Ezra

Jerome (c. AD 347–420)

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Ezra

[Translated by Kevin P. Edgecomb] BEGINNING OF THE PROLOGUE OF EUSEBIUS HIERONYMUS TO THE BOOK OF EZRA

Whether it may be more difficult to do or not to do what you have requested, I have not yet established. For it is also not my desire to refuse your commands, and the greatness of weight imposed thus press upon the neck, so that before a falling under the bundle, there might rather be a lightening (of the load). The efforts of the envious agree with this, who consider all that I write reproof, with conscience occasionally fighting against them, publicly tearing apart what they read secretly, to such a degree that I am compelled to cry out and to say: ”O Lord, free my soul from crooked lips and a false tongue” (Ps 119.2). It is the third year that you always write and write again, that I might translate the book of Ezra for you from Hebrew, as though you do not have the Greek and Latin scrolls, or whatever it is which is translated by us might not be something immediately spat upon by all. As a certain person says, ”For to strive without effort, and not to seek anything by wearying except hatred, is extreme insanity” (Sallust, Jugurtha 3). Therefore, I implore you, my dearest Domnius and Rogatian, that, keeping the reading private, you will not bring the book forth into the public, nor throw food to the fastidious, and you will avoid the pride of them who know only (how) to judge others, and themselves (know how) to do nothing. And if there are any of the brothers whom we do not displease, give the text to them, admonishing that they transcribe the Hebrew names, of which there is a great abundance in this book, separately and with intermediate spaces. For it will profit nothing to correct the book, without diligence being preserved in the correction of the copiers.

Neither should it disturb anyone that the book edited by us is one, nor should they be delighted by the dreams of the third and fourth books (which are) of the apocrypha, both because among the Hebrews the discourses of Ezra and Nehemiah are confined to one scroll, and those things which are not found among them, nor are of the twenty-four elders, are for throwing away. And if anyone sets the (version of the) Seventy interpreters before you, the variety of the texts of which shows them torn and perverted, nor indeed can it be asserted truth is diverse, send him to the Gospels, in which are set down many things as though from the Old Testament, things which are not found among the Seventy interpreters, like this: ”He will be called a Nazarene,” and ”From Egypt I have called my son,” and ”They

will look on him whom they have pierced" and many other things which we are saving for a more extensive work, and ask of him where they might be written, and when he has not been able to reveal (where), you must read from these texts which recently were edited by us, daily pierced by the tongues of the slanderous.

But so that I might come to a shortcut, certainly what I will introduce is the most reasonable. I have given, in what is translated by me, anything that is not found in the Greek or is found otherwise (than there). Which interpreter do they mangle? They may ask the Hebrews and their authors, whether they accept or reject the sense of my translation. Furthermore, it is another thing if, as is said, with eyes closed they want to slander me and not imitate the study and goodwill of the Greeks, who, after the Seventy translators, with the Gospel of Christ now shining, they both attentively read the Jewish and Ebionite interpreters of the Old Law, namely Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, and have also dedicated (them) to the churches, through the labor of Origen in the Hexapla. How much more should Latins be grateful, having understood that the joy of Greece is to borrow anything from itself (?). For firstly, it is of great expense and of infinite difficulty to be able to have all of the texts; then also, those who have (them) and are ignorant of the Hebrew words will err more, not knowing which ones of the many will have said the truth. Which thing also happened recently to a certain very wise man among the Greeks, so that occasionally leaving the sense of the Scriptures, the error of some particular translator was followed.

And we, who at least have a little knowledge of the Hebrew tongue, and our Latin does not lack style in any way, are both better able than others to judge, and to express those things of them which we understand in our language. Therefore, even if a serpent hisses, "and the victor Sinon throws burning torches," with Christ helping, my speech will never be silenced, for (even my) severed tongue will stutter (something). Those who will, may read; those who won't, may throw away. They may scatter (? the writings; they may slander the letters. Much more by your love will I be provoked toward study, rather than be deterred by their detraction and hatred.

END OF THE PROLOGUE

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