

THANKSGIVING DAY USA



November 2019

Philip Shields

www.LightontheRock.org

All scriptures are NKJV unless noted otherwise.

Summary: *THANKSGIVING DAY should be a day we remember to actively thank the true God above. But some now teach it has its roots in ancient pagan harvest festivals to pagan gods and teach believers should not participate. I address that and much more including the unsanitized history of the Pilgrim thanksgiving.*

Hello and welcome everyone to Light on the Rock. This is Philip Shields , this time with **thoughts about American Thanksgiving Day** that I hope will make you sit up and think.

Americans soon will be traveling to be together with their scattered families for American Thanksgiving Day. The Thanksgiving travel is the largest travel day of the year.

It's a day to remember family and everyone being together, depicted so well by an old **Norman Rockwell** painting, showing a whole family around the table and nicely browned turkey and all the trimmings. Of course that was of an all-white family he showed, and today he'd have to do 2-3 more paintings showing black, Asian and Hispanic families too, and that would be right. (Picture)

Thanksgiving Day has always been a much anticipated day in our home – from the **time I was a little child**, even while growing up in the Philippines in the 1950's and 60's, my father tried to have Thanksgiving as much as possible.

We especially looked forward to the trip to Baguio City where there was Camp John Hay, a US base – and there we'd participate in their American-style Thanksgiving dinners. Loved it! Baguio was quite cool, compared to the lowlands where we lived and it was a winding 2 hour drive from San Fernando, La Union where we lived. Any of you Filipinos hearing this will understand. It was great eating American food – though I also loved the Filipino pancit, adobo, rice cakes, halo-halo drinks and sweet macapuno. I

never actually ate their “balot” or “baggo-ong” though. I grew up speaking Ilocano and learning Tagalog, but not as well as I learned Ilocano. So those were my early Thanksgiving Day memories.

But now even now, as many as possible of our relatives get together on this special day.

I notice Christmas songs are being played in stores before Thanksgiving now, which does diminish what would have been a focus on Thanksgiving Day.

WHY I’m giving this message:

**** Some believers are now saying we shouldn’t observe THANKSGIVING DAY because it is based – they say – on pagan roots.** They say thanksgiving days after the harvest were well known in pagan societies for millennia and that the day honored a goddess of the harvest – like Ceres – or something like that. And then they go on to say that if you keep Thanksgiving Day, you’re giving homage to the pagan gods and goddesses and how they were worshipped.

Let me explain later today why I don’t buy into that reasoning at all. I hope you’ll hear me out and decide. **My answer is focused exclusively on the American Thanksgiving Day**, not any similar days in foreign countries. I know where ours started, but can’t speak for other countries.

**** I also feel many who DO KEEP this special day have left the ROOTS of this day** – and instead of making it a real day of thanksgiving to God Almighty, we have started calling it “Turkey Day” and spend the day at shopping mall sales or watching football all day and God is getting left out. A day thanking and praising the true God of the Bible is a good thing.

**** And I also want to retell the history of this day correctly**, as many of you will be surprised by at least 1-2 things I’ll bring up today. The story MOST of us have heard, frankly, has been sanitized and pasteurized a lot – and some of it is simply untrue. Some is unfair to the Indigenous peoples and some unfair to the Puritans.

For example, did you realize that historic Thanksgiving Day at Plymouth Rock was not kept in **November**? And it lasted more than one day? Or that it wasn’t even the first Thanksgiving Day celebrated by European settlers in what is now America?

And there was no pumpkin pie, no cranberry sauce, no cornucopia, and probably no turkey dinner either? Did you know all that?

I'll get into the history soon.

Is American Thanksgiving Day really A PAGAN HOLIDAY?

I want us to discuss first – is the American THANKSGIVING DAY a pagan holiday? Should believers be keeping it? I confine my comments to THANKSGIVING DAY in America though, OK?

The main argument is that it can indeed be shown that “thanksgiving days” after the harvest were celebrated by pagans long ago as they gave thanks to their pagan goddesses and gods of their harvest – and therefore, the argument goes, neither should we be keeping such a national holiday.

(picture) Ceres was a goddess of the harvest, as were other gods and goddesses. So in ancient times, the people partied and rejoiced because the harsh hard work of harvesting and reaping – was done and now they could celebrate. They also celebrated by worshiping and giving thanks to their gods of the harvest and other gods.

But God also delighted in Israel's harvest thanksgivings to HIM too though – and that was largely what the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) is all about. So GOD'S people under Joshua and other leaders also celebrated the harvest each year; Sukkot was called “the Season of our JOY”. So God's people kept harvest festivals too. The entire holyday season, in fact, revolves around the harvests in Israel – as something blessed and ordained by GOD.

Exodus 23:14-16

"Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year: 15 You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty); 16 and **the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits** of your labors which you have sown in the field; **and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field.**"

So if God delights in something – and pagans also have a harvest festival – do we somehow find something wrong with a day rooted in thanking the God of the Bible for having delivered them through a very rough winter?

Now let me ask you: have you ever even heard – here in America – that we are to give praises and worship pagan goddesses like Ceres, the goddess of the

harvest? NO, you haven't – because our Thanksgiving Day has nothing to do with pagan gods and goddesses, based on historical accounts.

IF a day involves WORSHIPING other gods, pagan gods – then have nothing to do with that, of course. But we're not doing that on our Thanksgiving Day. And the original Puritans did not – in their day of thanksgiving. They read the Bible and they thanked the God of the Bible. They read their Bibles, they believed God the Father in heaven had preserved their lives and had brought people like Squanto into their lives to help them survive. More on that later.

My point is: they started out as 102 coming over from Plymouth, England and now there were only 53 left. Forty nine had died. The rest were thankful to be alive. In fact, some accounts say they were likely trying to come close to what is described in Lev 23 as the Feast of Tabernacles, a harvest time of praise and worship to God among other things as well.

Leviticus 23:39

'Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the Lord for seven days; on the first day there shall be a Sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a Sabbath-rest.

If PAGANS do something, does that mean believers never can do the same thing? Again, if it's about worshiping false gods, we should have nothing to do with it.

So I see nothing wrong with remembering how our American history of OUR Thanksgiving started – in praising and thanking God and eating with the native peoples. To be clear: neither is Thanksgiving Day a required day to be kept; it's not one of God's holy days. I'm just saying there's nothing wrong with observing it.

But just because pagans do some things, doesn't make it automatically wrong for US to do those things. Let's give some examples:

(Picture) The pagan goddess **Athena** is shown with a spear, shield, helmet and a nice robe. Because she is a pagan goddess, does that mean that Israelites could not use shields, spears, robes and helmets – because SHE did? That's silly.

Pagans also go to bed, get up, take a shower, get dressed, eat, etc. etc. Just because pagans do all those things – does that mean we must not do any of those activities? We must not eat, get showered and dressed?

Do you see my point? Except for how they worship THEIR gods, besides that – what pagans do may or may not be things we also do on a daily basis.

So the early pilgrims coming off the Mayflower were trying to worship the true living God as best as they understood. They were not trying to honor pagan gods and goddesses, so I do not fault their desire to have **3 days of feasting** and celebrating how God had brought them through the winter and brought important people into their lives. OK, they weren't Sabbath keepers, but they did read the Bible and tried to live by how they best understood the Bible. And I think the evidence is clear that God in heaven heard them and was watching out for them.

There's NOTHING WRONG with that or REMEMBERING that.

Compare Thanksgiving – with, say, Halloween – which I preach against and have nothing to do with! On Halloween everything dark, sinister, ugly, satanic, witch-inspired, violent and evil comes out. It's a night of spiders, bats, black cats, witches, and evil. I want nothing to do with that. There's no glory to the great God in heaven on Halloween. NONE.

So do you see the difference? So my family and I keep and will continue to remember Thanksgiving Day. I think what the pilgrims and Native Americans did on that day was remarkable and inspiring.

KEEP THANKSGIVING AS a DAY OF REAL THANKSGIVING

Please – let's not get so involved in other things happening on this day that we forgot the name of the day: a day to give thanks!

It's a family thanksgiving time. In our home, we all hold hands and have someone lead in prayer of thanksgiving to our great God.

We also often go around the table for those who wish to volunteer to state some of the things they're thankful for, or happy about. The comments from the youngest ones are often so heart-warming.

Maybe have some **homemade signs or banners** about thanks be to God. The link below can give you a lot of ideas.

<https://www.bing.com/images/search?q=family+thanking+god+at+thanksgiving&id=4555A90D698DC8D1041DBCEA13B08D1F7A4B9FF3&FORM=IQFRBA>

Please don't call it "Turkey Day". That moves GOD aside. It's NOT Turkey Day – but a day of thanking God. Please don't call it Turkey Day.

I don't believe there's anything wrong with watching *some* football on TV on THANKSGIVING DAY – but again, I suggest this should not be an all-consuming function of the day.

But most of all, please be sure to have a time of praising God and asking his presence with you on Thanksgiving Day – and THANKING Him for being what He is, for giving us a Savior, for his high calling and giving us his spirit – and then for our family, our country, our home, our blessings and knowing our whole life (painful or not) is in his hands. Thank HIM. Praise Him.

You might even do this 10 minutes or so before the meal begins. Get this part done early, so you're not rushing it and not letting the hot food go cold (some people will have put a lot of time into this).

Then eat. But eat with great THANKSGIVING to our God. It's good for US to express thankfulness. The early Pilgrims felt very thankful to be alive and thankful that one Native American Indian in particular -- was sent into their lives and no doubt kept them alive! His shortened name was Squanto!

They read Psalm 100 as they arrived in what is now Plymouth Rock, MA. They were not reading some pagan writings to a pagan God, but reading praises to YHVH.

Psalms 100:1, 4-5

"Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands!

4 Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,
And into His courts with praise.

Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.

5 For YHVH is good; His mercy is everlasting,
And His truth endures to all generations."

See **Ephesians 5:20** – we are to give thanks FOR all things.

Ephesians 5:20-21

"giving thanks *always* FOR all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God".

Actually – maybe we can show it on the screen – we are to give thanks to God all the time, in all circumstances, whether painful or wonderful to us, for ALL things work together for good to those who love God. I go in depth on this idea in the sermon “When I am weak, then I am strong.”

Philippians 4:6-7

“Be anxious for *nothing*, but IN EVERYTHING by prayer and supplication, **with thanksgiving**, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

THE HISTORY OF THAT PLYMOUTH ROCK THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving as we’ve heard it is probably a jumbled mix of fact and fiction, myth and truth.

Keep in mind that I strongly believe God in heaven was guiding the growth of what would become the USA – way back then. Spanish, English and French were the primary European involvement in North America.

Plymouth Rock Thanksgiving day was not the first American Thanksgiving by Europeans. Of course the Native Americans say they too, had their own harvest and other Thanksgiving days to THEIR gods.

The very first TWO European thanksgivings in America were in the 1500’s by the Spanish priests in what is now St Augustine and later near what is now El Paso and into New Mexico. We don’t hear much about those, but the history is there.

The Plymouth Rock, MA story begins *before* the Pilgrims arrive in America in November 1620 on the Mayflower. But **I’ll begin the story in 1605**. Why 1605? Because that is when some English traders captured/kidnapped a young man named **Squanto** and took him to England. Squanto, or his full name was *Tisquantum* -- was part of the Pawtuxet band of native peoples, and he eventually teamed up with the larger Wampanoag group of Indians.

So English traders had captured Squanto in 1605, sent him to England – and then allowed him to return to America, only to be **kidnapped again in 1614**, but this time he was sold to the Spanish as a slave. Not a good part of the story, but it happened. ***Some Jesuits introduced him to Catholicism and then helped him escape*** back to England, where he learned English as he

worked in the ship yards. Then he went back to America now speaking English. Kinda cool. Did you know all that? He was actually kidnapped or captured several times – by the English and then also by Chief Massasoit of the Wampanoag tribe. So Squanto was quite a remarkable man. GOD was working out a grand design, a great purpose.

Some of you won't like or agree with this: but remember even Joseph of the Bible, the son of Jacob, was sold as a slave – for GOD'S purposes.

Genesis 50:19-21

Joseph said to them [his brothers], "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 20 **But as for you, YOU meant evil against me; but GOD meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.** 21 Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Now in the same way – the horrible kidnapping of Squanto – and being sold at first as a slave to Spain was evil – and yet God turned it around for good! HOW? Because of all that, Squanto learned ENGLISH – USES IT later on as a middle-man between the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag tribe to eventually have a Thanksgiving day and peace treaty; all facilitated by SQUANTO.

God turns even horrible things into the good that HE is bringing about. And what he wanted to do was to save this little group of now 53 people alive to create a foundation for what would become the USA.

So **Squanto** got on a ship and returned to the Americas – to Newfoundland at first – and then to his village near Plymouth Rock only to find the entire village had died – probably from smallpox or something else brought on by the European settlers. (That same ending happened to hundreds of thousands of other American Indians, Aztecs, Mayans and Incas further south.) The Wampanoag chief Massasoit captured Squanto, who later convinced him to use his English-speaking skills.

Meanwhile in England, some of the Separatist Puritans – who would not agree to be part of the Church of England – were being terribly fined, beaten, imprisoned and 3 of their leaders were even killed for their beliefs. So some stayed in England, and some moved to Holland. But then they feared the liberal ways of the Dutch back then was ruining their children and so they wanted to move again.

(Picture) The short story: some from England and some from Holland banded together to form the group of 102 who eventually left England on a

ship called the **Mayflower** and after a terrible 65 days or so of travel, landed off-course in Massachusetts in November 1620. Some sources say December 1620.

Check out this link for the full history:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilgrims_\(Plymouth_Colony\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilgrims_(Plymouth_Colony))

That winter was terrible for the settlers and more died – ***but then Squanto got*** involved with the settlers/Pilgrims. Yep, Roman Catholic and Native American Squanto. That's what he was and he, I believe, was sent by God, to help save the 53 remaining settlers still alive but who were ill prepared for the new world.

If you wish to read more about Squanto – a lot of detail – check out this link <https://thesestonewalls.com/gordon-macrae/the-true-story-of-thanksgiving-squanto-the-pilgrims-and-the-pope/>

Squanto showed settlers how to plant and grow corn, how to fish and hunt deer to survive in this new land – and they had a good harvest of vegetables so they celebrated in thanksgiving at the end of the harvest.

As a white male in 2019, I say “thank you God in heaven for sending Squanto to our ancestors in Massachusetts that autumn of 1621.

Squanto was a Native American Indian made in God's image like every other human being born into the world.

But did you know – **the original Plymouth Thanksgiving Day was not in November but either in September or October 1621**, depending on the historical source you read. And it **lasted THREE days**, not just one. Some feel they may have been inspired by the Biblical “feast of tabernacles” or **Sukkot** – which was also kept about that time. But they did not keep it in November.

The English puritan settlers then went “fowling” – hunting probably ducks and geese and were successful. Some later began firing their guns in celebration. The Wampanoag Indians nearby – with 90 warriors – came to check out what the shooting was all about. *The Pilgrims were outnumbered almost 2 to 1, in fact. Did you know that?*

Short story: they all talked, and cautiously agreed to have a meal together, stretching over the 3 days. **The Wampanoag brought 5 recently killed deer** and the settlers provided the vegetables, corn, sea food, shell fish – and

MAYBE some geese, ducks and maybe turkeys – though turkey is not mentioned in their letters back to England. But the DEER made an impression because in England the average commoners weren't allowed to hunt or kill the deer.

Of the 102 who started –only 53 remained by the autumn of 1621. The rest had died. How thankful would YOU have been to still be alive? So the living were very thankful that they were still alive and attributed much of the God in heaven they read about in their Bible. They were NOT worshipping pagan goddesses or gods.

(PICTURE – painting) The **Original Thanksgiving Day dinner table:** no pumpkin pie, probably no turkey (maybe geese or ducks though), no cornucopia, no cranberries, but a lot of vegetables, corn, sea food and shell fish and venison. Also no football games on TV, no big shopping mall sales. They DID pray and they did thank God for his mercy and providence. I hope those of you hearing this will do the same today.

(Picture of statue of Massasoit, and picture of Squanto)

TREATY: Squanto helped translate and there ultimately was a mutual-aid treaty signed between the Pilgrims and **Chief Massasoit** – where settlers promised not to hurt or kill the Wampanoag and they promised to help and not kill the settlers. Chief Massasoit probably was hoping the settlers' guns and cannons could keep his enemy Native Americans to the south, at bay too.

The settlers held another 3 day Thanksgiving Day two years later – 1623.

This relative peace did not endure. In 1637, one of the settlers was supposedly killed by one of the Indians – and the end result was a lot of Indians killed brutally by the settlers, not just from Plymouth Rock but from all over Massachusetts. Some accounts say as many as hundreds of men, women and children were killed.

(Picture) So it's no wonder that some Native Americans refer to this time as the "**National Day of Mourning**". There's a monument and big sign to that effect up there in Plymouth Rock. I'm not part of that sentiment – I still believe in the National Thanksgiving Day while admitting and realizing it wasn't all as rosy and cozy as we've been taught. **GOD was in this. Like all the details or not – GOD was fulfilling promises to Abraham** that his descendants, including these very imperfect Puritan separatists, would be blessed with beautiful land and wealth because of Abraham's obedience.

But the Pilgrims and other English atrocities? No excuses for that. At the time though, it's good to remember that the English and European settlers did not consider indigenous tribesmen on the same par as they. They called them "savages" and were suspicious of them. We've learned a few things since then, I hope. I have relatives who are of Indian descent – so I'm trying to give both sides to this story. I too have some Indian blood in my veins.

We are all created in God's image, bleed the same red blood and have the hopes and dreams that all humanity has.

I ask: Is it RIGHT to have a national day of Thanksgiving – especially if you focus on thanking God for your life, your country, your freedoms – and especially your family, your calling, His Holy Spirit and all the blessings we have of living in America today, and the freedoms we still have.

In 1789 President Washington established a Thanksgiving Day on Nov 26 – but it was slow to catch on nationally.

(Picture) Finally on October 3, 1863...during the bitter civil war, .Abraham Lincoln felt it could be a unifying concept to declare it as a national holiday. The symbolism of 2 very different peoples who all bled the same red blood – *the Wampanoag Indians and the Puritans* –all of them made in the image and likeness of God, all of them for whom Christ died – were now eating together in peace. President Lincoln thought that to be a beautiful symbol and goal during the Civil War.

Every president after that continued his support for the day, until President Franklin Roosevelt designated the 4th Thursday of each November to be our national Thanksgiving Day.

And now it has become the biggest travel day in America as families do try to get together on this day. And now we have major football games going on – starting back in 1876 with Yale vs. Princeton; plus we now have Thanksgiving Day parades like the Macy's parade in New York.

Today Thanksgiving Day is seen – and I hope remains – as a way to promote family getting together, intercultural peace and a welcome to newcomers to America.

I gotta mention one more thing: the turkeys. I watched a presentation by a vegan lady and half of her pitch was the terrible modern genocide on Thanksgiving Day of millions of turkeys! She showed a video that truly was

alarming to watch – about how the Thanksgiving Day turkeys are produced, fattened, terribly treated and It was just disgusting.

I have no problem eating meat and hunting or killing animals – as God himself tells us what animals to eat and what animals not to eat. Neither do I have a problem being friends with vegetarians, vegans and all. But 2 things here:

I HOPE that that vegan stands just as strongly against the genocide going on of unborn *babies* in the womb, by abortion. There seem to be a lot of vegetarians who are members of PETA or other non-meat groups – who decry the killing of *animals* but who are all FOR a mother's right to choose to end the life of her own unborn child.

Be sure to hear my sermon coming up on what God says about abortion or ending the life of an unborn. I just hope the anger of how some turkeys are killed is carried over to the anger of how the most defenseless human lives – little baby boys and girls – are being discarded and killed by our society today!

Now having said all that, I'll add my voice also to **those who cry out against inhumane raising, transporting and slaughter of millions of turkeys.** I'm not against killing turkeys for food. I'm against *inhumane* ways this is being done to turkeys or any livestock.

I'll end with that... my time's up. May you have a wonderful day of thanksgiving and praising our Great God for all he has done for us, such as:

- * for giving us Jesus/Yeshua to be our Savior and Redeemer. Actually both the Father and the Son are Savior and Redeemer, according to scriptures.
- * And thank God for our wonderful country and bountiful land he's given us
- * thank him you're alive – even if you're not in perfect health

- * thank him for being HIM, for being what he is.

Until next time, this is Philip Shields signing off. Thank you for telling other people you know about our free website – which is also *your* website.

Please feel free to comment on these messages and to email us or – if you're up to it – even helping us with your offerings as we help some very needy orphans and brethren in poor parts of the world and continue to grow this ministry. It also helps us buy the gear and things we need to make these recordings that you enjoy. So thank you, to those of you who do help in that way. We're more than pleased to make all this available free of charge to you.

God bless you and keep you and watch over you and continue to bless you –
and may we all offer our Thanksgiving to our great God.