

# Bible Stories In Kanji



"A Speaking, Revealing God"  
How Did They Know ?

Robert P. Nichols

# Introduction

In the winter of 1958 while studying the Japanese language in Kobe I saw that the word *ship* 船 was made up of *boat* 舟 and *eight* 八 plus *mouth* 口 or people as in "he has eight mouths to feed." I used the association with the flood of Noah to remember this Chinese character. About the same time a letter to the editor of an English language newspaper in Japan explained *righteousness* 義 as *I* 我 plus *lamb* 羊, or I plus the Lamb of God equals righteousness. Since 1958 I have been using these and other Chinese characters (called Kanji in Japanese) to explain the Bible.

The use of these Chinese characters has served two purposes. First they have enabled me to use the sound educational principle of starting where the learner is to lead him from the known to the unknown. In Japan and China the Bible is largely unknown but everyone knows Kanji and from these illustrations many can be led into a deeper study of the Bible. The second benefit of this study began to appear as more and more of these Bible stories in Kanji became known to me. I was led by this study to conclude that the Chinese people constructed some of their picture words with a knowledge of the Bible stories. In 1981 I read *The Discovery of Genesis* by C. H. Kang and Ethel R. Nelson, published in 1979, which presented many of the Kanjis I had discovered plus hundreds more. This book also had as its purpose "to propose . . . that the ancient Chinese people were quite familiar with the same record which the Hebrew Moses is popularly given credit for writing some 700 to 1,000 years later."<sup>1</sup> Think of the implication, a written record of many Bible events one thousand years before the Bible!

*Robert P. Nichols*

Osaka, Japan

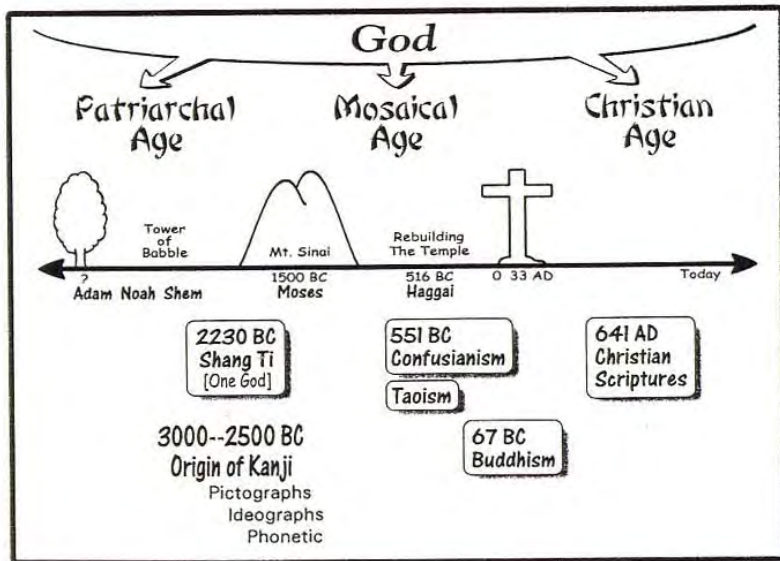
July 10, 1984



## Bible Stories In Kanji

The most convincing witness for the authenticity of the Bible is the Bible itself, read in one's native language. The study of Bible prophecy, of the historical and scientific accuracy of the Bible, and of archaeology among other subjects is important in this field. However, the study of myths and traditions of the various cultures of the world constitutes an important collateral witness often overlooked. There are numerous traditions of creation similar to the Bible narrative and one German scholar collected eighty-eight different flood traditions.<sup>2</sup>

When we look at the oldest civilization that continues to exist in the world today, we find vivid details that compel us to the conclusion that the Chinese and Hebrews must have had identical roots in the ancient past. This is seen in their traditions and religious rituals, but most especially when we compare the Chinese writing system with the Bible stories. It is these Chinese characters that we want to study but first let's relate the origin of Chinese characters (Kanji) to Biblical chronology.



## Kanji and Bible History

The Patriarchal, Mosaical, and Christian periods of Bible history at the top of the chart enable us to relate Bible events to some of the ancient history of China. On the right side of the Chart, 641 A.D. represents the date of the oldest known Chinese translation of any gospel portion.<sup>3</sup> Nestorian Christian missionaries were in China earlier but were hundreds of years too late to have been the source of the Bible stories in Kanji.

Buddhism, which acknowledges no Supreme Being, entered China from India in 67 B.C. About five hundred years earlier, Confucius was born in 551 B.C. and was a contemporary of Lao-tse the founder of Taoism. Neither atheistic Buddhism, nor Confucianism with its scholarly teachings, nor Taoism with its myths and magic could have been the source of the Chinese knowledge of the one God of the Bible.

More than one thousand, six hundred years earlier, in 2230 B.C. the ancient Chinese were worshipers of one God, Shang Ti.<sup>4</sup> Compare the following portion of a recitation from the worship of Shang Ti with Genesis chapter one:

*Of old in the beginning, there was the great chaos, without form and dark. The five elements (planets) had not begun to revolve, nor the sun and moon to shine. In the midst thereof there existed neither forms nor sound. Thou O spiritual Sovereign camest forth in Thy presidency, and first didst divide the grosser parts from the purer.*

*Thou madest heaven; Thou madest earth; Thou madest man. All things with their reproducing power got their being.<sup>5</sup>*

The writing systems of most ancient civilizations - Egyptian hieroglyphs, Mesopotamian cuneiform etc. - were basically pictorial. The most primitive symbols of Chinese were also pictographs. Today about 600 of these remain in use. Examples are 木 tree, 口 mouth, and 人 man. Chinese characters express ideas rather than actual pictures, they are ideographic rather than pictographic. For example, rest 休 is formed by the combination of the character (radical) of 人 man and 木 tree, so a man under a tree equals rest. There are about 700 ideographs. Phonetic characters are formed by bringing

radicals together for their sound rather than their meaning.<sup>6</sup> There are more than 50,000 Kanjis in the largest dictionaries.<sup>7</sup>








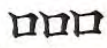


Kanji were "mature" or fully developed 3300 to 3400 years ago<sup>8</sup> during the Shang dynasty (1766 B.C. - 1027 B.C.).<sup>9</sup> When the Chinese began to write, between 4000 and 4500 years ago, their word "picture stories" had to contain events of common knowledge in order to be widely understood. The monumental events of creation and God's early dealing with man would have certainly been such memorable events but could the ancient Chinese have know these things?

Chinese similarity to the later Babylo-Assyrian culture in arts, sciences, and government leads to the belief that the Chinese originally migrated from Mesopotamia. The Chinese claim of an unbroken 4500 year old civilization places this migration close to the dispersion from the tower of Babel and supplies the ancient Chinese with an accurate knowledge of Bible events from Genesis 1:1 to Genesis 11:9. Remember that this period only spanned three patriarchal life-times: Adam to Methuselah to Shem (Gen. 5:3-32; 11:10-32).

 1. To Show 2. Revelation	 To Say	 God
--	---	--

## God Speaks

The Kanji on the left above is used in many religious words and as a radical is written 礻. Two examples are *temple* 社, and *prayer* 祈. When this radical for *revelation* 礻 is combined with *to say* 申 the meaning becomes *God* 神. Somehow when the written word for God was developing a Being who could speak and make revelation of His will was one with which enough people were familiar to use these characteristics to indicate God. In the Bible we read of God who has revealed His will and who created the world through the Word. (John 1:1-3, 14; Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 20, 24, 26; Psa. 33:9).

 SPIRIT		 SPIRIT	
 Heaven	 Cover	 Water	 Rain
 Rain	 Three Persons	 Worker of Magic	 SPIRIT

## Three Personalities In Spirit

*"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness"* (Gen. 1:26). The words "us" and "our" are not singular but plural and express a plurality of Personalities in the Godhead, that is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (See John 15:26; Matt. 3:16-17; 28:18-20). According to John 4:24, *"God is a Spirit."* The Chinese character for Spirit is now written in the simplified form on the left of the top line of Kanji above but it was formerly written as on the right. The line at the top symbolizes heaven and when we add cover and water we have water under the cover of heaven or rain. But rain or water plus three people, (that is three mouths as in "he has three mouths to feed") plus a worker of magic equals Spirit. Could these three persons refer to the three Personalities in the Godhead? In the Bible this Kanji is first found in the words *"And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the water"* (Gen. 1:2).

## Man Made From Dust of The Earth

*"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul"* (Gen. 2:7). By combining



土 口 丿 告

Dust Mouth Alive To Talk

告 辶 造

To Talk To Walk To Create

dust of the ground 土 that is alive 丿, after receiving the breath 口 of life, the Chinese wrote to talk 告. When to walk or advance 辶 was added to to talk 告 the ancient people arrived at the word to create 造. Thus, when man was created God made him full grown, able to walk and to talk. The small character 丿 is not a separate character in modern Japanese but in older Chinese "P'ieh" 丿 indicated activity or life. Life 丿 made of the dust of the ground 土 to become man 人 indicates the first 先 man, Adam.

二 人 元

Two Man's Legs Beginning

元 宀 完

Beginning House Complete

## Two In The Beginning

Gen. 1:27; 2:22-23 tells of the beginning of mankind. God created two people, man and woman. When we write two 二 and add the character known as man's legs 人 we have written beginning 元. If we then add the roof 宀 of a house beginning 元 becomes complete 完. God's creation was complete, just as the first home was complete when God made man and woman.

三 四 五 十

來 坐 從 僉

To Come Sit 1. Obey 2. Follow Unite

## Two People

Three 三, four 四, five 五, and ten 十, are written in this fashion. But neither the Chinese, the Japanese, nor anyone else ever writes these characters with man's legs 人 under them because there were only two people in the beginning. Two people 人人 are often found in such basic Kanji as to come, to sit, to obey or the unite.

林

*Trees*

女

*Women*

婪

*Desire -or- Covet*

林

*Trees*

示

*Revelation*

禁

*Prohibition*

## Two Trees

In the midst of the garden of Eden God planted the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:8, 9), and commanded man not to eat of the tree (Gen. 2:16-17). But "when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise" she ate of it (Gen. 3:6). To express *desire* or *covetousness* 婪 the ancient Chinese wrote *two trees* 林 plus *woman* 女. When *two trees* 林 are combined with 示 *revelation* of God, the result is 禁 *prohibition*. The very first revelation of God was His prohibition concerning the two trees. In Japan this Kanji is seen on all "No Smoking" and "Keep Off the Grass" signs and in countless other places. Each one should remind us of God's first revealed prohibition.

## The Tempter

Under the cover of the trees the devil tempted the woman to eat (Gen. 3:1-4). The word for tempter contains all these elements.

广

*Cover*

林

*Trees*

鬼

*Devil*

魔

*Tempter*

## Naked

In Chinese there are three ways to write naked. On the left is body plus fruit of a tree, in the middle is man plus the fruit of a tree and on the right is clothing plus fruit of a tree. When Adam and Eve knew they were naked they "sewed fig leaves together" and made themselves clothes. If the ancient Chinese knew this why didn't they write the leaves of a tree instead of the fruit of a tree? Remember that it was because of the fruit of a tree that they came to know they were naked.

裸

*Naked*

裸

*Naked*

裸

*Naked*

視  
 To Inspect  
 身 乃 木 躲  
 Body Is Tree To Hide  
 來  
 To Come

## God Inspects

### The Two Hiding Among The Trees

After their sin the man and woman "heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden" (Gen. 3:8). God 祂 had come to see 見 or to inspect 視 His creation. The man and his wife hid 躲 themselves from God among the trees of the Garden. In other words the body 身 is 乃 a tree 木 means to hide 躲. In Gen. 3:9-10 God called Adam, and the two who were hiding from God came from the tree, so to come 來 is written with a tree 木 and two people 人人 coming from behind it.

### Punishment Of Two Offenders

The two offenders 仟 were driven from the garden as by a knife 刀 as punishment 刑. To punish them, God also caused thorns 荊 which is made up of to punish 刑 and weeds or vegetation 艸 to grow, Gen. 3:17-19.

仟 刀 刑  
 To Offend Knife To Punish  
 刑 艸 荊  
 To Punish Weeds Thorns

## Form and Beginning of Clothing

Now that the man and woman knew they were naked, God made "coats of skins, and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21). The two offenders 仟 with their new clothes of animal skins had the appearance of hair 彡 or hairy. So even today form or appearance 形 is written with two offenders covered with hair.

仟 彡 形  
 Offenders Hair  
 (Two)  
 1. Form  
 2. Appearance  
 衤 刀 初  
 Clothing Knife Beginning

In order for man to have his clothing 衤 of animal skins it was necessary for the animals to die or be knifed 刀. This was the beginning 初 of God's expression of concern for sinful man that culminated in the redemption in Christ Jesus.



元 始 初  
Beginning Beginning Beginning

## Three Beginnings

There are three ways to write beginning in Chinese and Japanese today and all three Kanjis are rooted in the pre-history of China. We have already seen how 元 *beginning* related to the beginning of the human race, and how 初 *beginning* was connected with the beginning of God's redemption of man. You may recognize the center *beginning* 始 as being made up of *woman* 女 and *mouth* 口 but what does 亠 mean? That part of the character to ancient Chinese indicated a secret. Could this refer to the woman putting a secret thing in her mouth and the beginning of sin?

我 羊 義  
I Sheep Righteousness

## How I Become Righteous

Gen. 4:1-5 tells of the offerings of Cain and Able and that "the Lord had respect unto Able and his offering" but it doesn't tell us why. However Heb. 11:4 explains that "by faith Able offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain by which he obtained witness that he was righteous." There are two reasons for this. First, "by faith" shows that he obeyed God (Rom. 10:17). Then Able offered a blood sacrifice, which foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus "the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). I by myself can never be righteous, but I 我 plus the Lamb 羊 of God equals *righteousness* 義.

兄 兇 兇  
Elder Brother 1. Cruel 2. Violent

## The Cruel Elder Brother

When the elder brother, Cain, realized that God had rejected his offering, he became jealous and killed his younger brother, Able. Elder brother is written as a *mouth* 口 and *man's legs* 儿. When younger brother comes along elder brother can already walk and talk. There is also another meaning. In the East, and this includes the Bible lands, the elder brother is a representative of the family, the spokesman for the family. Because of his sin, Cain lost his position as spokesman as symbolized by the *broken mouth* 兇. God also placed a mark on this *cruel* and *violent* 兇 elder brother. Today we write *cruel* or *violent* by writing a broken mouthed elder brother with a mark. Could this correlation of stories in Kanji and the Bible be mere coincidence?

牛 羊 秀 戈 犧  
Ox Sheep Beautiful (Unblemished) Spear Sacrificial Animal

## Sacrifices of Unblemished Calves and Sheep

To prepare man for the sacrifice of Jesus as "a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18, 19). God in the Old Testament required calves and sheep without blemish as sacrifices for sins (Lev. 9:2). When the Chinese write *sacrificial animals* 犧 they write *calf* 牛, *sheep* 羊, *beauty* or *unblemished* 秀, and *spear* 戈. Why?



示 巳 祀

Revelation  
(God)

9 - 11 a.m.

Sacrifice

## Morning Sacrifice

The Hebrews as well as the Chinese observed morning and evening sacrifices. "One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer in the evening" (Ex. 29:39). This prefigured the sacrifice of the Christ, for at 9:00 a.m., the time of the morning sacrifice, He was hung on the cross (Mark 15:25); and at 3:00 p.m., the time of the evening sacrifice He gave up His life (Mark 15:34).

The character "mi" 巳 means 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., and when joined to revelation (God) 示 it means sacrifice 祀, or to be more precise, a morning sacrifice. At this exact time, the Emperor of China once each year offered a bullock as a burnt sacrifice to the Spirit of the Universe.<sup>10</sup> This sacrifice by the ruling patriarch of the nation began in antiquity, its origin was unknown even to Confucius almost 2500 years ago.

The Chinese actually continued these sacrificial rituals until 1911, when the Manchu dynasty finally fell. Although the origin and meaning had been lost, the Chinese sacrificed to the Supreme God, Shang Ti, for nearly 4500 years. This great altar without an image still stands in Peking.<sup>11</sup>

## Noah

Noah escaped from a deluge that destroyed the human race with the exception of himself, his wife, his three sons and their wives. These eight 八 people 口 built a boat 舟 which was a big boat or ship 船 in order to escape.

船

Ship

八

Eight

口

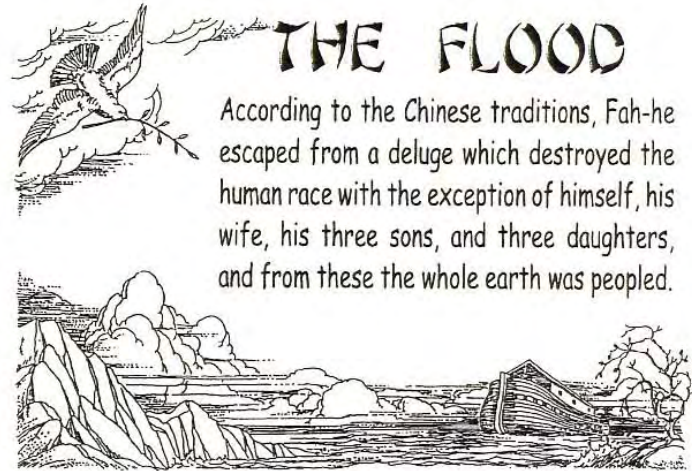
Mouth  
(People)

舟

Boat

## THE FLOOD

According to the Chinese traditions, Fah-he escaped from a deluge which destroyed the human race with the exception of himself, his wife, his three sons, and three daughters, and from these the whole earth was peopled.



## Fah-He

Besides preserving their knowledge of the floods in Kanji the ancient Chinese also handed down an oral tradition. "According to the Chinese tradition, Fah-He escaped from a deluge that destroyed the human race except for himself, his wife, his three sons, and three daughters, and from these, the whole earth was peopled."<sup>12</sup>

船  
Ship

共  
Total

洪  
Flood

人  
Mankind

一  
One

口  
Mouth

合  
United

穴  
Cave

空  
Empty  
Vacant

公  
Public  
Common To All

分  
Division

合  
United

土  
Clay  
(Brick)

艹  
Grass

塔  
Tower

## Eight Survived The Flood

Eight 八 can be found in each of the following words as well as in many others. There were *eight* 八 people 口 on the *ship* 船, which was the *total* 共 number of survivors. After the *total* 共 water 氵 or *flood* 洪 there were no *houses* 宀 to live in so the *eight* 八 lived in *caves* 穴. When they went out of the cave to *work* 工 the *cave* 穴 was *empty* or *vacant* 空. At this time any *secret* 厶 known to *eight* 八 was *common to all* or *public* 公. In the word *division* 分 eight is written at the top. When the *eight* 八 were separated as with a *knife* 刀 there was *division* 分.

肉  
Flesh  
(Animal)

又  
Again

示  
God

祭  
To Sacrifice

## Worship

The first thing that Noah did upon leaving the ark was to build an altar and offer burnt offerings of *animal flesh* 肉 夕 *again* 又 to *God* 示, that is he *worshiped* 祭. (Gen. 8:20)

## The Tower

God had told Noah to "replenish the earth" (Gen. 9:1). After the flood "the whole earth was of one language and of one speech" (Gen. 11:1), and mankind wanted to build a tower in opposition to God lest they "be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." *Mankind* 人 was of *one* 一 *speech (mouth)* 口 that is they were *united* 合 against God, and made brick of *clay* 土 and *grass* 艹 to build a *tower* 塔. The use of clay and straw is understandable in building a tower, but why does the word tower include the idea of united in one speech?

舌  
Tongue

𠂔  
Right Leg  
Half of 𠂔

乱  
1. Rebellion  
2. Confusion

## Rebellion Resulting In Confusion

Amazingly the Chinese have one word that means not only *confusion* but also *rebellion* 乱. The *tongue* 舌 was confused at the time of the rebellion (Gen. 11:6-7). The right hand part of the Character is the right leg of *man's legs* 𠂔, extended for walking. The Lord God "did there confound (confuse) the language of all the earth" and scattered "them abroad upon the face of all the earth" (Gen. 11:7-9).



## **Conclusion:**

Only a few of the literally hundreds of examples of Bible stories in Kanji have been presented. Are these stories the result of mere coincidence? One or two or maybe even a dozen could be coincidental, but not hundreds and the cumulative nature of these extra-Biblical records should be considered. Here is another reliable record that agrees in close detail with the Bible. They corroborate and illustrate the Biblical record and add to the historical trustworthiness of the Bible.



## REFERENCES

1. C. H. Kang and Ethel R. Nelson, *The Discovery of Genesis*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), p. 15.
2. Alfred M. Rehwinkel, *The Flood: In the Light of the Bible, Geology, and Archaeology*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951, p. 129.
3. James H Shultz, *The Church in T'ang China*, (Los Angeles: A Thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School, University of Southern California, 1970), pp. 17, 25, 35. quoted in Kang and Nelson, op. cit.
4. James Legge, *The Notations of the Chinese Concerning God and Spirits*, (Hong Kong Register Office, 1852) p. 50 quoted in Kang and Nelson, op. cit, p. 14.
5. Ibid., p. 2
6. Morita Tohru, ed., *Kanji Kanji*, (Tokyo: The East Publications, 1983), p. 19.
7. Edwin O. Reischauer and John K. Fairbanks, *East Asia: The Great Tradition*, (Boston:Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958), p. 39.
8. Morita, op. Cit., P. 16.
9. *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan*, 1983 ed, s.v. "Kanji", by Yamada Toshio.
10. Kang and Nelson, op. cit., pp. 90, 91, 92.
11. Reischauer and Fairbanks, op. cit., pp. 49, 50.
12. Rehwinkel, op. cit., p. 142.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Kang, C. H., and Nelson Ethel R. *The Discovery of Genesis*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979.
- Kato, Joken. *Kanji no Kigen 漢字の起源*. Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten.
- Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan*, 1983 ed., s. v. "Kanji", by Yamada Toshio.
- Legge, James. *The Notations of the Chinese Concerning God and Spirits*. Hong Kong Register Office, 1852.
- Morita, Tohru, ed. *Kanji Kanji*. Tokyo: The East Publication, 1983.
- Nelson, Andrew N. *The Modern Reader's English-Japanese Character Dictionary*. Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1961.
- Rehwinkel, Alfred M. *The Flood: In the Light of the Bible, Geology, and Archaeology*. St. Louis; Concordia Publishing House, 1951.
- Reischauer, Edwin O., and Fairbank, John K. *East Asia: The Great Tradition*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958.
- Shultz, James H. *The Church in T'ang China*. Los Angeles: A Thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School, University of Southern California, 1970.
- Ueda, Mannen et al. *Dai Kanwa Jiten 大漢和字典*. Tokyo: Kodansha.