Who Were The Puritans?

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First came the Pilgrims in the 1620s. They were followed by thousands of Puritans in the 1630s, and these Puritans left their mark on their new land, becoming the most dynamic Christian force in the American colonies. Back in England, the Puritans had been people of means and political influence, but King Charles would not tolerate their attempts to reform the Church of England. Persecution mounted. To many there seemed no hope but to leave England. Perhaps in America they could establish a colony whose government, society, and church were all based upon the Bible. "New England" could become a light Old England could follow out of the darkness of corruption.

"Puritan" had been a name of ridicule first used during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. These were Christians who wanted the Church of England purified of any liturgy, ceremony, or practices which were not found in Scripture. The Bible was their sole authority, and they believed it applied to every area and level of life.

A fortuitous loophole
When King Charles granted a colonial charter to the Massachusetts Bay Company, the document failed to specify that the governor and officers of the company had to remain in England. The Puritan stockholders took advantage of this silence and agreed to move the company and the whole government of the colony to America. There they would try to establish a biblical community, a holy commonwealth, as an example to England and the world.

New England: A new way
In the mother country, every Englishman was part of the national church of England. In New England, only the converted were members of the church. Only those individuals whose lives had been changed by belief in the gospel of Christ were accepted into the church. Men who were church members were given the right to vote in the colony. They were expected to establish rules for a godly social order, a society which would glorify God. As the Mosaic Law had regulated Israel's society in Old Testament days, so the church under the Scripture's authority would regulate New England's society. There was no place for toleration in Puritan America. Those not in accord with the lofty spiritual aims of the colony could move elsewhere.

Although they were individuals of strong faith and conviction, the Puritans were not individualists. They came to America in groups, not as individual settlers. Often entire congregations, led by their ministers, left England and settled together in the new land. They organized their settlements into towns, with their meeting house or church at the center of town. The church was the center of their community, providing purpose and direction to their lives.

Honor the Lord's day
The Puritans believed God and His worship were important enough to reserve at least one full day out of the week, and the original Puritan settlers joyfully devoted Sunday to the Lord. Sermons were central to the intellectual life of the Puritans, and they rarely were less than an hour in length. Times of prayer could also be as long. Hymns were not allowed in the earliest Puritan worship; only psalms or paraphrases of other Scriptures were sung. The first book printed in America was the Whole Book of Psalms (or Bay Psalm Book), a metrical version of David's psalms printed in 1640.
The mind as well as the soul
The instruction and training of children were considered heavy responsibilities, and parents prayed that children would become a source of glory to their Lord.

Within five years after its founding, Massachusetts established schools for children. Every child should learn to read so he could read the Bible. As one Massachusetts law stated, "It being one chief project of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures...schools should be established." In 1636 the colony established Harvard College, especially to train ministers. The earliest rules for Harvard testify to the Christian commitment expected: Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well the main end of his life and studies is, to know God, and Jesus Christ which is eternal life (John 17:3). And therefore to lay Christ in the bottom is the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning.

All is the Lord's
In keeping with their belief that every area of life should be molded by Christian principles, the Puritans saw all honorable work as a means of glorifying God. All of life was God's, and there was no distinction between secular and sacred work. God calls each person to a particular vocation or occupation, and the Christian should act as a careful steward of the talents and gifts God has given him. Working in one's calling or vocation was a means of serving God and men. Idleness was considered a great sin; diligence in one's calling was a virtue.

Shaping America
The Puritans who settled in New England laid a foundation for a nation unique in world history. They also had a most significant influence on the subsequent development of America. A large portion of later pioneers and westward settlers were descendants of these early Puritans. Their values and principles, though sometimes secularized and removed from their religious foundations, continued to mold American thought and practices in the next centuries.

Organized like a miniature church
The family was the most basic institution in Puritan society and was organized like a miniature church. Established by God before all other institutions and before man's fall, the family was considered the foundation of all civil, social, and ecclesiastical life. In the morning and evening the family assembled together for worship, and on Sunday the family joined other families in worship.
How to Spot a Witch

by Adam Goodheart

The belief in witches existed for centuries before the trials at Salem. Over time, a considerable body of folklore developed about how to identify witches. A contemporary writer explains the most popular methods.

Perhaps the reason witch-hunting has gotten a bad name is that some practitioners used rather crude methods to separate the guilty from the innocent. The notorious judges of the Holy Roman Empire, for example, simply applied thumbscrews until the unfortunate suspects confessed. And during the English witch craze in the 1640s, the Rev. John Gaule recorded that “every old woman with a wrinkled face, a furled brow, a hairy lip, a gobber tooth, a squint eye, a squeaking voice, or a scolding tongue... is not only suspected, but pronounced for a witch.” (Sexism was regrettably widespread among Gaule’s colleagues, even through both men and women could be witches.) But more discriminating European witch hunters used far more refined techniques, as described in early lawbooks, manuals and court records.

1. Devil’s Marks and Witches’ Teats  According to many witch-hunting guides, it is best to start your examination by shaving the suspect’s body and examining it for devil’s marks. These are the spots where Satan brands his followers to seal their pact with him. An English jurist in 1630 described them as “sometimes like a blew spot, or a red spot, like a Flea-biting.” One problem: In the vermin-ridden 17th century, such blemishes were hardly uncommon. So the witch hunters devised an ingenious solution. The Devil, they reasoned, would not allow anything of his to be harmed. Therefore, they prickled any suspicious marks with a long silver pin. If the spot didn’t bleed or was insensitive to pain, the suspect was a witch.

English experts believed witches often had extra nipples that they used to suckle demons. Matthew Hopkins, a witch hunter under Oliver Cromwell, exposed one woman as a witch when she was “found to have three teats about her, which honest women have not.”
2. **The Swimming Test**  If the hunt for teats and devil's marks proves inconclusive, you may have to resort to a popular folk method, the "swimming test." First, sprinkle the suspect with holy water. Tie his right thumb to his left big toe, and his left thumb to his right big toe. Fasten a rope around his waist. Then toss him into a pond or river. If he floats, he's a witch. If he sinks, haul him back in and set him free. The theoretical basis for this is simple, explained James VI of Scotland in 1597: "The water shall refuse to receive in her bosom those who have shaken off the sacred water of baptism."

Other popular tests include weighting the suspect against a very heavy Bible (if she weights less than the book, she is guilty) and asking her to recite the Lord's Prayer without making a mistake. (In 1663, a defendant was convicted after repeatedly failing to do better than "Lead us into temptation" or "Lead us not into no temptation.") When you suspect a witch has murdered someone, ask her to lay her hands on the victim's body. If she is guilty, the corpse will start to bleed.

3. **Nabbing the Elusive Imp**  One of the most devious ways to foil witches is to catch them with their familiars, the imps in animal form who do their nefarious bidding. Many witch hunters believed that the imps could not go for more than 24 hours without being sucked by their master or mistress. Therefore, when you have a suspect in prison, drill a peephole in the cell door and keep a close watch. If you see a rat, mouse or beetle in the cell, you've nabbed an imp. Beware of even the most improbable animals. In 1645, an Englishman named John Bysack confessed that for the last 20 years, he had regularly suckled imps in the form of snails.

4. **Asking the Right Questions**  Even stubborn suspects will often collapse under skillful interrogation. Europe's most successful witch hunters were expert at framing questions of the when-did-you-stop-beating-your-wife sort. The justices of Colmar in Alsace used to lead off with "How long have you been a witch?" before moving on to more specific inquiries such as "What plagues of vermin and caterpillars have you created?"
Puritan Concepts of the Devil and Witches

During the 17th century and well into the 18th century, belief in the reality of witches was widespread both in America and Europe.
Thousands of people were executed during the period; and few people ever questioned whether or not witches actually existed.

The only problem to the 17th century mind was how to identify a witch.
- Perhaps more than any other group, the **Puritans** accepted most readily the idea of witches in any society. Part of this results from Puritans’ complete acceptance of the contents of the **Bible**.

- They accepted every word of the Bible as totally accurate and would allow no **debate** on this matter. Moses’ pronouncement in Exodus 22:18, “Thou shall not suffer a witch to live,” became a phrase known to almost everyone in the Puritan community.
- In the play, The Crucible, when Elizabeth and John Proctor only hint that it is not proven that witches exist, the Reverend Hale is shocked and cries out, “You surely do not fly against the Gospel!”

- In spite of 17th century advancements in science and knowledge, we see that there still existed a strong and determined belief in the reality of witches.
The concept of the Devil grew out of basic beliefs of the Puritan religion. The Puritans accepted the story that the Devil was once one of God’s angels who had fallen from grace.

After being thrown from heaven for betraying God, the Devil set up a continual campaign to destroy the designs of God. This concept is used in The Crucible when Reverend Hale mentions that the Devil’s deception takes on many forms, and if the Devil were able to deceive God, then it would be easy for him to deceive man.
The Puritans accepted completely the doctrine of *original* sin and many *sermons* emphasized that man was born corrupt and *sinful*.

Man was depicted as existing on the verge of *eternal* damnation and was seen as a potential colleague of the Devil. *Ministers* delighted in telling the members of the congregation that they were *worms*, insects, *dogs*, and filthy *beasts*. 
- Given the view that man is on the verge of damnation and is **born** evil and corrupt, it was then easy for the Puritan to see a devil hiding behind every tree ready to **trap** and ensnare man.

- For the Puritan, the Devil did not work **alone**. He employed many legions of helpers which were generally referred to as **witches**.
What a witch actually is and how to discover one was never solved by the **Puritans**. The devil used witches to help him gain his goal and a person became a

- witch by entering into some type of binding **contract** with the Devil.

Once a person entered into this contract with the Devil, that person would attack other **innocent** people. The identification becomes more complex when we realize that a witch could be **invisible** and could **enter** a person’s **body** without that person knowing it.
Additional difficulties arise in discovering a witch when we realize that the Puritan also believed that the Devil or one of his agents could assume the shape of innocent people and then torment another person.

The tormented person then would automatically accuse the innocent person of being a witch and this innocent person would be punished for being in league with the devil. By this subtle means, the Devil would gain his end of tormenting an innocent person and of bringing confusion into God’s world.
- By an equally strange quirk of logic, once a person **confessed** to being a witch, then the person was **free**. This goes along with the Puritan view that **salvation** begins by making an open confession of one’s sins, yet if a person were actually a witch, he would have no qualms about **lying** and could therefore confess to repentance so as to continue along with the Devil’s work.

![Image](image_url)

- Yet, one faction thought that if a witch confessed, then his soul could be saved; whereas another faction believed that to confess to being a witch would eternally **damn** a person.
In conclusion, there was much confusion and disagreement about how to detect a witch and just what a witch actually was.

The Puritans agreed only that witches came from the invisible world and sought some means of making them known to the visible world so as to destroy them. In their attempt, many innocent persons lost their lives.
Salem Massachusetts Background

- Only those recognized as true believers could join the church
- Only church members could vote
- Church and state intertwined – The duties of the judge were to uphold Puritan religion (theocracy)
  Private citizens were encouraged to report anyone who strayed

Persons Typically Accused of Witchcraft

- The poor
- The elderly
- The mentally ill
- The rude or quarrelsome
- Anyone who looked or acted “different”
Powers of Witches

- Witches Could:
  read minds
  foretell future
  raise ghosts of the dead
  put temptation in the path of the godly

Powers of Witches

- Her spirit could leave her body and torture her victims while the witch herself stayed home (she could not prove her innocence)

- Image magic – make image of victim (doll or poppet) if witch tortured image then victim would suffer (stick a pin in doll’s head and victim would get a sudden headache)
Testing of Witches

- Puritans believed that the only way to break a witch's power was to kill her.
- Witch was tied up and thrown in a stream – if she floats, she is seen as guilty of witchcraft – if she sank, she was innocent.
- Trial by ordeal (fire, dunking, etc...) – usually luck if victim survived.