

The Mayflower Pilgrims

by Wayne Goff with notes from Historical Glimpses

In December, 1620, on a cold day, the tired, weather-beaten pilgrims first stepped on the shores of Massachusetts. Behind them was the vast Atlantic Ocean and their native England. Before them lay a wilderness full of the unknown. Why did this small band of people make the dangerous journey?

King James of England had taken the throne and was determined to assert his full power over the government and the Church of England. A religious group of Puritans (Separatists) were unwilling to submit to any headship other than that of Christ's and His Word. After ridicule and persecution, one group secretly left for Holland where they remained for twelve years. While they had religious freedom there, they had to learn new trades and they and their children were being worn down by difficult labor. Thus they considered moving to a new land, America. They believed that they could carry the gospel of Christ to that remote part of the world and perhaps be "even as stepping stones unto others for the performing of so great a work."

Only thirty-five pilgrims left Holland for America on that first voyage due to a lack of funds. The pilgrims met their ship, the Mayflower, in England; others from England joined them. Not all the 102 passengers were going to America for religious reasons, but those who were served as the leadership for the whole.

Arriving in America, the need to cooperate and prevent rebellion and anarchy led to the Mayflower Compact -- an agreement among free and equal men to create and obey their own government. It was modeled on the form of a previous church government made years before at Scrooby, England.

Though many pilgrims died from cold, hunger and disease in the early years, in all of their trials and successes, they saw God's providential hand. William Bradford was governor for thirty-one years and wrote the following:

"Thus out of small beginnings greater things have been produced by his hand that made all things of nothing, and gives being to all things that are, and as one small candle may light a thousand, so the light here kindled hath shone unto many, yea in some sort to our whole nation; let the glorious name of Jehovah have all the praise."

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