

# THE Bible IN America™ MUSEUM

Houston Baptist University

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## Anniversary of the World's Most Published Book

2004 is the 400th anniversary of the beginning of the King James Version of the Bible, the most published book in the world. Soon after King James assumed the throne of



England in 1603, Puritan church leaders sent the King a petition to reform the Church of England. Over sixty years earlier, King Henry VIII had separated the Church of England from the Roman Church and made the English monarch head of the English Church. The English Church continued many of the rituals and practices of the Roman Church.

The Puritans wanted to purify the Church so its teachings and liturgy followed the Bible more closely.

In response to their petition, King James called a conference of leading churchmen and theologians to meet at Hampton Court, a royal palace fifteen miles from London, in January 1604. The Puritan petitioners sought “a due and godly reformation” in the Church of England. Believing the church government of bishops as well as some church practices and the liturgy in the Book of Common Prayer were “not agreeable to the Scriptures,” they encouraged the planting in all churches of good pastors who could preach the Scriptures. They were optimistic that King James, who considered himself a scholar and something of a theologian, would move forward the Church’s reformation. In concluding their address to the king, they quoted Mordecai’s words to

Esther, “Who knoweth whether you are come to the kingdom for such a time?”

However, during the three days of the Hampton Court Conference, the King gave little support to the petitioned reforms and favored few changes in the ecclesiastical order. King James fully supported the established bishops, believing they were necessary supports to his own throne. He feared the abolition of the one would lead to the abolition of the monarchy itself. King James was determined to make the Puritans conform to the established church, “or else I will harrie them out of the land, or else do worse.”

Though the King would not accept Puritan reforms, he did accept an almost off-handed comment made by Dr. Rainolds, the Puritan spokesman. When Dr. Rainolds mentioned a new translation of the Bible might be in order, since the translations approved under earlier monarchs were “corrupt and not answerable to the original,” the King became interested. He gave an order for a new Bible translation, “to be done by the best learned of both the Universities.” In almost a footnote to the Hampton Court Conference, King James set in motion the project for translating a Bible into English. The sponsorship of this translation, which came to bear the King’s name, today is King James’ most memorable accomplishment.



# Latest Acquisition: Codex Vaticanus

The **Bible in America Museum's** newest acquisition is a magnificent limited edition facsimile of the *Codex Vaticanus*, one of the earliest complete manuscripts of the Bible. The earliest Bible manuscripts were written in Hebrew and Greek on papyrus or parchment (made from animal skins) scrolls. Soon the Christians began using a book or codex format rather than scrolls for their



The beginning of John's gospel, from the *Codex Vaticanus*

Scriptures. They were the first in the ancient world to extensively use books, apparently because the book format made cross referencing the Scriptures easier. Though many of the early Bible manuscripts were intentionally destroyed during the years the early church was persecuted, there are today over 6000 known Biblical fragments or manuscripts. Among the most important is *Codex Vaticanus*.

Written in Greek on vellum (calf's skin), the Codex has been in the Vatican library since at least 1475. Its writings and character are very similar to the *Codex Sinaiticus*, now in the British Museum. Because of their similarities, scholars speculate the two manuscripts originated in the same scriptorium in Egypt in the first half of the fourth century. Possibly they were even among the fifty complete Bibles Constantine commissioned once he became emperor.

The writing of the manuscript is a neat uncial script (only capital letters) without spaces between words or punctuation marks. Of course there are no chapters or verses either; those were added centuries later. Six or seven centuries after the manuscript was first made, a scribe carefully reinforced the fading ink. The exquisite facsimile in the **Bible in America Museum** clearly shows these ink variations and other notes and marks made by over 1600 years of Bible scholars.

## For Father's Day: John Q. Adams' Letter to His Son

My dear Son:

September 1811

In your letter of the 18th January to your mother, you mentioned that you read to your aunt a chapter of the Bible or a section of **Doddridge's Annotations** [available in the **Bible in America Museum**] every evening. This information gave me real pleasure; for so great is my veneration for the Bible, and so strong my belief, that when duly read and meditated on, it is of all books in the world, that which contributes most to make men good, wise, and happy – that the earlier my children begin to read it, the more steadily they pursue the practice of reading it throughout their lives, the more lively and confident will be my hopes that they will prove useful citizens of their country, respectable members of society, and a real blessing to their parents...

I have myself, for many years, made it a practice to read through the Bible once every year... My custom is to read four to five chapters every morning immediately after rising from my bed. It employs about an hour of my time...

It is essential, my son, in order that you may go through life with comfort to yourself, and usefulness to your fellow-creatures, that you should form and adopt certain rules or principles, for the government of your own conduct and temper... It is in the Bible, you must learn them, and from the Bible how to practice them. Those duties are to God, your fellow-creatures, and to yourself. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thy self.' On these two commandments, Jesus Christ expressly says, 'hang all the law and the prophets'; that is to say, the whole purpose of the Divine Revelation is to inculcate them efficaciously upon the minds of men...



# Picturing the Word

Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* has focused attention again on how we visualize what the Bible describes in words. Manuscripts of medieval Bibles are filled with beautiful and often fanciful illuminations. Early printed Bibles often included engravings depicting Biblical stories. The **1534 Martin Luther Bible**, a facsimile of which is in the **Bible in America Museum**, had beautifully colored woodcuts of Biblical scenes. There are accounts of the early settlers to Virginia using the picture of Creation in the Bible (probably the Bishop's Bible first published in 1568) to introduce the native Americans to Bible truths.

The first Bible printed in America with illustrations was the one printed by **Isaiah Thomas in 1791**. The fifty plates commissioned for the 2 volume folio Bible were all executed by American engravers. The illustration at left, of the first and last Adam, was placed between the Old and New Testaments. On the left is the first Adam: naked, under the cloud of God's wrath, contemplating death all around him. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the serpent are in the background. On the right is the last Adam, Jesus Christ: the light of God flows down from the triangle symbolizing the Trinity, the light even piercing the cloud of wrath. Jesus hands Adam the clothes of righteousness as He steps on the serpent's head (fulfilling Genesis 3:15) and death; Calvary's cross is in the background. Here is a visual image of Paul's words: "by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the *free* gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one, shall many be made righteous." (Rom. 5:17-18); "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (I Cor. 15:22).



## A Prayer Before the Reading of the Holy Scriptures

*From William Burkitt's Expository Notes, 1794.*

ALMIGHTY God and merciful Father, who hast appointed thy word to be a light to our feet, and a lamp to our paths, and caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning; grant us the assistance of thy Holy Spirit, that we may in such ways read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.

And seeing of thy tender love to mankind, thou hast given thy dear and only Son to be unto us both a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of Godly life, give us grace that we may always most thankfully receive this his inestimable benefit, and also daily endeavour ourselves to follow the blessed steps of his most holy life; who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

## A Volunteer Opportunity

Do you have a love for the Bible and a fascination with its influence in our American culture? Would you like others to know more about the Bible in America? Then maybe you should become a **Bible in America Museum** volunteer. Volunteering to be a guide in **Bible in America Museum** will help expand the hours the Museum is open to the public and community. An orientation and training session will be held at the **Bible in America Museum** Tuesday, May 8 at 10 am. To register or for more information, please contact Diana Severance at 281-649-3287 or [dseverance@hbu.edu](mailto:dseverance@hbu.edu).

The Bible in America Museum

**HOUSTON  
BAPTIST  
UNIVERSITY**

7502 Fondren Road  
Houston, TX 77074-3298

281-649-3287

Fax: 281-649-3474

E-mail: [dseverance@hbu.edu](mailto:dseverance@hbu.edu)

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“IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO RIGHTLY  
GOVERN THE WORLD WITHOUT  
GOD AND THE BIBLE”

—GEORGE WASHINGTON

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Please notify us of any changes or corrections in your address. If you would like to receive the *Bible in America Museum* Newsletter by e-mail and save the University postage, send your e-mail address to [dseverance@hbu.edu](mailto:dseverance@hbu.edu).



*There is no charge for admission*

- During June and July, tours of the **Bible in America Museum** will be by appointment only. Regular hours will resume in August. Appointments for tours may be made by calling 281-649-3287 or emailing: [dseverance@hbu.edu](mailto:dseverance@hbu.edu).
- Tours for groups up to 45 are available.
- School groups and home schoolers are welcome (grades 7 and above).

The Museum is currently located in the Moody Library at Houston Baptist University.

## 1836 Children's Bible For Sale

The **Bible in America Museum** has reprinted a facsimile of an 1836 children's Bible in its collection. Called a *Hieroglyphic Bible* for its 400 illustration, made by noted American engraver Joseph Adams (1803-1880), Harper Brother's 1836 *Hieroglyphic Bible* includes Bible verses on one page and devotional poems for children on the facing page. Many of the poems are from *Divine Songs* and *Hymns for Infant Minds* by the famous English hymn writer Isaac Watts. The facsimile is available at the HBU bookstore and at the **Bible in America Museum** for \$14.95 plus \$1.23 tax. Mail orders are also accepted; add \$1.42 for shipping and handling (or \$3.19 for 1st Class). Please make checks payable to Houston Baptist University.

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“MANY BOOKS IN MY LIBRARY ARE NOW BEHIND AND BENEATH ME. THEY WERE GOOD IN THEIR WAY ONCE, AND SO WERE THE CLOTHES I WORE WHEN I WAS TEN YEARS OLD; BUT I HAVE OUTGROWN THEM. NOBODY EVER OUTGROWS SCRIPTURE; THE BOOK WIDENS AND DEEPENS WITH OUR YEARS.”

—CHARLES H. SPURGEON

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