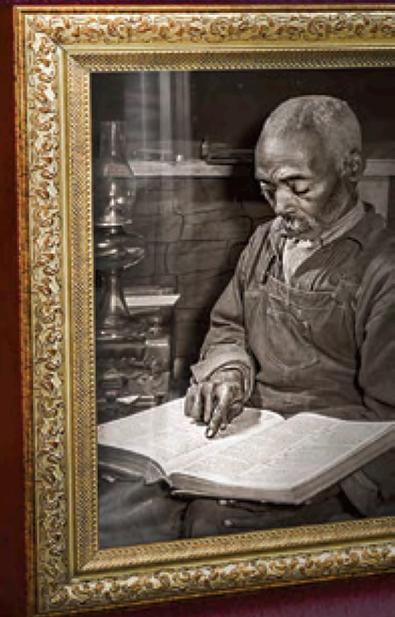
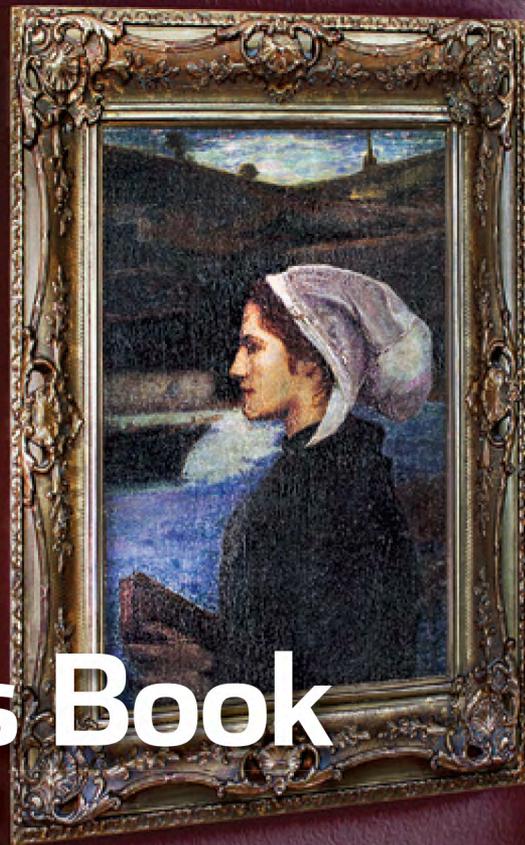
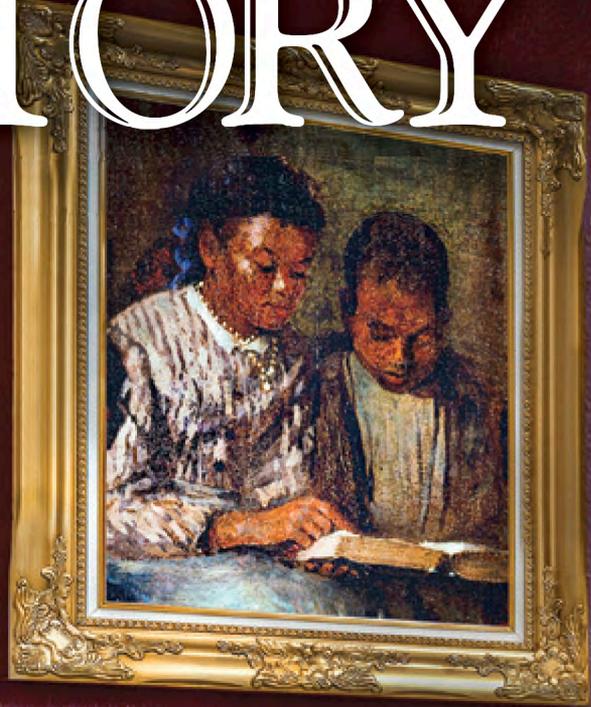


CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 138



America's Book

How the Bible helped
shape a nation

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138



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“GOING TO HEAVEN!” Biblical themes and terms haunt the poetic vocabulary of Emily Dickinson (above; see pp. 32–34).

Did you know?

BIBLE TOWNS, BIBLE SONGS, BIBLE NOVELS,
AND POCKET BIBLES

FIRST BIBLES IN AMERICA

- The first English book published in North America was *The Whole Booke of Psalmes Faithfully Translated into English Meter* (1640), known as the *Bay Psalm Book*.
- The first Bible translation to appear in America was by Puritan pastor John Eliot, who translated the New Testament into an Algonquian dialect in 1661, followed by the Old Testament in 1663.
- An edition of Martin Luther’s German Bible, printed in 1743, became the first colonial translation published in a European language.
- Bibles were not printed in America in English until after the Revolution; it was illegal to print a Bible in the colonies as the British Crown held copyright. Robert Aitken printed the first complete King James Version in 1782, the only one ever authorized by Congress. Copies of his New Testament appeared as early as 1777. Pocket-sized, they were called the “Bible of the Revolution” because soldiers found them easy to carry around.

HERE I FIND MINE EBENEZER—ON THE MAP

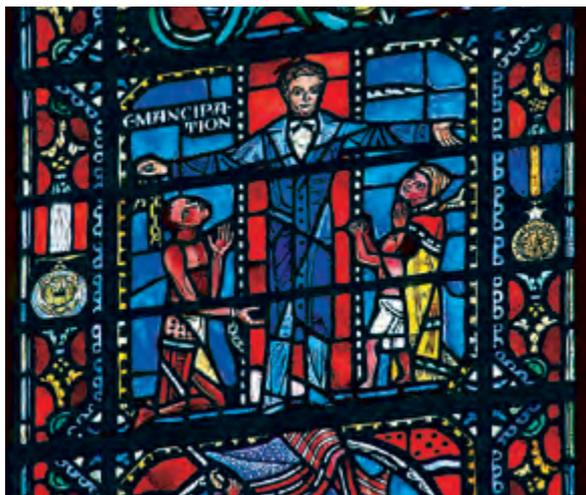
Americans have named hundreds of towns after biblical places and people. Some include Canaan,

THE “DEMOCRATIC MOSES” Cartoonists often used William Jennings Bryan’s faith to mock him (see p. 38).



EMILY DICKINSON PHOTOGRAPH, 1846 TO 1847. AMHERST COLLEGE ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS / (PUBLIC DOMAIN) WIKIMEDIA COMMONS
KEPPLER, UDO J. THE DEMOCRATIC MOSES AND HIS SELFMADE COMMANDMENTS. PUCK, V. 60, NO. 1, 1942 (1906 SEPTEMBER 19). KEPPLER & SCHWARZMANN / LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION

JOSEPH G. REYNOLDS, JR. FREEDOM WINDOW, 1933, NATIONAL CATHEDRAL. TIM EVANSON / (CC BY-SA 2.0) WIKIMEDIA COMMONS
IMAGE 6 OF GEORGE WASHINGTON PAPERS, SERIES 4, GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE, ELLIUS BOUDINOT TO GEORGE WASHINGTON, MARCH 17, 1783. [PUBLIC DOMAIN] LIBRARY OF CONGRESS MANUSCRIPT DIVISION



GREAT EMANCIPATOR People often used biblical imagery to interpret the Lincoln presidency (see pp. 16–18).

Connecticut (Genesis 9:18); Zoar, Ohio (Genesis 13:10); Gilead, Nebraska (Genesis 31:21); Bethlehem, Pennsylvania (Genesis 35:19, Matthew 2:1, Luke 2:4); Goshen, Indiana (Genesis 45:10); Ephraim, Utah (Genesis 46:20); Jericho, Arkansas (Numbers 22:1); Ebenezer, Georgia (1 Samuel 4:1); Zion, Illinois (2 Samuel 5:7); Ruma, Illinois (2 Kings 23:36); Mount Tirzah, North Carolina (Joshua 12:24); Zela, West Virginia (Joshua 18:28); Nazareth, Texas (Matthew 2:23); Berea, Kentucky (Acts 17:10); and Smyrna, Georgia (Revelation 2:8). You will find about 60 Edens (Genesis 2:8), 50 Bethels (Genesis 12:8), and 95 Salems (Genesis 14:18). The most famous Salem, home of the 1692 witch trials, is in Massachusetts.

THE BIBLE THAT QUICKLY EXPIRED

Noah Webster (1758–1843), who had simplified some aspects of British spelling in his famous 1783 spelling book, produced a simplified, updated revision of the KJV in 1833. It replaced “Holy Ghost” with “Holy Spirit,” “why” with “wherefore,” “usury” with “interest,” and “whore” with “lewd woman.” It even rewrote whole sentences: “Why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?” (Job 3:11) became “Why did I not expire at the time of my birth?,” and Martha says to Jesus about Lazarus (John 11:39) “by this time his body is offensive” instead of “by this time he stinketh.” But Americans were not ready to give up the KJV, and Webster’s Bible sold so poorly that it is now one of the rarest Bibles ever printed in America.

TALES OF THE CHRIST

While the Bible appears in many well-known

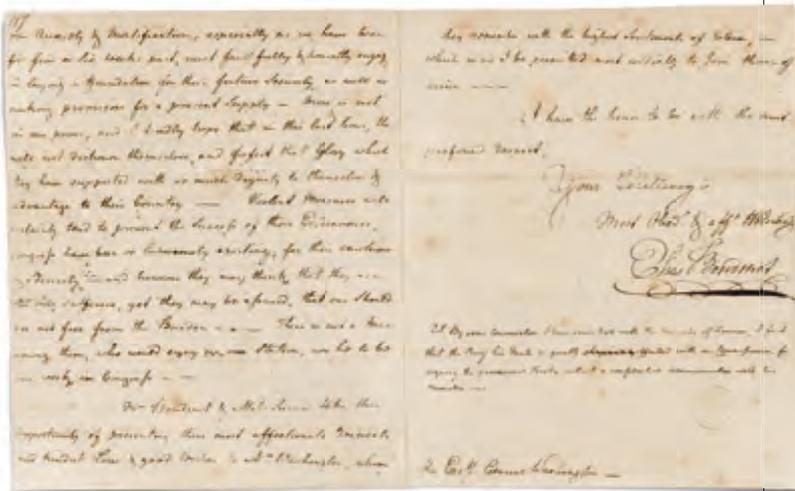
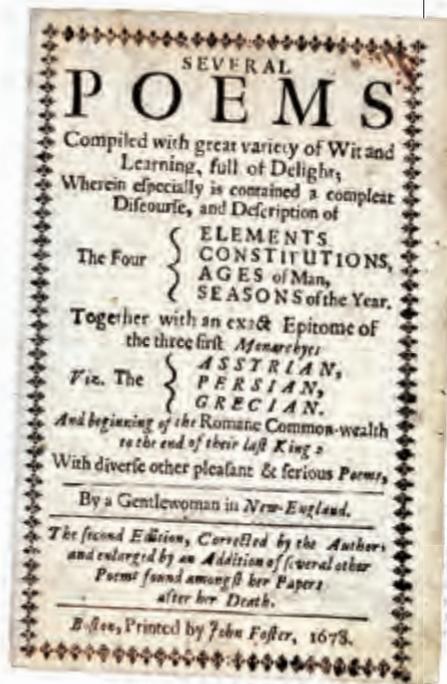
FOUNDING FATHER Elias Boudinot shaped both politics and biblical literacy in the new United States (see pp. 28–31); at right is a letter he wrote to George Washington in 1783 about congressional matters.

WIT AND LEARNING Another American poet who wrestled with biblical and religious themes was Anne Bradstreet (publishing anonymously below).

American books, some once popular are now forgotten. Among these is *Julian: Or, Scenes in Judea* (1841) by Unitarian minister William Ware, one of the first American novels where a fictional protagonist tells biblical stories. Lew Wallace (1827–1905) later used this idea in the more famous *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (1880). Wallace was a lawyer, general in the Union army, governor of New Mexico, and ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. He claimed Christianity but never joined any church, and he never set out to be a professional author: he started writing because being a lawyer bored him.

THE SONG FOR ME

No one seems to know who wrote the famous chorus “The B-I-B-L-E.” It first appeared with no author or composer credited in a 1934 Evangelical Covenant Church hymnal, *Bible Choruses and Songs*. Americans have sung many hymns about the Bible, but the Good Book has climbed the secular charts too. In the nineteenth century, the most popular Bible-related song was “My Mother’s Bible” (1843) by George Morris; in the twentieth, artists recorded “The Bible Tells Me So” (1955) by Dale Evans three times. Pete Seeger’s “Turn! Turn! Turn!” (1959) climbed to #1 in 1965 when the Byrds recorded it—with a text almost entirely from Ecclesiastes 3:1–8.



RedeemTV

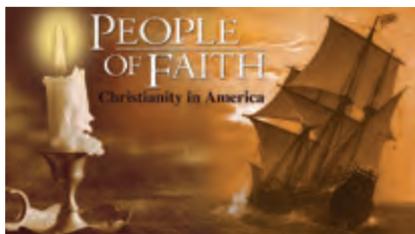
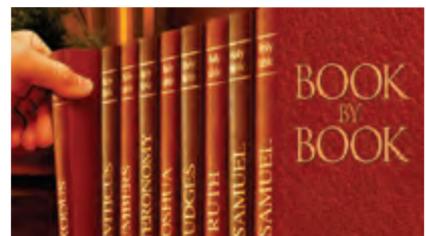
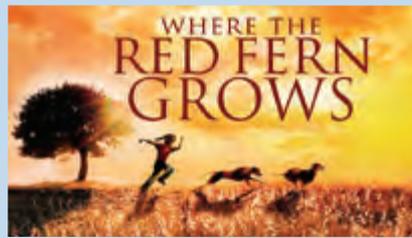
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Letters to the editor

Readers respond to *Christian History*



In our fall 2020 *Ministry Update* letter, we asked our readers which CH projects encouraged them and why. Among the letters below are many of the responses we received.

JONESES AND FRIENDS

Thanks so much for the excellent work on the issue about E. Stanley Jones! What a wonderful review of his life and work. . . . It will be a great resource for years to come, and hopefully helps to introduce him to a new generation.—*Jack Harnish, Honor, MI*

I especially enjoyed your issue about E. Stanley Jones. What an awesome personality! His wife's accomplishments were news to me. Our world is a better place because of devoted people like them.—*Anne Lippstreu, Alma, NE*

I was so glad you gave Jones and his incredible life an entire issue!—*Myron Barbour Jr., Alexandria, VA*

E. Stanley Jones—a man and wife I never heard of lived a dedicated life for our Lord. . . . The world needs more stories like theirs.—*David Stonesifer, Owings Mills, MD*

MEDICINE AND MARVELS

My son and daughter-in-law, both doctors, enjoyed our conversations over medicine and Cotton Mather's inoculation methods (#135). He said they were taught that in medical school. I have lent this issue to so many people and it's been so enjoyed that it is really dog-eared by now.—*Martha Weaver, Fuquay Varina, NC*

I was encouraged to learn much more about the ways Christians loved and served others during times of plagues. God was faithful to bring mankind through each one!—*Penny Casey, Lexington, SC*

SCIENCE AND FAITH

Another top rate issue (#134). It was wonderful to see scholarship that unveils the close relationship of faith and science, quite a departure from the unfortunate and often acrimonious reports to the contrary in our media outlets and even textbooks. Thank God for the women and men of science who hold to their Christian beliefs in our wonderful creator and sustainer God.—*Tom Edmunds, Washington, NJ*

HISTORY BY SCREEN

I am enjoying and always looking forward to receiving my CH magazines. But Redeem TV is an absolute delight, particularly the series on Christian history. The biographical stories are both informative and inspirational. Thanks!—*Phyllis Cooper, Potomac, MD*

UPLIFTING HISTORY

There is never an issue that is not like reading a devotional! Each one is spiritually rich and uplifting. Thank you!—*Jerry Salvatore, Centereach, NY*

MEET THE STAFF: MAX POINTNER

How long have you been at CHI and what is your role?
For just over a year now I have been the image researcher. I'm responsible for finding images that illustrate the content of the magazine and fit within the historical period. After our managing editor and designer sift through my findings and finalize a list, I hunt down copyright permissions and high-resolution versions so that we can actually use them in the magazine.



What is your favorite part of the job?
Often the actual search process feels like a wild goose chase: it can be thrilling or exhausting, and it's always surprising how many images there are of very obscure people and how few to illustrate concepts we take for granted. But once I have a solid set of options, I love hearing my colleagues' reactions and the historical connections they make between them to create a visual tapestry for the issue.

What do you most wish readers knew?
There is so much more historical research and understanding than makes it into the issue. My colleagues are full of delightfully obscure knowledge. It is such a pleasure working with a team made of people from such distinct fields who all have a passion for the history of our faith.

What do you do in your spare time?
When I'm not image hunting or teaching at Charis Classical Academy here in Wisconsin, I squeeze into my life reading (classic literature, sci-fi, or natural history), composing music (usually for my church), or rock climbing and hiking. Here and there I still build a Lego model, pin an insect, or label a rock for my collection. Recently, I've found sitting with a poem for just a snatch of time can transform a whole day. ☑

CHRISTIAN HISTORY #137
CHRISTIAN HISTORY #138
MAX POINTNER—PERSONAL PHOTO

Editor's note



I GREW UP SINGING THE SONGS “The B-I-B-L-E, yes that’s the book for me” and “Sing them over again to me, wonderful words of life” and Scripture choruses such as “I am the door.” I had a little box shaped to look like a loaf of bread with King James Version memory verses tucked inside it. (Google “Scripture breadbox” and you will see what I mean.) I memorized John 3:16 at Vacation Bible School. I read the Bible through for the first time at the age of 11, using a handy chart in the back of the Revised Standard Version Bible I’d received several years previously in third grade.

I also grew up in a world where not only my church life but also my *weekday* life was saturated with references to God and scriptural metaphors. I frequently heard people claim a special role for America in God’s plan of salvation, referring to the country in terms the Bible uses for the nation of Israel. The Pledge of Allegiance printed on my pencil box told me we were “one nation under God.”

NATIONAL SONGS, BIBLE PROTESTS

On the Fourth of July, we sang our national anthem, sometimes including the last verse: “May the Heav’n-rescued land / Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation!” Did you know “The Star Spangled Banner” was not the official national anthem until 1931? Neither did I, until I started writing this letter.

We usually followed that up with “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee” (“America! America! / God shed His grace on thee / And crown thy good with brotherhood / From sea to shining sea!”), “America the Beautiful” (“Our fathers’ God to Thee, / Author of liberty, To Thee we sing. / Long may our land be bright, / With freedom’s holy light, / Protect us by Thy might, / Great God our King!”). “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” followed, chock-full of scriptural metaphors from start to finish.

I was old enough in 1980 to hear Ronald Reagan tell visitors to Washington, DC, they came to “a city on a hill,” a phrase from Matthew 5:14 originally intended

by the Puritans as a description of their church life but later adopted as a national rallying cry (see pp. 6–10).

But I also heard Scripture used as a cry for liberation. In my childhood people were still regularly singing the protest songs of the 1960s; I first learned Ecclesiastes 3 from “Turn! Turn! Turn!” and spotted the references to Isaiah 2:4 and Revelation 6:11 in “Down by the Riverside”; though a much older spiritual, it was regularly used as an antiwar protest song in the Vietnam era. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated shortly before I was born, and I knew that his most famous speeches reference turning swords into ploughshares (Isaiah 2), going to the mountaintop (Deuteronomy 34), every valley being exalted (Isaiah 40), and justice rolling down like water (Amos 5).

In American history the Bible has loomed large in all these ways and more. So many, in fact, that we’re going to publish two issues on it. This, the first, explores the ways the Bible has formed much of our civic life—animating governmental ideals, shaping national identity, prompting reform, causing political union and political division, and supplying novelists and artists and songwriters with fertile creative material. We’ll follow this up next year with the story of how the Bible has been used in the American church—from Sunday schools and Bible quizzing to preaching, hymn-writing, liturgy-shaping, and the founding of specifically American denominations.



I hope that you, like me, believe the “B-I-B-L-E.” And I hope that you, like me, are ready to immerse yourself in its complex story and its place in our nation’s history. ❏

Jennifer Woodruff Tait
Managing editor

P.S. CH thanks Alan R. Crippen II and Anthony Schmidt for their assistance in the preparation of this issue.

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A city on a hill?

THE BIBLE AND “CHRISTIAN AMERICA”

Abram Van Engen

IN JANUARY 1983, near the tail end of the worst recession since World War II, President Ronald Reagan (1911–2004) addressed an annual convention of national religious broadcasters. The theme was “facing the future with the Bible,” and Reagan announced that as president he would do his part. “At the National Prayer Breakfast,” he said, “I will sign a proclamation making 1983 the Year of the Bible.”

Knowing that some might criticize him for failing to separate church and state, Reagan declared that he was doing nothing less than the founding fathers of the nation who had supposedly looked to the Bible for guidance. In invoking these foundations, Reagan articulated a theology in which God specially chose and set apart the United States with a unique role in human history:

I’ve always believed that this blessed land was set apart in a special way, that some divine plan placed this great continent here between the two oceans to be found by people from every corner of the Earth—people who had a special love for freedom and the courage to uproot themselves, leave

THERE’S EVEN A RAINBOW This 1840 painting by Robert Weir for the US Capitol imagines the Pilgrims embarking with Scripture and prayer.

their homeland and friends. . . . They created something new in all the history of mankind—a country where man is not beholden to government, government is beholden to man.

A SPECIAL ROLE

Reagan was clearly not alone. According to recent polling from the Public Religion Research Institute, 40 percent of Americans believe God has granted the United States a special role in human history. In addition 36 percent say the United States has always been and is currently a Christian nation.

Usually Americans bolster such a belief by turning first and foremost to the Pilgrims (as Reagan often did). Where others came for gold, the story goes, these settlers came for God. They left England for the freedom to practice what they believed and established a colony



WRITTEN IN THE STARS In *Our Heaven Born Banner* by William Baulby (left), the American flag literally forms from the clouds.

PLYMOUTH ROCK 19th-c. textbooks (bottom and p. 9, bottom) often featured the Pilgrims.

mightily infused with English cultural ideas that could often be mistaken for biblical norms.

But the Pilgrims were not the first people here (these were the Native Americans, of course), nor the first Europeans (Spanish, French, and Dutch came earlier), nor the first English voyagers,

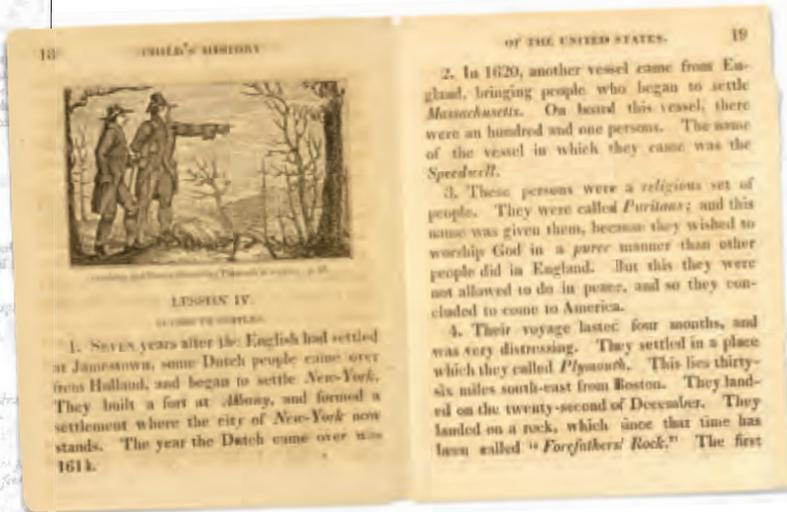
nor even makers of the first permanent English settlement (Jamestown, 1607). When they were set forth, often intentionally, as the true origin of America, all these other beginnings and their influences were erased.

When history textbooks in the early nineteenth century began to tell the nation's history for future generations, such messy details were often glossed over or omitted. Textbook authors, largely New Englanders, took the opportunity to cast their ancestors with noble hearts and motives. The South was mostly ignored to downplay slavery and elevate a commitment to noble ideals. The Puritans were also largely wiped clean of slavery. But, in fact, they had participated in the slave trade and had enslaved Native Americans and Africans.

Furthermore the Pilgrims and Puritans had considered economic opportunity to be just as vital and important a reason for immigrating to New England as religious purity. They took their place among many groups mingling the devout and the profane, including people committed to the Bible, people who ignored it, people who used the Bible for unjust gain, and people who never could tell the difference.

The biblicism the Puritans brought to bear on society did not entirely disappear, though. This meant a high rate of biblical literacy on the one hand and an attempt to support any and all policies with scriptural texts on the other. The Bible was prevalent in the Revolutionary era, though not necessarily among founders themselves. Biblical texts do not appear in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, or any new state charters. Religion was not really part of the rationale for a new nation or the structure it would take.

Instead the Bible surfaced most readily in the sermons of ministers who used Scripture to sanctify the nation and present it as essentially, if not officially, Christian (see pp. 12–15). Some preachers launched jeremiads against the Revolution, and Loyalist ministers rejected it altogether, but many supported it. It was preachers, not politicians, who truly created the idea



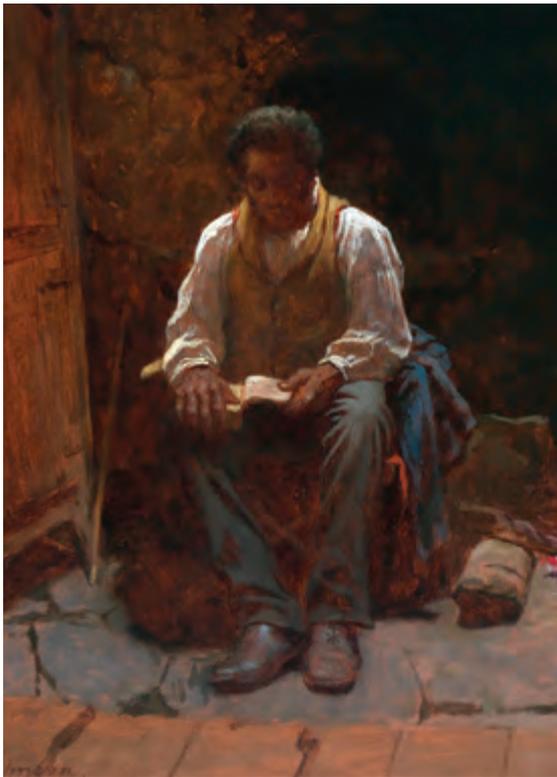
in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:14)—referring almost exclusively to the church, not the nation.

LAW FROM THE GOOD BOOK

Whether they paid attention to Winthrop or not, it is indeed true that the Puritans hoped to remove ceremonies and inventions from the church and return it to the pure, primitive simplicity they found in the Bible. They hoped to model simplicity to others and further the cause of the Reformation. To achieve this they turned to the Bible in conjunction with classical and Enlightenment models, separating government from church while also insisting that government's role was to nurture and support true religion.

Their initial law codes, as a result, frequently cited biblical injunctions. Sometimes this meant greater lenience (theft was punishable by death in England but not in New England); and sometimes it meant greater severity (adultery was punishable by death in New England, but not England—though Puritans enforced this only once). New England in the seventeenth century had become a “Bible commonwealth,” though one

SARONY, MAJOR & KNAPP LITHOGRAPHY; WILLIAM BAULBY'S OUR HEAVEN BORN BANNER C. 1861; WILLIAM SCHAUSS (PUBLIC DOMAIN) LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION; CHARLES AUGUSTUS GOODRICH, THE CHILD'S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES, P. 18–19, 1681; BOSTON, CARTER, HENDEE & BABCOCK; LIBRARY OF CONGRESS / (PUBLIC DOMAIN) INTERNET ARCHIVE



A WORD FOR ALL A free Black man reads a Bible in an 1863 painting by Eastman Johnson (*above*); the American Bible Society predicts the need for Bibles in the modern age (*right*).



of a providentially elected people and set them apart with a special mission—a nation taking over the role of the church, fulfilling the truths of Scripture, even when God’s will and ways, as then understood, mixed cultural norms and secular ideas with biblical texts. Ministers made sacred the work of politicians.

A NEW ISRAEL?

A huge number of preachers (especially from New England) repeatedly turned to the story of Israel’s exodus to make sense of American destiny and justify the United States’ departure from England. In this context the idea of America as a “New Israel” took shape. The Revolutionary era cast this idea back to the Puritans, and many still believe that it arose primarily from them, but the Puritans had always considered themselves to be part of a worldwide church, turning to the story of Israel as a biblical model and paradigm for *any* group of gathered Christians.

But for Americans in the new nation a century after the Puritans, the story of Israel was not just a model or a paradigm, but prophecy. Increasingly American ministers argued that their new nation was now taking the mantle of the covenant to advance the Kingdom of God. Ezra Stiles (1727–1795), a leading New England theologian and the president of Yale College, represented the

rhetoric of many with his 1783 sermon, “The United States Elevated to Glory and Honour.” Using Deuteronomy 26:19, Stiles turned to the subject of “God’s American Israel” and concluded that this verse is “allusively prophetic of the future prosperity and splendor of the United States.”

In many ways these ministers simply reapplied what had become standard practice throughout the eighteenth century. Protestantism had come to play a powerful role defining what it meant to be British and why the British Empire must succeed. Biblical interpreters had already begun to argue that God works his will primarily through the power of the state and the moral expansion of nations.

To understand why these interpretations would have such staying power, we have to look beyond the founding to the early decades of the new nation. It was then, not during the actual founding, that the Bible truly began to exert profound and pervasive cultural influence (see pp. 19–21) as a burst of revivals brought it into newfound prominence. In 1816 the American Bible



EASTMAN JOHNSON, THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD, 1863. SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM / (PUBLIC DOMAIN) WIKIMEDIA COMMONS FOR SUCH AN AGE AS THIS, NEW YORK CITY, PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY / (PUBLIC DOMAIN) WIKIMEDIA COMMONS EDWARD SYLVESTER ELLIS, A HISTORY OF OUR COUNTRY, BOSTON, LEE AND SHEPARD, 1836. (PUBLIC DOMAIN) LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



Society (ABS) began a massive production and distribution of Bibles (see pp. 29–31).

Just one of many such institutions, the ABS became part of a larger cultural explosion of biblicism in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Historian Paul Gutjahr reminds us that the Bible was “the most imported, most printed, most distributed, and most read written text in North America up through the nineteenth century.”

It is no accident that the burst of history textbooks in the 1820s—written in part to give the relatively young nation a history to bind its citizens together—largely took a providential tone. In schoolbooks throughout the country, God foresaw and created the United States as a crowning glory in the history of redemption.

All this provided a moment when the American Revolution was recast as a New Israel escaping the tyranny of Britain as a modern-day Egypt. Another such powerful moment arrived in the Cold War, when church membership again rose exponentially. In the face of an explicitly atheist and communist foe, the nation defined itself as always essentially religious and capitalist. In 1954 the United States added “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance. And soon Perry Miller, then JFK, and eventually Ronald Reagan all turned to Winthrop’s forgotten sermon and pronounced it the origin of the country.

WHO IS EGYPT?

From the moment of the Revolution forward, whether consciously or subconsciously, the nation has attempted to take on a prophetic role, acting as a deliberate agent in God’s redemptive history of the world. While that story has been perhaps the most powerful or noticeable, it is by no means the only story. If minorities,

BIBLES AND FREEDOM The Crusade for Freedom pictures a free society formed by faith (*left*); Reagan speaks to the National Association of Evangelicals (*above*).

particularly African Americans, had been afforded the opportunity to write the nation’s biblical history, the story would look very different (see pp. 24–28).

People of color in the United States have read the Bible against, rather than with, the broader American culture in which they were embedded. Providence does not point to the making of the United States, they argue; providence points beyond it. Far from being a New Israel, America is a new oppressive Egypt, which needs to be transcended. The Bible offers deliverance, promises, and hope, not past achievement or present identity. Condemnation, not sanctification, marks the prophetic tone ringing from its pages.

In the Revolutionary era, though, the nation’s founders had pulled from a large mix of resources to establish the contours of a new country. They utilized new Enlightenment philosophies and political theories, combining them with a careful searching of classical sources. As these ideas took shape in Revolutionary America, biblical rhetoric soon came along to bless and sanctify them. To this day we live with the consequences of that act—a nation that all too often perceives itself as a church. **■**

Abram Van Engen is associate professor of English at Washington University in St. Louis and the author of Sympathetic Puritans: Calvinist Fellow-Feeling in Early America and City on a Hill: A History of American Exceptionalism.

CRUSADE FOR FREEDOM STAMP, CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY / RADIO FREE EUROPE, 1951, WIKIMEDIA; PRESIDENT REAGAN ADDRESSING THE ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EVANGELICALS, 1983, NATIONAL ARCHIVES / COURTESY RONALD REAGAN PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY

Blessings and curses

Biblical references in some famous American speeches

For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill [Matthew 5:14]. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.—*Roger Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity” (1630)*

It was fashionable, hundreds of years ago, for the children of Jacob to boast, we have “Abraham [as] our father,” when they had long lost Abraham’s faith and spirit [Matthew 3:9, John 8:38–39]. That people contented themselves under the shadow of Abraham’s great name, while they repudiated the deeds which made his name great. Need I remind you that a similar thing is being done all over this country today?—*Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” (1852)*

Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said “the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether” [Psalm 19:9].—*Abraham Lincoln, “Second Inaugural Address” (1865)*

Having behind us the commercial interests and the laboring interests and all the toiling masses, we shall answer their demands for a gold standard by saying to them, you shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns [Matthew 27:29]. You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.—*William Jennings Bryan, “Cross of Gold” (1896)*

America was born a Christian nation. America was born to exemplify that devotion to the elements of righteousness which are derived from the revelations of Holy Scripture. . . . I ask of every man and woman in this audience that from this night on they will realize that part of the destiny of America lies in their daily perusal of this great book of revelations—that if they would see America free and pure they will make their own spirits free and pure by this baptism of the Holy Scripture.—*Woodrow Wilson, “The Bible and Progress” (1911), celebrating the 300th anniversary of the KJV*



HEAVENLY HEROES This 1865 lithograph showing the assassinated Lincoln ascending to heaven directly copies an earlier one honoring George Washington.

I just want to do God’s will. And He’s allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I’ve looked over, and I’ve seen the Promised Land [Deuteronomy 34:1–4]. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land.—*Martin Luther King Jr., address at Bishop Charles Mason Temple (1968) the day before he was assassinated*

These speeches were selected by Alan R. Crippen II, executive director, Faith and Liberty Initiative, American Bible Society. Specific excerpts were chosen by CH editors.



Rebels with a cause

THE BIBLE OF THE EARLY AMERICAN REPUBLIC

Mark A. Noll

WHEN THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS in 1776 asked Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) and Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) to design a seal for its would-be independent nation, they proposed images from Exodus 13 and 14—Israel’s miraculous journey through the Red Sea and the pillars of cloud and fire with which God protected his people. In so doing they touched on Revolutionary questions: Did the blessing of God rest on people in rebellion against their anointed monarch? Were they slaves toiling under the thumb of Pharaoh, awaiting God’s freedom? Triumphant Israelites finally entering the promised land? These images and more competed for attention as Bible believers eagerly turned to Scripture for a word from God for the times.

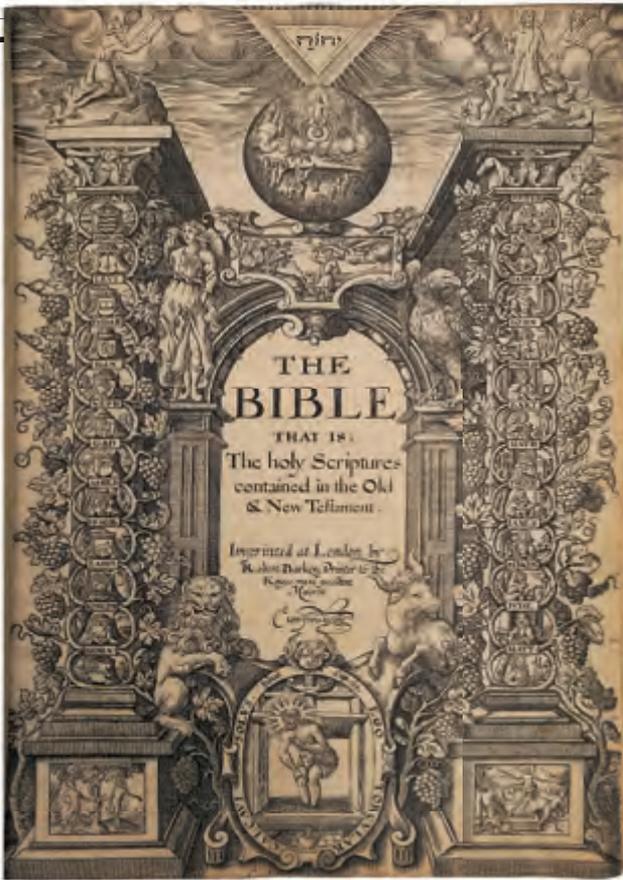
MISCHIEVOUS TAXES

The result could be eccentric—as in a sermon by Rhode Island Baptist John Allen (c. 1741–1785) on Micah 7:3. Allen somehow turned “a great man uttereth his mischievous desire” into a cry that Parliament’s tax on tea meant absolute tyranny. Copies of the sermon sold like hotcakes. Contemporary preachers also drew

LIGHT IN DARKNESS Though Catholics and his own king attempted to thwart his work, Tyndale, whose Bible is pictured above, pressed on with translation.

theological conclusions while commenting on contested issues, which did not always agree; John Witherspoon (1723–1794), president of the College of New Jersey, preached on Psalm 76:10 less than two months before becoming the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence. Witherspoon strongly defended the struggle against Britain, but also stressed God’s providential ability to bring good out of human evil.

John Fletcher (1729–1785), one of John Wesley’s close colleagues, explained that Romans 13 gives magistrates power to “execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” To Fletcher, colonists who complained about the “slavery” of Parliament while enslaving Africans were prime examples of evildoers. He concluded that Britain should fight against what he called “the tyranny of republican despotism.” But David Griffith, a Virginia Anglican who spoke from the same text, came to the opposite conclusion before fellow clergy in 1775.



He drew on Old Testament examples to explain what Paul meant in Romans 13 by “the powers that be are ordained by God.” If, for example, the Lord approved Israel’s murmuring against Pharaoh’s tyranny, then, as just cause existed for the colonists’ complaints against Parliament, it was not wrong for them to rebel.

But the turn to Scripture with the most impact did not come from the pulpit; it came from Thomas Paine’s (1737–1809) explosive tract, *Common Sense*—much of it devoted to biblical interpretation. This call to arms, first published in early 1776 and reprinted at least 20 times that year, urged colonists uneasy about Parliament’s actions to abandon monarchical government altogether. Paine found proof in 1 Samuel 8, where God condemns Israel for choosing Saul as king.

Authors loyal to King George III rushed to print counterarguments: for instance, Deuteronomy 17:14–20 says God himself would give Israel a king, and at least five New Testament passages (such as 1 Peter 2:17) command something very different than rebellion. But Paine’s exceedingly evocative prose carried the day.

DUAL IMPLICATIONS

The Bible of the American republic reflected the history of four earlier periods. These periods shared an approach that would prove crucial in the Revolution: reading Scripture simultaneously as a book of eternal salvation and a book with implications affecting life in the world. The first era was the **Reformation**. At his famous appearance before the emperor at Worms in

CAPTIVE TO THE WORD Luther (a page from whose Bible is shown *above*) believed he was repudiating Catholic abuses of Scripture by preaching justification by faith; translators of the Geneva Bible (*above left*) encouraged civil disobedience against kings.

1521, Martin Luther (1483–1546) boldly proclaimed, “my conscience is captive to the Word of God.” Although the phrase “sola scriptura” was not much used until later, the principle emerged alongside Protestantism. Protestants have never been able to agree exactly on what Scripture requires its readers to believe or to do. But they have agreed that the Bible deserves supreme honor as the book of salvation.

Four years after Luther’s famous declaration, William Tyndale (1494–1536) published his landmark New Testament in English. It provided much of the language eventually incorporated into the KJV. Tyndale began his preface to that New Testament by declaring that a Bible in the people’s language is a “light . . . to them that walk in darkness, where they cannot but stumble, and where to stumble is the danger of eternal damnation.” Because it sets forth the way of salvation, God’s revelation in the written Word should be honored above every other religious and secular authority.

After Tyndale’s translation, the most popular version in England and Scotland was the Geneva Bible (1557–1560), in use during the second era of biblical interpretation guided by **Puritan** influences. This version was distinguished by its accessible price,



**UNCOMMON SCRIPTURE,
COMMON SENSE**

From Thomas Paine (*left*) to Jonathan Edwards (*above*) to Samuel Davies (*right*), early American thinkers and preachers applied the Bible to the politics of their times.

memorable prose (much of it indebted to Tyndale), extensive marginal commentary, and pioneering division into individually numbered verse-paragraphs. This greatly facilitated use of Scripture but also encouraged an unfortunate tendency to chop biblical narratives into bits.

Most of the Geneva Bible’s marginal notes simply explained obscure material, but some encouraged readers to disobey their monarch when necessary. Christopher Goodman (1520–1603), one translator, underscored that revolutionary message with *How Superior Powers Ought to be Obeyd of their Subjects; and Wherein they may lawfully by Gods Worde be disobeyd and resisted* (1558). He and other ardent Protestants had fled to Europe when the Catholic Mary Tudor became queen in 1553 and began to silence England’s Protestants.

TRANSFIXED BY SALVATION

Many English settlers who colonized the New World agreed. The Bible opened for them the way of salvation; it also encouraged them to disobey rulers, parliaments, or traditions that in their minds violated the Scriptures. In *Of Plimouth Plantation*, William Bradford argued:

We desire to have the right worship of God and discipline of Christ established in the church, according to the simplicity of the gospel, without the mixture of men’s inventions; and to . . . be ruled by the laws of God’s Word, dispensed in those offices, and by those officers of Pastors, Teachers and Elders, etc. according to the Scriptures.

Other Puritan colonies were more explicit. When the Massachusetts Bay Colony drafted the “Body of Liberties” in 1641, instead of citing legal precedent or tradition, it gave biblical chapter and verse for many laws, backing each provision for capital punishment with a text from the Old Testament.

Although the colonies included several types of Protestants and a few Catholics, the Puritans were

the most articulate, energetic, and ideologically influential settlers. They wanted above all to follow scriptural teaching. Just as important for their later influence, they regarded their own settlements as in some way analogous to ancient Israel. And they refused to let any top-down authority tell them what the Bible means.

Revivals that swept over much of colonial America in the 1730s and 1740s ushered in the third era, which added an **evangelical** component. Some of the Great Awakening’s opponents, like Charles Chauncy (1705–1787) of Boston, argued that the Bible condemned the disorder he perceived when preachers like George Whitefield (1714–1770) came to town. Whitefield’s great popularity and the preaching of lesser-known evangelists carried a different (and livelier) message.

For his part Whitefield always based his sermons on the Scriptures, calling them “the unerring rule of God.” His fame, however, rested on transfixing audiences by dramatizing the Bible’s story of salvation. Listeners gathered not at regular Sunday worship hours, but on work days in fields, public squares, and natural amphitheatres. His way of proclaiming the new birth spoke personally and powerfully to ordinary men and women, to the enslaved as well as to the free.

Two notable women in Newport, Rhode Island, Sarah Osborn (1714–1796) and Susanna Anthony (1726–1791), spread these evangelical influences. Their deep appropriation of the revivals’ scriptural truths made them effective Bible teachers, beloved spiritual mentors, and highly respected “mothers in Israel.”

LAURENT DABOS; THOMAS PAINE: C. 1791; © NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON; C. JEFF M. HARRIS; JONATHAN EDWARDS: SCULPTURE BY WHITE OAK; SAMUEL DAVIES: PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY, 1896—SMALL BONES / (CCO) WIKIMEDIA; ALEXANDER STIRLING CALDER; STATUE OF SAMUEL DAVIES



Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) became the Great Awakening’s most important theologian; his encyclopedic grasp of Scripture guided his preaching and philosophizing. The way other revivalists applied scriptural preaching to reach the lost would, however, exert a greater influence in shaping the religious future.

A NEW EMPIRE

Finally, the most immediate influence for the use of Scripture in the Revolutionary period was **imperial**. For decades the British Empire had used Scripture to justify a never-ending series of wars with Europe’s Catholic powers, many of them fought on American soil: Drummer’s War (1722–1725, against French-backed Native Americans); the War of Jenkins’ Ear (1739–1748, against the Spanish); King George’s War (1744–1748); and the French and Indian War (1754–1763). These conflicts brought anxiety, conflict, and sometimes brutal destruction into colonists’ daily lives. As Americans looked to Scripture for guidance, their earlier traditions supported a powerful merging of biblical loyalty with libertarian political philosophy.

In 1749 the governor of New Jersey asked pastor and renowned revivalist Gilbert Tennent (1703–1764) to preach a sermon celebrating British victory in King George’s War. Tennent took his text from Psalm 65:1 and included a lengthy tribute to English Protestant King William III who in 1688 had replaced Catholic James II. According to Tennent that decisive act paved the way for King George II, “the principal . . . Pillar of our Hopes, and Source of our Joys, as well as the Terror and Envy of our Enemies.”

Samuel Davies (1723–1761), learned revivalist, hymn-writer, and church organizer, preached several sermons to rouse Virginians near the start of the French and Indian War. He took his text for one from Jeremiah 48:10, exploiting the Puritans’ metaphorical

DIFFERENT STROKES Gilbert Tennent (*left*) praised the king; George Whitefield (*above*) dramatized the gospel; John Witherspoon (*right*) stressed God’s providence.

identification of Britain with the children of Israel. On the one side stood “the Spirit of Patriotism . . . the inestimable Blessings of Liberty, British Liberty.” On the other were arrayed “the French, those eternal Enemies of Liberty . . . the horrid acts of Indian and popish torture . . . arbitrary Gallic power . . . Popish Slavery, Tyranny, and Massacre . . . the Chains of French Slavery.” The imperial wars fixed this absolute contrast in many minds. France, tyranny, poverty, vice, the pope, and disregard for Scripture presented a stark existential threat against Britain, liberty, prosperity, virtue, Protestantism, and obedience to the Bible.

But what if Britain later turned out to act like France? What if Parliament tyrannized the colonies? Beginning with the Stamp Tax (imposed to recoup expenses from the French and Indian War), that seemed to be exactly what was happening. Now the new Patriot cause was the “Pillar of our Hopes, and Source of our Joys, as well as the Terror and Envy of our Enemies.”

Protestant instincts to hold Scripture as an authority higher than kings, the Puritan tradition likening the new nation to Israel, evangelical disregard for inherited authorities, and a view of the world encouraged by imperial wars could have only one result. That result was the Bible of the American republic. ☐

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Preaching the holy war

BOTH SIDES IN THE CIVIL WAR APPEALED TO THE BIBLE

James H. Moorhead

WHEN THE MEN IN BLUE and the men in gray marched off to fight in 1861, they carried more than rifles and knapsacks. They took the blessing of ministers and other Christian leaders. Exceptions occurred, of course. Historic peace churches did not endorse the conflict, and disaffected people on both sides voiced dissent. On the whole, though, clergy in the North and South found scriptural grounds to ardently support their respective causes. American culture was drenched in biblical images; the ability of ministers to justify war in the name of the sacred book did much to mobilize popular support.

THE NEW CRUSADERS

When Lincoln's 1860 election prompted Southern secession, Northern ministers advised caution. Some with strong abolitionist convictions argued this might prove a blessing, freeing the United States from the taint of slavery. More numerous Northern conservatives, some of whom sympathized with the South, hoped forbearance would bring seceded states to their senses. Reluctance vanished when Confederates opened fire on Fort Sumter in April 1861. Lincoln's call to suppress the rebellion won nearly universal backing from Northern ministers. One noted: "If the crusaders, seized by

DELIVERANCE Artist A. A. Lamb honored the Emancipation Proclamation with this painting of Lincoln.

a common enthusiasm, exclaimed, *It is the will of God! It is the will of God!*—much more may we make this our rallying cry and inscribe it on our banners."

Preachers believed the hopes of humanity rested on the Union's preservation; the United States' pure Protestant Christianity and republican institutions must remain models to the world. If the Union was destroyed, Baptist minister and educator Francis Wayland (1796–1865) argued, "crushed and degraded humanity must sink down in despair." Many Yankee ministers thought Union soldiers were preparing the way for the Kingdom of God on earth. William Buell Sprague (1795–1876), editor of *Annals of the American Pulpit*, predicted Northern success would usher in "a flood of millennial glory," "the great Thanksgiving Day of the World."

But Southern clergy also viewed their cause as holy. Noted ministers called for secession. When conflict began clergy declared it to be a just war—and more. Confederates believed they bore a special mandate to set before the world ideals of ordered liberty, states' rights, and biblical values. Religious leaders rejoiced

HUMILIATION On national fast days (*right*), Christians gathered to hear ministers enumerate national failings and to express repentance.

GLORY Poet Julia Ward Howe (1819–1910, *below*) expressed widespread faith in the familiar lines “Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.”



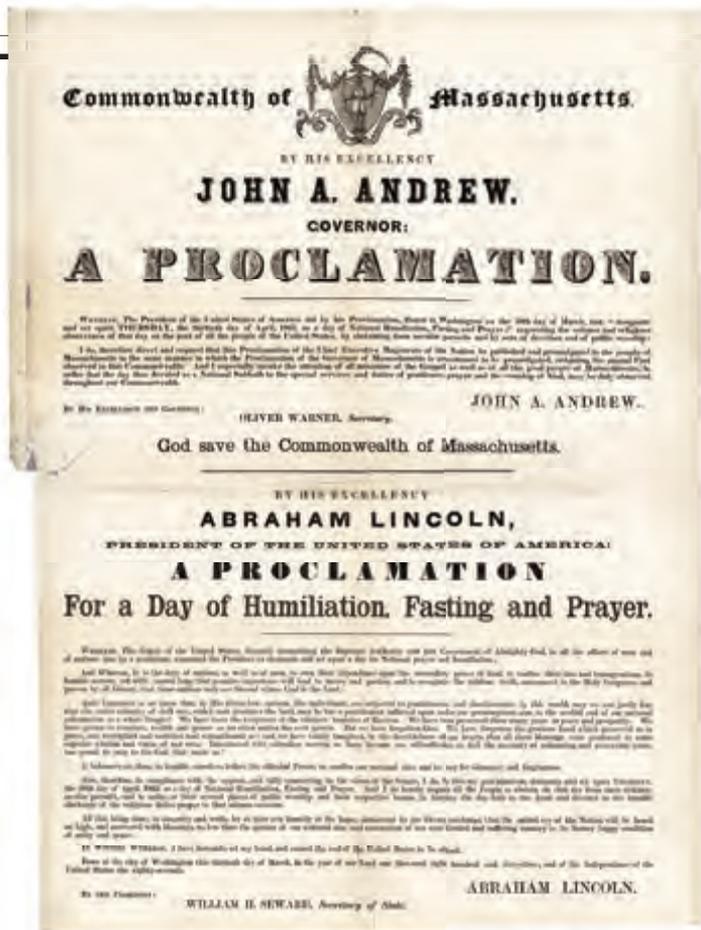
that the Confederate constitution explicitly recognized the nation’s dependence upon God. One minister called the Confederacy “the Lord’s peculiar people.” Another wrote, “the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night was not more plain to the children of Israel.”

Many believed the Confederacy represented the future. Robert Lewis Dabney (1820–1898), theology professor at Union Theological Seminary and adjutant (assistant) to Stonewall Jackson, contended that the South would save the world from false ideas of “radical democracy.” Other preachers asserted that God might use the Confederacy to inaugurate his kingdom.

BAPTISM OF BLOOD

On January 1, 1863, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation and fundamentally altered the character of the war. Northern churches reflected—and in some cases, promoted—this shift. Initially most ministers were reluctant to support abolition, but the first few years of the war convinced them otherwise as the Army of the Potomac stumbled through successive defeats. They asserted that through this defeat of Union arms, God had punished the United States for slavery and signaled that the oppressed should go free.

With a few notable exceptions, Southern ministers believed that preserving slavery was an integral



part of the Confederate mission: they argued God had ordained it as the most humane means of relating labor to capital, protecting Africans, and introducing them to the blessings of Christianity. “We do not place our cause upon its highest level,” wrote Episcopal bishop Stephen Elliott (1806–1866), “until we grasp the idea that God has made us the guardians and champions of a people whom he is preparing for his own purposes and against whom the whole world is banded.” Sermons and art frequently invoked images of contented, loyal slaves.

Some ministers demanded an end to laws prohibiting slave literacy and limiting ministerial preaching, for these kept African Americans from the gospel. Similarly reformers desired statutory recognition of slave marriages and families. Such proposals never became law, but won favorable comment from some Southern ministers who argued that God would not bless the Confederacy until it made bondage fully humane.

Presidents Davis and Lincoln designated various fast days for repentance during the war, and Northern and Southern clergy often named surprisingly similar transgressions: intemperance, Sabbath breaking, greed, unrestricted individualism, and lack of loyalty to authorities. Although clergy sometimes used fast days to condemn the enemy, generally each side reflected on its own sins. Presbyterian minister and Southern plantation owner Charles Colcock Jones (1804–1863) wrote to his aunt: “We have been sinning with the Northern people as a nation for seventy or eighty years, and now



HEALING White leaders saw Reconstruction as a time of millennial reconciliation (*left*).

BLOOD Northern defeat at the First Battle of Bull Run in 1861 (*below*) prompted soul-searching.

ordeal passed, he predicted, the United States would become “God’s own nation.”

For Northern clergy this blood baptism received final ritual enactment when an assassin struck down Abraham Lincoln on Good Friday, 1865. The president’s death symbolized reparation for national sins: “He has been appointed . . . to be laid as the costliest sacrifice of all upon the altar of the Republic and to cement with his blood the free institutions of our land.”

LOST CAUSE AND LEGACIES

Long after guns fell silent, some ministers still sounded battle cries. Prominent Congregationalist Theodore Munger (1830–1910) continued to interpret the war as God’s righteous retribution on the wicked South. Southerners such as Dabney nursed grudges against Yankees and longed for “retributive providence” to obliterate the Union.

But most Southerners admitted that preservation of the Union had been for the best. Over the next decades, though, they celebrated Confederate memorial days, erected statues of the fallen, and produced an outpouring of literature, surrounding the defeated South with an aura of sentimental nobility. Advocates of the Lost Cause converted Confederate warriors into pious men reluctantly taking up arms; in a haze of moonlight and magnolias, they transfigured them into romantic heroes with virtues appreciated even by former enemies.

Many clergy wished to bury the acrimony of the past; in the process both church and society often trivialized or obscured deeper moral issues. African Americans paid the price. Victor and vanquished tacitly agreed to end Reconstruction without securing political rights for formerly enslaved people, who soon faced epidemic lynching, the gutting of civil-rights legislation, and the creation of Jim Crow laws. Surely this outcome fell far short of the moral rebirth that Protestants had hoped would follow their baptism of blood. ❏

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we have become two nations, and the Lord may use us as rods of correction to each other.”

Protestants hoped the war might wash the nation clean, albeit through bloodshed. In the South Presbyterian pastor James H. Thornwell (1812–1862) warned “our path to victory may be through a baptism of blood.” B. T. Lacy (1819–1900), Episcopal chaplain to the Stonewall Brigade, declared: “Baptized in its infancy in blood, may [the Confederacy] receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and be consecrated to its high and holy mission among the nations of the earth.” On the Union side, Congregational pastor Horace Bushnell (1802–1876), shortly after Bull Run, told his parishioners more humiliation and suffering must purge America’s dross: “tears in the houses, as well as blood in the fields.” But once the



Christ versus the rum shops

SEEKING BIBLICAL LIBERTY FROM VICE AND BONDAGE

Jennifer Woodruff Tait

IT WAS OCTOBER 1874, somewhere in Chicago, when the unassuming, slender, bespectacled Frances Willard (1839–1898) began her call for reform. History was being made that day. With her trademark combination of gentleness and power, humor and quiet reserve, she took the podium. “We are taught to pray: ‘Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,’” she told her listeners:

Where? “On earth.” . . . We as a people believe what this good book says when it plainly again and again declares that Christ is again going to rule on earth. How is he going to rule until we get all the rum shops out of the way?

“GRAPE JUICE, GRISLEY SERMONS”

Willard delivered this speech, “Everybody’s War,” for the first time that day; she would repeat it many times over the next decades. In November 1874 she attended the founding convention of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), and by 1879 she became

SOUND THE TRUMPET Suffrage for women and alcohol prohibition were linked in the 19th c. and early 20th c.; people believed that women would vote against the saloon.

the organization’s president. Years later historians would stereotype Willard, the WCTU, and indeed the entire temperance movement as Bible-quoting fundamentalists; in 1920 Charles Beard (1874–1948), a founder of the New School of Social Research, described prohibition supporters as full of

Philistinism, Harsh restraint, Beauty-hating, Stout-faced fanaticism, Supreme hypocrisy, Canting, Demonology, Enmity to True art, Intellectual Tyranny, Grape juice, Grisley [*sic*] sermons, Religious persecution, Sullenness, Ill-Temper, Stinginess, Bigotry, Conceit, Bombast.

But, in the 1800s, temperance, like women’s suffrage and abolitionism, stood in the foreground of the Progressive reform agenda. And many of these activists grounded their work in the Bible.



TREMENDOUS TRIO Gerritt Smith (*left*), Frances Willard (*above*), and Charles Fowler (*below*) all desired to base reform on biblical principles.

Organized reformers thronged the nineteenth-century United States, many organizations arising in just over two decades: American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (1810), American Education Society (1815), American Bible Society (1816; see pp. 29–31), American Sunday School Union (1824), American Tract Society (1825), American Temperance Society (1826), American Home Missionary Society (1826), and American Anti-Slavery Society (1833). Numerous denominational societies were founded around the same time.

“NOT A LETTER BUT A LIFE”

Temperance activists believed the Bible does not affirm intoxicating drinks, and abolitionists preached that Scripture teaches freedom for those enslaved. In both cases they fought uphill interpretive battles, as Scripture does not unequivocally condemn either. Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy regulate slavery; Jesus’s parables speak of slaves; and Paul’s letters assume Christian households include slaves. Proslavery advocates argued repeatedly from these texts (see pp. 16–18).

Similarly, the Bible pictures the coming kingdom as “a feast . . . of well-aged wines strained clear” (Isaiah 25:6). Jesus changed water into wine at a wedding (John 2:1–12) and commanded his followers to eat bread and drink wine. Many Christians believed this gave biblical



support to moderate alcohol consumption and to using wine in Holy Communion.

Specific passages do support the other side, of course. Foes of drinking could point to Proverbs 23:31–32 and Ephesians 5:18; foes of slavery to Galatians 3:28 and to Exodus 21:5–6. But abolitionists often spoke in more general terms: they pointed out that slavery in the Old Testament is not race-based and not generally permanent, and they appealed to the overall scriptural depiction of God’s mercy and love. Abolitionist Gerritt Smith (1797–1874), also a temperance campaigner, argued in his *Three Discourses on the Religion of Reason* (1859) that “the religion taught by Jesus is not a letter but a life.”

Temperance activists also believed an overall commitment to God’s mercy compelled them to speak up against a destructive addiction; Charles Fowler (1837–1908), president of Northwestern (and Frances Willard’s ex-fiancé) wrote in his *Wines of the Bible* (1878) that if Jesus was on the side of wine drinking, he was on the side of “wife-beating and child-beating” and “seven-eighths of all the crimes committed in the civilized world.”

But they also developed a method of biblical interpretation known as the “two-wine theory.”

HON. GERRITT SMITH OF NY. PHOTOGRAPH 1855 TO 1856 - BRADY HANBY PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION / LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION
FRANCES WILLARD. PHOTOGRAPH 1880 TO 1898 - WRIGHT SETH L. COLEMAN / LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
CHARLES H. FOWLER. PHOTOGRAPH BY ALEXANDER HESLER, 1860 - [PUBLIC DOMAIN] NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES



IN THE NAME OF GOD Women such as those in this Montana WCTU chapter (above) and Harriet Beecher Stowe (right) fueled much 19th-c. and early 20th-c. reform; a cartoonist pictured temperance as their “holy war.”

Congregationalist professor Moses Stuart (1780–1852) popularized this argument in *Scriptural View of the Wine Question* (1849); he argued that both fermented and unfermented wine appear in the biblical text; any praise of wine must refer to the unfermented version.

A “TOTAL ABSTINENCE BIBLE”

The argument soon predominated among American temperance advocates and spread to Britain, where Anglican orator Frederic Lees (1815–1897) and Baptist minister Dawson Burns (1828–1909) produced the *Temperance Bible Commentary* (1868); their careful examination of every text referring to wine influenced many. Methodist minister Leon Field wrote in *his* temperance commentary, *Oinos* (1883), that at Cana Christ made grape juice because “no other is made, all else is manufactured. Nothing less than omnipotence could make one drop of the pure juice of the grape. The art of man can manufacture any amount of alcoholic wine.”

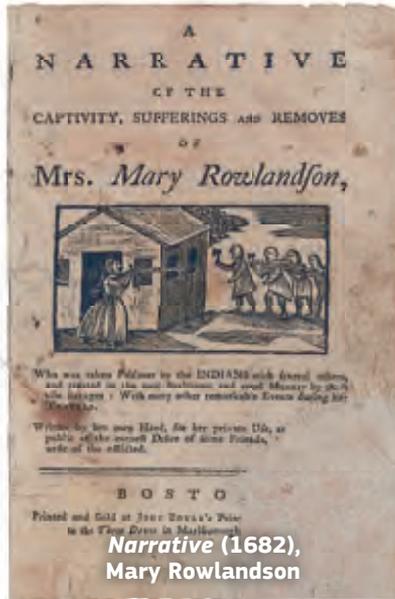
Temperance and abolition were often linked. *Communion Wine and Bible Temperance* (1869) by William Thayer (1820–1898) argues that the Bible is “a total abstinence Bible” and it had also taught “liberty just as much while slaves were held in bondage as since they were emancipated; but men did not see it.” Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), wrote in 1883 to Willard: “I feel that the Lord is with this movement and that he who came [to preach] deliverance to the captive will deliver those who are held in slavery by their own appetites and passions.” The causes were closely connected to female suffrage (another cause of Willard’s) too, with the assumption that women would vote to destroy the saloons that destroyed their families.



These reformers were convinced their work would bring a newer, more biblically faithful age in which God’s kingdom would come and his will be done. Frances Willard would not live to see the establishment of national Prohibition and women granted the vote in 1920. Had she been there, she might have told Charles Beard there is more than one kind of liberty. ☐

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Haunted by the Word



- **1630** John Winthrop preaches “A Model of Christian Charity,” including the “city on a hill” metaphor. William Bradford begins *Of Plimoth Plantation*, which he will finish in 1651.
- **1641** The founders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony draft the “Body of Liberties.”
- **1663** John Eliot translates the Bible into Algonquian, the first Bible translation printed in America.
- **1681** The charter is signed for the territory of Pennsylvania, which William Penn intends to make a settlement for religious liberty.
- **1682** Mary Rowlandson publishes *A Narrative of the Captivity, Sufferings, and Removes of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*.
- **1693** Cotton Mather begins work on the first American Bible commentary, *Biblia Americana*.
- **1702** Mather publishes his church history, *Magnalia Christi Americana*.

- **1734** Northampton Revival begins under Jonathan Edwards, a prominent event in the First Great Awakening. The Awakening will continue until about 1745.
- **1743** A printing of Luther’s German Bible arrives in America.
- **1749** Gilbert Tennent preaches an important sermon in honor of Britain’s victory in King George’s War.
- **1770** Phillis Wheatley publishes *An Elegiac Poem, on the Death of that Celebrated Divine, and Eminent Servant of Jesus Christ, the Reverend and Learned George Whitefield*.
- **1773** Wheatley publishes *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*.
- **1776** Thomas Paine publishes *Common Sense*.
- **1782** The first King James Bible is printed in the United States.
- **1783** Ezra Stiles preaches “The United States Elevated to Glory and Honour,” describing the United States as a “new Israel.”
- **1789** Elias Boudinot advances the idea for the United States’ first national Thanksgiving.
- **1794** Richard Allen founds the African Methodist Episcopal Church.



- **1801** Boudinot publishes *The Age of Revelation*.
- **1804** Thomas Jefferson begins compiling a miracle-free edition of the Bible. Sometime before 1820 he will finish it, calling it *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*.
- **1806** Lyman Beecher (father of Harriet Beecher Stowe) publishes the first of many sermons and treatises.
- **1809** The New York Bible Society is founded. In 1989 it will be renamed the International Bible Society and in 2009 Biblica.
- **1816** The American Bible Society (ABS) is founded.
- **1818** ABS makes its first Bible translation, into the Lenape language.
- **1829** David Walker publishes *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*.
- **1838** Winthrop’s “city on a hill” sermon is first published.
- **1844** The Philadelphia Bible Riots take place over a rumor that Catholics want the Bible removed from public schools.
- **1845** Frederick Douglass publishes *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*.
- **1848** Moses Stuart publishes *Scriptural View of the Wine Question*.

A NARRATIVE OF THE CAPTIVITY, SUFFERINGS AND REMOVES OF MRS. MARY ROWLANDSON. MARY ROWLANDSON, 1773—JOHN CARTER BROWN LIBRARY / (PUBLIC DOMAIN) WIKIMEDIA
MATTHEW BRADY. “REV. LYMAN BEECHER” PHOTOGRAPH, 1865 TO 1868—LIBRARY OF CONGRESS / (PUBLIC DOMAIN) WIKIMEDIA
MRS ELIAS BOUDINOT. ATTRIBUTED TO MATTHEW PRATT. (1734–1805)—(PUBLIC DOMAIN) WIKIMEDIA

Americans HAVE TRANSLATED, INTERPRETED, APPLIED, AND WRESTLED WITH THE Bible FROM COLONIAL TIMES TO THE 21st century

1851 Herman Melville publishes *Moby-Dick*.

1852 Frederick Douglass delivers "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?"

1855 Walt Whitman publishes *Leaves of Grass*, which he calls "the Great Construction of a New Bible."

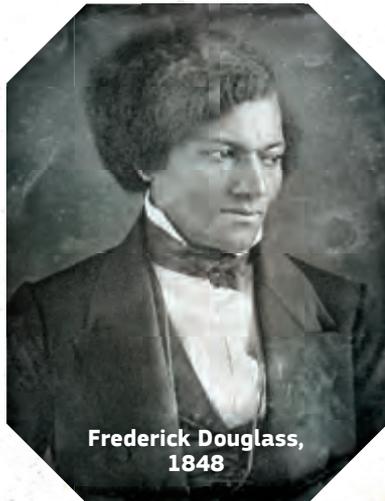
1856 Bradford's *Of Plimouth Plantation* is formally published.

1861 The Civil War begins. Julia Ward Howe writes the "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

1865 Abraham Lincoln delivers his Second Inaugural Address.

1868 Dawson Burns and Frederic Lees publish the *Temperance Bible Commentary* in Britain. A US edition follows in 1870.

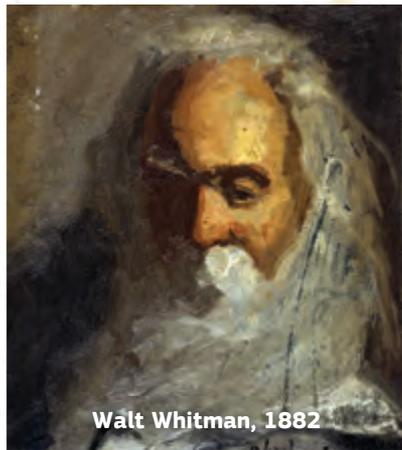
1896 William Jennings Bryan first delivers his "Cross of Gold" speech.



Frederick Douglass, 1848

1897 Paul Laurence Dunbar publishes the poem "Ante-Bellum Sermon." Producers film a Bohemian passion play, considered the first use of the Bible in movies.

1901 The American Standard Version (ASV) translation of the Bible is released.



Walt Whitman, 1882

1911 Woodrow Wilson delivers his speech "The Bible and Progress" on the 300th anniversary of the KJV.

1913 *Quo Vadis?*, the first Hollywood blockbuster, premieres; it is based on a story set in the early church.

1925 William Jennings Bryan takes part in the Scopes Trial.

1936 William Faulkner publishes *Absalom, Absalom!*

1944 Franklin Delano Roosevelt issues his D-Day prayer.

1952 Perry Miller popularizes the "city on a hill" motif in his book *Errand into the Wilderness*. The Revised Standard Version (RSV) translation of the Bible is released.

1954 Congress adds the words "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance.

1956 *The Ten Commandments* premieres.

1957 Carl McIntire founds the Bible Presbyterian Church.

1963 Martin Luther King Jr. publishes *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*; Kurt Vonnegut publishes *Cat's Cradle*.

1965 *The Greatest Story Ever Told* is released.

1966 The ABS releases *Good News for Modern Man*, a groundbreaking translation of the Bible into twentieth-century English.

1968 King delivers his "mountaintop" address.

1969 John McConnell proposes the creation of Earth Day.

1978 The New International Version (NIV) translation of the Bible is released.

1979 *Jesus*, usually known as "The Jesus Movie" or "The Jesus Film," is released.

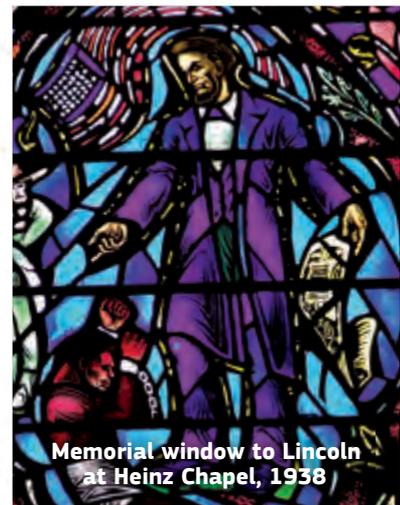
1989 The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translation of the Bible is released.

1993 Eugene Peterson begins publishing parts of *The Message*, one of the most popular modern Bible paraphrases. He will complete it in 2002.

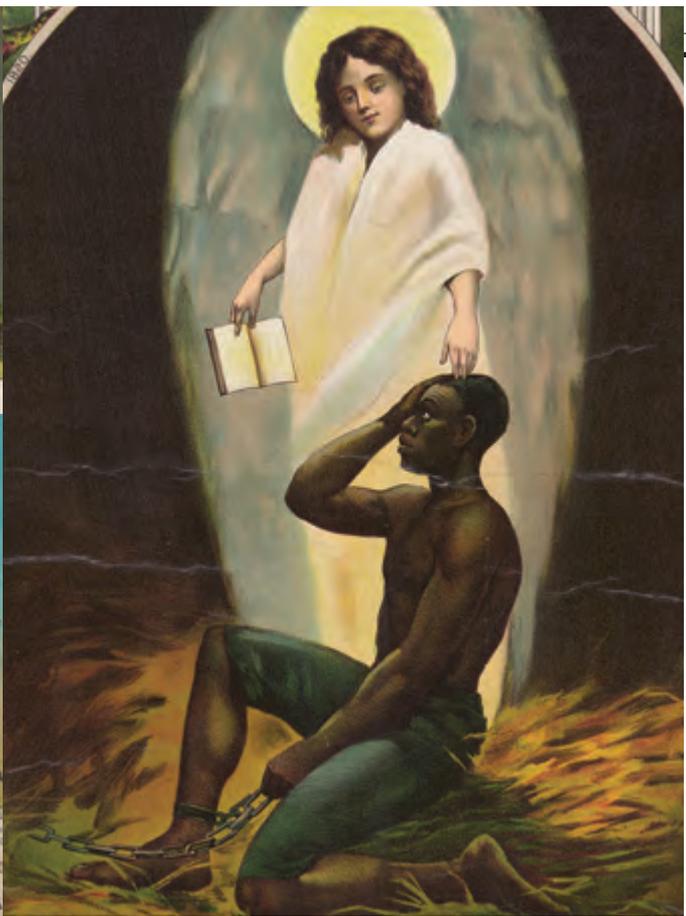
1994 *The Shawshank Redemption* is released.

1998 *The Prince of Egypt* is released.

2001 The English Standard Version (ESV) translation of the Bible is released.



Memorial window to Lincoln at Heinz Chapel, 1938



Oh, freedom

THE BIBLE IN BLACK CHRISTIAN MOVEMENTS FOR LIBERATION

Jay R. Case

A GROUP OF ENSLAVED BLACK CHRISTIANS gathered by the woods on a Sunday afternoon to hear a White preacher. Charles Colcock Jones (1804–1863) was three months into his grand project to bring the gospel to the enslaved. His listeners were generally receptive to the Princeton Theological Seminary graduate, who considered himself a “godly” slave owner. Jones’s morning sermon cautioned against idols, urging Blacks to abandon charms, sorcery, and “superstition.” This was well received.

In the afternoon, however, Jones preached about the runaway slave Onesimus. Despite the severe punishment his hearers risked for simply questioning a slave-owner, they protested his words which required runaway slaves to return to their masters as Christian obedience: “The doctrine is one-sided,” one told him after worship. “That is not the Gospel at all,” said another. “It is all [telling us not to] Runaway, Runaway, Runaway.” Some left during the service. Others told him they would never come to hear him preach again.

GOSPEL TRUTH An 1897 Black history “monument” includes images of a church poisoned by slavery, a slave being given a Bible, and Lincoln led by biblical principles.

A FIERY FURNACE

The reaction of this congregation in Liberty County, Georgia, reveals a critical feature of Black biblical interpretation: it was forged in the fiery furnace of slavery. From the Great Awakening in the 1740s through the nineteenth century, the overwhelming majority of Black Christians first came to faith through Methodist, Baptist, or Presbyterian evangelicalism. But the overwhelming majority of them *also* came to faith as enslaved people.

That meant that Black Christians simultaneously shared and departed from ways that White evangelicals understood the Bible and faith. Like White evangelicals they believed in the authority of the Bible, the significance of Christ’s atoning sacrifice, the necessity of conversion, and the importance of evangelism. (Jones had often preached on these subjects.) But Black Christians also prioritized a truth from the Bible that

EXODUS The figure of Moses loomed large in Black Christianity; Harriet Tubman (far left in the picture at right) was called the “Moses of her people,” and an 1840 painting (below right) imagines Sengbe Pieh, leader of the Amistad revolt, as Moses.

White evangelicals did not often emphasize or fully explore: God frees us from more than our sins.

The enslaved Black Christians who challenged Jones’s preaching that afternoon demonstrated the depth of that conviction. Every enslaved person knew from childhood what enslavers expected of them in terms of obedience. But in their eyes, something at the core of the faith was at stake. By declaring that “this is not the Gospel at all,” the dissenters did not claim that Jones simply held a different expression of the faith, as if he were a member of a different denomination. Instead they asserted that the preacher *read the Bible wrongly*.

BOUND FOR THE PROMISED LAND

Exodus loomed large as the fundamental narrative of the Old Testament for enslaved Christians. It convinced them that leaving slavery was not “running away” from proper authority; it was escaping injustice. The numerous spirituals composed and revised by enslaved Christians reveal this understanding of the Bible.

To be sure, many spirituals speak of the redemptive power of Christ and identify with Jesus’s suffering. But a large portion of them sing of Moses, Pharaoh, the Promised Land, and the River Jordan. Harriet Tubman, who composed her own spirituals, sang “I’m bound for the Promised Land, on the other side of Jordan” within hearing of her puzzled enslaver the night before she fled slavery. She regularly sang of Egypt and Canaan while leading fugitives away.

Black Christians were drawn to a God who explained his character to the children of Israel by saying repeatedly, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Exodus 20:2). Black Christians saw this deliverance as a critically important feature of God’s character and his plan for humanity. Those biblical themes continue to animate Black Christianity today.

This Black biblicism emerged in dialogue with, and in reaction to, a society dominated by Whites. Not only were 90 percent of African Americans in the early nineteenth century enslaved, they were vastly outnumbered by White Americans. In this social reality, White American Christians could easily deflect difficult questions that slavery raised for their faith.



A large proportion of northern White Christians considered slavery wrong but did not yet conclude from the Bible they ought to support abolition, which they viewed as a radical movement. Many nonenslaving Whites, North and South, justified slavery with simplistic readings of selective biblical texts.

Meanwhile Christian enslavers shaped the biblical message, consciously or unconsciously, to their interests because they controlled discussions with enslaved Christians. Until the issue came to a head in the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations in the 1840s, most Whites were not compelled to listen seriously to antislavery arguments from the Bible. After each of those denominations split over



LIVING WORD Artists interpreted Frederick Douglass as a biblical prophet (*above*); in a famous painting by Jacob Lawrence, Blacks migrate north as Israelites (*left*).

slavery, White southerners heard even fewer opposing interpretations.

“PURE, PEACEABLE, AND IMPARTIAL”

But while Whites could ignore Black interpretations, enslaved people lived with the White Christian justification of slavery every day. And free Blacks were not free to ignore slavery. After all slavery was still legal in 1794 Pennsylvania when Richard Allen’s resistance to discrimination in Methodism led him to create a Black congregation that would later become the African Methodist Episcopal Church—the first independent Black denomination in the United States.

The liberating character of God that Blacks found in the Bible deeply informed abolitionist efforts. Frederick Douglass (1818–1895) stands as the most famous example of this. While still enslaved a teenage Douglass had a conversion experience at a Methodist revival near his plantation. In his first years of freedom in New Bedford, Massachusetts—before he wrote *Narrative* (1845) and launched out as an abolitionist speaker—he preached at the local African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.

Throughout his life he quoted the Bible regularly and drew on biblical themes in his speeches and writings (see p. 11). His rhetoric did not pull any punches:

Between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference. . . . I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ: I therefore hate the corrupt, slave-holding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land.

American Christians with little understanding of the experience of the enslaved often became quite defensive listening to this rhetoric. That was part of Douglass’s point. He believed one had to be made uncomfortable to see things more clearly. How could one call the United States a Christian nation, Douglass argued, if it sanctioned the sale of children away from their parents?

Even Charles Colcock Jones, despite his pledge to never break up a nuclear family, had sold a Black family to enslavers in New Orleans. While keeping the letter of his promise, he had separated parents from adult children, grandparents from grandchildren, uncles and aunts from nieces and nephews, and cousins from cousins, all left with no means of seeing each other again. Harriet Beecher Stowe, who had known Jones at Princeton, saw slavery’s corrupting effects on

DOUGLASS INSPIRING THE YOUTH OF THE NEGRO. PAGE BY CLETUS ALEXANDER AND BRUNO REISER. MURAL, 1933—DAYTON ART INSTITUTE / (PUBLIC DOMAIN) WIKIMEDIA THE MURKIN SERIES. FRAME NO. 57. THE FEMALE WORKERS WERE THE LAST TO ARRIVE NORTH, 1940–1941 (CASEIN TEMPERA ON HARDBOARD). © 2020 THE JACOB AND GWENDOLYN KNIGHT LAWRENCE FOUNDATION, SEATTLE / ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS). NEW YORK. IMAGE ACQUIRED 1942 / BRIDGEMAN IMAGES



BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC.

BY MRS. JULIA WARD HOWE.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord:
 He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath
 are stored;
 He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:
 His truth is marching on.
 Chorus—Glory, glory, hallelujah!
 Glory, glory, hallelujah!
 Glory, glory, hallelujah!
 His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps;
 They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and
 damps:
 I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps:
 His day is marching on.
 Chorus—Glory, glory, hallelujah, &c.
 His day is marching on.

I have read a fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel,
 "As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace shall
 deal;
 Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel,
 Since God is marching on."
 Chorus—Glory, glory, hallelujah, &c.
 Since God is marching on.

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat:
 He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat:
 Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant my feet!
 Our God is marching on!
 Chorus—Glory, glory, hallelujah, &c.
 Our God is marching on!

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
 With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me;
 As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
 While God is marching on.
 Chorus—Glory, glory, hallelujah, &c.
 While God is marching on.

Published by the Supervisory Committee for Recruiting Colored Regiments

this Christian man. She used his writings to depict slavery in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852).

Black abolitionist David Walker (1796–1830) wrote just as forcefully as Douglass. "See how they treat us in open violation of the Bible?" he argued in an 1829 pamphlet that surreptitiously circulated in enslaved communities. "An American minister, with the Bible in his hand, holds us and our children in the most abject slavery and wretchedness," Walker declared. "Now I ask them, would they like for us to hold them and their children in abject slavery and wretchedness?"

Whites who turned to the book of Philemon to justify slavery failed to consider that Onesimus was not Black. Why, then, did Whites insist that only Blacks could be enslaved? Proslavery Christians remained blind to the reality that they were imposing their own racial categories on biblical texts, he argued.

CONVERSION AND LIBERATION

An African American Great Awakening swept through the South at the end of the nineteenth century.

"BACK TO THE SLAVE QUARTERS!"



Shall St. Louis be the Slave Master?

HIS DAY IS MARCHING ON? In 1861 Julia Ward Howe imagined a biblical apocalypse (*left*); yet from Reconstruction through the mid-20th c., many states actively enforced segregation (*above*, in 1916).

The number of Black Baptists in the United States increased from about 400,000 in 1860 to 2.2 million in 1906; Black Methodists from 190,000 in 1860 to more than one million in 1906. The estimated percentage of active Christians among African Americans rose from around 17 percent in 1860 to 42 percent in 1900.

Driven by Black evangelism and grounded in Black churches independent of White supervision, this produced a remarkable number of individual conversions to Christianity. But ideals of liberation also fueled this massive movement. Slavery, among other things, had denied religious freedom to Black southerners.

Some states had legally prohibited the ordination of Black ministers; most states had legally prohibited the enslaved from holding religious meetings without White supervision; and many enslavers would not allow the enslaved to hold religious services. A number of southern states had passed laws making it illegal to teach the enslaved to read and write, undermining a key Protestant conviction: the freedom to read the Bible for oneself. A few Whites defied these laws, some states permitted Black literacy, and some enslaved Blacks taught one another to read, but the vast majority had remained illiterate.

Abolition, however, opened tremendous opportunities for Black southerners to read the Bible for the first time. One elderly man in Mobile, Alabama, at the end of the war joined his grandson at a Black primary school newly created by missionaries. He told the

PROPHETIC PREACHING In jail (far right, in St. Augustine, Florida with Ralph Abernathy) and elsewhere, King argued from this well-worn Bible (right) for ending segregation.

teacher “he wouldn’t trouble her very much, but he must learn to read the Bible and the Testament.”

Fueled by such passions, the Black church not only grew dramatically during the late nineteenth century but emerged as the foundation of Black community life. Independent Black ministers preached freely not only on personal transformation, but also on biblical themes of hope and liberation for the disinherited.

The Black community needed this sort of institution. Many Whites gave up on the “peculiar institution,” but not the underlying conviction that Whites ought to control society. Despite freedoms gained during Reconstruction in the 1860s and 1870s, African Americans faced tragic setbacks in the 1880s and 1890s.

White southerners stripped them of voting rights, solidified segregation, and began the vicious practice of lynching in the 1890s. After the turn of the century, southern Blacks who migrated to northern cities for a marginally greater set of opportunities often faced embedded prejudices and de facto segregation.

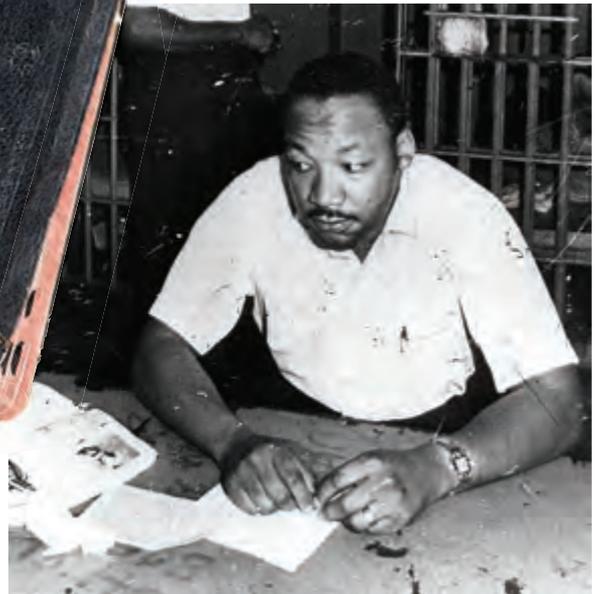
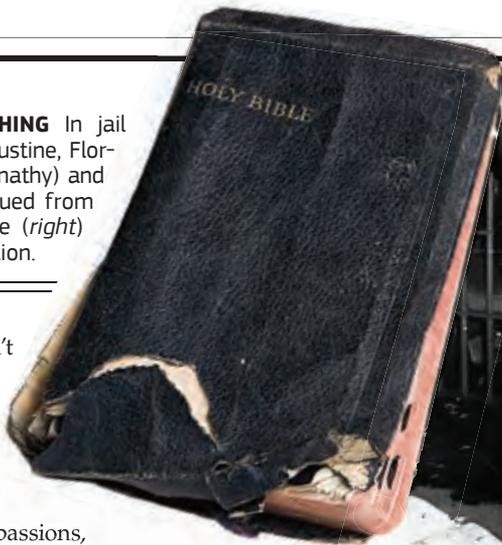
PLENTY OF “NICE” PEOPLE

In the first half of the twentieth century, liberationist biblicism continued to inform the Black church. Black Christians could not accept the assumption, held by many White Christians, that simply treating one another kindly would effectively address racial problems; plenty of “nice” people supported segregation.

Some southern church leaders began to see segregation as a problem by the early 1950s, but many actively supported it. Meanwhile many northern Whites passively ignored the issue and continued to deflect biblical arguments made by Black Christians.

Martin Luther King Jr.’s branch of the civil rights movement challenged this. Though he had adopted some new theological ideas in seminary, King (1929–1968) still drank deeply from the biblical fountains of his childhood Baptist church. The Old Testament particularly shaped his promotion of “prophetic Christianity”: though the just suffered and the unjust prospered, the arc of God’s activity through history would trend toward justice and hope.

At the grassroots level, Christians from Black churches formed the backbone of the civil rights



movement, infusing it with traditional patterns of faith. Recruitment often resembled evangelistic campaigns. During the seminal 1955 Montgomery bus boycott, Ralph Abernathy and his assistants rounded up “sinners” in the bars and pool halls of the city to join church Blacks in the boycott. At different times participants held prayer vigils, reported miraculous healings, and spoke in tongues. John Lewis (1940–2020) reported that some meetings resembled revivals.

King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” most clearly illustrates the biblical justification Black Christians made for ending segregation. Eight White clergy of Birmingham had published a letter to King arguing that King’s protests disrupted the peace, moved too quickly, and disobeyed the law. In response King justified his actions not only from great philosophers and theologians, but from the Bible, grounding his argument that unjust laws are no laws at all in the prophets, the life of Christ, and the story of the apostle Paul.

The White clergy of Birmingham thought they understood racism well enough. But King’s letter pushed them—and anyone who read it closely—to consider more deeply the Black biblical tradition. That tradition points to a God whose character not only promotes individual transformation, but liberation and justice. King challenged his White clergy brothers:

I have looked at the South’s beautiful churches with their lofty spires pointing heavenward. I have beheld the impressive outlines of her massive religious education buildings. Over and over I have found myself asking: “What kind of people worship here? Who is their God?”

Jay R. Case is professor of history at Malone University and author of *An Unpredictable Gospel*.

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.’S BIBLE. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. MEMORIAL CENTER IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA. MATT LEMMON / (CC BY SA 2.0) FLICKR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. (1929–1968). AMERICAN CLERIC AND CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER, IN JAIL IN ST. JOHN COUNTY, ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA, AFTER A SIT-IN PROTEST AGAINST SEGREGATION AT A MOTEL, 1964—RUE DES ARCHIVES / GRANGER



From revolutionary founder to founder of a Bible revolution

ELIAS BOUDINOT AND HIS FRIENDS WORKED NOT ONLY TO BEGIN A NEW NATION BUT ALSO TO START THE AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY

Jonathan Den Hartog

WHO WAS THE FIRST PRESIDENT of the United States? If you answered “George Washington,” you are right—sort of. Before the Constitution was adopted in 1789, fourteen men served as presidents of the Continental Congress during the Revolutionary War and under the Articles of Confederation. Long after the articles lay covered in dust, a different work occupied two of those “first presidents,” Elias Boudinot and John Jay—promoting the place of the Bible in the new nation.

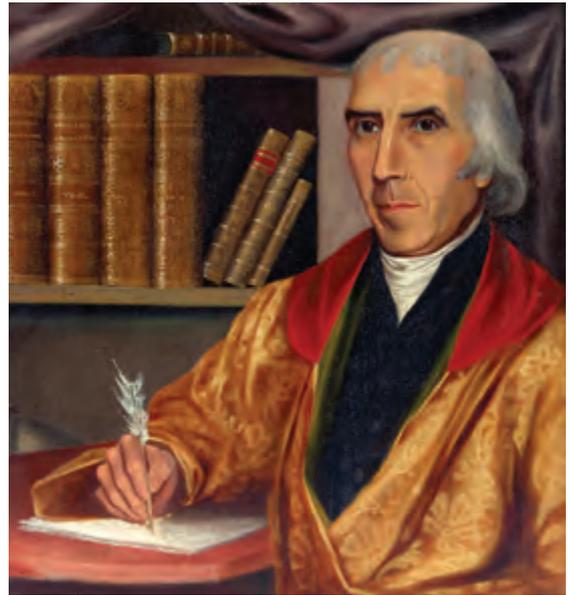
“SINCERE THANKS”

Elias Boudinot (1740–1821) grew up in Princeton, New Jersey, and was baptized as a Presbyterian by the great evangelist George Whitefield. He chose a career in law, joined the New Jersey bar in 1760, and soon married Hannah Stockton; they had one child, Susan. The outbreak of the American Revolution afforded him wider opportunity to serve; he was elected to the New Jersey

CASTING THE WORD This 19th-c. Bible society certificate shows the Bible bringing light to the world.

Provisional Congress as a Patriot (those who wanted to separate from England, as opposed to Loyalists who wanted to remain). As fighting raged across New York and New Jersey, General Washington called on Boudinot to serve as commissary of prisoners, visiting prisoners of war to see that they were receiving necessary supplies—a difficult task, as many were kept in prison ships in New York Harbor. In 1778 New Jersey sent him to the Continental Congress; in 1782, as its president, he officially received the Treaty of Paris ending the war and guaranteeing American independence.

Boudinot’s neighbors elected him to the US House of Representatives, where he served for three terms. He advanced several pieces of faith-informed policy: most dramatically, the first national Thanksgiving in



1789: “an opportunity to all the citizens of the United States, of joining, with one voice, in returning to Almighty God their sincere thanks for the many blessings he had poured down upon them.” The House named Boudinot as one of those to carry the suggestion to President Washington. Washington agreed and issued the call for a national Thanksgiving.

Boudinot also raised his voice as an early opponent to the trading of enslaved persons. The Constitution prohibited immediate outlawing of such trade, but he still argued that Congress should listen to petitions asking for its end, which he saw as a clear moral and Christian imperative.

REASON VS. REVELATION

Boudinot’s retirement from government in 1801 opened up opportunities for Christian service. One of his first efforts was a defense of the Scriptures. In the mid-1790s Thomas Paine had shifted to writing about religion; his book *The Age of Reason* (1794) strongly critiqued Christianity and the Bible in particular. Although many wrote responses to Paine, Boudinot penned one of the most developed, *The Age of Revelation* (1801).

Soon Boudinot grew deeply invested in the work of Bible societies. Here three factors converged. First, Americans were developing greater interest in voluntary societies—independent organizations devoted to a specific purpose—as powerful mechanisms for social and religious improvement. Second, they already had an example from Britain—the British and Foreign Bible Society—to emulate. Third, Bible societies provided a way for Christians to influence society positively by distributing the Scriptures broadly.

CHURCH AND STATE The ABS founders had both political and religious firepower; Boudinot (*top*) and John Jay (*left*) both served as presidents of the Continental Congress, and Jedidiah Morse (*above*) helped found Andover Seminary.

In 1809 Boudinot helped found the New Jersey Bible Society and served as its president. After several years he pushed for a national Bible society. In the middle of the War of 1812, he and the New Jersey society issued a call for a national convention. They received pushback, but Boudinot responded that the task was simply too large—an entire nation needing Bibles!—for any local society to accomplish. A national society could coordinate local and state efforts and use economies of scale. This approach would mirror the federal Constitution—a national structure that united and multiplied the effects of many smaller bodies.

By 1816 the time was right. With the War of 1812 concluded, the public mood was optimistic, entrepreneurial, and nationally minded, and Boudinot found allies in the Jay family of New York. John Jay (1745–1829), a

Portrait of John Jay, by Gilbert Stuart, oil on canvas, 1794; National Gallery of Art; (Public Domain) Wikimedia Commons; Portrait of Samuel Morse, by James Sharples, pastel, before 1811; (Public Domain) Wikimedia Commons; Portrait of Jedidiah Morse, Samuel Morse, c. 1810 to 1811; oil on wood—(Public Domain) Yale University Art Gallery

THOMAS PAINE CARICATURE, UNKNOWN AUTHOR, 1792—LIBRARY OF CONGRESS / (PUBLIC DOMAIN) WIKIMEDIA
THE AGE OF REASON, BY THOMAS PAINE, LONDON: THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, 1792—LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
THE AGE OF REVELATION, OR, THE AGE OF REASON SHewn TO BE AN AGE OF INFIDELITY; BY ELIAS BOUDINOT, PUBLISHED ASBURY DICKINS, 1801. NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY / (PUBLIC DOMAIN) INTERNET ARCHIVE

BIBLE TRUTH Paine (*right*) attacked faith with the same fervor with which he had defended democracy (*below left*); Boudinot aimed to rebut Paine's charges and undergird the reliability of the Scriptures (*below right*).

devout Episcopalian and student of the Scriptures, had been the first chief justice of the US Supreme Court, a key American diplomat, and New York's governor. John's son William (1789–1858) was a Yale-educated lawyer and an energetic reformer; he truly supported the vision of a national society and began working with Boudinot to make it happen.

PRESIDENT AGAIN

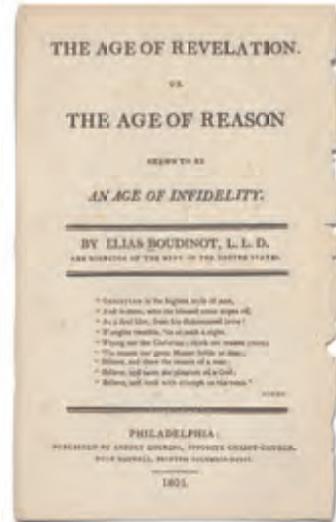
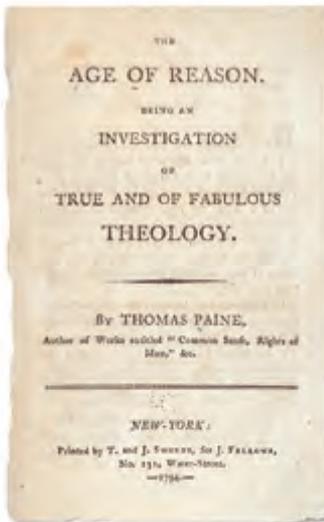
The group's founding convention met in New York City in May 1816. Boudinot was home sick in New Jersey, but William Jay, the dynamo at the center of the event, kept him well informed. Jay led the committee in drawing up a founding constitution, following the model he and Boudinot had been promoting. As first president the convention selected—naturally—Boudinot.

The ABS founding met with significant approval. Prominent ministers such as Jedidiah Morse (1761–1826) and Lyman Beecher (1775–1863, father of Harriet Beecher Stowe) gave their blessing. Many prominent national political figures also signed on in support, including John Jay, Governor Caleb Strong of Massachusetts, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney of South Carolina, Supreme Court Justice Bushrod Washington of Virginia (George Washington's nephew), and Congressman Felix Grundy of Tennessee.

And the work of the ABS prospered. It immediately set out to spread the Scriptures (published "without note or comment") throughout the rapidly expanding United States; partnering with affiliated societies, it gave members an opportunity to think nationally but act locally. Being interdenominational, it encouraged cooperation between Christians of various stripes even while advancing a Protestant appreciation for the individual soul encountering the unfiltered Word of God.

Meanwhile the national organization headquartered in New York City devoted itself to efficiently producing Bibles sold at extremely low costs across the country; it probably had a larger reach than the federal government. It also developed new printing techniques to bring costs down through mass production.

In short it was the prototype for an effective voluntary organization. Overseeing the launch of this endeavor was Boudinot, who served as president until 1821 (he was followed by no less a luminary than his friend John Jay). Every year he gave a presidential address, celebrating the work of the ABS and spurring the organization on to greater efforts. He believed the ABS effort was not just significant, but world-changing, and hoped it would stick to its mission until the world was evangelized and Christ returned.



Today the ABS (headquartered in Philadelphia since 2015) publishes the Good News Translation of the Bible, distributes Bibles in over 700 languages, and is even in charge of an internet extension (bible). In these and other modern ways, it tries to fulfill the goal Boudinot once set forth in a presidential address: "rearing a national superstructure of Heavenly charity, that will last we hope, till every region of the earth shall be enlightened by the Sun of Righteousness." ☐

Jonathan Den Hartog is professor of history and chair of the History Department at Sanford University and author of Patriotism and Piety: Federalist Politics and Religious Struggle in the New American Nation.



Gleams of truth

HOW AMERICAN AUTHORS, BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS ALIKE, USED THE BIBLE IN THEIR WORK

Marybeth Davis Baggett

“CALL ME JONAH. My parents did, or nearly did. They called me John.” The opening lines of Kurt Vonnegut’s 1963 *Cat’s Cradle* succinctly capture the complicated nature of American literature’s relationship with the Bible. In this satirical echo of Herman Melville’s opening line of *Moby-Dick* (1851), “Call me Ishmael” (Genesis 16), Vonnegut (1922–2007), a self-avowed agnostic, both called forth biblical imagery and lampooned it. This was reinforced by mock prophetic overtones:

Jonah—John—if I had been a Sam, I would have been a Jonah still—not because I have been unlucky for others, but because somebody or something has compelled me to be certain places at certain times, without fail.

Cat’s Cradle used the prophetic and apocalyptic traditions of the Bible to warn against technological overreach. But lest the reader confuse biblical motifs with devotion to the Scriptures, Vonnegut created “Bokononism” as a parody of Christianity.

MEETING OF MINDS Scriptural themes can be found in writings of many from Washington Irving’s literary circle (*above*)—including Emerson, Longfellow, Hawthorne, Cooper, and Irving himself.

Vonnegut sprinkled his writings with Scripture references—Sodom and Gomorrah, the Psalms, the Sermon on the Mount, the Crucifixion, and more. It was a curious thing for one so set against Scripture’s supernatural claims to rely so heavily on its imagination. But in the scheme of American literature, Vonnegut’s reliance on Scripture was less anomaly than exemplar.

“A NEW CANAAN”

The Bible has haunted the American literary tradition since before the country’s origins. From Anne Bradstreet (1612–1672) to Phillis Wheatley (1753–1784), from Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) to Emily Dickinson (1830–1886), Scripture formed American literature’s language and themes, characterization and plot patterns, style

WASHINGTON IRVING AND HIS LITERARY FRIENDS AT SUNNYSIDE, BY CHRISTIAN SCHUSSELE, 1864—NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY / [C00] SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

NEW LAND The Mayflower Compact (right) established a vision of Providence central to American literature.

NEW CREATURES Even Twain dabbled in biblical themes occasionally, as in *The Diaries of Adam and Eve* (far right).

and imagery, allusions and motifs. Mark Twain (1835–1910) and Henry James (1843–1916) were among the exceptions who often looked elsewhere for inspiration. More often than not, however, to be an American author meant to be steeped in and to draw on the biblical milieu.

This influence began in the colonial era, when settlers left (mostly) English heritage behind, striking out in a new land to forge a new history. The resulting cultural upheaval left a vacuum, and the Bible filled in what people lacked in shared culture, history, and governance. It gave them a sense of themselves and their mission—a “new Canaan” as Thomas Morton (c. 1579–1647) dubbed it. That many colonists were Protestants who sought to read and study the Scriptures for themselves served to further entrench the Bible as a unifying social force for the developing nation.

But if Scripture was ubiquitous within American literature, it was not sacrosanct. American authors, on the whole, had no qualms with using the Bible for their own purposes, another Protestant habit. In many works the Bible serves as little more than a cultural touchstone. Following the lead of Emerson in his “Divinity School Address,” American authors added their own voices, their own “new hope and new revelation.” In this way the Bible sits at the nexus of the enduring American tension between the country’s quasi-reverence for tradition and its strong individualist streak.

HIS FAITHFUL PROMISES

For the Puritans Scripture served as a template for life in this new world. Using a “typological hermeneutic” (interpreting biblical stories as foreshadowing events to come), Puritan leaders such as William Bradford (1590–1657) cast their venture in starkly theological terms. *Of Plimouth Plantation*—Bradford’s posthumously published history of the settlement, written between 1630 and 1651—portrays Providence alone as enabling the colony’s success. Drawing on Israel’s exodus from Egypt and Christ’s Resurrection, Bradford elevated the Pilgrims as foreshadowing God’s interventionist work in history and its fulfillment.

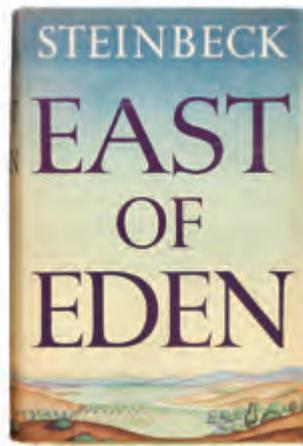
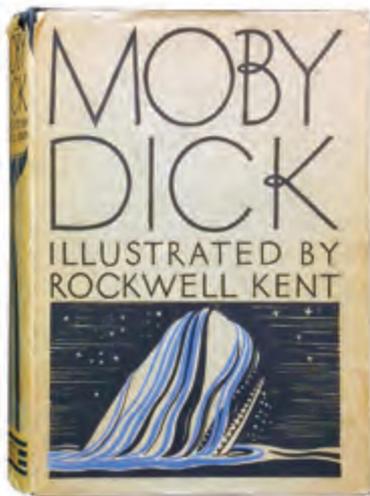
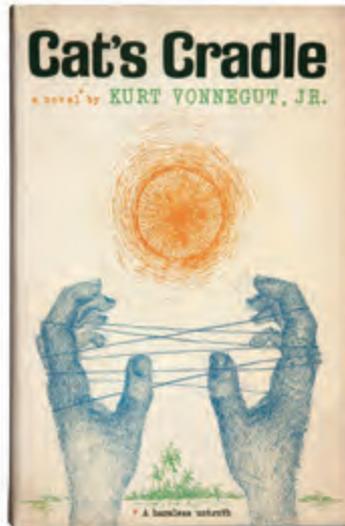


On a smaller, more personal scale, Mary Rowlandson (c. 1637–1711) applied the same principles when writing of her capture by Narragansett Native Americans, the first of many in what would become a popular genre. *Narrative of the Captivity and Removes of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson, Who was Taken by the Indians. . .* (1682) rehearses this pattern of tribulation and deliverance.

In Rowlandson’s case the evil confronting God’s elect in Ephesians 6:12 was embodied in the indigenous people who took Mary and her family hostage. Rowlandson wrote that she survived by turning to Scripture. In a moment of excruciating despair, she stumbled upon Deuteronomy and appropriated for herself the promises to Israel there:

But the Lord helped me still to go on reading till I came to Chap. 30, the seven first verses, where I found, there was mercy promised again, if we would return to Him by repentance; and though we were scattered from one end of the earth to the other, yet the Lord would gather us together, and turn all those curses upon our enemies.

The entire narrative, filled with biblical exhortations, transforms the tale from a personal story to an emerging national myth of Americans as a chosen people.



FROM EDEN TO DAVID These four books are only a tiny representation of famous American works informed by Scripture.

it was violation of the spirit of Scripture that was egregious.

After describing his life in slavery and detailing his escape, Douglass sought to draw a clear line between the Christianity of the slave-holding South and true Christianity. Enslavers like Captain Auld may have read the same Bible as Douglass, he wrote, but nothing like Christian love sprang forth. Instead they engaged in proof-texting, finding “religious sanction for their cruelty.”

Douglass argued that any reading that omits the righteousness of God is itself worthy of judgment. And he did not hesitate to call down that judgment on a nation that had for so long heard Scripture but failed to understand it, or to apply the right passages to itself: “But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in” (Matthew 23:13, KJV).

PLOTS FROM SCRIPTURE

The rich text of the Bible proved a wealth of inspiration for American authors, and America’s democratic spirit encouraged personal appropriation of its truths.

In *Moby-Dick* Melville (1819–1891) mined Scripture to create his own American epic, with his criticism of American imperialism enlarged by biblical names, themes, and style. William Faulkner (1897–1962) also relied on Scripture to craft many of his plots, most notably *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), which uses King David’s tragic family history to grapple with the legacy of slavery. Dickinson, Walt Whitman (1819–1892), John Steinbeck (1902–1968), James Baldwin (1924–1987), Toni Morrison (1931–2019), Cormac McCarthy (b. 1933), Marilynne Robinson (b. 1943): each leaned heavily on Scripture to carve out personal literary forms and fame.

At its best such literary reinterpretations highlight Scripture as a story in which people from all walks of life can locate their own story. Such practice can lend itself to presumption and become a source of pride and oppression; but if governed by Scripture’s own core commitment to justice and truth, it can remind us that the possibilities of American literature are rife with echoes, however faint, of Scripture’s infinitely expansive, hopeful, and life-giving promises. **BT**

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Much of American literature of the colonial era augmented and reinforced this vision of colonists as God’s elect. Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), for example, describes colonial founders as biblical figures—Bradford as Moses, Winthrop as Nehemiah, and Simon Bradstreet (1604–1697) as the apostle Peter. But as African American writers gained a voice, they challenged this notion of America as exceptional, recasting the country—especially in its embrace of and allowance for slavery—as the oppressor, not the oppressed. In this view the powers that be in America have more in common with Egypt and Pharaoh than with the Israelites they so readily identified with (see pp. 24–28).

This interpretation of Exodus as promise for deliverance from slavery had roots in Black spirituals and sermons and found expression in later published writings. Paul Laurence Dunbar’s “Ante-Bellum Sermon” (1897) illustrates how enslaved African Americans seized control of this biblical promise and leveraged it for self-empowerment and as a subversive critique of unjust authorities. Frederick Douglass (1818–1895) argued (see pp. 24–28) that it was not the personal application of Scripture alone that was problematic. Rather,

ABSALOM, ABSALOM! (1936 1ST ED COVER), BY WILLIAM FAULKNER, SCANNED BY HERITAGE AUCTIONS—ACCORDING TO BAPTIST RARE BOOKS; THE DUST JACKET WAS DESIGNED BY GEORGE SALTER, PUBLISHED BY RANDOM HOUSE / (PUBLIC DOMAIN) WIKIMEDIA
CAT’S CRADLE (1951 1ST ED COVER), BY KURT VONNEGUT, JR., SCANNED BY HERITAGE AUCTIONS—ACCORDING TO BAPTIST RARE BOOKS; THE DUST JACKET WAS DESIGNED BY BEN FEDER, PUBLISHED BY RANDOM HOUSE / (PUBLIC DOMAIN) WIKIMEDIA
MOBY-DICK (1930 1ST ED DUST JACKET), BY HERMAN MELVILLE, ILLUSTRATED BY ROCKWELL KENT—COVER DESIGN BY ROCKWELL KENT, PUBLISHED BY RANDOM HOUSE / (PUBLIC DOMAIN) WIKIMEDIA
EAST OF EDEN (1962 1ST ED DUST JACKET), BY JOHN STEINBECK, 1952, SCANNED BY HERITAGE AUCTIONS—PUBLISHED BY VIKING PRESS; DUST JACKET DESIGNER NOT CREDITED / (PUBLIC DOMAIN) WIKIMEDIA

The greatest stories ever told

The Bible has often starred at the box office

In the famous prison movie *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), unjustly imprisoned banker Andy Dufresne escapes at the end of the film and exposes prison warden Norton's money-laundering operation, which Norton made Dufresne facilitate. In one of the film's most memorable moments, Norton finds that Dufresne has taken the ledgers proving the money laundering from their hiding place and replaced them with a Bible. The warden opens the Bible and sees the outline of the rock hammer Dufresne used to chip his way to freedom through the prison walls over the past two decades. With it is a note reading, "Dear Warden, You were right. Salvation lay within."

The Shawshank Redemption is only one out of thousands of American movies that have used the Bible in some way since Marc Klaw and Abraham Erlanger filmed a Bohemian passion play in 1897—a production now considered the first use of the Bible in the movies. While the Bible obviously plays a role in films from Christian producers such as *A Thief in the Night* (1972), *The Cross and the Switchblade* (1970), *Jesus* (1979, sometimes called "The Jesus Film"), *Jonah* (2002), *Amazing Grace* (2006), and *Son of God* (2014), stories from and about the Bible have also found a much larger audience in Hollywood and beyond.

SWORDS AND SANDALS

Of course many movies, such as *Shawshank*, use biblical ideas, content, or themes to tell their story. The list includes such classic blockbusters as *Chariots of Fire* (1981), in which Eric Liddell's faith powers the plot; *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), with its Bible-quoting private, Daniel Jackson; the story of devout Catholic mutant Nightcrawler in *X2* (2003); *The Book of Eli* (2010), in which the protagonist carries a Bible across a postapocalyptic United States; Nat Turner's Scripture-fueled revolt in *The Birth of a Nation* (2016); and the Bible-inspired pacifism of hero Desmond Doss in *Hacksaw Ridge* (2016).

But there has also been a huge market across the decades for movies that *directly* retell Bible stories. The popularity of movies about the Bible (and related stories of the early church) began with *Quo Vadis* (1913), a silent film about Christian persecution under Nero. The movie is now considered to be the first true Hollywood blockbuster of any kind.

The 1920s and 1930s featured biblical epics that have endured, such as *Ben-Hur* (1925), *The Ten Commandments* (1923), *King of Kings* (1927), *Noah's*



ESCAPE ROUTE In an iconic scene from *The Shawshank Redemption*, Warden Norton realizes what Andy Dufresne was doing with his Bible.

Ark (1928), and *The Sign of the Cross* (1932). But it was post-World War II America that saw a real explosion of biblical films, including *Samson and Delilah* (1949), *David and Bathsheba* (1951), *The Robe* (1953), *Barabbas* (1961), and nonsilent versions of *Ben-Hur* (1959) and *The Ten Commandments* (1956).

These films are part of a genre commonly called "sword-and-sandal" (set in the Greco-Roman era, it also encompasses retold pagan myths such as 1959's *Hercules*). *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965) closed out this age of epics, but filmmakers have continued to put Bible stories on screen all the way into the twenty-first century.

Jesus Christ Superstar (1973), *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), *Exodus* (2014), and *Noah* (2014) controversially reinterpret their source material to attempt modern relevance. Like *Temptation*, *Godspell* (1973) was based on a famous stage musical about Jesus; it dramatizes much of the Gospel of Matthew on screen. *The Prince of Egypt* (1998) uses animation to tell the story of Moses, while *The Gospel of John* (2003) uses the Good News Bible word-for-word as its script. *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) became the highest-grossing Bible movie ever despite some gruesome scenes and dialogue entirely in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Latin. And recently *Risen* (2016) once again put Christ's life, and its influence on one searching Roman soldier, on screen.—Editors



WILLIAM PENN, STUDENT AT CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD, 1660. FROM THE MURAL SERIES THE FOUNDING OF LIBERTY SPIRITUAL, 1902 TO 1906 BY VIOLET OKLEY. GOVERNOR'S GRAND EXECUTIVE RECEPTION ROOM, PENNSYLVANIA STATE CAPITOL. PHOTOGRAPH BY DARRYL MORAN; COURTESY OF WOODMERE ART MUSEUM

“From sea to shining sea”

NOTABLE AMERICANS DREW INSPIRATION FROM THE BIBLE

Jennifer A. Boardman

WILLIAM PENN (1644–1718)

Born in England to famed admiral Sir William Penn and his wife, Margaret Jasper, William Penn grew up Anglican. But when plague drove the family to their estates in Ireland, the teenage Penn began attending Quaker meetings. Arrested for his Quaker affiliation, he was sprung from jail because of his father’s prominence, but the admiral sent his son packing without an inheritance.

Penn then began to write pamphlets full of scriptural references touting the truth of Quakerism and the corruption of other denominations, and questioning traditional doctrines such as the Trinity. By 1668 Penn was in the Tower of London for his religious convictions.

Eventually admiral and son reconciled; Penn regained his inheritance and became a royal counselor. In this capacity he proposed that English Quakers immigrate to the Americas. In 1677 a group of them purchased half of what is today New Jersey. Four years later Charles II gave Penn a large swath of land west of New Jersey (Pennsylvania, or “Penn’s woods,” named after Penn’s father).

LOOKING FOR LIGHT Today the Pennsylvania statehouse honors Penn with this image of him studying at Oxford.

Penn worked to create in this settlement a religious sanctuary not only for beleaguered Quakers, but also for Huguenots, Mennonites, Amish, Catholics, Lutherans, and Jews—all refugees. Though a believer in the power of God’s Word, Penn wrote in 1673 of the potential danger in people reading the Bible without Christ’s light in them: “That the Scriptures are Unintelligible without it [the Inner Light] is easily prov’d from the variety of Judgments that are in the World about most of the Fundamental Doctrines contained therein.” (Read more about Penn in *CH 117, The Surprising Quakers.*)

COTTON MATHER (1663–1728)

Cotton Mather was born in Boston to a famous pastoral family; his father, Increase Mather (1639–1723), and both his grandfathers, John Cotton and Richard Mather, were prominent Puritan ministers. In 1685 Mather took over his father’s duties as pastor of

"WONDERS OF THE INVISIBLE WORLD"

Cotton Mather (*near right*) left the world one of the famous accounts of the Salem Witch Trials (*far right*).

Boston's North Church. The younger Mather was a prolific writer, producing more than 450 books and pamphlets; he encouraged colonists (now two to three generations removed from England) to maintain Puritan roots instead of moving toward a more watered-down Protestantism.

Mather helped instigate the Salem Witch Trials and reported on them; he wrote, "If . . . the publication of these Trials may promote such a pious Thankfulness unto God, for Justice being so far executed among us, I shall Re-joyce that God is Glorified." In the years following, Mather continued to believe in the possibility of witchcraft, but he denounced the loose legal standards that had allowed the trials to explode. He was also a supporter of the day's progressive science and encouraged the controversial movement to inoculate against smallpox (see CH 135, *Plagues and Epidemics*).

Mather recognized that previous biblical interpretation would not satisfy a world full of new discoveries in cosmology and science. Instead of avoiding the conversation, he actively engaged in cultural discussion to promote the continued relevance of God's Word. One of his numerous unfinished works was the *Biblia Americana*, which he considered his masterpiece and worked on from 1693 until his death in 1728. In it he encouraged Christians to interpret the Bible in such a way that philosophy, science, and religion work together to create a fuller picture of God and his mysterious ways.

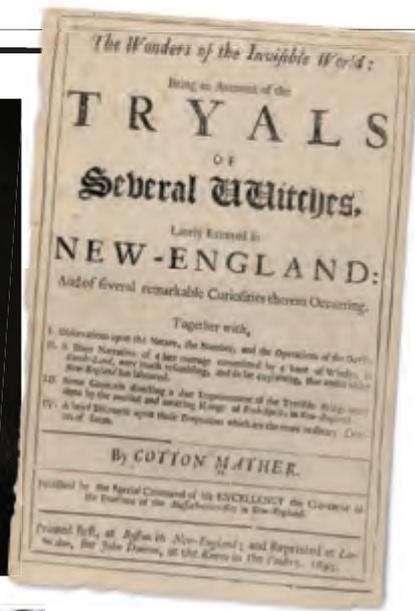
PHILLIS WHEATLEY (C. 1753–1784)

Phillis Wheatley, the first published Black woman in America, was captured in West Africa and sent via slave ship to America when she was only seven. The Wheatley family of Boston purchased her and brought her up as a domestic servant in their household. Against prevailing norms they taught her to read and write and also guided her theological training. By the time she was 10, she could translate Greek and Latin classic literature into English, and by age 16, Wheatley had become a Christian. She began to use her learning, faith, and literary skill to persuade fellow Christians of the humanity of enslaved Africans, writing:

Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
"Their colour is a diabolic die."
Remember, Christians, Negros, black as Cain,
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.

She also began referring to herself as an "Ethiope" to reclaim that biblical term for Black and African people, citing Moses's Ethiopian wife (Numbers 12:1). To counter Christian justifications of slavery, Wheatley argued that enslaving people is antithetical to the message of Christ. She compared American slaveholding to pagan Egyptian slavery, something White Christians would have understood to be evil.

Wheatley negotiated her freedom in the mid-1770s. She continued to use her literary voice to



HONORING THE DEAD
The first published poem by Phillis Wheatley (*above left*) was "An Elegiac Poem . . . on the Death of the Celebrated Divine George Whitefield" (1770, *above right*).

COTTON MATHER (1663–1728), AMERICAN PURITAN MINISTER INVOLVED WITH THE SALEM WITCH TRIALS OF 1692—PETER NEWARK AMERICAN PICTURES / BRIDGEMAN IMAGES
WONDERS OF THE INVISIBLE WORLD BY COTTON MATHER, 1693. JOHN DOUNTON, / PUBLIC DOMAIN WIKIMEDIA
PHILLIS WHEATLEY, AN ELEGIAC POEM, 1770—AMERICAN IMPRINT COLLECTION / LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
PHILLIS WHEATLEY, AN ELEGIAC POEM, 1770—AMERICAN IMPRINT COLLECTION / LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



challenge important cultural leaders (including George Washington and George Whitefield) in their support for slavery. However, life was difficult for her as a freed woman, and Wheatley died in obscurity and poverty at the age of 31. She is remembered for her fierce intellect and her focus on the biblical story to denounce slavery and promote true social change.

WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN (1860–1925)

William Jennings Bryan's Baptist father was a prominent Illinois judge and Democrat while his mother was Methodist; they determined to let their son choose his church affiliation. Bryan had a conversion experience at 14 during a revival, which he remembered as the most important moment of his life; as a result he joined the Presbyterian Church. A gifted student and orator, he decided to follow his father into law.

Bryan ran for Congress in the 1890 election, winning as a populist and progressive Democrat. In 1896 and 1900, he was the Democratic presidential nominee but lost both times to William McKinley (1843–1901). Following his second presidential defeat, Bryan founded a weekly newspaper, *The Commoner*, which became one of the most-read newspapers in the country. Again Democratic presidential nominee in 1908, he lost to William Howard Taft (1857–1930). He later served as secretary of state for Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924).

After 30 years in politics, Bryan focused more directly on religion, concerned with the erosion of biblical literalism in Protestantism. He also worried that Darwin's theory of evolution contradicted the Bible and would lead to unregulated Social Darwinism, affecting women's suffrage and workers' rights: "There has not been a reform for twenty-five years that I did not

A TEACHER OF MORALS William Jennings Bryan (*above*) kept faith central to his life; the caricaturist at *left* criticized him as sacrilegious and anarchist for his support for reform causes.

support, and I am now engaged in the biggest reform of my life." In 1925 he took part in the Scopes Trial concerning a substitute teacher who violated Tennessee's Butler Act by teaching evolution. (See CH 55, *The Monkey Trial and the Rise of Fundamentalism*.) The media criticized Bryan as scientifically uneducated, but he maintained that "science is a magnificent material force, but it is not a teacher of morals."

CARL MCINTIRE (1906–2002)

The son of a Presbyterian minister, Carl McIntire was raised by his mother in Oklahoma following his father's mental breakdown and his parents' divorce. A talented debater and a natural leader, McIntire decided to follow his father into ministry by entering Princeton Theological Seminary. Because he disliked liberal elements at Princeton, however, he soon transferred to the newly established Westminster Theological Seminary and graduated in 1931.

Ordained in the Presbyterian Church USA, McIntire took a church in 1933 in Collingswood, New Jersey; he would remain there for the rest of his life. Just as in seminary, McIntire took sides between fundamentalist and modernist factions within the PC (USA), helping to found a conservative alternative to the more liberal Board of Foreign Missions. Tried in ecclesiastical court over this, he joined other conservatives to create the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936. However, because of infighting, he then left in 1937 to form the Bible



TOUCH NO UNCLEAN THING Carl McIntire (*above*) attends a meeting of the International Council of Christian Churches, which he helped found as a fundamentalist counterpoint to the World Council of Churches; he was also famous for his newspaper (*right*).

IT BELONGS TO THE LORD In 2009 John McConnell (*far right*) said, "It may surprise many that . . . the original Earth Day . . . was founded by a Pentecostal . . . who has tried to steer his life in a way that would benefit people and the planet."



JOHN MCCONNELL (1915–2012)

The grandson of a Pentecostal preacher who came to faith at the Azusa Street Revival in 1906 and the son of founding members of the Assemblies of God in 1914, John McConnell began to develop a concern for God's creation during his work in plastic manufacturing in the late 1930s. He saw how much creating plastics hurt the environment, and he began to focus on environmental and peace causes. He moved to California to work on peace efforts, which culminated in a 1962 campaign called "Meals for Millions" to feed refugees from Hong Kong.

His interest in and concern for environmental health was born out of his understanding of Psalm 115:16: "The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to humankind." In 1969 he suggested the creation of Earth Day to focus on the beauty of Earth and the promotion of world peace. The first celebration took place March 21, 1970, and after adoption by the United Nations in 1971, it has been celebrated annually on the spring equinox around the world (including by those who never knew of its Christian origins). McConnell always saw Earth Day as an opportune time for Christians "to show the power of prayer, the validity of their charity, and their practical concern for Earth's life and people." ☞

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Presbyterian Church. Distinctives included abstaining from alcohol and tobacco, using the Scofield Reference Bible, and adhering to premillennial eschatology.

Both times McIntire left a denomination, the bulk of his congregation accompanied him; when they lost their beautiful Gothic property, they worshiped under an outdoor tent before eventually constructing a new church building that dwarfed their original home. McIntire also founded the weekly newspaper *The Christian Beacon*; a daily radio show, "The Twentieth Century Reformation Hour"; and summer Bible conferences, and he helped create the American Council of Christian Churches.

McIntire considered himself a pastor and teacher passionate about the Bible. He proudly called himself a fundamentalist, defining this as someone who adhered to the historical Christianity of the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Nicene Creed, and the Apostles' Creed. Remembered even among friends as someone who caused and even sought division as well as one who conflated politics and religion, McIntire would have said he lived out 2 Corinthians 6:17: "'Come out from them and be separate,' says the Lord. 'Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.'"

REFORMATORY WITNESS DAY OF THE ICC, CHAIRMAN DR. CARL MCINTIRE (KOP), UTRECHT, SEPTEMBER 28, 1973—BNA PHOTOGRAPHIC / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO
CHRISTIAN BEACON, OIL, XXIII, 3, 1933—ISSUES: DR. CARL MCINTIRE, OHS
JOHN MCCONNELL—JOHN C. MUNDAY / USED BY PERMISSION OF ANNA MCCONNELL



How much do *you* know about the Bible?

- The Bible is the best-selling book of all time: *True/False*
- The King James Version was the first translation of the Bible into English: *True/False*
- At least parts of the Bible have been translated into over 3,000 languages: *True/False*
- The original manuscripts of the Bible were written only in Hebrew and Koiné Greek: *True/False*
- The Declaration of Independence directly quotes the Bible: *True/False*
- Which of these is *not* a Bible verse?
 - God helps those who helps themselves
 - Cleanliness is next to godliness
 - This too shall pass
 - God moves in mysterious ways
 - None of these are in the Bible
- Which of these is *not* a parable told by Jesus?
 - The Prodigal Son
 - The Dishonest Steward
 - The Foolish Goat
 - The Lost Sheep
 - The Good Samaritan
- The book of Deuteronomy contains mainly these, intended to guide the people of Israel:
 - Laws
 - Psalms
 - Parables
 - Recipes
 - Pictures
- According to Proverbs, most of its sayings were written by whom?
 - Lemuel
 - David
 - Moses
 - Jesus
 - Solomon
- The shortest verse in *most* English translations of the Bible is which of these?
 - Esther 8:9
 - John 11:35
 - Genesis 26:6
 - Job 3:2
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:16
- The Bible was divided into chapters at what point?
 - The first century
 - The fifth century
 - The tenth century
 - The thirteenth century
 - The sixteenth century
- We owe the following English words or phrases to Wycliffe's and Tyndale's Bible translations:
 - Salt of the earth
 - First fruits
 - Scapegoat
 - Brother's keeper
 - All of the above
- Which was the first full translation of the Bible to be made in North America?
 - The King James Version
 - The Eliot Indian Bible
 - The Bay Psalm Book
 - The Coverdale Bible
 - The Douay-Rheims Bible
- Thomas Jefferson cut (literally—with a razor!) what out of his Bible edition *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*:
 - Geographical descriptions
 - Statistics about Israel
 - Miracles
 - Stories about women
 - References to war
- The Philadelphia Bible Riots were caused by:
 - An attempt to steal Bibles
 - A shortage of Bibles
 - A law against selling Bibles
 - An effort to turn Bibles into bullets
 - A rumor that Catholics wanted the Bible removed from public schools

Answers: 1. *True*; 2. *False* (there are Old English translations of at least part of the Bible going back to the seventh century); 3. *True*; 4. *False* (some parts of the Old Testament are in Aramaic); 5. *False* (there are references to God but no direct scriptural quotes); 6. *E*; 7. *C*; 8. *A*; 9. *E*; 10. *B* (1 Thessalonians 5:16 has more letters in English—it is the shortest in Greek; Job 3:2 is shortest in the NIV); 11. *D* (verse divisions were not added until the sixteenth century, though); 12. *E*; 13. *B*; 14. *C*; 15. *E*.
—Thanks to Stanley Malless and Jeffrey McQuain, Coined by God (2003), for the information on Bible words and phrases.

Questions for reflection: The Bible in America

These questions are meant to help you think more deeply about this issue and apply it to your own life and setting. Ponder them on your own, or discuss them in Sunday school or a study group.

1. How do you personally use the Bible? Where and how do you read it?

2. A stranger asks you, "What is the Bible?" Write your answer here:

3. What is your favorite Bible verse or verses? Do you tend to apply this passage more to your personal life, to national / world / social / political events, or both?

4. How have you encountered the Bible being used in contexts outside of church (classroom, political speeches, etc.)?

5. (pp. 6–10) What does the phrase "city on a hill" mean to you? This phrase was not popular until the 1950s. Does this change how you view it?

6. (pp. 12–15) What are some different ways the Bible was used and talked about in the colonies and in the early republic? How do they correspond to ways you see the Bible used in your context today in church, school, and civic life?

7. (pp. 16–18) Put into your own words the differing arguments used about the Bible during the Civil War. Do you see any similar arguments being used today? If so, where?

8. (pp. 19–21) Did any of the reforms mentioned in this issue surprise you by their connection to the Bible? How have you seen the Bible used for reform? Which reforms are you most passionate about in our cultural and civic life, and how do they connect to the Bible?

A SEAL THAT DIDN'T MAKE THE CUT This 1856 drawing is based on Benjamin Franklin's rejected suggestion for the Great Seal of the United States showing Moses raising his hands over the Red Sea as it destroyed the Egyptians. Thomas Jefferson also proposed an Exodus design (see p. 12).



9. (pp. 24–28) How would you describe the differences between the ways White Christians and Black Christians in America have talked about, preached about, sung about, and written about the Bible? With which of these ways do you identify?

10. (pp. 29–31) Have you participated in any interdenominational or parachurch activities or organizations centered on the Bible? What did you learn from the experience?

11. (pp. 32–34, 35) Consider the ways the Bible has been presented in pop culture. What songs, movies, books, and art with biblical references or themes have impacted you the most? Why? Have you ever incorporated a biblical concept into a personal creation such as a song, video, or story?

12. What's one thing you learned from this issue that surprised you? What's one thing that confirmed something you already thought?

13. With which of the figures mentioned in this issue do you most identify?

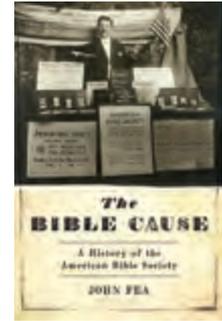
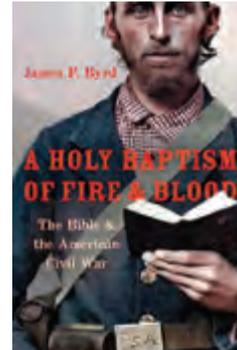
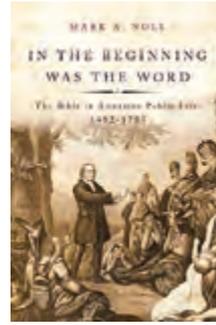
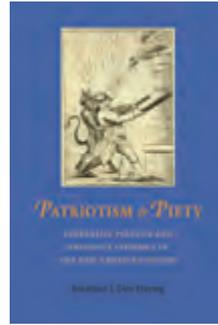
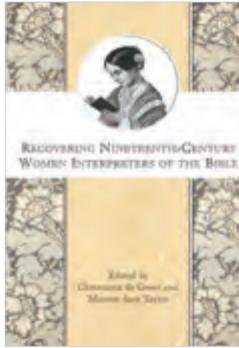
14. If you could ask a historical figure from this issue one question about the Bible, what would it be?



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Recommended resources

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THE BIBLE IN AMERICA WITH THESE RESOURCES SELECTED BY *CHRISTIAN HISTORY'S* AUTHORS AND EDITORS.



BOOKS

Overviews of the story of the Bible in America include Nathan Hatch and Mark Noll, eds., *The Bible in America* (1982); George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (2006); Paul Hanson, *A Political History of the Bible in America* (2015); Philip Goff, Arthur Farnsley II, and Peter Thuesen, eds., *The Bible in American Life* (2016); Paul Gutjahr, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in America* (2018); and Diana Severance, *The Living Word* (2020).

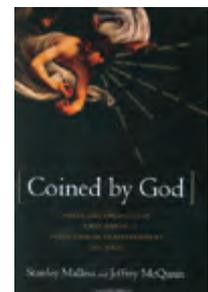
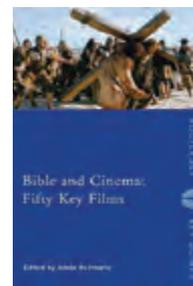
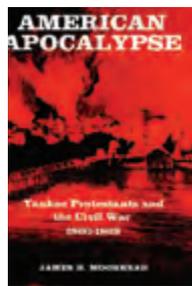
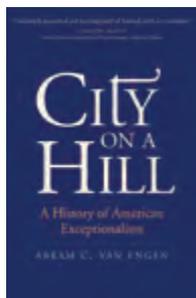
Read more about the **Bible in the colonies and the early republic** in Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (1952); Nicholas Miller, *The Religious Roots of the First Amendment* (2012); James Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War* (2013); Jonathan Den Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety* (2015); Mark Noll, *In the Beginning Was the Word* (2016); Daniel Dreisbach, *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers* (2017); Carl Esbeck and Jonathan Den Hartog, eds., *Disestablishment and Religious Dissent* (2019); and Abram Van Engen, *City on a Hill* (2020).

Learn about the **Bible and the Civil War** in James Moorhead, *American Apocalypse* (1978); Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood* (1980); C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches,*

Broken Nation (1985); Harry Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation* (2006); George Rabale, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples* (2010); Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (2015); and James Byrd, "A Holy Baptism of Fire and Blood": *The Bible and the American Civil War* (2021).

Read about the **Bible and nineteenth-century reform** in Paul Gutjahr, *An American Bible* (1999); Kathi Kern, *Mrs. Stanton's Bible* (2001); Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World* (2004); Christiana de Greet and Marion Taylor, *Recovering Nineteenth-Century Women Interpreters of the Bible* (2007); and Jennifer Woodruff Tait, *The Poisoned Chalice* (2011).

Find out more about **African American approaches to biblical interpretation** in David Chappell, *A Stone of Hope* (2004); Erskine Clarke, *Dwelling Place* (2005); Katherine Clay Bassard, *Transforming Scriptures* (2010); Allen Dwight Callaghan, *The Talking Book* (2008); Herbert Marbury, *Pillars of Cloud and Fire* (2015); David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (2018); Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black* (2020); and S. Jonathan Bass, *Blessed Are the Peacemakers* (2021).



Check out the history of the **American Bible Society** in Peter Wosh, *Spreading the Word* (1994) and John Fea, *The Bible Cause* (2016).

To learn more about **biblical themes in American literature**, look at Harold Gardiner, *American Classics Reconsidered: A Christian Appraisal* (1958); Sacvan Bercovitch, ed., *Typology and Early American Literature* (1972); David Reynolds, *Faith and Fiction* (1981); Giles Gunn, *The Bible and American Arts and Letters* (1983); Lawrence Buell, *New England Literary Culture* (1986); Roger Lundin, *Emily Dickinson and the Art of Belief* (2004); Robert Alter, *Pen of Iron* (2010); and Leland Ryken, *The Legacy of the King James Bible* (2011).

Read about the **Bible and the movies** in Richard Campbell and Michael Pitts, *The Bible in Film: A Checklist, 1897–1980* (1981); J. Cheryl Exum, ed., *The Bible in Film* (2006); J. Stephen Lang, *The Bible on the Big Screen* (2007); David Shepherd, *Images of the Word* (2008) and *The Bible on Silent Film* (2013); and Adele Reinhartz, *Bible and Cinema: Fifty Key Films* (2013) and *Bible and Cinema: An Introduction* (2013).

Finally, for a fun look at what common phrases we got from English **Bible translations**, check out Stanley Malless and Jeffrey McQuain, *Coined by God* (2003).

CHRISTIAN HISTORY ISSUES



Read past issues on our website—some are still available for purchase:

- 3: *John Wycliffe*
- 8 and 77: *Jonathan Edwards*
- 9: *Heritage of Freedom*
- 16: *William Tyndale*
- 23: *Spiritual Awakenings in North America*
- 33: *Christianity and the Civil War*
- 38: *George Whitefield*
- 41: *American Puritans*
- 43: *How We Got Our Bible*
- 50: *Christianity and the American Revolution*
- 55: *Scopes Trial and Fundamentalism*
- 100: *King James Bible*
- 102: *People of Faith*

VIDEOS FROM VISION VIDEO



Videos on this issue's topic include *The Great Awakening*; *Azusa Street Project*; *God's Outlaw*; *Harriet Tubman*; *John Wycliffe*; *KJV: The Making of the King James Bible*; *KJB: The Book that Changed the World*; *Man with a Mission*; *Saints and Strangers*; *Passion for Justice*; *People of Faith*; *Sheffey*; *The Stranger*; and *We the People*. On RedeemTV you can also watch *Gospel of Liberty* and *Sacred Space*. For children check out the Torchlighters episodes on William Tyndale and Harriet Tubman.

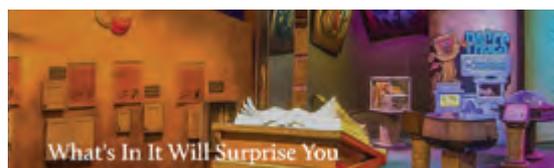
WEBSITES



Bible museum websites provide a wealth of information on the Bible in America. They include the Biblical Heritage Gallery at Cedarville University; Dunham Bible Museum at Houston Baptist University; the Museum of the Bible in Washington, DC; the Library of Congress Bible Collection (also in DC); the Museum of Biblical Art in Dallas; and the Faith and Liberty Discovery Center in Philadelphia.

Institutions distributing Bibles in the United States (and worldwide) include the American Bible Society, Biblica, Wycliffe, and the Gideons.

YouVersion offers a great Bible reading plan about the Bible and the movies, put out by the Museum of the Bible. [📖](#)



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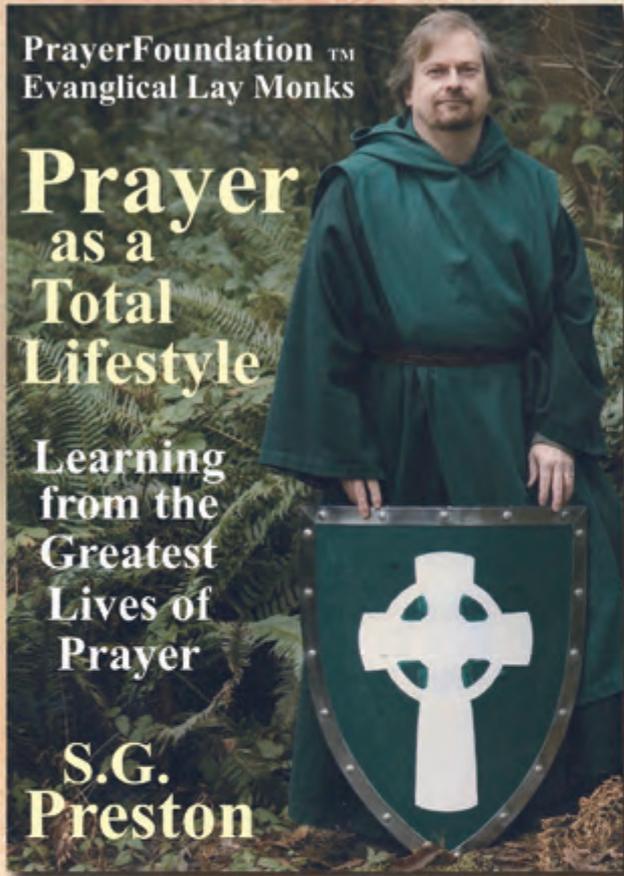


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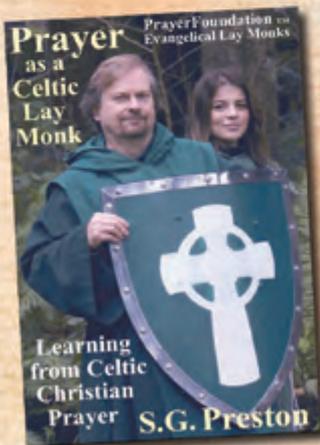


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