

Saint Jerome was born in 340, in present day Croatia. His father sent him to Rome to learn classic literature and rhetoric, that is writing based on formal rules of composition. Although his father instructed him in the Christian faith as a youth, Jerome was not baptized until the age of 20. He did this in Rome in 360, being baptized by Pope Liberius.ⁱ

Jerome was a lifelong learner. As an adult, he studied theology under two excellent teachers and two future saints, Chromatius and Heliodorus. “Jerome undertook to learn Hebrew from a Christian monk who had converted from Judaism. Somewhat unusually for a fourth-century Christian priest, he also studied with Jewish rabbis, striving to maintain the connection between Hebrew language and culture, and the emerging world of Greek and Latin-speaking Christianity.”ⁱⁱ

Jerome enjoyed travel to both places of solitude and to intellectual centers bubbling with scholarship. His trips throughout the Holy Land helped him to understand the significance of places made famous by the bible. In Constantinople he met Gregory of Nazianzus. They had much in common and easily made friends with one another. Gregory is one of the four great Greek Doctors of the Churchⁱⁱⁱ. Jerome became one of the four great Latin Doctors of the Church.

Beyond school and travel, he also felt much was to be learned from prayer and study. Having a deep appreciation for monasticism he felt called to a solitary life of a hermit in the desert. Jerome spent the better part of four decades in Bethlehem in the monastery he established so that he could devote his days to study, prayer, and an austere self-discipline.

With God as the main focus of his studies and prayer, it is easy to see why the Bishop of Antioch ordained him a priest and Pope Damasus I used him as a secretary. The Pope recognized the need to make the Old Testament more accessible and commissioned Jerome to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Latin. Although its usage is rarer today, in the 4th century, Latin was a language more accessible to a wider audience than Hebrew.

In 380, Jerome settled in Bethlehem. Prepared by his study and travel, Jerome spent decades translating the Bible into its authoritative Latin version. For all of his academic excellence, Jerome did not have the temperament to deal patiently with people. His words were often harsh, and he was openly critical of those whose approach was more pastoral. He won few friends this way.

Timothy tells us “all Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction” (2 Tim 3:16). With his knowledge of Scripture and so many other theological currents of thought, Jerome was sometimes engaged as an arbitrator to settle disputes that arose in the church.

Jerome is famous for teaching “ignorance of Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”^{iv} Although he was most learned about Scripture, his ability to deal with others was a great character flaw. Just as all scripture can be used for teaching, the Lord can take a fault of ours and make it useful for others. Jesus asks, “Why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye? ... You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother’s eye.” (Matthew 7:3,5). Did you ever wonder if there was a patron saint for those with wooden beams in their eyes? The answer is yes, Saint Jerome is the patron of people with difficult personalities.

Jerome was not completely blind to his own faults and no doubt his prayer and ascetical life tempered his propensity to be critical of others. He died in 420 in the Bethlehem monastery he had established in his younger days.

ⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-jerome-610

ⁱⁱ Ibid-610

ⁱⁱⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/resources/church-fathers/biographies-of-church-fathers/st-jerome

^{iv} Ibid-610