

THE  
**Bible**  
IN  
**America**™  
MUSEUM  
Newsletter

Houston Baptist University

July-September 2004

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## Medieval Torah Scroll Comes to Museum

The most recent acquisition to the **Bible in America Museum** is a Jewish Torah scroll placed on permanent loan with the museum by Sagemont Church, the scroll's owners. The sixteenth century scroll is written on vellum and is in excellent condition. It was originally produced by the Jewish community in Yemen, the ancient land of Sheba, at the southern tip of the Arabian peninsula.

The Yemenite Jews are among the oldest of the Jewish communities outside of the land of Israel, claiming to have moved to Arabia 42 years before the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BC. Relatively isolated from the larger Jewish Diaspora, the Yemenite Jews preserved the Hebrew punctuation and pronunciation similar to that used by Jews during the Babylonian captivity, which was different in many respects from that used by Sephardic (Spanish) and Ashkenazi (Central/Eastern European) Jews today.

For centuries the Yemenite Jews were the only minority in a Moslem country, and they endured regular periods of persecution and forced conversion. When the modern state of Israel was created in 1948, Moslem rioters in Yemen began a bloody pogrom of killing and rampage against the Jews. From 1948-1950 almost 50,000 Yemenite Jews, virtually the entire community, emigrated to Israel. Jews who had never seen an airplane before were airlifted back to their homeland, reminding them of God's description of that earlier Exodus, "I bare you on Eagles wings, and brought you unto my self." (Ex. 19:4). The emigration, often called "On Eagles Wings" or "Operation Magic Carpet," carried the Yemenite Jews not only thousands of miles, but seemingly thousands of years, as they were confronted with a totally different, technological way of life in their new land.



Don Anderson, Vice-President for Development at HBU, receives 16th century scroll from Dr. John Morgan, pastor of Sagemont Church and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of HBU.

In their emigration, the Jews brought with them their Torah scrolls, including the one donated to the **Bible in America Museum**. The rabbis had implemented stringent rules for the copying of the Hebrew manuscripts, including requiring a scribe to pronounce every word out loud before writing it, not writing any word from memory but only while looking at another scroll, and counting each letter on a line and page to make certain nothing had been added. It would take a scribe one year to copy a Torah scroll. Though the Yemenite Jews were isolated for centuries from much of the rest of the Jewish people, a Yemenite scroll has only nine letter differences between it and European Jewish scrolls.

## Ronald Reagan and the Bible

Recently the United States and the world mourned the passing of Ronald Reagan, fortieth president of the United States. Americans at home and leaders from around the world recognized Reagan's influence, based on his firm Christian faith. From his youth, Reagan had been strongly influenced by the Bible. At his first inauguration, on January 20, 1981, Reagan chose to use his mother's worn Bible when taking the oath of office. He placed his hand on one of her favorite verses, II Chronicles 7:14: "If my people which are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." Nelle Reagan had underlined the verse and wrote beside it, "A most wonderful verse for the healing of a nation."





Ronald Reagan being interviewed when he came to speak at HBU in 1969

Nelle Reagan's strong Christian faith profoundly influenced Ronald as a boy and throughout his life. With her he faithfully attended the Disciples of Christ church in Dixon, Illinois, where Nelle not only taught Sunday School and headed the Missionary Society, but let the light of her Christian faith shine by visiting the prisons, helping the poor, and by her dramatic readings of Scripture. Though the family was poor and went through many difficulties, Nelle believed everything that happens does so for a reason, that God's Providence was working out His purposes, even if they were not understood at the time. Her son shared this trust in God's plan, purposes, and Providence throughout his life.

By the time he was fifteen, Ronald was teaching a Sunday School class of his own. Many in Dixon were convinced that the young Reagan had a call to the ministry; Nelle hoped her son would be a missionary. When Reagan spoke at his (public) high school commencement, he challenged the graduates to reflect on Jesus' words in John 10:10, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

The rich grounding he received in the Bible continued with Reagan throughout his adult life, shaping his character, his words, and even his vision for America. When asked his favorite Scripture, he usually quoted John 3:16, elaborating, "having accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior, I have God's promise of eternal life in Heaven, as well as the abundant life here on earth

that He provides to each of us..." One of the reasons Reagan so strongly opposed communism was because it denied its people the freedom to accept Christ and have this eternal and abundant life.

In a 1984 speech to Chinese students at Fudon University in Shanghai, Reagan explained that America's Declaration of Independence asserted all men were created equal and were given unalienable rights by their Creator. Though America was a nation of many religions, "...most Americans derive their religious beliefs from the Bible of Moses, who delivered a people from slavery; the Bible of Jesus Christ, who told us to love thy neighbor as thyself, to do unto your neighbor as you would have him do unto you."

Reagan believed that within the Bible "are all the answers to all the problems that face us." To Reagan, God was the source of all wisdom and moral guidance: "When we open ourselves to Him, we gain not only moral courage but also intellectual strength." He believed that Biblical wisdom was necessary to devise sound laws. He held that Americans must "seek Divine guidance in the policies of their government and the promulgation of their laws." Americans must "make our laws and government not only a model to mankind, but a testament to the wisdom and mercy of God."

Reagan believed that God had a special plan for America. As he often said, quoting John Winthrop's famous 1630 sermon, America should be a shining city on a hill, a godly example to all the nations. This image of America as a city on a hill, taken from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 5:14-17, was Reagan's favorite image of his country. America had a mission to the world: to shine the light of freedom, liberty, and dignity under God. In Reagan's talks and visits with foreign leaders, he was ever conscious of that mission.

Reagan recognized, "There is sin and evil in the world, and we're enjoined by Scripture and the Lord Jesus to oppose it with all our might." His strong denunciation in 1983 of the "Evil Empire" of the Soviet Union was based on his understanding of the spiritual evil of communism's atheistic system. Reagan's call to freedom, especially religious freedom, gave hope to persecuted peoples in communist lands. Some prisoners in the Soviet gulag who managed to obtain Bibles, or portions of Bibles, even called their Bible sessions "Reaganite readings."

In 1983, the year Reagan denounced the Evil Empire abroad, he proclaimed the "Year of the Bible" in America. His Presidential Proclamation (A copy is found under "Influence in American history" at [www.hbu.edu/bia](http://www.hbu.edu/bia)) described the importance of the Bible in shaping the Founding Fathers' concepts of liberty and equality. Reagan viewed liberty and equality not only as American values, but as God's gifts to all men. He believed America had a responsibility to insure these God-given gifts were enjoyed by people throughout the world. Maybe Nelle Reagan's boy became a missionary after all.

[www.hbu.edu/bia](http://www.hbu.edu/bia)

**The Bible in America Museum's** website has expanded and is growing. Highlights from the collection can now be viewed online. Reprints from various items in the collection as well as articles on the Bible's influence in American history will be added regularly. Check us out and let us know what you think!

## Volunteer Opportunity

If you have a love for the Bible and a fascination with its influence on our American culture, then maybe you should become a **Bible in America Museum** volunteer. Volunteering in the **Bible in American Museum** will help expand the hours the Museum is open to the public and community. An orientation and training session will be held at the **Bible in America Museum Thursday, September 9 at 7 p.m.** To register or for more information, please contact Dr. Diana Severance at 281-649-3287 or [dseverance@hbu.edu](mailto:dseverance@hbu.edu).

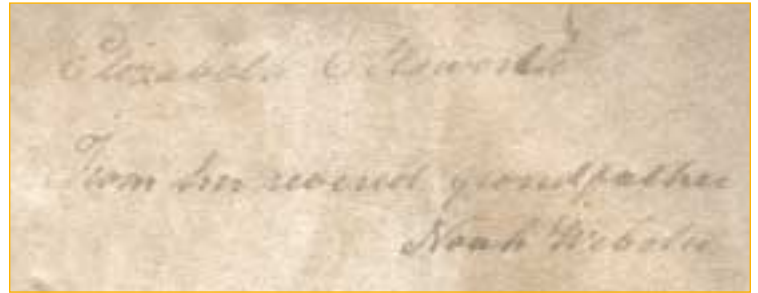


# Noah Webster's Bible and Its Story

Many recognize Noah Webster as the compiler of the first American dictionary as well as the author of the blue back speller, used in American school for decades. But, few are aware that Webster also published a Bible. In his **1833 edition of the Bible**, Webster was most concerned with modernizing the King James Version, which then was over two centuries old. Many words had changed their meanings or were no longer in use, and Webster sought to provide a translation which could be understood by common readers (Read Webster's Bible preface at [www.hbu.edu/bia](http://www.hbu.edu/bia), under "Reprints").

One of the treasures in the **Bible in America Museum** is a copy of **Noah Webster's 1833 Bible**, signed by Webster himself and given to his granddaughter Elizabeth Ellsworth. One of Noah's daughter's described the occasion of this gift as the Golden Wedding celebration in 1842 of Noah's daughter Eliza Webster Goodrich: "All the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of the dear, dear old Patriarch and his wife Rebecca were invited to gather at brother Goodrich's...35 of us were there... We felt that God was with us and it was a cheerful meal...21 of us were professedly children of grace, and the others – may they too come to the cross of Christ and find in Him their everlasting portion! At five we all went to Father's and took our tea in the home of our early days. In the evening before we parted, our beloved and revered parent called our attention, and kneeling, as we all did,

fervently implored the blessing of heaven upon us, our children and our children's children to the last generation. Oh shall not that prayer be heard? Then rising, he said, it was the happiest day of his life to see us all together; so many walking in the truth and the other, children of promise...Then he presented each of us with a Bible, his last gift, with our names written by his own trembling hand; and we closed our meeting by singing "Blest be the tie that binds." Shall we ever forget it? Oh No! the youngest there received some deep impression of the blessedness of nurturing a family in the fear of God. The little Bibles are cherished gifts."



Though it has faded with age, the Bible given to Elizabeth Ellsworth can still be read as signed "From her revered grandfather, Noah Webster"

## Students Study Early American Bibles

Research in the **Bible in America Museum** is part of HBU's "The Bible and Religion in America" course. In the recent quarter, students analyzed some of the earliest volumes in the collection, noting the format of the Bibles (whether printed with marginal notes, chapter or book summaries, paragraphs, etc.) and the variety of supplementary material in the Bibles. Several of the students especially liked the illustrated pull out maps in some of the Bibles, as well as the historical supplement giving additional history of the early church and the apostles. Students evaluated the supplements to determine which might

be most useful to digitize and place on the **Bible in America Museum's** website. Students also had the opportunity to study the various Bibles in the Museum's collection with study notes and commentaries. Each student chose one passage of Scripture to study in the variety of sources. Most students found **Thomas Scott's Commentary of the Bible**, first published in America in 1804, especially helpful and practical.

As they examined the old Bibles, students were intrigued by the family genealogies often written in them. Several entries were of individuals born in the 1600's. Students decided that in the future the Museum should put together an

exhibit of the "stuff" found in Bibles as well – pressed flowers and leaves, calling cards, obituaries, letters, scraps of material for bookmarks and even a cricket leg! Several poems, often devotional and sentimental, were found written in the Bibles, such as the following:

In every dark distressful hour  
When sin and Satan join their power  
Let this dear hope repel the dart:  
That Jesus bears us on his heart.

HBU students in "Bible and Religion in America" class studying Bibles from 1700 and 1800's. Top: Chris Jones, Cathy Warden, Brian Cuthbert; Left: Derek Carter; Above: Henry Taylor and Terry Bohannon.





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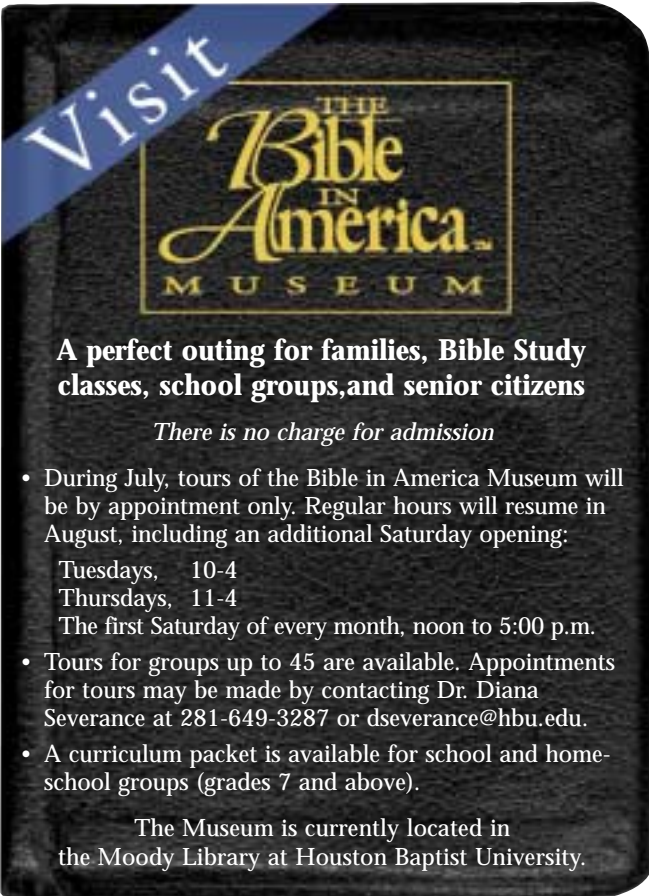
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"I'M ACCUSED OF BEING SIMPLISTIC AT TIMES WITH SOME OF THE PROBLEMS THAT CONFRONT US. BUT I'VE OFTEN WONDERED: ALL THE PROBLEMS THAT FACE US TODAY, IF WE'D ONLY LOOK THERE. 'THE GRASS WITHERETH, THE FLOWER FADETH, BUT THE WORD OF OUR GOD SHALL STAND FOREVER.' I HOPE AMERICANS WILL READ AND STUDY THE BIBLE...IT'S MY FIRM BELIEF THAT THE ENDURING VALUES...PRESENT IN ITS PAGES HAVE A GREAT MEANING FOR EACH OF US AND FOR OUR NATION. THE BIBLE CAN TOUCH OUR HEARTS, ORDER OUR MINDS, REFRESH OUR SOULS."

—RONALD REAGAN

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



**A perfect outing for families, Bible Study classes, school groups, and senior citizens**

*There is no charge for admission*

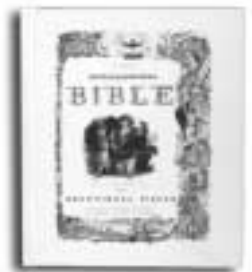
- During July, tours of the Bible in America Museum will be by appointment only. Regular hours will resume in August, including an additional Saturday opening:  
Tuesdays, 10-4  
Thursdays, 11-4  
The first Saturday of every month, noon to 5:00 p.m.
- Tours for groups up to 45 are available. Appointments for tours may be made by contacting Dr. Diana Severance at 281-649-3287 or [dseverance@hbu.edu](mailto:dseverance@hbu.edu).
- A curriculum packet is available for school and home-school groups (grades 7 and above).

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

## 1837 Children's Bible For Sale

In our last newsletter we had a notice of our 1837 facsimile children's Bible for sale. We are sorry that printing the Bible took longer than anticipated, and we appreciate the patience of all those who placed orders. We are pleased that the Bibles have now arrived and are ready for purchase.

This reprint is a facsimile of an 1837 children's Bible in **The Bible in America Museum's** collection. Called a *Hieroglyphic Bible* for its 400 illustrations, made by noted American engraver Joseph Adams (1803-1880), Harper Brother's 1837 *Hieroglyphic Bible* includes Bible verses on one page and devotional poems for children on the facing page. Many of the poems are from *Divine Songs and Hymns for Infant Minds* by the famous English hymn writer Isaac Watts. The facsimile is available at the HBU bookstore and at the **Bible in America Museum** for \$16.18 (\$14.95 plus \$1.23 tax). Mail orders are also accepted; add \$1.42 for shipping and handling (or \$3.19 for 1st Class). Please make checks payable to Houston Baptist University.



Bibles are also available for placement in church and local bookstores. Contact Dr. Diana Severance at 281-649-3287 or [dseverance@hbu.edu](mailto:dseverance@hbu.edu) for more information