

**NJS Presents**

**Museums, Archives, Artifacts, and Documents**

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***Christ Church's Vinegar Bible***

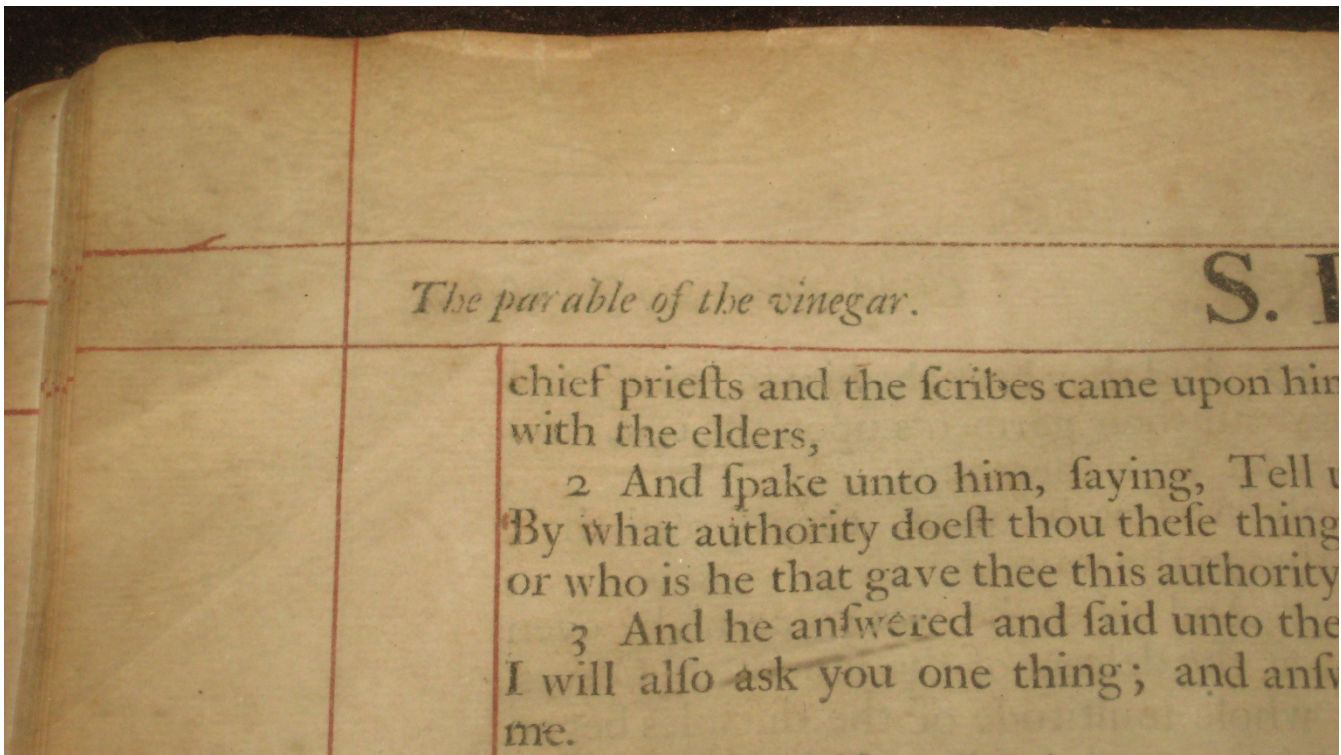
**By Robert M. Kelly, Jr.**

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*A church in Shrewsbury, NJ, is the proud owner of an absolutely beautiful, and exceedingly rare, 300-year-old Bible with the curious nickname, the “Vinegar Bible.” It’s been guiding worship since before the American Revolution. Before you read any further, take a guess where the interesting nickname might have come from. Got it? Ok, now read on for the true story...*



In 1717 John Baskett published the “Vinegar Bible” in Oxford, England.<sup>1</sup> Now, I won’t keep you in suspense. Why is this particular printing of the King James Version of the Bible called the “Vinegar Bible?” It’s all due to a typesetting error in the Bible. In Luke Chapter 20, in which the “Parable of the Vineyard” is told, there is a running headline that is incorrectly printed as “The Parable of the Vinegar.” There are some other very minor errors in the Bible, earning it a second nickname, “Baskett-ful of Errors.”



This article will illuminate many aspects of the Vinegar Bible with particular reference to the copy at Christ Church in Shrewsbury, New Jersey. Through this journey I hope to demonstrate that the focus on the error misses the beauty of this wonderful tome.

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<sup>1</sup> All photographs used in this piece are the property of Christ Church.



**The Vinegar Bible at Christ Church Shrewsbury**





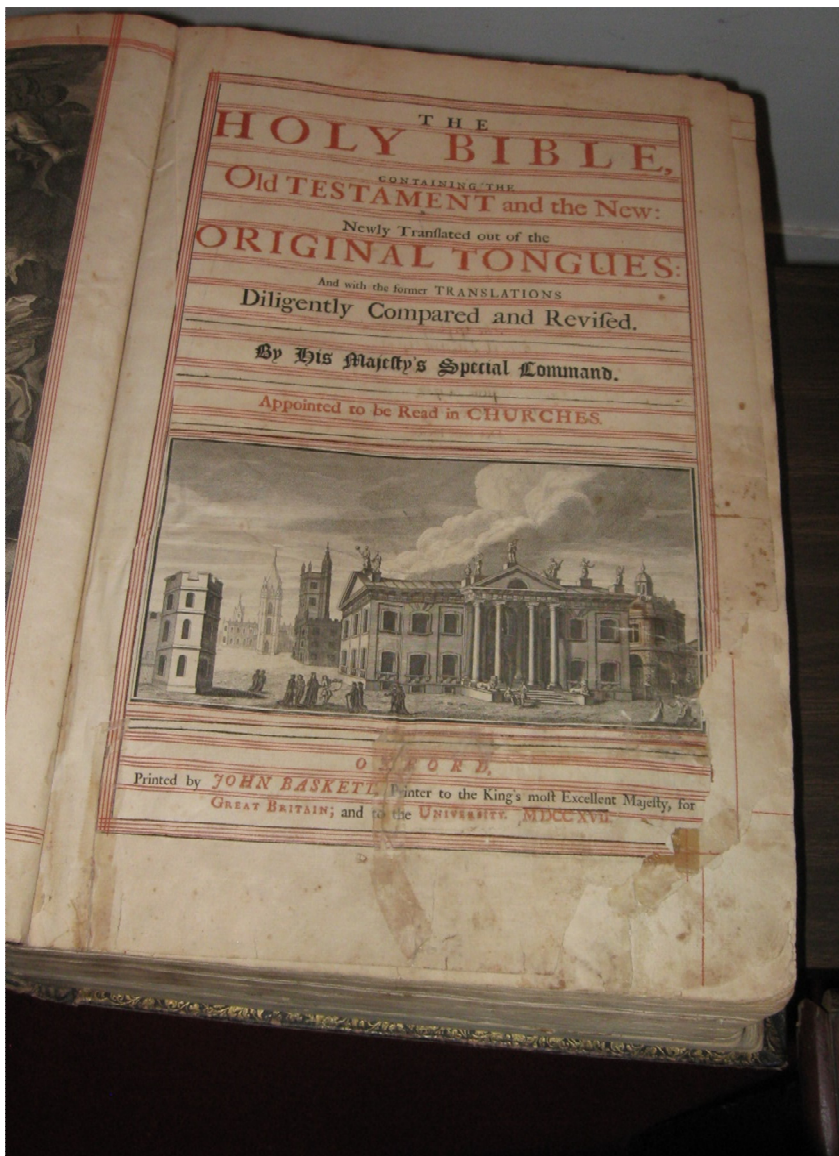
Our parish was founded in 1702 as one of the numerous Anglican colonial parishes in British-claimed territory in the New World. We were served by a series of missionary priests sent by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG). One of these priests, the Reverend Samuel Cooke, served from 1751 to 1775. His major accomplishment was the erection of our current church in 1769. Shortly after his arrival, Reverend Cooke received a copy of the Vinegar Bible from Robert Elliston who was the Controller of His Majesty's Customs in New York. Elliston was a Gentleman and thus a member of the British Nobility. In the image at right, his Coat of Arms is depicted as a bookplate. Below that is the inscription of the donation to Reverend Cooke and to Christ Church. Elliston was a Vestryman at Trinity Church on Wall Street and is buried there.



This leads to two unsolved mysteries. Where was this copy of the Bible from 1717 to 1752? What was the connection between Elliston and Cooke? Research to date has not solved these

mysteries and they may be lost to history. One fact is that the Monarchy, especially the Queens, Anne, Caroline, and Charlotte, encouraged Nobles to support colonial parishes. From this fact, some plausible, partial explanations can be offered but there is no proof. An excerpt from Cooke's semi-annual report to the SPG, dated August 1, 1753, reads: "Mr. Elliston, Comptroller of the Customs in N. York is a very worthy Gentleman and a Benefactor to the Society, and as such they desire you to return him their Thanks for the Handsome Bible bestow'd on your Church ..." This does suggest that Elliston wanted some documentary proof of this gift as evidence of his support for the Monarch's desires. The "they" in the quote may include Trinity and may suggest that the Bible was there until 1752.

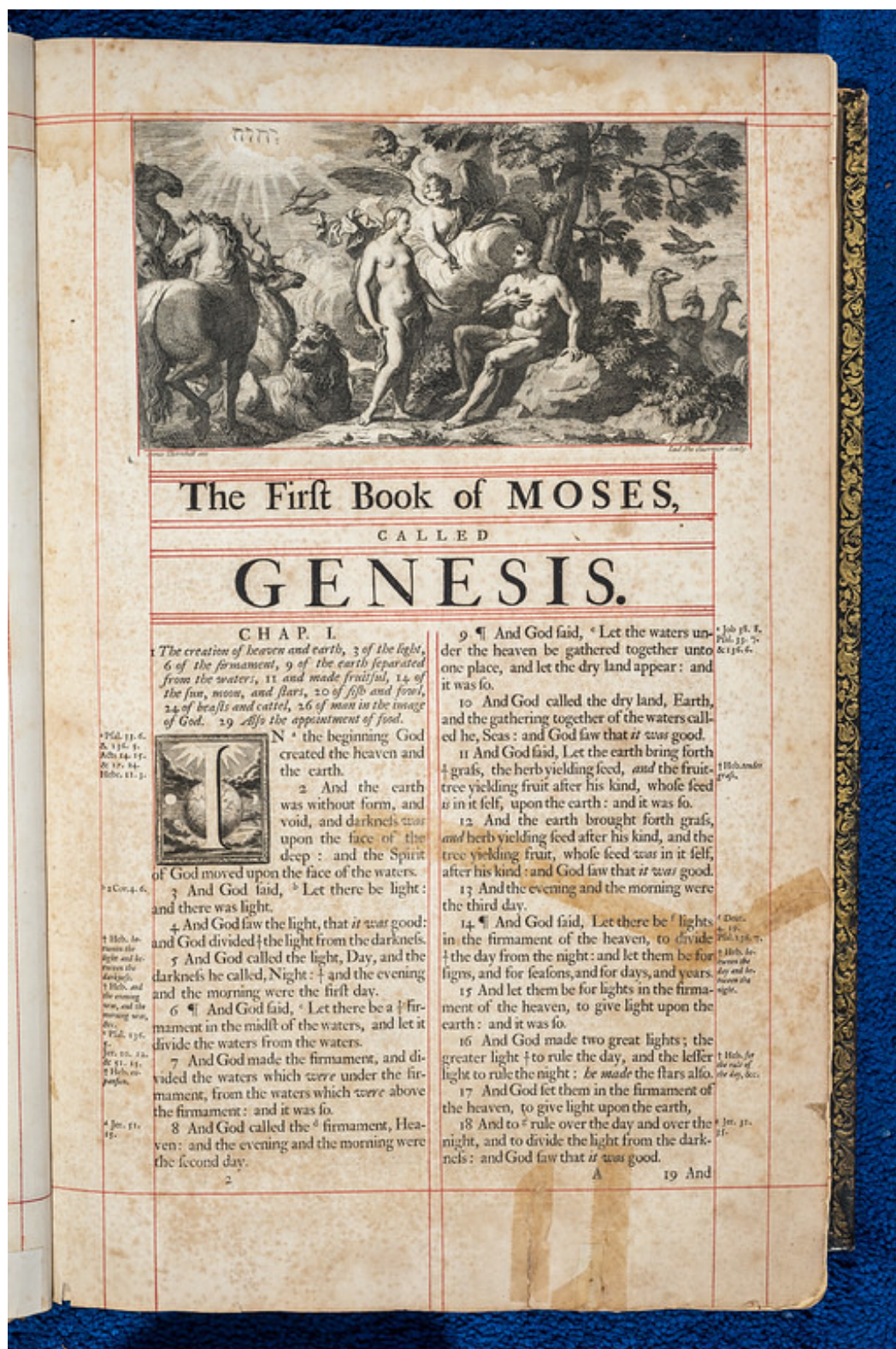
Cooke would have placed the Bible in the Christ Church Shrewsbury building at that time. (This was the church, preceding our current one, that was built in 1732-1733.) The Vinegar Bible is a lectionary Bible as noted in the image of the frontispiece at right.





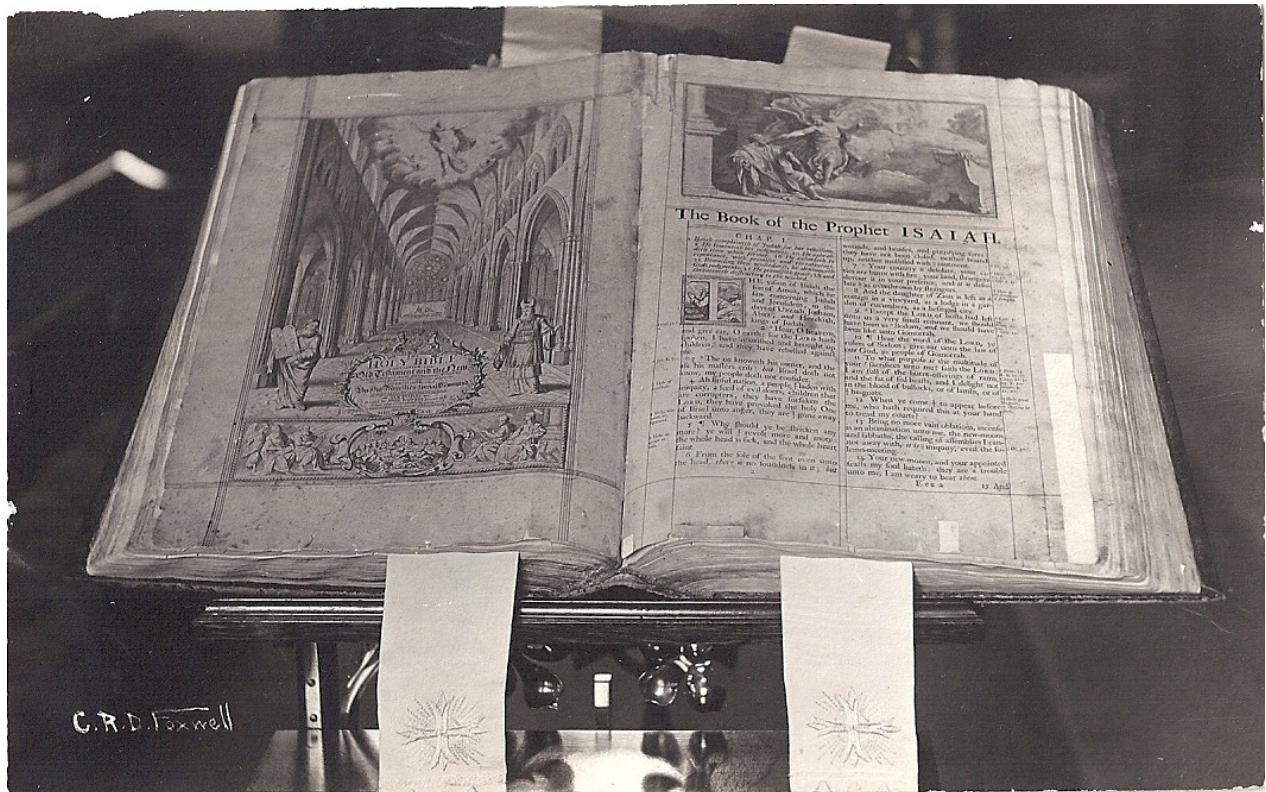
As such the Bible has large print and is physically imposing, measuring about 19" x 14" x 5".

Below is an example of one of the Bible's pages.





With one exception noted below, this Vinegar Bible would have been used continuously for reading scripture at services until the early 1900s when it was retired and ultimately placed in a display case. Below is a 1906 postcard of the Christ Church Bible.



Due to its regular use, the Bible has had innumerable page turnings and handling over about 175 years. The Bible shows this wear and tear. Some of this can be seen in the sample on the next page. We view this as a badge of honor in which a Bible has been used extensively for its intended publication and spiritual purpose.



*The excellency of Israel.*

## Chap. xxxiv.

*Moses death and burial*

22 ¶ And of Dan he said, Dan is a lions whelp: he shall leap from Bashan.

23 ¶ And of Naphtali he said, O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the LORD: possess thou the west and the south.

24 ¶ And of Asher he said, Let Asher be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oyl.

25 ¶ Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.

26 ¶ There is none like unto the God of Jesurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky.

27 The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee, and shall say, Destroy them.

28 ¶ Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine, also his heavens shall drop down dew.

29 Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt tread upon their high places.

## C H A P. XXXIV.

1 Moses from mount Nebo vieweth the land. 5 He dieth there. 6 His burial. 7 His age. 8 Thirty days mourning for him. 9 Joshua succeedeth him. 10 The praise of Moses.

AND Moses went up from the plain of Moab, unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho: and the LORD shewed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan,

2 And all Naphtali, and the land of

Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea,

3 And the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm-trees, unto Zoar.

4 And the LORD said unto him, This is the land which I swore unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither.

5 ¶ So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD.

6 ¶ And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.

7 ¶ And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.

8 ¶ And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days: for the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.

9 ¶ And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the LORD commanded Moses.

10 ¶ And there arose no prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face:

11 In all the signs and the wonders which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land,

12 And in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed in the sight of all Israel.





As noted previously the Bible was not in use for a period of time. Unsurprisingly, this was during the Revolutionary War. Samuel Cooke left for England in May 1775 for a combination of political and family reasons. The newly erected church building and our records and artifacts were at risk of vandalism since they were symbols of the King. In addition, Monmouth County leaned toward the Revolutionary side. Fortunately, there was a prominent Vestryman, Josiah Holmes, who, while a leader in the Revolutionary movement, also loved the church. He used his position and influence to successfully protect the building and the artifacts, likely by burying the latter including the Vinegar Bible.

### **Marking the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

When we at Christ Church realized that 2017 was the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vinegar Bible's printing, we embarked on a number of activities to celebrate that anniversary. One was to remove it from its display case. This was somewhat nerve-wracking since it was unclear what its condition was. With an expert present, we were ready to abandon the effort if the condition seemed very poor. Fortunately, it was not! There was the expected wear and tear, but the Bible was in decent condition, considering the long duration of its use. The pages are sturdy and readily turned without risk. This then enabled several activities.

After "liberating" the Bible in June, we read the Gospel from the Vinegar Bible each Sunday until the end of its tercentenary year. (This can be an adventure due to the unusual type, especially the use of what appears to be an "f" for an "s" like "faid".) We also engaged a professional photographer to take high definition photographs of key pages. These included the remarkable illustrations with head and tail pieces for each book of the Bible and the illustrated initial letter of each book. Examples can be seen in accompanying images. These illustrations are a main reason that this printing is truly beautiful and belies the odious nickname.

These high-resolution photographs have allowed us to study the illustrations without needing to handle the Bible. The images were created by a number of leading decorative artists of the day, including Thornhill, Laguerre, and Cheron. They were then turned into copper engravings. These images typically depict Biblical scenes, but the details are uncertain. A sample follows below. To learn more about these illustrations, we engaged an Art History student at nearby Monmouth University to research these over the next 1-2 semesters.





Finally, we wanted to share this remarkable historical treasure with the local community. In many ways it is as much their history as ours. This sharing has taken numerous forms including having an article published in a local newspaper, having visitors “tour the Bible” at a local Independence Day event, and having it as the featured attraction of our annual Lantern Tour on the first Friday in December. The major activity was an event that we called “1717,” which was a celebration of the Bible in history and music.

The musical aspect of the Vinegar Bible celebration was a nod to another interesting connection. The “1717” music was of the era of the Bible’s publishing in the Baroque period. A small choral group called Madregalia, which is in residence at Christ Church, performed a series of anthems that were largely selected from G. F. Handel’s Chandos anthems. Around 1717 Handel was in residence at the Earl of Chandos estate just north of London and composed these anthems. The connection is that Chandos, too, owned a Vinegar Bible, and it is now in the United States at the Morgan Library in New York City.

This leads us to other Bibles in the United States. In our research at Christ Church, we focused on Vinegar Bibles in the USA. (The Heritage Committee at St. John’s Anglican Church in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia has done more research on Vinegar Bibles elsewhere, mostly in Great Britain.) We sought to understand the provenance of these other Bibles to ascertain if there was a pattern in original acquisition. A list of these USA resident Bibles follows. Note that the Vinegar Bible at Christ Church is the only one in New Jersey.

**Sites of Vinegar Bibles in the United States**

J. P. Morgan Library, New York City

Lenox Branch, NY Public Library

Old North Church, Boston, MA

Christ Church, New Bern, NC

Yale University (3 copies)

First Presbyterian Church, Baltimore, MD

St John's Church, Portsmouth, NH

Christ Church, Philadelphia (2 copies)

Christ Church, Shrewsbury, NJ

Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, VA

Private Individual

Christ Church on Quaker Hill, Pawling, NY

Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX

Bob Jones University Mack Library, SC

Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA

Private Individual

This list is a work in progress and others may be discovered.<sup>2</sup> I have spoken with each of the organizations that have these Bibles and visited the ones at Yale and New York City. Some observations about these Bibles follow.

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<sup>2</sup> There are currently three copies of the Vinegar Bible for sale on abebooks; one is listed for \$45,000.



The Bibles were bound in either one or two volumes. When in two volumes the first Book in Volume 2 is the Book of Isaiah. This dividing point appears to have been selected simply in order to produce two volumes of equal size. In two volumes there is a second frontispiece.

As noted, the Bible at the Morgan Library in New York is the Chandos Bible, acquired at auction. This copy is only one of four ever printed on vellum. All others are printed on paper. The Chandos copy is in pristine condition, evidence of its presence in a library, originally that of Chandos himself, and infrequently accessed. The Bibles at churches in this country have rarely changed hands and consequently their provenance is easier to discern.

A complete discussion of these other Vinegar Bibles is beyond the scope of this article. However, St. John's Nova Scotia and Christ Church have formed a group called the Vinegar Bible Interest Group (VBIG). This group's purpose is to coordinate and share research about Vinegar Bibles. We hope to have all holders of the Vinegar Bibles as members as well as others with interest in this topic.

I hope the images of the Bible, especially the illustrations, have demonstrated why this Bible's negative reputation ("the Bible with the 'typos'") is quite ill-deserved. The beauty of this Bible is greatly enhanced when seen in person. I encourage you to visit one. There is also some additional information on the Christ Church web site at [www.christchurchshrewsbury.org](http://www.christchurchshrewsbury.org).

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