

## WHY THIS CHAPTER?

The Declaration of Independence has more references to God than the Ten Commandments.

George Washington's inaugural address and the Federalist Papers perhaps more than Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Yet some people persist in reading Thomas Jefferson's personal letter to Danbury Baptists like a law prohibiting the Christian acknowledgment of God.

In clear refutation of that notion is this 1982 bill co-written and co-signed by both Democrats and Republicans of the 97th Congress, and signed into law by the President of the United States.

"The rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God."

- John F. Kennedy  
Inaugural Address

"It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religions, but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

- Patrick Henry

"I reciprocate your kind prayers for the protection and blessings of the common Father and Creator of man."

- Thomas Jefferson, in closing his letter to the Danbury Baptists

"We believe that all men are created equal, because they are created in the image of God."

- Harry S. Truman  
Inaugural Address

"Our government rests upon religion. It is from that source that we derive our reverence for truth and justice, for equality and liberty, and for the rights of mankind."

- Calvin Coolidge

## Public Law 97-280

"We should live our lives as though Christ were coming this afternoon."

- Jimmy Carter

"I was humbled to learn that God sent His Son to die for a sinner like me."

- George W. Bush

"We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

- Thomas Jefferson,  
Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776

Introduced as Senate Joint Resolution 165, with thirty-three co-sponsors, and as House Joint Resolution 487 with 219 co-sponsors, a request was delivered before Congress to honor the Bible as Holy Scripture. The resolution suffered no amendments, no exclusions, no demands that it be stricken of religious references. It became law.

**The 97th Congress of the United States publicly declared 1983 the national "Year of the Bible"**. The bipartisan document known as Public Law 97-280, was signed on October 4, 1982 by Speaker of the House Thomas P. O'Neill, President of the Senate - Pro Tempore Strom Thurmond, and President of the United States Ronald Reagan. It reads as follows:

WHEREAS the Bible, the Word of God, has made a unique contribution in shaping the United States as a distinctive and blessed nation and people;

WHEREAS deeply held religious convictions springing from the Holy Scriptures led to the early settlement of our Nation;

WHEREAS Biblical teachings inspired concepts of civil government that are contained in our Declaration of Independence and Constitution of the United States;

WHEREAS many of our great national leaders--among them Presidents Washington, Jackson, Lincoln, and Wilson--paid tribute to the surpassing influence of the Bible in our country's development, as in the words of President Jackson that the Bible is "the Rock on which our Republic rests";

WHEREAS the history of our Nation clearly illustrates the value of voluntarily applying the teachings of the Scriptures in the lives of individuals, families, and societies; WHEREAS this Nation now faces great challenges that will test this Nation as it has never been tested before; and

WHEREAS that renewing our knowledge of and faith in God through Holy Scripture can strengthen us as a nation and a people: NOW, THEREFORE, be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the President is authorized and requested to designate 1983 as a national "Year of the Bible" in recognition of both the formative influence the Bible has been for our Nation, and our national need to study and apply the teachings of the Holy Scriptures. [33](#)

## **A Proclamation**

### **Proclamation 5018 -- Year of the Bible, 1983**

**February 3, 1983**

#### **By the President of the United States of America**

Of the many influences that have shaped the United States of America into a distinctive Nation and people, none may be said to be more fundamental and enduring than the Bible.

Deep religious beliefs stemming from the Old and New Testaments of the Bible inspired many of the early settlers of our country, providing them with the strength, character, convictions, and faith necessary to withstand great hardship and danger in this new and rugged land. These shared beliefs helped forge a sense of common purpose among the widely dispersed colonies -- a sense of community which laid the foundation for the spirit of nationhood that was to develop in later decades.

The Bible and its teachings helped form the basis for the Founding Fathers' abiding belief in the inalienable rights of the individual, rights which they found implicit in the Bible's teachings of the inherent worth and dignity of each individual. This same sense of man patterned the convictions of those who framed the English system of law inherited by our own Nation, as well as the ideals set forth in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

For centuries the Bible's emphasis on compassion and love for our neighbor has inspired institutional and governmental expressions of benevolent outreach such as private charity, the establishment of schools and hospitals, and the abolition of slavery.

Many of our greatest national leaders -- among them Presidents Washington, Jackson, Lincoln, and Wilson -- have recognized the influence of the Bible on our country's development. The plainspoken Andrew Jackson referred to the Bible as no less than "the rock on which our Republic rests." Today our beloved America and, indeed,

the world, is facing a decade of enormous challenge. As a people we may well be tested as we have seldom, if ever, been tested before. We will need resources of spirit even more than resources of technology, education, and armaments. There could be no more fitting moment than now to reflect with gratitude, humility, and urgency upon the wisdom revealed to us in the writing that Abraham Lincoln called "the best gift God has ever given to man . . . But for it we could not know right from wrong."

The Congress of the United States, in recognition of the unique contribution of the Bible in shaping the history and character of this Nation, and so many of its citizens, has by Senate Joint Resolution 165 authorized and requested the President to designate the year 1983 as the "Year of the Bible."

**Now, Therefore, I, Ronald Reagan, President of the United States of America, in recognition of the contributions and influence of the Bible on our Republic and our people, do hereby proclaim 1983 the Year of the Bible in the United States. I encourage all citizens, each in his or her own way, to reexamine and rediscover its priceless and timeless message.**

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this third day of February, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-three, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and seventh.

Ronald Reagan

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 10:10 a.m., February 3, 1983]

**President Reagan's Remarks at the  
Annual National Prayer Breakfast**

February 3, 1983

Thank you all very much, all our friends and distinguished guests here at the head table and all of you very distinguished people.

General Vessey [Gen. John W. Vessey, Jr., Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff], I'm terribly tempted to call for a vote right now on the

defense budget. [Laughter]

Nancy and I are delighted to be with you here this morning.

You know, on the way over, I remembered something that happened a long time ago when teachers could talk about things like religion in the classroom. And a very lovely teacher was talking to her class of young boys, and she asked, "How many of you would like to go to heaven?" And all the hands instantly shot into the air at once, except one, and she was astounded. And she said, "Charlie, you mean you don't want to go to heaven?" He said, "Sure, I want to go to heaven, but not with that bunch." [Laughter]

Maybe there's a little bit of Charlie in each of us. [Laughter] But somehow I don't think that wanting to go to heaven, but only on our terms, and certainly not with that other bunch, is quite what God had in mind. The prayer that I sometimes think we don't often use enough -- and one that I learned a few years ago and only after I had gotten into the business that I'm in -- is one of asking forgiveness for the resentment and the bitterness that we sometimes feel towards someone, whether it's in business dealings or in government or whatever we're doing, and forgetting that we are brothers and sisters and that each of them is loved equally by God as much as we feel that He loves us.

I'm so thankful that there will always be one day in the year when people all over our land can sit down as neighbors and friends and remind ourselves of what our real task is. This task was spelled out in the Old and the New Testament. Jesus was asked, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" And He replied, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. The second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Can we resolve to reach, learn, and try to heed the greatest message ever written -- God's word and the Holy Bible. Inside its pages lie all the answers to all the problems that man has ever known.

Now, I am assuming a new position; but I should warn our friends in the loyal opposition, this new job won't require me to leave the White House. With the greatest enthusiasm, I have agreed to serve as

honorary chairman for the Year of the Bible.

When we think how many people in the world are imprisoned or tortured, harassed for even possessing a Bible or trying to read one -- something that maybe we should realize how -- and take advantage of what we can do so easily. In its lessons and the great wealth of its words, we find comfort, strength, wisdom, and hope. And when we find ourselves feeling a little like Charlie, we might remember something that Abraham Lincoln said over a hundred years ago: "We have forgotten the gracious hand that preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own . . . we have become too proud to pray to the God that made us!" Well, isn't it time for us to say, "We're not too proud to pray"?

We face great challenges in this country, but we've faced great challenges before and conquered them. What carried us through was a willingness to seek power and protection from One much greater than ourselves, to turn back to Him and to trust in His mercy. Without His help, America will not go forward.

I have a very special old Bible. And alongside a verse in the Second Book of Chronicles there are some words, handwritten, very faded by now. And, believe me, the person who wrote those words was an authority. Her name was Nelle Wilson Reagan. She was my mother. And she wrote about that verse, "A most wonderful verse for the healing of the nations."

Now, the verse that she'd marked reads: "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 heal their land."

I know that at times all of us -- I do -- feel that perhaps in our prayers we ask for too much. And then there are those other times when we feel that something isn't important enough to bother God with it. Maybe we should let Him decide those things.

The war correspondent Marguerite Higgins, who received the Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting because of her coverage of the Korean war, among all her writings had an account one day of the

Fifth Company of marines who were part of an 18,000-man force that was in combat with a hundred thousand of the enemy. And she described an incident that took place early, just after dawn on a very cold morning. It was 42 degrees below zero. And the weary marines, half frozen stood by their dirty, mud-covered trucks, eating their breakfast from tin cans.

She saw one huge marine was eating cold beans with a trench knife. His clothes were frozen stiff as a board; his face was covered with a heavy beard and crusted with mud. And one of the little group of war correspondents who were on hand went up to him and said, "If I were God and could grant you anything you wished, what would you most like?" And the marine stood there for a moment, looking down at that cold tin of beans, and then he raised his head and said, "Give me tomorrow."

Now I would like to sign a proclamation which will make 1983 the Year of the Bible. And I want to thank Senator Bill Armstrong and Representative Carlos Moorhead and all those inside and outside of Congress who assisted them and made this all possible. Thank you, and God bless you. And I'm going down and sign the proclamation.

*Note: The President spoke at 9:03 a.m. in the International Ballroom at the Washington Hilton Hotel.*

**CONGRESS DECLARES THE BIBLE  
"THE WORD OF GOD"**

**97th Congress Joint Resolution**

**[S.J.Res. 165] 96 Stat. 1211**

**Public Law 97-280 - October 4, 1982**

Joint Resolution authorizing and requesting the President to proclaim 1983 as the "Year of the Bible."

**Whereas** the Bible, the Word of God, has made a unique contribution in shaping the United States as a distinctive and blessed nation and people;

**Whereas** deeply held religious convictions springing from the Holy Scriptures led to the early settlement of our Nation;

**Whereas** Biblical teachings inspired concepts of civil government that are contained in our Declaration of Independence and the constitution of the United States;

**Whereas** many of our great national leaders—among them Presidents Washington, Jackson, Lincoln, and Wilson—paid tribute to the surpassing influence of the Bible in our country's development, as the words of President Jackson that the Bible is “the rock on which our Republic rests”;

**Whereas** the history of our Nation clearly illustrates the value of voluntarily applying the teachings of the Scriptures in the lives of individuals, families, and societies;

**Whereas** this Nation now faces great challenges that will test this Nation as it has never been tested before; and

**Whereas** that renewing our knowledge of and faith in God through Holy Scripture can strengthen us as a nation and a people: Now, therefore, be it

**Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,** That the President is authorized and requested to designate 1983 as a national “Year of the Bible” in recognition of both the formative influence the Bible has been for our Nation, and our national need to study and apply the teachings of the Holy Scriptures.

Approved October 4, 1982.

1 U.S. Cong. & Adm. News '82-29 96 Stat. 1211

Legislative History - S.J. Res. 165:

Congressional Record. Vol 128 (1982)

Mar. 31 considered and passed Senate.

Sept. 21 Considered and passed House.

Comments by Pastor Sheldon Emry



**THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES BY AN ACT OF CONGRESS HAS DECLARED THAT THE BIBLE IS "THE WORD OF GOD" AND "HOLY SCRIPTURE" THE LAW-MAKING BODY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, THE U. S. CONGRESS, HAS OFFICIALLY DECLARED THE HOLY BIBLE TO BE "THE WORD OF GOD."**

Public Law 97-280 states "that renewing our knowledge of and faith in God through the Holy Scriptures can strengthen us as a nation and a people." **The Congress further found that the United States has a "national need to study and apply the teachings of the Holy Scriptures."**

Congress said, "the history of our Nation clearly illustrates the value of voluntarily applying the teachings, of the Scriptures in the lives of individuals, families, and societies." Therefore, disobedience to this Law should be discouraged in our own communities and in the nation at large. Under Public Law 97-280 any person or organization attempting in any way to prevent American citizens from voluntarily acquiring that "knowledge of and faith in God through the Holy Scriptures" 'would be attempting to weaken America. They would be guilty of trying to frustrate "our national need to study and apply the teachings of the Holy Scriptures." Such actions would be in violation of the plain intent of Public Law 97-280 and would probably make the instigators guilty of sedition against the United States of America.

Examples of disobedience to this Law would be any attempts to ban the Bible from the public schools, to actively oppose any Bible study group, or to interfere in any way with a Christian Church in its study and dissemination of "the teachings of the Holy Scriptures." Any interference with any mail carrying Bible related literature or with any radio or TV broadcast about the Bible would be in violation of this Law.

**On the positive side, filling that "national need to study and apply the teachings of the Holy Scriptures" should become one of the goals of those in government at all levels. Public servants should take action in their own departments or under their own realm of authority to conform to Public Law 97-280. All Elementary and High School**

Principals, Superintendents and College Presidents should be urged to take immediate steps to add courses of Bible study to their school's curriculum to bring them into conformity with the intent of the People's Congress. To strengthen our nation, courses of study of "the Holy Scriptures" should be made a part of every public and private school day.

The People of the United States, through their elected Representatives in the U.S. Congress have spoken. Public Law 97-280, with its forthright declaration that the Book which tells the story of Jesus Christ is "the Word of God," and its positive statements about the benefits to our nation and our People which come from "the Holy Scriptures," can be another significant step toward that day when "every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." America, whether she at this time understands the full significance of this or not, has proclaimed to her own citizens and to the World that America's well-being depends on how well she knows and applies the "teachings of the Holy Scripture." We should all pray that God Almighty will bless America by giving her elected Representatives in Congress the wisdom and the ability to act faithfully upon their own words as stated in Public Law 97-280.

**Executive Order 6100, EO 6100**

**DATE: 02-22-90 The President**

**International Year of Bible Reading - 1990**

**A Proclamation**

**By the President of the United States**

**George H. W. Bush**

Among the great books produced throughout the history of mankind, the Bible has been prized above all others by generations of men and women around the world -- by people of every age, every race, and every walk of life.

The Bible has had a critical impact upon the development of Western civilization. Western literature, art, and music are filled with images and ideas that can be traced to its pages. More important, our moral tradition has been shaped by the laws and teachings it contains. It was a biblical view of man -- one affirming the dignity and worth of the

human person, made in the image of our Creator -- that inspired the principles upon which the United States is founded. President Jackson called the Bible "the rock on which our Republic rests" because he knew that it shaped the Founding Fathers' concept of individual liberty and their vision of a free and just society.

The Bible has not only influenced the development of our Nation's values and institutions but also enriched the daily lives of millions of men and women who have looked to it for comfort, hope, and guidance. On the American frontier, the Bible was often the only book a family owned. For those pioneers living far from any church or school, it served both as a source of religious instruction and as the primary text from which children learned to read. The historic speeches of Abraham Lincoln and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., provide compelling evidence of the role Scripture played in shaping the struggle against slavery and discrimination. Today the Bible continues to give courage and direction to those who seek truth and righteousness. In recognizing its enduring value, we recall the words of the prophet Isaiah, who declared, "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand forever."

Containing revelations of God's intervention in human history, the Bible offers moving testimony to His love for mankind. Treasuring the Bible as a source of knowledge and inspiration, President Abraham Lincoln called this Great Book "the best gift God has given to man." President Lincoln believed that the Bible not only reveals the infinite goodness of our Creator, but also reminds us of our worth as individuals and our responsibilities toward one another.

President Woodrow Wilson likewise recognized the importance of the Bible to its readers. "The Bible is the word of life," he once said. Describing its contents, he added:

You will find it full of real men and women not only but also of the things you have wondered about and been troubled about all your life, as men have been always; and the more you will read it the more it will become plain to you what things are worthwhile and what are not, what things make men happy -- loyalty, right dealing, speaking the truth . . . and the things that are guaranteed to make men unhappy -- selfishness, cowardice, greed, and everything that is low

and mean. When you have read the Bible you will know that it is the Word of God, because you will have found it the key to your own heart, your own happiness, and your own duty.

President Wilson believed that the Bible helps its readers find answers to the mysteries and sorrows that often trouble the souls of men.

Cherished for centuries by men and women around the world, the Bible's value is timeless. Its significance transcends the boundaries between nations and languages because it carries a universal message to every human heart. This year numerous individuals and associations around the world will join in a campaign to encourage voluntary study of the Bible. Their efforts are worthy of recognition and support.

In acknowledgment of the inestimable value and timeless appeal of the Bible, the Congress, by Senate Joint Resolution 164, has designated the year 1990 as the "International Year of Bible Reading" and has authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of this year.

**NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE BUSH**, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim the year 1990 as the International Year of Bible Reading. I invite all Americans to discover the great inspiration and knowledge that can be obtained through thoughtful reading of the Bible.

**IN WITNESS WHEREOF**, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-second day of February, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and fourteenth.

PRESIDENT GEORGE H. W. BUSH

