

Part 1
GREEK TEXTUAL
BACKGROUND TO THE KJV

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Introduction

KJV-Brief Background

- The King James Version like all modern versions of the Bible is ultimately based on the original languages in which the bible was written. In this study we are concerned with the Greek New Testament that underlines the KJV.
- Whereas most English speaking Christians engage the New Testament through the KJV this study is very important as it helps us to better understand the nature, value and significance of the KJV with respect to Bible study, and ultimately to applied theology.

Introduction

Foundational to the textual history of the KJV's New Testament is the work of the Dutch scholar Erasmus (1469-1536 A.D.). He synthesized the Greek New Testament which formed the basis of the KJV.

Understanding his work and that of four other scholars subsequent to him, gives us a clearer picture of the textual history and the relative credibility of the New Testament as is found in the KJV.

Note: ms = manuscript; mss = manuscripts; TC = Textual Criticism ; NT= New Testament

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Erasmus' Greek Text

- The first printed Greek text to be published was that of Erasmus in 1516 AD. (Note: It was not the first Greek NT printed. That was the Polyglot's Bible in 1514)
- Because Erasmus' version was the first to be published, it gained wide circulation and popularity more than the other versions which were better.
- Erasmus' editions served as the base for all other later Greek editions until 1831

Erasmus' Greek Text

- Erasmus' Greek version was based on only 4 or 5 12th century mss. Note all of these manuscripts contained all of the New Testament. Therefore in many instances some books were distilled from only one or two manuscripts.
- His NT had many readings found in no Greek mss.

Erasmus' Greek Text

- Erasmus' Greek version was hastily prepared and printed. Erasmus later declared that “It was precipitated rather than edited.”
- Due to the haste in which it was prepared it contained 100's of typographical errors

Erasmus' Greek Text

- Scrivener declared: “It is the most faulty book I know” (Bart & Metzger, Text, 143)
- Erasmus' only manuscript of Revelation lacked the last six verses. Therefore, he translated it from the Vulgate. Thus, it contains readings found in no Greek mss of the NT (e.g., at 22:17; 22:19; 22:21).

Erasmus' Greek Text

- Erasmus introduced other readings from the Latin Vulgate not in Greek, e.g., Acts 9:6 “And he trembling and astonished said, Lord what wilt thou have me to do.”
- These words cannot be found in any Greek manuscripts (assimilation to Acts 22:10, inherited by the TR, then to KJV)

Erasmus' Greek Text

- 1John 5: 7, 8 - these verses as they now appear in the KJV are not found in any Greek manuscript. The Catholic Church wanted a text to substantiate the doctrine of the Trinity. Under coercion, Erasmus was persuaded to include these verses into his Greek Bible. Which now appear only in the KJV
- 1John 5: 7, 8 is usually called the *Johanneum comma* (*comma* = a short phrase or clause).
- 1John 5: 7, 8 appears in Erasmus' 3rd edition of 1520

Robert Stephanus (1503-59)

- His 3rd edition of 1550 based on Erasmus' 3rd edition
- Became the standard text of England
- His 3rd edition (1550) served as the basis for the KJV of 1611
- He was the first to divide the Bible into numbers and verses in his 4th edition, made in 1551. Said to do so while traveling on horseback. Some divisions made as horse jerked the pen onto paper.
- First edition of Greek Bible to have critical apparatus

Robert Stephanus (1503-59)

- Stephanus' 3rd edition became for many persons, especially in England the received or standard text of the Greek New Testament

Theodore Beza (1519-1605)

Friend and successor of Calvin at Geneva

- i) 1565 –1604 published nine editions based on Erasmus
- ii) His text differed very little from Stephanus' fourth edition of 1551
- iii) The 1588-89 and 1598 editions also used by KJV translators

Bonaventure & Abraham Elzevier (1633)

- In 1624 published an edition of Greek Bible based on Beza's 1565 edition
- The preface of the 2nd edition which appeared in 1633 makes the boast:

“You therefore have the text which is now received by all in which we give nothing altered or corrupted”

- Thus, the Received text or *Textus Receptus* - acronym, TR

Bonaventure & Abraham Elzevier (1633)

- TR reigned for 200 years until 1881
- **Note:** Whereas there were 7 editions done by the Elzeviers and the 2nd was the one upon which the pronouncement was made, there are more than one TR.

Erasmus (1469-1536 AD)

Robert Stephanus (1503-59)

Theodore Beza (1519-1605)

Abraham Elzevir & Bonaventure (1633)

Textus Receptus (TR)

King James Version 1611 (KJV)

Other Textual Scholars and their Influence on the Greek New Testament

- John Mill (1645-1707)
- Edward Wells (1667-1727)
- Richard Bentley (1662-1742)
- Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752)
- Johann Jakob Wettstein (1693-1754)
- Johann Salomo Semler (1725-1791)
- Johann Jakob Griesbach (1745-1812)
- Berlin Karl Lachmann (1793-1851)
- Lobegott Friedrich Constantin von Tischendorf (1815- 1874)
- Brooke Foss Wescott (1825-1901)
- John W. Burgon (1813-1888)

John Mill (1645-1707)

[Fellow at Queens College, Oxford]

- After 30 years of textual work, Mill published his Greek Text in 1707 two weeks before his death
- He collated 100 Greek manuscripts plus Patristic citations from many of the church fathers and uncovered some **30,000 variant readings**. For this he was greatly persecuted. For example, Daniel Whitby, rector of Edmunds Salisbury, charged that the authority of the holy Scriptures was in peril and that assembling of critical evidences was tantamount to tampering with the text (See Ehrman & Metzger, Text, 155)
- Mill however, did not break with the TR, but reprinted Stephanus' Greek text

Edward Wells (1667-1727)

- Between 1709 and 1719 published Greek text in which he departed from the TR some 210 times. He was the first to depart from the TR in favor of readings from other ancient mss.

Richard Bentley (1662-1742)

- His 1720 edition abandoned the TR in some 40 places
- Bentley was very confident that he could restore the best original, more accurate than the TR; but he died before he could complete the project

Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752)

- Influenced by Mill's 30,000 variant readings
- Witnesses to the text must be weighed not counted
- Advanced that mss must be classified into companies, families, tribes and nations

Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752)

- He distinguished two great groups or nations: Asiatic & African
- Asiatic originated in Constantinople, consisting of mss of more recent date
- African consisting of two tribes represented by Alexandrinus and the Old Latin

Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752)

- Formulated canons for weighing variants which are still in use today
- **Proposed: *Proclivi scriptioni praestat ardua*: “The difficult is to be preferred to the easy readings.”** (Metzger/Ehrman, 159)
- Published Greek text in 1734, but departed from the TR in only 19 places
- Although Bengel was a conservative Christian (superintendent of the Evangelical Church of Wurttemberg), he was treated as though he was an enemy of the holy Scriptures (Ehrman/Metzger, 159/60)

Johann Jakob Wettstein (1693-1754)

- Native of Basil, where he became a Protestant minister
- A collator for Bengel, he too was persecuted for pointing out variant readings in the text (although he inclined more towards the TR/Byzantine text)
- In 1730 he was deposed from his pastorate and driven into exile

Johann Jakob Wettstein (1693-1754)

- 1733 became professor of philosophy and Hebrew in Amsterdam
- Advocated that mss should be weighed not counted
- Published Greek NT in 1751-2
- First to designate mss using capital Roman letters (majuscule) and Arabic numerals (lectionaries) - still being used today

Johann Salomo Semler (1725-1791)

- Father of German Rationalism
- Refined the process of classifying mss into groups
- Renamed Bengel's Asiatic and African groups
- Asiatic renamed Eastern and attributed to Lucian of Antioch- 4th century
- African renamed Egypto-Palestinian and attributed to Origen
- Later he classified NT mss into three recensions:
 - 1) **Alexandrian:** (Syriac, Bohairic, Ethiopic versions)
 - 2) **Eastern:** (Antiochian, Constantinopolitan churches)
 - 3) **Western:** (mixture of all recensions)

Johann Jakob Griesbach (1745-1812)

- Marked the beginning of modern critical period in New Testament Textual Criticism
- He was a student of Semler
- Professor of NT at university of Jena from 1755 to his death
- Designated the Alexandrian, Western and Byzantine recensions
- Alexandrian: attributed to Origen

Johann Jakob Griesbach (1745-1812)

- Developed 15 canons of TC (see Metzger/Ehrman, Text, 166 for rules)
- Abandoned the TR in many places
- Published Greek editions between 1775-7; 1796-1806 and 1803-7

Other Scholars Who Departed From the Textus Receptus (TR)

- Daniel Mace
- William Bowyer (1699-1777): Omitted *comma Johanneum*, also the doxology of the Lord's Prayer
- Edward Harwood (1729-1794): In some 1,000 passages, he departed from the TR in 643 places (i.e., more than 70% of the time)
- Johann Leonhard Hugg (1765-1846)
- Johannes Martin Augustinus Scholz (1794-1852)
- Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (1813-1875)

End Part 1

For further information please see Part 2