



Pchum Ben Festival.

Shortly, Cambodians will celebrate and mark the start of the country's most important Buddhist Festival - Pchum Ben, also known as 'Ancestors Festival' or 'Hungry Ghosts Festival'. For an extended period of time, people will visit their local pagodas to light candles, pray and leave offerings of money and food such as rice and fruit, to appease the souls of their dead relatives (or hungry ghosts).

A pagoda is an important building in the everyday life of the average Cambodian. It symbolises and represents a central place of culture and education for young children. It can also serve as a museum for tourists and a library for the public. But the main reasons for any pagoda are worship, honour and the place one comes to make offerings and pay respect, especially respect for the dead. These are Buddhist temples and according to the World Factbook, 97% of the population in Cambodia are Buddhists, a large portion of whom may make a visit during this 15-day festival.

The purpose of the Pchum Ben festival is in the deep-seated belief of what happens after one dies. According to Khmer belief, after death, people turn into ghosts, walking and roaming around the earth, hoping that someone will pray them on to a better life, this task being left to the relatives of the one who has passed away. Sadly, and again according to Khmer belief, people who do not follow the practices of Pchum Ben will be cursed by angry ancestors; hence the name 'Hungry Ghosts Festival'. To appease the ghosts, the living relatives ease these wandering spirits' sufferings by offering them food. This is done through making offerings of money, clothes and other items to the monks at the pagodas. These offerings are then shared with the poor and disabled during Pchum Ben and the donors acquire some merit to cancel out their past sins.

For us, as believers in Christ, this is a very sad period and cannot be seen as a happy festival at all. Christ has come to set us free and freedom is available to all who believe. This can only happen through accepting His finished work at the cross and receiving His grace.

During Pchum Ben, please pray for our team members in Cambodia, that they may be witnesses of the truth of the gospel and given opportunities to share this good news. This is a heightened spiritual period with many strong emotions and feelings in people; pray that the Lord would protect His church in Cambodia and our team members serving in this country.

God Bless.

Chris