

THE STORY OF THANKSGIVING IN AMERICA

By Dianna Cudworth

ESCAPE TO FREEDOM OF RELIGION



in the United States most of us have experienced religious freedom since birth. Consequently, we do not have a perspective of a government that supplants God Almighty and decrees what the people are to believe and how they are to worship God.

God declares: **Hebrews**

8:10-11 “ *this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and none of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them*”.

Jesus declared in **John 14:25-26** “*These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.*”

I believe it is clear that God does not intend man, whether he be a King or even the Pope, to get between Him and His people. Yet the government in United Kingdom dictates religion even to this day independent of **Jesus Christ**. I worked with a man

from the United Kingdom. During one of our discussions he declared to me that he was a “Protestant”. I asked him if he knew **Jesus Christ** as his savior. He informed me that being a Protestant had nothing to do with **Jesus Christ**. He was a Protestant because the King of England declared him a Protestant.

As the story goes, the fore-fathers of this nation, the United States of America, migrated to the new land to escape the conflict of religious beliefs between the Catholic Church, the Pope, the Protestants, and the King of England. Nevertheless, one principle of the “Holy Scriptures” or the Bible that all factions had in common was days of fasting and thanksgiving and feasting. “Puritans who began emigrating from England in the 1620s and 1630s carried the tradition of Days of Fasting and Days of Thanksgiving with them to New England.”

STORY OF THE PILGRIMS

“In the United States, the modern Thanksgiving holiday tradition is commonly traced to a sparsely documented 1621 celebration at Plymouth- in present-day Massachusetts. The 1621 Plymouth feast and thanksgiving was prompted by a good harvest.” As the story goes "in September 1620, a small ship called the Mayflower left Plymouth, England, carrying 102 passengers—an assortment of religious separatists seeking a new home where they could freely practice their faith and other individuals lured by the promise of prosperity and land ownership in the New World. After a treacherous and uncomfortable crossing that lasted 66 days, they dropped anchor near the tip of Cape Cod, far north of their intended destination at the mouth of the Hudson River. One month later, the Mayflower crossed Massachusetts Bay, where the Pilgrims, as they are now commonly known, began the work of establishing a village at Plymouth.” The people spent the first winter on board ship. The loss of life was excessive. They suffered from exposure, scurvy and outbreaks of contagious disease. Fifty percent of the men, women and children that survived the dangerous crossing of the Atlantic perished that winter. “In March, the remaining settlers moved ashore, where they received an astonishing visit from an Abenaki Indian who greeted them in English.

Several days later, he returned with another Native American, Squanto, a member of the Pawtuxet tribe who had been kidnapped by an English sea captain and sold into slavery before escaping to London and returning to his homeland on an exploratory expedition. Squanto taught the Pilgrims, weakened by malnutrition and illness, how to cultivate corn, extract sap from maple trees, catch fish in the rivers and avoid poisonous plants. He also helped the settlers forge an alliance with the Wampanoag, a local tribe, which would endure for more than 50 years and tragically remains one of the sole examples of harmony between European colonists and Native Americans.” The following fall they held a three-day feast of thanksgiving to celebrate and thank God that their storehouses were full and they had ample food to survive the winter. They were blessed with a bountiful harvest of 20 acres of corn, in addition to crops of squash, beans, barley and peas, plus ample supplies of cod, bass, lobsters, eels, mussels, seals and other fish, and they hunted the local game and amassed a “great store” of wild turkeys, ducks, geese, swans and venison and gathered local fruit, including strawberries, gooseberries, raspberries, and three different types of plums. “In November 1621, after the Pilgrims’ first corn harvest proved successful, Governor William Bradford organized a celebratory feast and invited a group of the fledgling colony’s Native American allies, including the Wampanoag chief Massasoit. Now remembered as American’s “first Thanksgiving”. According to a quote from the Pilgrim chronicler Edward Winslow: “I make no question but men might live as contented here as in any part of the world.” As the story goes, four men were sent out to hunt fowl. In just one day, the hunters were able to kill so many birds that they not only had a three-day feast but had enough left over that the colony could eat turkey for nearly a week. The settlers decided to have a three-day feast of thanksgiving. “so we might after have a special manner rejoice together after we had gathered the fruit of our labors” Winslow wrote. Thus what is commonly known as the First Thanksgiving Feast occurred in 1621. An invitation to the Wampanoag tribe was issued to join the settlers in this day of thanksgiving: “And although it be not always so plentiful as it was at this time with us, yet ***by the goodness of God***, we are so far from want that we often wish you partakers of our plenty,” By his account, King Massasoit and 90 of his men showed up—outnumbering their

hosts—and brought with them five deer they had hunted to contribute to the feast. Although many Anti-Christ authors want to claim this celebration was based on a secular and carnal “Harvest Feast”, I believe the quotes from one of the participants, the Pilgrim chronicler Edward Winslow, demonstrates that it was God they were giving thanks to. Although the celebration of the puritans at Plymouth is considered the founding celebration of our modern day Thanksgiving in reality it was not an annual occurrence. At that time in our history our leaders followed the example in the Bible and called days of fasting and days of feasting, thanksgiving and celebration according to what the circumstances were. Two years later “The Pilgrims held their second Thanksgiving celebration in 1623 to mark the end of a long drought that had threatened the year’s harvest and prompted Governor Bradford to call for a religious fast.” Days of fasting and thanksgiving on an annual or occasional basis became common practice in other New England settlements as well. It was not until Abraham Lincoln that the feast became an annual affair in the United States as decreed by President Lincoln.

THANKSGIVING DAYS OF THE COLONIES

“Thanksgiving proclamations were made mostly by church leaders in New England up until 1682, and then by both state and church leaders until after the [American Revolution](#). During the revolutionary period, political influences affected the issuance of Thanksgiving proclamations. Various proclamations were made by royal governors, John Hancock, General George Washington, and the Continental Congress, each giving thanks to God for events favorable to their causes.

PRESIDENT WASHINGTON

“Thanksgiving has been celebrated nationally on and off since 1789, after a proclamation by George Washington. As President of the United States, George Washington proclaimed the first nationwide thanksgiving celebration in America marking

November 26, 1789, "as a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God".

PROCLAMATION OF GEORGE WASHINGTON

"Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor, and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me "to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness. Now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th day of November next to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be. That we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks, for his kind care and protection of the People of this Country previous to their becoming a Nation, for the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interpositions of his providence, which we experienced in the course and conclusion of the late war, for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty, which we have since enjoyed, for the peaceable and rational manner, in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national One now lately instituted, for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed; and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and in general for all the great and various favors which he hath been pleased to confer upon us. And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech him to pardon our national and other transgressions, to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually, to render our national government a blessing to all the people, by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed, to protect and guide all Sovereigns and Nations (especially such as have

shown kindness unto us) and to bless them with good government, peace, and concord. To promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and Us, and generally to grant unto all Mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as he alone knows to be best. Given under my hand at the City of New York the third day of October in the year of our Lord 1789.”

PRESIDENT LINCOLN

“In the middle of the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln, prompted by a series of editorials written by Sarah Josepha Hale, proclaimed a national Thanksgiving Day, to be celebrated on the final Thursday in November 1863. The document, written by Secretary of State William H. Seward, , reads as follows:

PROCLAMATION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

“The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God. In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign States to invite and to provoke their aggression, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere except in the theatre of military conflict; while that theatre has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union. Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense, have not arrested the plough, the shuttle, or the ship; the axe had enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege and the battle-field; and the country, rejoicing in the

consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years, with large increase of freedom.

No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most- High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.

It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and voice by the whole American people. I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to his tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and Union.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand, and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Proclamation of President Abraham Lincoln, October 3, 1863.

PRESIDENT FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT

“Abraham Lincoln's successors as president followed his example of annually declaring the final Thursday in November to be Thanksgiving. But in 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt broke with this tradition. November had five Thursdays that year (instead of the more-common four), Roosevelt declared the fourth Thursday as Thanksgiving rather

than the fifth one. On December 26, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed a joint resolution of Congress changing the national Thanksgiving Day from the last Thursday in November to the fourth Thursday. Two years earlier, Roosevelt had used a presidential proclamation to try to achieve this change, reasoning that earlier celebration of the holiday would give the country an economic boost.”

Thus what was originally considered a time of fasting, prayer and thanksgiving to God became a national holiday to increase commerce through political agenda. Thus came Thanksgiving Day football and Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade and the secular holiday of Thanksgiving that we know today. Unfortunately, whether his intentions were honorably or not, President Franklin Roosevelt changed the focus of “Thanksgiving” from giving thanks to God for our many blessings as a nation and the divine providence of this nation to one of a focus on self. This change is justified by declaring it a day of family.

THANKSGIVING AND INTERNATIONAL HOLIDAY

Thanksgiving days of fast, prayer, and feasting were established by God Almighty as demonstrated in the Old Testament of the Bible. It was common for old testament leaders to call for a day of fasting and prayer to gain God’s favor. Also it was common for leaders to declare a national day of feasting and celebration for God’s divine providence. Examples are “Hanukah” and “Purim” that are still celebrated by Jewish tradition.

The appointed times of God Almighty, are times of feasts and celebrations of giving thanks to God.

Included in these special times of giving thanks is the weekly celebration of Sabbath. When I was a child all stores were closed in honor of “The Lord’s Day” and although not all people went to church, all the people of the United States understood that it was a day dedicated to giving thanks to God. Many families gathered on Sunday to share a meal.

Another appointed time for giving God thanks is the monthly celebration and thanksgiving; Feast of First-fruits. Some Christian churches celebrate this feast but on a whole most Christian churches do not celebrate this special day of giving thanks.

Another appointed day to acknowledge God's blessing and give him thanks is Passover and the Feast of Unleavened bread. We know this time of celebration as Easter and Christian culture has a special reason to give God thanks because during this feast is when our Lord Jesus Christ gave his life for us and was resurrected from the dead giving us eternal life.

Another appointed time of thanksgiving and feasting is Pentecost. Christians know this as the day the Holy Spirit descended on the believers in the upper room. For the Jewish culture it is a time to give thanks for the spring harvest and the expectation of a good fall harvest.

Another appointed time of feasting and thanksgiving is the fall feasts which include Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement and Feast of Tabernacles. All these days of "Thanksgiving" were established by God Himself. Furthermore, the Bible teaches us that during the reign of Jesus Christ all people of the earth will celebrate "The Feast of Tabernacle".

National days of Thanksgiving are not inclusive to the United States of America. Many other nations celebrate "Thanksgiving" or similar national holidays.

Canada – While some researchers state that "there is no compelling narrative of the origins of the Canadian Thanksgiving day" the one common denominator is giving thanks to God Almighty.

Other countries celebrate a national Thanksgiving holiday because of influence from the United States of America including: Grenada, Australia, Philippines, Saint Lucia, and parts of Israel. The Netherlands celebrate Thanksgiving in remembrance of the Pilgrims

and their joint history. The United Kingdom and Germany celebrate a pagan – Christian holiday while Japan gives thanks to their own god.

We pray that the United States of America will rediscover their rich heritage and the divine providence of God Almighty in this nation and join together in one accord to give thanks to Almighty God.

<http://www.history.com/topics/thanksgiving/history-of-thanksgiving>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thanksgiving_\(United_States\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thanksgiving_(United_States))

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