

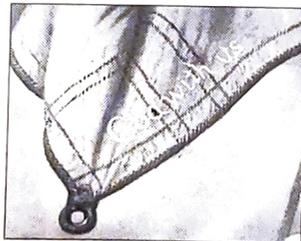
Chapter 4

The Pilgrims & the Plymouth Colony, 1620

The story of America's colonization displayed in the US Capitol Rotunda continues with a third large picture titled *The Embarkation of the Pilgrims at Delfts Haven, Holland, July 22, 1620*, painted by Robert Weir and placed there in 1843.⁶⁹ The work depicts Pilgrim leaders in prayer, including Pastor John Robinson, Governors John Carver and William Bradford, military leader Miles Standish, and others. In the center of the



The painting of the *Embarkation of the Pilgrims* shows them on the ship the *Speedwell* observing a time of fasting and prayer before leaving Holland to come to America



Painted on the sail is the phrase "God with us"



William Brewster holds an open Geneva Bible

scene, Elder William Brewster, who also served as their interim pastor in America, has an open Bible upon his lap on which are written the words: "*The New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*" On the sail of the ship can be seen the phrase, "*God with Us,*" which accurately describes the belief of these men and women.

The version of the Bible that Brewster holds is the Geneva Bible. It was the primary Bible of the English Reformation, used extensively by the Pilgrims and Puritans.

The Geneva Bible was first published in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1560 by English Reformers who fled there to escape the religious persecution at the hands of State-established churches. (In 1560, they specifically fled Queen Mary, known as "Bloody Mary.") That Bible, which was the first English Bible to add numbered verses to

each chapter, was so popular it went through 140 printings[†] from 1560 to 1644.⁷⁰ It was also one of the first Bibles taken to America, carried originally by the Virginia colonists then by the Pilgrims and others after them.

One thing that made the Geneva Bible distinctive was its unique marginal commentaries. Penned by prominent Reformers, these commentaries regularly challenged the corrupt European culture of the day, especially criticizing practices that violated God's Word, whether in government, judiciary, education, law, culture, organized religion, or any other sphere of life.

The Reformers, also known as Dissenters, by their study of the Geneva Bible and its commentaries, realized how flawed the civil and religious systems of Europe were at that time. But when they publicly pointed this out in England, they often experienced brutal persecution from the monarch, who was, and remains to this day, the head of the State-established Church of England.

Many of the Pilgrims attended the non-State church led by English Reformer John Greenwood (1556-1593). He objected to any monarch (at that time, Queen Elizabeth) being head of the Church because "*there could be but one head to the Church and that head was not the Queen, but Christ!*"⁷¹ For making that declaration, he was charged with "*denying Her Majesty's ecclesiastical supremacy and attacking the existing ecclesiastical order*" and was executed.⁷² Parliament, to reinforce its support of this brutal policy, then passed a law requiring that if "*any of Her Majesty's subjects deny the Queen's ecclesiastical supremacy...they shall be committed to prison without bail*"⁷³—a law aimed directly at groups such as the Pilgrims.

After years of enduring such government persecution, the Pilgrims finally, according to their governor and historian William Bradford, "*shook off this yoke of anti-Christian bondage, and as the Lord's free people joined themselves, by a covenant of the Lord, into a church estate, in the fellowship of the Gospel, to walk in all His ways.*"⁷⁴ So they left England and went to Holland, where they found religious toleration.

But after 12 years in Holland, they became concerned for the faith of their children. They also preferred the overall English culture

[†] The printing techniques of that age used lead printing plates on the presses. That metal was so soft that only about 5,000 copies could be printed before the plates had to be replaced and a new printing begun. The numerous printings of the Geneva Bible indicate both its popularity and widespread market penetration at the time.

to that of the Dutch, so they decided to move to America where they could freely worship God, raise Godly children, and share the wonderful truths of the Christian Gospel with others. Concerning this third point, Bradford affirmed that the Pilgrims had “a great hope and inward zeal...for the propagating and advancing the Gospel of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world [i.e., America].”⁷⁵



The *Mayflower*

The Pilgrims arranged for two ships to carry them to America: the *Speedwell* and the *Mayflower*. Shortly after setting out, the *Speedwell* developed a leak, forcing a return to England. After its repair, the ships departed once more, but the *Speedwell* again developed a leak, requiring a second return. It did not make a third attempt. Many at the time, including Bradford, believed the leak was intentional—a result of sabotage by the crew, who did not want to go to America.⁷⁶ Later evidence seems to confirm this, for once the *Speedwell* was sold to new owners, it made a successful voyage to the New World.⁷⁷

With the Pilgrims' transportation reduced to a single ship, space was a problem. The *Mayflower* was unable to carry all passengers from both vessels but several from the *Speedwell* transferred to the *Mayflower* and the rest remained behind, hoping to come later.

The *Mayflower* finally set sail for America in September 1620, now several months behind schedule, bearing 102 “Pilgrims and strangers.” This phrase is a Biblical quote from 1 Peter 2:11, the verse from which the Pilgrims took their name. But that ship carried much more than the Pilgrims: it also carried the Bible-based principles they had learned—principles that were to become the seeds of the greatest and freest nation the world has ever known.

It took 66 days before the *Mayflower* finally reached America. The Pilgrims' trip across the Atlantic was treacherous, with constant storms. The crossing was so rough, with the waves so violent and gales so strong, that at one point the main beam of the ship broke (this is the backbone of the craft, which largely held it together).⁷⁸ The ship did not have the tools necessary to make the repairs. The situation was desperate. It would take a miracle to save the Pilgrims and the ship—and that miracle occurred.

Back when the Pilgrims had been driven out of England and went to Holland, they began publishing materials for their congregation as well as other works explaining their religious beliefs to the public. Dutch officials, however, seeking to please the British, confiscated all their typesetting tools and materials to halt any further publications. The Pilgrims were left with a printing press, but no way to print anything on it. When they later loaded the ships to come to America, they strangely decided to bring that inoperative press with them on an already overcrowded ship.⁷⁹



The large jackscrew on a printing press

Providentially, the main component of the press was its large jackscrew. So when the main beam broke, the Pilgrims had with them exactly what was needed for the crew to raise the beam back into place where it could be secured, thus saving their endangered lives as well as the ship.⁸⁰

John Howland

With the continuous bad weather, the Pilgrims (and many of the 30 crew members) understandably remained below deck for a large part of the voyage. On one of these days, John Howland, a Pilgrim in his early twenties,⁸¹ seeking some relief from the cramped conditions, decided to go topside. He was swept overboard by a wave.

Few in that day knew how to swim; and making it worse, most did not know that Howland had been washed off the ship. Furthermore, fierce winds made it virtually impossible to stop the ship and turn back to rescue him—and even if they could have done so, it would have taken the better part of an hour. Howland would undoubtedly have drowned by then. His accident sentenced him to death.

Except . . .

There was a rope trailing along in the water behind the ship, and in a frantic effort Howland grabbed it. He desperately hung on, and was dragged through pounding waves and turbulent waters before finally being pulled up on deck.⁸² Eventually, he reached the New World with the others and married fellow passenger Elizabeth Tilley. The two raised a family of 10 children.⁸³

But what if Howland had died when washed overboard? He certainly would have become nothing more than a tragic footnote in history, recorded as one of the many Pilgrims who died that first year. But he survived, and the result makes a very different story. Howland helps us understand just how much a single life can be worth.

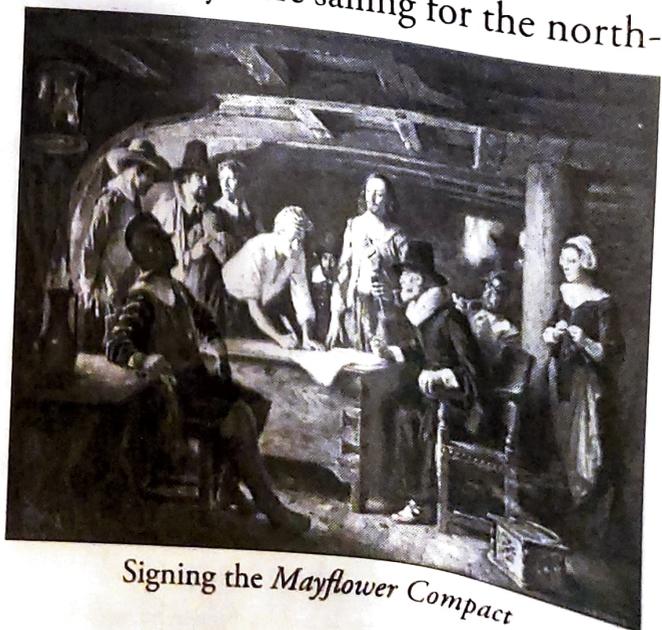
Because Howland lived, he had 10 children—and then grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, and so forth. As a result, Howland's descendants now number in the millions—literally. Among them are:

- Three US presidents: Franklin D. Roosevelt, George H.W. Bush, and George W. Bush
- Edith Roosevelt (wife of Teddy Roosevelt)
- Signer of the US Constitution Nathaniel Gorham
- Governors Jeb Bush and Sarah Palin
- Poets Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
- Hollywood stars Humphrey Bogart, Christopher Lloyd, Chevy Chase, and the Baldwin brothers⁸⁴

Think about how different America would be today if Howland had died. By the Providence of God he lived, and the resulting impact on the nation has been substantial.

Mayflower Compact

When the Pilgrims left England, they were sailing for the northern parts of the Virginia Colony. Throughout the voyage, they diligently tried to arrive there, but fierce winds blew them hundreds of miles north to a place completely outside of Virginia's jurisdiction. They finally put ashore at Cape Cod in the Massachusetts area, and after some searching they found an empty and uninhabited location in which to settle.⁸⁵



Signing the *Mayflower Compact*

Because the Pilgrims arrived in an area not under the authority of the Virginia Colony, they had come to a place with no official governance. So before leaving the *Mayflower*, they drew up their own governmental compact, which declared:

Having undertaken for the glory of God and advancement of the Christian faith, and the honor of our king and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia, do by these presents [that is, by this legal document and charter] solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God and one of another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic...⁸⁶

That agreement, which later became known as the *Mayflower Compact*, was the first governing document written in the New World.[‡] It placed the Pilgrim's civil government on a firm Christian basis and was the beginning of American constitutional government.

‡ Previous documents, such as those for the Virginia Colony, had been written in England by English officials. This was the first one (to borrow words from Abraham Lincoln's 1863 Gettysburg Address) to be written, "*of the people, by the people, and for the people.*"