

AMERICA'S CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

7/2/2017

The Bible was the most important document used at the onset of American History. Today we will note the scarcity and the implementation of bringing Scriptures to these shores.

I. THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT REGULATED THE PRINTING OF RELIGIOUS MATERIALS

- A. It was illegal to print Bibles in the English Language without a license from the King.
- B The Revolutionary War interrupted trade between the American colonies and the King's authorized printers in Britain.
 - 1. On these shores there was a shortage of the King James Version.
 - 2. The Kings James Version was used extensively by;
 - a. Clergy
 - b. Courts
 - c. Educational facilities

II. IN 1777 CONGRESS WAS ASKED TO MADE SCRIPTURES AVAILABLE TO AMERICA.

- A. Three prominent clergymen signed a petition to the Continental Congress seeking approval to make the Scriptures available. Note the letter;

"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 seasonable 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,

- B. 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.
- C. 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..."
- D. Please note the importance the committee placed on the Scriptures their recommendation to Congress: 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."

- E. On the same day Washington's troops lost the Battle of Brandywine and Congress had to evacuate Philadelphia before action could be taken on the Bible resolution.

III. IN 1780-81 OTHER BIBLE PETITIONS WERE PRESENTED TO CONGRESS

- A. A delegate from Pennsylvania, James McLene presented the motion and seconded by John Hanson, a delegate from Maryland which stated;

"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."

- B. 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..." "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."

- B 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."
- C. The Chaplains of Congress were asked to review the copy of Scriptures and make a recommendation back to Congress.
- D. At their recommendation Congress stated; 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."
- E. Charles Thomson Secretary of Congress endorsed the Bible with his signature. He also signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776
- F. This was the first English-language Bible to be printed in America. There were 10,000 originally copies printed by Aitken.
- G. The Aitken Bible was also known as the Bible of the Revolution.