# INTO THE HEAVENS: THE LUNAR BIBLE

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*"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."*
*- Matthew 24:35 (ESV)*

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With their backs to the floor, the instrument panel overhead obscured the men's vision of the overcast, winter sky.[1] Cramped inside the command module just beneath the tip of the dormant Saturn S-1B rocket which pierced the sky at 223 feet in the air,[2] the oxygen-saturated cabin lay still over the massive engines capable of breaking free from earth's grip.[3] This evening, the fuel tanks were empty. On January 27, 1967, this routine test offered little more than hour-long delays over both the breathable air supply and radio communication system problems.[4]

Suddenly, the Command Module's atmosphere ignited in a burst of gut-wrenching color. Out of the silence, operators heard the radio crackle from the cabin: "Fire!"

The men were trapped. Inside the Manned Spacecraft Operations building, Deke Slayton watched a camera feed of the command module window as astronaut Ed White, the first American to spacewalk,[5] scrambled to unscrew the bolts sealing the hatch shut.[6] There was no

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[1] *Wolfram|Alpha*, Wolfram Research, Inc., accessed February 16, 2015, http://www.wolframalpha.com/input/?i=cape+kennedy+fl+weather+January+27%2C+1967.

[2] Portree, David S. F., "A Forgotten Rocket: The Saturn 1B," *Wired* (2013), accessed February 20, 2015. http://www.wired.com/2013/09/a-forgotten-rocket-the-saturn-ib/.http://www.wired.com/2013/09/a-forgotten-rocket-the-saturn-ib/.

[3] "Saturn 1B," *Encyclopedia Astronautica*, accessed February 16, 2015, http://www.astronautix.com/lvs/saturnib.htm. The Saturn S-1B's rockets could exert 200,000 pounds of force.

[4] Chaikin, Andrew. *A Man on the Moon: The Voyages of the Apollo Astronauts*. New York: Penguin Books, 1994, 12. The radio communication issues were between the command module and both the "Saturn Blockhouse" a few hundred yards away and the Manned Spacecraft Operations building, over five miles away. Gus Grissom, commander at the time sitting in the command module next to Ed White that day asked, "How are we going to get to the moon if we can't talk between three buildings?"

[5] In the words of *Life* magazine, "There is a kind of riveting unease in the acknowledgment that the white-suited figure in the photos willingly left the relative safety of a cramped, 4-ton sardine can in order to float in space — a speck in the cosmos — and that no amount of testing can truly prepare anyone, or any mission, for that sort of landmark maneuver" (Cosgrove, Ben, "America's First Space Walk: Edward White Makes History," *LIFE.com*,

hope. "[S]econds after the fire started neither Ed White nor any other human being would have been strong enough to open it. As the fire progressed the buildup of hot gases sealed the hatch shut with thousands of pounds of force. As it was, White never had a chance even to undo the bolts."[7]

Gus Grissom, Roger Chaffee, and Ed White were the first to give their lives in the fledgling space program. Investigation of NASA revealed both deep existential and systemic problems. Numerous changes were made to avoid a repeat disaster. Despite the setback, Neil Armstrong's boot would touch the surface of the moon less than two and a half years later.[8]

Before his death, White mentioned to a reporter that he hoped one day to carry a Bible to the moon. Out of respect for White's legacy, Reverend John Maxwell Stout, a NASA chaplain and White's personal friend, determined to make his wish a reality.[9]

## The Chaplain

Born in Fort Worth in 1922, John Stout served during World War II as an "executive officer of an artillery battalion." There, "Stout watched as his chaplain was wounded in battle. In an early religious calling, Stout stood in for his fallen chaplain until a replacement could be found." After the war, he and his wife taught math and engineering at a school in China, only to be driven out during a communist takeover. Relocating to Brazil, Stout headed the "Analytical Chemistry and Engineering Design departments at Lavras University." When many of the missionaries nearby died during a yellow fever pandemic, the Stouts filled in and helped manage churches, schools, a hospital, and an orphanage that were all part of the ongoing Christian outreach. He and his wife even spent time reaching native tribes in the Amazonian jungle. Mr.

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(June 1965), accessed February 18, 2015, http://life.time.com/history/space-walk-nasa-edward-white-makes-history-june-1965/#ixzz3S5CETTsi).

[6] White was considered the most physically fit of all the astronauts in the space program. "For exercise, White and his backup, Dave Scott, used to practice opening the hatch; it was like pressing a couple of hundred pounds at the gym" (Chaikin, 24).

[7] Chaikin, 24.

[8] As Chaikin writes, "…there was a hidden blessing in this disaster: the wreckage of Apollo 1 was there for the accident board to examine, not a silent tomb circling the earth or drifting in the translunar void. Although three men had died, three or perhaps six more lives had probably been saved" (26). The disaster was transformational. "NASA halted all operations and immediately launched a comprehensive inquiry into its rules and procedures. Some of the changes that took place as a result of the fire, some of which still are in use today, included redesigning the hatch so it would open outward, replacing flammable materials with self-extinguishing materials, insulating plumbing and wiring, and replacing nylon suits with coated glass fabric suits," ("Biography," *The Official Site of Edward White, II*, accessed February 18, 2015, http://www.cmgww.com/historic/white/about/biography.html).

[9] Frohman, David, "A Profile of Reverend John M. Stout," *The Story of the First Lunar Bible* (2011), Accessed February 19, 2015, http://www.lunarbible.com/rjms1.html.

Stout eventually attended seminary in Texas, and then returned to Brazil where—along with his evangelistic efforts—he began developing the International Observatories of Satellites and was the first man to photograph the Russian's "Sputnik" in space.[10] Stout eventually began working for NASA, forming the "Association of Space Support Chaplains" and also advancing the field of information science.

Stout knew Ed White personally and helped create the Apollo Prayer League after the 1967 fire to pray for astronauts and engage in humanitarian efforts.[11] Stout wanted to send a Bible to the moon in keeping with White's wishes, but knew given the exorbitant cost of lifting any amount of weight to space that taking a Bible to the moon would require special technology weighing as little as possible. Fortunately, that technology had been in development for nearly one hundred years.

**The World, Too Small for the Naked Eye**

At first, critics dismissed the "puerile" novelty. Adapting the discoveries of John Benjamin Dancer,[12] who in turn benefitted from the work of Louis Daguerre and William Fox Talbot[13]—two of the first to make significant advances in photography[14]—Rene Dagron managed in 1864[15] to develop photographs in a space only a few millimeters wide.[16] Though at

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Frohman, David, "The Genesis of the Apollo Prayer League," *The Story of the First Lunar Bible*

(2011), accessed February 19, 2015, http://www.lunarbible.com/pl1.html.http://www.lunarbible.com/pl1.html.

[12] "Microfilm – A Brief History" in "The History of Microfilm: 1839 to the Present," *University of California Southern Regional Library Facility* (2005), accessed February 11, 2015,

http://www.srlf.ucla.edu/exhibit/text/BriefHistory.htm.

[13] Mahon, Mike, "John Benjamin Dancer, 1812-1887, 19th Century Manchester Instrument Maker & Inventor of Microphotography," *Manchester Microscopical & Natural History Society* (2006), accessed February 11, 2015,

http://www.manchestermicroscopical.org.uk/danchom.html.

[14] Morgan, Keya, "The Birth of Photography," Matthew Brady (2004), accessed February 11, 2015. http://www.mathewbrady.com/history.htm.

[15] Day, Lance, and Ian McNeil, eds., "Dagron, Prudent René-Patrice," *Biographical Dictionary of*

*the History of Technology*. Routledge Reference: London, 2005. http://www.astronautix.com/lvs/saturnib.htm. More on Dagron's developments can be found at http://www.historyofinformation.com/expanded.php?id=2437 and http://www.luminous-lint.com/app/photographer/Rene_Patrice_Proudhon__Dagron/ABCDEF/.

[16] Hayhurst, J.D., "The Pigeon Post into Paris: The First Important Application of Microfilm,"

*Jeremy Norman's HistoryofInformation.com* (2015), accessed February 20, 2015,

first the photographs were considered little more than a transitory source of entertainment, when the Franco-Prussian war exploded, the technology was appropriated for clandestine communications. After Dagron escaped Paris under siege in a balloon, he mounted a communication initiative using pigeons to deliver messages between Paris and Tours on microfilm.[17] The technology's newfound significance precipitated its adaptation by George McCarthy in the 1920's for maintaining bank records, and in the 1930's for keeping newspaper and other print materials on file. In the 1940's, the military co-opted microfilm for both espionage and the transmission of letters to soldiers.[18]

By the time Reverend Stout began searching for a Bible to be taken to the moon, the technology was advanced enough to reduce a 1,245 page Bible to a 1.5 inch$^2$ microform to be read at 200x magnification.[19]

**To the Moon and Back**

Apollo 12 proved the first mission to tote a diminutive King James Version to the moon. By accident, however, the Bible was left on the command module instead of descending with the lunar module to the moon's surface. Stout tried again with Apollo 13, to whose astronauts congressman George H.W. Bush presented 512 of the Bibles funded by the Apollo Prayer League. When Apollo 13's mission went sour, 100 of these Bibles were placed on the lunar module of Apollo 14, and 200 were stored in the command module. At last, the Bibles descended to the surface of the moon.

On February 5, 1971 at 4:18am, astronauts Alan Shephard and Edgar Mitchell depressurized the cabin and opened the hatch of the lunar module for the first of two walks on the lunar surface.[20] At that moment, the "The Bibles were… directly exposed to the Moon's environment," sitting "within the 'Antares' on the lunar surface under the one-sixth gravitational pull of the Moon."[21] The Bibles eventually re-entered earth's atmosphere at 25,000 miles per

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http://www.historyofinformation.com/expanded.php?id=2437.

[17] Ibid.

[18] The military mail service would shrink letters down for microfilm transportation and then enlarge them for printing later before delivering them to their intended recipients.

[19] Mersch, C.L., "First Lunar Bible," *The Apostles of Apollo* (2011), accessed February 11, 2015,

http://apostlesofapollo.com/first-lunar-bible/.

[20] Prior to his first moonwalk and speaking the words, "One small step for man—a giant leap for mankind," Buzz Aldren took communion on board the lunar module to commemorate the special moment and give glory to God. For more, see http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/19/moon-communion-buzz-aldrin_n_5600648.html. Despite atheist Madalyn Murray's lawsuit against NASA meant to ban astronauts from praying in space, she was unable to prevent the Bibles from being taken to the moon (http://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=12&article=4627).

[21] Frohman, David, "Landfall on the Moon," *The Story of the First Lunar Bible* (2011), accessed

hour and were framed in brilliant "24 karat gold and accented with pave diamonds and a Brazilian garnet."

The story of the "Apollo Bible" in Houston Baptist University's Dunham Bible Museum, then, is one birthed in tragedy but filled with intrepid exploration. It is a story of innovation on the smallest of scales, and of men seeking to honor God's Word despite setbacks. By choosing to send these Bibles to the moon at Reverend Stout's prompting and in memory of astronaut Ed White, NASA affirmed that the Bible is more than a historical book. Its message is important for all time and bears significance for all of God's creation.

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February 19, 2015, http://www.lunarbible.com/ap14_5.html.

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"Saturn 1B." Encyclopedia Astronautica. Accessed February 16, 2015. http://www.astronautix.com/lvs/saturnib.htm.

*Wolfram|Alpha*. Wolfram Research, Inc. n.d. Accessed February 16, 2015. http://www.wolframalpha.com/input/?i=cape+kennedy+fl+weather+January+27%2C+1967.