

RUSSELL SANDERS

11-24-2021

THANKSGIVING CELEBRATION – LESSON 2

THE MAYFLOWER COMPACT

The English settlers aboard the Mayflower had a charter as a trading company granted by King James I to colonize in northern Virginia, a territory of England. English stockholders financed the expedition with an understanding they would be paid profits from the new settlement.

Bad weather forced the ship farther north into Massachusetts, thus voiding their charter and leaving them with no governing authority over them. Only 41 of the 102 passengers were true pilgrims making the journey for religious reasons. These were namely to escape persecution rendered by the church of England and the government. The other 61 passengers were merchants, craftsmen, indentured servants, plain common folk, and orphaned children.

The 41 pilgrims were a branch of Puritans called “separatists.” They completely separated themselves from the Church of England because they believed it would remain too much like the Catholic church.

They called the other 61 passengers “strangers.” As they anchored off the coast, some of the “strangers” began to rebel against the pilgrim leadership. It was close to anarchy. The pilgrim leaders set out to create a temporary set of laws for ruling themselves according to a majority agreement. We call the resulting document “The Mayflower Compact” although it was not so called at that time.

In fact, these 41 Puritan Separatists were not even called “Pilgrims” until that label was given them by a society in Plymouth in 1800. The Mayflower carried 50 men, 19 women, and 33 children and “young adults.” The governing document, or compact, was signed by 41 of the men on November 11, 1620. Then they sent out scouting parties to determine where on shore would be a suitable place to set up for their eventual December 11 landing. On November 21 they elected John Carver as their Governor. He became the first democratically elected leader in the New World. He had been a leader throughout the voyage.

Tomorrow we will look at their first year in Plymouth and their hardships. We will speak of that fall feast attended by the survivors, who were thankful to God for an abundant provision despite the hardships.