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PILGRIM PSALM

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.

"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 called the "Pilgrim Psalm" because it echoes the real-life experience of our famous 1600s flock of freedom-seeking Christ-followers, deprived of basic human rights of religion, speech and assembly.

v5-12 **"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 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 foundational principles of religious, civil, and economic freedom. But they lived in poverty. And a godless culture threatened to snatch away their children.

v13-22 **"Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, 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."** After much prayer, and with formidable difficulty, including multiple betrayals, imprisonments, and humiliations, a few Pilgrims finally set sail for the New World in September 1620, hoping to escape further trials or death.

v23-28 **"Some went down to the sea in ships... the stormy wind lifted up the waves... their courage melted away in their evil plight... they cried to the LORD and He delivered them."** Intrepid faith sustained them through a traumatic 66-day journey in tumultuous seas. Storms blew them far off course. Their deprivations and impending winter left them in an extremely dangerous situation.

v29-31 **"He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, 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, they had sailed 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 providence of God!

v32-35 **"Let them extol Him in the congregation of the people, and praise Him in the assembly of the Elders."** Forty-six 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 to advancement of the Christian faith. World History Institute says this covenant to govern themselves, is "the first-known document of its kind in history" and a model for more than 80 others.

v36-42 **"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 of them died that harsh first winter. God sent Samoset - and Squanto, a former slave, who learned English and Christianity in Europe, then had returned. Finally in 1623, growing crops resulted from their help, along with resolve for God's principles and free enterprise. Then, drought left them desperate. But after a day of repentance, fasting and prayer, gentle rains fell. Saved! Governor Bradford declared a Day of Thanksgiving.

v43 **"Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the LORD."** 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. 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 Day, pray for Christians around the world experiencing dire persecution for faith in Christ. Pray for God's 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!