

## THE BIBLE IN EARLY AMERICAN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Acts 19:8-10 says that for two years the apostle Paul taught the gospel of Christ in the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus—some sort of private school that served like a Christian school or college. Europe, for centuries in the dark ages, was Catholic Roman in the West, Greek in the East. Priests, friars, and monks taught in churches and colleges. In the West, the Bible was generally available only in Latin until the 14th century when John Wycliffe first translated the Bible from Latin into English, for which the Roman Catholic Church excommunicated him and after his death exhumed and burned his bones.



William Tyndale in 1525 translated the New Testament from Greek into English and in 1530 began translating the Old Testament from Hebrew into English; before he could finish it, he was strangled and burned at the stake by the Catholic authorities. In the 16th century the Bible was translated into several of the languages of Europe, often by Catholic priests or monks who taught the Bible in Europe's schools and universities and who were persecuted and often executed for their work. Several translations were made into English before the King James Version of 1611, and hundreds of Bible scholars and translators were killed for this work because the Catholic Church did not believe people in general should have direct access to the Scriptures.

After Protestantism came in, some European nations became Lutheran, Anglican, or Presbyterian, and some remained Catholic; they each had their State religion, and so State schools and universities were religious schools, with the Bible or parts of it as a textbook. Few people were educated in universities, however, and not many in schools. State religions were often nominal and are yet today. Europe for at least a century has been irreligious and secular. It is said that most feel the need for religion three times in their lives—to be christened at birth, to be married, and to be buried.

In England and Europe in general, those who deviated from the State religion (whether Catholic or Protestant) were persecuted, so Puritans and others who came to America to escape persecution in Europe brought their religion with them and practiced it in America. Most of them were more religious than other Europeans, and they took pains to own their copy of the Bible and to learn to read it; for that reason they established and sent their children to schools and colleges. "Every college established before the Revolutionary War was founded and headed by successive ministers who extolled the virtues of Puritan doctrine and promoted prayer as an inseparable part of a student's educational curriculum. (Moore, *One Nation Under God The History of Prayer in America*. Doubleday, 2005. 29-30). They also emphasized and promoted the Bible and built practical (not fancy) meetinghouses.

Puritans in the 17th and 18th centuries were strong Calvinists and avid Bible readers, and the colleges and universities they established are one reason why the Bible and religion were intertwined with education in U.S. history. In 1636 the Puritans (Congregationalists) established Harvard University in Cambridge MA; in 1701 they founded Yale University in New Haven, CN; and in 1769 they started Dartmouth in Hanover NH. Meanwhile Anglicans (Church of England) who had settled farther south on the east coast of America, established the College of William and Mary in Virginia (1693); King's College, which became Columbia University, in New York (1754); and the College of Charleston in Charleston, SC (1770). Presbyterians started the College of Philadelphia, which became the University of Pennsylvania, in 1740; the College of New Jersey, which became Princeton University, in 1746; and a large number of other colleges in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and elsewhere.

Baptists started Brown University in Providence, RI, in 1764. The Dutch Reformed Church founded Queen's College (which became Rutgers University) in New Brunswick NJ in 1766. All these colleges were designed to train ministers, doctors, lawyers, and merchants, but they also produced politicians and other leaders. Harvard produced John Adams and John Hancock; William & Mary graduated Thomas Jefferson; Princeton trained James Madison; Columbia/King's College was Alexander Hamilton's alma mater. Twelve members of Continental Congress and five delegates to the constitutional convention were graduates of Princeton. This shows the influence of religious colleges (all were that); and these leaders would promote Bible reading and study along with prayer in the schools like they had experienced in their colleges.

Colonial leaders, including ship captains, governors, and others in authority all required daily prayer and Bible readings on ships sailing to America and in the colonies here. Many, both among Puritans in New England and in Anglicans in Jamestown, required the populace to come to prayer meetings daily and fined them for not coming. Moore reports that a typical Puritan morning program included opening prayer, Scripture reading, exposition of Scripture, Psalm singing, sermon, prayer, more Psalm singing, and the blessing. Psalms were led by lining out," lengthening the service. Spoken prayers could last as long as the sermon, well over an hour, and most of the time they were delivered while the congregation stood uncomfortably in their pews. (Moore, p. 31).

The Bible played a prominent role in schools and colleges in early America. This article looks mostly at colleges; we plan for the next to deal largely with schools prior to college in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries and how the Bible was used in them.

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