

1-2019

Question 80 - What are the facts regarding the Greek Text of Erasmus?

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Recommended Citation

Willmington, Harold, "Question 80 - What are the facts regarding the Greek Text of Erasmus?" (2019). *101 Most Asked Questions*. 91.

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101 MOST ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE

80. What are the facts regarding the Greek Text of Erasmus?

- A. In 1516 a milestone was reached in the Bible's story when the great monk-scholar Erasmus published the first printed edition of the New Testament in Greek. Now scholars everywhere could have access to the same text of the New Testament in its original language. A later edition of Erasmus' Greek text formed the basis of what has become known as the "Received Text" because of a printer's preface stating this is the text received from the beginning. The Latin equivalent, "Textus Receptus" or the "TR," are still common names for the fifth edition of Erasmus' Greek text.

The Protestant Reformation was awakening the masses to personal reading and studying of the Scriptures with the subsequent demand for copies easy to read and understand by the average layperson.

(How the Bible Became a Book. Terry Hall. Victor Books. 1990. p. 75)

- B. Tyndale vowed that if God should spare his life he would see to it that the plowboy would know more Scripture than ignorant priests. Erasmus had expressed a similar sentiment in the preface to his Greek New Testament: "I wish that the farm worker might sing parts of them (the Scriptures) at the plough, that the weaver might hum them at the shuttle, and the traveler might beguile the weariness of the way by reciting them."
- C. The response to this printed Greek New Testament varied. Some were suspicious and even hostile; Cambridge and Oxford students were forbidden to read Erasmus's writings; others accepted his N.T. enthusiastically. Within three years another edition was printed, and the total number of copies of the 1516 and 1519 editions was 3,300. Luther made his translation into German from this second edition.

The text of Erasmus came to be called the Textus Receptus, and this "received text" was published again and again during the next 400 years.

(A General Introduction to the Bible. David Ewert. Zondervan Publishing House. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1983. p. 150)

- D. Since Erasmus could not find a manuscript which contained the entire Greek Testament, he utilized several for various parts of the New Testament. For most of the text he relied on two rather inferior manuscripts in the university library at Basle, one of the Gospels and one of the Acts and Epistles, both dating from about the twelfth century. Erasmus compared them with two or three others of the same books and entered occasional corrections for the printer in the margins or between

the lines of the Greek script. For the book of Revelation he had but one manuscript, dating from the twelfth century, which he borrowed from his friend Reuchlin. Unfortunately, this manuscript lacked the final leaf, which had contained the last six verses of the book. For these verses, as well as at numerous passages throughout the book where the Greek text of the Apocalypse and the adjoining Greek commentary with which the manuscript was supplied are so mixed up as to be almost indistinguishable. Erasmus depended upon the Latin Vulgate, translating this into Greek. As would be expected from such a procedure, here and there in Erasmus' self-made Greek text are readings which have never been found in any known Greek manuscript but which are still perpetuated today in printings of the so-called Textus Receptus of the Greek New Testament.

(*The Text of the New Testament*. Bruce Metzger. pp. 99-100)

- E. The first printed Greek New Testament was published by Erasmus in 1516 (see 544). He was encouraged in this work by Pope Leo X. Besides the Greek text, it contained his Latin translation and some exceedingly stinging notes; some in the 1st, others added in following editions. These notes were "deliberate accusations attached to the sacred text where the religion which was taught by Christ and the Apostles and the degenerate superstition which had taken its place could be contrasted side by side." "Nothing was spared; ritual and ceremony, dogmatic theology, philosophy, and personal character were tried by what all were compelled verbally to acknowledge to be the standard, whose awful countenance was now practically revealed for the first time for many centuries. Bishops, seculars, monks were dragged out to judgment, and hung as on a public gibbet, in the light of the pages of the most sacred of all books, published with the leave and approbation of the Holy Father himself." "Never was a volume more passionately devoured. A hundred thousand copies were soon sold in France alone. The fire spread, as it spread behind Samson's foxes in the Philistines' corn. The clergy's skins were tender from long impunity. They shrieked from pulpit and platform, and made Europe ring with their clamour. The louder they cried the more clearly Europe perceived the justice of their chastisement." The printing presses scattered the book all over Europe, and produced "a spiritual earthquake." People were astonished to see, from the light of the pure Word as given from the original Greek, just what God did say, and it caused a great awakening and a desire for a good English translation from the Greek.

(*General Biblical Introduction*. H. S. Miller. The Word-Beaver Press. Houghton, N.Y. 1952. pp. 332, 333)