

Bibles unbound: the material semantics of nineteenth-century scriptural illustration

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In late January 1836, advertisements began appearing in the British press for *The Pictorial Bible*, to be published by Charles Knight in weekly parts beginning on 1 March. The announcement noted *The Pictorial Bible's* contiguity to the 'Picture-Bible' (*Bilder Bibel*) then in vogue in Germany, before explicating what would be the distinguishing characteristics of the new publication:

The immense treasures of Art which the great Painters have bequeathed to us on Sacred Subjects will be here opened to all, as far as they are capable of being diffused through the medium of wood-engraving; the Landscape Scenes will be represented with that fidelity which we are now able to realize through the labours of recent Travellers; and the other objects, whether of Natural History, of Costume, or of Antiquities, will be delineated with equal accuracy.¹

The effusive self-praise of the advertisement does not belie the significance of *The Pictorial Bible's* appearance within the growing landscape of illustrated scripture. This was indeed a watershed moment, foregrounding the importance of comprehensive visual exegesis of the Bible that would be rooted in Enlightenment-based practices of analysis while still giving credence to the art historical canon of biblical imagery. This type of Bible would carry numerous monikers – 'pictorial Bible', 'family Bible', etc. – and it would fundamentally reshape the Bible marketplace well into the twentieth century, remaining one of the most profound contributions of the period to the history of biblical imagery.

The Pictorial Bible evinces an acute, even prescient awareness of its position within the discourse of biblical scholarship, illustration, and printing. Two excerpts provide initial illumination of this fact. First, Deuteronomy 31:24-26: 'And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, that Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take the book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against

¹ *The Hull Packet*, no. 2671, 29 January 1836, 1. In the coming days, the advertisement would appear in numerous newspapers, including *The Ipswich Journal*, *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, *The Manchester Times*, *The Morning Chronicle*, and *The Examiner*.



Figure 1 *The Pictorial Bible*, vol. 1, London: Charles Knight & Co., 1836, 515.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.ah54v3?urlappend=%3Bseq=528>

Figure 2 *The Pictorial Bible*, vol. 2, London: Charles Knight & Co., 1837, 797.

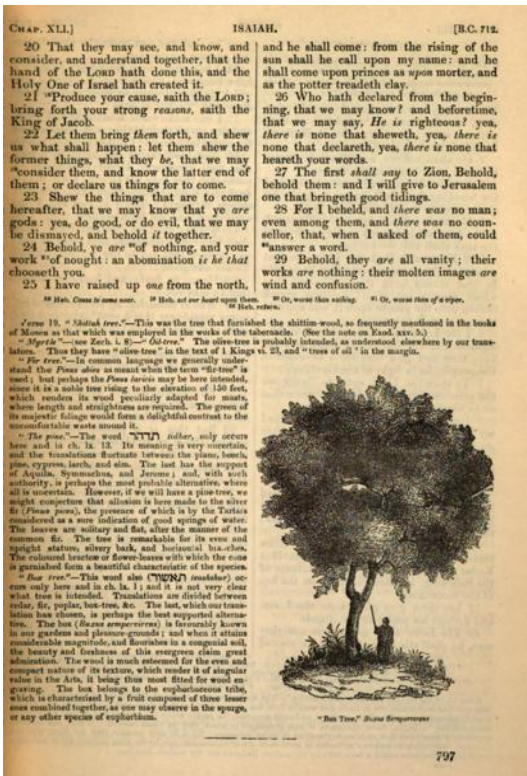
<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.ah5771?urlappend=%3Bseq=815>

thee'.² An extended footnote accompanies this chapter, which aims 'to give the reader some idea of the probable form and material of this most ancient book, and the other books mentioned in the sacred volume'.³ The author notes that his analysis is 'limited to such portable writings as may more or less properly come under the denomination of "book"'.⁴ Amidst this dissertation are a series of images, some drawn from ancient sources that are material to clarify the nature of writing and 'book-making' (fig. 1) The emphasis here is not on what modern readers would characterize as a 'book' – that is, a codex – but rather on the 'roll', frequently made from the inner bark of a tree (Latin: *liber*), rolled up (Latin: *volumen*) around a stick or cylinder. The images, as the author clarifies, 'exhibit an Egyptian roll, and others at Herculanum, in various illustrative circumstances—some unrolled, two in the act of being read; some closed; and others in the boxes in which they were usually kept, several

² *The Pictorial Bible*, vol. 1, London: Charles Knight & Co., 1836, 515.

³ *The Pictorial Bible*, vol. 1, 515.

⁴ *The Pictorial Bible*, vol. 1, 515.



together, deposited vertically and ticketed at the upper extremity with their titles'.⁵ This elucidation of the originary forms of 'the Bible' underscores their material variability and, by extension, the creative assemblage that is inherent in the construction of 'the Bible' as a single, cohesive entity. Recent historiographical and methodological shifts have generated greater attention to the kinds of practices – most obviously, of extra-illustration – that speak not only to the constructedness of rarefied texts like the Bible, but also the various modes of agency that are embedded in these objects.⁶ With publications like *The Pictorial Bible*, the self-consciousness of its construction, of the hodgepodge nature of the Bible, is laid to bear, though there is nonetheless an underscoring of the Bible as a (relatively) unified object. The necessary pivoting between fragment and whole is foregrounded throughout the notes to Deuteronomy; in expounding on the various types of substances used for writing in antiquity, it is noted: 'Most of those we shall notice, or probably all, were, in due order of time, known to the Jews, as we either know positively from Scripture, or else may, with tolerable certainty, infer from their connections with other nations. It may be therefore more useful to view the subject connectedly, than to take it up in fragments, as the several passages bring the details under our notice'.⁷

The fragment is an ever-present element of *The Pictorial Bible*, a paradoxically necessary feature of its aim toward comprehensiveness. Visual fragments populate its pages, necessitating a fragmentary practice of reading. Perhaps more significantly, the stylistic variation of the images imparts a range of performative functions, from the didactic to the emotive, and that range can be linked again to extra-illustration. What distinguishes *The Pictorial Bible* is its proliferation as reproduced and reproducible object – something that was made possible through the nineteenth-century wood engraving revolution. The significance of this development is highlighted in the second excerpt, Isaiah 41:19, in which God declares his promise to populate the land with various types of trees. The last variety mentioned, the box-tree, is, as the footnote states, 'much esteemed for the even and compact nature of its texture, which render it of singular value in the arts, it being thus most fitted for wood engraving'.⁸ The accompanying illustration does indeed indicate the capacity that boxwood lends in the rendering of texture and tonality (fig. 2). As we will see, though, *The Pictorial Bible* underscores the

⁵ *The Pictorial Bible*, vol. 1, 518.

⁶ See, for instance, Michael Gaudio, *The Bible and the Printed Image in Early Modern England: Little Gidding and the Pursuit of Scriptural Harmony*, New York and London: Routledge, 2017; William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007; and Adam Smyth, *Material Texts in Early Modern England*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

⁷ *The Pictorial Bible*, vol. 1, 515.

⁸ *The Pictorial Bible*, vol. 2, London: Charles Knight & Co., 1837, 797.

possibilities afforded by this process, which only in the 1830s was becoming the popular print media par excellence.

Though minor details within an expansive, three-volume set of tomes, these two excerpts are indicative of what was at stake in scriptural illustration in the nineteenth century, a period marked by a revolutionary landscape of media technologies and the rising tide of biblical scepticism. The nineteenth century saw vast, multi-faceted transformations of the Bible, the effects of which assured its sustained position as a monument of so-called 'Western culture'.⁹ The histories of the Bible and of print culture are indelibly intertwined; from the advent of the European printing industry, the Bible's authority as 'a book' (or 'the Book') became increasingly bound up with its formal and material properties as a codex. As Peter Stallybrass has argued, the codex as the form embraced by early Christians functioned in opposition to the scroll, which by necessity enacts certain physical and temporal continuity. In contrast, the codex, as Stallybrass asserts, 'not only allows for discontinuous reading; it encourages it'.¹⁰ Discontinuous reading is indeed part-and-parcel of the Bible's reception history, but becomes even more acute in the context of the nineteenth-century illustrated Bible through the inclusion of historical and didactic materials (both visual and textual).

This article takes as its starting point *The Pictorial Bible*, considering it as an historiographical vehicle for both biblical imagery and print history in the nineteenth century. The publication is significant alone as a compendium of visual forms, functioning for viewers even today as a vast collection of Judeo-Christian pictorial expression in the West stretching back to antiquity. This will become an underlying characteristic of much nineteenth-century scriptural illustration: the attempt to underscore the heterogeneity of the Bible while preserving its status as discursively unified object. The power of the Bible as a self-contained unity was an important refrain in the cacophony of nineteenth-century Christian discourse, as the scriptures were picked apart and subjected to new and urgent interpretive lenses. In his landmark 'On the Interpretation of Scripture' (1860), Oxford professor Benjamin Jowett noted that although 'the Bible is the only book in the world written in different styles and at many different times',¹¹ it must still be borne in mind that the constitutive books have 'a sort of continuity': 'That is to say, there is nothing miraculous or artificial in the arrangement of the books of Scripture; it is the result, not the design, which appears in them when bound in the same volume'.¹² Jowett's

⁹ See Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007, ix-xi.

¹⁰ Peter Stallybrass, 'Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible' in *Books and Readers in Early Modern Europe: Material Studies*, Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (eds), Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, 46.

¹¹ Benjamin Jowett, 'On the Interpretation of Scripture' in *Essays and Reviews*, London: J.W. Parker, 1860, 379.

¹² Jowett, 'On the Interpretation of Scripture', 384-85.

emphasis on the need to search for 'original meaning' in the Bible has prompted debates over whether this was advocating an historicist approach, as indeed that was one of the pressing issues of the time.¹³ For our purposes, Jowett's analysis underscores that there remained in biblical scholarship (as indeed in the popular imagination) the impulse toward approaching the Bible as a unified entity.

Jowett's underlying assertion regarding the continuity of the Bible echoes concerns that had been mounted at various moments since the advent of the printing press in Europe, notably by Thomas Hobbes and John Locke.¹⁴ But what distinguishes this context from earlier moments in the history of the Bible and of print culture are (in very broad strokes) an increased emphasis on historical authenticity and objectivity, and the availability of a diverse set of print processes, each with its own layers of perceived value. Embedded within the nineteenth-century illustrated Bible is the history of print itself, transformed through modern technological innovations but retaining signifiers of deeply rooted artistic traditions and their attendant cultural weight. This interplay of tradition and modernity was crucial to the Bible's continued status as a cultural monument and an historical document.

The dominance of secularist models of modernity, the marginalization of religious visual culture, and an isolation of different modes of scholarly inquiry are among the reasons for a lack of thorough attention to rich sources like *The Pictorial Bible* in art historical literature. Today they function as crucial windows through which we can understand the most pervasive adaptations of scripture, most notably in England and America but also globally through the missionary exportation that abounded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Moreover, as we will see, these Bibles demonstrate the fluid signification of print processes, the variety of which expanded significantly in the nineteenth century.

As noted above, central to the story of nineteenth-century illustrated books is wood engraving. The advancement and flourishing of the process is generally credited to Thomas Bewick, due not only to the engravings and publications produced under his name but also to the engravers who emerged from his studio and shaped the nature of the medium as it became ubiquitous. The benefits of wood engraving were rooted in its capacity for an abundance of detail, and its being a relief process that could be printed at the same time as text; wood engraving in essence merged the features of the archetypal intaglio and relief forms, metal engraving and woodcut. That said, engraved woodblocks could not withstand the repeated force of an industrial press. The relative fragility of the engraved

¹³ James Barr, 'Jowett and the "Original Meaning" of Scripture', *Religious Studies* 18, no.4, December 1982, 433-37.

¹⁴ See Gaudio, *The Bible and the Printed Image in Early Modern England*, 34.

woodblock would, however, ultimately be mitigated by developments in block casting and reproduction (e.g., *gillotage*, stereotyping, electrotyping).¹⁵ It became quite common for major publishers, especially in England, where wood engraving made its deepest initial impact, to buy and sell casts of engraved woodblocks to other companies. For example, an image of Moses and the tablets by Gustave Doré that initially appeared in French periodicals produced by the firm Hachette would subsequently appear in England within the extensively illustrated *Cassell's Illustrated Family Bible* (fig. 3). That publication was a clear model for the later *Bible Populaire* (produced by Charles Lahure, an imprint of Hachette), in which Doré's image once again appears.

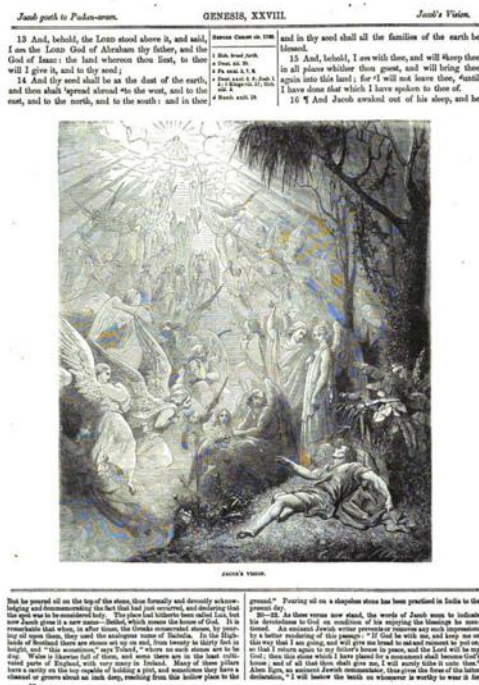


Figure 3 Gustave Doré, Jean François Auguste Trichon, and Léon Louis Chapon, "Jacob's Vision," from *Cassell's Illustrated Family Bible*, vol. 1, London & New York: Cassell, Petter & Galpin, 1860, 52.

<https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=gOc-AAAAcAAI&pg=GBS.PA52&hl=en>

The malleability of wood engraving is especially pertinent when discussing the history of nineteenth-century Bible illustration, in which we find drastically different types of images often with drastically different layers of discursive signification. Within *The Pictorial Bible*, several pages from the books of Samuel give some indication of the diversity of images, and of the significance of reproductive print media. First, an image of David and Goliath, in which the starkly modelled musculature is indebted to Benoît Audran's engraving of a Daniela de Volterra painting, from which the misattribution to Michelangelo in *The Pictorial Bible* also

¹⁵ See Jane R. Pomeroy, 'On the Changes Made in Wood Engravings in the Stereotyping Process', *Printing History* 17, no. 2, 1995, 35-40.



Figure 4 *The Pictorial Bible*, vol. 2, London: Charles Knight & Co., 1837, 44.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.ah5771?urlappend=%3Bseq=58>

Figure 5 Benoît Audran I (after Daniele de Volterra), "David and Goliath," 1717, engraving.

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https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_V-2-124



Figure 6 *The Pictorial Bible*, vol. 2, London: Charles Knight & Co., 1837, 104.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.ah5771?urlappend=%3Bseq=118>

Figure 7 Unidentified artist, *Portrait of Fath Ali, Shah of Iran (1772–1834)*, c. 1799, oil on canvas, Bodleian Library.

<https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/4731f3aa-de32-483a-b1c8-5f246f63c7e6/>



derives (figs 4, 5). Second, a richly textured portrait of the Qajar Shah Fath Ali, whose penchant for royal regalia and precise etiquette is aptly conveyed in this reproductive portrait (figs 6, 7). Third, a rendering of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, likely derived from the Holy Land travel imagery that was circulating in 1830s Britain (figs 8, 9). Finally, a facsimile-style line engraving of an Egyptian chair, derived from Ippolito Rosellini's magisterial *I Monumenti dell'Egitto e della Nubia* (figs 10, 11).



Figure 8 *The Pictorial Bible*, vol. 2, London: Charles Knight & Co., 1837, 120.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.ah5771?urlappend=%3Bseq=134>

Figure 9 William Finden (after David Roberts), "The Valley of Jehoshaphat," from Thomas Hartwell Horne's *Landscape Illustrations of the Bible*, vol. 1, London: Murray, 1836, pl. 93, etching and engraving.

<https://archive.org/details/landscapeillustr00horn/page/n207/mode/1up?q=jehoshaphat>

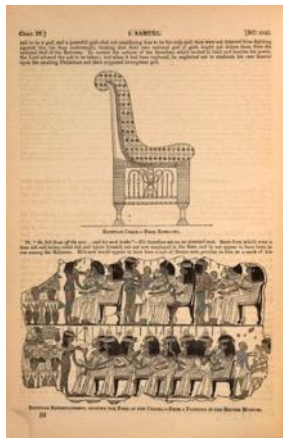


Figure 10 *The Pictorial Bible*, vol. 2, London: Charles Knight & Co., 1837, 10.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.ah5771?urlappend=%3Bseq=24>

Figure 11 Ippolito Rosellini, *Monumenti dell'Egitto e della Nubia*, vol. 2, Pisa: Presso Niccolò Capurro e C., 1834, pl. 140. From The New York Public Library.

<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47d9-473f-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

These four illustrations demonstrate not only the stylistic variation across *The Pictorial Bible*, but also the extent to which wood engraving could reproduce the styles associated with a range of print processes. Though devoid of the dot-and-lozenge technique of Audran's engraving, the dramatic chiaroscuro of David and Goliath's bodies replicates the proliferation of systematically applied hatching that characterized reproductive engraving from the seventeenth century onward. The Valley of Jehoshaphat maintains the appearance of an etching, which enjoyed a major revival in the nineteenth century in part due to its capacity for reproducing a

more sketch-like autographic style. The scrawling texture of an image like this became a signifier of its having been based on a drawing made 'on-the-spot', thus a more 'objective' representation of the landscape. Historical authenticity is indicated in a visually divergent manner in the illustration of an Egyptian chair, rendered in the flat and sharply profiled manner of contemporaneous archaeological reports that were frequently reproduced in popular media. The portrait of Fath Ali is perhaps the most effective indicator of the malleability of wood engraving as fluid hatching merges with the flattened patterning of the Shah's clothing and accoutrements, giving the image both an acute representational depth and a sense of objective visual description.

The appearance of different types of printed images within a single volume was not a new phenomenon at the time of *The Pictorial Bible's* appearance, and we can again tie the appearance of a work like *The Pictorial Bible* to the rich history of extra-illustration. As Michael Gaudio has demonstrated in his analysis of the Little Gidding concordances, separately printed images constituted navigable guides for a complex constellation of biblical exegesis, leaving the reader/viewer, as Gaudio puts it, 'between the fragment and the whole, on the seams of scriptural understanding'.¹⁶ The interwovenness of the narratives of extra-illustration and *The Pictorial Bible* becomes clear when considering one of the most expansive and complex examples of extra-illustration, what is colloquially referred to as the Kitto Bible, a staggering 60-volume set containing over 30,000 extra-illustrative materials (including prints as well as original drawings and watercolours) now in the collection of the Huntington Library.¹⁷ The Bible from which the text derives (as well as the name of the collection) is, in fact, an edition of *The Pictorial Bible*, which only in later editions would bear the name of John Kitto, whose extensive biblical scholarship forms the notes and image choices.

What is particularly notable is the fact that while developments in print technology, specifically the rise of wood engraving, made for printing of images with the text much more feasible, what we continue to see, particularly with the increasing popularity of the 'family Bible', is a hodgepodge of print types, or at least of images with very evident characteristics of particular print processes. Many of the images in these examples were not printed separately, but maintained the appearance of having come from disparate sources. When an image *was* printed separately, it would not have been out of necessity, as had been the case before the wood engraving revolution.

The stylistic malleability of wood engraving was subject to significant critical scrutiny in the nineteenth century. John Ruskin, for instance, associated a heavy moral weight with engraving, viewing the demand for illustration in the Victorian

¹⁶ Gaudio, *The Bible and the Printed Image in Early Modern England*, 35.

¹⁷ On the Kitto Bible and extra-illustration, see Lori Anne Ferrell, *The Bible and the People*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008, 158-191.

milieu as a detriment to the quality of craftsmanship.¹⁸ Unsurprisingly, Ruskin extolled wood engraving's own innate qualities rather than its adaptability both to different styles and to the speed process of print production. No doubt, Ruskin would have been more inclined toward the biblical imagery produced under the auspices of the Brothers Dalziel wood engraving firm — *The Parables of Our Lord* or *Dalziel's Bible Gallery* — in which engagement with the materiality of the woodblocks is much more evident than in *The Pictorial Bible*. The relative lack of success of these projects is one indicator of the powerful machine of the wood engraving industry, against which the screeds of Ruskin's pen could do little.¹⁹

It is important to note here that print terminology is both crucial and confounding in this context, as the terms associated with various print processes were (and continue to be) frequently used interchangeably and anachronistically. The title pages for all three volumes of the first edition of *The Pictorial Bible* state that the work is 'illustrated with many hundred wood-cuts', despite their being wood engravings. Continuing, these 'wood-cuts' represent 'the historical events, after celebrated pictures; the landscape scenes, from original drawings, or from authentic engravings; and the subjects of natural history, costume, and antiquities, from the best sources'. Despite the specific references to wood engraving and engravers as we've seen above, the terms 'wood-cut' and 'engraving' or 'wood-engraving' are used interchangeably throughout.²⁰

While this may seem like an exercise in print pedantry, the significance of process and its associated value is brought to the fore in later editions of *The Pictorial Bible*, as well as numerous other nineteenth-century family Bibles, particularly as steel engravings are increasingly featured. The benefits offered by this process, which took popular root in England beginning in the 1820s, was not only its capacity for fine detail, but also its longevity—thousands of impressions could be taken from a steel plate without degradation to the matrix. As an intaglio form, though, it could not be printed simultaneously with text; it is thus these prints, placed *hors-texte*, that frequently operate as somewhat separate entities in publications like *The Pictorial Bible*. More importantly, there was a level of value associated with steel engraving that was perpetuated in this context, and we can see

¹⁸ See in particular 'Notes on the Present State of Engraving in England' in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, vol. 22, London: George Allen, 1906, 463-76. For a discussion of Ruskin and engraving, see Michael Gaudio, *Engraving the Savage: The New World and Techniques of Civilization*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 140-43.

¹⁹ See Donato Esposito, 'Dalziels' Bible Gallery (1881): Assyria and the Biblical Illustration in Nineteenth-Century Britain' in *Orientalism, Assyriology and the Bible*, Steven W. Holloway (ed.), Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006, 267-96.

²⁰ For instance, a note to Psalm CVIII:2 states 'Our large cut exhibits what seems the most perfect and finished forms to which the Egyptian harp ultimately arrived'. Later, in the same paragraph: 'We need not expatiate on the form of the harp which our engraving so adequately represents'. *The Pictorial Bible*, vol. 2, 636.



Figure 12 J. W. Cook (after Julius Schnorr von Carlsfeld), 'Jacob's Covenant with Laban', *The Pictorial Bible*, vol. 1, London: W. and R. Chambers, 1855, between pages 96 and 97.

<https://archive.org/details/pictorialbible01kitt/page/n118/mode/1up>

Figure 13 Julius Schnorr von Carlsfeld, 'Jacob welcomes Laban', *Bibel in Bildern*, Leipzig: Verlag von Georg Wigand, 1852-1860, plate 34. <https://archive.org/details/diebibelinbilder00schn/page/34/mode/1up>

Figure 14 Spread from *La Sainte Bible* (Tours: Alfred Mame et fils, 1866) with Gustave Doré, Adolphe François Pannemaker, and Albert Doms, 'Joseph Explains the Dreams of Pharaoh [Genesis 41:14]', wood engraving.

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1044316d/f162.double>

that especially in the case of prints that had initially been produced as wood engravings. The later editions of the *Pictorial Bible* include, for instance, steel engravings after images by Julius Schnorr von Carlsfeld (fig. 12).²¹ Especially pertinent here is the fact that Schnorr's images were crafted as wood engravings (fig. 13), but are included in *The Pictorial Bible* as steel engravings. This would have required the creation of an entirely new matrix (in this case, by the prominent English portrait engraver J. W. Cook), and an intaglio one at that, meaning it necessarily required separate printing. As we see here, what results is a much more

²¹ Interestingly, this was before the publication of Schnorr's widely reproduced *Die Bibel in Bildern*, Leipzig: Verlag von Georg Wigand, 1852-1860. The image appeared in Atanazy Raczyński *Geschichte der neuen deutschen Kunst*, vol. 2, Berlin: Auf Kosten der Verfassers, 1840, 312. The series was published simultaneously in Berlin and Paris beginning in 1836, the latter as title *Histoire de l'art moderne en Allemagne*.

delicately contoured representation, more consistent with the contemporaneous vogue for velvety mezzotints. A similar situation occurs in the original editions of Doré's Bible illustrations, first published by the Mame company in Tours. The wood engravings here are inserted as separate images approximately every four pages, which results in a lack of physical correspondence between the image and the associated text (fig. 14)—this despite the fact that, again, by their very nature the wood engraved images could have been printed in closer coordination with the text.

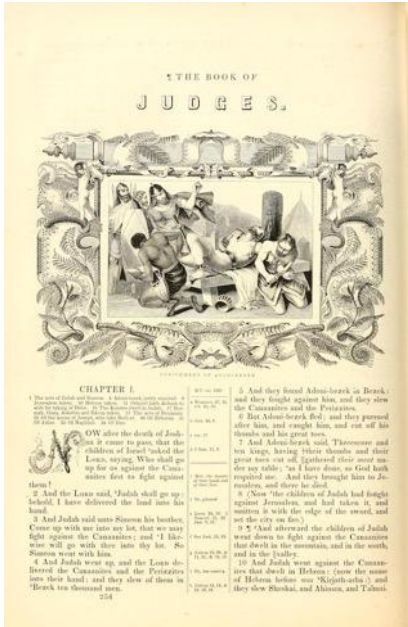


Figure 15 *The Illuminated Bible*, New York: Harper & Bros., 1843-46, 254.

<https://archive.org/details/illuminatedbib/e00adam/page/n271/mode/1up>

The examples cited above and later iterations of the family/pictorial Bible perpetuate a persistent hierarchy between didactic and 'fine art' images that is further underscored through the reliance on particular print media. This becomes especially evident in the American context, where by the second half of the nineteenth century the production of illustrated Bibles outpaced that of England.²² Harper & Brothers' *Illuminated Bible* of 1843–1846 is generally cited as the first American counterpart to *The Pictorial Bible*; however, its imagery is of a more narrative, emotive, and decorative than didactic bent (fig. 15).²³ Historiated letters and incidental vignettes abound, and larger images are framed by elaborate foliage and arabesques. While it makes claims for historical authenticity, there is very little recourse to the kinds of learned or scholarly sources that are present in *The Pictorial*

²² See Christopher de Hamel, *The Book: A History of the Bible*, London and New York: Phaidon Press, 2001, 260-264; and Paul Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, 9-39.

²³ On the style and impact of Harper & Brothers' *Illuminated Bible*, see Gutjahr, *An American Bible*, 70-76; and David Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 61-74.

Bible. That is not to say that it is not concerned with historical accuracy, but rather that the aesthetics don't foreground historical and archaeological research to the same extent as *The Pictorial Bible*. That would change in the second half of the century, however, as elaborate family Bibles increasingly dominated the marketplace for scripture. This milieu witnessed a trend toward the comprehensive compilation of both didactic-style print forms and fine-art reproductions, the latter often in the form of steel engravings. The development of both aesthetic and moral judgment is deeply enmeshed in this context, and tied to the perceived value of particular print forms.²⁴ A canvassing Bible made for a publisher's agents directs the seller (and by extension the buyer) in this kind of discernment: 'Warning---Do not be Deceived' tops an insert regarding one of the volume's key features, 'ten magnificent Line Steel Engraving, printed in the finest and richest colours', of the 'Parables of our Lord'.²⁵ What follows is a 'guarantee' of the images' authentic quality, and the bold declaration, 'Beware of the cheap wood-cut imitations which are printed in colours and palmed off on the public as illuminated steel plate engravings'. This is occurring in a period when new forms of reproduction (and, in particular, photo-reproduction) are emerging, making it easier for rogue publishers to appropriate illustrations from various sources with abandon.²⁶ Despite an increasing appetite among some publishers for international copyright laws that would prevent this kind of piracy, the United States would maintain its wild-west status in this respect, only recognizing the international copyright standards established by the 1886 Berne Convention in 1989.²⁷

The appropriations of nineteenth-century Bible illustrations that abound in the American context function almost like a new form of extra-illustration due to the ever-changing landscape print processes. Stereotyping of engraved woodblocks generated fluid channels for image circulation, and it is thus common to find the exact same images reproduced in innumerable contexts. When *The Pictorial Bible* was reproduced in United States in 1856, it contained the same material but in a more compressed page format (fig. 16). In subsequent decades, American publishers fervently mobilized the popularity of *The Pictorial Bible* model. The 1873 *Pictorial Household Bible* notes that *The Pictorial Bible* was published 'at too high a price for numbers who would fain be purchasers' and moreover was 'too elaborate for

²⁴ See Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, 87-98.

²⁵ *The Holy Bible: Containing the King James and the Revised Version of the Old and New Testaments, Arranged in Parallel Columns* [canvassing book], Philadelphia: Globe Bible Publishing, c. 1886, n.p. Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania Libraries, RBC Zinman 121.5.

²⁶ On the various methods of photo-reproduction, see Estelle Jussim, *Visual Communication and the Graphic Arts: Photographic Technologies in the Nineteenth Century*, New York and London: R. R. Bowker Company, 1983, 45-76.

²⁷ Sam Ricketson and Jane C. Ginsburg, eds., *International Copyright and Neighbouring Rights*, vol. 1, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.



Figure 16 *The Pictorial Bible*, New York: Robert Sears, 1856, 259.

<https://archive.org/details/pictorialbible00unse/page/n282/mode/1up>



Figure 17 Page from 'A New Self-Pronouncing Dictionary of the Bible', from *The Pronouncing Edition of the Holy Bible*, S.l.: s.n., 1890, 38.

https://archive.org/details/pronouncingedi00will_0/page/n257/mode/1up

general use'.²⁸ The elaborate variety would, however, become highly popular in the United States during last three decades of the twentieth century, with the penchant for expansive compendia of imagery being a key feature, to an even greater extent than was available in the original *Pictorial Bible*. By the 1870s, photo-engraving processes had advanced enough that high-quality reproductions from existing sources could be produced relatively easily and cheaply. The illustrated family Bibles that followed, with images often numbering in the thousands, draw from a standard set of popular sources, including William Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible* (first published in both London and Boston in 1860–63), *Cassell's Illustrated Family Bible*, Schnorr's *Bibel in Bildern*, and Doré's Bible illustrations.

The late-nineteenth-century family/pictorial Bible engenders an even more discontinuous form of reading through its compartmentalization of subjects and images. In some cases, a 'dictionary' precedes the body of the scriptures, derived with little variation from Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible* (fig. 17). In others, a more taxonomic structure is in place, with sections devoted to flora, fauna, geology, geography, numismatics, etc. The elaborate headers for individual books within *Cassell's Illustrated Family Bible* become frames for single-page summaries of those books (figs 18, 19). A hierarchization of image types and sources remains, with Doré's imagery frequently occupying pride of place, or perhaps steel engravings that were in theory commissioned/produced by the publisher. Schnorr's images are frequently reproduced, often as their own 'gallery of scriptural illustrations' (fig. 20). However, in their compact form (from two to six images per page), these images are at a remove from the 'fine-art' positioning of Doré's work (fig. 21), or other key

²⁸ *The Pictorial Household Bible*, Springfield: W. J. Holland and Company, 1873, iii.

examples both contemporaneous (e.g., William Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World*) and historical (e.g., Leonardo's *Last Supper*).

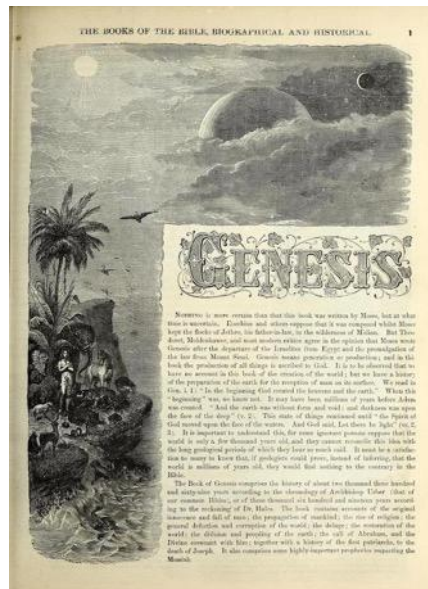
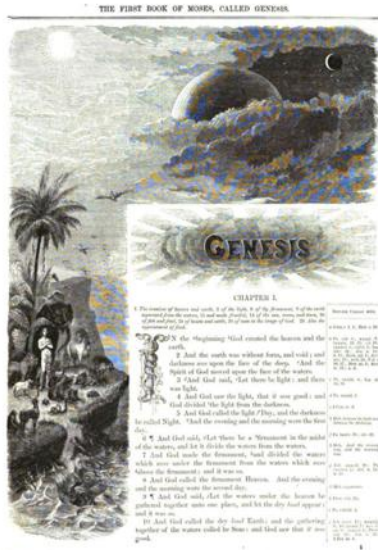


Figure 18 Cassell's *Illustrated Family Bible*, vol. 1, 1. <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=gOc-AAAACAAJ&pg=GBS.PA1&printsec=frontcover>

Figure 19 Page from "A Comprehensive and Illustrated History of the Books of the Old and New Testaments," from *The Holy Bible* (New York: Henry S. Goodspeed & Co., c. 1880), 1. https://archive.org/details/holybible00unse_14/page/n426/mode/1up



Figure 20 Page from "Gallery of Scripture Illustration" with images from Schnorr's *Bibel in Bildern*, *The Holy Bible*, Paris, Ont.: John S. Brown, 1881, 1. https://archive.org/details/holybiblecontain00unse_38/page/n312/mode/1up

Figure 21 Gustave Doré and John Quartley's *Jacob's Dream*, as reproduced in *The Holy Bible*, Paris, Ont.: John S. Brown, 1881, between 48 and 49. https://archive.org/details/holybiblecontain00unse_38/page/n392/mode/1up

The examples I have cited here only scratch the surface of the complex discourses of biblical imagery, print history, exegesis, and the popular imagination. The key point is that, in the context of the nineteenth-century illustrated Bible, recourse to a variety of sources was crucial in the maintenance of the Bible in the popular imagination. The growth of biblical scepticism was something numerous religious authorities and publishers felt it necessary to firmly and aggressively counter, and relying on the visual signifiers of objectivity and erudition were one very common way of doing so. However, and despite the knowledge of the ancient scriptures originary forms (as we saw in the note about rolls at the outset), there was

nonetheless a firm adherence to 'the Bible' a unified, ontological concept. That form, though, could only survive through an embracing of the fragment, as embodied in the robust yet fragmentary pictorial Bible.

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