

How are persecution and Pilgrims like turkey and dressing? You don't celebrate Thanksgiving without them! They pack the drama of our history with profound meaning, about the providence of God. Use this outline for daily devotional reading of God's Word of truth this week, as you give thanks - and as you apply Scripture to your own political, economic, and spiritual situation!

THANKS v1-3 - “**O give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever!**” begins Psalm 107. Written about 2,500 years ago, it traces ancient Israelites returning from exile to the Promised Land. But it's also called the “Pilgrim Psalm” because it echoes the real-life experience of our own famous 1600s flock of freedom-seeking Christ-followers, deprived of basic human rights of religion, speech, and assembly. They are our spiritual forefathers.

TROUBLE v4-9 - “**Their soul fainted within them. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress. He led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in.**” Hounded by English authorities, in 1609 the non-conformist Pilgrims finally escaped to Holland, where they found some measure of religious freedom. Their pastor, John Robinson, was former dean of Cambridge University. He taught them the Bible, along with God's foundational principles of religious, civil, and economic freedom.

DELIVER v10-16 - “**They cried to the LORD... and He delivered them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and burst their bonds apart. Let them thank the LORD for His steadfast love, and for His wondrous works.**” The Pilgrims lived in poverty. A godless culture threatened to snatch their children. After much prayer, and with formidable difficulty, including multiple betrayals, imprisonments, humiliations, a few Pilgrims finally set sail for the New World in September 1620, hoping to escape further trials or death. The ship Speedwell leaked beyond repair. So those willing all crammed into the Mayflower. 102 souls.

WORD v17-22 - “**they drew near the gates of death...He sent out His Word...and delivered them.**” Intrepid faith sustained them through a traumatic 66-day journey in tumultuous seas. Wild storms blew them far off course. Their deprivations and impending winter left them in an extremely dangerous situation. But their faith - determination to live out God's Word - sustained them. His plan is still being worked out. YOU can trust Him, even when dark clouds hide coming providence.

HAVEN v23-31 - “**He made the storm be still...and He brought them to their desired haven. Let them thank the LORD for His steadfast love.**” Five hundred miles north of their Virginia destination near the Hudson River, they had been blown to Cape Cod. They found suitable harbor near Plymouth Rock. Already-cleared land had been abandoned years before when a plague wiped out the Pawtuxet Indians. This was perhaps the only unclaimed land on the entire eastern coast, and not occupied by openly hostile Indians. The purpose and providence of God!

PRAISE v32-38 - “**Let them extol Him in the congregation of the people, and praise Him in the assembly of the Elders.**” 46 men crowded into the captain's cabin on the 11th of November 1620. They had to form their own government, to replace their official charter valid only for Virginia. They wrote the Mayflower Compact, “*In the name of God, Amen!*” It describes their purpose to plant a colony for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith. This covenant to govern themselves is “the first-known document of its kind in history” and a model for more than 80 others. “**There He lets the hungry dwell, and they establish a city to live in; they sow fields and plant vineyards and get a fruitful yield. By His blessing they multiply greatly.**” Half the Pilgrim community died that harsh first winter. God sent Samoset, and Squanto (a former slave, who had learned English and Christianity in Europe). They both knew English and survival. That fall 1621, some 90 natives joined 50 pilgrims for a harvest feast, a model for our own celebration.

WISDOM v39-43 - “**Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the LORD.**” With resolve for God's principles and recovery of free enterprise, the Pilgrims finally had flourishing crops. In 1623 drought left them desperate. After a day of fasting, repentance and prayer, gentle rains fell. Saved! The governor declared a Day of Thanksgiving. There's a plethora of fascinating detail about the Pilgrims, persecution, and God's providence - which reveal ever more layers of the lovingkindness of our faithful God. Yes, pointed persecution prompted their pilgrimage. Hardships steeled their character. Miracles delivered them time and again. Fervent faith fueled their trust in the bounty of Almighty God's grace and truth. This is OUR heritage! As YOU pause to thank GOD this THANKS-giving season, pray for Christians around the world experiencing dire persecution for faith in Christ. Pray for His steadfast love to give them - and you - His strength and grace, to live only for the Lord Jesus, in every life situation, trusting and obeying Him day by day. Regardless of our hardships, God prevails. To God be all glory! ☐