

129-4 The Pilgrims' Providential Progress

On the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the Pilgrims, **Daniel Webster** came to Plymouth and said:

Finally, let us not forget the religious character of our origin. Our fathers were brought hither by their high veneration for the Christian religion. They journeyed by its light and labored in its hope. They sought to incorporate its principles with the elements of their society and to diffuse its influence through all their institutions, civil, political, or literary. Let us cherish these sentiments and extend its influence still more widely; in the full conviction, that that is the happiest society which partakes in the highest degree of the mild and peaceful spirit of Christianity.¹

The Pilgrims are synonymous with **Thanksgiving Day**. As Dissenters to the King's Church of England, they set out with their **Geneva Bibles** in hand to purify the English church and follow the pattern of the NT church. The King viewed them as traitors and persecuted them for their nonconformity.

Once the Dissenters realized they could not cleanse the Church of England, they left it and went on their own. Their Pilgrim journey under the hand of Providence led them to Holland and then to America. Even on their journey across the Atlantic, they encountered the working of God in their lives as He worked through them to prepare a nation that would lead the way for liberty.

In 1618, the Pilgrims realized they would have to leave the Netherlands. The truce with Spain was ending in 1620. William Bradford expressed the reasons the Pilgrims left for the New World.²

1. There were challenges of remaining in a culture on the edge of war.
2. They were aging. They had a view of longevity rather than merely being successful in their generation. So they determined to leave.
3. They wanted their children to walk with God and had seen many depart from the faith.
4. Their ultimate goal was to advance the kingdom of Christ by being stepping stones to others. This kept them from partisan and selfish purposes.

Here is a brief timeline of the events leading up to Thanksgiving.

One hundred and two passengers PLUS the crew set sail on the Mayflower from Plymouth, England. Not all were Separatists. They invited some Anglicans to join them because of their skill sets and desire to come to the New World. The skilled Anglicans included **Miles Standish** for security and **John Alden**, a cooper.

On November 9, 1621, after sixty-six days at sea, they arrived at the tip of Cape Cod at what would become Provincetown, Massachusetts. All 102 Pilgrims survived the voyage. Because they were not in their intended destination of northern Virginia, their agreement with the king was non-binding. They recognized unity as the only chance to survive, so they drafted the **Mayflower Compact**. On November 11, 1620, forty-one men agreed to be bound by this rule of law they had drafted. This was monumental in history. The **Magna Carta** was a governing document signed by a ruler and his subjects. However, the Mayflower Compact was the first time a group of equals constituted a governmental agreement of, by, and for themselves. This sounds like **Abraham Lincoln's** "of the people, by the people, and for the people." The "power flow" went from God to the individual and the government, starting with the first phrase, *In the*

¹ Jehle, Dr. Paul. *Journey of Faith: Why the Pilgrims Came*. Plymouth Rock Foundation, 2020, p. 15.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 41-43.

name of God, Amen. We whose names are written . . . The Loyal subjects. The Compact rehearses the motive of faith as to their purpose, *Having undertaken for the glory of God and advancement of the Christian faith.*

The Pilgrims stayed on the ship at night for nearly a month while teams searched for the best settlement location. After a month of exploration, on December 16, 1620, they chose and began building at modern-day Plymouth. It was then that they may have set foot on Plymouth Rock.

During the first winter, forty-seven died of illnesses. When Captain Jones offered them FREE passage back to England to save their lives, not one returned. They believed they were in their new location by the grace and providence of God.

Almost simultaneously with the Mayflower's departure for England, an English-speaking Indian (who loved white people) named **Squanto** befriended the Pilgrims! Squanto saved their lives, teaching them how to farm and hunt in the New World and as a translator in developing relationships with other tribes. In the fall of 1621, likely in conjunction with the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, they celebrated the First Thanksgiving.

As we look at the Pilgrims' story, we see how they encountered God's providence. There are at least seven providential miracles surrounding their history.

- Miracle 1: 1588 Storm that Destroyed the Spanish Armada (consequently, New England was settled by Separatists and Puritans, rather than Catholic Spain)
- Miracle 2: They were the first generation to have access to the Bible for themselves
- Miracles 3 and 4: Having their trip delayed, they were blown off course by storms. They avoided certain deaths and landed in an ideal location.
- Miracle 5: At their weakest point, an English-speaking Indian who liked Englishmen walked into their camp.
- Miracle 6: They attempted a Communist solution for survival that failed.
- Miracle 7: The Practice of Church Constitutions and Elections (Congregational Churches) laid the foundation for American Civil Government

As you enjoy your Thanksgiving festivities, I hope you are genuinely thankful and reflect on more than football, the Butterball, and the fixings. Remember our hearty ancestors who endured all they did to bring the gospel to the New World and, with it, the most unique form of government the world has seen based on the word of God and the power of the people. **Psalm 100:4** (NKJV) reads:

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.

Keep The Light of *Genuine Thanksgiving* Burning!

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