



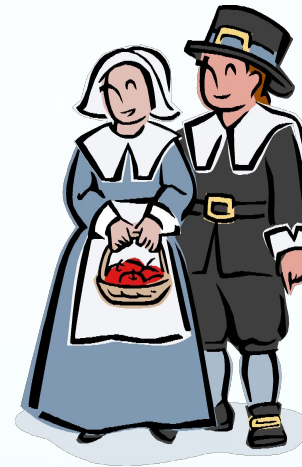
# THE PURITANS

1620-1720



# WHO WERE THE PURITANS?

- † **Puritan** refers to a number of Protestant groups that sought to “purify” the Church of England of its corruptions
- † Believed that religion is a **personal, inner experience**; therefore, a clergy cannot act as an intermediary between the individual and God.
- † Emphasized **simplicity, sobriety, religious earnestness, and personal self-control. STRICT adherence to the teachings of the Bible was also required.**



# WHO WERE THE PURITANS?

- † They were viewed in England as **religious extremists** who were **very conservative morally** and fear to be **potential political revolutionaries**.
- † Puritan belief in a more **democratic church organization** carried potential political implications
  - † If church organization was no longer “top-down,” could government change as well?
  - † Absolute monarchs feared this reorganization
  - † As a result, Puritans were harassed and persecuted in England



William Bradford led a small group of Puritans to the New World to escape persecution in England in 1620.

# WHY DID THEY COME TO AMERICA?

- † To escape persecution
- † To find religious freedom
- † To make money: they were good businessmen and hard workers. Most puritans were well-educated, cultured, and of good family.
- † To establish a “City on a Hill”
  - † An exemplary religious community that all could see, admire, and emulate
  - † Could only do this in an uninhabited, uncivilized, undeveloped land where they had total freedom and where they were not overshadowed by other cultures.

# Tenets of Puritan Theology

- † God is a God of authority, a king and ruler
- † Our duty in this world is to see that God's will prevails
- † We discover what God wants us to do by reading the Bible
- † Because of Adam's fall, mankind is totally depraved from birth
- † Some few of us will be saved as an undeserved gift from God (grace)
- † For the chosen few, the "elect," God's grace is predestined and irresistible. The saved come to know of their election by inner voices and by the godly spirit shown in all their actions. The damned are damned despite their best efforts.

# STRONG BELIEF IN *PREDESTINATION*

- † God selects those to be “saved,” taken to heaven, before they are even born
- † One cannot influence God’s decision during life: it can’t be changed
- † One cannot know for sure whether one is “saved” or “damned”
- † ALL humans deserve damnation; only through God’s bestowal of grace due to His infinite mercy are a few saved

# THE ELECT VS. THE DAMNED

- † The Elect are those chosen for heaven.
  - † They are few compared to the damned
- † The Damned are those going to hell
  - † They are many
- † ALL deserve damnation due to our depraved and evil nature
- † It is only through God's infinite mercy that even a single person is saved from hell



# HUMAN NATURE AND “THE FALL”

- † Human Nature is EVIL: we are born to sin and are drawn towards it as our natural impulse
- † It is evil due to “Original Sin”
  - † Adam and Eve’s disobedience in the Garden of Eden: also called “The Fall”
- † All humans inherit Adam and Eve’s sin—so even newborn babies are not innocent.
- † Thus it is our nature to do evil, to disobey, to rebel despite God’s great kindness in creating us



# GRACE

- † You could feel God's presence entering you in the form of "Grace."
- † This was an overwhelming feeling of joy and exhilaration
- † They searched their lives and hearts and souls for signs of grace: this they felt, was proof that God had chosen them as one of the Elect.



# WHY DO GOOD INSTEAD OF EVIL?

- † If your action on earth do not influence whether you go to heaven or hell, why do good?
- † Puritan logic suggests the following:
  - † God wouldn't choose someone to go to heaven who was evil or corrupt
  - † So, you act holy to try to convince yourself that you would be good enough for God to have chosen you
  - † Grace is the only “proof” you might have
- † However, we are imperfect and we have an evil nature, so we will naturally always revert to sin . . .

# CRIMES IN PURITAN SOCIETY

- † Sinning = crime
  - † Ex.: Adultery was a sin, and also a crime: could be punished in court for it.
- † The Bible was literal word of God
  - † So, any deviance from the teaching therein was a sin, and thus a crime
- † Extremely strict morally:
  - † Dancing, showing any skin, playing cards, wearing ostentatious clothing, any sort of sexual misconduct, were all sins. Having fun was a SIN! (at least it seemed like it)



# THE DIFFICULTY OF THE PURITAN EXISTENCE

- † They were a very serious, dour people under enormous stress constantly
  - † Everything is a sin
  - † We are by nature evil so we have no real chance of avoiding sin for long
  - † God damns most people—and we all deserve it
  - † We can't change God's decision (predestination)
  - † We can't even KNOW if we are saved or not
  - † Everyone watching over you constantly to control your behavior and keep you from sinning (or to tell on you)
  - † No way to really confess sins due to the harsh judgments of the community: so no way to expiate guilt
  - † Purely human impulses are harshly punished and never forgotten or forgiven

# THE PURITAN CREED

- † Human beings are sinful by nature.
- † Salvation belongs to the elect, or God's chosen, who can be identified by virtue.
- † Hard work and worldly success are signs of God's grace.
- † Education is essential in order to read the word of God.
- † A person should be thrifty, modest, and simple.
- † Society should be ruled by covenants that parallel God's covenant with His people.

# Nature vs. the Community

- √ Nature was seen as frightening, potentially a place of evil, and always a place of temptation
- √ You fear what you don't understand: this is pre-science so didn't understand nature; thus, they feared it
- √ Without the strict rules of the community, harsh punishments for sin, and the authorities to enforce punishments, our evil nature would take over
- √ You don't have these restrictions in Nature to keep you on the straight and narrow—thus we would be more likely to sin in nature than in the community

# Puritan Virtues

✓ Sobriety

✓ Temperance

✓ Industriousness...“Idle hands are the Devil’s workshop.”

✓ Simplicity...In dress, lifestyle, worship

✓ Self-Reliance

✓\*\*\* Just by chance, these are EXACTLY the characteristics it would take to survive in the New World

# Puritan Literature

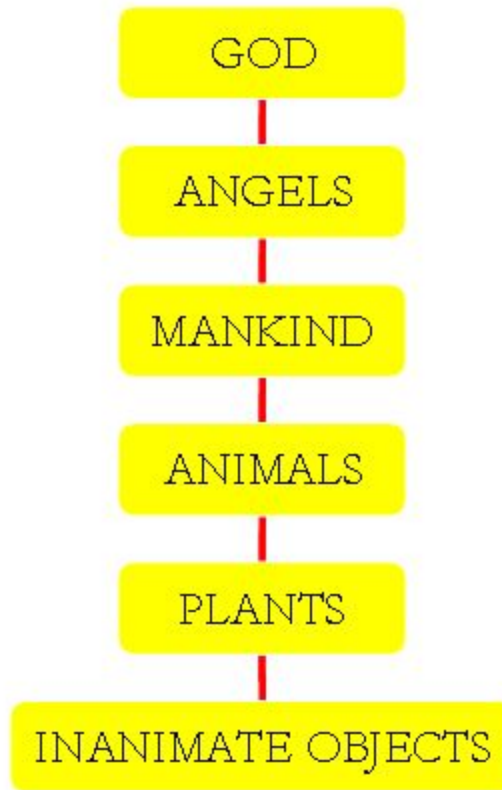
- Sermons
- Histories
- Journals
- Some poetry
- Very little creative literature
- Little concern for beauty
- Total focus is on God, following God's will as outlined in the Bible, and the afterlife



# THE MEDIEVAL PARADIGM: THE GREAT CHAIN OF BEING

A hierarchy;  
each level is  
subordinate to  
the one above it

Each level, other  
than God, has  
sublevels



No concept of democracy  
or equality in this  
worldview; a clear order of  
superiority/inferiority and  
absolute obedience to  
those above

This carried over  
to the way they  
organized  
politically and  
socially

# THINK ABOUT IT...

- † How many of these Puritan beliefs are still valued in America?
- † Where do you see Americans still following the Puritan creed and where do you see them abandoning these beliefs?
- † Back up your opinions with logical arguments and specific examples.