

# The Rock

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## Is the *Textus Receptus* the Only Legitimate Source for the Bible?

This week's question comes from Ron L. of Burlington, Kansas. Ron wants to know why the church is using versions of the Bible that didn't use the *textus receptus* as their basis for translation. Before we answer his question, it might be helpful to review what is the *textus receptus* and the implications of his question.

Before the sixteenth century, biblical texts were in Greek and Latin, though the Old Testament was also in Hebrew. Until this time, translations were freely made from any combination of these texts. In 1516 Erasmus of Rotterdam compiled a Hebrew and Greek manuscript of the Bible from the existing Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. It became the standard text for making translations, though not without some disagreement from scholars of his day. In any event, tradition eventually deemed the Erasmus edition the *textus receptus*, the "received text" and was considered the ultimate of the original language manuscripts. In the seventeenth century, fifty-four scholars were commissioned by King James to translate a version of the Bible into English that would be accepted by the Church of England. They chose the *textus receptus* as their source for the translation. Because of this, and because of the title "Authorized Version" (though the King James Version was never formally "authorized" by either King or Parliament), this translation was touted as the one holy and infallible version of the Bible for the English speaking world for nearly 400 years.

Now, to the question. "Why are other translations *not* using the *textus receptus*?" When translations are made, scholars want to use the best manuscripts available in making their translations. In the 1500s only a limited number of manuscripts were available to Erasmus (actually only five or six). In the seventeenth century discoveries of much earlier manuscripts were made and around 1700 the *textus receptus* itself was modified by John Mill who used these ancient manuscripts the thought being the more ancient the manuscript the closer it was to the original writings. In 1870 the Church of England commissioned a revision of the original 1611 King James Version based upon the weight of newly discovered Greek manuscripts. Indeed, there were over 30,000 textual changes made in the New Testament alone, 5,000 of them directly resulting from the Greek manuscript discoveries. Thus, in reality the King James Version used today has itself departed from the *textus receptus*.

Since 1870 more ancient Greek and Hebrew manuscripts have been discovered so that virtually no scholar relies on the *textus receptus* alone for making translations. However, English too has changed since 1611. Today when we read the King James translation of Acts 26.20 "Do works meet for repentance" most readers don't understand what the writer really means is to "Perform deeds worthy of repentance." Since our language has changed our translations must change if we are to read and understand scripture in English.

In 1516 the *textus receptus* was the best tool available for translators to use. However, since then there have been many discoveries and many more tools have become available to make our Bibles more reliable and more accurate than ever before. As our language continues to evolve and new discoveries are made, we can be sure that men and women will continue to prayerfully and carefully bring us the very best translations of scripture for our time. [Back to Top](#)

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