

# GUTENBERG & THE BIBLE

## The Beginning of the Printed Word

### Typefounding

Johanne Gutenberg was born in 1399 in Mainz, Germany. He was a German goldsmith who invented and developed “movable type” for printing which was the first successful technology for the accurate manufacturing of type in 1450.

Johann Gutenberg’s typefounding process involved the principle of replica-casting. The “hot metal typesetting” method involves engraving a character on the end of a hot metal punch which is driven into a softer metal known as the matrix. The matrix is placed in an adjustable type mold and molten metal is poured into the mold which hardens and produces the piece of type.

The type design was modeled after the decorative Gothic handwriting of the formal black letter styles that were popular in Germany at the time. The black letter style that Gutenberg used was known as Textura, it was a typeface commonly used for religious and legal purposes.

### The Beginning

Gutenberg first started experimenting with printing about 1440, in Strasbourg, Germany. His invention of “movable

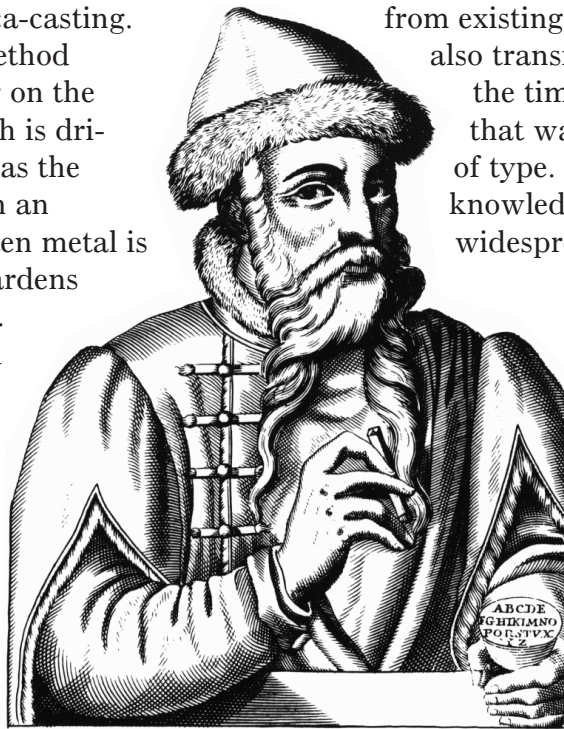
type” in 1450, took place in his home town, Mainz, Germany. Gutenberg’s invention became exploited commercially by accomplishing the printing and publishing composition of the Gutenberg Bible.

The Bible, printed in Latin language, is known throughout the world as “The Beginning of the Printed Word” because it was the first book to have been printed on a press using movable type. The Gutenberg Bible is also known as the 42-line Bible because its Latin text is arranged in two

columns of forty-two lines and is known as the “Mazarin” Bible, after the seventeenth-century Cardinal whose first copy attracted attention.

In addition to the casting of type, Gutenberg developed an ink that would adhere to his metal cast type by changing the chemical composition

from existing woodblock printing inks. He also transformed the wooden winepress of the time into a screw and lever press that was capable of printing the pages of type. Gutenberg’s invention made knowledge more accessible through the widespread of printed literature.



Earliest known portrait of Johannes Gutenberg appeared more than a century after his death in André Thevet’s book, *Vies des Hommes Illustrés*, where he was described in 1589 as “L’ Inventeur de l’ Imprimerie.” (Don Cleveland Norman, Harry Ransom Research Center at University of Texas.)

### Bible Facts

Gutenberg developed a workshop that contained six presses with six pressmen to operate them and another six men to composite the type. The stock of Latin type he created for use in the printing of the Bible took him nearly two years to produce before he actually started the printing of the Bible in 1452.

Gutenberg cast a total of 290 different characters of capital letters, small letters, and punctuation marks (period, colon, and hyphen) for the

Bible. Each page of the Bible was set in two columns and each column contained 1,310 characters. The pages were designed purposely to leave blank areas for scribes to fill in after the completion of printing. The compositors could only set one page a day in which it took nearly three years to print the Bible. The Gutenberg Bible was noted by the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris to have been completed on August, 24, 1456, in Mainz, Germany.

The edition of the Bible is believed to have contained approximately 180 copies, an estimated 150 were printed on paper and 30 on parchment. The printed parchment edition used 6,000 calves and the printed paper edition used 51,000 sheets that were 412 x 300 mm in size. Each copy of the Bible contained two volumes of 1,282 pages.

Later, by 1600, Bible copies were acquired by royal and ecclesiastical libraries throughout Europe where local artisans, associated with the monastic community at the time, were employed to redecorate the initials opening each book, the page headings and the lesser initials, with red or blue ink. They also made new book covers out of calfskin that covered wooden boards. These features are now unique to the forty-eight surviving copies of the Bible today.



The Gutenberg Bible, courtesy of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas.

## Bible History

The United States contains five copies of the forty-eight surviving copies. They exist at: Harvard University in Massachusetts, Yale University in Connecticut, Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, Library of Congress in Washington and the University of Texas in Austin.

There are twenty-one complete copies existing of the forty-eight surviving copies, one of which is at the University of Texas and is printed on a paper edition. The Texas copy, given in memory of Harry Hunt Ransom, was purchased on June 9, 1978, from the Carl H. and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation

of New York, by the Chancellor's Council and the Board of Regents.

The provenance of the Texas copy can be traced back to 1822 at the sale of James Perry's library in England which was sold to the Duke of Sussex, the younger brother of King George IV. The Duke of Sussex sold it at a auction in 1844 and it was purchased by Bishop Robert Daly. Daly sold it later in 1858 to Bernard Quaritch who sold it to the Earl of Crawford. In 1887, Crawford sold it to the Earl of Carysfort who sold it to Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach on July 2, 1923, for Carl Pforzheimer. In April 1957, the Carl Pforzheimer library became part of the Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation in New York.

The Texas copy is permanently displayed in the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas in Austin. The copy contains 1,282 pages and is bound in two volumes. The first volume contains Genesis through Psalms. The second volume contains Proverbs and continues through to the end of the New Testament.

## Final Days

Gutenberg's method of casting type and printing were so successful that its fundamental principles remained virtually unchanged well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although Gutenberg was successful with his invention he faced a lawsuit from Johann Fust from a loan he took out in 1455 for his commercial setup for printing. He was unable to pay Fust back because he did not

make enough money on his small printing jobs and the Bible was not for sale yet. Gutenberg had to give up his office in which he lost possession of his type and presses. Johann Gutenberg abandoned printing shortly thereafter and died on February 3, 1468, in Mainz, Germany.

Gutenberg's mechanical printing process using movable type is an acknowledged landmark in the history of printing. The accomplishment of the Bible is credited as being the first printed book in Europe and for introducing printing in the West ❁