

The Feast of the Ingathering, the fall harvest, is first described in Exodus.

*Exodus 23:16b*

Also you shall observe . . . the Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field.

The meaning of the fall harvest also took on the remembrance of being totally reliant on God for sustenance and protection. Leviticus 23:39-41 say this is a time to celebrate and rejoice.

Our Thanksgiving Day also occurs at the fall harvest - we have seen videos about this, centered around the Pilgrims.

The Pilgrims were Separatists. (Do not mix them with the Puritans, who thought they could purify the Church of England, and who still believed in a state church with mandatory attendance and other forms of coercion to achieve religious conformity.) The Separatists rejected the whole idea of a state church and the coercion that went with it. The History channel wrote, "The Separatists were even more orthodox in their religious beliefs than Cromwell." They were persecuted as heretics by the Church of England, so they escaped in 1608 to avoid the increasing intolerance of their Separatist views by the Bishop of Lincoln and Archbishop of York.

Sephardic Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492; they scattered and settled in different parts of Europe and the Middle East. A small group made Holland their home. Both the Jews and the Separatists settled in Holland because of the country's religious tolerance, a haven for religious dissenters and minorities.

While the Separatists were there, they had their first personal contacts with Jews, and even held worship services in an Amsterdam synagogue before establishing their own church in Leyden. The Separatists only spent a decade in Holland before leaving for the New World (America), but they were there long enough to interact with the local Jewish population and witness Sukkot celebrations while living among the Sephardic Jews of Holland.

One of the Separatist ministers, Henry Ainsworth, studied Jewish Biblical interpretation with the leading Dutch rabbis. The Separatists were deeply grounded in the tradition of the Hebrew Bible. As they studied the Scriptures, they came to see themselves as the "People of Israel", and saw, in their own experience of oppression and marginalization, deep parallels with Jewish history. They believed that they, too, were slaves, fleeing Pharaoh - King James I - crossing the Red Sea - of the Atlantic - in a journey toward the Promised Land - of the New World. So great an emphasis was placed on the Hebrew Scriptures, that the greatest Separatist leaders, Elder William Brewster and Governor William Bradford, became devoted students of the Hebrew language, so that they could read the Bible in its original language. Attempting to reclaim a simple, "pure" form of Christianity as close as possible to the early church of the time of

Jesus, the Separatists sought a model in the traditions of Jewish observance and worship.

During this period of exile in Holland, a parallel story was unfolding around a special individual whose life would converge with the Separatists later in a dramatic way. Tisquantum (known as Squanto) was born around 1580 in Patuxet, present-day Plymouth, Massachusetts. He was a member of the Patuxet tribe, part of the Wampanoag confederation. Little is known about his early life, but he was kidnapped in 1614 by Captain Thomas Hunt, an associate that Captain John Smith had left behind to continue trading with the Indians in New England, after their mapping expedition. Captain Hunt kidnapped 27 Indians who had been lured aboard his ship to trade beaver skins. He took Squanto and the other kidnapped Indians to Malaga, Spain and sold them there. Captain Hunt was so totally despised by the English for this act of treachery (he jeopardized English trading relations with the Indians), that his career as a ship captain was over. After being ransomed by Franciscan friars, Squanto learned English. He boarded an English ship from Bristol in 1618 that happened to be in Malaga, and it took him to Newfoundland. From there, Squanto and Captain Thomas Dermer were sent on an exploring mission to New England, where Squanto was released to his homeland at the conclusion in 1619, only to find his village devastated by disease.

In 1620, the Separatists arrived on the Mayflower and settled in Plymouth. They began their experiment in America under a communistic model - it failed. Squanto played a crucial role in their survival. He acted as an interpreter and guide, helping the settlers establish relations with local tribes, particularly the Wampanoag led by Chief Massasoit. Squanto taught the Separatists essential agricultural techniques which were vital for their first successful harvest. In the midst of a harsh winter and widespread death throughout their settlement, the Separatists held the first thanksgiving feast in 1621. Mayflower historian Caleb Johnson believes that the original Thanksgiving was a harvest festival (as is Sukkot), that it was observed in October (as Sukkot usually is), and that Separatists would not have celebrated a holiday that was not in the Bible (but Sukkot is in the Bible).

It was the embrace of free market - the necessity of each settler to work hard and provide for his or her own family - that brought about the plentiful harvest that defined the latter thanksgiving celebration.

Squanto's contributions were significant in forming an alliance between the Separatists and the Wampanoag. However, his life was marked by tragedy. He died in November 1622, likely from an illness described as "Indian fever." His death was mourned by the Separatists, who recognized his invaluable assistance.