

I have been dealing with a thread within a thread within a thread, and now I want to get back for a few of posts to the thread itself. My initial question was about what it is translators are translating when they translate the New Testament into English. I have talked about the fact that there are thousands of manuscripts of the New Testament that are now known; and I have indicated that the King James Version was based on only a few of these manuscripts, and these ones were not of high quality. .

But what is it that modern translators — for example for the New Revised Standard Version or the New International Version or the Jerusalem Bible or any one of the other gazillion translations now available — actually translate? Do they choose one of the manuscripts? A couple of them? Which ones? Why? Or do they do something else?

They do something else. They translate a printed text of the Greek New Testament that is widely available today, one you yourself can easily buy and access off of Amazon.

To explain what this printed text is, let me provide a bit of background. I have already discussed the first published edition of the Greek New Testament by Erasmus in 1516. This became the basis for the Textus Receptus (the “Received Text”) - the technical term for the standard text that was published year after year by various publishers, basically the same text that Erasmus had produced on the basis of very few manuscripts (in some passages, on the basis of no Greek manuscript at all!) which now is recognized as problematic (it contains, for example, the passage on the Trinity in 1 John, the story of the woman taken in adultery in John 7-8, and the last twelve verses of Mark 16).

But even though printers would not print another form of the text (without these passages, for example), mainly because it was easy, convenient, and non-controversial to keep reproducing the Textus Receptus, there were some textual scholars who realized that there were problems with it and that there were other, better manuscripts available. It’s a pretty interesting story. Here’s ...

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