

# Thanksgiving Day: Honoring our Biblical *and* National Heritage

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“...Now therefore, our God, we thank you and praise your glorious name.”  
(I Chronicles 29:13, C.f. vv. 10-20)

What are *your* plans for Thanksgiving Day this year? Maybe you haven't thought about it yet but suspect that the day will be much like last year. For some of us this means attending a church service. Most of us will gather with family to enjoy a meal and then spend the afternoon watching football, playing games, searching the newspaper for sales or just enjoying each other's company. Others will volunteer at food banks or homeless shelters. But where do these traditions come from? To ask this differently, what sort of elements should make up a Thanksgiving Day?

To answer these questions, we need to remember that Thanksgiving Day is a national and historic holiday that *also* has biblical precedent. Americans gather on Thanksgiving Day because, for 146 years, the President of the United States has declared an annual national day of thanksgiving.<sup>i</sup> At the same time, we should observe Thanksgiving Day in a way that honors the Bible as well.

In this article we highlight three essential elements for observing a truly national and biblical day of Thanksgiving. In *defending* these three elements we consider the testimony of Scripture (specifically 1 Chronicles 29:10-20) as well as the testimony of American history garnered specifically from past presidential thanksgiving proclamations. What are the ingredients for true thanksgiving?

## *Biblical Testimony*

First Chronicles 29:10-20 records a thanksgiving service led by Israel's King David. The people were specifically giving thanks that God had enabled them to build his temple. Even a casual read of these verses reveals that this thanksgiving service was a corporate worship service. The people worshipped God by declaring both his being and his works.

This means, first, that David proclaims the character of God, the Father of Israel (v. 10). As the King of all things he possesses greatness and power, glory, majesty and splendor (v. 11). For our Thanksgiving Day to resemble David's we too must gather together to speak of the Lord's glorious character.

Second, David highlights God's works, what he has done. God gives wealth and honor; he gives strength to all (12). He gives obedience to his people (vs. 19). The Bible calls us to worship God in thanksgiving also because of what he has done for us.

## *American Historical Testimony*

It may surprise some of us to learn that this same theme is clearly evident in the history of American Thanksgiving Day celebration. One of the central parts of most American Presidential Thanksgiving Day pro-clamations issued since 1863 is a call to the citizens of this nation to assemble in their *place of worship* to give thanks to God.

For example, in 1874 U.S. Grant (our eighteenth president) “recommend[ed] all citizens to assemble in their respective places of worship...and express their thanks for