

Valentine's Day

Do you think that Messianic Believers should participate in Valentine's Day?

The following comes from the book *Holidays & Holy Days* by Susan E. Richardson about the origins of Valentine's Day:

"Why a day dedicated to two or more Christian martyrs named Valentine came to be associated with lovers is a mystery, although there are several theories.

"Early lists of church martyrs show at least three men named Valentine. All have their feast day on February fourteenth. The first man was simply listed in a group of martyred believers. Of the other two, one was a priest and the other was the bishop of Interamma. Emperor Claudius II reportedly had both men beaten and beheaded in A.D. 269. These pieces of information gradually blended into a single figure.

"You can find a number of legends about Valentine. One tells that while imprisoned, he cured the jailer's daughter of blindness. Another says that he fell in love with the jailer's daughter and sent her a letter signed 'from your Valentine,' thereby sending the first Valentine greeting.

"Another story relating to his eventual patronage of lovers takes place during the reign of Emperor Claudius II. The Emperor wanted to recruit men as soldiers, but they didn't want to leave their wives and sweethearts. Furious, the Emperor forbade marriages and canceled all engagements. Valentine, however, was sympathetic to young lovers and married several couples in secret. When the Emperor discovered what Valentine had done, he had him thrown in prison.

"More than likely, Valentine's Day is a Christianized form of the ancient Roman feast of Lupercalia. During the celebration, young men drew young women's names from a box. The young men then became the woman's partner for the festival.

"Early Christian clergy objected to the pagan celebration and substituted the names of saints. During the following year the young men then attempted to emulate the saint he had drawn. People celebrated Lupercalia one day after Valentine's Day and the two merged over the years.

"Still another possible explanation comes from the Middle Ages in Europe. People believed the birds began to mate on February fourteenth. Chaucer preserved evidence of this belief in his *Parliament of Foules*. He states, 'For this was Seynt Valentyne's day. When every foul cometh ther to choose his mate.'

"Credit for sending the first valentine goes to Charles, Duc d'Orleans. In 1415, while imprisoned in the Tower of London, he sent his wife valentine poems. Some point to this as the earliest evidence for the rhymed valentines popular throughout history. Others held that the Duke's letter was a one-time incident, not a tradition.

"A 1477 English Valentine's Day letter is the oldest certain valentine in existence. This letter shows that people sent valentines not long after the poems sent by the Duc d'Orleans. It would seem to support the idea that his letter was representative of this custom instead of a unique occurrence. Margery Brews wrote to her finance John Paston and addressed him as 'Right reverent and worshipful and my right well-beloved valentine.' Later references to Valentine's Day can be found in Shakespeare, Drayton, and Pepys.

"By the seventeenth century, the custom of sending valentine cards developed. People made their cards by hand, so the style depended entirely on the maker. The first commercial valentines came out around 1800. Cards varied from the elaborate, with lace and flowers, to the 'penny-dreadfuls' or inexpensive put-down cards. The name came from the fact that they cost only a penny, and the designs were dreadful.

"In the United States, exchanging valentine cards probably reached an all-time high during the Civil War. An 1863 periodical said of Valentine's Day 'with the exception of Christmas, there is no festival throughout the year which is invested with half the interest belonging to this cherished anniversary.'

"In the first third of the twentieth century, the custom of sending valentines began to be observed by and for children. Remember 'mailing' valentines for your classmates during your school days? The valentine 'mailbox' where children could 'mail' cards for their classmates became a common feature during this time.

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"Now you can buy valentines for every associate, from friends and family on down to business and casual acquaintances. From being a festival mainly for lovers, Valentine's Day has become a time to express appreciation and friendship on all levels.

"*Cupid*. One of the most enduring symbols of Valentine's Day is Cupid. In Roman mythology, he was the god of love, taken from his Greek counterpart, Eros. According to most myths, Cupid was the son of Venus, Aphrodite in Greek, the goddess of love and beauty. In earlier stories writers described him simply as a slender youth.

"The latter better-known stories showed Cupid as a naked, winged boy carrying a bow and arrows. Cupid was often mischievous and frequently caused problems with his arrows. When he shot either humans or gods in the heart with the arrows, they fell in love.

"During Hellenistic times, Eros (Cupid) went from being shown as one god to being multiplied into many 'cupids' on frescos or ceramics. This representation has passed down to us today, though the cupid has also been Christianized as a baby angel.

"*Heart*. In many traditions, people once considered the heart to be the seat of emotions and affections. During the Middle Ages, people romanticized this idea and the stylized heart shape was born.

"So how did we get the standardized heart shape? No one seems to be certain, though various possibilities have been raised. One source suggested that the heart is a stylized human buttock, or perhaps suggests a female torso. Another possibility is that it comes from the imprint of a kiss on paper. Regardless, the heart is now a universal symbol of love and affection."¹

For many people today, Valentine's Day is a day where one has to "perform," and show love and affection to others, and much of this love and affection is fake and put on. The emphasis on "love" is forced, and it is almost as if we are to love people this day, but every other day we can treat people with anything but love. True love for one's close family and friends is demonstrated in action on a daily basis, through service, consistency, always being there when they treat you unfairly, and as Yeshua tells us, the ability for us to lay down our lives for one another (John 15:13; 1 John 3:16). True love is demonstrated to others over long periods of time that never wavers, as opposed to just one day out of the year.

Of course, Valentine's Day has become commercialized, and is a time where many immoral acts (fornication and adultery) are commonplace.

If as Messianic Believers we are feeling out of place on Valentine's Day, we should read through 1 Corinthians 13, commonly considered the "love" chapter in the Bible. The Greek word used by Paul is *agapē*, which is a self-sacrificing Divine love that can only be produced through the Holy Spirit:

"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if *there are tongues*, they will cease; if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13, NASU).

Should Messianic Believers celebrate Valentine's Day? Valentine's Day is clearly not on the list of the Lord's appointed times in Leviticus 23. It has definite Roman origins, and it has become a day when people can demonstrate their "love" to others, yet this love may only come one day a year, rather than every day of the year.

Scripturally speaking as Believers, we are called to love our fellow human beings **wholeheartedly all the time**. By not celebrating Valentine's Day, we can truly demonstrate that we are followers of God by serving them every day. Yeshua says, "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12, NASU), and if we want to be loved by others, we must love others in

¹ Susan E. Richardson, *Holidays & Holy Days* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 2001), pp 35-38.

return. This is a love that will always be demonstrated by kindness, sincerity, acts of goodness and mercy, and always being there for people—regardless of what they do for, or even to, us.