




The Bizzell Bible Collection

By JOE A. DAVIS
Photos by J. P. Smith

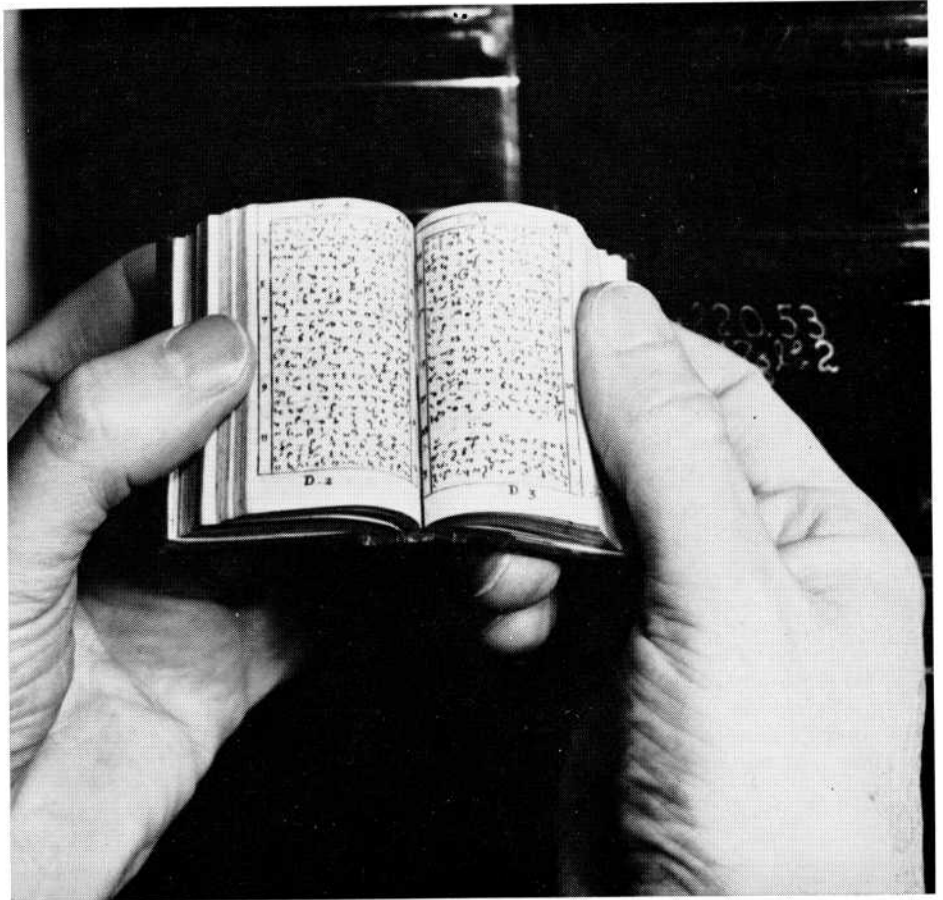


O.U.'s library is the academic and intellectual center of the University. Several important collections make the library an important source for scholarly research. One of these is the Bizzell Bible Collection. The Bizzell Collection contains 655 volumes, including Bibles dating from 1479 to modern times, separate Old and New Testaments, commentaries and interpretations, books of illustrations, histories of the Bible, works concerning the history and geography of the Holy Land, textual studies, books on the life of Christ, prayer and hymn books. Most of the volumes were collected by Dr. William Bennett Bizzell, president of the University from 1931 to 1941. Dr. Bizzell died May 13, 1944, and his Bible collection was presented to the University Library in 1949 by his heirs. Dr. Bizzell loved books and the knowledge they represented. Stamped in all of his personal books was the quotation from Shakespeare, "Ignorance is the curse of God, Knowledge the wing wherewith we fly to heaven." Dr. Bizzell became a collector of rare Bibles by accident. One day while he was a student at Harvard, he was browsing through a shabby Boston bookstore. He discovered a battered but interesting old Bible and bought it for \$1. Later, he found the old book to be a first edition of the Breeches Bible, named for the passage in Genesis in which Adam and Eve were ejected from the Garden of Eden and made themselves "breeches" of fig leaves. Another of his important finds was the Koberger Bible, the oldest book in the collection. One of the most interesting aspects of the Bible is the wood cut on the first page. Hand carved, the illustration is credited by some historians of printing to be one of the first to be used in a Bible. It was the practice of early printers to make the binding of books from scraps of paper usually taken from the floor of the printing shop. That is the method of binding used by the Koberger Bible's printer. The collection, housed in the Bizzell Bible Collection room in the basement of the library, has never been completely catalogued and few people know its full contents. Only a few books have been added to the collection since it was presented to the library by Mrs. Bizzell, widow of the late O.U. president. One of the most important was the "Bible of the Revolution." Donated by an anonymous alumnus, the Bible was the first printed in America in the English language. It is the only Bible ever authorized by Congress. Printed in 1782 by Robert Aitken in Philadelphia, the Bible was published here because the supply of Bibles from England had been cut off by the Revolutionary War. According to a 1940 census, only about 75 copies are still in existence. The Bibles come in many sizes—everything from mammoth polyglot Bibles two feet in width to those less than an inch wide. The polyglot—or multi-language Bible—offers the scholar a chance to compare different passages of the Bible in different

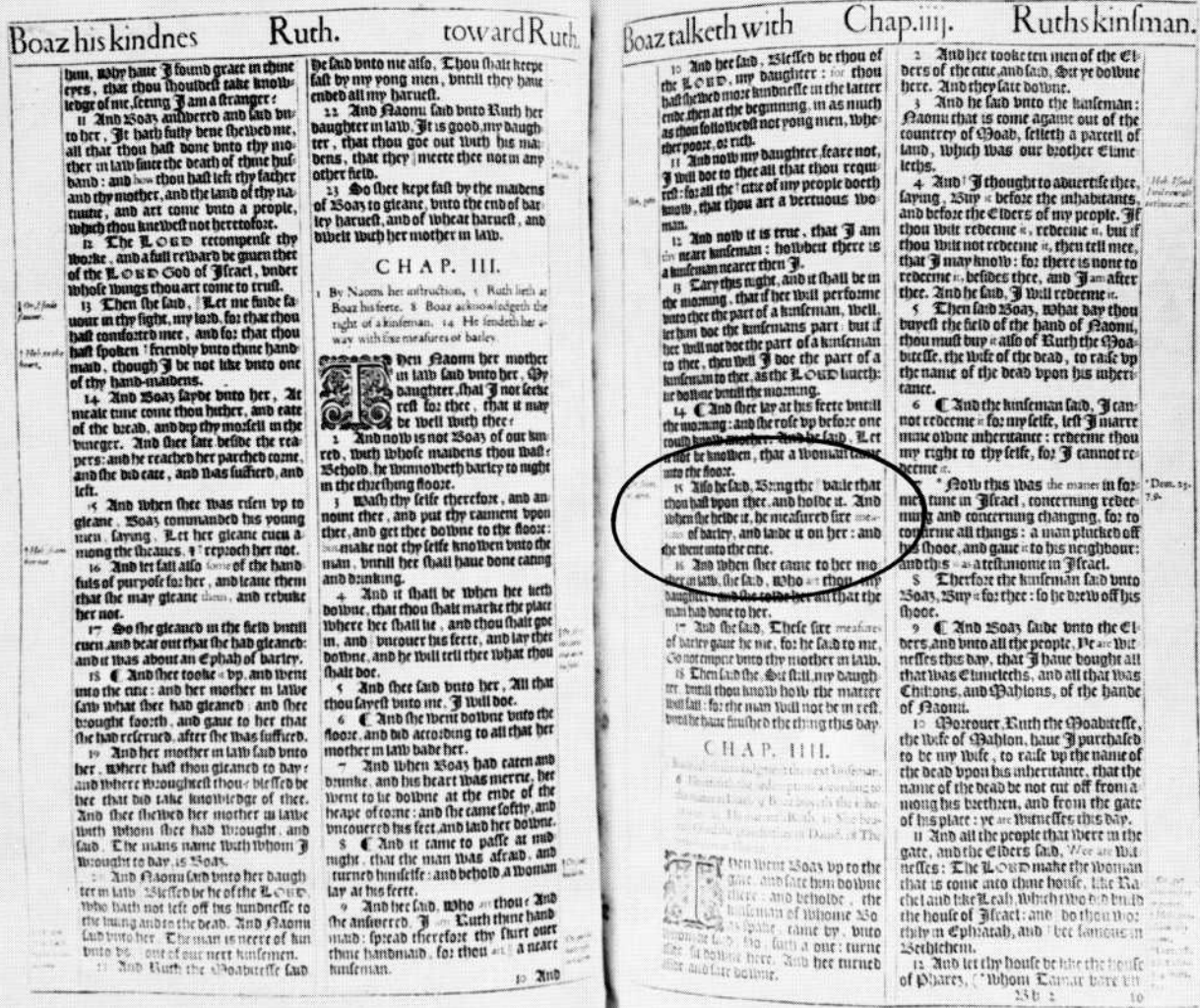
languages. In most large polyglot Bibles, passages of Latin, Greek, Hebrew, English and German appear side by side in adjoining columns. One of the most important in the Bizzell Collection is Walton's Polyglot Bible published in London in 1655 to 1657. This particular work fills six volumes and is in 16 languages. The Bizzell Collection does not include a Gutenberg Bible, which was believed to have been printed in 1454 and is the first book printed in Europe from movable metal types. However, the Collection does have a notable facsimile printed in Germany in 1913. The Bible is one of only 300 copies printed at that time. Both are in the standard Gutenberg form which included 42 lines to the page and both are printed in Latin. Gutenberg printed his famous original at Mainz, Germany. The Bizzell Collection also contains an interesting array of Bibles preceding the famous King James version, which first appeared in 1611. The 54 King James-appointed translators used such sources as William Tyndale's translations of the New Testament and the Bishops Bible as references for the famous old translation. Some of the translations used for references and contained in the Bizzell Collection are: *The Bible in Englyshe*, published in London in 1541, and a copy of the original 1526 edition of *The New Testament Of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, published in 1837. Both were translated by Tyndale. William Bates, rector of St. Dunstan's Church in London during part of the 17th century, called Tyndale's translation of the New Testament "the greatest work of English prose ever achieved by a single individual." Tyndale followed the Erasmus Greek text and his translations display the influence of Luther's 1522 German translation. Tyndale became a martyr ten years after making his first translation. He was strangled and his body burned in 1536. His New Testament translations are practically the basic version used by the King James Edition. The British Museum has the only fragment of the first issue of Tyndale's New Testament known as "the Cologne Fragment." But the Bizzell Collection has a facsimile of the unique fragment made by the Clarendon Press at Oxford in 1926. The Bishop's Bible was produced by a company of divines led by Archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker. The translators consisted mostly of bishops, giving the work its name. The Bible was begun in 1562 and the first publication made in 1568. The Bizzell Collection contains the second folio edition published in London in 1572. The Collection is an amazing one considering that it is largely the work of one man. It is a tribute to that man who loved books and who searched the world for unique ones. (His own personal library was also very large.) The Bizzell Collection lacks many books and is of limited value to the researcher. It is, however, the best Bible collection in Oklahoma and possibly the entire Southwest.

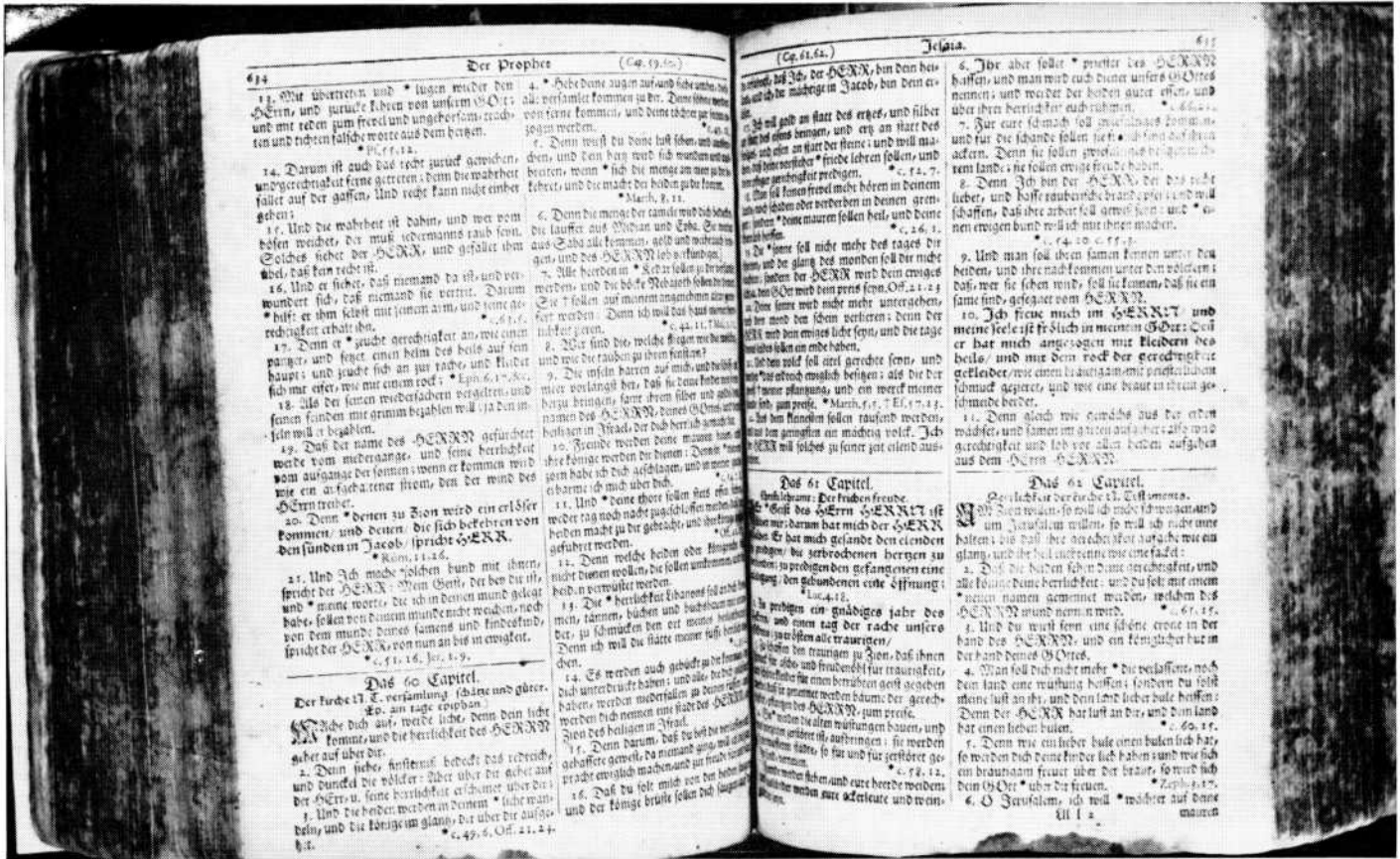
BIZZELL BIBLE COLLECTION

RIGHT: The Bizzell Collection contains a great variety of works. The small Bible pictured here is only about an inch wide and is written in shorthand.



BELOW: The first edition of the King James version of the Bible was completed in 1611 and is known as the great "He" edition, named for the error in Ruth 3, verse 15: "And HE went into the city," rather than than SHE. The error was corrected in the second edition, which is known as the "She" edition.





BELOW: The Breeches Bible, known as the Geneva or Puritan Bible, was made under the influence of Calvin in Geneva. It is the first English Bible to divide chapters into verses.

ABOVE: The first Bible printed in America for the European colonists was the first edition of the Saur Bible, printed in 1743 by Christopher Saur at Germantown, Pennsylvania. It was written in German.

