

Thanksgiving Day – Pagan?

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Edited and Revised by Avram Yehoshua
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Articles

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Before getting into the actual history of Thanksgiving, which may shock some people, let's look at two Christian arguments for keeping it:

'I don't keep Thanksgiving Day as a holy day. It's a national day of giving thanks for what God has provided. It's not a holy day.'

Isn't this the response many Christians use for justifying Sunday, Easter, and Christmas? Many who observe those thoroughly pagan days do not keep them as pagan holy days but observe them none the less. The question is: Is it right to keep any of them? The Catholic Church expects all good Catholics to be in church those days, and Thanksgiving Day, too. There are many Protestant churches that also keep Thanksgiving Day as holy. Holy, as a Christian, literally means, 'set apart for God' and in this case, for religious observance, by the church setting it apart 'to honor God.' In other words, any church that speaks of 'giving thanks' to God about this day is setting that day apart to God. Now, of course, we should thank God every day for His graciousness toward us and His many benefits, but Thanksgiving

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Day is a special day set aside by the Church to give thanks to God, yet, where does God speak of it in Scripture? The question then becomes, “Does Man have authority to create ‘holy days’ unto God?”

Another Christian defense of Thanksgiving Day is that even ‘if it’s from pagan times, we are at liberty to keep it because we are offering our thanks unto Jesus, and He will appreciate it.’

God’s Word commands us to not be like the pagans and heathens, specifically stating that we’re not to offer up worship to God the way the pagans worshiped their gods (Dt. 12:28-32). Many Christians don’t realize that all ancient pagan peoples had their own ‘holy days,’ where they gave thanks to their gods for the provisions that the gods allegedly gave them. Thanksgiving Day is one of them. Why would anyone want to ‘honor God’ in a way that is displeasing to Him?

Thanksgiving Day is not a day ordained or authorized by God for His people. A lady, upon finding out that I didn’t keep Thanksgiving said, ‘Why, isn’t it a Christian holiday?’ And this woman doesn’t even go to church.

What kind of a witness to the Living God do Christians proclaim who observe days that God has not ordained, but pass them off as His? Is this not how the ancient Pharisees acted when they made up traditions that went against the Word of God, and proclaimed that the traditions were of God? (Mt. 15:1f.) If we cannot explain to non-Christians, from the Bible, why we do the religious things we do, are we any less Pharisaical than the Pharisees?

Thanksgiving Day, the Church and Paganism

Just what is Thanksgiving Day? The Church proclaims it a holiday (holy day), for the purpose of giving thanks to God for the many blessings they have received, especially agriculturally. Quoting a 6-year-old, after hearing the last line, he said, ‘That’s what we do for the seven days of *Sukote* (the Feast of Tabernacles).’ Out of the mouth of babes...Why do we need another fall harvest festival? God has given us *Sukot* (Lev. 23:33-44). It seems apparent that to keep *Sukot*, and then to keep, only 30 or so days later, another harvest day of thanks to God, is not only repetitious, but very strange. Thanksgiving Day is an outright copy of *Sukote*. albeit a pale copy. The Counterfeiter has struck again. Did you ever wonder why the majority of God’s people don’t keep the days He has designated as holy? The majority are deceived by Satan. The majority also keep Thanksgiving Day. For those of you whom He has called out of Babylon, but keep Thanksgiving Day, this ought to be cause for concern.

Most history books would like to convince us that Thanksgiving Day goes back to only Plymouth Rock in the 1600s. Plymouth Rock was not the first Thanksgiving Day though. Also, have you ever wondered why Canada has a Thanksgiving Day, but on a different date? This pagan feast, honoring the agricultural gods, goes back thousands of years, in one form or another:

‘Thanksgiving Day, in the United States and Canada, a day set apart for the giving of thanks to God for the blessings of the year. Originally, it was a harvest thanksgiving, and while the purpose has become less specific, the festival still takes place late in autumn, after the crops have been gathered.’ *Indeed, it is probably an outgrowth of the Harvest-Home celebrations in England. Such celebrations are of very ancient origin, being nearly universal among primitive peoples.*’

‘The first Thanksgiving in the New World, however, was not merely a feast, there were prayers and sermons and songs of praise; and three days had gone by before the Indians returned to their forest and the colonists to their tasks.’²

Notice the wording, not the first Thanksgiving, but just the ‘first Thanksgiving in the New World.’

‘In 1789...the Protestant Episcopal Church in America announced the *first Thursday* in November as a regular annual day for giving thanks.’³

With that Thanksgiving Day on the first Thursday in November, it was very close to *Sukote*, which generally falls in October.

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‘It was not until 1888 however, that the Roman Catholic Church formally recognized the day.’⁴

Throughout the country, ‘but especially in New England, where the custom originated, the day is looked upon with *great reverence*.’⁵

That sounds like a holy day or a day ‘set apart’ to Jesus. This is also what happens for Christmas and Easter.

‘Thanksgiving Day in Canada. The Dominion too, has an annual Thanksgiving Day, which is celebrated in much the same way, with family reunions and religious services.’⁶ (Note well: ‘religious services.’)

How can this be a *religious* day? Isn’t that the same as a holy day? Where does God, in Scripture, tell us to celebrate it?

‘It is proclaimed by the Governor General as a harvest festival, but although it is a public statutory holiday, it is not traditional in date. Usually, it falls on the last Monday in October, but if harvest is especially early, an earlier date may be appointed.’⁷

‘When the corn crop was gathered in the fall of 1621, Governor Bradford decreed a day of Thanksgiving.’⁸

‘Thanksgiving is a day to give thanks for the *harvest* and for other blessings of the past year...Gov. Bradford of Plymouth Colony ordered the day for feasting and thanks.’⁹

‘Although we have nationalized Thanksgiving, *celebrations were held in ancient times* to give thanks for the bountiful harvest. *The Greeks honored Demeter, the goddess of agriculture, with a 9 day celebration; the Romans honored Ceres, Anglo-Saxons rejoiced with a feast to celebrate the reaping of the harvest; and the Jews have given thanks for the bountiful harvest with their 8 day Feast of Tabernacles.*’¹⁰

‘Thanksgiving is a sports holiday...It is a religious holiday (it welcomes the Christmas season), as well as a civil holiday (most offices and shops are closed).’¹¹

It is a ‘religious holiday.’ Thanksgiving Day is a pagan day of giving thanks that Satan has set up.

‘Thanksgiving is...a giving of thanks for divine bounty. Churches of all denominations *are open for services* on this particular Thursday every year...*Quite as important as worship on this day* is the renewal of family ties.’¹²

‘Pilgrims and Indians, turkey and pumpkin pie are so much a part of the American tradition that it is hard for us to realize that *the beginnings of Thanksgiving go back not only to the Old World, but to the early world*. The Pilgrims frowned on all the holidays of merry England and refused to celebrate even Christmas because they knew of its pagan origins.’¹³

‘In proclaiming a day of Thanksgiving after the crops were gathered and before winter set in...they certainly did not know that they were acting in a tradition which went back to the time when men first began to sow and reap. Long before the dwellers by the Nile learned to measure the year, or dreamed of building pyramids, *all people who grew grain gave thanks at harvest time to the beings who had given them their daily bread.*’¹⁴

‘The Old Testament includes many references to harvest festivals...It is recorded that Moses gave instructions to the Hebrews for the celebrations of their harvest festival, which was called the Feast of Tabernacles.’¹⁵

Yeshua (Jesus), observed *Sukot* (Tabernacles) every year of His life,¹⁶ and with good reasons; God gave it to the people Israel as a reminder of the food that He provided for Israel in the Wilderness, and also the ‘present’ harvest and the spiritual Harvest to come, when God would feed His people from His Son.

‘*Even before biblical times the ancient people of the Mediterranean Basin held festivals at harvest time in*

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honor of the earth mother. The goddess of the corn ('corn' being the European term for any grain; Indian corn [American corn], is called maize), was always one of the most important deities in the hierarchy of the gods, and her child was the young god of vegetation.'¹⁷

'The ancient Semites called the earth mother Astarte...The Phrygians called her Semele...The Minoans had an earth mother for each district. All these local deities were absorbed by the Greeks into the one great goddess, Demeter.'¹⁸

Astarte and Semele are also known as the Queen of Heaven and are fertility goddesses. In different countries the name of the goddess would change, but her functions would remain similar, if not identical. 'Thanksgiving Day' was more than just filling a 'horn of plenty',¹⁹ thanking the goddess, eating food, and playing sports:

'Besides eating, feasting, etc. the married women practiced special rites. Under the cover of night, the women spent the next day bathing nude in the sea and dancing and playing games on the shore. Then they fasted, sang songs, then feasted, sang, and had general gaiety. All this lasted over a period of several days.'²⁰

'The Roman harvest festival...was called the Cerelia, after Ceres, the Roman goddess of the corn.'²¹

'With the acceptance of Christianity as the official religion of Rome and the conversion of the barbarians who had invaded the crumbling Empire, these pagan rituals were frowned upon and even forbidden by law. However, the peasants clung to them with a tenacity which has made the word 'pagan' (originally meaning simply 'a villager'), a synonym for 'heathen.' As late as the sixth century...St. Benedict...found the local peasantry worshiping Apollo in a sacred grove. Even after conversion, old habits and beliefs died hard, and the church was too busy...to trouble with minor heresies.'²²

'The benevolent earth mother...blended with the equally benevolent mother of Christ.

Folk memory of local deities fused with the Christian tales of saints to provide patrons for villages, and *the white robed goddess of grain lived on in various guises.* To those who live close to the soil, the harvest has an emotional and religious significance...their gratitude finds expression in rites in honor of the being who they feel is most closely related to fruitfulness; a being of warm earth, rather than cold heaven.'²³

'Even today a half pagan belief in the corn mother still survives among the peasants in many parts of Europe.'²⁴

'The Pilgrims undoubtedly brought memories of such English harvest home celebrations with them when they came to the new world. They had also witnessed 'thanksgiving' ceremonies during their sojourn in Holland...The Pilgrims themselves would have denied that the Thanksgiving feast in honor of their first harvest in 1621 was evoked by memories of the profane practices of the old world; however, all revolutionaries, political or religious, once their goal is accomplished, turn back to the patterns of the society in which they have been reared, and the Pilgrims, at the time of the first Thanksgiving, were no exception.'²⁵

Abraham Lincoln declared on Oct. 3, 1863, after Thanksgiving had become a national holiday, that all in the United States should 'set apart' and observe the last Thursday of November as a day of Thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens.²⁶

'The day is fixed by proclamation of the president. It is an annual festival of thanks for the mercies of the closing year, celebrated by prayers and feasting.'²⁷

'The earliest harvest Thanksgiving in this country was held by the Pilgrim fathers at Plymouth Colony in 1621. But long before the Pilgrims held their first Thanksgiving dinner, *harvest festivals were observed in this country.* Among the North Dakota tribes, the corn spirit was known as the 'old woman who never dies.'²⁸

'In Peru, the ancient Indians worshiped the 'Mother of Maize' and tried every year to persuade her to bring in another good harvest. In Europe, the Austrians also had a 'Corn Mother' doll, fashioned from the last sheaf

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of grain cut in the field and then brought home to the village in the last wagon.’²⁹

It's interesting that God uses the *first* sheaf to dedicate the forthcoming crop (Lev. 23:5-12), while Satan draws attention to the *last* sheaf for next year's crop! Also, Yeshua is the *First Fruits* or *First Sheaf* of the Resurrection from the dead: 'But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.' (1st Corin. 15:20)

'In Upper Burma, the friends of the household are invited to the barn for a feast when the rice has been piled in the husks on the threshing floor. After a prayer to the 'father and mother' for a good harvest next year, 'then, *much as we do*, the entire party celebrates this year's harvest with a feast.'³⁰

"A substantial portion of our ancestors came from England in 1621. Looking into English history we can determine why they celebrated this feast. 'Thanksgiving for the harvest is one of the oldest and the most joyous festivals *that man has created*.'"³¹

'However innocuous harvest rites are today, they are a relic of the great drama of the season when the fruits of the earth were collected and the means of life ensured for another year, and the thankfulness had a hidden stratum of cruelty.'³²

'The leading role in the drama was taken by Ceres, the Roman Corn goddess. In *Britain* she was later known by several names: the Maiden, the Harvest Queen, the Kern or Corn Baby, the Kern Doll, the Ivy Girl, the Neck, and the Mare. Sometimes she was simply the stalks of corn and sometimes she was represented by a sheaf dressed in many colored clothes, which were decorated with flowing ribbons and the finest lace. Whatever her form, she dominated the banquets, harvest suppers, and merry making of early times.'³³

'The Kern Baby was made either from the last of the corn left standing...or from the biggest and ripest ears to be found in the fields. *The spirit herself* dwelt in the corn, and mere mortals shirked the responsibility of cutting her down. So, often the act was left to chance. All those present, threw their sickles at the lone sheaf from a respectable distance and thus no one could be said to have deliberately performed the act. In the depths of folk memory, there was still the awareness of the death and resurrection cycle. The vegetation deity of the remote past needed to be propitiated *by a human sacrifice*.'³⁴

'When the feast was over, the Kern Baby was taken to the farmhouse and kept there until the next harvest supper. The symbol of the previous years' harvest was ceremoniously burned in the farmyard.'³⁵

'*The Kern Baby is by no means extinct* and can be seen in some churches as part of the harvest festival decorations, though she has been divested of her divine powers. At Little Waltham in Essex and Whalton in Northumberland for example, Kern Babies are attached *to one of the pews*, 'the custom of crying the neck,' once prevalent in the west of England, is still observed here and there, though now it is incorporated in the harvest festival held in the church. The origin of the word 'Neck' or 'Nack' is obscure. It may come from an old Norse word for sheaf or corn, or it may have a connection with 'Nix', a water spirit that is supposed to be from where we get Old Nick, one of the Devil's names.'³⁶

'Crying the neck: while the laborers were reaping the last field of wheat, one of them went to each group of sheaves and selected the best of the ears, which he then tied up neatly, 'plaiting and arranging the straws most tastefully.' When the laborer's work was done and the last of the wheat cut, the entire company of reapers, binders and gleaners would form a circle round the man with the neck. He then stooped down, grasped the neck with both hands and held it near to the earth. The people surrounding him removed their hats and held them downwards too, a gesture of homage to the soil which had nurtured the crops.'³⁷

'Most countries had their own special way of celebrating the 'ingathering,' but they all sprang *from the same pre-Christian impulse*; the act of sacrifice which had to be performed at the end of the harvest...The cries when the neck was held up were originally the wails of death, and the shouting and dancing which followed captured the joy of resurrection.'³⁸

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Of course, most American Christians do not follow the rituals described above. Yet, does that make Thanksgiving Day right for them to observe? Is it acceptable for Christians to celebrate Christmas as long as they don't have a tree or yule log? Of course not.

God would not have His people to cling to any vestiges of practices that portray gods or spirits in food to be worshiped. We, who are coming out of worshiping the Lord in the ways of Babylon, do not need to cling to a poor copy of what our God has given us in *Sukote*. Our need to thank the Lord for His Provision has already been ordained by God in the Feast of Tabernacles. Alexander Hislop writes that the Druids of the British Isles (the priests of their times), had their 'Midsummer fires and sacrifices' which were intended 'to obtain a blessing on the fruits of the earth' whether for May Day (the first day of May), or for 'those of the last of October...a thanksgiving for finishing the harvest.'³⁹

Does Man have the right or the authority to ordain holy days of thanks to God, especially when God has provided holy days for giving thanks to Him? Yahveh answers whether or not Man can make his own religious days, in counter-distinction to His, whether in ignorance or rebellion, when we see that the first king of the northern Kingdom of Israel, set up a day of festivity in the 8th month, the 15th day (approximately about the time Thanksgiving Day is celebrated in the United States). The Feast of Tabernacles occurs in the 7th month on the 15th day and lasts for eight days. It generally falls around mid-October. In the book of 1st Kings 12:26–13:5 Scripture records that Jeroboam set up a feast to rival the Feast of Tabernacles, which was held in Jerusalem:

'And Jeroboam said in his heart, 'Now shall the kingdom return to the House of David. If this people go up to sacrifice in the House of Yahveh at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam, King of Judah, and they shall kill me and go again to Rehoboam, King of Judah.'

"Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem! Behold your gods, Oh Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'"

'And he set the one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan, and this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan.'

'And he made shrines on every high place, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the Sons of Levi.'

'And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered sacrifice upon the altar. So, he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made, and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places, which he had made. So, he offered sacrifice upon the altar, which he had made in Bethel, the fifteenth day of the eighth month, *even in the month which he had devised of his own heart*, and ordained a feast unto the Sons of Israel, and he offered sacrifice upon the altar, and burnt incense.'

'And behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the Word of Yahveh unto Bethel, as Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. And he cried against the altar in the Word of Yahveh, and said, 'Oh altar, altar, thus says Yahveh! Behold, a child shall be born unto the House of David, Josiah by name, and upon you shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon you, and men's bones shall be burnt upon you!'

"And he gave a sign the same day, saying, 'This is the sign which Yahveh has spoken; Behold, the altar shall be torn, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out.' And it came to pass, when King Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, which had cried against the altar in Bethel, that he put forth his hand from the altar, saying, 'Lay hold on him!' And his hand, which he put forth against the prophet, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to himself."

'The altar also was torn, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the Word of Yahveh.'

Jeroboam not only set up golden calves to be worshiped in place of Yahveh, and ordained ordinary men to the priesthood

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(the Levites having left the northern kingdom, not wanting to take part in the idolatry), but please note well the wording of the Scriptures in relating how the new feast came to be:

Jeroboam set up a feast in ‘the month which he had devised of his own heart.’ (KJV)

Jeroboam set up a feast in ‘a month of his own choosing.’ (NIV)

Jeroboam instituted a feast ‘like the festival held in Judah’ (1st Kings 12:32), and Yahveh was angry with him for doing this. The picture is very clear. Jeroboam set up a substitute festival to rival what God had already set up. Jeroboam’s ‘Thanksgiving Day’ was a replacement for the Feast of Tabernacles.

Jeroboam had lived in Egypt in the days of King Solomon and had come in contact with the pagan celebrations of the people in Egypt (1st Kings 11:40). It’s very possible that he ‘borrowed’ his holy day from the Egyptians, seeing how the Egyptians worshipped the calf. (This was what the Sons of Israel reverted back to when they were in the Wilderness—the Gold Calf; Ex. 32.)

Satan copies the days and ways of the Lord, but perverts them, with the intent of leading God’s people astray. ‘What harm is there in it if we worship Jesus this way?’ The Prophet Daniel spoke of Satan changing the ‘times and the Law’ in Daniel 7:25:

‘And he (the Pope) shall speak blasphemous words against the Most High God! He shall *wear out the saints* of the Most High God and shall intend to change times (Sabbath and Feasts of Israel) and (Mosaic) law, and the saints shall be *given into his hand* until a time and times and the dividing of time.’

Christians keeping pagan days ‘to Christ’ doesn’t surprise God. He knew it was going to happen, but it is offensive to Him and sin for Christians because it’s not only a pagan way of worshipping the God of Israel, but also, Christians don’t worship Him in the days that God has ordained; in this case, the Feast of Tabernacles. Thanksgiving Day was not acceptable to God 3,000 years ago. How could it be different today?

Joshua was instructed to keep all the instructions (i.e., Mosaic Law) that God gave to Israel, so that he and his sons after him would be blessed by Yahveh forever, doing what was *good and right in the Eyes of Yahveh his God*:

‘When Yahveh your God has annihilated in front of you the nations that you are to dispossess, and when you have dispossessed them and made your home in their country, *be careful you are not caught in a trap. Do not imitate them* once they have been destroyed in front of you, or go inquiring after their gods saying, ‘*How did these nations worship their gods? I will go and do the same.*”

‘*This is not the way for you to behave towards Yahveh your God.* For Yahveh detests all this and hates what they have done for their gods; even burning their sons and daughters in the fire for their gods. ***Whatever I command you, you must be careful to do. You shall not add to, nor take away from it***’ (Deuteronomy 12:28-32).

Thanksgiving Day originated in the darkness of the ancient past and falls into the same category as two other pagan-Christian holy days: Easter and Xmas. Thanksgiving is not a day to thank Jesus for all the blessings He has given to us. The Church is oblivious to its marriage with paganism because it thinks it can baptize those pagan days, ‘in the name of Jesus,’ and everything is alright then, but it’s not alright with God.

Following Messiah Yeshua means that He wants to change us, from the inside-out. We all come to Him with many things we learned growing up, like Thanksgiving Day, but there comes a time when we hear the Truth and need to separate from those ways and choose His Way. Christians who want to know and walk in God’s Truth must separate themselves from all pagan days and ways and walk in the Light of the God of Israel, for He has called us out of *darkness* into His marvelous Light (1st Peter 2:9-10). We must follow Him, not a sanitized form of paganism. When we celebrate God’s holy days, we reflect to ourselves and the world the true God who provides for our every need, including our food. He has provided holy days of thanksgiving for us. When Christians celebrate Satan’s pagan holy days, ‘in honor

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of Jesus,’ they not only sin against Jesus, but present a distorted and perverted picture of the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).⁴⁰

¹ *World Book Encyclopedia*, 1942 Edition, article entitled, *Thanksgiving Day*.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Special Days: History, Folklore, and What Not* by Sharon Cade, 1984.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *We Gather Together: The Story of Thanksgiving* by Ralph and Adeline Linton, 1949.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Deut. 16:16: ‘Three times in a year shall all your males appear before Yahveh your God in the place which he shall choose; in the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and in the Feast of Weeks, and in the Feast of Tabernacles.’

¹⁷ *We Gather Together: The Story of Thanksgiving* by Ralph and Adeline Linton, 1949.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Cornucopia, or Horn of Plenty, is a symbolic, hollow horn filled with the inexhaustible gifts of celebratory fruits. In modern depictions, the cornucopia is typically a hollow, horn-shaped wicker basket filled with various kinds of festive fruit and vegetables. In most of North America the cornucopia has come to be associated with Thanksgiving and the harvest. From <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornucopia> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horn_of_Plenty

²⁰ *We Gather Together: The Story of Thanksgiving*.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Organic Gardening and Farming*, Nov. 1975, page 132ff, the article entitled, *Thanksgiving Day*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *A Year of Festivals: A Guide to British Calendar Customs* by Geoffrey Palmer and Noel Lloyd, 1972.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, 2nd American edition (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1959), p. 116.

⁴⁰ Revised on Thanksgiving Day, Thursday, November 26, 2020.

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