

# The Dr. Gene Scott Bible Collection

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## STATION 12: ERASMUS



Overview of Station 12

## From Erasmus & Luther to Tyndale: Birth of the English Reformation

### Part 1 - ERASMUS

*"I utterly dissent from those who are unwilling that the sacred Scriptures should be read by the unlearned translated into their own vulgar tongue. I wish that even the weakest woman should read the Gospels, should read the epistles of St. Paul. I long that the*

*husbandman should sing  
some portion of them to  
himself as he follows  
the plow."*

- Erasmus, in his Preface to his Greek New Testament.

Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam was the most popular scholar of 16th Century Europe. His "In Praise of Folly," a satire on women, became, with his friend Sir Thomas More's "Utopia," the most widely read and disseminated novels in their time. Erasmus was gifted in the classic Greek language, which had been rediscovered in Europe only one generation before him, and he walked onto the stage of history at exactly the right moment to parlay his linguistic talents into fame and fortune.

Erasmus was a consummate diplomat, always "pushing" his scholarship to the edge of disaster but never crossing the line that could cause enemies of the "New Learning" to indict him for heresy. A favorite of the Pope, he was the champion of the new breed of scholars, all over Europe, who sought to make the Scriptures available in the common people's languages.

Born in 1480, Erasmus was the son of a priest who had taken the vow of celibacy. His education never ceased; during his tenure at Oxford, he came under the influence of Sir Thomas More and of John Colet (Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London). Colet had pioneered extemporaneous teaching of the Pauline Epistles, and attracted the masses to the lecture halls at Oxford and at St. Paul's Cathedral, where he in effect permitted the Apostle to speak directly from the text, without interpretation. Erasmus, determined to learn Greek, lived for a while in a refugee camp in Venice.

After returning to England, Erasmus was a guest professor at Cambridge from 1510 to 1514; his lectures in Greek on the Pauline Epistles were immensely popular. He determined, while at Cambridge, to reconstruct the New Testament in its original Greek and then to translate it from Greek to Latin. When word of this project reached the enemies of "New Learning," their efforts to undermine his work soon drove him from England to the printing house of John Froben in Basle, Switzerland. Erasmus had with him Greek manuscripts borrowed from Colet at St. Paul's; these, together with other manuscripts in Froben's hands and fragments from the University of Paris enabled Erasmus to reconstruct the first relatively complete text of the New Testament in Greek, which enabled him to render his version in Latin - the first fresh translation into Latin in over 1000 years.

Erasmus' Greek-Latin Testament, with the two languages in parallel columns, was issued from Froben's press in 1516. Its superior scholarship made it a dangerous book, for it undermined and eventually destroyed the infallibility of the Latin Vulgate in the mind of any scholar of an open mind who encountered it. Through the courage of secret agents and simple smugglers, forbidden books and tracts, especially on the subject of religion, reached deep into England, and found fertile ground among the scholars of Oxford and Cambridge. One such scholar,



William Tyndale, found Erasmus' masterwork and became convinced of the need of an accurate printed Bible in the hands of the ordinary people of England. Tyndale worked from Erasmus' third edition, shown here.



**Erasmus' Greek-Latin New Testament  
(the edition used by Tyndale)**

## **Erasmus' New Testament**

### **PARALLEL GREEK & LATIN VERSION**

**1522** - Third edition, revised by Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam and printed by Froben of Basle, Switzerland. This is the **very edition used by Tyndale** in translating the Bible into English. Thanks to the influx into Europe of Greek manuscripts after the fall of Constantinople, Erasmus was able to piece together nearly the complete text from the sources available to him (with a few minor gaps filled by translating from the Latin Vulgate back into Greek). Erasmus' Latin translation, made from the original Greek, forever shattered any claims to infallibility of the Vulgate, and allowed would-be translators of the Bible into the languages of the common people to have an accurate near-original of the New Testament to work from. This edition incorporated all the changes which Erasmus and his publisher made in the interest of scrupulous accuracy since the first edition of 1516 and the second of 1518-19; it includes much prefatory material by Erasmus explaining his purpose and the corrections made. Of the subsidiary title pages to each book, the most elaborate is that to "Romans," an indication of the importance in which Erasmus and Froben held it. This volume was formerly in the library of a German prince, and is the only one of this edition in private hands in the United States

(no more than five examples are believed to remain in private hands world-wide). Its importance in the context of this collection is that this is the edition actually used by Tyndale.



### Erasmus' "Paraphrase on Matthew"

*Click on the image  
above to see an  
enlarged view!*

## Erasmus' Paraphrase on "Matthew"

**1548** - From the two-volume Erasmus Paraphrase on the New Testament, printed by Edward Whitchurch of London in "Black Letter" type (volume 1 completed 1548; volume 2 completed 1549). The text of the Gospel is that of the "Great" Bible version, with Erasmus' commentary interpolated. As King Edward VI had ordered in 1547 that a copy of this book be placed in every church, the printing was rushed; very few copies resemble each other in minute details, evidence that corrections were made on the press, "on the fly." The translator of this portion of the commentary was most probably Nicholas Udall.

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## STATION LOCATION MAP

Below is a floor plan map of the Cathedral in 3 sections, one for each level. The first section is the Lower Level, the second is the Foyer Level, and the third is the Mezzanine Level. This station is located in the "Smoking Room" on the Lower Level at the red #12.





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