

September 25, 2024

It is not very often, (OK-never) that this writer gets mentioned, even indirectly, in the headlines. Such a thing happened this week so I am taking writer's privilege to feature the story in this week's article.

The Washington Post on September 18th proclaimed, "U.S. Military to Apologize to Alaska Natives for 1800s Terror Campaign." The article begins with a description of the damage done in October 1882 by the U.S. Navy to the Alaskan village of Angoon, "Long spruce houses blasted apart by U.S. warships. Food stores burned. The U.S. troops responsible had gathered canoes — the village's lifeblood — and smashed them to pieces." A teenage boy who survived the attack memorized each detail including the starvation that followed as a result. The "boy" lived until 1960 and passed on the history of the attack to later generations.

On September 21st, the Guardian featured, "US Navy Apologizes for Razing of Native Alaska Community in Late 1800s." The Hill featured a condensed version of the Guardian article under the title, "Navy Apologizes to Alaskan Natives for 19th Century Attacks." These articles start with the September 21, 2024 ceremony conducted by the U.S. Navy apologizing ". . . for firing upon and torching the Alaska Native village of Kake in 1869." The Guardian states that a similar ceremony will be conducted on October 26th at Angoon (mentioned above). I will be the Navy chaplain extending the apology at that ceremony.

The Bible features a government ceremony of apology for a massacre that happened in the past. The facts are found in 2 Samuel 21. Here is the back story: God revealed to King David the reason Israel had experienced three years of drought was because Saul had massacred the Gibeonites (v.1). God reminded David that Israel had made a peace treaty with the Gibeonites (Jos 9:15), and, "The Israelites had sworn to spare them, but Saul in his zeal for Israel and Judah had tried to annihilate them (2Sa 21:3). David admitted the government of Saul was in the wrong and asked what his government could do to make it right (2Sam 21:3). The Gibeonites did not want reparations, they wanted blood. Their leaders told King David, "Let seven men of Saul's family be given to us. We will put an end to them by hanging them before the Lord in Gibeon" (2Sa 21:6). This was done and there was peace between Israel and the Gibeonites.

It is never a bad thing for a government to admit when it has wronged somebody. However, I'm sure glad the service I will be a participant in on October 26th in Angoon will be under the New Covenant and not the Old.