

Pilgrims and Pacifists

Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD.
—Psalm 31:24

On December 21, 1620, the Pilgrims landed on the rocky coast of Massachusetts. They thanked God for their safe arrival in the New World. These were deeply religious people who had separated from the Church of England. It took great courage to separate from the church, as well as their homeland.

About nine years later the Massachusetts Bay Colony was established by the Puritans. They, too, were men and women of deep religious life and conviction who left England because there was no religious freedom.

A few years later in England, George Fox, a serious and deeply religious young man who firmly believed in the Bible, was distressed at the worldliness of so many in the churches of his day. This inspired him to become the founder of Quakerism. He began preaching about 1640.

Many groups were pacifists. This means they opposed war and would not fight. They were persecuted for their beliefs. Pacifists were found among the Amish, the Mennonites, the Quakers (properly called “The Society of Friends”), and others. Many left Europe because of their anti-military beliefs. They also believed that each local church or congregation was a complete church in itself and no church should have anything to say about any other church.

The Friends based their religious life on the principle that kindness produces kindness. They are a plain people and firm in their

belief in divine guidance, not only in meetings, but in their daily lives. They have become famous for their relief work in wars and disasters, and were the only religious group in colonial times to take a definite stand against slavery.

In spite of being severely persecuted, their numbers continued to grow. In 1634 there were sixty Quakers in America—four years later there were thirty thousand!

Bible Students are also opposed to carrying guns in wartime, preferring to remember Paul's statement that our weapons are not the weapons of the world (2 Corinthians 10:4). We are opposed to killing human beings—our desire is to save them! If you are compelled by the government to enter military service, look for other ways to serve your country, such as the conscientious objectors' program in the United States.



It took great courage for the Pilgrims to leave their homeland.