



JEROME 331- 420

Jerome was born in 331 A.D. to well-to-do Christian parents. They sent him to Rome to be educated when he was ten years old. There, he became an accomplished classical scholar with an insatiable passion for learning. After finishing his education, Jerome traveled throughout the Roman Empire. He studied Christian theology in Trier, Germany and became part of an ascetic community in Aquilea, Italy. Moving on to Antioch, Jerome had a dream where Christ accused him, saying, "You are a Ciceronian, and not a Christian." He realized he had devoted too much of his life to studying the pagan classics at the expense of Christian truth. So, he lived from 374 to 377 as a hermit in the desert east of Antioch, fasting and studying. Nearby, he found a Jewish Christian from whom he learned Hebrew, eventually mastering it as no other Christian of his day had done.

Although he was ordained as a presbyter after his desert sojourn, Jerome returned to Rome to live the monastic life, rather than minister in a church. He became the theological advisor and secretary to Pope Damasus and began to translate the Bible into the common language of the Western Roman Empire, Latin. There were already several Latin translations of the Scriptures in circulation. However, these varied greatly in accuracy and readability. So Pope Damasus commissioned Jerome to revise the translation of the Gospels and Psalms, for which Jerome used the Septuagint text, which was the Greek translation from the Hebrew Old Testament. The Apostles often quoted from this translation and many other trusted Latin versions were from the Septuagint. Latin was the universal language of Europe during these years, and Jerome's translation of Scriptures into the common tongue became the Vulgate (or common) Bible.

After the death of Pope Damasus, Jerome and a wealthy woman named Paulina established two monastic communities in Bethlehem, one for women and one for men. Relieved to be away from the politics and turmoil of Roman life, Jerome could live the ascetic, monastic life he so desired and devote himself to study. For the next fifteen years, he went behind the Greek Septuagint and translated the books of the Old Testament Bible from the Hebrew in to Latin. These translations were often done for his friends. Although some criticized his translating from the Hebrew rather than the Greek Septuagint, Jerome insisted that Hebrew was the original, inspired language of the Old Testament and that it could therefore make a better translation.

Jerome believed that the knowledge of the Scripture was the riches of Christ, but ignorance of Scripture was ignorance of Christ. He repeatedly exhorted others to saturate their minds with the Scriptures. His work was accompanied by the prayer that his Latin translation might speak the truth of God as clearly and powerfully as the original Hebrew or Greek. When Wycliffe translated the Bible into English and Luther into German, they translated from Jerome's Latin Vulgate. Martin Luther commended Jerome's work by saying, "St. Jerome has personally done more and greater in translation than any man will imitate."