

Good News

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Biblical specialist compares ancient texts to modern day translations

By DEBRA HELTON

Dr. Jewell Smith, owner and curator of the Biblical Heritage collection archives headquartered in Orlando, Fla., has amassed an incredible selection of Biblical texts dating from 2,000 B.C. to the present.

The collection includes ancient manuscripts written entirely by hand or printed via the earliest of printing machines in an immense array of languages (Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Armenian, Coptic, German, Syrian as well as English) on an incredible assortment of materials: vellum, parchment, animal skins and papyrus.

After spending 30 years as a Baptist minister, Smith had acquired an interest in the historical aspects of his religion that caused him to begin studying the history of the source: the Bible.

Indeed, much of the history of scripture is enmeshed in the stories of those who were martyred in protecting (and furthering) the Gospel. Thus began the operation that has today blossomed into the full-time ministry of accompanying the collection throughout the United States and abroad showing the collection and telling of the history that surrounds the Bibles included therein.

Today, those with more colorful histories are among

those that are of greater value - as are those that were present on the scene prior to, and during, those periods in our history when Bibles (and those that helped in circulating them) were subject to public burnings.

The Tyndale Bibles, for instance, were of two specific groups: those that were published when William Tyndale first began distributing his Bibles. He published 3,000 Bibles prior to King Henry VIII's order to burn all Bibles. In an unbelievable display of efficiency, King Henry's men succeeded in burning all but one of those First Edition Bibles.

Tyndale continued in his mission, however, and published another 15,000 Tyndale Bibles before he was captured and burned at the stake for his devotion in about 1510 A.D.

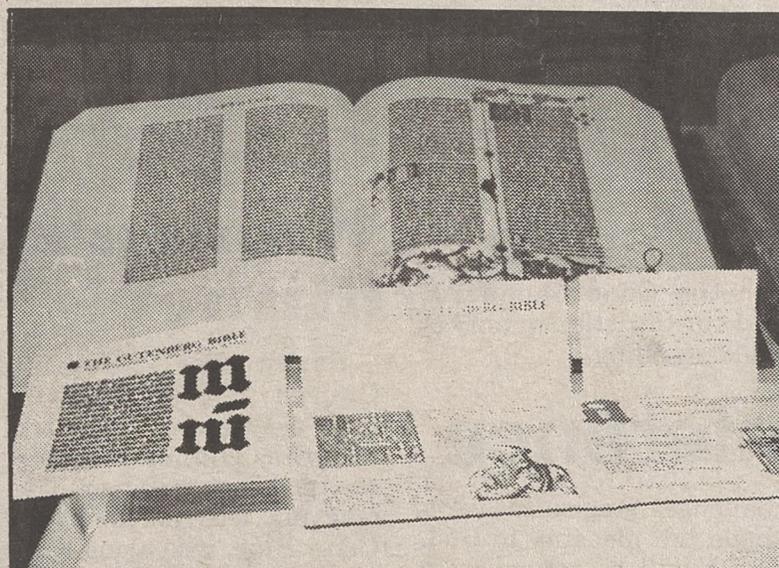
Those Bibles of Tyndale's second batch are also considered to be of great value - but the one first edition is virtually priceless. It is today the property of the Baptist Museum in London, England.

One of Smith's more recent acquisition's includes a beautiful scroll, with rolls of 2 and 1/2 feet in length from the top handle to the bottom one, with the scripture imprinted on deerskin.

Incredibly soft and pliable, the scroll was smug-



Smith tends to the display of this 65 pound edition included in his collection.



This reproduction Gutenberg Bible is representative of the detail and beauty of the original - now valued at almost \$20 million.

gled out of Russia only three years ago by Jews returning to Jerusalem.

"They cut it into 'wearable' lengths and wrapped

it around their bodies to escape detection," Smith explains. "In Jerusalem, they met and rejoined the pieces in their appropriate order

so that of the original piece, and its value remains intact" The scroll will soon go to paleographers for dating.

Smith's collection even includes a photographically reproduced copy of the Dead Sea Scrolls believed to be dated about 400 B.C.

"Any time we have an addition to the collection that is not an authentic item, we are careful to document that fact and note thereon, the means by which it was reproduced," Smith explains. "We only travel with between five to ten percent of the actual collection, also. Most of it remains at the archives in Orlando where it is displayed in a more protected environment."

What began as the service of taking a collection of ancient Bibles for viewing throughout the world, has become a ministry of equal, if not greater, importance.

Smith's reputation as an authority on scripture has led into the issue of our modern day translations and their acceptance in the modern world.

According to Smith, there are ever increasing numbers of 'new' Biblical texts flooding the marketplace. While these versions are, indeed, easier to read and perhaps to understand than the more widely known and accepted Kings James versions, these new editions

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