Gospels

Jerome (c. AD 347–420)

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Gospels

PREFACE TO THE GOSPELS
BEGINNING OF THE PREFACE FOR THE GOSPELS OF SAINT JEROME THE PRESBYTER To the blessed Pope Damasus, from Jerome,

You urge me to make a new work from the old, and that I might sit as a kind of judge over the versions of Scripture dispersed throughout the whole world, and that I might resolve which among such vary, and which of these they may be which truly agree with the Greek. Pious work, yet perilous presumption, to change the old and aging language of the world , to carry it back to infancy, for to judge others is to invite judging by all of them. Is there indeed any learned or unlearned man, who when he picks up the volume in his hand, and takes a single taste of it, and sees what he will have read to differ, might not instantly raise his voice, calling me a forger, proclaiming me now to be a sacrilegious man, that I might dare to add, to change, or to correct anything in the old books? Against such infamy I am consoled by two causes: that it is you, who are the highest priest, who so orders, and truth is not to be what might vary, as even now I am vindicated by the witness of slanderers. If indeed faith is administered by the Latin version, they might respond by which, for they are nearly as many as the books!

If, however, truth is to be a seeking among many, why do we not now return to the Greek originals to correct those mistakes which either through faulty translators were set forth, or through confident but unskilled were wrongly revised, or through sleeping scribes either were added or were changed? Certainly, I do not discuss the Old Testament, which came from the Seventy Elders in the Greek language, changing in three steps until it arrived with us . Nor do I seek what Aquila, or what Symmachus may think, or why Theodotion may walk the middle of the road between old and new. This may be the true translation which the Apostles have approved. I now speak of the New Testament, which is undoubtedly Greek, except the Apostle Matthew, who had first set forth the Gospel of Christ in Hebrew letters in Judea. This (Testament) certainly differs in our language, and is led in the way of different streams; it is necessary to seek the single fountainhead. I pass over those books which are called by the name of Lucian and Hesychius, for which a few men wrongly claim authority, who anyway were not allowed to revise either in the Old Instrument after the

Seventy Translators, or to pour out revisions in the New; with the Scriptures previously translated into the languages of many nations, the additions may now be shown to be false.

Therefore, this present little preface promises only the four Gospels, the order of which is Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, revised in comparison with only old Greek books. They do not disagree with many familiar Latin readings, as we have kept our pen in control, but only those in which the sense will have been seen to have changed (from the Greek) are corrected; the rest remain as they have been.

We have also copied the lists which Eusebius the bishop of Caesarea, following Ammonius of Alexandria, set out in ten numbers, as they are had in the Greek, so that if any may then wish through diligence to make known what in the Gospels may be either the same, or similar, or singular, he may learn their differences. This is great, since indeed error has sunk into our books; while concerning the same thing, one Evangelist has said more, into another they have added because they thought it inferior; or while another has differently expressed the same sense, whichever one of the four he had read first, he will revise the other to the version he values most. Whence it happened how in our time that all have been mixed; in Mark are many things of Luke, and even of Matthew; turned backwards in Matthew are many things of John and of Mark, yet in the remaining others, they are found to be correct. When, therefore, you will have read the lists which are attached below, the confusion of errors is removed, and you will know all the similar passages, and the singular ones, wherever you may turn to. In the first list, the four agree, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John; in the second, three, Matthew, Mark, John; in the third, three, Matthew, Luke, John; in the fourth, three, Matthew, Mark, John; in the fifth, two, Matthew, Luke; in the sixth, two, Matthew, Mark; in the seventh, two, Matthew, John; in the eighth, two, Luke, Mark;

in the ninth, two, Luke, John; in the tenth some peculiar ones are given which the others don't have. Separately in the Gospels are numbered sections of unequal length, beginning with one and increasing to the end of the books. This is written before the passage in black, and it has under it a red number, which shows to which of the ten (lists) to proceed, with the first number to be sought in the list. Therefore, when the book is open, for example, if you will wish to know of this or that chapter in which list they may be, you will immediately be shown by the lower number. Returning to the beginning (of the book) in which the different lists are brought together, and immediately finding the same lists by the title in front, by that same number which you had sought in the Evangelist, which you will find marked in the inscription, you may also view other similar passages, the numbers of which you may note there. And when you know them, you will return to the single volumes, and immediately finding the number which you will have noted before, you will learn the places in which either the same things or similar things were said.

I wish that in Christ you may be well, and that you will remember me, most blessed Pope. END OF THE PREFACE FOR THE GOSPELS OF SAINT JEROME THE PRESBYTER 1. Translated by Kevin P. Edgecomb, 27 July 1999, Berkeley, California. As far as I am able

to find, this is the first translation of the full letter into English, modern or otherwise. 2. Hebrew > Greek > Latin.

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