

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication & Acknowledgments	x
Foreword	xi
Part One: George Washington Hidden In Plain Sight	
Prologue.	3
1. The War Behind.	5
2. Chosen: The Reluctant President	6
3. Stricken Yet Inspired.	7
4. The Amazing Impact of a Silent Endorsement.	9
5. Assassination by Defamation: Not a Deist	13
Part Two: Questions That Demand Explanation	
6. Monongahela: Miraculous Protections in Battle?	37
7. Sally Fairfax: A Forbidden Love?	39
8. Slavery: Washington's Final Battle?	43
9. Freemasonry: Then and Now?	46
Part Three: God's Invisible Hand Clearly Seen	
10. Two Kingdom Builders Who Never Met	55
11. What Did John Teach? Brown's Doctrine	60
Part Four: The Unending Story	
12. The Most Popular Study Bible in the World.	69
13. How England's Sunday (Only) Schools Saved America	71
Appendixes	
The Historic Frontispiece (by Dr. Peter Lillback)	81
Who Told the President?	83
Declaration of Independence; Why Not Jefferson's Original?	85
The Mystery of "The Missing Half-Page"	88
The "George Washington Bible" as a Supplemental US History Curriculum	91
Bibliography	96
Family Tree Chart	105
Family Bonus Pages	107
Brown's Self-Interpreting Bible (1792/New York)	113

DEDICATION & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Karen, my beloved helpmate of more than 40 years. Your well-timed and generous gifts of godly wisdom and encouragement have been more important to me than I can express. Thank you for leaving behind your vocation as a public-school educator to take on the honorable career of homeschool teacher to our own children: April, Kristin, Analisa, and Taylor. Watching them and their excellent spouses apply what you taught, and adding their own passions and life experiences in disciplining our ensemble of distinctly unique grandchildren is a blessing from the Creator!

And in appreciation of my paternal great-grandparents Leonard & Emma Payne, whom I never met. They left everything familiar in the British Isles and arrived via steamship at Boston Harbor in 1911 with a big dream, a little luggage, and a giant Bible. That treasured copy of God's Word, which was a KJV *Self-Interpreting Bible*, was bequeathed a quarter century later to their daughter, my grandmother Clara Jane Payne Mason. Three decades after that, Grandma Mason passed the family Bible to my father Russell, and five more decades later it was passed to me. It was years before I discovered that I had been entrusted with something extremely valuable. Perhaps not in terms of money, but certainly in terms of heritage—both ancestral and spiritual. That brittle book with its faint smells of dust and traces of Welsh family history was full of unknowns. Anxious to understand the religious beliefs and emigration mysteries of my ancestors, it set me on an expedition I could never have imagined. In the process I found amazing facts about the nearly forgotten influence of America's first president upon the Christian growth of his generation, and many generations that followed. May *The Forgotten George Washington Bible*—with its unabridged facsimile of the earliest US printing of Brown's *Self-Interpreting Bible*—launch your own journey of discovery. I pray that you will realize wonderful new things about your family heritage, your country, and above all about the gospel of Jesus Christ, our Creator and Savior!

Special acknowledgements and sincere thanks are extended to the following individuals for key assistance and encouragement related to this unusual project. Although space does not allow for specific descriptions of the story behind each name listed, this project may never have been completed without the strategic part that each one played. May God bless you for your many invaluable kindnesses.

Dr. Diana L. Severance (Director/Dunham Bible Museum)
Mary V. Thompson (Research Historian Emerita/George Washington's Mount Vernon)
Dr. Peter Lillback (President/Westminster Theological Seminary)
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David Barton (historian, Founder/WallBuilders)
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Lauren P.M. (unlocker of mysteries)
Israel Wayne (author, speaker)

Researcher & General Editor



Dale Mason is a husband, father, and grandfather. Never without at least a couple new projects in his mental pipeline, Mason strives to bring the soul-saving message of the Bible to life for all ages. In his multi-faceted career as a successful author, producer, and publisher he has helped bring hundreds of books, articles, films, and videos to life. As founding Publisher of the award-winning *Answers* and *Kids Answers* magazines and author of the acclaimed hardcover *The 10-Minute Bible Journey*, Mason enjoyed two decades as a vice president at Answers in Genesis (home to the Ark Encounter, and the Creation Museum) before “retiring” to research and write full-time.

It is Dale's hope that, as you read the well-documented true stories behind George Washington and his “forgotten” Bible, you and your loved ones will grow to appreciate the transformation that took place in the life of America's most-loved founder, the “father of his country.”

Mason has served on the boards of various ministries, including National Religious Broadcasters, International Christian Visual Media, and the Evangelical Free Church of America, as well as in local congregations where his family has attended across the US.

FOREWORD

You hold in your hands an extraordinary accomplishment. After many years of being nearly forgotten, a truly significant edition of the Bible, entitled *The Self-Interpreting Bible*, by Rev. John Brown of Scotland, has reappeared. By the diligence of Dale Mason, it is again available. This Bible held an important place in the life of early America.

In my research on the faith of our founding president, George Washington, I came across the fact that his name was printed in large bold letters as the first on a list of numerous sponsors who invested to bring it to print in the newly formed United States. Brown's *Self-Interpreting Bible* was already highly regarded in the United Kingdom.

When doing my research on Washington, I was stunned to discover that as President, Washington had put his name on such a project.

This, however, was consistent with what I had realized after reading the many writings of Washington—he was in fact, a Bible reader. This is evidenced throughout his vast writings. Like many Americans at that time, he was biblically literate.

Washington's personal Bible reading is substantiated by some 200 biblical allusions and quotations I have documented from his writings that span the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. He held a deep respect for the Bible, referring to it as not only the Bible, but also as Holy Writ, the word of God, and Scripture. And when he took his oath of office he placed his hand upon the Bible. Following the historic Anglican custom, he kissed the Scriptures when he took his oath. He added, as was the custom of Virginians taking an oath in those days, the words that have been followed by other Presidents, "So help me God."

There is a compelling reason why George Washington sponsored and welcomed this Bible. He firmly believed it would support the viability of his new nation. For example, on April 30, 1789, the new president said in his First Inaugural Address,

Since we ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smiles of Heaven, can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right, which Heaven itself has ordained: And since the preservation of the sacred fire of liberty, and the destiny of the Republican model of Government, are justly considered as deeply, perhaps as finally staked, on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people.

Washington well understood that "the eternal rules of order and right" so needed for the "sacred Fire of liberty" were found in the Bible.

Washington knew the central importance of the Bible from his reading, and from hearing many biblically-based sermons, some of which he read weekly to his wife on Sunday afternoons taken from the collection of sermons he had bound in his library.

All of this is said to underscore that Dale Mason has done a singularly important service for Americans today, by recovering this classic work and reissuing it, as it is nothing less than one of the premier sources for the founding values of America.

His production of Brown's Bible is the fruit of extensive research that he presents through a carefully written introduction. Together, they provide a rediscovered and renewed gem that will enlighten scholars and bless Bible readers, indeed, all who desire to appreciate the critical role that the Bible played in the formation of America.

The appearance of this publication offers all of us a triple blessing: first, it uncovers the lost Bible of John Brown with all of its unique strengths as a self-interpreting Bible. Second, it uncovers significant history of this important version of the Bible that has not been documented until Dale Mason's research. And finally, it again celebrates the Bible that George Washington sought to provide for his young nation, as manifested by his bold and visible subscription for its publication.

May the Lord smile on this work for generations to come. Every family in America would be blessed to have and to study this Bible — reborn as *The Forgotten George Washington Bible*—the one that helped President George Washington kindle America's "sacred Fire of Liberty."

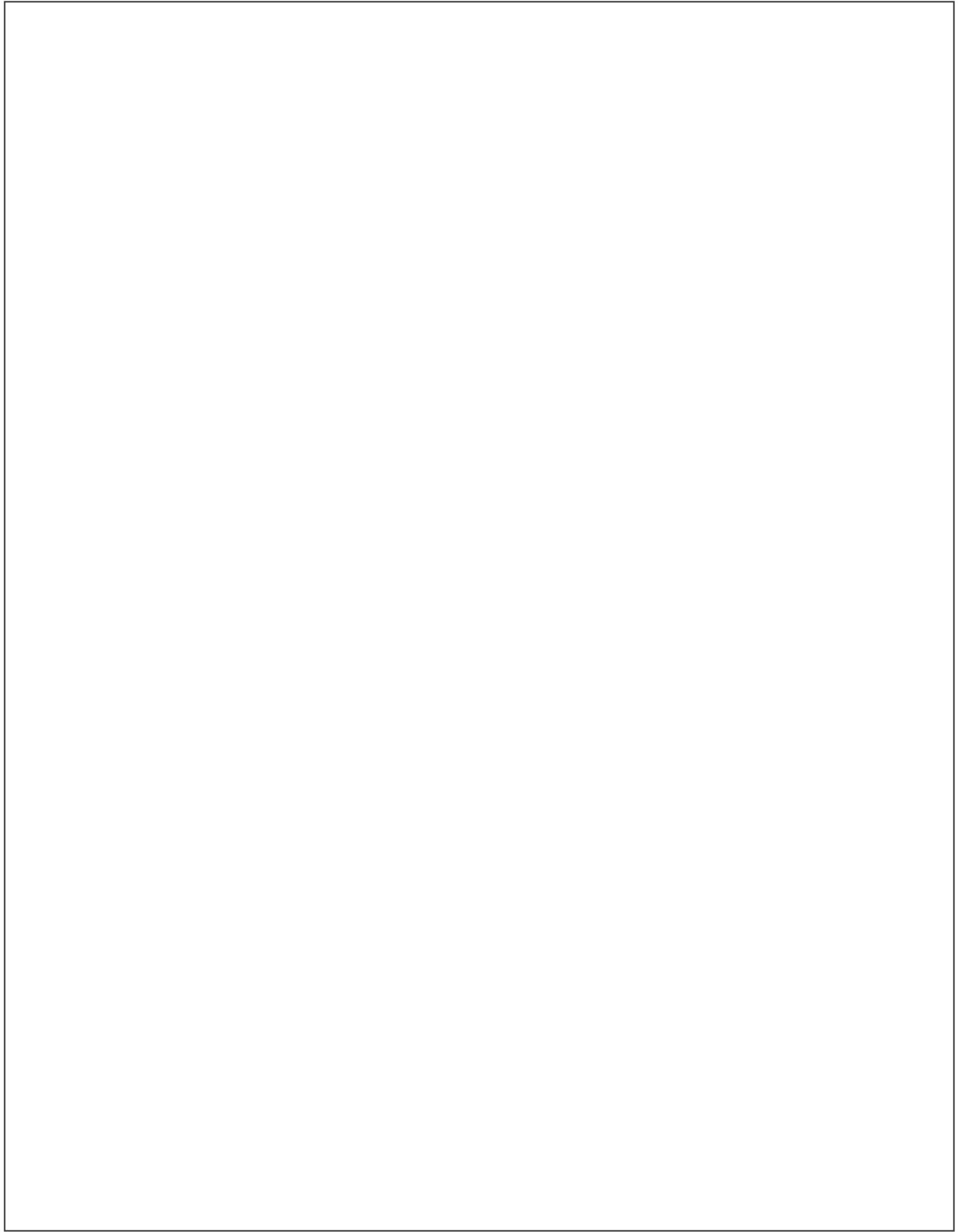
With gratitude,

Dr. Peter A. Lillback

Founder of The Providence Forum

President of Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia

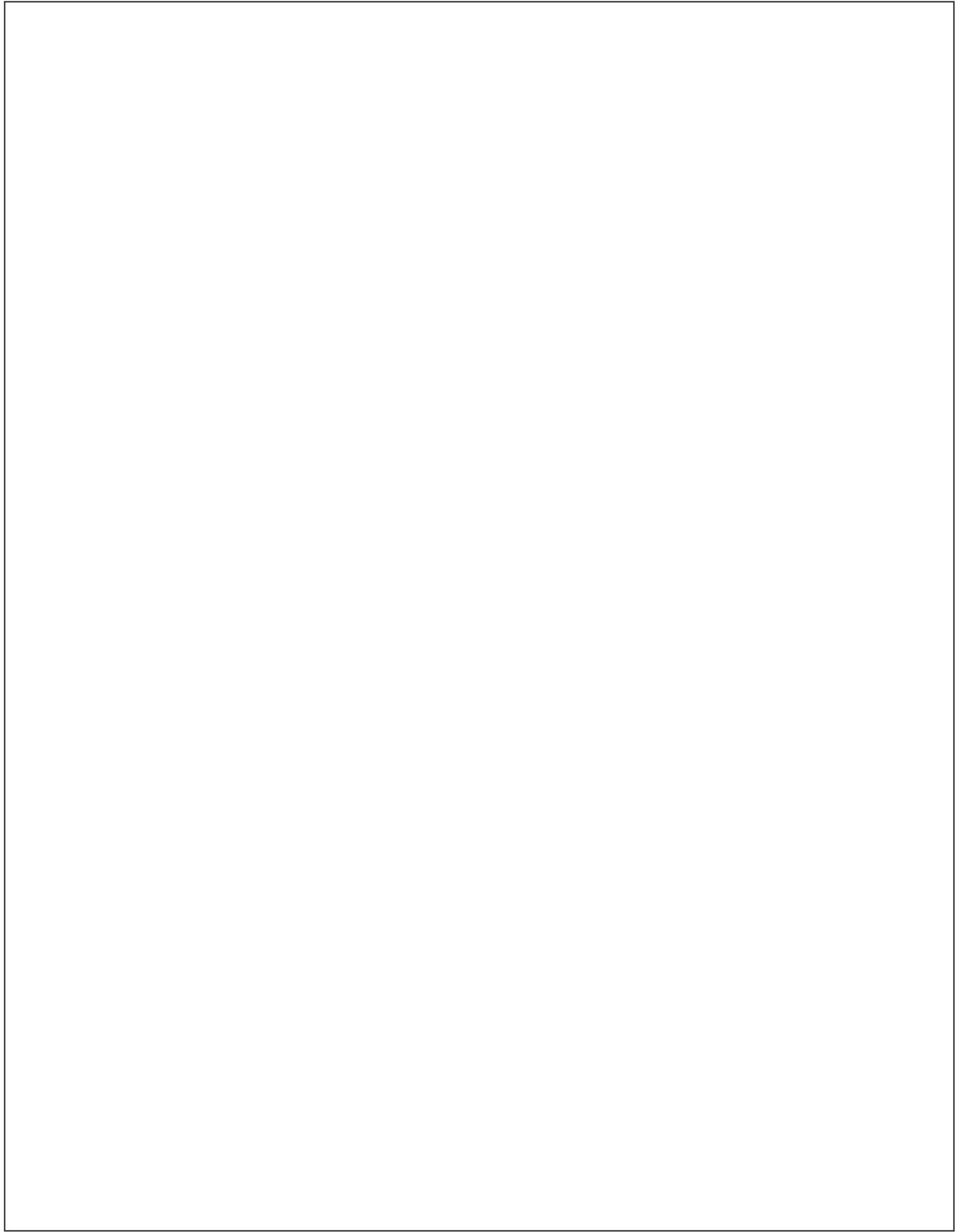
Author of *George Washington's Sacred Fire*.



PART ONE

GEORGE
WASHINGTON
HIDDEN IN
PLAIN SIGHT





PROLOGUE

George Washington, the first president of the United States, and Rev. John Brown of Scotland were each revolutionaries in their own right.

Although they never met, the president and the pastor lived at the same time and there was a sovereignly ordained camaraderie between them. Separated by the treacherous waters of the North Atlantic Ocean, their quiet yet immensely significant efforts to equip ordinary families with God's written Word impacted myriad homes for generations to come.

John Brown, the pastor-theologian whose name appears on the title page of his mammoth work, the *Self-Interpreting Bible*, entered the world in 1722. He began life in a tiny Scottish village steeped in poverty. After losing his parents before the age of twelve, young John earned food and shelter by working for an elderly farmer. Academically gifted and passionate about the Bible, John became a pastor in the town of Haddington, near Scotland's cold North Sea coastline.

Meanwhile, across the deep sea, George Washington was born in 1732. He was the fifth child of Augustine Washington Sr., a prosperous yet widowed Virginia tobacco planter, and the first child of Augustine's new wife, a sincere young Christian woman named Mary Ball Washington.

Like Brown, Washington's father died when George was only eleven. Unlike Brown, George continued to receive an education that, while not at the level of his older brothers, allowed his talent for mathematics to become evident. However, Washington believed his education was deficient and he worked throughout his life to make up for that deficiency by reading and amassing a library of more than 1,200 titles.

At twenty years of age, Washington was appointed a major in the Virginia provincial militia. He participated in the French and Indian War of the 1750s and credited his survival to God's providential hand. The wealthy plantation farmer and war veteran became a leader in his church and an elected member of the House of Burgesses. He also helped to write the Fairfax Resolves, proposals that included a plan to end the African slave trade in Virginia. In 1775, he was asked to lead the soldiers of the colonies in America's war for independence from Great Britain, which continued until 1783. Only a few years later, he was unanimously chosen to be the first President of the United States. His unparalleled role in early American history earned him the moniker the "father of his country."¹

The Writing, Publishing, and Popularization of the Self-Interpreting Bible

Meanwhile, John Brown focused on being a pastor, husband, and father. He wrote several significant books—including his massive *Self-Interpreting Bible* with cross-references, study helps, and devotional homilies. This unprecedented tool enabled the common man to understand the scriptures by letting its myriad cross-referenced verses and passages interpret themselves. Quietly and skillfully wielding the sword of the Spirit,² Brown ultimately helped launch a worldwide revolution of hearts.

With its New York printing, Brown's study Bible effectively "jumped the ocean." This was largely due to Washington's name that appeared atop the list of 1,279 otherwise alphabetically listed men and women who joined him in subscribing. Those 1,279 people made this first American edition of Brown's family study Bible possible. The *Self-Interpreting Bible* went from obscurity to

popularity and became a worldwide phenomenon within a generation. Without further explanation, his name served as Washington's silent yet powerful endorsement.

Both George Washington and John Brown were imperfect yet honorable and dedicated men. One threw off the fetters of poverty and illiteracy to become a revolutionary *pastor and Bible teacher* in Scotland. The other, born into a culture where enslavement was normal, became a revolutionary *soldier and farmer* who stood against the heavy hand of a tyrannical king and set free, at the end of his life, all whom he had the legal right to liberate.

Though Brown and Washington never met, their mutual desire to equip ordinary families with the extraordinary and life-changing truth of the Bible intersected and drove decisions that are among their most important legacies. They were both leaders of immense influence by their commitment to the transformative power and authority of God's written Word.

Jacob Brush's Bible

Numerous leaders of the early American Republic joined George Washington in publicly attaching their names to this specific family study Bible. Buried within that extensive list of subscribers is the name of a young circuit-riding preacher. With little formal training, an unmarried war veteran named Jacob Brush trekked for more than a decade by horseback through both dangers and drudgeries to preach the soul-saving gospel of Jesus Christ. In churches, cabins, meadows—wherever a family or a crowd could be gathered in the lonely forests of Long Island, the village of Brooklyn, and throughout New York and surrounding states—the heart of this prayerful preacher beat strong for his Savior.³ Yet Rev. Brush's life on earth ended by epidemic when he was only 33. Bequeathed in a hastily written deathbed will to his younger half-brother John⁴ only hours before Jacob's homegoing, this Bible eventually passed from one generation to the next. After more than two hundred and twenty-five years, it was abandoned to the public and auctioned along with the remaining possessions of one of Jacob Brush's distant, deceased relatives. Although this copy may have been long forgotten by men, God's plan for its impact was far from over.

Today, as though peering into the past, the facsimile in this volume is an exact duplicate of Brush's personal Bible, as originally published in 1792. It was perhaps carried in leather saddlebags to cabins and churches throughout the "horse preacher's" circuit of New York, New Jersey, and Delaware. Undoubtedly, this illustrated study Bible—purchased with the meager salary of that itinerant preacher—was prized and referenced by Brush diligently for sermon preparation, enjoyed for personal devotions, and very possibly read by fathers to families with whom he lodged. It was probably also near his bed during the final candlelit hours of his earthly life.

With tremendous care, the original was electronically scanned, its pages digitally enhanced to a near-original look, then re-printed and bound into the facsimile and historical overview that you now have before you.

Printing was very different in the 1700s. Imperfections occasionally came about while hand-setting the metal type, inking the block, aligning paper on the heavy wooden printing press,⁵ then pulling the large screw to compress each side of each leaf, and finally hand-colating the nearly eleven hundred large pages for each of the 1,567 subscribed Bibles. This new printing is a historical snapshot, and those misalignments, ink spots, tiny fuzzy words, and other imperfections are preserved

just as they were bound into Jacob Brush's 10.5 x 16.5 x 3.25-inch original—the content and technical quality of which was virtually identical to President George Washington's copy.

The Self-Interpreting Bible's Influence on American History

The *Self-Interpreting Bible's* subscribers represented a highly diverse cross-section of society. Initially released in America during the early years of the Second Great Awakening, it became a staple item in countless homes, eventually impacting millions of people.

Also, during the 1790s and the early decades of the 1800s, "Sunday-only schools" were launched in America's burgeoning textile factories and other areas.⁶ Education and evangelization focused on impoverished children who toiled from Monday through Saturday, often in dangerous conditions. Even enslaved men and women who worshipped God alongside the very people who claimed them as property are counted among those who prayed to receive Jesus Christ as Savior during the great spiritual awakening of that time.⁷

Chapter 13 documents some of the near-forgotten realities of what contributed to the amazing increase in general and biblical literacy across the US in the early 1800s.

Then, beginning mainly in the 1820s, thousands of young men and women were inspired by the impassioned pleas of itinerant ministers, camp-meeting evangelists, and others to teach reading and writing and to share the good news of salvation with kids in the rugged lands to the west. These young missionaries left the safety and comforts of their eastern homes and traveled hundreds of miles through the Shenandoah Valley and across the Allegheny Mountains, boarded river boats down the Ohio, walked into remote regions of Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and eventually even beyond the great Mississippi River.⁸

Letters sent to their concerned and prayerful families back east revealed that these missionaries taught biblically illiterate children on the dirt floors of simple log cabins, as well as in tobacco barns and under God's sweeping canopy of sun and clouds in meadows and forests when no manmade shelter from the weather was available. For many frontier families, Sunday-only schools were the first and only opportunity to be educated and hear and respond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

By the 1840s, denominations were organizing Sunday-only schools under the leadership of Sunday school mission boards: mainly Baptist, Presbyterian, and Methodist. Through tens of thousands of small groups who met one day a week for several hours of schooling, poor and illiterate children and adults were taught to read from the Bible and specially designed reading books. They learned to write and memorize the Bible's Ten Commandments, live out gospel-based morals, and, especially in the more remote and rural situations, add and subtract.

Over time, as villages took shape, community weekday schools replaced Sunday-only schools. Female missionaries became schoolmarms, and unmarried or widowed pioneer men often courted them. Through it all, the Bible was almost universally the most prominent and most-read book in the homes, schools, and churches that would follow. Initially, nearly all Sunday-only schools used the Holy Scriptures—often the *Self-Interpreting Bible* or one of the many similar family Bibles which followed—as their sole or primary textbook. Eventually, in this era long before tax-funded public education, Christian societies were founded specifically to launch Bible-based "Sunday school" meetings which taught the three Rs (Reading, wRiting, and aRithmetic) to poor and wayward children throughout the expansive forests, plains, and hills of the rapidly growing United States, from Kentucky west to

Nebraska. Their foundational and multi-decade influence was monumental.

Simultaneous with the Sunday-only school movement, the Second Great Awakening continued to see many ministers from various denominations preach the gospel of Jesus and passionately declare the need to submit to the Bible's authority by living a truly transformed life. During this time, literacy increased, and movements against slavery and intoxication grew to a fever pitch.⁹ A similar awakening spread throughout Great Britain.¹⁰

America's spiritual awakening was real, and it was fueled in part by the God-honoring character of men like John Brown of Haddington, Jacob Brush, the circuit riding preacher, and by the Scripture-affirming endorsements and proclamations of the most beloved of America's founding fathers—George Washington. That reality is evidenced in the story behind this nearly forgotten Bible and the incredible cultural changes which ensued.

— Dale Mason (author/general editor)