

Valentine's Day – Where Did It Come From?

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Where did St. Valentine's Day come from?

You might suppose schoolteachers and educators would know. But do they?

How many of you were ever taught the real origin of Valentine's Day – were ever told in school *why* you should observe the custom of exchanging valentines?

The silence of educators

Teachers are all too often silent about the origin of the customs they are forced to teach in today's schools. If they were to speak out, many would lose their jobs!

Today, candymakers unload tons of heart-shaped red boxes for Feb 14, while millions exchange valentines. Florists consider Feb 14 – St. Valentine's Day – as one of their best business days. And young lovers pair off – at least for a dance or two – at St. Valentine's balls.

Why? Where did these customs originate? How did we come to inherit these customs? Isn't it time we examined why we celebrate St. Valentine's Day?

A Christian custom?

Many have assumed that traditional Valentine's Day celebrations are all connected with an early Catholic martyr by the name of Valentine. Nothing could be further from the truth! Notice what one authoritative encyclopedia says about this idea: "St. Valentine's Day as a lovers' festival, the choice of a valentine, and the modern development of sending valentine cards has no relation to the saint or to any incident in his life" (article, "Valentine, Saint." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1970 edition).

Did you know that centuries before the birth of Jesus, the pagan Romans celebrated Feb. 15 and the evening of Feb 14 as an idolatrous and sensuous festival in honor of Lupercus, the "hunter of wolves"?

The Romans called the festival Lupercalia. The custom of exchanging valentines and all the other traditions in honor of Lupercus – the deified hero-hunter of Rome – were also linked anciently with the pagan practice of teenagers going steady. It usually led to sexual escapades.

Today, the custom of going steady is thought very modern. It isn't. It is merely a rebirth of an old custom "handed down from the Roman festival of the Lupercalia, celebrated in the month of February, when names of young women were put into a box and drawn out by men as chance directed." That's the admission of the *Encyclopedia Americana*, article, "St. Valentine's Day."

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* also points out that the custom of exchanging valentines arose from this name drawing during the Lupercalia. The "custom was introduced to England by the

Romans and continued through the Christian era. In order to adapt the practice to Christianity the church transferred it to the feast of St. Valentine” (article “Greeting Card”).

When Constantine in A.D. 313 made Christianity an official religion of the Roman Empire, there was some talk in church circles of discarding this pagan free-for-all. But the Roman citizens wouldn’t hear of it! So, it was agreed that the holiday would continue as it was, except for the more grossly sensual observances.

It was not until the reign of Pope Gelasius that the holiday became a “Christian” custom.

“As far back as 496, Pope Gelasius changed Lupercalia on February 15 to St. Valentine’s Day on February 14” (Lavinia Dobler, *Customs and Holidays Around the World*, p. 172).

But how did this pagan festival acquire the name of “St. Valentine’s Day”?

And why is the little naked Cupid of the pagan Romans so often associated with Feb. 14th? And why do little children and young people still cut out hearts and send them to “sweethearts” on a day in honor of Lupercus the hunter of wolves? Why have we supposed these pagan customs, in honor of a false god, are Christian?

Who was the original “St. Valentine”?

Valentine was a common Roman name. Roman parents often gave the name to their children in honor of the famous man who was first called Valentine in antiquity. That famous man was Lupercus, the *hunter*. But who was Lupercus – and why should he have also borne the name Valentine among the heathen Romans?

The Romans identified Lupercus with the Greek god Pan (*Smith’s Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, Vol II, article “Lupercus”). Pan was an Arcadian god of light. As such he was equivalent to the Phoenician sun-god Baal.

Baal – mentioned so often in the Hebrew Bible – was a title of Nimrod, “the might *hunter*” (Genesis 10:9). The Persian author Rashid al-Din, in his *History of the Franks*, mentions that Nimrod extended his hunting expeditions even to Italy.

The Apennine Mountains of Italy also bore the name the Mountains of Nembrod or Nimrod. The hunter Nimrod pursued wolves in the Apennine Mountains of Italy and acquired the title Lupercus – or wolf hunter. Valentine’s Day was originally a day set aside by the pagan Romans in his honor!

But why should Nimrod have been called “Valentine” by the Romans? And why should the celebration of this day have been anciently limited to the city of Rome before Pope Gelasius’ time? What part did the site of ancient Rome play in the life of Nimrod?

Valentine comes from the Latin word *Valentinus*, a proper name derived from the word *valens*, meaning “to be strong, powerful, mighty.” Any connection with Nimrod? We read in the Bible that Nimrod was the “*mighty hunter*” (Genesis 10:9). It was a common proverb of ancient time that Nimrod was “the mighty hunter before the Lord.” Nimrod was their hero – their strong man – their *valentine!*

But why do we associate HEARTS with a day in honor of Nimrod – the *Baal* of the Phoenicians?

The surprising answer is that the pagan Romans acquired the symbol of the heart from the Babylonians. Nimrod founded Babel. He was the first lord of the Babylonians. In the Chaldean tongue, spoken in Babylonia, the word for “heart” was *bal*. The heart – *bal* – became, because of similarity in sound, a symbol, of Nimrod – the *Baal* or Lord of the Babylonians!

Later, professing Christians in Constantine’s day associated one of their martyrs named Valentine with festivities honoring Nimrod – the Valentine of the heathen. In this way pagan Romans were influenced to “embrace” the church while still continuing their pagan customs.

Why Feb. 14th?

But why should the early Romans have chosen Feb. 15 and the evening of Feb. 14 to honor Lupercus – the Nimrod of the Bible? (Remember that days in ancient times began at sunset the evening before.)

Nimrod – the Baal or sun-god of the ancient pagans – was said to have been born at the winter solstice. In the time of the tower of Babel the winter solstice occurred on Jan. 6. Eastern Orthodox churches still commemorate this day, but now call it “Christmas.”

It was the custom of antiquity for the mother of a male child to present herself for purification on the 40th day after the day of birth. The 40th day after Jan.6 – Nimrod’s original birthdate – takes us to Feb. 15; the celebration of which began on the evening of Feb. 14 – the Lupercalia or St. Valentine’s Day.

On this day in February the mother of Nimrod was said to have been purified and to have appeared for the first time in public with her son as “mother and child.”

The Roman month of February, in fact, derives its name from the *februa* that the Roman priests used in the rites celebrated on the Lupercalia. The *februa* were thongs from the skins of sacrificial animals used in rites of purification on the evening of Feb 14.

Cupid makes his appearance

Another name for the famous child who because a hunter was Cupid – meaning “desire” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, article “Cupid”). It is said that when Nimrod’s mother saw him as a young boy she *desired* him – lusted after him. Nimrod became her cupid – her desired one – and later her Valentine! So evil was Nimrod’s mother that *it is said she married her own son!*

As Nimrod grew up, he became the child-hero of *many* women who *desired* him. He was their cupid! In the book of Daniel, he is called the “desire of women” (Daniel 11:37). Moffatt translates the word as Tammuz – a Semitic name of Nimrod).

He provoked so many women to *jealousy* that an idol of him was often called the “image of jealousy” (Ezekiel 8:5). No wonder the pagans commemorated their hero-hunter Nimrod, or Baal, by sending heart-shaped love tokens to one another the evening of Feb. 14 as a symbol of him!

This, then, is the origin of Valentine's Day.

Why should we continue teaching little children these pagan customs, derived from ancient and outdated pagan-sex and hero-worship? Why not teach them, instead, what history and the Bible really say?

[Editor's note: For information about Christian living as presented in the Bible, please visit our website, www.thebiblefund.com].