

# THE FACTS ON HALLOWEEN

JOHN ANKERBERG  
JOHN WELDON &  
DILLON BURROUGHS



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

Unless otherwise noted, all verses are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Verses marked KJV are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

All emphasis (italics) in Scripture quotations has been added by the authors.

Cover by Dugan Design Group, Bloomington, Minnesota

Cover photos © iStockphoto

## THE FACTS ON HALLOWEEN

### Updated edition

Copyright © 1996/2008 by The John Ankerberg Theological Research Institute

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ankerberg, John, 1945-

The facts on Halloween / John Ankerberg, John Weldon ; updates by Dillon Burroughs.

p. cm.—(The facts on)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7369-2219-7 (pbk.)

ISBN-10: 0-7369-2219-9 (pbk.)

1. Halloween. 2. Amusements—Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Christianity and culture. I. Weldon, John. II. Title.

GT4965.A45 2006

394.2646—dc22

2008001018

**All rights reserved.** No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

08 09 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 / VP-SK / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# Contents

Trick or Treat? . . . . .	5
---------------------------	---

## Section One

### *Halloween—Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*

1. What is the origin of Halloween? . . . . .	9
2. Are the specific customs of Halloween related to pagan beliefs? . . . . .	14
3. How does Halloween relate historically to the Roman Catholic Church, the dead, and purgatory? . . . . .	19
4. Is Halloween related to modern pagan practices? . . . . .	23

## Section Two

### *A Christian and Biblical Analysis of Halloween*

5. Can Halloween be an entirely innocent practice? . . . . .	33
--------------------------------------------------------------	----

## Section Three

### *Halloween, Haunted Houses, Poltergeists, and Witchcraft*

6. What is the historic connection between Halloween and ghosts? . . . . .	49
7. How are ghosts, haunted houses, and Halloween related? . . . . .	50
8. What are the theories advanced to explain ghosts? . . . . .	52
9. Is the biblical view of ghosts credible in light of the facts surrounding hauntings and poltergeists? . . . . .	55
10. Do ghost phenomena require a supernatural explanation? And how are ghosts connected to demons? . . . . .	56

11. Who do these ghosts claim to be? What are the consequences of believing in their common interpretation? . . . . .	64
12. Does Halloween support witchcraft? Is witchcraft dangerous? Are ghosts related to witchcraft? . . . . .	72
Closing Remarks from the Authors . . . . .	81
Appendix: A Brief Timeline of Halloween. . . . .	83
Notes . . . . .	85

# Halloween—Ancient, Medieval, and Modern

# 1

## What is the origin of Halloween?

In AD 835, Pope Gregory IV designated November 1 as All Saints' Day, or All Hallows' Day (the term *hallow* refers to saints). The night before November 1, October 31, was known as All Hallows' Evening. How did we get the term *Halloween*? Look at the name "All Hallows' Evening." If we drop the word "all," the "s" on Hallows', and the "v" and "ing" on evening, the result spells *Halloween*.

Long before the church gave this name to the evening before All Saints' Day (a celebration in remembrance of saints and martyred saints), it had been celebrated in various ways in many places around the world. The book *Every Day's a Holiday* accurately observes that Halloween "probably combines more folk customs the world around than will ever be sorted out, catalogued and traced to their sources."<sup>1</sup>

### The Druids

It is generally agreed by historians that Halloween came to take the place of a special day celebrated by the ancient Druids. The Druids were the educated or priestly class of the Celtic religion.<sup>2</sup> The Celts themselves were the first Aryan people who came from Asia to settle in Europe. In fact, we can see certain similarities between Druidism and the religion of India:

Celtic religion, presided over by the Druids (the priestly order) presents beliefs in various nature deities and certain ceremonies and practices that are similar to those in Indian religion. The insular Celts and the people of India also shared certain similarities of language and culture, thus indicating a common heritage.<sup>3</sup>

For example, the Indian pagan gods Siva Pasupati (“lord of the animals”) and Savitr (“god of the sun”) are similar to the Celtic gods Cernunnos, a horned god who appears in the yoga position, and the god Lug, or Lugus (perhaps originally a sun god). “As in Hinduism, the Druids also believed in reincarnation, specifically in the transmigration of the soul, which teaches that people may be reborn as animals.”<sup>4</sup>

The Celtic peoples lived in northern France, throughout the United Kingdom, and in Ireland. They engaged in occult arts, worshiped nature, and gave nature supernatural, animistic qualities. Certain trees or plants, such as oak trees and mistletoe, were given great spiritual significance. (According to Celtic authority Lewis Spence, the original meaning of the term *Druid* implies a priest of the oak cult.) Interestingly, it has been claimed that 90 percent of the world’s sometimes mysterious “crop circles” lie within the geographical proximity of the ancient and possibly Druidic ruins of Stonehenge. At least some of these phenomena may be considered supernatural.

### What is the *occult*?

Religious writers often use the word *occult*, but what does it mean? According to the *Oxford American Dictionary*, *occult* can be defined as

1. secret, hidden except from those with more than

ordinary knowledge. 2. involving the supernatural, occult powers. The occult [involves] the world of the supernatural, mystical or magical.

In everyday usage, *occult* usually is used to refer to spiritual practices that focus on secret knowledge gained through personal experience or attempts to communicate with spirits. The term is used in reference to everything from ancient earth religions to modern conversations about ghosts and hauntings.<sup>5</sup>

The Celts worshiped the sun god Belenus, especially on *Beltane*, May 1, and they worshiped another god, apparently the lord of death, or the lord of the dead, on *Samhain* (pronounced “SOW-wen” by Wiccans), October 31. *Beltane* (“Fire of Bel”) was the time of the summer festival, while *Samhain* was the time of the winter festival. Human sacrifice was offered during both occasions. According to Julius Caesar in his *Commentaries* and other sources,<sup>6</sup> the Celts believed they were descended from the god Dis, a tradition handed down from the Druids. Dis was the Roman name for the god of the dead.

Of the 400 names of Celtic gods known, Belenus is mentioned most often. *Samhain* as the specific name of the lord of death is uncertain, but it is possible that the lord of death was the chief Druid deity. We’ll follow the common practice of other authors on this issue and refer to this deity by the name *Samhain*.

### Druidic festivals

The Celts and their Druid priests began their New Year on November 1, which marked the beginning of winter. They apparently believed that on October 31, the night before their New Year and the last day of the old year, *Samhain* gathered the souls of the evil dead

who had been condemned to enter the bodies of animals. He then decided what animal form they would take for the next year. (The souls of the good dead were reincarnated as humans.) The Druids also believed that the punishment of the evil dead could be lightened by sacrifices, prayers, and gifts to Samhain.

Druid worshipers attempted to satisfy and please this deity because of his power over the souls of the dead, whether these souls were good or evil. For those who had died during the preceding 12 months, Samhain allowed their spirits to return to earth to their former places of habitation for a few hours to associate once again with their families.<sup>7</sup>

As a result of this belief, the Celts taught that on their New Year's Eve (our Halloween) ghosts, evil spirits, and witches roamed the earth. In order to honor the sun god (Belenus) and to frighten away evil spirits who allegedly feared fire, large bonfires were lit on hilltops. In Lewis Spence's *The History and Origins of Druidism* we read,

The outstanding feature of *Samhain* was the burning of a great fire....*Samhain* was also a festival of the dead, whose spirits at this season were thought of as scouring the countryside, causing dread to the folk at large. To expel them from the fields and the precincts of villages, lighted brands from the bonfire were carried around the district...Divinations for the fate of the individual throughout the new year were engaged in.<sup>8</sup>

For several days before New Year's Eve (October 31), young boys would travel the neighborhood begging for material to build these massive bonfires. The fires were believed to not only banish evil spirits but rejuvenate the sun. Until fairly recent times, the hilltop Halloween

fires of the Scots were called *Samhnagan*, indicating the lingering influence of the ancient Celtic festival.<sup>9</sup>

On this night, evil or frustrated ghosts were also believed to play tricks on humans and cause supernatural manifestations, just like poltergeists today. As part of the celebration, people dressed in grotesque masks and danced around the great bonfires, often pretending they were being pursued by evil spirits. In addition, food was put out to make the ghosts or souls of the good dead Samhain had released feel welcomed and at home. Because Samhain marked the beginning of a new year, an interest in divination (the magic art of interpreting the unknown by interpreting random patterns or symbols) and fortune-telling became an important part of this holiday.

For example, the Druids believed that the particular shape of various fruits and vegetables could help predict, or divine, the future. Victims of human sacrifice were used for the same purpose. When the Romans conquered Britain, some of their customs were added to the traditions of the Druids, while others, such as human sacrifice, were banned.

The Samhain celebration was not unique to the Druids. Many festivals worldwide celebrate a time when the dead return to mingle with the living. The Hindus call it a night of Holi. The Iroquois Native Americans celebrate a feast of the dead every 12 years, when all those who have died during the preceding 12 years are honored with prayers. A national holiday in Mexico, the Day of the Dead, begins on November 2 and lasts several days. In this gruesome festival, death becomes a kind of neighborly figure, appearing on candy, jewelry, toys, bread, cakes, and so on. This is the time when the souls of the dead return and when the living

are to honor them. For example, doors are decorated with flowers to welcome the *angelitos*, the souls of dead children.

For the most part, then, our modern Halloween appears to trace its initial origin to the practices of the ancient Druids at their winter festival on October 31.

## 2

### Are the specific customs of Halloween related to pagan beliefs?

Since Halloween itself originated in paganism, it is not surprising that its customs are related to pagan belief. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*,

In ancient Britain and Ireland, the Celtic Festival of Samhain was observed on October 31, at the end of summer.... The souls of the dead were supposed to revisit their homes on this day and the autumnal festival acquired sinister significance, with ghosts, witches, goblins, black cats, fairies and demons of all kinds said to be roaming about. It was the time to placate the supernatural powers controlling the processes of nature. In addition, Halloween was thought to be the most favorable time for divinations concerning marriage, luck, health, and death. It was the only day on which the help of the devil was invoked for such purposes.<sup>10</sup>

Halloween symbols, customs, and practices undoubtedly have had a variety of influences upon Western culture throughout history. However, in early American history, Halloween was not celebrated due to America's strong Christian heritage. It was not widely observed until the twentieth century. Initially, it was practiced