

# ❧ The Pilgrims ❧

IT'S IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER that the Pilgrims were not the first people in America – Native Americans had lived in what's now the United States for thousands of years. The Pilgrims were the first large group of people to move to America and start a successful colony.

The Pilgrims were from England. England was a Roman Catholic country until the 1530s, when Henry VIII established a new church called The Church of England and made himself the leader. However, a small group of people wanted to break away from the Church of England. They disagreed with the ideas the church taught, and didn't like that the church was controlled by politicians and not by religious leaders. They felt forced to practice their faith in a way that they did not like. They called themselves "Separatists" because they wanted to separate themselves from the Church of England.

The Separatists started their own congregation. However, since the government was in charge of religion in England at the time, starting your own church was against the law. To avoid breaking the law, the Separatists moved to a city in Holland called Leiden to start fresh. Though they were free to practice their beliefs there, life was hard in Leiden. In England, most of the Separatists had been farmers. Leiden was an urban area, and many Separatists did not have the right skills to find work in a city. After twelve years of struggling, they thought it might be time to start over once again.

They had heard about a new land across the sea that people called "The New World." They had heard that a group of explorers and settlers had started a town called Jamestown there. They thought of joining them, but in the end decided not to, since the Jamestown settlers were also from England and might also look down on them for their beliefs. Soon after, they met businesspeople who were willing to give them the money they needed to get to The New World and build their own settlement. They bought a ship and sailed back to England, where they were able to buy a bigger ship and convince more people to come with them.

The Separatists set sail on the *Mayflower* on September 6th, 1620. They wanted to settle in what is now New York City, but bad weather made them choose to sail in a different direction. After over a month at sea, they saw land for the first time on November 9th. They landed two days later at Cape Cod, which is now in Massachusetts. After searching for a place that would fit their needs, they got off the ship and settled in Plymouth. We now call these people The Pilgrims.

❧ The Pilgrims were so frustrated by the rules in their home country that they not only moved to a different country, but a country that had hardly been explored by anyone! How would you feel if you did that today? Would you be scared to move to a place that no one knew anything about? Or would you be excited to explore it for yourself?



*The Embarkation of the Pilgrims from Delfthaven in Holland*  
by Robert Walter Weir – 1844



Henry VIII