

Smithsonian is restoring Jefferson's unique Bible

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [April 19, 2011](#) issue

A Smithsonian museum is restoring the "Jefferson Bible," a unique volume that the third president himself cut and pasted—omitting lots of theology—from portions of the New Testament.

Thomas Jefferson assembled the book in 1820 after retiring from the presidency. *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* resembles a scrapbook that puts Jesus' life in chronological order. Its 86 pages include clipped passages from the Gospels in English, Latin, French and Greek. It includes the crucifixion and burial of Jesus but not the resurrection and leaves out the miracles attributed to him.

Conservators

at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History will repair the fragile book's torn pages. It is scheduled to be displayed starting in mid-November for four months. The project, paid for by private and federal funds, will cost about \$225,000.

"The volume provides an exclusive insight to the religious and moral beliefs of the writer of the Declaration of Independence, the nation's third president, as well as his position as an important thinker in the Age of Enlightenment," said Brent D. Glass, director of the museum, in a March 10 announcement about the project.

The Smithsonian's librarian purchased the book from Jefferson's great-granddaughter for \$400 in 1895, said museum spokeswoman Valeska Hilbig. "He never sold it because he didn't want it to be public," Harry R. Rubenstein, the chair of the museum's political history division, told the *Washington Post*. "He wanted to avoid bringing back the arguments that he was anti-Christian." —RNS