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Sukkoth is known by 2 names - Hag ha Succot - the Feast of the Tabernacles and Hag ha Asif - the Feast of Ingathering. Sukkoth begins on the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Tishri, 5 days after Yom Kippur the most solemn day of the Jewish year.

Sukkoth is named for the huts (succots) that Moses and the Israelites lived in as they wandered the desert for 40 years before they reached the Promised Land. These huts were made of branches and were easy to assemble, take apart, and carry as the Israelites wandered through the desert.

When celebrating Sukkoth, which lasts for 8 days, the Jewish people build small huts of branches which recall the tabernacles of their ancestors. These huts are constructed as temporary shelters, as the branches are not driven into the ground and the roof is covered with foliage which is spaced to let the light in. Inside the huts are hung fruits and vegetables, including apples, grapes, corn, and pomegranates. On the first 2 nights of Sukkoth the families eat their meals in the huts under the evening sky.

The Egyptians

The ancient Egyptians celebrated their harvest festival in honor of Min, their god of vegetation and fertility. The festival was held in the springtime, the Egyptian's harvest season.

The festival of Min featured a parade in which the Pharaoh took part. After the parade a great feast was held. Music, dancing, and sports were also part of the celebration.

When the Egyptian farmers harvested their corn, they wept and pretended to be grief-stricken. This was to deceive the spirit which they believed lived in the corn. They feared the spirit would become angry when the farmers cut down the corn where it lived.

The United States

The Pilgrims left Plymouth, England, on September 6, 1620. Their destination? The New World. Although filled with uncertainty and peril, it offered both civil and religious liberty.

For over two months, the 102 passengers braved the harsh elements of a vast storm-tossed sea. Finally, with firm purpose and a reliance on Divine Providence, the cry of "Land!" was heard.

Arriving in Massachusetts in late November, the Pilgrims sought a suitable landing place. On December 11, just before disembarking at Plymouth Rock, they signed the "Mayflower Compact" - America's first document of civil government and the first to introduce self-government.

After a prayer service, the Pilgrims began building hasty shelters. However, unprepared for the starvation and sickness of a harsh New England winter, nearly half died before spring. Yet, persevering in prayer, and assisted by helpful Indians, they reaped a bountiful harvest the following summer.

The grateful Pilgrims then declared a three-day feast, starting on December 13, 1621, to thank God and to celebrate with their Indian friends. While this was not the first Thanksgiving in America (thanksgiving services were held in Virginia as early as



Pilgrim William Brewster holds a Bible as the Pilgrims pray for a safe journey as they leave for America from Delft Haven, Holland, on July 22, 1620.

1607), it was America's first Thanksgiving Festival.

Pilgrim Edward Winslow described the Pilgrims' Thanksgiving in these words:

"Our harvest being gotten in, our Governor sent four men on fowling [bird hunting] so that we might, after a special manner, rejoice together after we had gathered the fruit of our labors. They four in one day killed as much fowl as... served the company almost a week... Many of the Indians [came] amongst us and... their greatest King, Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted; and they went out and killed five deer, which they brought... And although it be not always so plentiful as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God we are...far from want."

In 1789, following a proclamation issued by President George Washington, America celebrated its first Day of Thanksgiving to God under its new constitution. That same year, the Protestant Episcopal Church, of which President Washington was a member, announced that the first Thursday in November would become its regular day for giving thanks, "unless another day be appointed by the civil authorities." Yet, despite these early national proclamations, official Thanksgiving observances usually occurred only at the State level.

Much of the credit for the adoption of a later annual national Thanksgiving Day may be attributed to Mrs. Sarah Joseph Hale, the editor of Godey's Lady's Book. For thirty years, she promoted the idea of a national Thanksgiving Day, contacting President after President until President Abraham Lincoln responded in 1863 by setting aside the last Thursday of November as a national Day of Thanksgiving. Over the next seventy-five years, Presidents followed Lincoln's precedent, annually declaring a national Thanksgiving Day. Then, in 1941, Congress permanently established the fourth Thursday of each November as a national holiday.

Lincoln's original 1863 Thanksgiving Proclamation came - spiritually speaking - at a pivotal point in his life. During the first week of July of that year, the Battle of Gettysburg occurred, resulting in the loss of some 60,000 American lives. Four months later in November, Lincoln delivered his famous "Gettysburg Address."

Happy Thanksgiving

From New York State Senator

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*Wishes Everyone
A Happy and Healthy
Thanksgiving*