

week of *Sukkot* commemoration and teaching, is perceived to be the yearly highlight of their faith experience.

This latter style of observing the Feast of Tabernacles, while perhaps fulfilling a need for some people, has actually developed a few issues that congregational leaders and teachers need to be aware of for their local ministry. Many congregational leaders who have larger fellowships may witness a small “exodus” of various families and people to these large *Sukkot* gatherings—away from the focus of their local congregational body and plans. Likewise, the sheer size of many of these large *Sukkot* gatherings at rural campgrounds, means that properly monitoring things becomes impossible, and there can inevitably be some kind of an incident among the attendees. Monitoring this since the late 1990s, we do know of several large Feast of Tabernacles gatherings where the testimony to the local Christian community is not that people are being changed by the Lord and receiving a greater portion of His Holy Spirit. Attendees often return to their home congregations from these functions having heard various sensationalistic teachings (usually about end-time predictions), complicating what the local leader must teach on with a new Torah cycle preparing to begin.

The Feast of Tabernacles is a wonderful time for us to consider our Heavenly Father’s desire to commune with us in a very real way. None of us should forget the Apostle John’s teaching about Yeshua’s Incarnation: “the Word became flesh, and did tabernacle among us” (John 1:14a, YLT). As a ministry, we encourage *Sukkot* to be a time of both family and congregational bonding. It is a time where Messianic fellowships can minister to the local community by having a *sukkah* on their congregational property, and where families can have a *sukkah* in their backyards. Just as the Lord invites us to dwell with Him, so can we invite our friends, neighbors, and colleagues to dwell with us during the week. *Sukkot* is a time when we remember the rural conditions of the Ancient Israelites in a very cosmopolitan way.

Miscellaneous

Do you think that Messianic Believers in the United States should celebrate Thanksgiving Day?

The tradition of celebrating Thanksgiving Day goes back to the Pilgrims who settled the Plymouth Colony in 1621. Originally, these colonists were English Puritans who had protested against much of the popery or Catholic elements present in the Church of England. Being persecuted in England, they had settled in the Netherlands for a season, but discovered that they would

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not be totally satisfied until they found a home of their own where they could practice their religious convictions in total peace.

The Pilgrims' intention was to actually settle in the colony of Virginia, but their voyage to the New World caused them to be led off course and settle in what is today Massachusetts. They were greeted by a harsh Winter that caused many of them to die from cold and hunger. In the Spring of 1621, the Pilgrims planted their first crops with the help of the local Native Americans or Indians. By that October, the Pilgrims celebrated their harvest to boost the morale of those who had endured terrible loss and hardships. They wanted to thank God and their neighbors for the bounty that had been provided.

As Puritans, the Pilgrims' spiritual convictions came from a strict reading of the Bible. They were very intent on eliminating any opulent elements of Catholicism from their worship. Much of their society was focused around the idea that they had fled England in a similar way to how the Ancient Israelites were led out of Egypt. As America was viewed as a new "Promised Land," much of the symbolism of the Old Testament was adopted for the Pilgrims' life. The emphasis on thanking God with a large communal meal in the Autumn is likely appropriated from the Tanach themes of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Thanksgiving Day is a holiday intended to commemorate the hardships of some of the early settlers of America, and how thankful they were to have God preserve them through times of difficult trial. These early pioneers and pilgrims were godly men and women who left Europe to flee religious persecution and establish a Bible-based community in the New World. Because we as Messianic Believers would not be here without Christians such as these, it is entirely appropriate for us as Americans to remember what they did. One finds that Thanksgiving Day is a very popular and welcome holiday in the American Messianic movement.