

Christianity in the Early American Republic

The Vision of the Mayflower Pilgrims

The *Mayflower* left England on September 16, 1620, after William Bradford acknowledged that “a prosperous wind” would blow the ship westward. (*The Vision of the Pilgrim Fathers*) The ship carried 102 passengers, 74 men and 28 women who came to be known as Pilgrims (*Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War*) travelers from a foreign land seeking a new Holy Land where they could worship their God as they believed He wished to be worshiped. Bradford was accompanied by his wife Dorothy (<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/May-153>), one of almost half of the Pilgrims who died in the upcoming harsh winter of 1620-21. He became governor of the colony for all but four years between 1621 and the year of his death in 1657. Bradford married Alice Carpenter in 1623, and they had many descendants who can be found across the entire United States today.

Why did the Pilgrims come to America? What drove them to risk their lives and the lives of their families? They came because they had a vision of a religion that was the truth. They wanted to live in a place that allowed them to practice that religion according to the way God wanted, without interference from the King’s government or church doctrines inconsistent with the Scriptures. They were completely committed to finding such a place and risked everything. They believed America was the place to realize their vision. As Reverend John Corder (<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Corder-5>) puts it, they “fell back on the Word of God revealed in the Bible, as upon the grand rule of faith and the great charter of the soul’s rights (*The Vision of the Pilgrim Fathers*).

In 1603, the King told them he would “make them conform [to the religion of the Crown], or he would harry them out of the land, or else worse.” History shows that the King was as good as his word. William Bradford’s (<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Bradford-24>) reaction to this treatment was to say, “Whatsoever it should cost them,” they would live in a land that allowed them to obey God without interference by men. They were determined to load their supplies on the *Mayflower* and face the North Atlantic. But that was only the beginning of the risk.

John Robinson (*Chief of the Pilgrims*), the pastor of the congregation in Leiden, Holland, where they had fled to avoid the King, chose America to realize the new land. Robinson had to stay behind with those not strong enough to make the first trip. He likened the pilgrims to the Israelites who left Babylon to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. The Pilgrims at Plymouth waited for Robinson (<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Robinson-1183>) to bring the rest of the congregation to the colony, but he died on March 1, 1625, and never saw America.

The man on the *Mayflower* who would be the spiritual leader of this new church was William Brewster, an elder (*Brief sketch of the character and sufferings of the Pilgrims*). The Brewster family had originally sailed from Holland to England aboard the ill-fated *Speedwell* but transferred to the *Mayflower* in England when the *Speedwell* was declared unfit to make the cross-Atlantic voyage. Brewster (<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Brewster-4>) was a very learned man and took piety and the promotion of the group’s cause of a genuine religion very seriously. Without an ordained minister, he performed the duties of pastoral services twice every Sabbath

to the blessing of many of the congregants. At nearly sixty years old, he was the oldest man in the colony. He served the congregation for 11 years until he received lands in nearby Duxbury, where he moved to set up a farm. He died in 1644 at 83. He was greatly respected and lamented. He proved to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ and a worthy colleague of John Robinson.

God blessed the commitment and resolve of the Pilgrims to seek Him and worship Him in spirit and in truth. The Plymouth Colony proved to be very prosperous and thrived. Today, the General Society of Mayflower Descendants (<https://www.mayflower400uk.org/education/celebrities-who-can-trace-their-ancestry-to-the-mayflower/>) claims that nearly 35 million people worldwide have descended from the brave group who felt called to sail the North Atlantic in 1620.

Bibliography

Brief sketch of the character and sufferings of the Pilgrims who settled at Plymouth, Dec. 1620.

Boston, MA: J.H.A.Frost, 1820.

https://go.gale.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Monographs&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&retrievalId=46011e71-4ac7-4468-ab52-07a774cde4c7&hitCount=1017&searchType=BasicSearchForm¤tPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CCY0100905318&docType=Monograph&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=SBN-2005b&prodId=SABN&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CCY0100905318&searchId=R2&userGroupName=vic_liberty&inPS=true

Cordner, John. *The Vision of the Pilgrim Fathers: An Oration Spoken Before the New England Society of Montreal in the American Presbyterian Church, on 22nd December, 1856.*

Montreal: H. Rose, 1857.

Philbrick, Nathaniel. *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community and War*, New York, NY: Penguin Books 2006.

Steele, Ashbel. *Chief of the Pilgrims, or The Life and Time of William Brewster: ruling elder of the Pilgrim company that founded New Plymouth, the parent colony of New England, in 1620.* Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott, 1857.

WikiTree Contributors. "Dorothy (May) Bradford (abt. 1597-1620)." WikiTree.

<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/May-153>

WikiTree Contributors. "John Robinson (1576-1625)." WikiTree.

<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Robinson-1183>

WikiTree Contributors. "Reverend John Cordner (1816-1894)." WikiTree.

<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Cordner-5>

WikiTree Contributors. "William Bradford (bef. 1590-1657)." WikiTree.
<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Bradford-24>

WikiTree Contributors. "William Brewster (abt. 1566-1644)." WikiTree.
<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Brewster-4>