Prefaces On Translations from the Septuagint and Chaldee

Jerome (c. AD 347–420)

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There are three stages of Jerome's work of Scripture Translation. The first is during his stay at Rome, a.d. 382-385, when he translated only from the Greek-the New Testament from the Greek mss., and the Book of Psalms from the LXX. The second is the period immediately after his settlement at Bethlehem, when he translated still from the LXX., but marked with obeli and asterisks the passages in which that version differed from the Hebrew: the third from a.d. 390-404, in which he translated directly from the Hebrew. The work of the second period is that which is now before us. The whole of the Old Testament was translated from the LXX. (see his Apology, book ii. c. 24), but most of it was lost during his lifetime (see Letters CXXXIV. (end) and CXVI. 34 (in Augustin Letter, 62)). What remains is the Book of Job, the Psalms, Chronicles, the Books of Solomon, and Tobit and Judith.

Chronicles.
This book was dedicated to Domnion and Rogatianus, about a.d. 388. Jerome points out the advantages he enjoyed, in living in Palestine, for obtaining correct information on matters illustrative of Scripture, especially the names of places. The mss. of the LXX. on such points were so corrupt that occasionally three names were run into one, and "you would think that you had before you, not a heap of Hebrew names, but those of some foreign and Sarmatian tribe." Jerome had sent for a Jew, highly esteemed among his brethren, from Tiberias, and, after "examining him from top to toe," had, by his aid, emended the text and made the translation. But he had not the critical knowledge to guard him against supposing that the Books of Chronicles are "the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah," referred to in the Books of Kings.

Book of Job.
This translation was dedicated to Paula and Eustochium, about the year 388. He complains that even the revision he was now making was the subject of many cavils. Men prefer ancient faults to new truths, and would rather have handsome copies than correct ones; but he boasts that "the blessed Job, who, as far as the Latins are concerned, was till now lying amidst filth and swarming with the worms of error, is now whole and free from stain."

The Psalms.

Jerome first undertook a revision of the Psalter with the help of the Septuagint about the year 383. when living at Rome. This revision, which obtained the name of the Roman Psalter "probably because it was made for the use of the Roman Church at the request of Damasus," was retained until the pontificate of Plus V. (a.d. 1566). Before long "the old error prevailed over the new correction," the faults of the old version crept in again through the negligence of copyists; and at the request of Paula and Eustochium, Jerome commenced a new and more thorough revision. The exact date is not known; the work was in all probability done at Bethlehem in the years 387 and 388. This edition, which soon became popular, was introduced by Gregory of Tours into the services of the Church of France, and thus obtained the name of the Gallican Psalter. In 1566 it superseded the Roman in all churches except those of the Vatican, Milan, and St. Mark's, Venice.

Long ago, when I was living at Rome, I revised the Psalter, and corrected it in a great measure, though but cursorily, in accordance with the Septuagint version. You now find it, Paula and Eustochium, again corrupted through the fault of copyists, and realise the fact that ancient error is more powerful than modern correction; and you therefore urge me, as it were, to cross-plough the land which has already been broken up, and, by means of the transverse furrows, to root out the thorns which are beginning to spring again; it is only right, you say, that rank and noxious growths should be cut down as often as they appear. And so I issue my custom. ary admonition by way of preface both to you, for whom it happens that I am undertaking the labour, and to those persons who desire to have copies such as I describe. Pray see that what I have carefully revised be transcribed with similar painstaking care. Every reader can observe for himself where there is placed either a horizontal line or mark issuing from the centre, that is, either an obelus (_) or an asterisk (*). And wherever he sees the former, he is to understand that between this mark and the two stops (:) which I have introduced, the Septuagint translation contains superfluous matter. But where he sees the asterisk (*), an addition to the Hebrew books is indicated, which also goes as far as the two stops.

Books of Solomon.

This is addressed to Paula and Eustochium. Jerome describes the numerous emendations he has had to make in what was then the received Latin text, but says he has not found the same necessity in dealing with Ecclesiasticus. He adds, "All I aim at istogive you a revised edition of the Canonical Scriptures, and to employ my Latin on what is certain rather than on what is doubtful."

Tobit and Judith.

The Preface is to Chromatius and Heliodorus. It recognizes that the books are apocryphal. After his usual complaints of "the Pharisees" who impugned his translations, he says: "Inasmuch as the Chaldee is closely allied to the Hebrew, I procured the help of the most skilful speaker of both languages I could find, and gave to the subject one day's hasty labour, my method being to explain in Latin, with the aid of a secretary, whatever an interpreter ex-

pressed to me in Hebrew words." As to Judith, he notes that the Council of Nicaea had, contrary to the Hebrew tradition. included it in the Canon of Scripture, and this, with his friends' requests, had induced him to undertake the labour of emendation and translation.

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.