

Bible IN America™

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Which Bible version did Pocahontas know?

2007 marks the Quadricentennial of the establishment of Jamestown, the first permanent English Colony in America. In 1607, 144 men aboard the *Susan Constant*, the *Godspeed*, and the *Discovery* sailed from England to America with a 3-fold mandate from the sponsoring London Company: find gold and precious metals; discover a water route to the Pacific; and bring the Christian gospel to the natives. The men who would establish Jamestown were not the first to bring English Bibles to America, however.

In 1577, when Sir Francis Drake spent 36 days in California overhauling the *Golden Hind* before sailing around the world, the sailors met with the natives, lifted their eyes and hands to heaven to show where God was, and read the Scriptures and sang psalms. Though the natives of course could not understand what they heard, they effectively cried, “oh!” at every pause.

A decade later, on the opposite American coast, an attempt to establish an English colony was made at Roanoke. Thomas Hariot traveled throughout the surrounding Indian villages explaining to the natives about the true God and salvation through Christ. Hariot explained to them that the message of the gospel was most important and that there was nothing magical about the Bible itself. Yet, Hariot noted, many would “be glad to touch it, to embrace it, to kiss it, to hold it to their breasts and heads, and stroke over all their body with it, to show their hungry desire of that knowledge which was spoken of.”

When the Jamestown colony was established in 1607, two English Bible versions or translations were brought to the colonies – the Bishops Bible and the **Geneva Bible**. Captain Argoll told of a trading expedition along the coast in 1610 when a native chief came aboard the ship to warm himself by the ship’s fire. The chief watched an Englishman reading a Bible as if he would like to do the same. Captain Argoll turned to the illustration of creation at the front of the Bishops Bible and explained the Bible’s account of creation to the chief.

The records of the London Company frequently included Scripture quotations, as do letters from the colonists and of course the sermons and writings of Jamestown’s ministers. These all are from the **Geneva Bible**, the translation popular with the English Puritans. John Rolfe, who later married Pocahontas, was probably a reader of the **Geneva Bible**. In his letter to Sir Thomas Dale on whether he should marry Pocahontas, Rolfe included Biblical references which shaped his thinking on the issue. Pocahontas herself was instructed in the Christian faith by Rev. Whitaker, who regularly quoted the **Geneva Bible** in his letters and sermons. This would have been the English Bible Pocahontas was familiar with.



The Baptism of Pocahontas by John G. Chapman is one of eight historic paintings in the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol.

When Pocahontas converted to Christianity, she took the Christian name of Rebecca at her baptism. After her marriage to John Rolfe, the couple traveled to England, where Rebecca became the sensation of London society and was received by the Queen (but not received by King James. The King, displeased with Rolfe for marrying a princess without his permission, refused to see the native American).

Before returning to America, Rebecca took ill and died. She was buried at St. George’s church at Gravesend. The church today contains two stained glass windows commemorating the young American woman. One is of the Old Testament matriarch Rebecca, with a smaller picture depicting Pocahontas’ baptism. The other window is of Ruth, the Moabitess who left her native people to follow the God of Israel. Did Pocahontas/Rebecca know of Ruth’s famous words to Naomi (as in the **Geneva Bible**)? – “Intreat me not to leave thee, nor to depart from thee, for whither thou goest, I will goe: and where thou dwelleth, I will dwell: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.”

Time for the Bible?

The cover story of the April 2, 2007 issue of *Time* magazine was “Why We Should Teach the Bible in Public School {But very, very carefully}.” David Van Biema, *Time*’s senior religion writer, made a strong case for teaching the Bible in the schools since it is the “bedrock of Western Culture. And it’s constitutional – as long as we teach but don’t preach it.”

The Bible has had an important place in education since the colonial days in America. Literacy was high

among the American colonists, primarily because reading the Bible was considered so important. In 1647 Massachusetts passed a school law to ensure all children be taught to read and write, primarily so they could read the Bible. Sometimes this is called the “Old Deluder” law because of the law’s explanation of the need for such schools - “It being one chief project of the old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the Scripture...”

The *New England Primer*, first published in 1690 and used by generations of New Englanders, taught the youngest children the alphabet and basic spelling. The *Primer* taught these elemental principles of reading within a Biblical framework. The alphabet was taught in couplets such as

In Adam’s Fall
We sinned all.

Heaven to find
The Bible Mind

Christ Crucify’d
For sinners dy’d

Higher education too had the Bible at its foundation. The 1636 Harvard rules for students directed, “Every one shall so exercise himself in reading the Scriptures twice a day that he shall be ready to give such an account of the proficiency thereof.” Early Harvard rules also stated that “the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning” was Jesus Christ. Yale, founded in 1699, similarly required, “The Scriptures ... morning and evening are to be read by the students at times of prayer in the school.”

Whether in elementary or higher education, the Bible was seen as important in forming the character of students. Benjamin Rush, a physician, signer of the Declaration of Independence, Treasurer of the U.S. Mint, and a founder of the American Bible Society, believed strongly that the Bible should be taught in schools for this very reason. He was concerned that the Bible’s use in the schools had declined: “I lament that we waste so much time and money in punishing crimes and take so little pains to prevent them. We profess to be republicans, and yet we neglect the only means of establishing and perpetuating our republican forms of government; that is, universal education of our youth in the principles of Christianity by means of the Bible; for this divine book, above all others, favors that equality among mankind, that respect for just laws, and all those sober and frugal virtues which constitute the soul of republicanism.”

Several early nineteenth century New Testaments (all King James Version translations) in the **Dunham Bible Museum’s** collection were published especially for use in schools. Often these Testaments included study aids such as markings for phonetic pronunciation, vocabulary definitions, and historical or geographical supplementary material. **Hervey Wilbur’s edition of the New Testament**, published in the 1820’s, had a fold-out page of questions for students to ask themselves as they read the Scriptures.

Many frontier children in early America learned to read by reading the Bible, often the only book a family owned. Abraham Lincoln was one such child, and his speeches as President continued to be molded and shaped by the Bible’s words, cadences, and teachings.

Between 1836 and the 1920’s, 122 million copies of *McGuffey’s Readers* were sold, making them the most published book in America after the Bible. At least half of America’s schoolchildren during that period learned from these readers. Presbyterian minister William Holmes McGuffey included both readings from the Bible and stories reinforcing Christian character in his readers (See a sample excerpt on the next page). *McGuffey’s Readers* both taught about the Bible as well as “preached” its message of salvation through Jesus Christ. However, revisions made after McGuffey’s death had much less Biblical content. In the last revision, God was mentioned once, and the Bible stories disappeared. Though the strong moral emphasis remained, salvation and piety were no longer taught. McGuffey and many of the earlier Americans would wonder how true morality was possible without the Bible.

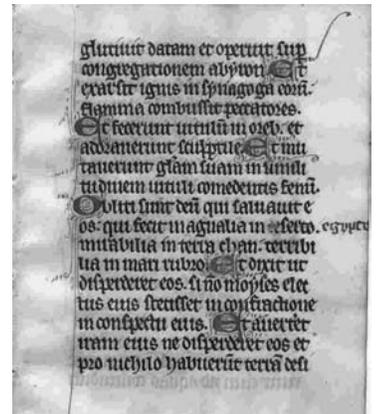
A 1625th Anniversary!

A discussion of Christian theology today among English speaking peoples would be almost impossible without referring to “justification,” “propitiation,” “regeneration,” or “Scripture” – all words which came into the English language from Jerome’s Latin translation of the Bible. English also acquired Greek words such as “apostle,” “evangel,” and “baptism” via Jerome’s translation. 2007 marks the 1625th anniversary of the commissioning of Jerome’s work, one of the most influential translations of the Scriptures of all time.

There were several different translations of the Christian Scriptures, or portions thereof, circulating throughout the Roman Empire of the fourth century. As early as the second century, North African Christians had translations of the Scriptures available in provincial Latin. Other translations into Latin were made over the years, producing a wide variety of versions with varying degrees of accuracy and readability. Damasus, Bishop of Rome, wanted a standardized Latin version of the Gospels and Psalms which could be used in all of the churches. In 382 he commissioned Jerome, the leading Christian scholar of the day, to revise the Old Latin Scriptures and provide an accurate Latin translation for the church.

Jerome began his revision in Rome while he was Damasus’ Secretary, completing the Gospels shortly before Damasus’ death in 384. Jerome then revised the Latin Psalter from the Septuagint, or Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. After he left Rome and went to live in Palestine, Jerome improved this revision using Origin’s translation and study of early Biblical manuscripts.

When the New Testament writers quoted Scripture, they most often quoted the Septuagint or Greek translation of the Old Testament. This Greek translation became so revered among Christians that some, such as Augustine, considered

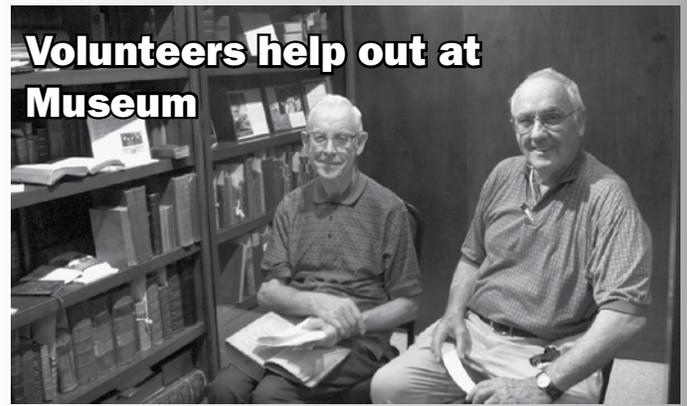


14th century manuscript on vellum of Psalm 105 from Latin **Psalter**, now on display at the **Dunham Bible Museum**. Note the scribal correction in the margin.

the Septuagint translation inspired. However, Jerome, one of the few Christian scholars of the fourth century who even knew Hebrew, thought it was necessary to go back to the Hebrew Scriptures. He made his third translation of the Psalms into Latin from the Hebrew. This was not well received, since people were more familiar with the versions from the Septuagint. As Jerome noted, “So great is the force of established usage that even acknowledged corruptions of text please the greater part, for they prefer to have their copies pretty rather than correct.” Though Jerome’s translation of the psalms from the Hebrew never was highly accepted, the remainder of his translation of the Scriptures from early Hebrew and Greek manuscripts became the accepted Scripture of the western church.

Jerome’s translation was not in elegant Ciceronian Latin but in the common literary Latin of his day. His Latin version became known as the Vulgate, or translation for the public, and was the Bible used throughout Europe for a millennium. Though they have never been completely catalogued, it is estimated that about 8000 Vulgate manuscripts are in existence today.

When John Wycliffe and his followers first translated the Bible into English in the fourteenth century, they translated from the Latin Vulgate. When Johann Gutenberg chose the first book to be printed with his new invention of moveable type, he chose to print Jerome’s Latin Vulgate Bible.



Charles Pierce and Doug Sanders help in the labeling and cataloguing of the **Dunham Bible Museum’s** collection. The **Museum** is completing implementation of a new software program which allows for a more extensive and detailed cataloguing and tracking of items in the collection. This will be a great tool in planning new exhibits. Doug and Charles both regularly volunteer at the **Museum**. As a retired Exxon employee, every quarter Charles completes 20 hours of volunteer work at the **Museum**, the **Museum** receives \$500 from Exxon/Mobile.

The Readers written by William H. McGuffey were used in schools throughout the United States for a century and are still in print today. Lessons 18-19 of the Third Eclectic Reader (1837) were on the Bible. Following are excerpts from these chapters (the vocabulary is quite advanced for our day, but was expected to be understood by elementary students of the 19th century):

The word Bible means book, and the sacred volume is so called because it is the book of books – the best book. The word Scriptures signifies writings. The Bible was not written at one time, or by one person, but consists of various parts, written at different times by different men. It is divided into two Testaments, called the Old and the New, chiefly with reference to the time when they were published. The Old was published before the coming of Christ, and the New after His death.

The excellency of the Bible might be proved sufficiently from its sanctifying and transforming influence upon the minds of all who read it with a proper spirit. This is manifest more especially from the fact of its having God for its author. That God is its author is evident from its being the only book which teaches everything that our Creator requires of us, either to know, or believe, or do, that we may escape his deserved displeasure, obtain his sovereign favor, and dwell forever in the bliss of his immediate presence.

It opens to us the mystery of the creation, the nature of God, of angels, and of men, the immortality of the soul, the end for which man was created. It teaches the origin of evil, and the inseparable connection between sin and misery, the vanity of the present world, and the glory reserved in a future state for the pious servants of God.

Although many hundreds of thousands of books have been written in different ages by wise and learned men, even the

best of them will bear no comparison with the Bible, in respect either of religion, morality, history, or purity and sublimity of composition ...

The design of the Bible is evidently to give us correct information concerning the creation of all things by the omnipotent word of God, to make known to us the state of holiness and happiness of our first parents in paradise, and their dreadful fall from that condition by transgression against God, which is the original cause of all our sin and misery.

It is also designed to show us the duty we owe to Him, who is our almighty Creator, our bountiful Benefactor, and our righteous Judge, the method by which we can secure His eternal friendship, and are prepared for the possession of everlasting mansions in His glorious kingdom.

The scriptures are especially designed to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, to reveal to us the mercy of the Lord in Him, to form our minds after the likeness of God our Savior, to build up our souls in wisdom and faith, in love and holiness, to make us thoroughly furnished unto good works, enabling us to glorify God on earth, to lead us to an imperishable inheritance among the spirits of just men made perfect, and finally to be glorified with Christ in heaven.

If such be the design of the Bible, how necessary must it be for everyone to pay a serious and proper attention to what it reveals. The word of God invites our attentive and prayerful regards in terms the most engaging and persuasive. It closes its gracious appeals by proclaiming, “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” The infinite tenderness of the divine compassion to sinners flows in the language of the inspired writers, with which they address the children of men, and the glory of the most gracious promises of the Lord of glory accompany the divine invitation.

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“I have always been sturdily in favor of secular education, in the sense of education without theology; but I must confess that I have been perplexed to know by what practical measure the religious feeling, which is the essential basis of conduct, was to be kept up without the use of the Bible.” ~T.H. Huxley

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Did You Know?

- The three most widely owned titles among the world’s libraries (as found on the OCLC WorldCat database) are:
 1. *The Bible*
 2. U.S. Census (various editions)
 3. *Mother Goose*
- The three most frequently banned books from the world’s libraries are:
 1. *The Bible*
 2. *Huckleberry Finn*
 3. *Don Quixote*
- The most widely owned music titles among the world’s libraries are:
 1. *The Messiah* (the libretto of which is totally from the Bible)
 2. *Carmen*
 3. *Don Giovanni*

Visit the Dunham Family Bible in America Museum

- Museum Hours, September-May:
 - * Tuesdays, 10 a.m.- 4 p.m.
 - * Thursdays, 11 a.m. – 4 p.m.
 - * 2nd Saturday of the month, noon – 5 p.m.
- Tours at other times, including summer tours, are available by appointment.
- A curriculum packet is available for teachers, designed for grades 7 and up.

For appointments or more information,
contact Dr. Diana Severance
at 281-649-3287 or
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