

RUSSELL SANDERS

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THANKSGIVING CELEBRATION – LESSON 1

OUR PURPOSES FOR THE HOLIDAY

We Americans have celebrated a special day of Thanksgiving since the days of Abraham Lincoln when he started the tradition.

The true purpose of it was to give thanks and adoration to God for His abundant mercy and blessing upon our country. However, Thanksgiving has evolved into a family gathering for fellowshiping and feasting, often with little thought about God.

People do relate this holiday to the Pilgrim's celebration in 1621. Do they really know much about these Pilgrims? We will look further into who they were and what their celebration was about.

When we hear of these Pilgrims, we have visual images in our minds based on pictures of how the men may have dressed. We associate a turkey feast with their original celebration.

First of all, they did not call themselves "Pilgrims." We call them that because a pilgrim is typically one who makes a long journey to some place. It is often for a sacred or a religious purpose, although it could be for any reason.

We call them Pilgrims only because they left England in 1620 to make a new life in the New World, a pilgrimage for religious reasons. People of their day called them Puritans and it was not a complimentary label. They called themselves by other terms such as "the godly," or "saints," or "professors" (of Christ), or simply "God's children."

They were traditionally members of the Church of England who had become disaffected with the church because it had retained a considerable amount of tradition and ritual of the Roman Catholic Church. They were influenced by the Protestant churches of continental Europe that had shed all visages of Catholicism.

They held a strong Calvinist theology. They rejected church rule by bishops in favor of local church elders. All of this set them at odds with the Church of England which was ruled by an English Monarch (Elizabeth I, James, and Charles).

Being in disfavor of the official state church and called "Puritan" in derision due to their strict manner of living (in purity) led to their desire to start anew in the New World. This first group of "God's Children" (Puritans) sailed on the Mayflower to present-day New England. They made a written compact (Mayflower Compact) as their governing document before landing at Plymouth Rock (Massachusetts) on December 11, 1920.

Tomorrow we will look at that first year, their hardships, and why they were thankful.