The Puritans' desire to reform society often led to clashes with their neighbors. Their drive to change the church led to persecution by the government. Believing that reforming English society and its church was a hopeless cause, some Puritans—appropriately called Separatists—separated from Anglicanism altogether. A group of these Separatists, later known as the Pilgrims, left their homeland for the Netherlands before immigrating to New England and founding the Plymouth Colony in 1620.

Most Puritans rejected separatism, focusing instead on spreading their views and trying to change the church from within. During the reigns of King James I (1603-1625) and Charles I (1625-1649), however, the Puritans' hopes for reform grew dimmer, and persecution by the government increased. Many Puritans began to look to North America, where they would be able to establish a new society far from the corruption of the Anglican Church and the harassment of non-Puritan neighbors. Their mission, as they saw it, was to build a godly "city upon a hill" which would serve as an example to the English churches.

**Puritan Beliefs.** The Puritans' religion was based mainly on Calvinist principles. According to their beliefs, God determines what will happen and then makes it come to pass through his will. He established a "covenant of grace" with the first man, Adam, and promised him salvation if he obeyed God's laws. However, Adam chose to sin, breaking the covenant. The Puritans believed that all humans inherited Adam's inability to understand God's plan—an imperfection they called "original sin." Humans, therefore, could never discover the will of God through the use of reason and must rely on faith alone. After Adam's fall, God established a new "covenant of grace" by sending his son, Jesus Christ, to sacrifice himself for the sins of humans. By accepting Christ as their savior, individuals could achieve salvation.

Puritans combined this idea of the covenant with a belief in predestination—the idea that God has already decided which people will go to heaven and which to hell. Therefore, salvation cannot be achieved through good works or pure thoughts and cannot be controlled by the individual. Those who are members of the "elect"—the ones God has chosen to go to heaven—will eventually come to Christ and be saved. Those who are not among the "elect" can do nothing to bring about salvation. The idea of predestination helped explain to believers why some people lived godly lives while others did evil. It also guaranteed that God would never abandon those who accepted his covenant.

**The Spread of Puritanism.** In 1629 a group of investors founded the Massachusetts Bay colony as a haven for Puritans. A year later several wealthy Puritans organized the Providence Company, which established several settlements on islands in the Caribbean. By 1642 about 80,000 people had left England for these new colonies. In North America, the Puritans also settled in Virginia and Maryland, but they never had as strong an influence on society or culture there as they did in New England.

In New England, the Puritans adopted a form of organization in which each church congregation was independent from others. Each chose its own ministers and recognized no central church authority. Under this system, called