

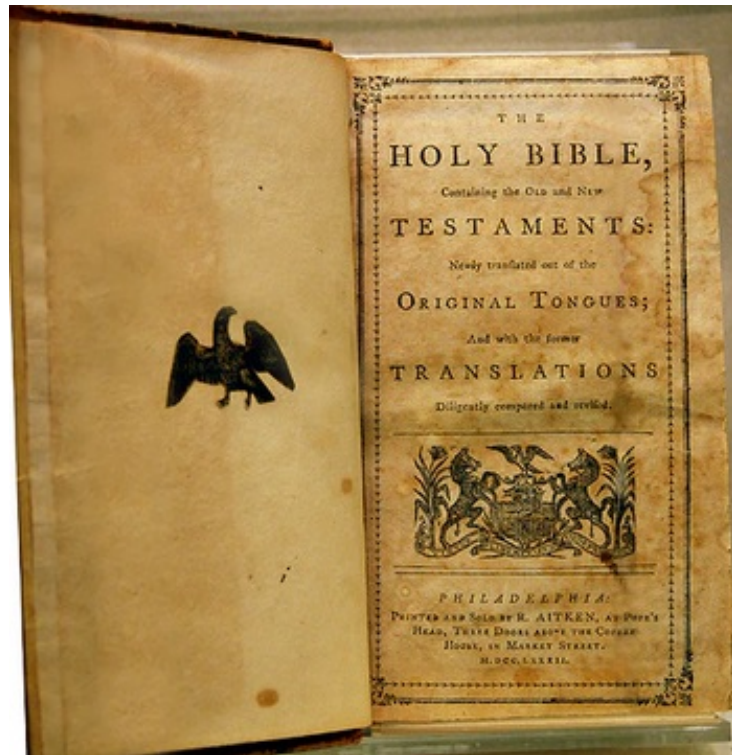
## American Minute with Bill Federer

First Bibles printed in America, One even Authorized by Congress: "Bible teaching ... is ploughed into the very heart of the race"-FDR

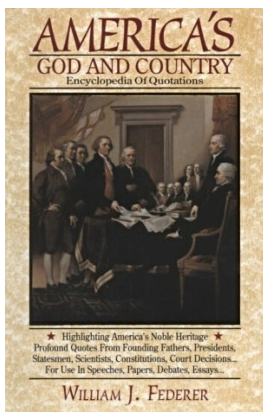
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In colonial America, Bibles had to be imported from Britain as the British government strictly regulated the printing of religious materials.

It was illegal to print Bibles in the English language without a license from the King ... [continue reading American Minute here ...](#)



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The first book printed in America was ***The Bay Psalm Book***, in 1640, by Stephen Daye, in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Used by Puritans in congregational worship, the complete title was:

"THE WHOLE BOOKE OF PSALMES faithfully TRANSLATED into ENGLISH Metre, Whereunto is prefixed a discourse declaring not only the lawfulness, but also the necessity of the heavenly Ordinances of singing Scripture Psalmes in the Churches of God."

In 1663, **Missionary John Elliot** printed **the first Bible in the Western Hemisphere** at Harvard College in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

It was in the **Algonquin language** spoken by the **Wampanoag tribe**.

It would be 120 years later that the first complete **Bible** in the **English language** would be **printed in America**.

**Queen Elizabeth I**, in 1589, had granted **Christopher Barker** the title of **Royal Printer**. He had the exclusive "**perpetual royal privilege**" to **print Bibles in England**.

His son, **Robert Barker**, assumed the position of the **King's Printer** with the sole permission to print the **King James "Authorized Version"**.

Unfortunately for him, **Robert Barker** did not adequately proof his 1631 edition, resulting in the word "**not**" being left out of the commandment "**Thou shalt not commit adultery**."

It became known as "**The Wicked Bible**." Printing of it was immediately stopped and **Robert Barker** was thrown into prison.

By 1629, **Oxford University** and **Cambridge University** had acquired **royal licenses** to **print revised editions of the Bible**, and in 1633, so did a **printer in Scotland**.

The **Revolutionary War** interrupted **trade between the American colonies** and the **King's "authorized printers"** in **Britain**.

This caused a shortage in America of the **King James Authorized Version of the Bible**, which was used extensively by clergy, courts of justice and in education.

In July of 1777, three prominent clergymen signed a **petition to the Continental Congress**:

"To the honorable **Continental Congress** of the United States of North America now sitting in Philadelphia.

Honored Gentlemen,

We the Ministers of the Gospel of Christ in the City of Philadelphia, whose names are under written, taking it into **our serious consideration** that in our present circumstances, books in general, and in particular, **the Holy Scriptures contained in the Old and New Testaments are growing so scarce and dear**,

that we greatly fear that unless timely care be used to prevent it, **we shall not have Bibles for our schools and families, and for the public worship of God in our churches ...**

... We therefore think it our duty to our country and to the churches of Christ to **lay this danger before this honorable house**,

humbly requesting that under your care, and by your encouragement, **a copy of the Holy Bible may be printed**, so as to be sold nearly as cheap as the common Bibles, **formerly imported from Britain and Ireland**,

were sold.

The number of purchasers is so great, that we doubt not but a large impression would soon be sold ...

... We are persuaded that your care and reasonable interposition will remove the anxious fears of many pious and well disposed persons; would prevent the murmurs of the discontented ... would be the means of promoting Christian knowledge in our churches ...

Our sincere prayers shall ever be for your welfare and prosperity, and we beg leave with the greatest respect to subscribe our selves.

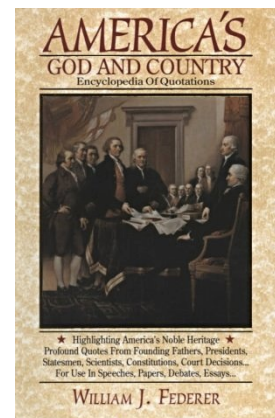
Honored Gentlemen, Your most obedient humble servants,

--**Francis Alison** (a founder of **University of Pennsylvania & University of Delaware**),

--**John Ewing** (provost of **University of Pennsylvania**),

--**William Marshall** (Scots Presbyterian Church, Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania)."

[America's God and Country Encyclopedia of Quotations](#)



The **Chaplain of Congress, Patrick Allison**, Pastor of Philadelphia's First Presbyterian Church, brought the issue to the attention of the **Continental Congress**, which referred it to a Committee composed of **John Adams, Daniel Roberdeau** and **Jonathan Bayard Smith**.

The Committee reported to the **Continental Congress**, September 11, 1777, that it had:

"... conferred fully with the printers, etc., in this city and are of the opinion, that the proper types for printing the **Bible** are not to be had in this country, and that the paper cannot be procured, but with such difficulties and subject to such casualties as render any dependence on it altogether improper ..."

The Committee recommended:

**"The use of the Bible is so universal** and its importance so great that your committee refers the above to the consideration of Congress ...

The Committee recommends that Congress will order the Committee of Commerce to **import 20,000 Bibles from Holland, Scotland, or elsewhere**, into the different parts of the States of the Union.

Whereupon it was resolved accordingly to direct said Committee of Commerce to import 20,000 copies of the Bible."

That same day, September 11, 1777, Washington's troops lost the **Battle of Brandywine**, retreating eventually to Valley Forge, and British General John Burgoyne's troops were marching down from Canada.

In a panic, the **Continental Congress evacuated Philadelphia** before action could be taken on the **Bible resolution**, fleeing to the City of Lancaster, then to York, Pennsylvania.

On September 26, 1777, **British General William Howe occupied Philadelphia**.

Howe expected this would end the war, as the tradition in European warfare was that when a country's capital was captured they would surrender.

The war continued, though, and in 1780 another **motion** was presented to Congress pertaining to the **printing of the Bible** by James McLene, a delegate from Pennsylvania, and seconded by John Hanson, a delegate from Maryland:

"Resolved: That it be recommended to such of the States who may think it convenient for them that they take proper measures to procure **one or more new and correct editions of the Old and New Testament to be printed** and that such states regulate their printers by law so as to secure effectually the said books from being misprinted."

On January 21, 1781, **Robert Aitken** presented a "Memorial" petition to **Congress** to publish the **Bible**:

"To the Honorable The Congress of the United States of America --

The Memorial of **Robert Aitken** of the City of Philadelphia, Printer

Humbly Sheweth

That in every well regulated Government in Christendom, The Sacred Books of the Old and New Testament, commonly called **the Holy Bible**, are printed and published under the Authority of the Sovereign Powers, in order to prevent the fatal confusion that would arise, and the alarming Injuries the Christian Faith might suffer from the spurious and erroneous editions of Divine Revelation ..."

**Robert Aitken** continued:

"That your Memorialist has no doubt but this work is an object worthy the attention of the Congress of the United States of America, who will not neglect spiritual security, while they are virtuously contending for temporal blessings.

Under this persuasion your Memorialist begs leave to, inform your Honors that he both begun and made considerable progress in **a neat edition of the Holy Scriptures for the use of schools**, but being cautious of suffering his copy of the Bible to issue forth without **the sanction of Congress**,

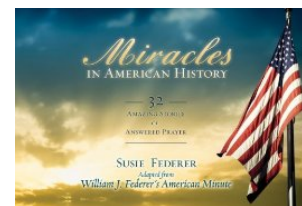
humbly prays that your Honors would take this important matter into serious consideration & would be pleased to appoint one Member or Members of your Honorable Body to inspect his work so that the same **may be published under the Authority of Congress**.

... And further, your Memorialist prays, that he may **be commissioned** or otherwise appointed & **authorized to print** and vend editions of, the Sacred Scriptures, in such manner and form as may best suit the wants and demands of the good people of these States, provided the same be in all things perfectly consonant to the Scriptures as heretofore Established and received amongst us."

**Robert Aitken**, a Scottish immigrant, printed *The Pennsylvania Magazine*, which had 600 subscribers, with **Thomas Paine** as editor.

In January of 1776, **Robert Aiken** began printing the **Journals of the Continental Congress**.

### [Miracles in American History](#)



In early September, 1782, **Robert Aitken** sent a message to Congress informing them he **had nearly completed his Bible, "accomplished in the midst of the Confusion and Distresses of War."**

Congress requested the **Chaplains of Congress** review

it:

"REPORT OF COMMITTEE OF CONGRESS ON MR. AITKEN'S MEMORIAL

By **The United States Congress Assembled:**

September 12th, 1782.

THE Committee to whom was referred a Memorial of **Robert Aitken, Printer**, dated 21st January, 1781, respecting **an edition of the Holy Scriptures**, report,

That **Mr. Aitken** has, at a great expense, now finished an American edition of the Holy Scriptures in English, that the Committee have from time to time attended to his progress in the work;

that they also recommended it to the two Chaplains of Congress to examine and give their opinion of the execution, who have accordingly reported thereon; the recommendation and report being as follows:

... 'Philadelphia, 1st September, 1782.

Reverend Gentlemen,

OUR knowledge of your piety and public spirit leads us without apology to recommend to your particular attention **the edition of the Holy Scriptures publishing by Mr. Aitken.**

He undertook this expensive work at a time when, from the circumstances of the war, an English edition of the Bible could not be imported, nor any opinion formed how long the obstruction might continue.

On this account particularly he deserves applause and encouragement.

We therefore wish you, Reverend Gentlemen, to examine the execution of the work, and if approved, to give it the sanction of your judgment, and the weight of your



recommendation.

We are, with very great respect, Your most obedient humble servants.

(Sign'd) JAMES DUANE, Chairman in behalf of a Committee of Congress on **Mr. Aitken's Memorial.**"

The two **Chaplains of Congress** at this time were: **Rev. George Duffield**, pastor of the **Third Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia**, who helped form the Presbyterian Church in the United States;

and **Rev. William White**, rector of **Christ Church**, who helped organize the Protestant Episcopal Church in America and was the first president of the Bible Society of Philadelphia -- the first Bible Society in the United States.

**Chaplains William White and George Duffield** reported to **Congress**, September 10, 1782:

"REPORT OF THE CONGRESSIONAL CHAPLAINS  
**Reverend Doct. White and Revd. Mr. Duffield,**  
**Chaplains of the United States in Congress**  
assembled.

Report.

Gentlemen,  
AGREEABLY to your desire we have paid attention to **Mr. Robert Aitken's impression of the Holy Scriptures** of the Old and New Testament.

Having selected and examined a variety of passages throughout the work, we are of opinion that **it is executed with great accuracy** as to the sense, and with as few grammatical and typographical errors as could be expected in an undertaking of such magnitude.

Being ourselves witnesses of the demand of this invaluable book, we rejoice in this present prospect of a

supply; hoping that it will prove as advantageous as it is honorable to the Gentleman, who has exerted himself to furnish it, at the evident risque of private fortune.

We are,

Gentlemen,

Your very respectful and humble servants,

(Sign'd) **William White, George Duffield.**

Philadelphia, September 10th, 1782."

On September 12, 1782, **Congress** approved of **Robert Aitken's** printing of the **Bible**.

Called "**The Bible of the Revolution**" it was the **first English-language Bible printed in America** and the **only Bible ever authorized by an act of Congress:**

"ENDORSEMENT OF CONGRESS

Honble James Duane, Esq. Chairman, and the other Honble Gentlemen of the **Committee of Congress** on **Mr. Aitken's Memorial.**

... Whereupon, RESOLVED,  
THAT the **United States in Congress** assembled highly approve the pious and laudable undertaking of **Mr. Aitken**, as subservient to the interest of religion, as well as an influence of the progress of arts in this country, and being satisfied from the above report of his care and accuracy in the execution of the work,

**they recommend this edition of the Bible to the inhabitants of the United States, and hereby authorize him to publish** this Recommendation in the manner he shall think Proper.

CHA. THOMSON, Sec'ry."

**Robert Aitkens' "Bible of the Revolution"** is one of the **rarest books.**

In 1940, the Rev. Edwin A.R. Rumball-Petre located 28 copies of the "**Bible of the Revolution**" in institutions in

America and abroad, and 22 in private collections.

Copies of "**The Bible of the Revolution**" are in the possession of the

- **American Bible Society's Museum of Biblical Art** in New York;
- Houston Baptist University's **Dunham Bible Museum**; and
- Hobby Lobby's Green Family, who established the **Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C.** to display **The Green Collection** -- the world's largest private collection of rare biblical texts and artifacts.

Congress' endorsement of **Robert Aitken's Bible** was signed by the **Secretary of Congress Charles Thomson**, who had also signed the Declaration of Independence with John Hancock on July 4, 1776.

**Charles Thomson**, with William Barton, designed the **Great Seal of the United States**.

When **Charles Thomson** retired from Congress, he spent 19 years researching and writing his "**Thomson Bible**," a four-volume work containing the **first American translation of the Greek Septuagint**.

**Charles Thomson's Bible** was printed in 1808 by **Jane Aitken**, the **daughter of Robert Aitken**, who had taken over her father's printing business when he died on JULY 15, 1802.

This made America's **Jane Aitken** the **first woman ever to print the Bible**.

In 1810, the **first French New Testament in America** was printed in Boston, a **de Sacy version** based on the Catholic Latin Vulgate.

In 1811, the **first Protestant French New Testament** (Ostervald's version) was **printed in America** at Boston, followed by the **first complete French Bible** published in 1815 by the New York Bible Society.

In 1819, the **first Spanish New Testament** was printed in the **Western Hemisphere** by the American Bible Society.

It was from **Padre Scio de San Miguel's 1793 & 1797 Spanish translations** printed in Madrid, based on the Latin Vulgate.

In 1824, the **American Bible Society** published **America's first complete Spanish Bible**; and in 1839, **America's first Portuguese Protestant and Catholic New Testaments**.

In 1828, the **first Hawaiian-language Gospel of Matthew** was printed in Rochester, NY, 1828), and the **first Hawaiian New Testament** in Honolulu in 1835.

**America's first Hebrew Bible**, based on Van der Hoog's 1705 Amsterdam edition, was published by William Fry and Thomas Dobson in Philadelphia in 1814.

In 1845, **Isaac Leeser** published the **first Hebrew-English edition** of the **Torah** in the United States.

In 1848, with the help of an Episcopalian minister, **Leeser** published America's **first Masoretic Hebrew Tanakh**, *The Biblia Hebraica*; and in 1853, published **America's first English translation of the entire Tanakh**, referred to as *The Leeser Bible*.

In 1984, the *American Political Review* published an article titled "**The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late 18th-Century American Political Thought**," written by **Donald S. Lutz** of the University of

Houston, and **Charles S. Hyneman**.

After reviewing nearly **15,000 items written between 1760 and 1805**, **Lutz and Hyneman** discovered that the **writers of the Constitution quoted from the Bible more than any other source.**

**President Franklin D. Roosevelt** stated October 6, 1935:

"We cannot read the **history of our rise and development as a Nation**, without reckoning with the **place the Bible has occupied** in shaping the **advances of the Republic ...**

**Its teaching ... is ploughed into the very heart of the race.**

Where we have been **truest and most consistent in obeying its precepts** we have attained the **greatest measure of contentment and prosperity;**

**where it has been to us as the words of a book that is sealed, we have faltered in our way, lost our range finders and found our progress checked."**

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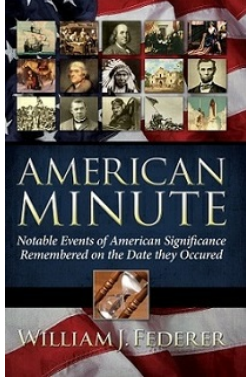
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