



Sukkot

Thanksgiving: An Act of Joy and Humility

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International Fellowship
of Christians and Jews®

סוכות הגדה
Sukkot
מצה



A Season of Rejoicing

Lesson One:

Thanksgiving: An Act of Joy and Humility

Lesson Objectives

By studying the practice and discipline of thanksgiving, we will gain a greater understanding and appreciation for:

- The countless reasons why we thank God
- The connection between the Jewish holiday *Sukkot* and the act of thanksgiving
- The many different forms thanksgiving takes
- How praising God in tough times can transform us
- The great examples of thanksgiving found throughout the Psalms

Key Bible Verse

“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.” 1 Chronicles 16:34

Before You Begin

Thank you. They’re among the first words our parents teach us. They’re foundational to our value system, to polite human interactions, to the life of faith. So, we thank our grandparents when they buy us an ice cream cone, write thank-you notes for birthday and wedding gifts, and pause for a day each November to count our blessings and offer thanks to the God who grants them.

For Jewish people, Thanksgiving Day is eclipsed by the Festival of *Sukkot* (also known as the Festival of Booths or Tabernacles). This eight-day celebration occurs in the fall and draws its inspiration from Leviticus 23:33–34, *“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites: ‘On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the LORD’s Feast of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days.’”*

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This holiday occurs four days after *Yom Kippur*, a somber time of introspection, repentance, and petitioning God for atonement. Now, with sins forgiven, Jews usher in one of their most joyful holidays. Falling during the autumn, *Sukkot* is also a time to offer thanks for the harvest and to remember their forefathers' wandering in the desert for forty years.

Jews commemorate the latter event by building *sukkot*, or small huts, that bring to mind the temporary dwellings the Israelites inhabited during their desert wanderings. Building these structures today—usually out of branches, leaves, and plywood—reminds the Jews of God's past provision and protection, and of how dependent we still are on Him for our every need. As *Fellowship* founder and president Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein writes in his book *How Firm a Foundation*, "By dwelling in an exposed, insecure hut, we are reminded that true security comes from being sheltered under God's protective wings."



Two girls with plants

So while *Sukkot* is a time of thanksgiving and joy, it's also a time of humility. Thus, it mirrors the true nature of thanksgiving—because anyone who utters the words "thank you" is expressing not only joy and happiness, but also an acknowledgment that these good things came from an outside source, from the one being thanked. As people of faith, we regularly offer our thanks as an act of obedience, in words of worship, and as a declaration of utter dependence on our God.

Thanking God for His Mighty Acts

The Festival of *Sukkot* is instituted in Leviticus 23, along with God's instructions to Moses for the Sabbath, Passover, and *Yom Kippur*. Read verses 33–43, where God instructs Moses about *Sukkot* and then answer the following:

1. What specific instructions are given to the Israelites?

2. Why do you think God asks them to do each of these things?

3. How do they impact the giver and the receiver?

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4. In Deuteronomy 8, God speaks to the Israelites through Moses before they cross over into the Promised Land. What additional instructions about thanksgiving, remembering, and obeying do you find in these verses?

5. When God performed other extraordinary acts for His people, how did they express their thanks in the following verses?

Verse	Action	Thanks
Joshua 4:1		
2 Samuel 6:1		
I Chronicles 16:4		

If God has done something extraordinary in your life, how can you emulate one of these methods of thanksgiving to express your gratitude to Him?

Thanking God in Tough Times

While it is easy to thank God when He does something miraculous or when life is good, praising Him during difficult times is much harder. And yet, it is perhaps even more important and necessary to praise Him in those moments.



6. Read Job 1:13–22. Horrible things happened to Job in rapid succession. How do these verses describe his immediate reaction?

What perspective does his thanksgiving, especially in verse 21, offer for you in your difficult circumstances?

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7. Read Jonah 2:7–9. Where was Jonah when he offered this prayer of thanksgiving?

How did this praise reveal his change of heart?

What happened after he offered this prayer?

8. Read Psalm 13. What does David’s honesty here teach us about how we are to approach God?

9. How did others respond when God’s people survived tough times in the following verses from the book of Daniel?

Verse	The Situation	The Response
Daniel 3:26–30		
Daniel 6:19–23		
Daniel 6:25–27		



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Thanking God with Psalms

The Psalms are full of thanksgiving to God, offering great examples of godly gratitude for us to follow.



10. Read Psalm 8, then answer the following:

Why did God ordain that His praise would come from the lips of children and infants?

Why is the author in such awe of God's creation?

How can we tell from this psalm that God loves mankind more than all His earthly creations?

What comfort can we find in the name of God mentioned above?

11. Read Psalm 96, and then answer the following:

Why does the psalmist call on all the nations to praise the God of Israel?

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Why is it significant that even the trees, the fields, and the seas are said to praise God?

List the different verbs (action words) commanded in these verses. How can these words inform your thanksgiving?

What future events does the psalmist say to praise God for?

11. Read Psalm 121, and then answer the following:

What specific attribute of God gave the psalmist assurance of God's ability to provide the help he needed?

Why is it important for us to know that God never slumbers or sleeps?

The use of the sun and moon here speaks of harm that could come to us by day or by night. What is the psalmist trying to tell us about God's care by using such figures of speech?

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A Christian Reflection

What further lessons about thanksgiving do these instructive verses teach us?

Verse	Lesson
Psalm 100:4	
Isaiah 12:4	
Philippians 4:6	
Colossians 3:17	
1 Thessalonians 5:16–18	

Extra Credit

Using the Psalms in this study or other favorites as a model, write your own psalm of thanksgiving to God for the things He has done in your life or for the attributes about Him you appreciate most.