

OUR THANKSGIVING HERITAGE

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TheSabbathGathering.org

(freely borrowed from many sources)

The Pilgrims set sail for America on the Mayflower on September 6, 1620, and for two months braved the harsh elements of a storm - tossed sea. Upon disembarking at Plymouth Rock, they held a prayer service and then hastily began building shelters; however, unprepared for such a harsh New England winter, nearly half of them died before spring. Emerging from that grueling winter, the Pilgrims were surprised when an Indian named Samoset approached them and greeted them in their own language, explaining to them that he had learned English from fishermen and traders. A week later, Samoset returned with a friend named Squanto, who lived with the Pilgrims and accepted their Christian faith. Squanto taught the Pilgrims much about how to live in the New World, and he and Samoset helped forge a long - lasting peace treaty between the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag Indians. Pilgrim Governor William Bradford described Squanto as “a special instrument sent of God for [our] good... and never left [us] till he died.”

Contrary to popular, the first harvest of the pilgrims was not plentiful:

Governor Bradford writes, “They gathered in their **small** harvest.”

Edward Winslow writes, “Our corn did well, our barley was mediocre, and our peas were not worth gathering.”

The truth is that the previous 10 months, since their seven-week journey on the Mayflower, had been devastating. Weakened by the journey and then by all that was needed to establish housing and live in the new land, many became sick and began to die -- one per day, then two, and sometimes three. They dug the graves at night, so that the Indians would not see how their numbers were dwindling. At one point, there were only seven people, out of 102, strong enough to get wood, make fires, and care for the sick. By the spring, they had lost 46 of the original 102. Of the 17 male heads of families, ten died during the first infection; of the 17 wives, only three were left. On the surface, it doesn't seem like they would have been very thankful.

But interestingly enough, they still felt blessed with abundance:

Governor Bradford also wrote that they “had all good things in plenty.”

Edward Winslow also wrote, “And although it be not always so plentiful, as it was at this time with us [during the 3-day feast with the Indians], yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want, that we often wish you partakers of our plenty.”

The pilgrim's voyage to plant their first colony was “**undertaken for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith.**” These were religious people. Familiar with the Bible, and not just the New Testament, but also the Old Testament. In fact some of the early Pilgrims knew Hebrew and referred to the Hebrew Bible. Their first publication was the book of Psalms with frequent notes in Hebrew to clarify meaning and understanding.

Both the Pilgrims and the Jews were victims of religious persecution. The Sephardic Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492; they scattered and eventually settled in different parts of Europe and the Middle East. A small group of Jews made Holland their home. The Pilgrims escaped England in 1608 to avoid the increasing intolerance of their Separatist views by the Bishop of Lincoln and Archbishop of York. Both the Jews and the Pilgrims settled in Holland because of the country's religious tolerance.

The Pilgrims only spent a decade in Holland before leaving for the New World, but they were certainly there long enough to interact with the local Jewish population; the Pilgrims also would have witnessed Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles) celebrations while living among the Sephardic Jews of Holland. Seeing themselves as new Israelites in a new “promised land,” the Pilgrims surely found inspiration in the Bible, in the Books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, in which God commands the ancient Israelites to observe Sukkot, “to rejoice before YHWH your God” at the time of the fall harvest [Lev. 23:40].

So when their very first harvest came, even though small, and even though nearly 50% of them had died during the prior months, they considered themselves blessed by God. And they were going to celebrate. So 53 pilgrims and 90 Indians feasted for three days. The Indians brought much of the food.

What a reminder to us that even in spite of extreme hardship and disappointment, we by the goodness of God, we are so far from want” and have “all good things in plenty.”

Shofar & Cornucopia

Cornucopia: a symbol of plenty consisting of a **goat's horn** overflowing with flowers, fruit, and corn; an ornamental container **shaped like a goat's horn**. (google dictionary)

Some believe this comes from Greek mythology: The horn was symbolic of Amalthea, the goat that fed and protected Zeus as an infant while he was being hidden from his father, Cronos. When young Zeus was playing with Amalthea, he accidentally broke off one of her horns. Zeus made up for his actions by promising that the horn would always be filled with whatever good things its owner desired.

However the Shofar comes from a much more ancient Biblical source – beginning with the ram’s horn that was associated the event of Abraham’s visit to Mt. Moriah to sacrifice his son Isaac. Because the ram was caught in the thicket by its horns, the ram’s horn (shofar) became a symbol of God’s provision (Jehovah Jireh, “YHWH provides”).

The ram’s horn is traditionally shown overflowing with fruits. It is an appropriate symbol to remind us of God’s blessings and provision.

Bradford diary

"They began now to gather in the small harvest they had, and to fit up their houses and dwellings against winter, being all well recovered in health and strength and **had all things in good plenty**. For as some were thus employed in affairs abroad, others were exercised in fishing, about cod and bass and other fish, of which they took good store, of which every family had their portion. All the summer there was no want; and now began to come in store of fowl, as winter approached, of which this place did abound when they came first (but afterward decreased by degrees). And besides waterfowl there was great store of wild turkeys, of which they took many, besides venison, etc. Besides, they had about a peck of meal a week to a person, or now since harvest, Indian corn to that proportion. Which made many afterwards write so largely of their plenty here to their friends in England, which were not feigned but true reports.

Letter of Edward Winslow, 11 December 1621

Loving, and old Friend; although I received no letter from you by this ship, yet forasmuch as I know you expect the performance of my promise, which was, to write unto you truly and faithfully of all things. I have therefore at this time sent unto you accordingly. Referring you for further satisfaction to our more large relations. You shall understand, that in this little time, that a few of us have been here, we have built seven dwelling-houses, and four for the use of the plantation, and have made preparation for divers others. We set the last spring some twenty acres of Indian corn, and sowed some six acres of barley and peas, and according to the manner of the Indians, we manured our ground with herrings or rather shads, which we have in great abundance, and take with great ease at our doors. **Our corn did prove well, and God be praised, we had a good increase of Indian corn, and our barley indifferent good, but our peas not worth the gathering,** for we feared they were too late sown, they came up very well, and blossomed, but the sun parched them in the blossom; our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after a more special manner rejoice together, after we had gathered the fruit of our labors; they four in one day killed as much fowl, as with a little help beside, served the company almost a week, at which time amongst other recreations, we exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and among the rest their greatest King Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five deer, which they brought to the plantation and bestowed on our governor, and upon the captain, and others. And **although it be not always so plentiful, as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want, that we often wish you partakers of our plenty.** We have found the Indians very faithful in their covenant of peace with us; very loving and ready to pleasure us: we often go to them, and they come to us; some of us have been fifty miles by land in the country with them; the occasions and relations whereof you shall understand by our general and more full

declaration of such things as are worth the noting, yea, it hath pleased God so to possess the Indians with a fear of us, and love unto us, that not only the greatest king amongst them called Massasoit, but also all the princes and peoples round about us, have either made suit unto us, or been glad of any occasion to make peace with us, so that seven of them at once have sent their messengers to us to that end, yea, an Fle at sea, which we never saw hath also together with the former yielded willingly to be under the protection, and subjects to our sovereign Lord King James, so that there is now great peace amongst the Indians themselves, which was not formerly, neither would have been but for us; and we for our parts walk as peaceably and safely in the wood, as in the highways in England, we entertain them familiarly in our houses, and they as friendly bestowing their venison on us. They are a people without any religion, or knowledge of any God, yet very trusty, quick of apprehension, ripe-witted, just, the men and women go naked, only a skin about their middles; for the temper of the air, here it agreeth well with that in England, and if there be any difference at all, this is somewhat hotter in summer, some think it to be colder in winter, but I cannot out of experience so say; the air is very clear and not foggy, as hath been reported. I never in my life remember a more seasonable year, than we have here enjoyed: and if we have once but kine, horses, and sheep, I make no question, but men might live as contented here as in any part of the world. For fish and fowl, we have great abundance, fresh cod in the summer is but coarse meat with us, our bay is full of lobsters all the summer, and affordeth variety of other fish; in September we can take a hogshhead of eels in a night, with small labor, and can dig them out of their beds, all the winter we have mussels and othus at our doors: oysters we have none near, but we can have them brought by the Indians when we will; all the springtime the earth sendeth forth naturally very good sallet herbs: here are grapes, white and red, and very sweet and strong also. Strawberries, gooseberries, raspas, etc. Plums of three sorts, with black and red, being almost as good as a damson: abundance of roses, white, red, and damask: single, but very sweet indeed; the country wanteth only industrious men to employ, for it would grieve your hearts (if as I) you had seen so many miles together by goodly rivers uninhabited, and withal to consider those parts of the world wherein you live, to be even greatly burdened with abundance of people. These things I thought good to let you understand, being the truth of things as near as I could experimentally take knowledge of, and that you might on our behalf give God thanks who hath dealt so favorably with us.

Our supply of men from you came the ninth of November 1621, putting in at Cape Cod, some eight or ten leagues from us, the Indians that dwell thereabout were they who were owners of the corn which we found in caves, for which we have given them full content, and are in great league with them, they sent us word there was a ship near unto them, but thought it to be a Frenchman, and indeed for ourselves, we expected not a friend so soon. But when we perceived that she made for our bay, the governor commanded a great piece to be shot off, to call home such as were abroad at work; whereupon every man, yea, boy that could handle a gun were ready, with full resolution, that if she were an enemy, we would stand in our just defense, not fearing them, but God provided better for us than we supposed; these came all in health unto us, not any being sick by the way (otherwise than seasickness) and so continue at this time, by the blessing of God, the goodwife Ford was delivered of a son the first night she landed, and both of them are very well. When it pleaseth God, we are settled and fitted for the fishing business, and other trading, I doubt not but by the blessing of God, the gain will give content to all; in the mean time, that we have gotten we have sent by this ship, and though it be not much, yet it will witness for us, that we have not been idle, considering the smallness of our number all this summer. We hope the merchants will accept of it, and be encouraged to furnish us with things needful for further employment, which will also encourage us to put forth ourselves to the uttermost. Now because I expect your coming unto us with other of our friends, whose company we much desire, I thought good to advertise you of a few things needful; be careful to have a very good bread-room to put your biscuits in, let your cask for beer and water be iron-bound for the first tire if not more; let not your meat be dry-salted, none can better do it than the sailors; let your meal be so hard trod in your cask that you shall need an adz or hatchet to work it out with: trust not too much on us for corn at this time, for by reason of this last company that came, depending wholly upon us, we shall have little enough till harvest; be careful to come by some of your meal to spend by the way, it will much refresh you, build your cabins as open as you can, and bring good store of clothes, and bedding with you; bring every man a musket or fowling-piece, let your piece be long in the barrel, and fear not the weight of it, for most of our shooting is from stands; bring juice of lemons, and take it fasting, it is of good use; for hot waters, aniseed water is the best, but use it sparingly: if you bring anything for comfort in the country, butter or sallet oil, or both is very good; our Indian corn even the coarsest, maketh as pleasant meat as rice, therefore spare that unless to spend by the way; bring paper, and linseed oil for your windows, with cotton

yarn for your lamps; let your shot be most for big fowls, and bring store of powder and shot: I forbear further to write for the present, hoping to see you by the next return, so I take my leave, commending you to the Lord for a safe conduct unto us. Resting in Him

Plymouth in New England
this 11 of December.
1621.

Your loving Friend
E. W.

The letter of William Hilton, passenger on the Fortune

(The letter was written in November of 1621)

Loving Cousin, At our arrival in New Plymouth , in New England, we found all our friends and planters in good health, though they were left sick and weak, with very small means; the Indians round about us peaceable and friendly; the country very pleasant and temperate, yielding naturally, of itself, great store of fruits, as vines of divers sorts in great abundance . There is likewise walnuts, chestnuts, small nuts and plums, with much variety of flowers, roots and herbs, no less pleasant than wholesome and profitable . No place hath more gooseberrries and strawberries, nor better . Timber of all sorts you have in England doth cover the land, that affords beasts of divers sorts, and great flocks of turkey, quails, pigeons and partridges; many great lakes abounding with fish, fowl, beavers, and otters . The sea affords us great plenty of all excellent sorts of sea - fish, as the rivers and isles doth variety of wild fowl of most useful sorts . Mines we find, to our thinking; but neither the goodness nor quality we know . Better grain cannot be than the Indian corn, if we will plant it upon as good ground as a man need desire . We are all freeholders; the rent - day doth not trouble us; and all those good blessings we have , of which and what we list in their seasons for taking. Our company are, for most part, very religious, honest people; the word of God sincerely taught us every Sabbath; so that I know not any thing a contented mind can here want . I desire your friendly c are to send my wife and children to me, where I wish all the friends I have in England; and so I rest Your loving kinsman, William Hilton