

# Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement For The Real World

*“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.”—Leviticus 23:39*

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*Every year, on the evening of Oct. 31, millions of families celebrate a distinctly odd holiday known as Halloween. For your own good, you need to know what lurks behind the mask of Halloween.*

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## Thanksgiving: A Timeless Lesson

By Jerold Aust

*Are we aware of the true source of blessings and wealth?*



**T**HE YORUBA PEOPLE OF WEST AFRICA have an old saying: “However far the stream flows, it never forgets its source.” But, we may ask, have the people of the United States forgotten the source of their blessings?

The United States observes the national holiday of Thanksgiving, dedicated to remembering the many blessings America enjoys: hills and plains filled with mineral riches; fertile soil that grows endless crops of grain; waters teeming with fish; pastures feeding millions of head of livestock; forests for building homes, schools, hospitals and industrial complexes; two long borders on oceans providing transportation, food and natural barriers for defense.

There is more, of course. But, when we ask ourselves how we have been blessed, another question should come to mind: How grateful are we for these blessings? And, perhaps more crucial, do we remember the real source of these blessings?

Although Thanksgiving Day is an American institution, any country can benefit from following the biblical principle of always being thankful to God for His bountiful blessings.

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*For 376 years, and with few exceptions, this holiday has been kept. But what does it mean to us?*

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### The origins of Thanksgiving

The first Thanksgiving celebration, in 1621, lasted three days. Plymouth Colony’s Governor William Bradford issued a thanksgiving proclamation and, for three days, the Pilgrims feasted with their Indian guests on wild turkey and venison.

Days of thanksgiving were celebrated sporadically until President George Washington proclaimed a nationwide day of thanksgiving on November 26, 1789. He made it clear that the day should be dedicated to prayer and giving thanks to God.

Due credit for finally establishing Thanksgiving Day as a lasting national holiday goes to Sarah J. Hale, editor and founder of the *Ladies' Magazine*. Her editorials and letters to President Abraham Lincoln resulted in Lincoln's proclamation, in 1863, designating the last Thursday in November as a national holiday of thanksgiving. Later, in 1941, Congress adopted a joint resolution setting the date on the fourth Thursday of November.



For 376 years, and with few exceptions, this holiday has been kept. But what does it mean to us? Do we truly show our gratitude to God for His bountiful blessings, or are they merely something we've come to take for granted?

### The rigors of pilgrimage

America is a nation of immigrants. In the New World, settlers sought spiritual and economic renewal. America represented an opportunity to escape war, despotism, material want and religious persecution. The New World was a place to avoid some of the problems of the Old World.

But the earliest settlements of New England were not established easily. The first permanent settlement had its origins in the restlessness of a small, devoutly religious group of Englishmen living in the Netherlands. Since they felt that their only hope was withdrawal from the established church, they were called Separatists.

Persecution had forced them to flee to Holland in 1609. Yet, after a decade in the Netherlands, the English Separatists were eager to move again. Holland's society was hospitable and tolerant, but it was too densely settled for the Separatists, who desired to remain apart from the world.

William Bradford, in his *History of Plymouth Plantation*, explained why the Separatists moved from Holland: "But that which was more lamentable, and of all sorrows most heavy to be borne, was that many of their children...were drawn by evil examples into extravagant and dangerous courses, getting the reins off their necks and departing from their parents. Some became soldiers; others took upon them far voyages by sea; and others some worse courses tending to dissoluteness and danger of their souls to the great grief of their parents and dishonor of God" (Louis Wright, *The Atlantic Frontier*, 1959, p. 105).

Another of their reasons, says Bradford, was an "inward zeal...of laying some good foundation...for the propagating and advancing the gospel of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world; yea, though they should be but even as stepping stones unto others for the performing of so great a work" (Wright, p. 106).



So it was that the *Mayflower* weighed anchor September 16, 1620, with 101 prospective settlers aboard. After 65 storm-tossed days, the *Mayflower* landed, not on Virginia soil that the sojourners had contracted for, but at Cape Cod. Ill and weary, the Pilgrims abandoned their hope for Virginia land and settled in New England. Throughout the rough voyage, they had lost one by death and added two by birth (ibid.).

Landing in November, they were unprepared for the harsh winter ahead. They had been led to believe glowing reports that the fertile country would have a climate similar to southern France, since the two areas lie at the same latitude. Instead, the Pilgrims were confronted with a severe winter on a rockbound coast. Come spring, half of the *Mayflower* passengers were dead, including 13 of the 18 married women. William Bradford led the survivors, now settled at Plymouth. His leadership would be considered strict and even harsh by today's norms, but it helped the early Pilgrims survive.

They escaped Indian attacks during that first winter. "By a freak chance, two Indians in the neighborhood, Samoset and Squanto, could speak English, and the settlers made a treaty with a tribal chief through them" (Wright, p. 108). The settlers thought it an act of God that these two English-speaking Indians were available to help them through their time of distress.

The settlement at Plymouth survived. When the *Mayflower* sailed for home in April 1621, not one of the settlers returned on it. By autumn, with health restored, the settlers gathered their harvest and celebrated with a feast, washing down roasted venison, wild duck and cornbread with wine made from native grapes. Thus, they began the tradition of Thanksgiving that President Lincoln declared a national holiday in 1863.

### Lincoln and Thanksgiving

James Russell Lowell wrote an introduction to *The Works of Abraham Lincoln*, State Papers, 1861-1865 (edited by John Clifford and Marion Miller, 1908, Vol. 6). In it, Lowell describes the terrible conditions facing the Union and Mr. Lincoln. He especially addresses the notion that from that time forward the South and North would experience increasing difficulty feeling at ease and comfortable with one another. It was a sad time.

Note part of the "Proclamation of Thanksgiving" that President Lincoln delivered October 20, 1863: "It has pleased almighty God to prolong our national life another year. Now, therefore, I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, do hereby appoint and set apart the last Thursday of November next as a day, which I desire to be observed by all my fellow citizens, wherever they may then be, as a day of thanksgiving and praise to almighty God, the beneficent Creator and Ruler of the universe.



"And I do further recommend to my fellow-citizens aforesaid, that on that occasion they do reverently humble themselves in the dust, and from thence offer up penitent and fervent prayers and supplications to the great Disposer of events for a return of the inestimable blessings of peace, union, and harmony throughout the land which it has pleased him to assign as a dwelling-place for ourselves and for our posterity throughout all generations" (ibid., p. 166).

These expressions of praise, thankfulness and humility can guide us in the late 20th century, as some presidents of this century have reminded us. How far have we come as a society since President Lincoln's formal proclamation?

## Modern signs of ingratitude

Sadly, much of society has strayed from the moral and religious underpinnings that characterized America's earlier years. Hedonism—"If it feels good, do it"—has become the order of the day, continually evidenced in the entertainment media and modern culture. Self-oriented social fragmentation is replacing a once-common outlook of concern about our personal example and the welfare of others. Increasingly, the prevailing attitude is epitomized by the saying, "I've got mine; you get your own." These attitudes are pervasive, corrupting the lives of our children, our future leaders.

President Lincoln issued a timeless warning: Our greatest enemy is not beyond our shores, but the enemy within. On Jan. 27, 1838, he warned his fellow Americans with these words: "All the armies of Europe, Asia, and Africa combined, with all the treasure of the earth, (our own excepted) in their military chest; with a Bonaparte for a commander, could not by force, take a drink from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years.

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*One of the greatest basic weaknesses of human nature is that of ingratitude. The Bible has much to say about it.*

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"At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide" (Don Fehrenbacher, *Abraham Lincoln, Speeches and Writings, 1832-1858*, 1989, pp. 28-29).

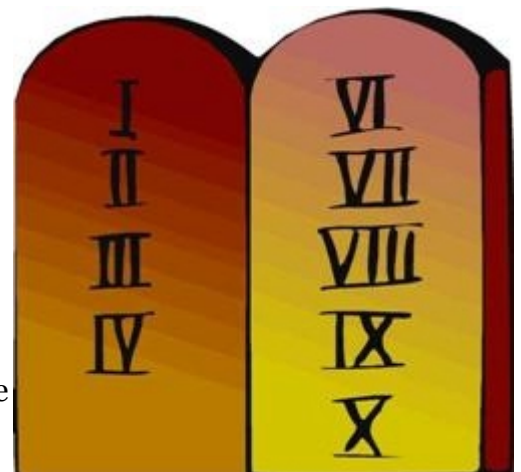
## The unrealized link

One of the greatest basic weaknesses of human nature is that of ingratitude. The Bible has much to say about it.

After their Exodus from Egypt, the ancient Israelites spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness until the earlier, faithless generation died out. In the book of Deuteronomy, God through Moses reminded members of the new generation of the importance of obedience if they were to learn from the sad example of their parents. They were exhorted to remember God's law and their parents' lack of obedience to it. The law was to be repeated in their hearing lest they forget God's requirements and be cursed.

Moses repeated God's Ten Commandments to Israel (Deuteronomy 5). God expressed His sorrow that Israel simply didn't have the heart to obey Him consistently: "Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!" (Deuteronomy 5:29).

Lack of obedience to God may indicate ingratitude. If we acknowledge that God's standards are superior to ours, but we fail to obey them, we indicate our lack of understanding, our personal weakness or a willfulness to disobey. All may



demonstrate our lack of gratitude for what God has given us. An attitude of thankfulness, on the other hand, can help counteract this weakness.

We see these principles clearly brought out in Scripture. In Deuteronomy 8 God addresses the importance and blessings of gratitude and strongly cautions us to avoid the curses of ingratitude. “Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers” (Deuteronomy 8:1).

Moses reminded the people of how God had so carefully taken care of them in the wilderness. He miraculously fed them with manna 40 years, but also reminded them that “man shall not live by [physical] bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD” (verse 3). Their garments didn’t wear out, nor did their feet swell, during those 40 years in the wilderness (verse 4).

### **Biblical warning against ingratitude**

Since God was bringing His people Israel into a fertile, productive land, filled with “brooks of water, of fountains and springs, ...a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey” as well as mineral wealth, they should have been grateful (verses 7-9).

God warned them about the all-too-human weakness to give oneself, not Him, credit for what one has.

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“When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. *Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God* by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and *you forget the LORD your God...*, then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth’... Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the LORD your God,... you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 8:10-20,

emphasis added).

This warning against ingratitude is not for ancient Israel alone. Lack of gratitude to God is all too common across the ages! The apostle Peter exhorts his readers not to forget God’s blessings and promises so freely given them (1 Peter 1:2-7).

Gratitude plays a major role in any kind of right relationship with God!

## The blessings of gratitude

Most people overlook a simple fact recorded thousands of years ago: “The earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein” (Psalm 24:1). All our blessings come from God, but our actions don’t always acknowledge this wonderful truth.

To its credit, America has set aside Thanksgiving Day for annually reflecting on national blessings. Of course, we should all be thankful every day of every year, but there is certainly nothing wrong with a special day every year to remind us that we should continually be thankful.

In 1621, Plymouth Colony—made up of refugees seeking religious freedom in the New World—observed the first day of Thanksgiving to honor the God who had preserved their lives through a harsh winter, then blessed them with a good summer and a plentiful fall harvest. On Oct. 20, 1864, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed Thanksgiving Day to be an American national holiday, a time during which he called on all its citizens to thank the great God who bestowed such great bounties on them.

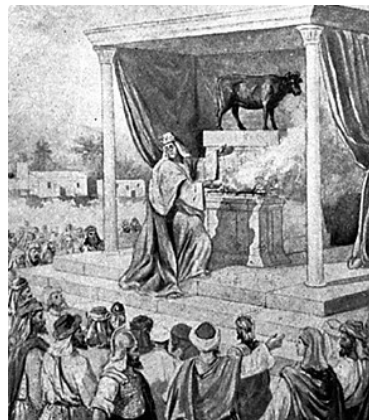
All nations would do well to remember the wise axiom of the Yoruba people of West Africa: “However far the stream flows, it never forgets its source.” May all peoples of the earth remember to give thanks to God, from whom all blessings flow (James 1:17).

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## Feast Days God Despises

By Robert Berendt

*While we all think we are honoring God with the days we keep, history shows it’s not always true.*



**G**OD TOLD THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL, “I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies” (Amos 5:21). And He told the house of Judah (the Jews), “Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear” (Isaiah 1:14-15).

Why? For one thing, He said, “your hands are full of blood” (last part of verse 15).



God had given His people beautiful, meaningful feasts. Obviously it was not His own feasts that He despised, but the way the people were keeping them. In one blatant example of human disregard for God's feasts, Jeroboam, king of Israel, had actually changed the dates of God's Holy Days when he feared that the 10 tribes of Israel would be drawn back to the nation of Judah and the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:32-33).

## Love and law

To understand God's righteous anger at those who trampled on His commanded feasts, let's step back for a moment. Remember that God is almighty. He is perfectly just, wise and all knowing. He is also all-caring. Because there is none greater, it should be obvious—even to the casual observer—when He says He despises something, we ought to take note. Thankfully, He is a very loving Father and wants us to all become His children.

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*The Bible teaches us all of the wonderful and holy feast days God commands us to keep. He calls them "My feasts".*

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There are many scriptures admonishing us to obey God. It would seem that once we have even a glimpse of His love and His might, obedience to His will would be automatic. However, many people are not truly concerned about the things God despises or hates. They think since He is a father and He is love, nothing could ever upset Him.

Yet God is holy by nature, and knows the terrible effects of disobedience, sin and evil. He thus cannot stand sin and evil. When we follow Satan's deceptive ways, we in effect thumb our noses at God and what is right! Satan wants us to do anything except what God commands—what is good for us.

## God's feasts

The Bible teaches us all of the wonderful and holy feast days God commands us to keep. He calls them "My feasts" in Leviticus 23:2. Later in the Bible we learn that when God's Kingdom is set up on earth, all nations will keep His feasts (Zechariah 14:16).

Ezekiel 44:6 states: "Now say to the rebellious, to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "O house of Israel, let Us have no more of all your abominations."' He says the priests will teach the difference between the holy and the unholy, the clean and unclean (verse 23). He also tells us that "they shall hallow My Sabbaths" (verse 24). God's Sabbaths include the seven annual Holy Days and the weekly Sabbath—the seventh day of the week. He wants mankind to worship Him on *these* days.

## The wrong way to worship

Why then would He speak so strongly against Israel for the feasts they observed?

They were appearing before God as hypocrites. The people were trying to appear obedient to God by outwardly keeping the biblical Holy Days, or the altered days set by Jeroboam, while they secretly had other gods before Him. God would have nothing to do with such hypocritical attempts at deception.



Amos described further transgressions in the way they kept the feasts. Their attitude was wrong. God expressed His anger with Israel because they complained they could not sell grain and other things until after the Sabbath—they were not appreciating the blessing of rest God gave us. God was also angry that they wanted to do business so they could cheat the poor (Amos 8:5-6). It was the *way* Israel worshipped Him and the changes they made to His holy feasts that upset God. It was an insult to Him and a transgression of His commands. Judah was no better. Though they didn't change the days, they did change the way they worshipped.

They became so wicked God turned from them. There were always major problems in their worship. There were several reformations that took place (usually after a calamity), but the Bible shows that the temple was deserted at times and out of use. Worship was profaned by actions God condemned

(Malachi 1:12-14).

Isaiah 58 reveals some of the major problems. God's people felt quite smug in a self-congratulatory manner—thinking whatever they did was pleasing to God. They fasted, but then did whatever they pleased. They did not concern themselves with the oppressed and downtrodden. They were gossips and accusers of others. Verse 13 encompasses God's concern by telling Israel to stop breaking the Sabbath and dishonoring it by going their own way and by not using it as a day of joy and delight.

When God stated He despised their feast days (Amos 5:21), He was referring to the abominable conduct and attitude He was seeing. The attitudes reflected anything but the love and concern for one another God commanded, and the honor He deserved. He was referring to those who developed whole systems of behavior that were in violation of the spiritual intent of the Holy Days of God.

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In Malachi, God speaks out against the priests who have not set their heart to honor Him (Malachi 2:2). In the book of Proverbs we read about seven things that God hates. All seven could be found within the attitudes about the Holy Days of God. Proverbs 6:16-20 lists pride, lying, hurting the innocent, having a wicked heart, running to evil, being a false witness and sowing discord among brethren.

### **Christ continues the theme**

Matthew records Jesus Christ driving out those who bought and sold in the temple, turning over their money tables and accusing them of making the temple into a den of thieves (Luke 19:46). The whole intent of the temple had been altered by decisions based on greed and commerce. God was placed far away in the minds and hearts of many of those in positions of responsibility, because their attitudes were not suitable for worship or instruction.

Jesus continued His condemnation in Matthew 23. It was certainly not God's laws that Jesus condemned; it was the way humans conducted themselves. It is not His feast days that God condemns; it is the human acts that pollute them. Recognition of the true greatness of God—His grandeur and worthiness of our complete attention and worship—is the path leading to lasting joy and peace. God wants to bless His people as a loving Father, but He is far too brilliant to spoil His children. He is too good of a Father to do that. Out of love, He gave His holy Sabbaths to mankind. Our mishandling of this gift is what God despises.

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*God has given mankind His feast days and an instruction book (the Bible) to follow. Let us despise what He despises and love what He loves as we endeavor to become like Him.*

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The day will come when God will dwell with men (Revelation 21). We will no longer be flesh and blood as we are now. God will give His faithful followers eternal life and blessings that cannot yet be imagined (Revelation 22:14). They will be the ones who have learned to love and keep His commandments.

Keeping His commandments very carefully does not remove our sin. Only the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us—but our sin caused His death, so it becomes painfully obvious that we should show our love by carefully following His instructions. Our love is reflected by our keeping God's commandments (1 John 5:3). God has given mankind His feast days and an instruction book (the Bible) to follow. Let us despise what He despises and love what He loves as we endeavor to become like Him.

### **Recommended reading**

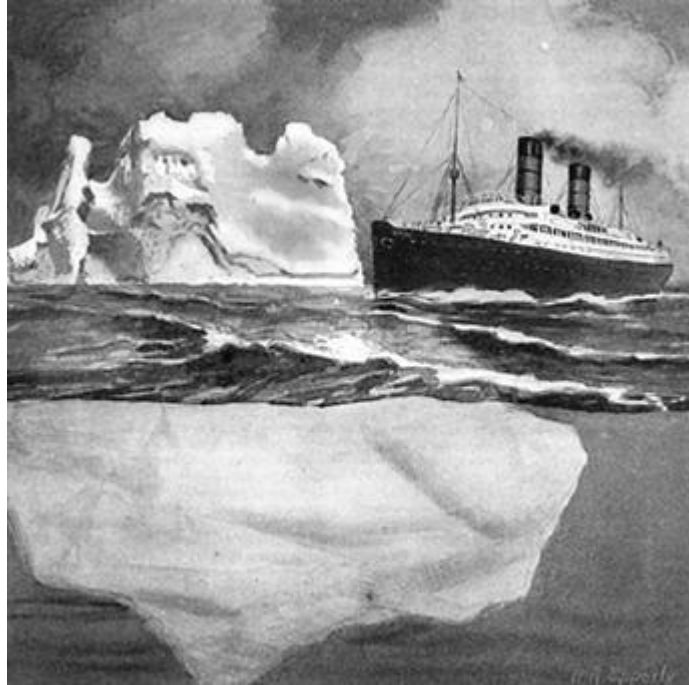
To learn more about the days God calls “My feasts” and how we should keep them, please request our free booklet [\*God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind\*](#).

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## Prepare Yourself: Icebergs Ahead

By Patrick Read

*Like the Titanic, we must navigate dangerous waters. But God shows how we can make it through safely.*



**T**HE SINKING OF THE OCEANLINER HMS *Titanic* on April 15, 1912, is remembered as one of the most dramatic events of the 20th century. In a mere four hours after striking an iceberg, the largest passenger ship yet built sank while on its maiden voyage, claiming the lives of 1,517 persons.

It was thought to be so safe it wasn't even equipped with enough lifeboats for all the passengers. Someone said, "Not even God Himself could sink her." But she did sink, and the wreckage still lies at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, off the coast of Newfoundland.

The sinking of the *Titanic* was the result of many mistakes. Its construction did not prepare it for an iceberg rip through several compartments. It was not outfitted with enough lifeboats. There was not a well-organized plan for dealing with emergencies and evacuation. The captain did not slow down or place additional sentries after being warned of icebergs. There was a lack of communication. The crew made additional mistakes. Panic added to all the rest.

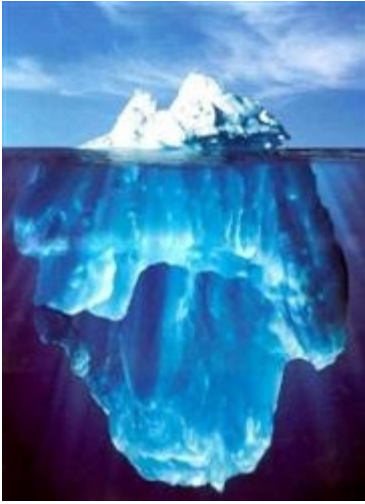
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*The Titanic had received several warnings from other ships in the area of the grave danger in the ocean that night.*

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The history of the *Titanic* provides some good lessons for Christians. It's easy to be overconfident after starting one's voyage as a new child of God. It's easy to neglect important details, and as the saying goes, "the devil is in the details." Above all, it's easy to follow "what seems right" and neglect to rely on our Owner and Captain through prayer, Bible study and humble obedience (Proverbs 14:12; 3:5).

Do we think we're unsinkable? Are we so sure of ourselves we feel we only need a few lifeboats, if any at all? Would we not listen to or ignore warnings of potential danger? Or will we take heed to the things we have been taught?



“Many are the afflictions of the righteous” (Psalm 34:19). Temptations abound. If we become spiritually vulnerable in any way, Satan will notice and take advantage of it.

Let's compare our lives with a ship trying to navigate an ocean filled with icebergs. The icebergs, small and big, are the temptations, trials and tribulations that threaten to discourage and destroy us. And we have but one life to live. We must not sink.

Let's look at some of the valuable lessons we can learn from the story of the *Titanic*.

**Lesson One:** In 1 Corinthians 10:12 we read, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”

We do not know when Jesus Christ will return to take His rightful place as King and Lord of all nations. We do know, before He does come, the whole world will be thrown into utter turmoil. We will be severely persecuted because of Satan's intense hatred for God and His people. He will use whatever devices he can to separate and destroy us including instilling thoughts of superiority or causing us to feel invincible. Those are just two of his tools.

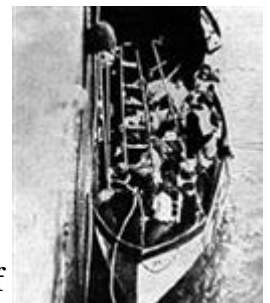
Satan is the biggest iceberg we will ever face. Will you face him on your own, or will you allow God to be your Captain and steer you through time after time? Satan will always try to get in our way. He will always put obstacles in our way, but he can only “sink” us if we fail to draw close to God and watch as we have been warned.

We should never be cocky, overly confident or possess an attitude of invincibility. Without the continual help, love, support and mercy God gives us, we are *nothing*. If we try to rely on our own strength or knowledge, we simply will not make it pass all the icebergs. So who will you be? Will you be one who allows God to be your Captain through the world with its many hazards? Or will you be like the captain of the *Titanic* and cast caution to the wind?

**Lesson Two:** In Hebrews 10:25 we find: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Our lifeboats are, above all, God and Jesus Christ, but they also include one another. Our lifeboats can be there for us. What we do on the Sabbath and throughout the rest of the week in calling each other, sending cards and e-mails and praying for one another provides spiritual lifeboats for each other.

We cannot fail if we properly prepare for our own tribulations by having God as our Captain and truly following His instructions and leadership. A major part of



His instruction includes having love one for another (John 13:34-35). We should pay particular attention to the last part of Hebrews 10:25, "...so much the more as you see the Day approaching." That day includes the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord (Matthew 24:21, 29-31).

**Lesson Three:** Matthew 25:13 tells us, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."

The *Titanic* had received several warnings from other ships in the area of the grave danger in the ocean that night. The captain was told to slow down and alter his course. Whether he did not hear those warnings or he simply chose to ignore them, the result of his negligence was deadly.

Christ warned His disciples and all of us to watch. We read those warnings all throughout the Bible. Scripture foretells of the impending doom this entire world is facing. Will we take to heart these warnings of danger lurking in the spiritual sea ahead of us? Or will we ignore those warnings because we believe, since we have the truth of God, nothing can "sink" us? We must not have a false sense of security.

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*The icebergs, small and big, are the temptations, trials and tribulations that threaten to discourage and destroy us.*

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The word *watch* is used 57 times throughout the Bible. A dictionary defines this word as: "to be constantly on the alert; give earnest heed; to be observant, vigilant or attentive, to take preventive measures; take care and watch that you are not caught."

The *Titanic* had someone posted on watch on that deadly night. But by the time he saw the iceberg, it was too late to avoid it.

The apostle Paul warned of a prevailing attitude in the end time: "For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape" (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

Will we be caught off guard because we failed to be attentive and to watch?

We need to stir up one another and remind each other that in spite of what appears to be clear sailing, real dangers are lurking in the darkness. We cannot allow ourselves or our relationships to slip into complacency. As our trials become increasingly severe, we are going to need one another's support.

**Lesson Four:** Hebrews 11:36 reveals, "Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented."

This scripture gives us several things to contemplate:

- These people God speaks of in Hebrews 11 endured these trials and tribulations because of their religious beliefs.
- These people were able to endure because of their boundless faith and reliance on God as their Captain.

- Many stories in the Bible show how and why God allowed His people to go through suffering and tribulation.

We must stay close to God to “be counted worthy to escape all these things [icebergs] that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36). Then think of the Great Tribulation as the super iceberg that looms in our future. By the time it occurs, hopefully this is what God will say to you: “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (Revelation 3:10).

However, these verses definitely do not mean that God will protect all of His people from “untimely” death during the Great Tribulation, just like He doesn’t always protect true Christians from death in this day and age. Plus with increasing persecution of Christians in the end time, there will be an increasing number of martyrs then, just like many Christians have been persecuted and killed because of their faith in the past. What counts is the resurrection and life after death—eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

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*Satan is the biggest iceberg we will ever face. Will you face him on your own, or will you allow God to be your Captain and steer you through time after time?*

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God expects His children to be strong and of good courage. He expects us to endure to the end, no matter what we face. He also expects us to be attentive and watch the signs of the times.

The *Titanic* was warned. We have also been warned! There are icebergs floating about in the spiritual sea we are in. Some can be avoided, others cannot. The unavoidable icebergs must be met with complete assurance God is at the helm and will not let us sink.

Romans 8:35-39 stands as a constant reminder of God’s everlasting love. It is a sure promise to each and every one of His children that as long as we remain faithful and true, He is always there for us and with us. No amount of tribulation or persecution can ever stop that! Verse 35 asks, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”

Paul’s answer is that none of these things these “icebergs” can separate us from the safety of the love of God (verse 39).

For more about navigating the Christian life, request or download the free booklet [The Road to Eternal Life](#).

## Feasting With a Focus

By Anthony Wasilkoff

*The physical harvest serves to remind us of the spiritual blessings we enjoy.*



**D**URING THE DEPTHS OF A LONG, ARDUOUS WINTER, one of my sources of hope is a good-quality color seed catalog. Many of us receive a copy or two from various seed houses in January or February. I enjoy thumbing through a copy to look over the plants that are promised to grow if I plant that company's wondrous seeds. The flowers and vegetables are portrayed as tantalizingly lush and lovely.

Finally, at long last, spring does arrive and we are privileged to plant an array of seeds that germinate and poke through the ground with their tiny wisps of green. Some turn into gorgeous flowers, others into leafy vegetables. Every spring I think of the song that melodically implores, "Inch by inch, row by row. Someone bless these seeds I sow..."

Don't you just love the first taste of fresh chives straight from your backyard? Don't you enjoy picking the first batch of radishes and slicing them into a crisp, green salad, loaded with succulent lettuce, also from your very own kitchen garden? It seems nothing beats the joy of harvest. Oh, how good the first batch of baby potatoes, carrots and peaches taste. The joy of harvest, even though miniscule in the spring, is a remarkable treat. A vine-ripened tomato plucked from the pot on your apartment balcony easily beats its cousin purchased at the local supermarket.





## Biblical lessons from the harvest

Is there any connection or correlation between the Feast of Tabernacles and Thanksgiving Day? The seventh chapter of the Gospel of John describes Jesus Christ observing the Feast of Tabernacles. In his *New Testament Commentary*, for John 7:2, David Stern writes, “The festival also celebrates the harvest, coming, as it does, at summer’s end, so that it is a time of thanksgiving. (The puritans, who took the Old Testament more seriously than most Christians, modeled the American holiday of Thanksgiving after the Sukkoth [or Feast of Tabernacles]).”

The wonderful Feast of Tabernacles is identified by its Creator by more than just one name. In Exodus 23:14-16 we read, “Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year... and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field.” The Feast of Tabernacles is connected to the major harvest that occurs at the end of the growing season. In a sense, it is a type of harvest festival—a time of gathering in, a time of expressing gratitude to the One who makes it all possible.

Of our wondrous Creator, Acts 14:17 states, “Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” This passage seems especially applicable during the eight days we spend together at the Feast of Tabernacles.



fruits and vegetables.

In the northern hemisphere, the connection between the autumn harvest and the Feast of Tabernacles is hard to miss. Even today, there are numerous fall fairs where avid gardeners bring their produce and compete for prizes for the biggest pumpkin, squash or rutabaga. When attending God’s festival, many of us have seen the stages decorated with beautifully fashioned autumn scenes and a colorful array of

Our family was blessed to observe the Feast of Tabernacles in Prince Edward Island one year. Some of you readers may have been at that lovely locale. We were in the beautiful province where *Anne of Green Gables* was set. One of my recollections is that of people from Newfoundland taking excursions to local fruit orchards. They so much enjoyed picking a goodly number of apples to take back home with them. There is definite joy in participating in the harvest.

Deuteronomy 16:13 instructs us, “You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress.” The agricultural connection is clear, isn’t it! Those among us who are farmers see the significance of this connection more readily than others. Verse 15 further admonishes, “Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice.”

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*A vine-ripened  
tomato plucked  
from the pot on  
your apartment  
balcony easily beats  
its cousin  
purchased at the  
local supermarket.*

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## Greater meaning for Thanksgiving Day

What this implies is that we humans are the recipients of the bounty of a benevolent God. Thus, it is necessary for us to express our gratitude and joy toward Him. Too often Thanksgiving Day is lacking real meaning because many people aren't really thankful, while those who are don't know whom to direct their thanks toward.

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*The first Thanksgiving observed in October 1621 centered on acknowledging God for seeing them through.*

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The Pilgrims came to North America in search of religious freedom. The Mayflower Compact was an amazing document: “[H]aving undertaken for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith...a voyage to plant the first permanent colony...” They soon discovered that their search for permanence was not easy to come by. The first Thanksgiving observed in October 1621 centered on acknowledging God for seeing them through the ravages of winter, when half their contingent had sadly succumbed to the elements.

Abraham Lincoln established Thanksgiving as an official event by a proclamation. He upbraided his fellow citizens for having “forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us.” Lincoln continued, “We have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own.”

The Feast of Tabernacles is surely a time of rejoicing and celebration. But it must also focus on expressing sustained gratitude to the Source of all our blessings and bounty. We do this all week long. Each year those in Canada, the United States and some other nations also have a special opportunity to express extra thanks on Thanksgiving Day.

### We have much to be thankful for

In Luke 12:48 we read, “To whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.” Of the Sabbathkeeper, God says in Isaiah 58:14, “Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of LORD has spoken.”

In Matthew 13:16-17 we read, “But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

Spiritually speaking, so much has been given to us. Our ears are blessed to hear and our eyes are blessed to see what others earnestly wished they could. We are given spiritual food and drink all year round, but especially so on the annual Holy Days. Most of all, we are given spiritual sustenance in remarkable quantity and quality at the Feast of Tabernacles and its companion Holy Day, the Last Great Day.

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*In the northern hemisphere, the connection between the autumn harvest and the Feast of Tabernacles is hard to miss.*

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In a column written some time ago, Dr. Laura Schlessinger addressed the topic of covetousness. She referred to a front-page story in the *Wall Street Journal* about the “haves and have-mores.” Even in these times of economic health, one could observe “the wave of envy gnawing at those near the top of the economic pyramid as they see others making even more.” Dr. Laura concluded her column by saying, “With the help of the commandments we can rise above these basic instincts to focus on our blessings and be thankful for all that we do have. Gratitude is the best medicine for covetousness.”

Hebrews 6:4-5 describes what happens to us as the result of conversion: We are “...enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come.” Surely, this occurs to us most of all at the Feast of Tabernacles, a time of celebration, rejoicing and thanksgiving.

Would you like to learn more about the people who keep these annual Holy Days? Please request the free booklet [This Is the United Church of God](#) today.

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## The Law of God’s Kingdom

By George Carter

*The Bible proclaims that the Kingdom of God is coming to this earth. Every kingdom has a king and laws. In God’s Kingdom, Jesus Christ will be King, and God’s laws will be the law of the land—and what a wonderful difference that will make!*



**T**HE BIBLE TALKS A LOT ABOUT GOVERNMENT—the right kind and the wrong kind. The wrong kind has produced all the evils and troubles in this world today. But the right kind is destined to bring peace and happiness to this world—and Christians are called to be a part of it!

This aspect of the Christian calling is summarized essentially in a passage in Revelation:

“They sing a new song: ‘You [Christ, the Lamb of God] are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; and have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth’ (Revelation 5:9-10, New Revised Standard Version).

*Those God calls must be converted, changed and, in fact, reconstituted before they are ever given such authority on earth.*

This is surprising to many, and profound in its application. God is the Great King and Ruler of the universe. His children will by nature become kings and priests, ruling under Christ for a thousand years.

God will not give that authority to proud, self-serving men. Those whom God calls must be converted, changed and, in fact, transformed and glorified before they are ever given such authority on earth. All who are converted and attain the resurrection will come together in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet (1 Corinthians 15:52).

Keep in mind that though God’s Kingdom goes on forever, the millennial rule described in Revelation 20:4 is temporary. It will last only one thousand years! We should go into it knowing: 1) The very temporary nature of man and of this earth; and 2) The very eternal nature of God’s law of love.

### Laws in motion

When I was working on aircraft carriers, my job was to keep aircraft flying. To do this one needs to understand how the engines provide thrust, and the wings provide lift. Two things apply: Newton’s Third Law of Motion (every force has an equal and opposite reaction) and the physical laws governing vacuum (in this case, pressure differences caused by the acceleration of air or gas through a restricted space).



It doesn’t matter whether you understand the application to flight; what matters is that we realize that there are laws governing these matters. We cannot see the laws, but we can see the results and we rely on them. We know that without these physical laws, nothing would work. The same applies to spiritual laws.

King David understood this and discussed it in Psalm 19. The first six verses explain how the reality of God’s law is clearly discerned in the physical creation, upheld by the power of God. The next four verses describe the spiritual aspects of the law that, when understood and applied, enhance interpersonal relationships between man and man, and man and God.

David then asks that God would give him the ability to see properly, and to be kept even from presumptuous and hidden sins.

### Government throughout the Bible

It is interesting to note that much of the Bible relates to governance in some way or another. God inspired the Holy Scriptures to be written by men of practical experience.

Moses, who wrote the first five books of the Bible, was ruler over Israel when God formed that nation out of a group of slaves after He delivered them from Egypt. Moses had been taught first in the household of Pharaoh, as a son in that house, and as a prince in his own right. And then God gave him some very different training up on the hillsides with the sheep for 40 years!



After Moses, Joshua became governor of Israel, and the record is written in the book bearing his name. Although Israel was a theocracy, the priesthood did not rule. The priesthood and all the people were subject to Joshua. Joshua, in turn, attended at the tabernacle and continued to be taught—instructed in the Word of God—season by season as the feasts came around, and Sabbath by Sabbath.

After Joshua, the judges—who operated in much the same way—governed Israel. But over time the people increasingly began “doing their own thing.” The law was diluted and authority diminished. The common people came to recognize the fact, because it was they who suffered most at the hands of judges, priests and rich men of the land who bent the law to serve themselves. And so the people cried out for a king, much to Samuel’s dismay.

God gave them kings—first of all Saul and then David and Solomon, as well as many other succeeding kings. We read the records of their doings in 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles.

Two of these kings, David and Solomon, wrote most of four more books of the Bible—Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon.

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*Since God is love,  
why would anyone  
imagine doing  
away with God’s  
law? Shall we do  
away with love?*

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Later, after the 10 tribes of Israel went into captivity, they were dispersed. But following Judah’s captivity, many of the Jews returned to the land under leaders such as Nehemiah, whom Artaxerxes appointed as governor. Records of this time under gentile kings are found in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Esther is also concerned with this time in history. The book chronicles the queen’s intervention on behalf of her Jewish people.

Daniel, while he yet served in the Babylonian and Persian courts, gave detailed prophecies regarding the coming of the King and the times of His return! Daniel also recorded some good illustrations of the contrary ways of rulership in this world.

And what of the prophets? They were not kings, governors or rulers, but they were sent to the governments of the nations, usually to the kings in particular, but also to the priests, the leaders who at times were leading the people astray. They were sent to straighten things up, to warn of future consequences and to deliver God’s Word to the kings and priests. They often suffered because of their ministry, including being thrown out of town or executed for their word.

Ultimately, events led to the birth of Christ, who was an heir to the throne of David of the house of Judah. He came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God, into which we are called.

## In our hearts and minds

Jesus Christ, quoting from Deuteronomy (which He did often), said that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). Our Father wants us to be completed, to become perfect. The law of God helps steer us to that. The law must yet be written in the minds and on the hearts of mankind (Hebrews 8:10; Jeremiah 31:33). This is not merely intellectual, but emotional and loving.

*The law must yet be  
written in the  
minds and on the  
hearts of mankind.*

The two cardinal principles of God's law are love—love of God and love of fellow man (Matthew 22:37-40; Romans 13:9-10). Since God is love (1 John 4:8), why would anyone imagine doing away with God's law? Shall we do away with love? The saints are called to help administer God's law of love, as rulers on this earth for a thousand years—and beyond!

For more about this subject, download or request a free copy of [\*The Gospel of the Kingdom\*](#).

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## Halloween: Behind the Mask

By Jerold Aust

*Every year, on the evening of Oct. 31, millions of families celebrate a distinctly odd holiday known as Halloween. For your own good, you need to know what lurks behind the mask of Halloween.*



**H**ALLOWEEN IS UNDOUBTEDLY one of the strangest holidays people celebrate, with its symbolism of witches, devils, skeletons, bats and black cats. Is it not a little bizarre that children are taught to dress up as ghosts and monsters to go from house to house demanding “trick or treat!” (with the threat of a trick or prank, constituting a playful form of extortion)?

While tricks are no longer the norm in most places, it used to be common in many areas that a refusal to give trick-or-treaters candy invited them to commit acts of minor vandalism. Things

like having one's windows marred with a bar of soap, trash dumped on the lawn, toilet paper unrolled across tree limbs and raw eggs thrown against the house and car.

Where, how and when did such strange customs begin? And why do they continue?

Many parents encourage their children to celebrate Halloween, assuming it to be harmless and innocent fun, but why? Would parents honor this holiday if they knew what's behind it—behind the mask?

### Halloween's origins

Few people really understand the origins of Halloween. However, many clues are obvious from the trappings of the holiday—witches, ghosts, jack-o'-lanterns, skeletons, and the like.

History shows that behind the dark mask of this popular children's holiday reside the terrors of an ancient Celtic festival renamed All Hallows Eve. It was originally a holiday marking the mythical time when the dead supposedly rose from their graves to walk the earth.

To better understand the origins of Halloween one needs to be introduced to the ancient pagan festival of Samhain (usually pronounced *sow-en*).

In *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, under the heading "Halloween," the author's link Halloween to the eve of Samhain, "a celebration marking the beginning of winter as well as the first day of the New Year within the ancient Celtic culture of the British Isles."

This encyclopedia explains, "The time of Samhain comprised the eve of the feast and the day itself (31 October and 1 November). This event was a crucial seam in the social and religious fabric of the Celtic year, and the eve of Samhain set the tone for the annual celebration as a threatening, fantastic, mysterious rite of passage to a new year" (1987, p. 176).

Both the eve and day of Samhain were thought to be a time when the barriers between the human and supernatural worlds were broken, allowing passage between the two. "Other worldly entities, such as the souls of the dead, were able to visit earthly inhabitants, and humans could take the opportunity to penetrate the domains of the gods and supernatural creatures.

"Fiery tributes and sacrifices of animals, crops, and possibly human beings were made to appease supernatural powers that controlled the fertility of the land. Samhain acknowledged the entire spectrum of nonhuman forces that roamed the earth during that period" (ibid. p. 177).



*The Encyclopedia of Religion* then explains the origin of the bizarre customs that survive in today's Halloween: "Divination activities remained a popular practice. Adults, dressed in fantastic disguises and masks, imitated supernatural beings and visited homes where occupants would offer tributes of food and drink to them. A fear of nocturnal creatures, such as bats and owls, persisted, since these animals were believed to communicate with the spirits of the dead" (emphasis added throughout).

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*History shows that behind the dark mask of this popular children's holiday reside the terrors of an ancient Celtic festival renamed All Hallows Eve.*

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### **Halloween comes to the New World**

Centuries later, Irish and Scottish immigrants brought the custom of Halloween with them to the New World. After massive immigration of the Irish to the United States during the great potato famine in Ireland (1845-46), Halloween eventually became a national event.

Today, says *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, "modern Halloween activities have centered on mischief making and masquerading in costumes, often resembling otherworldly characters. Folk customs, now treated as games (such as bobbing for apples), have continued from the various divination practices of the ancient celebrants of this occasion. Supernatural figures (such as the ghost, the witch, the vampire, the devil) play a key role in supplying an aura of the mysterious to the evening, whether or not they originally had an association with the festival.



"Children are particularly susceptible to the imagery of Halloween, as can be seen in their fascination with the demonic likeness of a carved and illuminated pumpkin, known as the jack-o'-lantern. In recent times, children have taken up the practice of dressing in Halloween costumes and visiting homes in search of edible and monetary treats, lightly threatening to play a trick on the owner if a treat is not produced...

"There also has been renewed interest in Halloween as a time when adults can also cross cultural boundaries and shed their identities by indulging in an uninhibited evening of frivolity. Thus, the basic Celtic quality of the festival as an evening of annual escape from normal realities and expectations has remained into the twentieth century" (p. 177).

### **God un.masks Halloween**

Does the Bible have anything to say about strange customs and holidays such as this? In fact, it does—and none of it is good.

While God's Holy Days in the Bible celebrate the role of Jesus Christ in bringing mankind to salvation in the eternal family of God (as explained in this article and our free booklet [God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind](#)), Halloween is a celebration of the opposite—of demonism, witchcraft, death and evil spirits.



*Many parents encourage their children to celebrate Halloween, assuming it to be harmless and innocent fun.*

God's Word makes it clear that no one should dare entertain witchcraft or act as a sorcerer. "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, *or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.* For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD" (Deuteronomy 18:10-11).

God pronounced death on any Israelites who would dare dally with demonism or Satanism: "A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones. Their blood shall be upon them" (Leviticus 20:27). "You shall not permit a sorceress to live" (Exodus 22:18).

Why such a harsh penalty? God did not want such perverted, demonic practices to spread among His people and corrupt others. "But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams *shall be put to death*, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall *put away the evil* from your midst" (Deuteronomy 13:5).

Would God be against something as harmless as Halloween, especially since it allows children to have fun and enjoy a little entertainment? Can't we let them have a little harmless fun?

Frankly, Halloween is anything but harmless. It focuses one's attention on witchcraft and demonism, which flies in the face of the holy God Almighty! When parents not only allow but also encourage their children to celebrate witches and goblins, they are teaching them that it's acceptable to deal in demonism.



And we have seen what God thinks of that. God is a God of light and truth (1 John 1:5). Satan, "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4), is a very real being—a being of darkness, deception and death (Revelation 12:9; John 8:44). We are to have nothing to do with his ways. (To learn more, request our free booklet [Is There Really a Devil?](#))

Do not assume that Halloween is a harmless holiday. God hates mankind's dabbling in the spirit world of Satan and his demons!

If there were no other reason available, that should be enough. But there are more reasons. Halloween keeps humankind, and many Christians, confused, disoriented and separated from the one and only true God.

God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). Nor is He the author of Halloween or any other "Christianized" pagan holidays (Amos 5:21). Why would the only true God who loves mankind support any worldly holiday that blinds human beings to Him and His truth and that holds men, women and children captive to deception?

## What does God expect from you on Halloween?

You now know what lurks behind Halloween's mask: Satan the devil! God will one day unmask the ritual and tradition of Halloween to all people (Hebrews 8:10-11).

If you believe that God exists and you understand that He is highly offended by the holidays designed and perpetuated by the god of this age, then you have a choice: whether you will begin honoring God the way He expects to be honored and be blessed for doing it, or whether you will ignore the truth revealed in history and His Word. Don't wait!

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*Would God be  
against something  
as harmless as  
Halloween?*

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God is not a god of masks, but a God of truth. God says that if you honor Him, He will honor you (1 Samuel 2:30). Ignore God and He will leave you subject to the god of this world and all that entails. God expects all who love and honor Him to repent from dead works and turn in faith toward Him, the only true God.

### Recommended reading

It's ironic that so many of today's major holidays—including major religious celebrations like Christmas and Easter—originated in ancient pagan festivals and customs, while God's Holy Days revealed in the Bible are almost universally ignored. Which should you celebrate, and why? To learn more, request your free copies of the booklets [Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?](#) and [God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind](#). While you're at it, also request [Is There Really a Devil?](#) You'll be surprised to discover the truth about these things!

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## Letters to the Editor

### Peanuts and Perfume

Thank you for addressing this subject. People really need to be informed about the real problem of chemicals. This problem is becoming more and more of an issue, but some people are still not getting it. I know some at church who would like everyone with this problem to just be quiet about and go away. "You cannot tell people they cannot wear perfume" has been a standard reaction. I think how to really love your brother is the real problem. Thank you.

— J. Stewart

### "Do It Anyway"

I just read your article "Do It Anyway" and wanted to let you know that the song "Anyway" was also recorded by a CCM artist named Katie Giguere and is presently climbing the INSCO radio charts. The only difference is, Katie changed the lyric from "sing it anyway" to "praise Him anyway." You can hear both versions at this link: <http://www.gannsdeen.com/?p=319> Just thought you might be interested to know since you referenced the song in your article. Great article, by the way!

— Marc

Some feedback messages are edited for space and/or clarity