

The Crucible**Informational Focus*****Puritan Religion and Beliefs***

Frustrated by the Church of England, early Puritans came to America to escape persecution and to establish a new sect in which God's law was held supreme. They believed that the Bible and its message were above man's law, and therefore, it was the key to salvation. Most of the dissenters settled in New England, and it was in these new colonies that they established a close-knit community governed by absolute religious faith and strict discipline.

The Puritans believed in predestination—people were either born sinful and bound to a life in Hell, or they were destined to be saved. Nothing could be done to change one's destiny except to live a life of purity and pray that God would save them at the time of their death. Puritans believed in a life of hard work, self-discipline, and religious duty. Those who engaged in gossip, dancing, drunkenness, adultery, and other activities that were seen as the work of the Devil and a threat to the conformity of the community were subjected to public humiliation and punishment.

This strict, oppressive environment created tension in the community. Satan was ever-present in their daily lives, as death, drought, flood, and other natural disasters were blamed on Satan and his followers. As a result, Puritans became paranoid and suspicious of each other, and were often quick to place blame. This tension and paranoia created the perfect equation for the Salem Witch Hunt in 1692.

Spurred by political and social unrest in the community, and religious leaders such as Cotton Mather who wrote the book *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions* (1689), the hysteria in Salem spread like wildfire. By the end of the trials in 1692, nineteen men and women were hanged, one man was pressed to death, and many others died in prison while awaiting trial.