

Giving Thanks Biblically at Thanksgiving

As Americans prepare for Thanksgiving, it's important to look at not only what we have to give thanks for but what the origins of giving thanks are. Of course Americans know that the first Thanksgiving was a joyous celebration of the bounty, which the Pilgrims had experienced in the New World. The early settlers were devout Christians and knew that they were not just giving thanks generically but to God.

Today, while Thanksgiving is a holiday during which Americans travel sometimes across country to spend time with friends and loved ones over the long holiday weekend, sometimes we forget what we are giving thanks for and to whom. It's important to underscore what the Pilgrims knew; that all providence is from God and, therefore, to explore the biblical roots of giving thanks.

If one looks at the biblical festivals, it's very easy to see that we celebrate God's providence seasonally: celebrating the Exodus from Egypt, the harvest and receiving the Torah and how He always provides even in the desert. More recent, but no less biblical, are the miracles of the rededication of the Temple at Chanukah and the saving of the Jews in ancient Persia, as recounted in Esther. Jews have celebrated these for millennia and only more recently have Christians begun to understand that while these are uniquely Jewish holidays, they are nevertheless biblical holidays. Those wishing to connect with the Jewish roots of their faith as Christians have begun celebrating these holidays in their own way.

While each holiday has its own theme, a common thread that runs throughout is giving thanks. In that context, Psalm 113-118 are recited and often sung. It's known as Hallel, a biblical foundation upon which both Jews and Christians can

relate.

Following the restoration of Jewish sovereignty to the land of Israel, and Israel's declaration of independence in 1948, these same psalms of thanks were incorporated as a cornerstone of celebrating Israel's rebirth. Jews and Christians also understand this in modern times as the fulfillment of prophecy and, therefore, often join together in celebrating, adopting a biblical tradition in modern times as we thank God for His faithfulness.

While not a religious holiday per se, from a Jewish perspective, there's wide understanding that Thanksgiving is indeed an important holiday not just for American Jews but for Jews worldwide.

Americans celebrate Thanksgiving with a wide range of religious, ethnic and culinary traditions. It's also become commercial with Black Friday starting weeks in advance and Giving Tuesday as a bombardment of just about every non-profit asking for funds, as if it's the only day of the year on which people give. However, and with whomever, one celebrates and whether it's an occasion for mega shopping or a reminder to give generously, one thing that's for sure, and to which we all need to recommit ourselves, is to give thanks to the One who provides all we have and for which to be grateful. {eoa}

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