

## BIBLE QUILTS AND THEIR ROLE IN HISTORY

"The Bible was, of course, the principal literary presence in most American homes..." <sup>1</sup> *Sandi Fox*

### RELIGION IN AMERICAN HISTORY

This series of Bible Quilt blocks is designed in remembrance of the women of our past who were sustained by the Bible and loved making these Biblical quilt blocks. The blocks I've chosen have a long history of being used by quilters.

It's not surprising that so many quilt blocks are based on the Bible. Religion has always been an important part of American culture. Going to church and revival meetings were the main social events for many over the last two centuries, but that didn't mean that faith wasn't a vital part of these gatherings.



Historian, Daniel Sutherland, in his book describing everyday life in the mid nineteenth century stated, "*Few Americans doubted that God actively intervened in everyday affairs.*" <sup>2</sup> He wrote that visitors to America were struck by how many churches were to be seen. They also found many more varied religious sects than other countries had, perhaps the result of a nation founded on freedom of religion.

### WOMEN AND THEIR FAITH

As it still does today, their Christian faith sustained many people through hardships. It was a rare person who never lost a family member from war or illness. Children were especially vulnerable in a time before modern medicine. A firm belief in an afterlife along with a faith that a greater power was guiding them helped women deal with their troubles. Christianity also gave them a sense of thankful joy for the beauty and love in their lives. The nineteenth century brought a fading of the fear of hell. God was more often seen as a firm yet loving father.

Imagine a pioneer woman making her way across America. Danger was always near and tragedy struck all too often. In her diary Sarah Royce wrote about a frightening desert crossing and giving her young daughter one of the last sips of available water. Shortly the travelers came upon smoldering brush from an earlier fire. Suddenly a bush right in front of her burst into flames.



Although she knew it was a result of the dying fire it still seemed to be a miraculous sign. She wrote, "*For a few moments I stood with bowed head worshiping the God of Horeb, and I was strengthen thereby.*" <sup>3</sup> Later that very day two young men who had been traveling with her party came running and shouting with joy. They had found grass and water.

### QUILTS MADE BY WOMEN'S GROUPS

Christian women have been meeting in church groups for prayer and to do God's work for almost two centuries. Quilting was sometimes a part of these gatherings. Women made quilts for those in need and for church fund raising. Bible Quilts of Biblical blocks have also been a way to study scripture. These women's group activities continue to this day.

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### REFERENCES:

<sup>1</sup> p113, "[Small Endearments: 19th Century Quilts for Children](#)", by Sandi Fox

<sup>2</sup> pp 79, "[The Expansion of Everyday Life 1860-1876](#)", by Daniel Sutherland

<sup>3</sup> p50 "[A Frontier Lady](#)", by Sarah Royce