



et lamina pretis earum. Hec sunt mandata  
atque iudicia que mandavit dominus per manum  
moysi ad filios israel in campibus  
joab supra iordanem contra ihericho

*Explicit liber numerorum  
Incipit liber deuteronomii*

Et sunt verba que locutus  
est moyses ad omnem israel trans  
iordanem in solitudine  
terre campestris contra  
mare rubrum: inter

pharan et thophel et laban et aseroth  
Vbi auri est plurimum Undecim diebus  
de ore per viam montis seir usque ad  
barne. Quadragesimo anno undeci

# The Gutenberg Bible guide



HARRY RANSOM  
CENTER

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

# The Gutenberg Bible

Printed by Johann Gutenberg  
ca. 1454–55

THE GUTENBERG BIBLE is the first complete book printed with moveable metal type. Prior to its printing in 1454 or 1455, books were either copied by hand or printed from engraved wooden blocks, processes that could take months or years to complete. Gutenberg's invention revolutionized the distribution of knowledge by making it possible to produce many copies of a work in a short amount of time. Gutenberg's shop produced between 150 and 180 copies of the book, most printed on paper and a few on vellum (scraped calfskin). The Ransom Center copy is on paper.

The Ransom Center's Gutenberg Bible is one of 48 complete copies in the world. Of these complete copies, five are located in the United States; the other four copies are at the Library of Congress, Harvard University, Yale University, and the Morgan Library & Museum.

## Gutenberg and his Printing Methods

Very little evidence survives in the public record of Gutenberg or his invention. He was born in Mainz, Germany, where he lived most of his life. He and a business partner quarreled over money matters, presumably in regard to their investment in the development of printing and the production of the Bible. Later in his life, Gutenberg was given a pension by the Archbishop of Mainz and lived comfortably until his death in 1468.



Gutenberg invented a wooden printing press that was modeled on the winepress used in Germany. He also devised a means of casting individual pieces of metal type, which were used to print words on the page, although there is still considerable debate about the process he used. The textura (“woven”) typeforms used by Gutenberg were modeled on letterforms used in manuscripts of his day.

## Language and Version of the Bible

In Gutenberg’s time, the standard language of the Bible in Western Europe was Latin, and the most common version was St. Jerome’s translation, known as the Vulgate.

## Binding

The binding of calfskin over wooden boards is not original but can be dated to 1600. Because of deterioration, the spine was replaced in the first part of the twentieth century.

## Special Features of the Center's Copy

Like most copies of the Gutenberg Bible, this one has been bound in two volumes. The first volume contains a series of elaborate and colorfully illuminated initial letters at the beginning of each book of the Bible. The second volume, apparently decorated by a different artist, features red and blue rubricated initials. Inscriptions in the margins indicate that the Bible was read from on a daily basis in a Carthusian monastery. Other unique features include a papermaker's hair embedded in a page and the date "1589" scratched into the gold illumination at the beginning of the Book of Deuteronomy.

## Previous Owners

The Ransom Center's copy of the Bible was purchased from the Pforzheimer Foundation of New York in 1978 to honor Dr. Harry Hunt Ransom, the Center's founder. Before that, it belonged to several distinguished book collectors. Little is known about its history prior to 1800, but it almost certainly belonged to Carthusian and Jesuit monasteries in the southern part of Germany.

## Value

The Bible is probably the most valuable single artifact belonging to The University of Texas System. The last complete copy was sold in 1978, about the same time the Ransom Center purchased its copy.

# The Gutenberg Bible is on permanent display at the Harry Ransom Center.

The Harry Ransom Center is an internationally renowned humanities research library and museum. Its extensive holdings provide a unique record of the creative process of writers and artists, deepening our understanding of literature, photography, film, art, and the performing arts. Thousands of scholars, students, and cultural enthusiasts from around the world study materials from the collections each year. These collections also inspire original exhibitions and programs that offer visitors opportunity for enrichment, discovery, and delight. The Ransom Center advances the study of the arts and humanities and fosters an environment where culture thrives.



“That which has been  
done is that which  
shall be done: there  
is nothing new under  
the sun.”

Ecclesiastes 1:9

Visit [www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/permanent/gutenberg](http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/permanent/gutenberg) to view an online exhibition of the Gutenberg Bible and to purchase the digitized Gutenberg Bible on CD-ROM.

ABOVE: Quote on the exterior of the Gutenberg Bible's permanent exhibition display  
LEFT: The Gutenberg Bible on view in the Ransom Center lobby. Photo by Eric Beggs  
FRONT: Illuminated letter from Deuteronomy (volume I)  
INTERIOR: Illuminated letter from Judges (volume I)

Harry Ransom Center  
21st and Guadalupe Streets  
The University of Texas at Austin  
512-471-8944  
[www.hrc.utexas.edu](http://www.hrc.utexas.edu)

Admission is free.

Open Tuesday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
with extended Thursday evening hours to 7 p.m.  
Saturday and Sunday from noon to 5 p.m.

Though the Ransom Center's exhibition galleries are closed Mondays, the First Photograph and the Gutenberg Bible are on permanent display in the lobby and can be viewed on Mondays.