

Thanksgiving Day

Do you believe that Messianic Believers in the United States should celebrate Thanksgiving Day?

The tradition of celebrating Thanksgiving Day goes back to the Pilgrims who settled the Plymouth Colony in 1621. Originally, these colonists were English Puritans who had protested against much of the popery or Catholic elements present in the Church of England. Being persecuted in England, they had settled in the Netherlands for a season, but discovered that they would not be totally satisfied until they found a home of their own where they could practice their religious convictions in total peace.

The Pilgrims' intention was to actually settle in the colony of Virginia, but their voyage to the New World caused them to be led off course and settle in what is today Massachusetts. They were greeted by a harsh Winter that caused many of them to die from cold and hunger. In the Spring of 1621, the Pilgrims planted their first crops with the help of the local Indians. By that October, the Pilgrims celebrated their harvest to boost the morale of those who had endured terrible loss and hardships. They wanted to thank God and their Indian neighbors for the bounty that had been provided.

As Puritans, the Pilgrims' spiritual convictions came from a strict reading of the Bible. They were very intent on eliminating any opulent elements of Catholicism from their worship. Much of their society was focused around the idea that they had fled England in a similar way to how the Ancient Israelites were led out of Egypt. As America was viewed as a new "Promised Land," much of the symbolism of the Old Testament was adopted for the Pilgrims' life. The emphasis on thanking God with a large communal meal in the Autumn is likely appropriated from the Tanach themes of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Thanksgiving Day is a holiday intended to commemorate the hardships of some of the early settlers of America, and how thankful they were to have God preserve them through times of difficult trial. These early pioneers and pilgrims were godly men and women who left Europe to flee religious persecution and establish a Bible-based community in the New World. Because we as Messianic Believers would not be here without Christians such as these, it is entirely appropriate for us as Americans to remember what they did.