the Ten Commandments. There is no Scripture saying, “Thou shalt keep the 25th of December holy.” While it might be a public holiday, it is not a biblical holy day.

What about the origins of Christmas? Concerns about pagan elements in this holiday are nothing new. Controversies over Christmas go back hundreds of years. The Puritans in England actually led the English Parliament to ban Christmas for a period of time as a “popish festival with no biblical justification” and a time of wasteful and immoral behavior. Even in Colonial America there was a time (1659) when Christmas was outlawed. More recently, secular elements of society have faced off with religious groups over nativity scenes and crosses on public property.

The Bible certainly highlights the birth of Christ (Luke 3:7). It not only describes the glorious announcement of the Messiah’s birth (v. 13) but also tells of shepherds coming to worship the newborn child (v. 16). These humble worshippers were not quiet about what they saw either (v. 17). Furthermore, there is a record of wise men from the east bringing gifts to Jesus—though this likely occurred when Jesus was a toddler (Matthew 2:11). If people recognized the birth of Christ through worship and bringing gifts, perhaps there is something we can learn from their examples.

Aside from its pagan elements, most people understand that Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus. But in practice, people spend more time in December cruising shopping malls than studying the life of the Savior. Frosty the Snowman and Rudolf the Red-nosed Reindeer compete with wise men and shepherds for our attention. During all the bustle between “Black Friday” and Christmas Eve, materialism tends to overshadow the simple stable.

But what if Christians spent more time witnessing for Christ at Christmas or purchasing and sharing Christians resources to point people to Jesus? What would happen if more families
dedicated time and money to serve the poor and advance the gospel through short-term mission service? How would our churches be strengthened if, during this holiday time, believers explored the prophecies of Christ’s first advent as well as His second advent? Perhaps our concerns about Christmas should have less to do with its pagan origins and more with its current practice.

Many people might deny they “worship” this day as holy, but what is worship? Worship isn’t measured by simply attending a Christmas concert or midnight mass. It describes how we live our lives and spend our means. As Paul said, “He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord” (Romans 14:6), and, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

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An Amazing Fact:

In 1876 a handful of mobsters botched a morbid plan to kidnap the body of Abraham Lincoln and hold it ransom. The hapless grave robbers were arrested two days later. Fearing another attempt, the government secretly hid the body of the sixteenth president in an unmarked grave for 25 years. Then in 1901, under the urging of Robert Lincoln, the president’s only surviving child, Lincoln's body was dug up and placed inside a steel cage, lowered into a 10-foot deep vault, and buried under tons of concrete. He’s still there today, in his tomb, on the grounds of Oak Ridge Cemetery. So do the dead care when their remains are disturbed? There’s no evidence that Abraham Lincoln ever complained about all the odd grave shuffling.

ONE of the most important subjects in life is to understand what happens when it’s over. Unfortunately, there is a lot of confusion about death, inside and outside the church, which makes it very difficult for the average person to understand such a vital subject. Perhaps the greatest understatement ever would be to say that death is unpleasant. In our culture, when people die, we quickly cover...
them up and whisk them away. We don’t want to think about death, especially when it comes to those we love and ourselves. But the topic must be faced, not only for the practical reason that we’re all touched by it eventually, but because understanding the truth about death is actually good news if you have everlasting life.

It’s not hard to see why people are so confused about what happens when we die. Even the many and varied tombstones at graveyards reveal this state of confusion. For example, one tombstone might read, “Father is sleeping now in the arms of Jesus, waiting for the resurrection trumpet.” But a few tombstones over, one reads, “Mother is now singing on golden streets with the angels.”

So which is it? Are the dead sleeping, waiting for the resurrection, or are they alive somewhere? If so, what are they doing? There is a debate about the afterlife, even among good and honest Christians. This brief study on death will help you see what the most important document in human history — the Holy Bible — really says about the subject.

**Life and the Human Soul**

Before we can understand what happens at death, we need to understand the basics of how life happened. The Bible tells us that when God made Adam in the garden of Eden, the man became a living soul. “The LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7).

Notice it doesn’t say that God “gave man a soul,” but rather, “man became a living soul.” The dust from the ground (the body), combined with the vital breath of life from God, produced a soul.

When someone dies, it is creation in reverse. “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). The spirit that returns to God at death is the energizing breath of life given by God in Genesis 2:7.

“All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils” (Job 27:3). Here Job is talking about “the breath of life” mentioned in Genesis 2:7. In fact, it’s the very same Hebrew word in both passages. At death, the body returns to dust, the breath of life returns to God, and the human soul ceases to exist.

**An Eternal Reward—the Afterlife**

Nobody is suffering in hellfire today, and the vast majority of people who have died are not in heaven. This might shock you, but it’s exactly what the Bible teaches.

“Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Revelation...
22:12). Everyone gets his or her reward when Jesus returns. It's important to understand this because Jesus hasn't returned, has He? Judgment Day is still in the future.

“So man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more” (Job 14:12 NKJV). The dead do “not rise” from the grave until the heavens are no more. When will the heavens be no more? “The day of the Lord will come … in which the heavens will pass away” (2 Peter 3:10 NKJV). The heavens pass away on the day of the Lord, when Jesus returns to the earth. Until then, the dead do “not rise” from the grave.

But aren't there people in heaven now?

Yes. A few. They are the exceptions. The Gospels tell the story of the transfiguration, when Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus on the mountaintop. They were real and in the flesh. Jesus spoke with them; the apostles saw them. They had come from heaven to offer encouragement to Jesus. But how did they get to heaven?

In 2 Kings 2:11, the Bible tells us that Elijah was caught up to heaven in a fiery chariot. Elijah went to heaven, even though he didn't die. Moses died first, but the Lord raised him up and took him to heaven (Jude 9).

In Matthew 27, during the time when Christ died on the cross, there was a strong earthquake, and many of the graves around Jerusalem opened up. Many of the saints who had died—patriarchs and prophets who lived prior to the time of Christ—were raised in a special resurrection. It doesn't name names, so we don't know who they were. But the Bible says they came out of the graves after His resurrection and went into the holy city where they appeared to many.1 At the ascension of Christ, they ascended with Him.2 These resurrected humans were what the Bible calls the first fruits of Jesus' successful mission.

Empty Cemeteries

When you go to the cemetery, does it ever make you feel creepy? Especially around sundown, are you afraid that some ghost is going to lunge out from the grave and grab your ankle? We've been trained in our culture to think that the dead aren't
really dead. But the Bible teaches the dead don't come back. They can't communicate. They certainly don't haunt cemeteries!

Have you ever gone to bed and woken up, thinking you had only slept a short while, then you peek at the clock to discover it was hours longer than you thought? You have no awareness of time in sleep. That's how the Bible describes the sleep of death. For the saved and the lost, it's the same.

“Consider and hear me, O Lord my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death” (Psalms 13:3). Death is called “sleep” over and over again in the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments. Jesus clearly referred to death as “sleep” when speaking about Lazarus. “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep” (John 11:11). The apostles took Jesus literally, so Jesus clarified for them that Lazarus was, indeed, dead.

It took Jesus four days to get to Lazarus' tomb. Lazarus' body was decomposing, turning back into dust. Martha was even afraid of the stench of an open tomb. They reluctantly rolled away the stone, and Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!” That's what Lazarus did.

I believe Jesus allowed Lazarus to be in the grave for four days so there would be no doubt that Lazarus was very dead. Some skeptics suggest that other resurrections in the Bible were probably due to coma, arguing the people weren't really dead yet. But Lazarus had been embalmed and wrapped up. If he had been alive, he would surely have suffocated to death! The stench of his decomposing body wafted out of the open tomb and gagged them. But Lazarus came out alive at Jesus' command.

If that happened today, FoxNews and CNN would have called Lazarus for an interview. What do you think would have been their first questions?

What happened? What did you see? What did you do? Who'd you meet? What was it like to be dead?

Despite the fact that this is one of the most public miracles of Jesus, and all the

Continued on page 32.
Gospel writers knew about it, we find nothing regarding Lazarus commenting on his experience.

Lazarus has the answer to the biggest question in history! But there’s no comment. Why? Jesus tells us Lazarus was asleep. Lazarus had a fever, he was sick, he lost consciousness, and eventually he died. He didn’t know anything until, all of a sudden, he woke up feeling great, wrapped up in something like perfumed first-aid bandages. He didn’t know what was going on. He was hearing Jesus call him. That’s all he knew. He stumbled to his feet and shuffled to the shiny entrance. To him it was like waking up from a nap.

Some believe that while the body might perish, the soul remains conscious. But the Bible tells us in Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6, “For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their
hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.”

**Talking to the Dead**

Paul, to the Thessalonians, writes about death, “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep” (4:13). Paul wants you to understand the truth about death because not understanding this opens you up to deception in the last days.

In fact, there are several prominent television programs that feature folks who allegedly talk to or “channel” the dead. Some of them reveal things only loved ones would know. According to the Bible, it’s not dead people. It is either trickery or Satan’s minions. They know a lot about us, even our secrets. They can use these bits of knowledge to trick you into thinking you’re talking to your dead loved one.

I miss my brother Falcon and would love to talk to him. But I can’t. He’s dead. If anyone appears to me with red hair and freckles claiming to be my brother, as much as I miss him, I know from the Bible it’s not my brother. Either my mind is playing tricks on me or it’s the devil.

There are hundreds of scriptures on the subject of death, so how can the church be so confused on this topic? How has the devil been able to bamboozle Christians? Why has he bothered to put so much energy into deceiving the church on this subject? Because he’s going to use it to his advantage before Jesus comes again! “In the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (1 Timothy 4:1).

**Why the Truth About Death Is So Important**

Of course, you’ve heard reports of near-death experiences, of people on the operating table who floated around the room. Yet researchers have shown that when people temporarily stop breathing, they will quickly build up too much carbon
Some have interpreted these events as visions, but it’s dangerous to base your theology on an operating table dream or hallucination.

“He said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets” (1 Kings 22:22). There are going to be in the last days lying spirits in the mouths of false prophets. Revelation 16 says these unclean spirits go forth to the kings of the earth, working miracles to deceive. That will have a trickle-down effect and deceive people into thinking they should embrace a certain theology based on the testimony of demons posing to be the spirits of the dead.

“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders” (Matthew 24:24). The spiritualism infecting the church today is going to be used by the devil in the last days to deceive, similar to how he deceived Saul. Israel’s troubled king, in the desperation of his last days, went to see a witch. He saw a devilish apparition, not the dead prophet Samuel, that greatly discouraged him, and he committed suicide the next day.

How can we avoid being deceived in the last days? “They received the word of God with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). The Word of God is our only sure foundation. “If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). It doesn’t matter if it looks and sounds just like your departed grandma or Mary the mother of Jesus, and it knows all the intimate secrets only they would know. If someone dead appears to you, it’s of the devil or your brain is not functioning properly.

The Fate of the Righteous

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of
God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Jesus made it very clear that this resurrection is in the last days . . .

“This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40 NKJV, my emphasis). The words of Jesus could not be clearer! How many are raised when they die? None. The saved are raised up at the “last day.”

One more: “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming” (1 Corinthians 15:22, 23 NKJV). The dead believers are raised at Jesus’ coming!

The Bible promises that one day, “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain” (Revelation 21:4). Unfortunately, death is a reality in our world today—and it does and should cause us sorrow. But, most important, you don’t need to be afraid of death. Jesus promises, “He who has the Son has life” (1 John 5:12 NKJV).

That life begins now because Christians don’t die permanently! You might experience a momentary dreamless sleep, but Jesus will awaken you on that great day. You don’t need to be afraid of death if you have Jesus. So I invite you today to accept the fullness of His Word and take His grace into your life.

For more information on this subject, visit www.truthaboutdeath.com.

1. Matthew 27:51,52
2. Ephesians 4:8
October 21, 2012

From Pastor Doug

Reaching the Last Frontier with the Final Message

An Amazing Fact: During his reign, Emperor Qin Shi Huang was obsessed with eternal life, dispatching entire armies to search for an “elixir of life” that would allow him to live forever. Preoccupied with eternity, Huang began working on his burial city when he was only 13 years old. He filled vast underground caverns around his tomb with more than 8,000 full-size Terracotta soldiers, horses, and court officials to guard his gravesite. Construction of this massive mausoleum, which is still only partially excavated, is believed to have taken 700,000 workers 38 years to complete! Tragically, Huang died when he was just 49 years of age—likely due to mercury poisoning from swallowing a bizarre metallic concoction his doctors said would help him live longer.

Dear friends,

The longing for eternal life is very real in China!

And it’s burning in the hearts of people like “Mei Ling,” who found our Bible studies and prophecy videos on our Amazing Facts Chinese Internet site. (To help protect her, I won’t use her real name.)

She emailed us with questions about the Bible, the end times, and the Sabbath. She wrote, “I know the Sabbath was changed in history … and also that those who keep the Sabbath in the last days will suffer persecution. Isn’t that right?”

We said, “Yes.” She said, “I am not afraid of persecution; I just pray that I will be faithful. I know that death of body doesn’t matter.” We agreed and told her, “God promises eternal life to those who obey His truth. We must follow God and His Word.”

She wrote back, “Your words have made me more determined to follow God’s teaching!”

Wow! I’m always amazed at the dedication of believers in China, dear souls who are willing to endure all kinds of persecution for the sake of Christ. I’m so glad you and I can be a part of helping “Mei Ling” grow in her walk with God. This is happening all over China today because of your generous support of Amazing Facts.

The Last Frontier

Truly, China is the last great frontier of mission work in our world … a country in which more
than 60 percent of its 1.3 billion people are atheists!

Persecution of Christians in China is still very real. One member of our team was beaten by police and had his boxes of Amazing Facts books confiscated. Of course, we are also restricted from open evangelism through television and radio. Yet despite a repressive government, as the apostle Paul said, “The word of God is not bound” (2 Timothy 2:9).

And I firmly believe there will come a time soon when the doors will open up—and the Chinese government will allow Christian TV, radio, and public evangelism. When those doors do open, I want us to be ready!

Many believers in China are right now desperately looking for tools and resources to help them grow in the faith. Although they cannot get Bible teaching on the radio or on TV, they can watch and listen to our programs on the Internet and through DVDs and books!

That means we have a great open door for us to reach tens of millions of people with the truth of God’s Word about Jesus and the end times.

If present trends continue, our Amazing Facts website at qimiaozhenxiang.com will receive one million visits from hungry hearts in China this year. They are already downloading everything they can get their hands on—Bible studies, videos, and the Final Events documentary.

**Faithful Souls Standing for Truth**

And make no mistake: The people we are hearing from are very serious about their faith—they have to be! For these brave believers, taking a stand for their faith can literally be a matter of life and death.

After our first contact with “Mei Ling,” she called us to say, “I can’t find a church in my area that keeps the Sabbath. I’m very sad and don’t know what I should do.”

We prayed with her and told her about more resources online, such as the Final Events video, which would give her a good understanding of the future. A few days later, she said, “I didn’t go to church on Sunday. My house has a hair salon. Can we close the doors on Sabbath and study together at my home?”

We replied, “Of course you can close shop on the Sabbath—read your Bibles, pray, and watch videos on our website! God loves you and will bless you.” The next Sabbath, this faithful dear lady and a small group of believers gathered in that little salon to fellowship, study, and worship! What an amazing testimony of courage and faith in action!

**Missionaries Together**

This wonderful story reveals the real impact that your support of Amazing Facts is having on so many lives of people who need us. Because of your help, we are able to have a small team be there for them on the ground and also through video resources, the Internet, printed material, and, of course, in many other countries on television and radio.

None of this would be possible without you.
But today, the spiritual need in China is enormous and dire. Suicide has rapidly risen there to become one of the leading causes of death among the despairing young people of China. Why? Because there is no hope in atheism! No hope of eternal life. No hope for a better or meaningful life here on earth—without Christ!

THAT is why so many are seeking something better today. They know there MUST be a better life, a better hope, and even eternal life!

What they don’t know is that this abundant, eternal life is only offered through Jesus! In short, the need is great … and it is growing … and Amazing Facts needs your help to be able to respond to this need and meet it.

The government of China is very restrictive. They have done everything possible to keep their doors closed to the gospel. But doors have a way of opening … and I believe that the door to the gospel in China is about to open in a manner we have not seen in our lifetimes. It is only a matter of time!

And when that day comes, we must be ready to charge through those doors—with a trainload of materials and programs. So we are already translating our online programming into Mandarin, but we need to do so much more. We need to translate more of our television programs and books and increase our efforts to produce more Mandarin resources on topics such as marriage, suicide, and smoking.

So your financial support today will help us get these urgently needed tools for salvation and spiritual growth into the hands of millions of people in China—people just like “Mei Ling”—who are desperately looking for help and the truth and the way to eternal life. You can help us prepare for a great harvest … perhaps the greatest we have seen in the history of Amazing Facts.

The ancient Chinese quest for eternal life is still strong today … and with your help, Amazing Facts will be there with the answers that offer the truth to the seeking and the hurting. Thank you so much for being part of this wonderful work. We really need to hear from you this month.

Pastor Doug Batchelor

Click here now to donate!

Visit www.amazingfacts.org for free Bible study resources!
The Gentle Power of Rain

An Amazing Fact: A little cumulus cloud weighs about the same as 100 elephants, and a thunderstorm cloud can weigh as much as 200,000 elephants!

The Gentle Power of Rain
Did you know that within one second, approximately 16 million tons of water evaporate? And contrary to popular belief, as raindrops fall, they are not in the shape of a “teardrop.” As the size of the raindrop increases, they change from a spherical shape to a flat-bottomed disk shape, similar to a hamburger bun. Eventually, they can actually take the shape of a parachute before they split apart into two smaller droplets.

In awe of the Creator’s marvelous physical laws of nature, Job observes that He “binds up the water in His thick clouds, Yet the clouds are not broken under it” (Job 26:8). Job knew that if this amount of water were carried in a sack common in his day, it would be ripped apart.

Imagine the effect if rain fell as if from a giant tub in the heavens. Because of their size and the way droplets are formed, however, raindrops can only reach a maximum of 22 miles per hour before they split into lighter drops. So when the rain falls, instead of destroying vegetation, it is evenly distributed in small droplets to refresh the grass, plants, and trees.

In the beautiful song of Moses, recorded in Deuteronomy 32, he illustrates the tenderness with which God instructs and teaches His precious people. “Let my teaching drop as the rain, My speech distill as the dew, As raindrops on the tender herb, And as showers on the grass” (v. 2). God knows that we are as tender grass (Isaiah 40:7). In His merciful dealings with us, He doesn’t send all His teaching to us at once. We would be overwhelmed! He knows just the right amount of instruction we can handle. Let’s just be sure that we are there to receive it every morning.

Key Bible Text: “The Lord God has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned” (Isaiah 50:4).
Click here to support the ministry of Amazing Facts and make more online Bible resources possible!

Visit www.amazingfacts.org for free Bible study resources!