

Movable Type

The first time I heard this phrase I had no idea what it meant. It refers to Gutenberg's invention that enabled book printing. As we all know, up until this time, everything had to be copied by hand or by cutting out a wooden template.

Gutenberg used single letters that he combined in a frame. Using a press, he could then print an entire page in one go, and continue printing more copies of the exact same page. Obviously, this made the process much faster and therefore also cheaper. Plus, the letters could be reused afterwards; this makes for the "movable" in the above phrase.

Religious truth is imprisoned in a small number of manuscript books, which confine instead of spread the public treasure. Let us break the seal which seals up holy things and give wings to Truth in order that she may win every soul that comes into the world by her word no longer written at great expense by hands easily palsied, but multiplied like the wind by an untiring machine. (Johannes Gutenberg, preface to the Gutenberg Bible, 1454)

Not many decades after Gutenberg, the Reformation began. The reformers cashed in on the new invention of printing in a major way. They used it to flood the world with their ideas in the form of books and pamphlets. In the process, they unleashed a revolution that transformed the Western world.

Fast forward to the end of the 20th century. Another invention, that of the Internet, promised yet again a communication revolution. Anyone with Internet access could in theory communicate his or her ideas to everyone else with Internet access. All you needed was a solution to create content and make it available on the World Wide Web.

You may have heard of WordPress. This is probably the system used by the largest number of people publishing blogs and other content on the web today; I am using it here. One of the earliest such systems was called ... Movable Type. As [their website](#) states:

Movable Type was created by a husband and wife team with a single purpose: to create a powerful solution for the creation and management of web content. An originator of the blogging field, Movable Type offers stability, a user-friendly interface, and beautifully extensive visual customization for websites and blogs.

It was in this context that I came across "movable type" for the first time. I found the term powerful and deeply moving, but had no idea where it came from, what it meant, and why someone would call anything *that*.

I then learned that its creators envisioned a new communication revolution and fittingly named their Content Management System (that's what such a thing is called) after Gutenberg's invention.

So will these new publishing tools do for the 21st century what the printing press did for the 16th century? Not likely, in my opinion. What the world needs is not just words that are correct. Such words are important as well, but they are not sufficient. It needs true people, not just true ideas. To change the world requires words-in-the-flesh, not just words on paper or on a screen.

This is how God publishes his message to the world: true people. They are God's movable type, the true movable type of the 21st century.

As with Gutenberg's invention, it won't do to have one letter by itself. They have to be combined in harmonious and coherent pages, or they will fail to get the story out.

So it is people like you and I, all of us together, who are God's movable type. The ideas I hope to publish here, in the area of biblical studies, are a start, but they won't make much of a difference unless they are lived out and become flesh. And movable.

To finish, here is an example from the Bible: Prisca and Aquila.

In AD 49, they leave Rome, presumably already believers, because emperor Claudius expels all the Jews. Aquila originally came from Pontus. In Corinth, he happens to run into Paul (ca. 50), who works with him as a tentmaker. Prisca and Aquila leave Corinth with Paul, but stay in Ephesus; this must be a year or two later. There, they help Apollos to get the gospel right. All of this is in Acts 18.

Next thing we hear about them is around AD 57. By now they are back in Rome, and there is a church that meets in their house (Rom. 16:3f). "Not only I, but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them," so Paul at this point. This is probably after at the most eight years of ministry.

Prisca and Aquila were a mere two letters, but as such they were moving about (literally, too) and involved in writing several quite different stories. They truly were "movable type"!