Conversion narrative of “Old Goodwife Cutter” (1630s)

Puritan colonists in the New World sought to establish a church that was incredibly simple compared to their religious experiences in the Church of England. The church was central to the community and daily life of the colonists, and their relationships with God were equally important. In the excerpt below, a female colonist describes her conversion. These conversion experiences were crucial to Puritanism, and the idea of submission to God was a necessary ingredient.

I was born in a sinful place where no sermon preached. My parents I knew not father, mother sent me to Newcastle, where placed in godly family as I think. And hearing—fear God, keep His commandments—two of which third and fourth I saw I broke. And six and seven years I was convinced thus; and I went to another family where the people were carnal and there fell to a consumption and after followed with Satan and afraid he would have me away. Mr Rodwell come to me and he was an instrument of much good to me. And afterward Lord’s hand was sad on me husband taken away and friends also to this place. And I desired to come this way in sickness time and Lord brought us through many sad troubles by sea and when I was hear the Lord rejoiced my heart. But when come I had lost all and no comfort and hearing from foolish virgins those that sprinkled with Christ’s blood were unloved. So I saw I was a Christless creature and hence in all ordinances was persuaded nothing did belong to me. Durst no seek nor call God Father nor think Christ shed His blood for me. And afterward I went to Thomas Shepard and found more liberty and so had less fear....But I thought I had no repentance, yet I was encouraged to seek the Lord and to be content with His condemning will to lie at Lord’s feet. Seeing such need of Christ was not knowing whether else to go and that he that comes to me I’ll not cast away and so desired Lord to teach me and desired to submit.

Document Analysis

How did Goodwife Cutter describe her early religious training?
Why did Goodwife Cutter convert?
How did she describe her conversion? What was the value of such narratives at the time they were published? Is that value different than the value the document has for us today?