**The Bible into English – BD39-01**

In this segment, “The Bible into English,” we will study the translation of the Bible into the English language. This is background material for our study of inspiration and of the canon of Scripture which is coming up. This background may make you feel as if you’re in a school room situation. My number 3 son told me that he got so carried away in the morning service as we were describing some of the background that he didn’t understand something and he almost forgot himself and almost spoke out loud to ask a question. He thought he was in class. Well I hope you have the spirit that you are in class and that you are learning.

If you do, we have learned thus far certain things. We looked at the nature of writing in the ancient world, and the kind of materials that were used. We studied the sources of the present copies which we have of the Bible in Greek and Hebrew manuscripts in the lectionaries and in the papyri fragments. We looked at the various hazards that were faced by the manuscripts until they came down over the centuries into our hands and into the hands of the textual critics who have received these texts, who have undergone these hazards, and then the textual scholars restoring that text to its original form.

Along with 5,000 Greek manuscripts and hundreds of Old Testament manuscripts and Old Testament versions, with the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts, we have quite a collection of material to work from—far more than any of the ancient classical Greek and Hebrew writers.

We learned that there were made of course in copying as that was inevitable. Some of these were unintentional and some of these were intentional—errors of the eye, skipping a line; or, errors of the ear, hearing a thing wrong, etc. So there were various ways that these errors could come in.

Between the year 100 and 325 A. D., when Christianity became an authorized religion and became the department of religion of the Roman Empire, this was a period of extensive copying of scriptural manuscripts on papyrus, and the time of bringing the various New Testament books together in one volume. It was also a time of extensive persecution and of destruction of manuscripts.

Christians, under these conditions were more interested in the substance of Scripture than in the accuracy of the words or the various forms. Consequently, they were not as concerned about errors, and errors were more likely to creep in. This is the period when most of the problems that textual criticism has to deal with arose. Here is where the errors were made. Here is where the variants, by and large, were produced that the critics seek to solve today.

Between 325 A. D., after Christianity was now accepted in the Roman Empire, and 1516 A. D., when the first Greek text was printed, this was a period during the Middle Ages where the velum codex manuscript was the most prominent kind. Hundreds of copies were made of the Greek and Hebrew texts as well as the versions.

Now all of the time there had been vast destruction of manuscripts, but some copies had survived. However, what was being copied included all these errors that were made in that early period from 100 to 325 A. D during which they were under persecution, more concerned for the substance than the accuracy of the words.

So there was very little revision of the text. They just passed it on down without being worried too much. Their attitude was, “The Word of God is the Word of God.” They didn’t concern themselves too much with the accuracy of the copying.

So we have a source of a vast number of manuscripts as a result for the scholars to work from—5,000 of them, but they have a considerable job of reworking them because of the technique of copying. However, we did study then the principles which guide the textual scholars in determining the original readings from among the variants.

Now we’ve found that there were families of manuscripts in the Greek and Hebrew both. The New Testament were the traditional, the Alexandrian, and the Western. Most of them were in the traditional, and out of these have come our various English translations. In the Hebrew there were also families, including the Masoretic which is the basic family, the Septuagint which was the Greek translation, and the Samaritan Pentateuch. All of these represented various family groups, that is, manuscripts that all seem to have the same words and the same type of variations within them.

We also looked at the nature of the Greek and Hebrew languages which was used by God to bring His revelation. We found that this was the very language that people used in normal business life. It was the vernacular, the common speech. All of this study is background information so that you’ll understand when the critic attacks and says, “You can’t depend on the Bible because it has too many mistakes in it from its original copies. I remind you that God not only inspired but His hand was upon these manuscripts, and upon all of this copying of His Word and preserving it so that down to our day it is possible for us to come up with the original writings once more.

**English History**

Now I want to look at the racial background of the English background. That requires that we start with a little bit of looking at the racial background of the English language. All of the races on the face of the face of the earth have descended from Noah’s three sons. From them came three great families: the Semitic, the Hamitic, and the Japhetic. The Japhetic line is also called the Aryan, the Indo-European, or the Indo-Germanic family. The Japhetic has six sub-families. This includes the Asiatics which were the Medes, the Persians, and the peoples of India. It included the Greeks with various branches of that group. It included the sub-family of the Romans, the Latins, and then the romance nations such as the Italians, the French, the Spaniards, the Portuguese, and the Romanians. Then it also had the sub-family of the Celts which were the Galls, the Britons, the Cornish, the Welch, the people who lived in Britany and France, the Irish, the Highland Scots and the Manx. Another sub-family was the Slavs including the Russians, the Bulgarians, the Bohemians, the Polish, and Serbians, and the Slovaks. A final one was the Teutonic or the Germanic peoples. These fall into three classes, and our concern and our interest is with this particular group. These fall into the East German which was the Goths, the Burundians, the Vandals, the Franks, the Lombards, and so on. These have disappeared as racial groups. There was the North Germanic, or the Scandinavian group—the Danes, the Norwegians, the Swedes, and the Icelanders. Then there was the West Germanic sub-family group. The Upper, or Southern, Germany group was called the High Germans. The Northern Germany group was called the Lower Germans.

Now these people, the Lower Germans, that we want to zero in on here, lived on the shore of the North Sea and on the continent along the shores of the Danish peninsula. These included the Angles, the Saxons, the Jutes, the Dutch, and the Flemish. It is these people who are the forerunners of the English nation and of the language which you speak today. The people of England were invaded at an early date, somewhere between 600 to 400 B. C., and conquered by this subgroup called the Celts. The Celts invaded the British Isle and they took it over. They gave themselves the name Britons. They brought the Celtic civilization, customs, dialects, and along with it the Druid religion with all of its horrible features including human sacrifices. In 55 to 54 B. C., the Romans invaded under Julius Caesar. They invaded Britain twice, they took hostages, and they left with a promise of tribute which however was never honored.

So in 43 A. D., the Roman Emperor Claudius made a third invasion of Britain. He destroyed the power of the Druids, he subdued the Britons, and he took their leader captive to Rome. This brought to an end the Celtic civilization in Britain. The Romans introduced a better civilization. They built defenses against the northern marauders and against the Saxon pirates. In 410 A. D., the Roman Empire was on its last legs. It was cracking at the seams under the onslaught of the Germanic tribes surrounding the empire. So under the threat of the barbarians, namely the Visigoths, the Vandals, and the Huns, which were a mongrel group—Attila being one of the bright boys. In 410 the Roman emperor Honorius withdrew his troops from the British Isles and left the Britons to themselves. A this time with Roman military force withdrawn, and the island exposed to invaders, the Low German invaders proceeded to do just that, and the Anglo-Saxon conquest took place.

The Britons, being abandoned by the Romans, came under attack of the Picts and the Scots from the North and the Saxon pirates on the southeast of England. So in desperation the Britons invited the sea-roving Jutes who lived on the Danish peninsula to come and help them. They promised them land and money. So they got one enemy to fight another enemy. The Jutes agreed. They drove the invaders back. Then they settled down in one of the choice areas of England in the area of Kent.

Bands of Saxons also invaded from the continent over the years 477 to 530 A. D. They conquered areas which were not held by the Jutes. Sussex, Wessex, and Essex were the areas in which they settled. Then in 527 and again in 547, bands of Angles came over from the continent. They invaded and they conquered all of eastern Briton which was not held by the Jutes and the Saxons.

So here you have three Low German, or West German, classes who drove out the Britons, the Celts, and with it Christianity, which had been introduced into Briton in 70 A. D. They drove the Celts into Wales, into Brittany, and into France across the channel. The Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes later united under one name called the Anglo-Saxon, and in time the Angles became the dominant group, so the country came to be called Angleland which was then softened to England.

By the middle of the 7th century A. D., the Anglo-Saxons held England. The subjugation of the Galic Britons was complete. It was done violently. They were either put to the sword, put to slavery, or driven to exile. The period of Celtic domination was over. The Anglo-Saxons were in full command.

**Old English**

Now on this background we come to the origin of the English Bible because the English language falls into three periods. The first period goes from 450 to 1100 A. D. It is called the period of Old English. Old English was actually Anglo-Saxon English. The Old English, because of its German heritage, used endings. We call these declensions and conjugations in the case of verbs. These inflectional endings were signposts grammatically as to what was being said. Our modern English today does not do that, but the original Old English did. This form of Old English is quite impossible for us to read today.

If you look at … some of the poems by the great Old English epic writer Beowulf, you can see that there’s no way that you can read Old English, unless you learn how to read it—you can learn that. But for us to read anything like Beowulf, and we have just one manuscript of some of his epic poems in the British museum left today. The only way for you to read this is for somebody to translate it into modern English. It was to all intents and purposes just totally foreign to us.

However, there were people who spoke this language. Christianity was re-introduced to England in 500 A. D. by Patrick, a Scotchman who evangelized Ireland. He worked apart from the Roman Catholic Church. He introduced Christianity into northern England. Christianity was introduced into southern England in 597 A. D. by Augustine of Canterbury under the direction of Pope Gregory I. Gregory the Great was a pope who had a heart for evangelization. He commissioned Augustine with a group of monks to evangelize England. Augustine’s heart was not in this at all. As a matter of fact he got half-way there and he sent a message back to the pope and said “Can we come back and just forget it?” The pope said, “No, do the job.” Well it was seven years before the pope could send them any assistance, but as it turned out in the providence of God that Augustine’s mission was a magnificent success. King Egbert of Kent and his people were converted and Augustine became the first Archbishop of the first English cathedral at Canterbury.

Christianity spread from here throughout the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Few people could read and the only Bible that was in existence is that Latin Vulgate version that we have been studying, and this was of course only in manuscript form. Now the monks did have some education and they interpreted the Latin Vulgate to the people, but the people themselves had a great desire for the Word of God in the language they understood, namely Old English.

**Caedmon**

So we have some early Old English translators of Scripture. Here they are: The first of them was a man named Caedmon. He died about 680 A. D. He was a stable man, a servant in a monastery in north England. It was the custom at feast times to pass the harp around the hall for everybody to sing. When they started doing that, Caedmon would always get up and slip out because he couldn’t sing. One night he had a dream in the form of a vision, as the story goes. He reported that he had an angelic commission to sing. He said, “What shall I sing?” The angel said, “Sing of the glories of creation.” So Caedmon entered the monastic life and in Celtic Saxon verse as a monk would translate from the Latin for him, he would form short lines of musical expressions of the Scripture.

So they would start with the book of Genesis and the monk would read to him, and Caedmon would put this into a song, into a verse form. It was a paraphrase. It was not really a translation. He would sing it. Well the next time they had a feast and it came his time, he grabbed a harp and sang through Genesis chapter one and made a big hit. In the process of it people heard the Word of God, even though it was a paraphrase which is not a desirable thing. People who write paraphrases have a way of viewing what they write as the bread of life. It has such a nice sound to it that Christians have a way of looking at it as the bread of life. So it is presented as bread, and the people who make paraphrases usually end up rolling in dough—that’s true. But be careful of paraphrases. Maybe once every few years, look and see if they’re still around, but read the Word of God. A paraphrase is a commentary. It is not the Word of God. Steer clear of them. But here, Caedmon did a splendid thing in starting off a presentation of the Word of God in a way that people could understand in the form of the language of Old English.

The second man that came along was a man named Aldhelm. He died in 709. He was a bishop in south England. He was really the first great scholar in England. He translated the Psalms into Anglo-Saxon, that is, Old English.

The next man was Egbert who was a bishop in north England. He translated the gospels in about 705 A. D. into Anglo-Saxon. He did this under the urging of Aldhelm. Consequently, Aldhelm’s translation in the Old Testament and Egbert’s in the New Testament were the forerunners of the English Bible which you hold today.

**Bede**

The next man on the scene was a man named Bede who died in 735. Bede was a gold monk in north England, much respected as a scholar, an historian, and a theologian. For this reason he was historically called the Venerable Bede. As a matter of fact, he was the father of English history because he wrote a volume called the Ecclesiastical History of England. He wrote it in Latin and it was a classic. He translated the book of John by dictation into Anglo-Saxon. When he was doing this work, he was extremely ill. As a matter of fact, he was on his deathbed. As he came right down to the very last chapter, while his assistant and servant was urging him to rest, he was pressing on to finish the last chapter of the Gospel of John. They pushed on and came down to the last verse. It was obvious that Bede was very very ill, and still he pressed on and finished the last line, and shortly thereafter that day he died. Right to the very end he pressed himself because, he said, after he is gone he did not want his boys to read a lie, but to read the truth of the Word of God, and he didn’t want them to work to no purpose after his death, but to have the Word of God to guide them to a purpose in their lives. He believed the only way this could be done was in a language that they could read. So he pressed his very ounce of life into a predecessor copy of the Bible that is ours today.

**Alfred the Great**

The next man in the Old English translator group was Alfred the Great, king of England. He died in 901. The Danish pirates had been making havoc in north England, destroying places of learning, abbeys, monasteries, churches, libraries, and schools. Well Alfred stopped the Danes and restricted them to the northeast part of England with himself as their overlord. Alfred was a man of learning. As a matter of fact, he was responsible for the revival of learning in western England. He loved books and he wanted all freeborn Anglo-Saxon youth to read the Bible in Anglo-Saxon before they did anything else in life. So he led scholars in the translation of the Ten Commandments, the Old Testament laws, the book of Psalms, and the gospels. He composed a code of English law, and for this reason he is called the father of modern historical study.

A sixth man was Algred who was a priest who about 950 A. D. made an interlinear Anglo-Saxon paraphrase of the old Latin version of the gospels. The old Latin version was the one before the Latin Vulgate of Jerome. He made a paraphrase, again not a translation. This is called the Linsfard gospels and it’s in the dialect of Anglo-Saxon in north England.

A seventh man was Alfrick who died in 1006. He was archbishop of Canterbury. He translated the gospels, the first seven books of the Old Testament, Esther, Job, part of Kings, and the apocryphal books of Judith and Maccabees. He is the most important write of this Old English period except perhaps with the exception of Bede.

**Middle English**

From this period we move to the Middle English period which ran from 1000 to 1500 when the Renaissance was in full swing in Europe after the Dark Ages. Middle English developed some differences now from Old English and you begin to recognize Middle English as something that you can read. Up to now everything has been in this strange old Anglo-Saxon language. Middle English developed the habit of accenting all the words on the first syllables, which is the way we do in English. This is not so in other languages. Even though English sometimes would retain letters that we call silent letters, it might retain it in the spelling but it discontinued in the pronunciation. Before that you pronounced every letter that you saw on the page.

**The Normans**

The change in language came about with a conquest of Britain again. This was the last of the long line of conquest of the British isle. This was by the Norman conquerors. The Normans were rough adventurous sea-rovers from Scandinavia and Denmark. They were men who had come down, invaded France in the 10th century, and they took a district on the coast of the English Channel which was then named after them as Normandy. Normandy, you remember, came into fame during World War II as the point at which the allied forces landed in the invasion of Hitler’s fortress Europa. They were called North men. They were Scandinavian so they were naturally called North men, but this name was softened to Norman. They were actually a mixed race of Frenchmen and these North men.

**The Battle of Hastings**

Upon the death of the English king, Edward the Confessor, Harold, Earl of Essex, was chosen king. However, William, Duke of Normandy, claimed that the throne had been promised to him by Edward before his death. So they decided to invade England. He invaded England and the confrontation was at the famous Battle of Hastings that every school boy has studied in 1066 when William, Duke of Normandy, slew Harold, Earl of Essex, and took the English throne from him. The ended the Anglo-Saxon period of English history.

With the Normans came a new spirit of enterprise and initiative and liberty into the English nation. They united the nation. These Normans had been “Christianized,” so religion prospered very very much under them—great building programs, great organizational advancement. However, they had no use for Bible translations and use for the Saxon manuscripts. But they did create an intellectual stirring in England and an improved standard of living.

Now the Norman language began affecting the Old English language. What the Normans spoke was a combination of the German and the French. The Norman French was the language of the ruling class, but Anglo-Saxon remained the language of the people, but the scholars all spoke in Latin. So you had all three going at the same time. But gradually the Norman French combined with the Anglo-Saxon to develop what we call Middle English. The French influenced the English word order from its Germanic heritage. Those of you who have studied German know that the word order in German has the habit of throwing the verb at the end of the sentence, whereas we put it in a different place in the English order. Well this is when this changeover began to take place.

Three dialects developed in the Middle English period, and that in the vicinity of London began to rise in dominance. … You can look at a segment of Middle English and you can see that without too much difficulty you are able to read it. You can see that German syntax with that verb thrown at the end of the sentence.” That’s how Germans speak. This still has a trace of its Germanic background.

Now there’s a great difference, immediately you see, of the language that has taken place from the Anglo-Saxon Old English. Immediately a problem arose because people who now knew something about reading Scripture in whatever was translated in Old English were at a loss now that this was their speech. So immediately something had to be done again. There had to be a change. The bridge was broken to the continent. The change had taken place. So there was a span of 200 years from the time of Alfrick before there was anything else put in the way of Bible translation.

**Orm**

The first man to come along to do that was a man name Orm. Orm was an Augustinian month who in 1215 A. D. made a verse-like metrical paraphrase of parts of the Gospels and Acts. This was in Middle English. This was not a translation. This work is called the Ormulum. It included explanatory notes for use in church services. In other words, a sort of an exposition. This work reveals the progress of English into the place where it has definite spelling.

**Shoreham**

The second man was a man named Shoreham who was a scholarly parish priest in the south of England, a talented poet. He translated the Psalms into Middle English.

**Rolle**

A third man was Richard Rolle who died about 1349. Richard Rolle was a hermit, a poet, and an author living in north England. He made a translation of the Psalms along with a verse-by-verse commentary. This work on the Psalms was often combined with Shoreham’s work and it was known as the Shoreham-Rolle version representing northern and southern England. This had a wide circulation, this combined translation of the Psalms, and it again created a hunger in the hearts of people for large portions of the Word of God in the language of Middle English that they now spoke.

**John Wycliffe**

This desire prepared the way for the great translator of the Middle English period which was a man named John Wycliffe. He lived from 1300 to 1384 A. D. John Wycliffe was a born-again Roman Catholic priest who was popular and was the greatest professor at Oxford University in England at the time. Wycliffe spoke out strongly against the usurpations of the papacy against the government of England. The papacy was imposing great tribute upon the various governments, particularly upon England, in order to support the lavish life of the papal courts. Wycliffe spoke out against this—against the invasion of the rights of a sovereign nation. The antagonism of Wycliffe toward the Roman Catholic Church, of course, made him a persona non grata with the Roman Catholic clergy whom he was denouncing for their various corrupt practices.

Well, Wycliffe saw that the best way to break the power of the Roman Catholic Church was to place the Bible in the hands of the common people, in their language—the Middle English. So he translated the Bible into Middle English. However, he did not work from Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. He translated it from the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church, the Latin Vulgate version. The New Testament was done in 1380 and the Old Testament in 1382. So what we have in Wycliffe’s Bible was a translation of a translation. However, it is the first complete translation of the Bible into English. That was a milestone. For the first time in the history of the world the whole Bible was translated in English. It was on manuscript. This was before printing so the only copies you could have were by manuscripts.

Now Wycliffe’s version had an immense influence on crystalizing the English language. King John of England, who reigned form 1199 to 1216, had lost almost all of his continental possessions including Normandy in France. So 140 years of French influence, since the battle of Hastings, came to an end. The English language was set adrift on its own apart from the Norman French influence under which it had labored for some 140 years. The English then settled into its own pattern of expression and it broke down into three dialects—Northern, Middle, and Southern English. However, these were not national languages and they were not by and large intelligible to one another. There was no one language that everybody in England spoke and everyone understood.

The eastern Middle English around London was gradually beginning to predominate, and this is the language in which Wycliffe translated the Bible. When he did this, and with the widespread reading of this Bible, this particular form of English began to crystalize as the national language. In effect, Wycliffe did for English what Luther later did for German when he translated the Bible into German and established a national German language.

Well, Wycliffe’s work was revised in 1388 by a friend of his, John Purvey, and for the next 145 years this was widely circulated as the only English Bible. It was copied by hand. It cost hundreds of dollars to own a copy. A man would pay a load of hay just to be able to have a copy of the New Testament to use for one day. So precious was the Word yet so unavailable.

Wycliffe on December 31st, 1384… Wycliffe was called the Morning Star of the Reformation and the first Protestant. He devoted himself to a study of doctrine and he moved, consequently, in the direction of the Reformation views which were to come after him. He was however brought to trial by the Roman Catholic Church because he made the mistake of publicly denouncing and rejecting transubstantiation. Transubstantiation is the Roman Catholic doctrine that says that at the Lord’s Supper the priest actually converts the bread and wine into the real body and blood of Christ. When he denied this they brought him to trial and he was convicted and he was dismissed from his position at Oxford. This was in 1382, two years before his death. He wrote many articles in Middle English that the people could read concerning the abuses and the corruption in the Roman Catholic Church of the middle Ages.

Well, the church of course was opposed to his translation of the Bible into English. It was considered a work of the devil. One of his enemies, a monk, at his death gave us this description which reflects the attitude of the clergy toward Wycliffe at the time for translating the Bible into the language of the people. This enemy monk says, “On the day of St. Thomas the Martyr, Archbishop of Canterbury, John Wycliffe, the organ of the devil, the enemy of the church, the confusion of the common people, the idol of heretics, the looking glass of hypocrites, the encourage of schism, the soul of hatred, the storehouse of lies, the … of flattery was suddenly struck by the judgment of God and had all his limbs seized with palsy.” That’s the description of a persona non grata, somebody they don’t like. He suffered a stroke and Wycliffe never spoke again.

Continuing: “That mouth which was to speak huge things against God and against his saints, our holy church, was miserably drawn aside and afforded a frightfully spectacle to the beholders. His tongue was speechless and his head shook, showing plainly that the curse which God had thundered forth against Cain was also inflicted on him. Archbishop Arundel complained to the pope of that postulant wretch John Wycliffe, the son of the old serpent, the forerunner of antichrist, who had completed his iniquity by inventing a new translation of the Scriptures.”

So the church did not welcome what Wycliffe had done. At the Roman Catholic Council of Constance in 1415, Wycliffe was officially declared a heretic and the pope ordered that his bones be dug up from consecrated ground and scattered. But for some reason no one did this. A few years went by, and finally in 1428, Pope Clement VIII had the bones dug up and burned, and the ashes scattered on the River Swift, and John Wycliffe felt very bad about the whole thing.

Now Wycliffe’s influence toward the Reformation was something absolutely immense because it went far beyond England. He indeed was the morning star of that tremendous era in history, the Reformation period. He suffered a great deal of abuse and humiliation during his lifetime and after. Why? To give you the English Bible which you hold in your hand this morning.

**Modern English**

With this we come to the modern English period. The Modern English period is from 1500 on to the present. It is the next link in the English Bible. It came 150 years after the death of Wycliffe. During this time much change had again come into the English language. It was now in the form of that Elizabethan language in which our King James translation was cast, and indeed our King James Version came from this period of the Modern English era. It was a time of revolutionary learning and changes in society. There were four great things that had taken place that laid the background and set the scene for the first translation of the Scriptures from the original Greek and Hebrew under the hand of William Tyndale.

**The Printing Press**

The time was right because, for one thing, printing had been invented in 1450 by John Gutenberg of Mainz Germany. The first book he printed was the Latin Vulgate version of the bible in 1455, and he rapidly improved his printing press to the use of moveable type. It took a copyist ten months to produce one Wycliffe Bible and it cost hundreds of dollars to buy one. But a printing press produced thousands of copies very quickly and comparatively cheaply.

So this was a tremendous breakthrough and invention under the providence of God as God was preparing and moving through history, preparing the Word of God for its greatest blossoming and fruitage. It came at an opportune time because in just the next few years the Protestant Reformation was to break out in Germany and the printing press was going to get the Word out to people about the revival of learning of Bible doctrine.

The second thing that happened was the capture of Constantinople by the Turks. Mohammedan control drove out the Greek and Christian scholars with the manuscripts of Scripture that they had and all their classical writings. They grabbed everything and they headed west. They moved out to Italy, to Europe, and the result was that they greatly stimulated the Renaissance, the revival of learning, which was then underway. They introduced Bible study from Hebrew and Greek and they taught these languages.

Now you must understand that the great universities, until about the 15th century, were not teaching Hebrew and Greek. It was the monasteries, it was the church schools that had been the repositories for reserving and preserving learning which had been lost during the dark ages. But not schools, universities, began teaching Greek and Hebrew which was preparatory for the translators.

**Erasmus**

Then another great thing that happened was the first printed Greek Testament prepared by a Dutch humanist named Erasmus. He was a great scholar. He printed this testament in 1516. It included notes near the text which revealed the corrupt state into which the Roman Catholic Church had fallen. Thousands of copies of this were sold all over Europe. This Greek text created an awakening again among people because people were astonished to see what God actually had to say in His Word as they had never seen it before.

Well, the result was another rising tide of desire for a good translation of the English Bible. The text that Erasmus prepared is today called the Textus Receptus, or the received text. That means “received by all.” It is virtually identical with that traditional family of texts that we looked at earlier. Erasmus was commissioned by Froben, a publisher, to put together this Greek testament in 1515. So Erasmus came to Balsa, Switzerland and he worked with about five Greek manuscripts dated from the 11th to the 15th century. These manuscripts are in the traditional family, and the reason the Textus Receptus is so often attacked is that scholars say, “Well, Erasmus just went there and found five, six, or seven manuscripts and that’s what he worked from.” Well, that’s one way of looking at it. However, we do have to give account again to the providence of God, that God was getting ready to do something in the preparing of the Greek text, because when Erasmus finished in 1516, the thing went to press, and the Reformation exploded the next year in 1517 in Germany. And it was necessary to have a Greek New Testament in print in order to defend the new doctrines and the revival of learning of doctrine that was to take place.

So I think we must take into consideration that God was in there providing Erasmus with adequate and proper and reliable manuscripts, and we can’t discount the Textus Receptus (TR) so readily. God was preparing and the job was done. As leading principle of the Reformation was the absolute and sole authority of Scripture in faith and practice.

The second edition of the Textus Receptus was the basis for Luther’s German translation. The fifth edition of Bezae in 1598 was the basis for our King James Bible in 1611. This text is viewed by many scholars today as still the nearest to the originals in spite of the fact that it has controversial passages such as the Trinitarian passage in 1 John and the last verses of the Gospel of Mark in it. It was the Greek Bible nevertheless for 300 years until about 1830 when some of these more recent texts were found—Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Vaticanus, and so on that we’ve been talking about, and which brought in a further light upon the original writings and which scholars have used since. Erasmus did use some Latin Vulgate readings sometimes in some of his translation where some of his manuscripts were poor. For example, in the book of Revelations, where parts were missing, he would bring it in from the Latin Vulgate. But again, perhaps God was preserving in the Latin Vulgate what had disappeared for one reason or another from the Greek text.

There was a fourth thing and that was the discoveries of exploration. Columbus has discovered America in 1492. Vasco de Gama had rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1497, Magellan had circled the world in 1520, and Copernicus had set the sun as the center of the solar system in 1543. So it was a whole new era upon which mankind had entered. With this background, and with this new condition of learning and of interest in the Word of God, we come to the most magnificent translator of all, William Tyndale, and we’ll pick up the story here next time. The series of Bibles then rapidly flowed from him down to the one that we have today.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1971