

At the end of the 20th Century, numerous publications discussed who they believed were the most important people of the millennium. Johannes Gutenberg, the inventor of the Printing Press, was in everybody's top 10, and many voted him as The Most Important Man of the Millennium!

Johannes Gutenberg was born in the city of Mainz near the shores of the Rhine River. His father, Friel Gensfleisch, married Else Von Gutenberg, who gave her name to her second son, Johannes. As a young boy, Johannes developed an insatiable appetite for knowledge, reading every book he came across. During his teen years, Johannes and his family were forced into exile twice due to political in-fighting and conflicts. Johannes travelled from town to town, studying monuments and visiting men who were renowned for their knowledge in science, art or the trades. He travelled alone, on foot, carrying a knapsack with his precious books and clothes. As an itinerant student, he travelled throughout Italy, Switzerland, Germany and Holland. His love for God grew and deepened the more he read and studied. And the further he travelled, the greater his vision developed of spreading the Word of God to all people.

One day, in Haarlam, his friend, Lawrence Koster, handed him a piece of wood that had letters carved on it, wrapped in a piece of parchment. Some of the sap from the greenwood had hardened into the relief shape of the letters on the parchment. As Johannes saw this simple plaque of wood an inspiration flashed into his heart and mind with the force of lightening. The possibility of producing a machine that could print the Word of God welled up inside him. Gutenberg travelled up the Rhine to Strassburg and closeted himself in his workroom.

He fashioned his own tools, developed plans, tested and tried, reorganized and attempted again and again to produce an effective printing machine. Starting with moveable wooden types, he bored through the side of each with a small hole to string together the letters of the alphabet cut in relief on one side.

Johannes Gutenberg seemed to understand something of the immense importance of this invention upon industry, society and civilisation itself. When he contracted a skillful craftsman, Conrad Saspach, to create a full size version of his scale model, the craftsman responded: *But it is just a simple press you are asking from me Master Hans.*

*Yes,* replied Gutenberg, *It is a press, certainly, but a press from which shall soon flow in inexhaustible streams the most abundant and most marvelous liquor that has ever flowed to relieve the thirst of man! Through it God will spread His Word. A spring of pure truth shall flow from it! Like a new star, it shall scatter the darkness of ignorance, and cause a light heretofore unknown to shine among men.*

Despite his great vision, Johannes was acutely aware of his limitations. He was just one man, with very limited resources. He was concerned about his work being discovered and possibly pirated for lesser goals. He worked on the mechanics of printing secretly, moving his workshop into the ruins of an old deserted monastery. He spent sleepless nights wearing himself out in pursuit of his invention. He engraved his movable types in wood and projected casting them in metal. He studied hard to find the means of enclosing them in forms, whether of wood or of iron, to make the types into words, phrases, lines and to leave spaces on the paper. He invented coloured mediums, oily and yet able to dry, to reproduce the characters, brushes and dabbers that spread the ink on the letters, boards to hold them, and screws and weights to compress them. He invested months and years, and his entire fortune in these experiments. There were many disappointments, failures and frustrations before he developed a model press, which combined all elements for an efficient printing press.

The first book to be printed had to be the Holy Bible, the second was *Psalter* (the first book to ever bear a date: 1457).

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Gutenberg Bible, completed in 1455, was the first book ever published with movable type. Less than 200 copies were originally printed and only about 50 have survived to this day. Today, the original Gutenberg Bible is considered one of the finest works of art. In 1978 a two-volume edition of the Gutenberg Bible was sold for over \$2 million, the highest price ever paid for a book.

At first the Roman Catholic church opposed the Printing Press. For political reasons, and for the survival of his invention, Gutenberg wrote a dedication to pope Paul II on behalf of the Printing Press: *Among the number of blessings which we ought to praise God is this invention, which enables the poorest to procure libraries at a low price. Is it not a great glory that volumes that used to cost 100 pieces of gold, are now to be bought for four, or even less, and that the fruits of genius multiply over all the earth!*

Soon Gutenberg could not sustain the demand for printing in his small workshop. He was forced to develop partnerships with successful businessmen, who unfortunately did not have the integrity of the inventor. These businessmen hijacked his invention and stole everything from Gutenberg. But, despite these trials and betrayals, Gutenberg maintained his integrity and honour, maintaining a faithful Christian witness to the end.

Gutenberg's invention of the Printing Press is rightly classified as one of the greatest events in the history of the world. The Printing Press prepared the way for the Reformation and the progress of modern science and literature. The Printing Press became an indispensable tool in the fulfillment of the Great Commission and the development of universal education.

Gutenberg's invention enabled multiplied millions to discover for themselves great literature and, most importantly, the Word of God.

This one invention made possible the greatest Revival of faith and freedom ever experienced. The inventing of the Printing Press played a key role in mobilising the Reformation. Without printing, it is questionable whether there would have been a Protestant Reformation. A century before Luther, Wycliffe and Hus had inspired dedicated movements for Bible study and Reform, but the absence of adequate printing technology severely limited the distribution of their writings. As a result their ideas did not spread as rapidly, or as far, as they could have done. By God's grace, the Printing Press provided the Reformers, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, William Tyndale, John Calvin and others with the spiritual weapons they needed to make the Reformation succeed.

***Making disciples of all the nations, teaching obedience to all things*** Matthew 28:19