

0347-0420 – Hieronymus – Preface to the Book on the Sites and Names of Hebrew Places

Preface to the Book on the Sites ad Names of Hebrew Places

this file has been downloaded from <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.html>

to be of use; and my friends Lupulianus and Valerianus⁵³⁷⁶ urged me to attempt it, because, as they thought, I had made some progress in the knowledge of Hebrew. I, therefore, went through all the books of Scripture in order, and in the restoration which I have now made of the ancient fabric, I think that I have produced a work which may be found valuable by Greeks as well as Latins.

I here in the Preface beg the reader to take notice that, if he finds anything omitted in this work, it is reserved for mention in another. I have at this moment on hand a book of Hebrew Questions, an undertaking of a new kind such as has never until now been heard of amongst either the Greeks or the Latins. I say this, not with a view of arrogantly puffing up my own work, but because I know how much labour I have spent on it, and wish to provoke those whose knowledge is deficient to read it. I recommend all those who wish to possess both that work and the present one, and also the book of Hebrew Places, which I am about to publish, to make no account of the Jews and all their ebullitions of vexation. Moreover, I have added the meaning of the words and names in the New Testament, so that the fabric might receive its last touch and might stand complete. I wished also in this to imitate Origen, whom all but the ignorant acknowledge as the greatest teacher of the Churches next to the Apostles; for in this work, which stands among the noblest monuments of his genius, he endeavoured as a Christian to supply what Philo, as a Jew, had omitted.

Preface to the Book on the Sites and Names of Hebrew Places.

For the scope and value of this book see Prolegomena. It was written a.d. 388.

Eusebius, who took his second name from the blessed Martyr Pamphilus, after he had written the ten books of his “Ecclesiastical History,” the Chronicle of Dates, of which I published a Latin version, the book in which he set forth the names of the different nations and those given to them of old by the Jews and by those of the present day, the topography of the land of Judæa and the portions allotted to the tribes, together with a representation of Jerusalem itself and its temple, which he accompanied with a very short explanation, bestowed his labour at the end of his life upon this little work, of which the design is to gather for us out of the Holy Scriptures the names of almost all the cities, mountains, rivers, hamlets, and other places, whether they remain the same or have since been changed or in some degree corrupted. I have taken up the work of this admirable man, and have translated it, following the arrangement of the Greeks, and taking the words in the order of their initial letters, but leaving out those names which did not seem worthy of mention, and making a considerable number of alterations. I have explained my method once for all in the Preface to my translation of the Chronicle, where I said that I might be called at once a translator



⁵³⁷⁶ Nothing is known of these men. It is very improbable that this Valerianus was the bishop of Apuleia, who must, however, have been known to Jerome.

and the composer of a new work; but I repeat this especially because one who had hardly the first tincture of letters has ventured upon a translation of this very book into Latin, though his language is hardly to be called Latin. His lack of scholarship will be seen by the observant reader as soon as he compares it with my translation. I do not pretend to a style which soars to the skies; but I hope that I can rise above one which grovels on the earth.

Preface to the Book of Hebrew Questions.

Written a.d. 388. For the scope and character of this work, see Prolegomena.

The object of the Preface to a book is to set forth the argument of the work which follows; but I am compelled to begin by answering what has been said against me. My case is somewhat like that of Terence, who turned the scenic prologues of his plays into a defence of himself. We have a⁵³⁷⁷Luscius Lanuvinus, like the one who worried him, and who brought charges against the poet as if he had been a plunderer of the treasury. The bard of Mantua suffered in the same way; he had translated a few verses of Homer very exactly, and they said that he was nothing but a plagiarist from the ancients. But he answered them that it was no small proof of strength to wrest the club of Hercules from his hands. Why, even Tully, who stands on the pinnacle of Roman eloquence, that king of orators and glory of the Latin tongue, has actions for embezzlement⁵³⁷⁸ brought against him by the Greeks. I cannot, therefore, be surprised if a poor little fellow like me is exposed to the gruntings of vile swine who trample our pearls under their feet, when some of the most learned of men, men whose glory ought to have hushed the voice of ill will, have felt the flames of envy. It is true, this happened by a kind of justice to men whose eloquence had filled with its resonance the theatres and the senate, the public assembly and the rostra; hardihood always courts detraction, and (as Horace says):

“The⁵³⁷⁹ highest peaks invoke
The lightning’s stroke.”

But I am in a corner, remote from the city and the forum, and the wranglings of crowded courts; yet, even so (as Quintilian says) ill-will has sought me out. Therefore, I beseech the reader,

“If⁵³⁸⁰ one there be, if one,

⁵³⁷⁷ Terence’s rival, to whom he makes allusions in the Prologi to the Eunuchus, Heoutontimoroumenos and Phormio.

⁵³⁷⁸ *Repetundarum*. Properly an action to compel one who has left office to restore public money which he had embezzled.

⁵³⁷⁹ Hor. Odes II., x. 19, 20.

⁵³⁸⁰ Virgil, Ec., vi. 10.