

DID YOU KNOW?

THANKSGIVING IS NOT AN AMERICAN HOLIDAY. IT IS ACTUALLY CELEBRATED AROUND THE WORLD.

Countries like India, Korea, Malaysia, Africa, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada all celebrate Thanksgiving holiday on different days of the year. Where did the holiday come from and why is it celebrated in other countries besides the United States?

***** The Facts Behind Thanksgiving*****

Ask any North American child where Thanksgiving comes from and you will probably hear a story about Pilgrims, Indians, and a turkey dinner that they shared. These things are mostly myths, however, there are a few things in the story that seem to be historical:

In the year 1620, a small English colony was set up on the edge of a big and harsh wilderness. Some of the people who lived there were very religious and they were called Pilgrims which means someone who travels to a special place for religious reasons. It was a good name for them because they had moved all the way from England because they wanted the freedom to worship God however they wanted. But their first winter there was so bad that nearly half of the people died of either disease or extreme cold whether. The next year, though, in Autumn of 1621 they had a *good* corn crop and so the people declared a 3 day festival to celebrate.

What kind of things did they do during the festival? They had a formal march (which is another word for parade) and the settlers showed off their skills with their weapons: guns. The Native American's (who likely had not actually been invited) showed how good they were with shooting a bow and arrow. And of course there was a lot of eating over the 3 days. This was only a one time festival - the next year they did not hold the festival again, because the crops were bad again and there were so many other problems that the Pilgrims felt there was little to celebrate.

But where did the Pilgrims get the idea of holding a festival to celebrate a big harvest? Did they make it up? No they did not. Their 3 day festival came from a popular pagan holiday called a "harvest festival." In fact there are other groups of settlers who came to America before the pilgrims who were reported to hold harvest festivals. Historians note that 'harvest festivals' are among the oldest known pagan holidays. The MSN Encarata Encyclopedia states: "Harvest Festival, celebration of the end of the summer harvest, usually marked by lavish feasts. Among the oldest known festivals, harvest feasts have existed for thousands of years. Ancient peoples offered the year's first ripe grains to the gods in thanks for the crops that would sustain their communities for the coming year." The Encyclopædia Britannica explains that many customs trace their origin to the worship of the Corn Goddess. In some areas, farmers believed that a "spirit" lived in the last sheaf of grain to be harvested - to chase out the spirit, they would beat the grain to the ground. In other areas they would turn it into a "corn dolly" that was supposed to symbolize the goddess of grain and they kept it safe for "luck."

Some legends associate harvest festivals with the worship of the Babylonian god Tammuz, husband of the fertility goddess Ishtar. Cutting off the ripe head of grain was supposed to symbolize Tammuz' untimely death. Let's look up Ezekiel 8:13,14 to see how Jehovah felt about his people weeping over the false god Tammuz.

In the USA, Thanksgiving Day marks the official beginning of the Christmas season—a 'holiday period' extending through New Year's Day, January 1.

MAKE YOUR OWN DECISION:

- 1) Read Joshua 24:14-16 and you decide: how does this scripture help you decide whether celebrating harvest festivals and Thanksgiving makes Jehovah happy or deeply hurt his feelings?

- 2) In addition to religion, Thanksgiving is an also an official national holiday in the country where we live. Read 1 Corinthians 10:20, 21 and you decide: If the nations celebrate this holiday, do I want to? _____

DID YOU KNOW?

WHERE DO THANKSGIVING TRADITIONS COME FROM?

The Cornucopia

The cornucopia is a symbol of abundance (abundance means having a lot of something), and it has been long associated with Thanksgiving. However, it was symbolic well before this holiday existed. The word 'cornucopia' actually dates back to the 5th century BCE. It comes from two Latin words: "cornu," meaning *horn* and "copia," meaning *plenty*. So the word "cornucopia" literally means *horn of plenty*. It was usually shown as a curved goat's horn, filled to overflowing with fruit and grain.

Here is how this came to be:

In Greek mythology, when the false god Zeus was born it was said that the goat provided milk for the baby. Zeus eventually broke off one of the goat's horns, and gave it "magical power" of becoming filled with whatever a person wanted and thus it became a symbol of plenty, that whoever had it would never starve. It became associated with several false gods and goddesses of riches and abundance and today the cornucopia often finds its way to the Thanksgiving table as a centerpiece.

MAKE YOUR OWN DECISION:

1) Now that you know that the horn of plenty is associated with magic, superstition, and false gods and goddesses, how do you feel about the horn of plenty?

Thanksgiving Day Parades:

Thanksgiving parades announce the beginning of the Holiday season. They give people the signal to go out to the stores the next day and begin shopping for Christmas. Stores hold huge 1 day sales the day after thanksgiving (known as Black Friday because business profits are written in black ink.) The ongoing festive spirit, shopping spree, helps the shopkeepers to gain maximum sales and profits. In the US, the most popular thanksgiving parade is shown on tv and is paid for by a major department store – now you know why.

MAKE YOUR OWN DECISION:

1) What are thanksgiving parades for? How do you think Jehovah views them and how does this affect how you feel about them?

Turkey dinner

The turkey was really pushed by Benjamin Franklin. Ben Franklin wanted to make the turkey the US national symbol because it runs quick, has good eyesight, and looks regal and dignified...at least to Ben Franklin they did. Well, the bald eagle was chosen for the national symbol and Ben Franklin lost out. Years later, an artist named Norman Rockwell drew a picture for a newspaper that had a family gathered around a turkey during a thanksgiving dinner. People liked Norman Rockwell and they respected the newspaper it was published in... from that point on the turkey became the official thanksgiving main dish in the US.

SHOULD I GET TOGETHER WITH MY FAMILY FOR THANKSGIVING?

Some people believe that celebrating thanksgiving isn't a big deal. They decide to overlook the pagan roots of this holiday and use it as an opportunity to get together with their family seeing as everyone gets the day off.

Some may reason that it is no different than the thanks we give to Jehovah every day. After all, the early Christians were encouraged to apply the principle found at Ephesians 5:20. In the name of Jesus Christ, they were to "give thanks always for all things to their God and Father" and to display an attitude of appreciation to Jehovah. The words "thanks" and "thanksgiving" are used over forty times in the Christian Greek Scriptures. But, would the 1st century Christians have applied this Bible principle as an excuse to take part in a pagan Roman celebration?

What, then, is the modern-day Christian likely to conclude as he views this national holiday? Dedicated Christians certainly will not want to convey to others (especially their family) the idea that they believe in one-day-a-year gratitude.

Personal decisions need to be made.

USE YOUR REASONING ABILITY:

- 1) Do you think Jesus would overlook the pagan roots of this holiday and celebrate it simply because his family members all got the day off? Explain your answer:

Does this affect your decision and if so, how and why?

- 2) Read 1 Corinthians 8:1, 11-13 and then 1 Corinthians 10:31, 32. Here, Paul reasons that Christians should wisely avoid eating before others a perfectly acceptable food if doing so would stumble them. "Respect your brother's conscience" is the message. Jehovah created the turkey. While there is nothing wrong with eating turkey, stuffing, and cranberries, why might some Christians decide not to eat turkey on Thanksgiving day? What are your feelings about it? How do you think Jehovah feels about it?

- 3) The Bible talks about something called using our "power of reason" to prove to ourselves what would make God happy and what decision he would like us to make. Remember that as powerful as Almighty God Jehovah is, he never forces anyone to worship him. He wants people to worship Him because they love him. He gives us choices to make so that we can show how much we love him by our decisions. What is your personal decision about the "Thanksgiving Holiday/Harvest Festival?"
