

The Holy Bible: Source of Inspiration for Quilters

[Homepage](#) [Quilting History](#) [Quilt Patterns](#)



Quilters in America, seeking inspiration for new quilt blocks, looked no further than the one book that most homes owned in the nineteenth century: the Holy Bible.

In a preliminary search done to seek and identify quilt blocks that were based on Biblical people and events, approximately one hundred eighty examples were discovered. Since then, even more blocks have come to light, in out-of-print books dedicated to floral designs which commemorate plants that are mentioned in Biblical verse.

Perhaps the most beloved block design of all is the one called "Rose of Sharon", which has many variations. These blocks share the common feature of a traditional red, green, and white palette, so popular around 1850.

So far, close to forty of these designs have been published. While Biblical scholars state that the plant, "Rose of Sharon", which grows in Syria, is not truly a rose at all, the "Rose of Sharon" quilt was often made as a bride's quilt. In floral symbology, the red rose has always stood for romantic love. In many of these bride's quilts, heart motifs were quilted onto the surface with hand quilting stitches. Treated as "best" quilts, they were used only on special occasions or not at all, which is the reason some of them have survived this long.

There are a dizzying array of quilt block names associated with Biblical themes: "Jacob's Ladder", "Job's Tears", "Job's Troubles", "Caesar's Crown", "King Solomon's Temple", "Armageddon", "Balm of Gilead", "Crosses and Losses", "Cross and Crown", "Rose Cross", "Tree of Life", and "Tree Everlasting", to name just a few.



Blocks were created in a variety of ways: pieced, appliquéd, or embroidered. In addition to crafting individual block designs that had a special meaning, if only known to the individual, quilters also designed whole quilts based on Adam and Eve, or Noah's Ark, or even a collection of Bible-based imagery as seen in [Harriet Powers' two Bible quilts](#). Many of the state documentation quilt history books, and/or other quilt history books show photos of quilts that are related to the Bible in some way. Clearly, the Bible has proven to be a take-off point for many quilters of the past and remains an inspiration for quilters today, as well.

In the nineteenth century, stay at home mothers had very few social outlets other than the quilting bees of their church. Fundraising quilts were worked on to earn money to expand the physical space of a church, to engage in charitable relief efforts for church members who had hit upon hard times, or to support ongoing ministries such as religious education. The "bees" were a place for the ladies to share new patterns and ideas and may have been the arena where ideas for new block designs related to the Bible were generated.

As historians, the only reliable index or point of reference we have as to the names of blocks are their published names. There may have been additional blocks created by quilters for whom the Bible was their design source, but if the block did not find its way into print, that information was "lost to history". The whole subject of block names is quite fascinating. In the case of geometric blocks, if we are not initially given the name of the block, we would never guess what it is!



The subject of Biblical Blocks is a fascinating one that is fun and interesting. I hope that your interest has been whetted a bit by this short article that I have written as requested by the website owner, Judy Anne.

For more information about Bible blocks and more photos, please see The Quilter magazine, September 2003 and November 2003, for a series of articles which I wrote. Go to www.thequiltermag.com to order back issues of The Quilter magazine. If no longer available, then please check with the reference department of your local library to request copies through Interlibrary Loan. In addition, there is an addendum article on my website: www.quiltersmuse.com.

Links:

If you key in "Biblical Quilt Blocks" in any search engine, a myriad of opportunities will pop up whereby you can find free quilt blocks on the internet.

Copyright 2003, Patricia L. Cummings, Concord, NH.

The quilt blocks shown on this webpage were reconstructed from old quilt pattern sources by Patricia L. Cummings of the [Quilter's Muse](#). Be sure to visit this lovely site that offers thoughtful musings along with information on quilts and quilt exhibits.

The Quilt Patterns From History site has some free Bible quilt patterns at [Far Above Rubies](#) a Bible sampler quilt. The pioneers also had some favorite quilts related to their faith. An example found on this site is [Delectable Mountains Quilt Pattern](#).

[Free Bible Quilt Block Patterns](#)

(Do not reproduce any material from this site without permission from the author.)