

Thanksgiving—Your Peace Offering

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In December of 1621, all fifty Pilgrims who had survived that first year in the New World ceased their normal activities. They feasted for three days—giving thanks to God and celebrating His abundant provision.

On October 3, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation urging the war-torn nation to set aside time to remember God's goodness "... as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens." Ever since then, Thanksgiving has remained one of America's most loved holidays.

Did you ever wonder, "Where did the Pilgrims get the idea in the first place?" Why did these frugal, unpretentious people stage such an elaborate celebration? And why did they share their hard-earned bounty with Chief Massasoit and the Wampanoag people?

The Pilgrims almost certainly adapted their thanksgiving celebration from the Old Testament "peace offering" that God had ordained for His people. Sacrifices and offerings were central to the pattern of worship that God had established. Of all the offerings and feasts prescribed in the Law, the peace offering was Israel's favorite.

"There you and your families will feast in the presence of the LORD your God, and you will rejoice in all you have accomplished because the LORD your God has blessed you" (Deuteronomy 12:7—NLT).

These special sacrifices were often tributes of a family breakthrough or a national event that called for specific recognition of God's goodness. Peace offerings—celebrations when God's people came together to appreciate the Lord and to have fellowship with one another, served as a blueprint for the Pilgrims' holiday feast in 1621. Consider these similarities (and some notable differences):

- Peace offerings were *voluntary*, not commanded (Leviticus 3:1-2). Worshipers brought their animals as tributes of gratitude to God for health, peace, and happiness.
- Only *cows, sheep, and goats* qualified as peace offerings (Leviticus 3:1-17). Wild game (turkeys and deer) would not have reached God's altar!
- Peace offerings were *shared between the Lord and the worshiper* (Leviticus 3:3-5 and 7:15). This portrayed fellowship between God and His people.
- *Breads and cakes* accompanied the peace offerings (Leviticus 7:12-13). Maybe pumpkin pie, too!
- Peace offerings were a *fellowship meal* for the entire believing community (Deuteronomy 12:12, 18). Worshipers readily shared their offerings with priests, their own families, and the poor. This demonstrated fellowship among God's people.
- Peace offerings were a time of thanksgiving and rejoicing *before the Lord* (Deuteronomy 27:7). God, Himself, was pleased to participate.

Thanksgiving is a season to remember God's generosity and goodness. As you enjoy a special meal with family and friends this year, remember to invite the Lord to be your special Guest. As you do, perhaps this familiar verse will take on new meaning for everyone present:

"Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends" (Revelation 3:20—NLT).