

The Old Testament Reason Native Americans Loved the Pilgrims

The Pilgrims treated the native people with dignity, love and respect. During their first year in the New World, they established peace treaties with several tribes in the region, including the Wampanoag, the most powerful of the tribes. These treaties opened the way for free intercourse between the two peoples and led to much visiting back and forth, both for trade and friendship. This led one unnamed Pilgrim to write back to England,

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. And we, for our parts, walk as peaceably and safely in the wood as in the highways of England (Hyatt, *Pilgrims and Patriots*, 33).

Their first face-to-face encounter with an American Indian was in the spring of 1621 when two English-speaking natives, Samoset and Squanto, visited the Plymouth colony. Squanto, whom Bradford called "a special instrument sent from God for their good," instructed the Pilgrims in farming, hunting and fishing. This was life-saving, for in England they had been craftsmen and townspeople, and without these new skills, they would not have survived in the wilderness of New England.

The First Peace Treaty Signed on American Soil

Squanto also arranged a special meeting between Bradford and Massasoit, who was Chief of the Wampanoag. Massasoit arrived at the plantation with 60 of his warriors, and the Pilgrims received him with the respect they would have shown a dignitary in England.

They ushered him to a building where they seated him on a special green rug with three or four cushions. Bradford then arrived, and after exchanging cordial greetings, they had a drink together and discussed the need for friendly and mutual relations.

Bradford and Massasoit agreed on a peace treaty, promising mutual friendship and security. According to Bradford, it included the following:

1. That neither Massasoit nor any of his people would do harm to any of their people.
2. That if any Wampanoag took away anything from the Pilgrims, Massasoit would cause it to be restored, and they would do likewise.
3. That they would aid one another in the event of an outside attack on either.

This first American security pact opened the way for trade and free movement between the Wampanoag and the Pilgrims. Within a year, the Pilgrims had signed similar peace treaties with several other tribes. Meantime, the treaty with the Wampanoag was kept faithfully for over 50 years, until Massasoit's son, Metacom, became chief. He was better known in history by his chosen name, "King Philip."

After the treaty was signed, Massasoit returned to his place called Sowams, which was located about 40 miles from Plymouth in what would be present-day Barrington, Rhode Island. Squanto, however, remained with the Pilgrims as did Samoset, Hobomok and possibly other natives. Their assistance to the Pilgrims was invaluable, serving them as guides and interpreters and showing them how to farm, fish and hunt.

The Pilgrims Treat Native Women Fairly and Justly

Indeed, the first generation of immigrants to New England treated the indigenous people with what Dr. Samuel Eliot Morison called "a combination of justice, wisdom and mercy."

Examples of this are found in the account of the unnamed Pilgrim in *Mourt's Relations*, which is a collection of several Pilgrim journals first published in 1622.

The unnamed Pilgrim tells of Squanto leading several of their number to the Massachusetts tribe and acting as their interpreter. The Pilgrims wanted to trade with them, especially for furs. There was a great market for beaver fur back in England, and they saw this as a way to pay off their debt to the adventurers who funded their journey. They also saw it as a way to establish friendly relations with the natives, whom they hoped to reach with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In their journey, they came across a group of native women working with corn and wearing beaver coats. Squanto, the writer says, wanted to "rifle" the women and take their furs. "They are a bad people and have oft threatened you," he said. The Pilgrims replied, "Were they ever so bad, we would not wrong them, or give them any just occasion against us" (Hyatt, *Pilgrims and Patriots*, 32).

They insisted that the women be offered a fair price for their furs, and Squanto complied. The women agreed to the price, removed their beaver coats and then wrapped themselves in foliage.

Obviously relieved and impressed at how they were treated, the women accompanied the Pilgrims back to their boat. Noticing how the native women were very careful to cover themselves, the writer further commented, "Indeed, they are more modest than some of our English women" (Hyatt, *Pilgrims and Patriots*, 32).

Natives Join the First Thanksgiving

As the Pilgrims completed the final gathering of their crops that first fall in the New World, there was a sense of thankfulness in many hearts. Just a few months prior, they had

been living on the edge of starvation and wondering if they would survive. Now they had plenty.

Governor Bradford, therefore, declared a certain day to be set aside as a Day of Thanksgiving in which to “rejoice together after we had gathered the fruit of our labors.” Word of the event soon spread, and many of their Native American friends arrived to participate in the celebration.

Massasoit himself arrived with 90 of his people to participate in the festivities. It soon became obvious that they would need more food, so Massasoit and his men went out and killed five deer and dressed them for the feast.

One can only imagine the emotions that filled their hearts as, in the presence of their new Native American friends, they joined Elder William Brewster in lifting up their hearts in praise and thanksgiving to God.

The Pilgrims did not seek to force their faith on the Indians, but neither did they hide their faith. After all, in the Mayflower Compact, they had clearly stated that they had come to the New World for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith.

The day turned out to be more than they could have imagined. Not only did they enjoy meals together with thankful hearts, but they engaged in shooting matches, foot races and various forms of friendly competition. It was such an enjoyable time for the Pilgrims and their Native American friends that the one Day of Thanksgiving was extended to three full days (Hyatt, *Pilgrims and Patriots*, 34).

A Pilgrim Saves the Life of Massasoit

In March of 1623, Bradford received word that Massasoit, chief of the Wampanoag, was sick and on the verge of death. Not being able to go himself, he appointed Edward Winslow to lead a delegation to represent him and the Plymouth colony.

Winslow and his companions arrived to find Massasoit very ill, having lost his sight but still able to speak. As they conversed with the help of an interpreter Winslow noticed "corruption" on Massasoit's tongue. Obtaining permission, he scraped Massasoit's tongue and mouth. He then went out and cut some sassafras root, which he boiled, strained through a handkerchief and gave to Massasoit to drink.

He repeated this process, and in a short time, Massasoit was feeling much better and his sight returned. He then asked Winslow to make some English stew such as he had enjoyed at Plymouth. His recovery was remarkable, and he asked Winslow if he would help his people who were suffering the same sickness. Winslow, therefore, spent an entire morning going from one lodging to another, scraping their mouths and giving them sassafras tea to drink.

Many visitors had come to see Massasoit in his sickness, and Winslow said that a day before he arrived, another native chief told Massasoit that he could now see how hallow-hearted the English were in that they had not come to see him. But upon his recovery, Massasoit declared, "Now I see the English are my friends and love me; and whilst I live, I will never forget this kindness they have showed me."

Massasoit and his people were overwhelmed with Winslow's kindness and could not thank him enough. "While we were there," Winslow said, "Our entertainment exceeded all other strangers."

Englishmen Executed for Murdering a Native

Around 1630, there began a mass exodus of Puritans from England to New England. Most were devout Christians, but mixed in with them were a few bad apples who came to escape trouble in England or were just looking for adventure.

In 1638, three such characters were involved in the murder of an Indian from Rhode Island whom they encountered in their

travels. One of their number stabbed him several times with a knife and took the furs and beads for which he had traded. They left him for dead, but the injured man revived and was able to make his way back to Rhode Island, where he died shortly thereafter.

The wounded man's people complained to the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which had been founded in 1630 by John Winthrop. The officials of the Bay Colony decided that the crime had occurred within the jurisdiction of the Plymouth Colony and turned the case over to Bradford and the Pilgrims.

Bradford sent people to Rhode Island to interview the man before he died, and he told them who had attacked him. The three men were arrested and tried before a jury in Plymouth. As evidence was produced before the jury, the three Englishmen all confessed to the crime.

The Pilgrims believed in the dignity of all human beings and, based on Old Testament law, they believed that anyone who would take another's life without just cause should forfeit his own life. The jury, therefore, found the three men guilty of murder and condemned them to be executed for their crime.

Being of the Narragansett tribe, many of the murdered man's people traveled to Plymouth to observe the execution. Bradford said the proceedings gave to them, and all the country, much satisfaction and the sense that justice had been done.

This is Why They Loved the Pilgrims

This incident demonstrated how deeply committed the Pilgrims were to treating the Indians justly and fairly, and it made clear that their other acts of kindness were not mere window dressing. This is why Native Americans trusted and loved the Pilgrims. Sadly, succeeding generations did not have that same commitment toward the indigenous people. {eoa}

This article is derived from Dr. Eddie Hyatt's book, Pilgrims

and Patriots, available from Amazon and his website at . Dr. Hyatt is an author, historian and Bible teacher. His passion is to reconnect America's severed Christian roots, and he does this by conducting "America Reawakening" events in churches and conferences, which consists of a PowerPoint presentation that documents how America was birthed out of prayer and spiritual awakening. He can be reached at dreddiehyatt@.