

Foundations of Biblical History  
Rev. David Seeley  
Lesson 8  
Erasmus and the Textus Receptus

In recent lessons we have explored two streams of Bible manuscripts. One began in Antioch of Syria, where Bible believers carefully copied and published the Bible.

In Antioch they believed the Bible is perfect and has nothing to improve. The other stream of manuscripts originated in Alexandria, Egypt.

In the school of Alexandria, heretics and non-believers added false teachings and changes to the Bible texts.

As we have learned, the **Alexandrian** manuscripts have historically been used by the Roman Catholic church.

These were the sources used by Tischendorf, and passed down to Westcott and Hort who published a new Greek text in 1881. Their hidden goal was to influence England back in to Roman Catholicism.

In today's lesson we will explore further the Antioch stream of texts and the man named Erasmus who compiled these manuscripts into a complete Greek New Testament, now known as the Textus Receptus, or Received Text.

*Textus Receptus* is Latin for "**Received Text**." Another title often used is "Majority Text"

The Textus Receptus is the compiled Greek New Testament published by Erasmus. This Bible preserves the accuracy of the Bible as it was in Antioch. The Textus Receptus is the Greek source for Luther's German Bible (1522-1534), Tyndale's New Testament (1525), Coverdale Bible (1535), Matthew's Bible (1537), Geneva Bible (1560), the King James Bible (1611) and others.

Much of the information for this lesson comes from *Gipp's Understandable History of the Bible, Third Edition*, Sam C. Gipp, Th.D., Daystar Publishing, 2004.

Erasmus was born in Rotterdam, Netherlands in 1466. He was the son of a Roman Catholic priest. When he was a young boy, both his parent died.

His uncle did not want to care for Erasmus and his brother, so he sent them to a monastery, (training school for Roman Catholic monks).

Erasmus grew up under the training of the Roman Catholic church. "The Roman Church had captured his body, but quite apparently his mind and heart were still unfettered." *Gipp, pg. 109*

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Erasmus constantly spoke out against abuses he saw in the Catholic church. He cried out against wickedness he saw among priests.

He was so outspoken against corruption within the church that the pope tried to bribe him into silence by offering him a powerful position as a bishop.

“Although grounded early in Catholicism through no fault of his own...Erasmus was orthodox enough to speak out against the Church’s...abuses, reject her Vulgate [Bible], and manifest the most non-Catholic attitude of all—an intense burden to put God’s Word into the hands of the common man.

The only Bible available in Europe during this time was controlled by the Roman Catholic church. The church only used corrupted Alexandrian Bibles and only printed them in Latin so they could not be read by common people.

The Latin Bible widely used by the Catholic church was the **Latin Vulgate Bible** published by Jerome. This Bible was based entirely on the corrupt Vaticanus Greek manuscript.

Erasmus believed everyone should be able to read the Bible. He said, “Do you think that the Scriptures are fit only for the perfumed?”

He also said that he wanted to see the Bible in the hands of “the farmer, the tailor, the traveler and the Turk.”

Erasmus, writing of this Scripture, says: “I would have those words translated into all languages...I long for the plowboy to sing them to himself as he follows the plow, the weaver to hum them to the tune of his shuttle, the traveler to [sing] them with the dullness of his journey.”---*Final Authority, A Christian’s Guide to the King James Bible*, Dr. William P. Grady, Grady Publications, 1993, pg.130-131

“The most powerful event of the fifteenth century was the development of **printing**. Erasmus was right at the point in history when books would, for the first time, become both affordable and accessible. No longer were manuscripts hand-copied to order, and the preserve of the rich alone. By 1501 there were more than a thousand print-shops in Europe, which had produced some 20,000,000 copies of 25,000 titles. All the works of Erasmus

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were published through the printing press and found their way into the hands of a wide range of people.”—  
[www.textusreceptusbibles.com/is\\_textual-criticism\\_relevant](http://www.textusreceptusbibles.com/is_textual-criticism_relevant)

Erasmus collected all the Greek manuscripts he could get his hands on. He carefully examined them to see which ones were reliable.

He rejected the **Vaticanus** and other texts that were influenced by Alexandrian manuscripts. He knew that Jerome’s Latin Vulgate was based on the Vaticanus, so he refused to use it.

He published his first edition Greek text in 1516. He refined it and published his second edition in 1519.

The first two editions did not contain 1 John 5:7, the verse that describes the three persons of the Trinity. The reason it was missing is because Erasmus could not find a Greek manuscript that contained it.

When he did find a reliable Greek manuscript that include 1 John 5:7, he revised his work and published his third edition.

Jerome’s Latin Bible wrongly placed too much **authority** in the hands of the Catholic Church.

God used Erasmus to fulfill His promise to preserve His Word to every generation forever. The Textus Receptus is the preserved Word of God in Greek and has become the foundation for true Bibles in many languages.

Erasmus Greek Bible and other writings devastated the authority of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Bibles exalted the **Pope** and the church above God’s Word. The Textus Receptus re-established the Bible as God’s final authority.

In a short time, a German monk by the name of **Martin Luther** would translate the Textus Receptus into German and start the fires of the Protestant Reformation throughout Germany and eventually around the world.

The most significant contribution of Erasmus to the Protestant Reformation was undoubtedly his publication of his 1516 Greek-Latin New Testament.

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It was this book that was used as the primary source-text for Martin Luther to translate the New Testament into German for the first time in 1522.

It was this book that was used as the primary source-text for William Tyndale to translate the New Testament into English for the first time in 1526. –[www.greatsite.com/timeline-english-bible-history/Erasmus.html](http://www.greatsite.com/timeline-english-bible-history/Erasmus.html)

“The Textus Receptus has a long and rich history. In four of the past five centuries it was accepted exclusively as the true word of God.

The first Textus Receptus was produced at a time which immediately precedes one of the most turbulent times in Christian history. It was produced by a highly qualified scholar whose work was respected by scholars for many centuries...

...The most widely accepted and trusted Bible translations in English speaking history have been translated from the Textus Receptus.

The greatest number of quotations made by the early Church Fathers support the readings in the Textus Receptus.

The greatest majority of [existing] manuscripts today are more closely related to the Textus Receptus than the minority readings of other manuscript types.”

([http://textusreceptusbibles.com/Is\\_Textual\\_Criticism\\_Relevant](http://textusreceptusbibles.com/Is_Textual_Criticism_Relevant))

It has been said that Erasmus laid the egg, and Martin Luther hatched it.

In upcoming lessons we will explore the Life of Martin Luther and how he lit the fires of Reformation, and broke the power of the Catholic church by translating Erasmus’ Textus Receptus in to German, giving the common people God’s Word.