

BAKER PUBLISHING GROUP CELEBRATES 75TH ANNIVERSARY 1939-2014



Our mission is to publish high-quality writings that represent historic Christianity and serve the diverse interests and concerns of evangelical readers.



» Herman and Rich Baker, 1989

BUILDING A BOOK BUSINESS FROM THE GROUND UP

At age 28, with help from his in-laws, Herman Baker opened his bookstore at 1019 Wealthy Street in Grand Rapids. The year was 1939—the Great Depression was nearing its end and German troops invaded Poland in the opening salvos of World War II. Herman paid just \$18 a month to rent the bookstore space, which he filled with less than five hundred used books collected over the years and displayed on homemade shelves. His equipment consisted of two used desks and a typewriter purchased at the Salvation Army.

The demand for used religious books soon exceeded expectations. Herman expanded his business into several ground-floor rooms and then into the basement. Continued growth meant purchasing adjoining buildings and converting upstairs apartments into storage and display rooms.

Just a year after opening the store,

Herman Baker took his first steps into publishing books. In 1940 Baker Book House released *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* by Dr. William Hendriksen, professor of New Testament exegetical theology at Calvin Seminary, located just a short distance from the store.

More Than Conquerors proved to be just the sort of title Baker loved to publish: conservative, scholarly, biblical, timeless. The book is still in print and continues to draw reviews and comments nearly seventy-five years after its original publication.

Herman Baker purchased the Wealthy Street building in 1942, gradually growing the business through the war years. There were times, however, when he had to wait for money to come in before buying postage stamps to send out more catalogs.

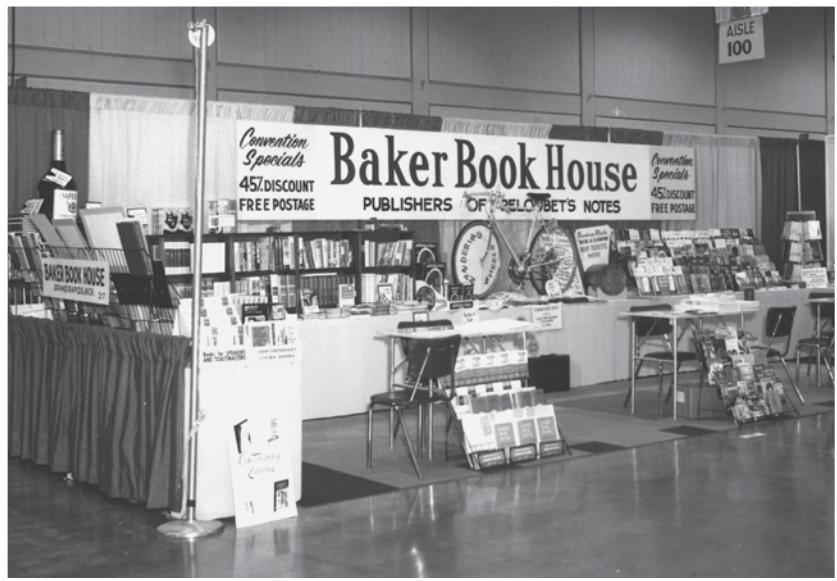
The war years saw the first new and used fiction sold at the store, in part to draw in

FUN FACTS

When Baker Book House first opened, mailing personnel simply stacked packages on a two-wheeled cart and walked half a block to the nearby post office. Today, an average of more than 30,000 books are shipped from Baker Publishing Group's warehouse each day.

the many women who stayed home while the men went off to war.

Baker knew how to sell books. As the tenth anniversary of the business approached, he and his staff came up with the novel idea of reissuing the popular *Barnes' Notes*, a commentary series that had already been a bestseller for over a century. It had been last reissued in 1852. But reissuing the twenty volumes would cost a prohibitive \$30,000 for 2,000 printed and bound sets. Herman didn't have that kind of capital, but he did have a salesman's instincts. Baker Book House issued them on the Volume-A-Month Plan at \$3 each beginning in early 1949, a plan "that has proved very popular with purchasers of modest means," according to the tenth anniversary catalog. More than 20,000 volumes were ordered in just five months.



"We love to sell a good book. There is no better business to be in. In books we have the richest treasures on earth, the output of the best minds of the ages."—Herman Baker

By 1949, Baker Book House was among the largest distributors of new and used religious books in the United States and abroad. Orders came from as close as the next block to as far away as South Africa, Korea, and Hungary.

EXCERPTS FROM "SO YOU WANT TO WRITE A BOOK" BY HERMAN BAKER, (MAY 1959)

So you want to write a book. This is welcome news. Evangelicals have a weighty responsibility. God has given man the task of studying His revelation, both special and general. We can be of great help to each other and to those beyond our circles by sharing the results of our research and thinking by means of the printed page. So you are to be congratulated on this desire. . . .

The evangelical can speak confidently, positively, and with conviction. I am pleased that you have reached the decision to grasp this opportunity. . . .

1. Be sure your motivation is right.
2. Be sure the subject of your proposed book is worthwhile.
3. Be sure you are qualified to make a contribution.
4. Be sure you can express yourself effectively through the medium of the printed page.

Are you still with me? If you have given up already as a result of this article, nothing is lost. You would have fallen by the wayside anyway. You can thank me for saving you time and effort.

If you still want to write a book, there is hope that you may become a powerful and positive influence in the interest of evangelical Christianity.

May God give you strength and wisdom. We are expecting great things from you.

FUN FACTS

In the 1960s, catalogs were typed by hand as employees moved a portable table and typewriter along the rows of books. Pages were laid on light boards for proofreading. Once the catalogs were mailed out, employees had about two weeks' rest before orders began flooding in.



» Baker's First Publication, 1940



» Peter, Herman, and Rich Baker



» The Expansion of Baker Books



» Rich Baker

DISTINGUISHED BAKER BOOK HOUSE SHOPPERS

D. James Kennedy

David Otis Fuller

David Martyn
Lloyd-Jones

Peter Masters

Ernest E. Jolly
(who had his own key)

J. I. Packer

Harold F. J. Ellingson

Ezra Carter
(father of June Carter Cash)

Eleanor Roosevelt
(through catalog)

PASSING THE TORCH AND SURPASSING EXPECTATIONS

The early 1950s were years of change for Baker Book House and the Christian publishing world in general. The Wealthy Street store underwent a complete renovation inside and out in 1953, providing additional space and improvements for both the publishing offices and the bookstore. In the larger Christian publishing world, the Christian Booksellers Association was incorporated in 1950 in Illinois with 219 charter member stores, including Baker Book House.

By the bookstore's twenty-fifth year, Herman Baker's sons Richard and Peter were part of the staff. Richard Baker came on in 1957 after attending Calvin College and graduating from the Publishing Procedures Course sponsored by Radcliffe College. Peter Baker joined the business after attending Calvin College and Davenport Business Institute.

Richard Baker calls Baker Book House "the only job I ever had." He remembers many hours spent at the store as a child and young adult. "My dad would say, 'Put

those books in canonical order' or 'Put those books in alphabetical order,'" recalls Rich. "I got really good at that."

The late 1960s onward were years of unprecedented growth for Christian publishing in general and for Baker Book House specifically. The bookstore on Wealthy Street became a gathering place for area pastors, teachers, and laypeople eager to find the newest books or fill holes in their libraries.

Perhaps the biggest move during the 1960s was the construction of a 25,000-square-foot facility in Ada, just east of Grand Rapids, to house the publishing division and warehouse. The building has been expanded three times since then, adding space to the mailing and warehousing departments, as well as publishing division offices.

In the 1970s, the retail aspect of the business was going strong under the leadership of Herman Baker's second son, Peter J. Baker. In 1968, Baker opened a store in Holland, about twenty-five miles

Cambridge Bibles
distribution begins: 1990

Baker purchases Revell,
Chosen, and Spire: 1992

1985

1990

1995

southwest of Grand Rapids. A third store opened in 1970 in the Benton Harbor area. Then, between September 1972 and April 1976, three stores opened in Breton Village Mall in Grand Rapids. The first, also named Baker Book House, sold religious and secular titles from the major publishers in both realms. Paperbacks on Parade sold only paperbacks, and the third store, Pooh's Corner, specialized in children's books. In late 1978, the company established an outlet store in Grand Village Mall in the Grand Rapids suburb of Grandville.

Richard Baker, Herman's oldest son,

Baker's purchase of Revell and Chosen set the company on track as a trade publisher, but it was hard to reeducate the public.

"Isn't Baker the company that does classics and reprints?" many asked. "The perception of Baker as a dusty corner of the book business stuck to us for years," relates current president Dwight Baker. "Of course, Baker did remain a publisher of classics. It was good business to continue working in that area as we established ourselves in the new markets of the late 1990s and the new millennium."

"In fact, we turned the final page on

books into boxes in the mailroom.

After graduating from Grand Rapids Christian High School, Dwight attended Calvin College and majored in art. He joined Baker Book House in 1979, became art director in 1983, and took on the role of executive vice president in 1991.

"My dad retired on the last day of a five-year paydown after the purchase of Revell. He took us through the five years of higher risk, then retired and left me with money to invest. I invested in staff, infrastructure, and authors," said Dwight.

"There is always a market for books from Baker Publishing Group. We can go along as an independent publisher for years. I'm very optimistic for our immediate future with the position we're in and the grace of God."—Rich Baker

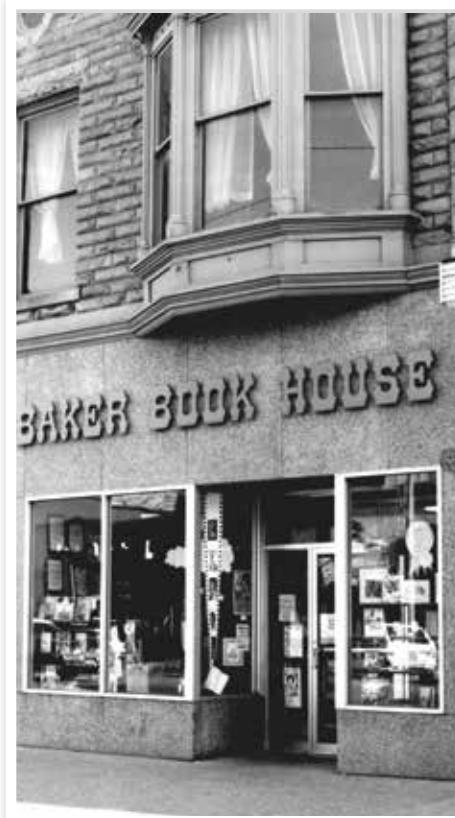
became president of Baker Book House upon Herman's retirement in 1987. Despite his retirement at age 76, Herman continued to play a role in the book business as publisher at large. He continued working until his death in February 1991 at age 79.

Richard Baker could see a need in the area of trade publishing. The man who stepped into his father's shoes put his mark on Baker Book House by expanding the company through several key purchases that filled that need, including the purchase of the Fleming H. Revell Company and Chosen Books in 1992.

The early 1990s were years of adjustment as the company doubled its business. Rich

this history only recently," says Dwight. "The last carton of *Calvin's Commentaries* shipped from our warehouse in April 2013. The occasion passed without notice or fanfare, but that shipment marked the end of an era for our publishing program. Today our catalog represents only works that we introduce."

The 1990s were also a time of transition in leadership. Rich Baker, who had led the company since 1987, stepped down in 1997, and his son Dwight stepped in. Dwight, Rich's oldest son, had grown up at the company his grandfather started. Like his father, Dwight started out sweeping floors, washing windows, and packing



» Original Holland Store

Baker launches
Brazos Press: 1999

Baker purchases Bethany
House Publishers: 2003

Baker purchases
GOD'S WORD
Bibles: 2008

2000

2005

2010

BAKER ENTERS AN UNPREDICTABLE NEW MILLENNIUM

One of the key changes made at Baker in the early 2000s reflected the growth and breadth of Herman Baker's vision and Richard Baker's forward thinking. The publishing divisions began operating under the name Baker Publishing Group in 2004 and expanded once again, this time nearly doubling the line and strengthening exponentially its reach into the fiction market with the purchase of Bethany House Publishers.

Already well known for powerhouse fiction authors like Beverly Lewis, Lynn Austin, and Tracie Peterson, Bethany House also boasted a strong stable of nonfiction authors and was a natural fit for Baker. Offices and staff remain in Bloomington, Minnesota.

In 2008, Baker purchased the publishing rights to *GOD'S WORD* Translation (GW), marking its first venture into Bible publishing.

But all was not smooth sailing. The early 2000s—with Baker's continued growth and deepened commitment to reaching readers with fine books—were the calm before the storm of a huge recession that hit the United States and Michigan in particular. Sales in 2008 and 2009 plummeted as consumers struggled to make ends meet due to job loss and higher costs of living. The book publishing industry was hit especially hard, with Baker Publishing Group no exception.

Many other companies went through staff reductions during this time, a step that Dwight Baker sought to avoid. Instead, the company announced in late 2008 that every employee making more than \$12 per hour would receive a 5 percent pay cut. This action, in addition to a hiring freeze and many other spending reductions, enabled the company to get through the recession. Staff members' pay was restored several months later as economic conditions improved.

Editors and office staff also took shifts in the warehouse when the hiring freeze meant warehouse workers were falling behind in processing returns. They donned jeans and t-shirts and got to work opening cartons, putting books back on shelves, and handling damaged books.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY READERS

Baker Publishing Group was on the cutting edge of the ebook revolution in 2008 when *The Pawn* by Steven James and *UnChristian* by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons became the first BPG ebooks. Between 2008 and 2012, almost all backlist titles were converted to ebook format. The current focus is on

frontlist title conversion, with all new titles (300–350 titles a year) released in ebook form to accommodate the preferences of twenty-first-century readers.

"Sales and profits from digital books have helped us continue publishing with minimal interruption to the company," said Dave Lewis, Executive Vice President,

AUTHOR QUOTE

"I'm especially grateful for Baker Publishing Group and all they have done to help their authors minister to people all over the world. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, 'Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds you plant.'

Thank you, Baker Publishing Group, for helping me plant some seeds! One day we shall behold the harvest."

—Warren W. Wiersbe

Sales and Marketing. "Fiction was the category that exploded for ebook sales first and is the reason we have kept pace with the overall industry in ebook sales."

Lewis credits Nathan Henrion and others in the sales department who were quick to understand the power of promoting certain ebooks at low prices to find new readers.

First mimeograph machine: 1946



First electric typewriter and Dictaphone: 1977



First Mac computer and fax machine: 1985



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dwight Baker,

President,

Baker Publishing Group

Dan Baker,

Executive Vice President/

Human Resources,

Baker Publishing Group

John Jackoboice,

Chairman Emeritus,

Monarch Hydraulics

Bruce Ryskamp,

President/CEO, Zondervan

Corporation, retired

Kathryn Scanland,

President, Greystone Global

Quentin Schultze,

Professor of Communications,
Calvin College

Jody Vanderwel,

Corporate Counsel and
VP Corporate Giving,
Herman Miller

C. Jeffrey Wright,

CEO, Urban Ministries, Inc.

MOVING CONFIDENTLY INTO THE FUTURE

The future is bright for Baker Publishing Group. Baker Book House, the retail arm of the company, recently underwent a million-dollar renovation to expand and update the store. Current bestsellers, backlist titles, and a deep academic section draw casual readers and scholarly experts. Customers come from around the world to shop the store's ninety thousand used books and bargain area; prominent authors—from Ted Dekker to Liz Curtis Higgs to Charles Stanley—are eager to do events at the store; and the community has found a meeting place with private meeting rooms, wifi, a café, event space, and comfortable seating.



» 1989 Design Team: Dwight B.,
Lisa H., and Dan M



» Dwight Baker at the company Christmas party, 2011

"When we review the past few decades, it becomes clear that we have made our greatest progress during those periods when our confidence and comfort levels were comparatively low. We do our best when we are in over our heads, and we eventually forget about how panicked we felt at the time. That's one of the amazing aspects of book publishing. Yes, it is conservative by nature and rich with tradition, but every morning on the job I still feel like a freshman. There is still so much to learn about serving the church through publishing, and that is the enduring joy of it."—Dwight Baker

First desktop PCs:
1992



First Laptops:
1997



First iPads: 2010



1995

2005

2010

2020

Baker Publishing Group, now in its third generation of Baker family leadership, is preparing for the future. In September 2012, Dwight Baker created a governing board made up of Dwight and Dan Baker and six non-family members. These thoughtful men and women are tasked with guiding the organization into the fourth generation and beyond. And while Dwight Baker leads Baker Book House Company, the company is owned jointly by four Baker family members who are all voting shareholders.

Baker Publishing Group looks to the future even as it celebrates the past seventy-five years. The company's goal remains the same, reflecting the words of Herman Baker: "We love to sell a good book. There is no better business to be in."

TODAY



» Our New Bookstore Building, 2012

BESTSELLING AUTHORS

Over 25 million

Gilbert Morris

Tracie Peterson

Michael Phillips

Lauraine Snelling

Dale Evans Rogers

Over 15 million

Beverly Lewis

Over 5 million

Charles Allen

Kevin Leman

Lois Leppard

Catherine Marshall

Don Piper

Helen Steiner Rice

Corrie ten Boom

David Wilkerson

Over 2 million

Neva Coyle and Marie Chapian

Larry Christenson

dcTalk

Elisabeth Elliot

Dave and Neta Jackson

Over 1 million

Brother Andrew

Willard F. Harley, Jr.

T. D. Jakes

Over 3 million

Hayley DiMarco

Warren Wiersbe

BESTSELLING TITLES

Over 5 million

90 Minutes in Heaven, Don Piper

In His Steps, Charles Sheldon

The Hiding Place, Corrie ten Boom

Over 2 million

All Things Are Possible with Prayer, Charles Allen

God's Smuggler, Brother Andrew

The Master Plan of Evangelism, Robert Coleman

His Needs, Her Needs, Willard Harley

Beyond Ourselves, Catherine Marshall

The Total Woman, Marabel Morgan

The Cross and the Switchblade, David Wilkerson

Over 1 million

God's Psychiatry, Charles Allen

The Christian Family, Larry Christenson

Born Again, Charles Colson

Free to Be Thin, Neva Coyle and Marie Chapian

Jesus Freaks, dcTalk

Hide and Seek, James Dobson

The Shunning, Beverly Lewis

Personality Plus, Florence Littauer

Little Girls & Little Boys Bible Story Books, Carolyn Larsen

God Calling, A. J. Russell

The Helper, Catherine Marshall

Something More, Catherine Marshall

To Live Again, Catherine Marshall

None of These Diseases, S. I. McMillen and David Stern

Love Comes Softly, Janette Oke

Love's Enduring Promise, Janette Oke

When Calls the Heart, Janette Oke

Once Upon a Summer, Janette Oke

Angel Unaware, Dale Evans Rogers

The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life, Hannah Whitall Smith