



# The Puritan Legacy



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Central to the development of the American literary tradition have been the writings of the Puritans of New England.

**Puritan** is a broad term, referring to a number of Protestant groups that, beginning about 1560, sought to “purify” the Church of England, which since the time of Henry VIII had been virtually inseparable from the country’s government.

For them, religion was first of all a personal, inner experience and they want to return to simpler forms of worship and church organization that are described in the Christian Scriptures.



## **Many Puritans suffered persecution in England.**

- Some were put in jailed and whipped
- Some had their noses slit and their ears chopped off
- Some fled England for Holland and then set sail in 1620 to the New World. There they hoped to build a new society patterned after God's word.



### **Puritan Beliefs**

1. Humans are sinful by nature
2. Most are damned for eternity
3. Salvation belongs to the elect who can be identified by their virtue
4. Hard work and worldly successes are signs of God's grace
5. People should live in a thrifty, self-reliant, and simple way.



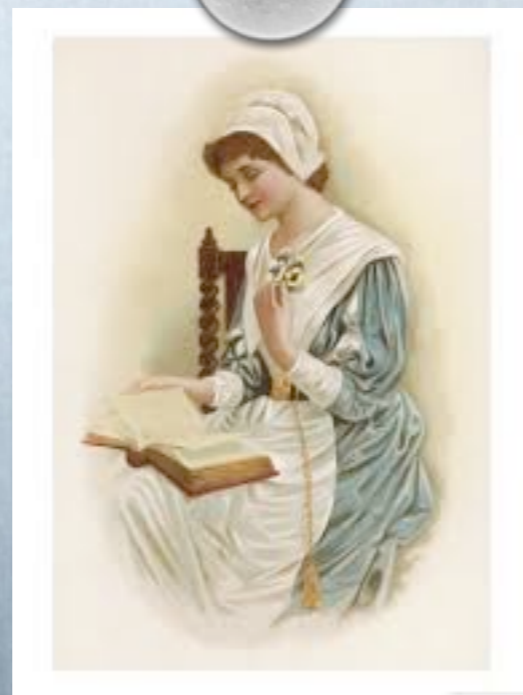
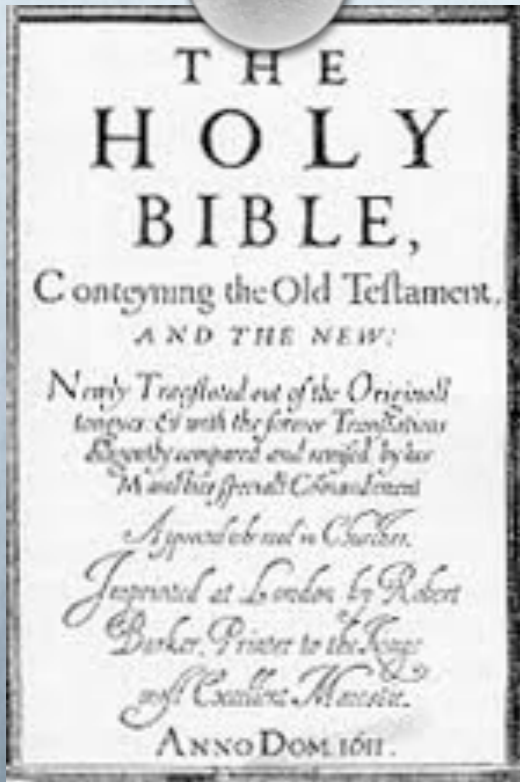
# Puritans & the Government

- Puritans believed that a covenant existed between God and humanity.
- This spiritual covenant was a useful model for worldly social organization as well: Puritans believed that people should enter freely into agreements concerning their government.
- Puritans also believed that the saintly elect should exert great influence on government.



## The Bible in America

Each Puritan read the bible and could see connections to events in his or her own life or to events in the community. Each Puritan was trained to see life as a pilgrimage, or journey, to salvation. Puritans believed the Bible was the **literal** word of God and was necessary for all.





# The Bible in America

- Reading the bible was a necessity to all Puritans, as was the ability to understand theological (the study of the nature of God & religious beliefs) debates.
- For this reason Puritans place a great emphasis on education. Thus, Harvard College was founded in 1636. Three years later the first printing press in the American Colonies was set up.
- Puritan beliefs required them to keep a close watch on both their spiritual and public lives. This focus greatly affected their writings. Therefore, **diaries** and **histories** were important forms of Puritan literature because they were used to record the workings of God.

# Characteristics of Puritan Writing



**Hornbook used to teach the alphabet to children**

- The bible provided a model for Puritan writing.
- Diaries and histories were the most common forms of literary expression in Puritan society.
- Puritans favored a plain style of writing. They admired clarity of expression and avoided complicated figures of speech.