

Should You Celebrate Thanksgiving Day?

Thanksgiving Day, as celebrated in North America, is a time to gather with family and friends to give thanks for the many blessings enjoyed by these nations and their citizens. However, to many people, its meaning is lost. It has become simply another day for huge meals, dinner parties, get-togethers or reunions. What does Thanksgiving mean to you?

TURKEY DINNERS, cranberries, candied yams, stuffing, mashed potatoes, pumpkin pie and family gatherings—these are all commonly associated with most Americans' and Canadians' yearly celebration of giving thanks—Thanksgiving Day!

In the United States, Thanksgiving is on the fourth Thursday of November. In Canada, it is the second Monday in October. On this holiday, a Thanksgiving meal is prepared with all the trimmings; families gather together and talk, while others watch a game or a parade filled with pilgrims, Indians and other colonial figures. Some families may even have their own yearly Thanksgiving traditions.

What comes to mind when you think of Thanksgiving? Do you picture a time of thankfulness toward God—or is it merely one of eating, partying or watching football?

Sadly, the latter is what Thanksgiving has become to most. They have forgotten *why* the day was established. Its meaning has slowly deteriorated, and is now almost completely lost under a cloud of media hype, sales pitches, marketing tactics and blitz commercialism.

While many are familiar with the traditional *representation* of the original Thanksgiving, it is helpful to examine the purpose for which it was first celebrated. By doing this, the day's meaning will be firmly established.



The Origin of Thanksgiving Day

In August 1620, the *Mayflower*, a 180-ton ship, set sail from Southampton, England. After difficulties with the vessel, resulting in her return to port, finally the voyage began. Her 102 passengers were to become some of the founding pilgrims of the United States of America, and the initiators of one of this nation's most popular holidays.

After weeks of plowing through the tumultuous Atlantic waters, battling strong winds, pounding waves and a number of problems with their vessel, the pilgrims spotted Cape Cod, off the coast of Massachusetts. The stormy weather was brewing so strongly that they had arrived there by accident. Their intended location was off the Virginia coast, where other pilgrims had begun colonies.

Before anchoring at Plymouth Rock and disembarking to explore the territory, the pilgrims devised the "Mayflower Compact." This was to serve as the basis for governing their new colony, where all would have the freedom to worship God as they chose.

The compact stated, "We whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread sovereign lord King James...Having undertaken, for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith, and honor of our king and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia, do by these presents solemnly and mutually in the presence of God and one of another, covenant, and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation, and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute, and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions, offices from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the colony: unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names; Cape Cod, the 11th of November..." (*Mourt's Relation: A Journal of the Pilgrims at Plymouth*).

The next few months would prove to be difficult and trying. More than half of the original pilgrims did not survive the



first, long, bleak New England winter. Often, two or three people would die in one day due to infection and sickness.

But, with the approaching of spring came new hope. The survivors built homes and planted crops. They made friendships with local Indian tribes, and traded with them. The passing of winter allowed the pilgrims to labor and produce, causing the colony to flourish.

After reaping their first harvest in the fall of 1621, the pilgrims dedicated a day for thanking God for the bounty with which He had blessed them. They had endured the many hardships that came with pioneering a new land. They toiled through building an entire colony from what was simply wilderness. They were at peace with their neighbors. And they were especially grateful for their harvest. This allowed them to gather and store plenteous food and crops for the long and brutal winter ahead.

Their governor, William Bradford, proclaimed a day of *thanksgiving* toward God. They prepared a great feast to enjoy with family and friends—both from within the colony and with neighboring Indian tribes.

The following quotes from *America's God and Country* demonstrate Bradford's and the colony's thankfulness for God's protection and blessings:

"Being thus arrived in a good harbor, and brought safe to land, they fell

upon their knees and blessed the God of Heaven who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean, and delivered them from all the perils and miseries thereof, again to set their feet on the firm and stable earth, their proper element."

In reminiscing upon the colony's success, Bradford continued, "Thus out of small beginnings greater things have been produced by His hand that made all things of nothing, and gives being to all things that are; and, as one small candle may light a thousand, so the light here kindled hath shone unto many, yea in some sort to our whole nation; let the glorious name of [God] have all the praise" (*ibid.*).

Clearly, pilgrims of the Plymouth colony gave God credit for all that they had. Notice the many references to God, and their acknowledgement of how He granted them so many blessings. The pilgrim's beliefs were firmly entrenched in the realization of God's presence and intervention in their everyday lives. Thanksgiving Day began because of this belief. It is a day dedicated to giving thanks to God for the many things we often take for granted.

Over the years, many colonies did keep Thanksgiving, but they kept various other days of thanksgiving, at different times of the year. It is a popular misconception that the pilgrims kept Thanksgiving on the same day each year following the first celebration in 1621, and that the other colonies began keeping that same day. In truth, it was a tradition always used to highlight and show gratitude for important events, such as bountiful harvests, victories in battle, etc. Whenever these took place, the colony called for the celebration of a day of thanksgiving.

In the late 1700s, during the American Revolution, the Continental Congress suggested the yearly observance of a day of national thanksgiving, in hopes to unite factious states.

In 1817, the state of New York adopted Thanksgiving Day as an annual holiday. By the mid-1800s, other states likewise adopted the practice. In 1863, President Lincoln appointed it as a national holiday, and gave a Thanksgiving proclamation. Each president since then has issued a proclamation, announcing the celebration of this day.

Is Thanksgiving Day Biblical?

In examining the origins of popular holidays, some may wonder if Thanksgiving Day is a biblical holiday, or whether it is rooted in paganism, as some have claimed.

Though not specifically mentioned in the Bible, Thanksgiving is different from most other national holidays. In fact, many nations celebrate their own unique harvest festivals. Deceived by Satan (Rev. 12:9), the world at large is cut off from the true God. Therefore, it should not be surprising that even such harvest festivals occasionally become tainted with the worship of heathen deities. Although such ancient festivals were usually influenced by paganism, history shows Thanksgiving Day as practiced in North America was unique. The originators of this day focused upon giving thanks for an abundant harvest, sorely needed for survival.

Being centered on giving thanks to the Creator is a major distinction in origin that separates Thanksgiving Day from holidays tainted with pagan origins, such as Easter, Valentine's Day, Christmas or Halloween. (Refer to our booklet *God's Holy Days or Pagan Holidays?*)

But does God allow Christians to participate in holidays even if they are not associated with paganism?

To find the answer, we must examine God's Word—the Holy Bible. God has allowed the recording of certain scriptural accounts so that those who diligently search it can find the answers to their questions.

John 10:22 records Jesus Christ being present at a Jewish celebration called the "Feast of Dedication." This day was a yearly anniversary of the purification of the Temple at Jerusalem (in about 165 BC) after it was desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes. This was not a day of riotous parties or celebrations. It was a national holiday commemorating a respectable and solemn event. This account clearly shows that Christ Himself was with the Jews as they gave thanks to God on this special day.

In the book of Esther, we read that through the inspiration of God, Mordecai and Esther established the "Feast of Purim." This day was a yearly commemoration of the Jews overcoming persecu-



tion from Haman, the prime minister of King Ahasuerus.

Notice Mordecai's and Esther's proclamation, confirming the keeping of this day: "And that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the

Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed. Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority, to confirm this second letter of Purim" (9:28-29).

These days were not to be observed with the same degree of honor and reverence as God's Holy Days, which rep-



resent specific parts of His Master Plan of salvation. Rather, these celebrations were simply for remembering important national events.

The examples of Christ, Mordecai and Esther show that God permits that customs commemorating honorable moments in national history be kept—but *only* if they are kept in control, done

in a proper manner and kept free of any pagan influence!

Although not *directly* mentioned in Scripture, Thanksgiving Day *is* a holiday specifically based on *biblical* principles and commands. It was to be a day to spend with family and friends, honoring and *thanking* God for the bountiful blessings He provides.

King David wrote in the Psalms, “Let us come before His presence *with thanksgiving*, and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms” (95:2). “Enter into His gates with *thanksgiving*, and into His courts with praise: be thankful unto Him, and bless His name” (100:4). And, “O give *thanks* unto the LORD, for He is good: for His mercy endures forever... Oh that men would praise the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! For He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness” (107:1, 8-9).

The apostle Paul wrote, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known *unto God*” (Phil. 4:6). He also said, “*Giving thanks* always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 5:20).

These great servants of God gave thanks, and recorded their examples for us to follow today. Thanksgiving should be done regularly. In fact, God even **COMMANDS** that we do so.

Sacrifices of Thanksgiving

In the Old Testament, God’s people were required to sacrifice animals (such as lambs, rams, goats, etc.), and offer them as burnt offerings to Him. These sacrifices took place in conjunction with repentance for sins, and asking for God’s forgiveness. Sacrifices took place regularly, and served as a constant reminder of obedience toward God.

Yet God did not require sacrifices because it pleased Him. In fact, it was done to picture the *ultimate* sacrifice that was yet to come—Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God (John 1:29). At Christ’s death, the ritualistic practices that were part of the Old Covenant were done away. Christ’s sacrifice and shed blood truly washed away humanity’s penalty for sins—death.

Today, God *still* requires the offering of a certain kind of sacrifice.

Psalms states, “I will offer to You the *sacrifice of thanksgiving*, and will call upon the name of the LORD” (116:17), and, “Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? *Offer* unto God *thanksgiving*; and pay your vows unto the most High” (50:13-14).

These verses clearly explain that God has no need of “the flesh of bulls, or the

blood of goats” that would be offered in a sacrifice. Instead, He wants us to offer Him sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise!

David understood this, and even appointed certain Levite priests the specific duty of thanking and praising God: “And he appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, and to record, and to *thank* and *praise* the LORD God of Israel” (I Chron. 16:4). Chapter 23 of I Chronicles further explains the Levites’ duties. Verse 30 states that they were to “stand every morning to thank and praise the LORD, and likewise at even.”

Today, God wants—and expects—from us these same sacrifices of thanksgiving through our actions and prayers. Recall what Paul wrote: “Giving thanks *always* for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 5:20). Paul further explains, “Rejoice evermore. *Pray* without ceasing. In everything give *thanks*: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (I Thes. 5:16-18).

This is how we can give thanks to God each and every day! To be effective, our thanksgiving must be spontaneous and from the heart, rather than an expression of routine formality. Our article “The Keys to Dynamic Prayer” provides helpful points in how to properly and effectively praise God.

The book of Daniel records a valuable lesson regarding learning to acknowledge God’s power. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, leader of one of the most powerful Gentile kingdoms ever, believed that he had strength and wealth because of his actions. The king failed to realize that this power came from God—and His mighty hand directing world events and the flow of history. Because of Nebuchadnezzar’s ingratitude, God caused him to become as a wild animal, roaming the countryside and eating grass. This pagan king lived as a madman for seven years (Dan. 4:27-33).

Finally, at the end of King Nebuchadnezzar’s life, he learned his lesson. Notice this sobering and insightful account: “And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High [God], and I praised and honored



Him that lives forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He does according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What do You?” (vs. 34-35).

“Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase” (vs. 37).

Pride, arrogance and ingratitude prevented Nebuchadnezzar from grasping the full scope of God’s power. But

through his trial, his pride was broken—and he came to see how puny and weak he and his kingdom actually were in comparison to God. If we do not acknowledge God’s might—as this Gentile king did at the end of his life—and thank Him for it, then this account of Nebuchadnezzar should be taken as a personal warning!

The Ultimate Gift Giver

The pilgrims could never have imagined that America would become the global superpower it is today. The U.S. has continuously been at the forefront of economic prosperity, medical science, technology, food production, sanita-

tion, architecture and space exploration. Its citizens enjoy the freedoms of religion and speech. It allows individuals and families to emigrate from other countries, and enjoy these liberties. It is usually the first country—if not the only one—supporting other nations and peoples in need. And the income and standard of living for most Americans is still relatively high compared to other industrialized nations, though significantly less than its peak of about five decades ago.

Yet Americans seem to have forgotten *where* these blessings came from!

Consider: “The silver is *Mine*, and the gold is *Mine*, says the LORD of hosts” (Hag. 2:8). Exodus 19 records, “Now therefore, if you will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: *for all the earth is Mine*” (vs. 5).

A quick reading of the Bible shows that God owns EVERYTHING! He gives. He also takes away.

James 1:17 further states, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from *above*, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no *variableness*, neither shadow of turning.” There are no variables with God; He does not change.

The apostle James makes his point by comparing God’s promise of blessings to the source of the earth’s physical light—the sun. Depending on the time of day, cloud coverage and other deciding factors, the amount of light reaching the earth’s surface varies. For example, a tree, mountain or building may block light, which creates a shadow; smog and exhaust can cause less sunlight in a city.

However, variables do not apply to God. His goodness and blessings do not change from one day to the next, depending on His mood, cloud coverage or temperature. While there are conditions to receiving blessings, His promise of showering gifts for obedience is forever—*constant*—UNCHANGING!

Look at the world around you. If you live in the U.S., or another Western country, you enjoy many blessings that other nations do not. Although many live relatively comfortable and peaceful lives, many dangers come with this.

Notice Moses’ grave warning: “Then *beware lest you forget the LORD*, which

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brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage” (Deut. 6:12). Moses understood—and warned—that when people receive much, it is in their nature to become ungrateful and arrogant, and forget the SOURCE of their blessings—God!

Christ’s admonition in Luke 12:48 has been ignored: “For unto whomsoever much is *given*, of him shall be much *required*.”

But not for long. Society will soon be caught unaware, like “a thief in the night.”

America the Strong?

Because of the mighty promises God made to the patriarch Abraham millennia ago, the descendants of ancient Israel have never been part of the “brotherhood of poverty” so many in the Third World are in. (David C. Pack’s book *America and Britain in Prophecy* explains this in greater detail.) It has never had to face the grim prospects of continuous famine or pestilences sweeping our countryside, or many hundreds dying on domestic soil.

Nevertheless, this same national power, prestige and wealth have caused many to become blind to *where* these blessings originated. The general national attitude is one of arrogance and pride, no longer feeling the need to show gratitude toward God the Provider. Although Thanksgiving Day is celebrated yearly, the practice of giving thanks—as the pilgrims had originally intended—has all but disappeared!

In 1974, a Senate member proposed a resolution to declare April 30 as a “National Day of Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer.” The purpose of this day was to repent for “national sins,” modeled after Abraham Lincoln’s 1863 “Proclamation Appointing a National Fast Day.” (Interestingly enough, President Lincoln believed that the Civil War was punishment for the nation’s sins. To receive forgiveness from God, he issued this national day of fasting—much like the king of Nineveh did in the book of Jonah, chapter 3.)

However, the resolution was overturned. Members of the House, and even some of the Senate, did not approve of using the word “humiliation.” Many cynics equated the term “repent for national sins” to Americans feeling sorry or ashamed for the wealth and prosperity of the nation. The purpose of the resolution, as originally introduced by President Lincoln, was ignored—even ridiculed. The cynics concluded that there was no need to repent for *anything*!

If that was the world in 1974, one can only imagine how much worse this nation has become—decades later!

In 1630, John Winthrop, the first governor of Massachusetts, gave a moving speech titled “A Model of Christian Charity” to the passengers of the 350-ton sailing vessel, the *Arbella*. Winthrop believed that through humility toward God, they would prosper.

He said, “We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other; make other’s conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. The Lord will be our God... and will command a blessing upon us in all our way. So that we shall see much more of his wisdom, power, goodness and truth, than formerly we have been acquainted with. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies...”

“For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall

deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to *withdraw His present help from us*, we shall be made a *story* and a *by-word* through the world..." (*Colonial American History*, emphasis added).

These are strong words. They accurately portray the condition of our nation today!

The Bible foretells that because America has forgotten God—and dealt “falsely with Him”—no longer recognizing that He is the great Provider, He will “withdraw His present help from us.” The very blessings now taken for granted by so many will be stripped away. Millions will go into a time of great suffering because of the dangerous and deadly sin of ingratitude. Only through God’s great mercy will this country avoid becoming “a story and a by-word through the world.” (Again, to learn more about the prophetic identity

of the U.S. and United Kingdom, read *America and Britain in Prophecy*.)

Carefully read and soberly reflect on the many prophecies describing this terrible time of national punishment.

But this need not include you! *You* can avoid being one of the perpetrators of this national shortcoming and *sin*.

Making Thanksgiving Meaningful

To most nations, the concept of celebrating Thanksgiving Day is viewed as a holiday that is meaningful for North Americans, although certain other nations have similar harvest festivals.

However, the act of thanksgiving toward God should be done everywhere—everyday—by everyone! It is not just an American holiday; neither should it be limited to one day a year.

As Thanksgiving Day approaches, ponder and consider the many wonderful blessings you enjoy. Be grate-

ful for these wonderful benefits. (To learn more, read our article “The Sin of Ingratitude.”) Realize that these material blessings were not given to us because of anything we have done—we do not deserve them. God has bestowed them on us—simply because of His mercy, and His promise to Abraham, the father of the faithful (Gal. 3:6-9).

Before you and your family enjoy Thanksgiving dinner, or begin watching a parade or football game, be sure to take time to truly thank God in prayer and thought for the national wealth, power and prestige He has given this nation.

While there is still time, make certain that you and your family are not partaking in the nationwide, unthankful attitude. Be sure to give thanks to God in the same heartfelt, sincere manner that the pilgrims did on the first Thanksgiving in North America! □

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