

Understanding the Development of the Textus Receptus and Its Relationship to the King James Version

by Steve Combs

The Textus Receptus, also called the Received Text, is a printed Greek New Testament that is based on the vast majority of ancient hand-written New Testament manuscripts. It is not my purpose here to go into detail about the minor portions of the Received Text that come from the minority of Greek and Latin manuscript evidence. For example, 1 John 5:7, rests on an impressive array of ancient evidence, but it is not in most Greek manuscripts. Yet, 1 John 5:7 is genuine. I believe God did this to show man that preservation is something we must trust Him about and not trust the intellect of man (Prov. 3:5-6). It is a matter of Divine preservation of the text. Every word has been preserved.

My purpose is to summarize the history of the Received Text and its use by the King James translators. According to Edward Hills the origin and development of the Received Text was guided by the common faith at the time. He described the common faith this way:

This common view remained a faith rather than a well articulated theory. No one at that time drew the logical but unpalatable conclusion that the Greek Church rather than the Roman Church had been the providentially appointed guardian of the New Testament text. But this view, though vaguely apprehended, was widely held, so much so that it may justly be called the common view. Before the Council of Trent (1546) it was favored by some of the highest officials of the Roman Church, notably, it seems, by Leo X, who was pope from 1513 to 1521 and to whom Erasmus dedicated his New Testament. Erasmus' close friends also, John Colet, for example, and Thomas More and Jacques Lefevre, all of whom like Erasmus sought to reform the Roman Catholic Church from within, likewise adhered to this common view. Even the scholastic theologian Martin Dorp was finally persuaded by Thomas More to adopt it. (Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended*. Des Moines, Iowa: Christian research Press. 1973. Print. p. 197.)

There were textual errors and printing errors in the Received Text when it was first printed. These and other readings were corrected in subsequent editions of the printed text. The history of the text from 1516 through 1894 is a history of purification and each edition of the Received text brought it closer to perfection. These editions represented steps in the process of God's preservation of His pure words.

Some may object to the previous statement on the grounds that if God preserves His words He did not need to purify or perfect them. His words in Greek are pure and perfect. However, it was not the words He was perfecting, but rather a printed Greek text that brought all the words of God in the New Testament together into one place. This is something that had never before existed. Printing was a new thing. Hand-written copies of the New Testament were often incomplete and sometimes had errors. All of this had to be looked at carefully and decisions made as to what was the correct reading. This is not the same as the process of textual criticism going on today among doubting and unbelieving scholars. This all took place in a context of faith in God's preservation of His words.

Disiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) was one of the most famous scholars of the early Renaissance. He traveled widely in Europe during his lifetime and collected a number of New Testament manuscripts and many more variant readings. Among these manuscripts were the following with their designations on the Gregory-Aland list:

- 1) 1-an 11th century manuscript of the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles. (Still designated 1)
- 2) 2^e-an 11th or 12th century manuscript of the Gospels. (Now designated 2)
- 3) 2^{ap}-a 12th century manuscript of Acts and the Epistles. (Now designated 2815)
- 4) 4^{ap}-a 15th century manuscript of Acts and the Epistles. (Now designated 2816)
- 5) 1^{rk}-a 12th century manuscript of Revelation. (Now designated 2814)
- 6) 7-a 12th century manuscript of the Gospels. (Still designated 7)
- 7) 817-a 15th century manuscript of the gospels. (Still designated 817)
- 8) 3-a 12th century manuscript of the entire New Testament except Revelation. (Still designated 3) This was used in Erasmus' second edition.
- 9) The Complutensian Polyglot in his later editions.

Erasmus had access to many more manuscripts than this. He traveled Europe and devoured libraries. The Papal Librarian, Paulus Bombasius, gave him many variant readings and offered the entire Vaticanus manuscript to him to use. Erasmus rejected it.

Erasmus issued five editions of the Greek text: 1516, 1519, 1522, 1527, and 1535.

The Complutensian Polyglot: While Erasmus was laboring in Central Europe, a group of scholars was working on an edition of the whole Bible in Spain. The effort was led by Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros (1436–1517), called Cardinal Ximenes. The Complutensian Polyglot was a Bible in Greek, Latin, Aramaic, and Hebrew. Cardinal Ximenes collected a number of Greek manuscripts. The work went on from 1502 to 1517. The Greek New Testament was printed in 1514, but not issued. However, Erasmus' Greek New Testament was published and issued first. The Complutensian Polyglott was not in circulation until 1522.

It is clear that many of the Greek copies Ximenes gathered were of the Traditional Greek type, which was the same type of manuscripts that produced the Received Text. So, this group had some very good source material. They also had some corrupt sources as well, seeing they used Jerome's Latin Vulgate (400 AD). However, according to F.F. Bruce, it does not appear that the manuscript *Vaticanus* was a source for the Polyglot. Regardless, it was good enough to become a resource for the coming editions of the Received Text and, as we will see, for the King James translation.

If we believe that God is the God of History, then we should take a close look at what God was doing at this time. God wasn't just sitting in Heaven watching the foolish antics of some men who styled themselves as scholars. No, He was making preparation for a major change in history. Some have said that Erasmus was in competition with Ximenes to get his New Testament published first. I see it differently. It was God who wanted Erasmus' text published first so that it would be available to be used in the upcoming Reformation, when Europe rebelled against the Catholic Church. Erasmus' first edition was published in 1516. The Reformation began the following year, 1517, when Martin Luther posted his

ninety-five theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany. Erasmus' second edition in 1519 became the basis of Martin Luther's German translation. God made a deliberate choice of the Received Text over the Complutensian Polyglot. Nevertheless, the Polyglot became an important source for the further purification of the Received Text.

The Complutensian Greek text became the basis for the Greek New Testament of the polyglot printed in Antwerp in 1568-72 by **Christopher Plantin**.

A minor edition of the TR and the Old Testament was printed by **Aldus Manutius' press** in 1518 (Manutius himself died in 1515). The Old Testament was based on the Complutensian Polyglot, and the New Testament was almost entirely a reprint of the Erasmus 1516 edition. One source said even the printing errors were reproduced. Another source said the KJV translators consulted it.

Robert Stephanus (1503-1559) and his step-father, Simon Colinaeus, were the next editors of the Received Text. They were French printers in Paris. Colinaeus issued an edition of the TR in 1534. The editions of Robert Estienne (called Stephanus or Stephens) were issued in 1546, 1549, 1550, and 1551. His editions of the Received Text aroused the opposition of the Catholic Church so much that he had to flee Paris in 1550 and settle in Geneva, Switzerland. His last edition was from Geneva and was the first to be divided into chapters and verses. The third edition was known as the "royal edition" or "editio regia," and it was the first to use a critical apparatus, referring to manuscript sources. Stephanus used the Complutensian Polyglot and used manuscript evidence beyond that listed above as used by Erasmus. This included:

- 1) Codex Bezae-a 5th century manuscript including most of the four Gospels and Acts and a small fragment of 3 John. (Now designated D^{ea} or 05)
- 2) Codex Regius-an 8th century manuscript containing most of the four Gospels. (Now designated Le or 019)
- 3) 4-a 13th century manuscript with an almost complete copy of the four.
- 4) 5-a 13th century manuscript of the entire New Testament except Revelation.
- 5) 6-a 13th century manuscript of most of the New Testament except Revelation.
- 6) 7^{pk}-a 12th century manuscript of nearly all of Paul's epistles (now designated 2817).
- 7) 8-an 11th century manuscript of the entire four Gospels.
- 8) 9-a 12th century manuscript of the entire four Gospels.

Theodore Beza (1519–1605), of Geneva, started with the third edition of Stephanus (1550) and published four major folio editions (1565, 1582, 1588, 1598) and five more minor octavo editions (1565, 1567, 1580, 1590, and 1604). In his 1582 edition, Beza listed some additional materials he used. Some of these were not Greek New Testaments. They included a Syriac version, an Arabic version translated into Latin, D (Codex Bezae), and D2 (Codex Claromontanus). However, he rarely changed anything from the fourth edition of Stephanus. God was always in control.

None of these editors differed with one another more than about 250 times and many of these were spelling, accent marks, breathing marks, word order, and other minor differences.

The Authorized Version (KJV): The King James Version translators used more than one source for their translation. In 1603, the Received text was still developing, so the translators were open to the possibility that the text may still need to be edited. According to Frederick Scrivener (1813-1891), it is reasonable to determine that their primary source text was Beza 1598, because (among other reasons) the KJV is almost an exact match for it.

In considering what text had the best right to be regarded as “the text presumed to underlie the ‘Authorized Version,” was necessary to take into account the composite nature of the Authorized Version, as due to successive revisions of Tyndale’s translation. Tyndale himself followed the second and third editions of Erasmus’ Greek text (1519, 1522). In the revisions of his translation previous to 1611 a partial use was made of other texts; of which ultimately the most influential were the various editions of Beza from 1560 to 1598 ... Between 1598 and 1611 no important edition appeared; so that Beza’s fifth and last text was more likely than any other to be in the hands of King James’s revisers, and to be accepted by them as the best standard within their reach. It is moreover found on comparison to agree more closely with the Authorized Version than any other Greek text ... (Frederick H. A. Scrivener, *Scrivener’s Annotated Greek New Testament*. 1881. (Dean Burgon Society Press: Collingswood, New Jersey. 1999). Print. pp. vii-viii.)

Dr. Scrivener compared every verse of the KJV New Testament with Beza’s 1598 text. He found about 190 differences (variances). He listed all these variances in *The New Testament in Greek*, 1881, reprinted in the above referenced book.

So, did the KJV correct “the Greek Text?” If by “text” one means the Beza 1598 edition, then it can be said they did correct that edition in the sense that at times they chose to follow Greek readings from other sources. But, if one means by “text” the general Textus Receptus tradition and the manuscripts that back it up, then no, they did not, because that tradition contained the Greek words of God. They did not correct God’s inspired Greek words. However, the differences between the Beza 1598 text and the KJV represent the pinnacle of the edits made to the TR text and laid the foundation for Scrivener’s 1881 Greek TR edition. No Greek text has ever been produced that is better. Nevertheless, their edits to the Received Text were made in English, not Greek. The KJV translation and its changes in Beza’s 1598 text was an especially important step toward a completely pure printed Greek text.

How did the KJV translators decide what edits to make? Was it some inspired guess work given to them by God? Not at all. They started with Beza 1598, but they also used other editions of the TR and the Complutensian Polyglot. ***What can certainly be said is that the KJV translators did not correct ANY of the Greek words of God.*** They did correct errors Beza made with God’s Greek words they found elsewhere. I have included herein an example from the approximately 190 differences given to us by Scrivener. In that example, the correct Greek reading was found in the Complutensian polyglot.

The Elzevir Editions were published after the publication of the King James Version. The Elzevirs were a Dutch family of printers. They published three editions in 1624, 1633, and 1641. There was a statement in the preface of the 1633 edition that declared this text was now the Greek text received by all. Hence, the name Received Text or, in Latin, Textus Receptus, is applied to the entire Greek text tradition starting in 1516 with Erasmus' first edition up to the 1881 edition of Frederick Scrivener.

The 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith confirmed the general attitude toward the Received Text. The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith agreed with it. (see chapter 1, section 8. https://reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=https://reformed.org/documents/westminster_conf_of_faith.html.)

The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), **being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic**; so as in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal to them. But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have a right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded in the fear of God to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner, and through patience and comfort of the Scriptures may have hope. (1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, section 8. <http://www.arbca.com/1689-chapter1.8-23-18>. Author's emphasis.)

Frederick H. A. Scrivener: The Scrivener edition of the Received Text (1881) is usually ignored by liberal and liberal leaning scholars. However, it is a valid edition of the TR and a further purification of the Greek text. It is entirely based on the Beza 1598 edition with the edits made by the King James translators. When it was published in 1881, it was said to be "According to the text followed in the Authorized Version." Scrivener used a process to find and adjust the differences between Beza's text and the KJV.

- 1) First, Scrivener compared each verse of the KJV with Beza 1598 to see if they matched.
- 2) According to him, he found about 190 places where they were different.
- 3) For each difference, he looked for the Greek manuscript evidence or Greek text that had the reading matching the KJV. He would not make a change in Beza without Greek authority.
- 4) He made changes in the 190 places based on what he found in the Greek evidence.
- 5) He corrected printer errors in the Beza text.
- 6) He corrected Beza for inconsistent and incorrect Greek spelling.
- 7) He adjusted the paragraphs and punctuation.

Scrivener's labors were comparable to those of any other TR editor. Erasmus may have labored more because he put the text together in the first place. Stephanus may have labored more because he divided the text into verses and chapters in his fourth edition. However, the labors of Scrivener rise to their level of scholarship and intensity.

Scrivener's List of Edits Made to the Beza 1598 Text

Frederick Scrivener's TR with notes was published in *Scrivener's Annotated Greek New Testament*, by the Dean Burgon Society in 1999. The appendix of this book contains two lists by Dr. Scrivener. The first is a list of items in the Beza 1598 text that he changed to match the readings of the King James Version. The second list is said to be a list of readings in Beza that were different from the KJV readings, but that Scrivener did not change.

The first list is quite impressive. It covers variances in 166 verses and 13 New Testament book titles. All of them represent actual changes Scrivener made to the Beza text.

The second list is of variances Scrivener did not change, according to his statements. The reason for this is that he could not find Greek evidence for the reading chosen by the KJV translators. It appeared to him that the KJV readings came from the Latin Vulgate. However, I have compared each of these KJV readings with Scrivener's TR. I found a total of 58 items. They are listed in a table on this web site. The interesting thing I found is that 57 are not variances at all, but the Scrivener TR text and the KJV match. Eight of these are *apparent differences*, but in my opinion these differences between the Greek text and the KJV are not **textual** differences. They are not because of a faulty Greek text or a variance between that text and the KJV. Rather, they are apparent differences because of *translation choices* made by the KJV translators. This in no way indicates there are errors in the KJV. It indicates there are differences between Greek, as a language, and English. For example, several times the KJV did not translate a conjunction, no doubt, because they believed the verse was more correct in English without it. Sometimes small words like that work well in Greek, but not in English. It is simply the nature of languages. There are two times the KJV added words, but they are not in italics. Scrivener pointed out that the KJV was inconsistent in its use of italics.

There are two issues among these 58 items that have true challenges. The first is in Acts 19:20 which says, "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed." The Greek word translated "God" here is the word *Kurios*. The usual translation of *Kurios*, when it is applied to God and the Lord Jesus Christ, is "Lord;" the normal Greek word for God is *Theos*. The KJV translators rendered *Kurios* as "God" here, even though in every other use of the word it was translated "Lord." This is not a textual problem. No Greek text, to my knowledge, has *Theos* in this verse. However, I encourage the reader to read the article, *God or Lord*, on this web site, where I argue that *Kurios* can legitimately be translated "God."

The final issue in Scrivener's second list comes from Ephesians 6:24. This issue involves a single word and it is a true issue. In the KJV, the verse ends with the word *amen*. Scrivener argued that *amen* is not in any Greek text and the KJV got it from the Latin Vulgate. How he came to this conclusion is a mystery. The word *amen* is in several Greek texts. I have found it in Beza 1598 (which means there was never a difference with this word between Beza 1598 and the KJV), Stephanus 1550, Erasmus 1522, and Elzevir 1633. So, the word *amen* is a legitimate part of the New Testament and should be in Scrivener's

text, but it is not. This single omission is the only variance between the KJV and Scrivener that I have found. I disagree with anyone who says this is a minor issue. "Amen" is a word of God. The Scriptures say that "every word of God is pure" (Prov. 30:5), and Psalm 12:6-7 says they will all be preserved. Every word of God is important. Therefore, Scrivener's New Testament appears to be entirely correct except for this one word. The Scrivener TR text should be amended to include this word at the end of Ephesians 6:24.

A Specific Example of the Scrivener Edits

All of the foregoing can give background for a study of specific textual issues between the TR and the KJV. The first thing to realize is that a comparison of the 1550 Stephanus edition and the KJV is an erroneous comparison. The KJV was not primarily based on any of Stephanus' editions. Any difference between them is irrelevant. The KJV was based primarily on Beza's 1598 edition. This was corrected by Scrivener based on the work of the KJV translators. Therefore, any comparison should be made between the KJV and the Scrivener edition. The Scrivener edition is where the TR is NOW. One example of the Scrivener edits is Revelation 7:14.

Revelation 7:14- (KJV) And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made **them** white in the blood of the Lamb.

(Beza) And I said unto him, Sir, you know. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made **their robes** white in the blood of the Lamb.

(Scrivener) And I said unto him, Sir, you know. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made **them** white in the blood of the Lamb.

Revelation 7:14 is one of the 190 variances between Beza and the KJV. Scrivener found the correct reading in the Greek text of the Complutensian Polyglot. Therefore, the Scrivener Edition of the TR has the right reading.

Conclusion

Some say the King James corrects every Greek text, but that is not entirely true. They did make edits to the TR text of Beza 1598. More precisely, the KJV translators helped to make an already excellent text better, by choosing alternative readings that already existed in the historic Traditional Greek Text that the Biblical church had used since the first century. God has preserved all His inspired Greek words. They were already pure (Prov. 30:5) and are available.

So, on the one hand, the men of the KJV translated God's Words that had been in existence since the days of the Apostles. On the other hand, the King James translators were also editors of the Received Text. Their edits were made in English, rather than Greek. It was Dr. Scrivener, who placed

those edits into the Greek Received Text after searching for and finding the Greek source of the edits. Then, he produced the Greek text that underlay the KJV. It should be noted that the edits in the Received Text made by the translators of the King James Bible **were the final edits made to the Received Text**. Elzevir's edits did not flow into the Scrivener text. The KJV translators' edits did. God, who is sovereign in history, did not make a mistake here. The God of history led the work to be done on the edition of the TR by Dr. Scrivener, which was the last edition of the TR.

We at Bearing Precious Seed Global believe that God's preserved Greek text is the Received Text as represented in Scrivener's 1881 text, printed also in 1894, and now published by the Trinitarian Bible Society. Therefore, we have embraced the 1894 Scrivener edition of the TR as the Greek text to be used in translation work.