

# THANKSGIVING DAY— ITS TRUE MEANING

**What should Thanksgiving Day mean to Americans — and especially to Christians? What are the consequences of ingratitude? This article explains.**

by Dennis G. Luker

**I**F YOU are an average American, you will enjoy a delicious turkey dinner with all the trimmings on Thanksgiving Day. You will enjoy this fabulous banquet in a warm and comfortable home equipped with many modern conveniences. You may watch a football game on television — possibly in full color.

If you are an average American, you are tremendously blessed! But are you thankful? Or do you take your blessings for granted and assume you will always have them?

## The First Thanksgiving

The first “Thanksgiving Day” originated with the festival held by

Plymouth Colony in December 1621, in gratitude for a successful harvest. The Pilgrims from England had landed at Plymouth Rock in December 1620 and had endured a hard year. On that first “Thanksgiving Day” they thanked God they were still alive and had food to eat. The Pilgrims recognized *God* as the source of their blessings. They held that first “Thanksgiving Day” in gratitude and praise to *God*. Many Americans have forgotten this. Many probably

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Traditional American Thanksgiving dinner with friends and relatives. A day to consider and express gratitude for divine blessings.

don't even *think* of God on Thanksgiving Day much less actually *pray* to Him and give *thanks*.

For too many Americans, Thanksgiving Day has become just another holiday on which friends and family come together to glut themselves with *too much* food and drink. God is left out of the picture. He is not acknowledged as the source of all blessings — yet, the Bible, God's inspired Word, says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). Christ Himself said, speaking of God the Father, “He makes his sun to rise on the evil and on

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the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). Even though many may not *really* believe it, God is the source of their life and every good thing they enjoy. God blesses even the wicked with the basic necessities of life — hoping that they will repent someday of their evil ways!

### Presidential Proclamations

Thanksgiving Day has been preserved and passed on to us by Presidents who believed in God and the Bible as the source of national greatness and integrity. George Washington in 1789 issued the first presidential thanksgiving proclamation in honor of the new Constitution. He said, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible." How many Americans really believe this and give God thanks for the Bible? Most Americans don't even read the Bible! They certainly don't acknowledge it as God's inspired Word by which Presidents should rule nations! Yet God's Word says to the leaders of the nations, "And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them" (Deut. 17:18-19). God says the king (or President) of a nation should study the laws of the Bible to be able to *properly* and wisely rule.

Abraham Lincoln believed this! He said, "I believe the Bible is the best gift God has ever given to man. All the good from the Savior of the world is communicated to us through this book."

On October 3, 1863, by Presidential Proclamation, Abraham Lincoln appointed the last Thursday of November as Thanksgiving Day for the United States. Each succeeding president annually followed his example until December 1941 when Congress by joint resolution, approved by the President, officially set the fourth Thursday of November as Thanksgiving Day, a national public holiday.

### Have Americans Forgotten God?

President Lincoln did another very remarkable, and in this case, most unusual, thing in 1863. On April 30 he proclaimed a national day of fasting and prayer! President Lincoln saw America becoming vain and cocky because of rapid success and prosperity. He saw Americans *forgetting* that God gave us this land and every national blessing! He proclaimed this truth and warning to America, "It is the duty of nations, as well as of men, to owe their dependence upon the overruling power of God . . . and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord. . . . We have been the recipients of the choicest blessings of heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation ever has grown; BUT WE HAVE FORGOTTEN GOD! We have forgotten the gracious Hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and 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."

Never has that message been more applicable than to America today! Abraham Lincoln called upon all Americans to confess the great sin of ingratitude and selfishness. He exhorted the nation to repent and turn to God! Undoubtedly, God used Abraham Lincoln to save our nation at that time.

But we as a nation today are in serious trouble! Again, we have *forgot-ten* God and He is beginning to withdraw His blessings from us! Notice this dire *warning* from God, "Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest *when thou hast eaten and art full*, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied. . . . And thou say in thine heart, *My power and the might of mine*

hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is *he* that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the Lord thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish" (Deut. 8:11-13, 17-19).

God spoke this prophecy to ancient Israel, but it applies today to modern America!

### Curses Promised for Disobedience

God says to America (or *any* nation), "But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field, cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The Lord shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me" (Deut. 28:15-20). Unless we repent of our disobedience and ingratitude, God is going to curse us until we are destroyed! That may be shocking and incredulous to some of you. But, it is going to happen — unless we repent as a nation!

Will you as an individual repent of disobedience to God's laws? Will you repent of ingratitude for the many blessings God has given you? God promises protection if you do (Psalm 91:7-10).

True Christians have repented of sin (breaking God's Commandments — I John 3:4). True Christians can keep Thanksgiving Day and understand its true meaning — that *every day* is a day to give thanks to God! □