

DEFINITION

In law, a *covenant* is a contract or other agreement between people or groups, in which they agree to do or not do a particular thing. They also agree upon the terms—that is, what will happen if terms of the agreement are not fulfilled. In a religious context, a *covenant* refers to an agreement a group of believers feels their deity has made with them. For example, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all refer to covenants made between God and people.

THE CALVINIST ORIGIN STORY

The Europeans who came ashore at Cape Cod in November of 1620 carried a view of the world that was based on the teachings of Christian religious reformer John Calvin. Calvin objected to Europe's dominant religious doctrines of his time.

According to Calvin,

- Humans do not have free will and do not determine the course of their own lives. Everything that happens is the will of God.
- People's salvation is predestined, already decided by God, and has nothing to do with their actions while on earth.
- Certain individuals are "called" by God and are among the "elect."
- One is born as part of the elect or not, according to God's will.
- Outward good fortune, especially material wealth, is a sign of God's favor.

- Obeying lawful authority, even when one disagrees with it, is a sign of being one of the elect.
- Bad luck, poverty, and a rebellious attitude are all evidence of damnation.

As Calvinists, the Pilgrims and the Puritans thought, although they could never be certain, that they were among the elected few their god had chosen for salvation. They believed that they were called by their god to create a new place where they could practice their own religion without having to live among those who did not believe as they did. Both groups viewed the "New World" as a place where they could do that.

When the *Mayflower* landed at Cape Cod in 1620, forty-one of the men on board wrote an agreement for how their colony would operate. This *Mayflower Compact* invoked their god's name and declared that they and their fellow passengers on the *Mayflower* were

- loyal subjects of the king of England
- the "First Colony" in North America
- in a covenant that would be governed by "just and equal laws" that they promised to obey

Ten years later in 1630, Massachusetts Bay Colony was founded by the Puritans. This colony had two purposes. One goal was to establish trade in goods produced in the colonies. But it was also meant to be a godly community, a religious home for the Puritans, who did not tolerate dissenting views on spiritual matters. The Puritans saw the Indigenous people as incapable of salvation but still in need of aid, as the colony's official seal suggests. It depicts