

# **Pilgrims for Freedom and Religious Practices of Choice**

## ***Pilgrims came to America to Live Freely and Practice their Religious Beliefs without Persecution***

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Pilgrims came to America during the seventeenth century for the same reasons immigrants come to America today – to live their lives as they see fit without political interference.

Living in England back in the seventeenth century could be rough on independent thinkers like pilgrims were. However, not only did pilgrims have their own way of thinking, they also had their own lifestyles and their own ideals and methods for practicing religion. Their religious practices and beliefs prompted them to come to America.

Simply because pilgrims and their “separatist” religious practices did not fair with English aristocratic society, pilgrims became outcasts. Lawmen hunted them down and treated them like criminals.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, English Christians decided to “separate” from the Church of England. They made this decision because they disagreed with many of the church’s practices and they did not believe churches should run in conjunction with governments.

Those who separated from the Church of England were called “Separatists”, “independents”, and later “Congregationalists”. These Christian Separatists wanted to form their own independent churches. They wanted to be able to attend the

church of their choice. Setting up independent churches and attending church of choice were in direct violation of English rule. The Church of England expected citizens to attend assigned churches located in areas in which they lived.

Separatists also had their own beliefs about what Jesus expected of them. They believed the only way to connect with Him and to abide by his laws was to find him within themselves – spiritually.

The Church of England believed connection with the Lord only came about through deeds and that connections were detectable by the naked eye. The Church of England also believed crimes against the church warranted punishment by imprisonment and death. And to the church – or whomever was in power at the time – crimes against the church – even practicing religion as one saw it – were heresy and punishable by law.

The pilgrims (separatists) suffered many a consequences at the hands of Church of England militia. The militia jailed separatists, killed separatists, and forced separatists to flee from England for their safety.

After fleeing to and residing in Leiden, the Netherlands, for a number of years, the pilgrims decided they should migrate some place where they could start anew. At that time they formed contracts with a company, London Stock Company, who agreed to finance the pilgrim's travels. So, at last, the pilgrims came to America for the same reason people still migrate to America 400 centuries later – to live freely and to practice their beliefs without persecution or government interference.