

## Jerome, The Lives of Famous Men

You urge me, Dexter, to follow 'Tranquillus' example in setting down an ordered account of ecclesiastical writers, and doing for our authors what he did for the famous men of letters among the Gentiles—namely, that I should briefly set before you all those who produced any memorable works on the sacred Scriptures from the Passion of Christ down to the fourteenth year of the Emperor Theodosius. Such works have been produced among the Greeks by Hermippus the Peripatetic, Antigonus of Carystus, the learned Satyrus, and—by far the most learned of all—Aristoxenus the Musician; among the Latins, by Varro, Santra, Nepos, Hyginus, and Tranquillus, whose example you call on us to follow. By my position is not like theirs. For they, unrolling the ancient histories and annals, could as it were from some great meadow gather the materials to weave no small crown for their own work; but what am I to do, since I follow in no man's footsteps, and have, as they say, the worst of all teaches, namely myself? Nevertheless Eusebius Pamphilus' ten books of *Ecclesiastical History* have been of the greatest help to us, and the works by each of the men of whom we are to write often record the dates of their authors. Accordingly I beseech our Lord Jesus Christ, that what your Cicero, standing at the pinnacle of Roman eloquence, did not scorn to do in his *Brutus*, namely to put together a catalogue of the Latin orators, I too may worthily perform in reckoning up the writers of his Church, spurred on by your encouragement. And if any who are yet writing should find their names passed over in this volume of mine, they should lay the blame on themselves rather than me. For I could not know of those who hid their own writings, which accordingly I did not read; and those who are perhaps well-known to others, will be unknown to me in this corner of the world. But if indeed they have gained distinction through their own writings, they will not be greatly disappointed in any loss caused by our not mentioning them. Therefore let Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian, those rabid dogs snarling against Christ, together with their followers, who suppose the Church to have no philosophers or orators or men of erudition, learn how many and what sort of men founded, built, and adorned her; let them also cease to upbraid our faith for bumpkinish simplicity, and come to recognise their own ignorance. I bid you farewell in our Lord Jesus Christ.

### 1. Simon Peter.

Simon Peter, the son of John, of the province of Galilee, from the town of Bethsaida, brother of the Apostle Andrew, and himself the Prince of the Apostles, after serving as bishop over the Church in Antioch, and preaching to the Diaspora—that is, to those believers who were of the Circumcision—in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, made his way to Rome in the second year of the Emperor Claudius<sup>1</sup> to overthrow Simon Magus. Here he held the sacerdotal chair for twenty-five years, until the last, that is the fourteenth, year of Nero.<sup>2</sup> By this emperor he was nailed to a cross and received the crown of martyrdom, with his head turned towards the ground and his feet lifted up on high; for he said that he was not worthy to be crucified in the same way as his Master. He wrote two Epistles, which are called "Catholic", though many hold that the second was not written by him, on account of its difference in style from the first. Nevertheless the Gospel According to Mark, who was his disciple and interpreter, is said to be by

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<sup>1</sup> Claudius was emperor AD 41-54.

<sup>2</sup> Nero was emperor AD 54-68.

him. The other books, however—one of which is called his Acts, another his Gospel, a third his Preaching, a fourth his Revelation, and a fifth his Judgement—are rejected as apocryphal. He was buried in Rome in the Vatican, next to the Triumphal Way, and is venerated by the entire world.

## 2. James the Just.

James, who is called the brother of the Lord, and surnamed the Just, is considered by some to be the son of Joseph by another wife, but it seems to me that he was the child of Mary the sister of our Lord's mother, whom John mentions in his book.<sup>3</sup> After Our Lord's Passion, the Apostles immediately ordained him Bishop of Jerusalem. He wrote only one Epistle, which is counted among the seven Catholic Epistles; some assert that it was written by another and published under his name, although it has gradually gained authority with the passage of time. Hegesippus, who lived close to the time of the Apostles, says of James in the fifth book of his *Commentaries*:

James, the brother of Our Lord, was made head of the Church in Jerusalem after the Apostles. There are indeed many men called James. This one was holy from his mother's womb: he drank no wine or strong drink, ate no flesh, and neither shaved, anointed himself with perfume, nor used a bath. He alone was permitted to enter into the Holy of Holies, for indeed he did not wear clothing of wool, but only of linen. He would enter into the temple alone, and with his knees fixed on the ground would intercede for the people, so much so that his knees were believed to have acquired the hardness of camels' knees.

Hegesippus says many other things about him as well, which it would take too long to recount here. But Josephus, in the twentieth book of his *Antiquities*, and Clement, in the seventh of his *Outlines*, say that after the death of Festus, who ruled over Judaea, Nero sent Albinus to succeed him; but when Albinus had not yet reached his new province, the high priest Ananus, the young son of Ananus of the priestly class, took advantage of this state of anarchy to assemble a council for the purpose of compelling James to publicly deny that Christ is the Son of God. James refused, and Ananus ordered him to be stoned. He was cast down from the top of the temple, whereby his legs were broken, but he himself was still half-alive, and, raising his hands to heaven, said, "Lord, forgive them, for they know not what they do."<sup>4</sup> After this he was struck on the head by a club such as fullers use to wring out damp garments, and died. Again, Josephus records that he was a man of such holiness and so esteemed by the people that the destruction of Jerusalem was attributed to his death. It is of James that the Apostle Paul writes to the Galatians, "But I saw no other Apostle, except for James the brother of the Lord,"<sup>5</sup> and the Acts of the Apostles frequently bears witness to this as well. The Gospel called According to the Hebrews, which I recently translated into the Greek and Latin tongues and of which Origen makes frequent use, mentions him after the resurrection of our Saviour: "But when the Lord had given his grave-clothes to the servant of the priest, he went to James and appeared before him. For James had sworn that, from the hour in which he drank of the chalice of the Lord, he would not eat bread, until he should see him rise again from those that sleep." And again, a short while later: "The Lord said, Bring a table

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<sup>3</sup> Jn. 19.25.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lk. 23.34.

<sup>5</sup> Gal. 1.19.

and bread.” And it is immediately added: “He took the bread and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to James the Just, and said unto him, My brother, eat this bread, for the Son of Man is risen again from those that sleep.” So he ruled the Church in Jerusalem for thirty years, that is until the seventh year of Nero, and was buried next to the same temple from which he was cast down. His gravestone was very well-known down to the siege of Titus and the later siege of Hadrian.<sup>6</sup> Some of our authorities suppose that he is buried on Mount Olivet, but they are mistaken in this view.

### 3. Matthew.

Matthew, also called Levi, was a publican before being made an Apostle. He first composed a Gospel of Christ in Judaea, written in the Hebrew language and alphabet, for the sake of those of the Circumcision who believed; it is not known for certain who afterwards translated it into Greek. The Hebrew itself is kept even today in the library at Caesarea, which the martyr Pamphilus so diligently gathered. I, too, was able to have this volume described to me by the Nazarenes of Beroea in Syria, who make use of it. It is to be noted with regard to this work that whenever the Evangelist cites the Old Testament, either in his own voice or in that of our Lord and Saviour, he does not follow the authority of the translators of the Septuagint, but of the Hebrew; this is why there are two versions of the statements, “Out of Egypt have I called my son,” and, “For he shall be called a Nazarene.”<sup>7</sup>

### 4. Jude.

Jude, the brother of James the Lesser, left behind an Epistle which is reckoned as one of the seven Catholic Epistles. Because he cites the apocryphal Book of Enoch, this Epistle is rejected by many; nevertheless it has merited authority through age and use, and is counted among the Holy Scriptures.

### 5. Paul.

The Apostle Paul, previously called Saul, was outside the number of the Twelve Apostles. He was of the tribe of Benjamin, from Giscalis, a town in Judaea; when this was captured by the Romans, he moved with his parents to Tarsus of Cilicia. From here he was sent to Jerusalem to study the Law, and was taught by Gamaliel, a man of the greatest erudition, who is mentioned by Luke. After being present at the death of the martyr Stephen, and receiving letters from the high priest of the temple instructing him to persecute those who believed in Christ, he set off for Damascus, but was compelled to accept the Faith by revelation, as is written in the Acts of the Apostles, and from a persecutor was transformed into a vessel of election. And since the first to believe in his preaching was Sergius Paulus, the Proconsul of Cyprus, Saul took on his name, because he had

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<sup>6</sup> Titus’ siege occurred in AD 70. Hadrian’s siege will have occurred during the Bar Kokhba Revolt of 132-6, although the exact events of this revolt are unclear.

<sup>7</sup> For “Out of Egypt...” cf. Hos. 11.1 (ἐξ Αἰγύπτου μετεκάλεσα τὰ τέκνα αὐτοῦ), Mat. 2.15 (ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ἐκάλεσα τὸν υἱὸν μου). “For he shall be called...” is from Mat. 2.23 (ὅτι Ναζωραῖος κληθήσεται); this precise phrase is not found anywhere in the Old Testament, however, and it is likely that Matthew is either quoting an extra-Biblical source, or else perhaps referring to Isa. 11.1, “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots” (the Hebr. for *branch*, נֶזֶר, uses the same consonants as *Nazareth*).

subdued him to the faith of Christ. After this he associated with Barnabas and travelled through many cities, before returning to Jerusalem, where he was ordained Apostle to the Gentiles by Peter, James, and John. And since his doings are most fully recounted in the Acts of the Apostles, I will say only this, that in the twenty-fifty year after Our Lord's Passion, that is the second year of Nero, when Festus had succeeded Felix as Procurator of Judaea, he was sent in chains to Rome, where he remained two years in free custody, daily disputing with the Jews regarding Christ's advent. It should be noted, however, that at his first hearing, held when Nero had not yet firmly established his power or burst forth into such criminality as the histories record him to have indulged in, Paul was dismissed by Nero, that the Gospel of Christ might be preached in the western regions as well, as he himself writes in his Second Epistle to Timothy, which he dictated in chains whilst awaiting death: "At my first hearing, nobody stood by me, but all abandoned me; may this not be laid to their charge. But the Lord stood by me, and strengthened me, that through me the preaching might be accomplished, and all the Gentiles hear, and that I might be delivered from the lion's mouth."<sup>8</sup> It is most evident here that he refers to Nero as a lion, on account of his cruelty. And following this passage, he says, "I have been delivered from the mouth of the lion"; and immediately afterwards, "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and bring me safe unto his heavenly kingdom,"<sup>9</sup> for indeed he sensed that his martyrdom was near. For in the same Epistle he proclaims, "Even now am I being sacrificed, and the time of my departure is at hand."<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, in the fourteenth year of Nero, on the same day as Peter's execution, Paul was beheaded in Rome for Christ's sake, and buried by the Ostian Way, in the thirty-seventh year after Our Lord's Passion. He wrote nine Epistles to seven Churches: one to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, one to the Galatians, one to the Ephesians, one to the Philippians, one to the Colossians, and two to the Thessalonians. He also wrote several to his disciples: two to Timothy, one to Titus, and one to Philemon. But that which is called the Epistle to the Hebrews is not considered his, on account of its difference from the others in style and language; Tertullian considers it to have been written by Barnabas, and others consider it to be by Luke the Evangelist or by Clement, afterwards Bishop of the Roman Church, whom they say arranged and embellished Paul's teachings in his own style. It may be, however, that Paul was indeed writing to the Hebrews, and that because of their hatred for his name left it out of the initial salutation. Being himself a Hebrew, he wrote most eloquently in the Hebrew tongue, that is in his own native language, so that those things which he had eloquently written in Hebrew were more eloquently translated into Greek, and this is the reason why it appears to differ from Paul's other Epistles. Some also read the Epistle to the Laodiceans, but it is rejected by everybody.

## 6. Barnabas.

Barnabas of Cyprus, also called Joseph the Levite, was ordained as Apostle to the Gentiles together with Paul. He composed one Epistle for the edification of the Church, which is counted among the apocryphal writings. He later separated from Paul on account of the disciple John, who was also called Mark; nevertheless he continued to busy himself with the work laid upon him, namely the preaching of the Gospel.

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<sup>8</sup> 2 Tim. 4.16 f.

<sup>9</sup> 2 Tim. 4.18.

<sup>10</sup> 2 Tim. 4.6.

## 7. Luke.

Luke, a physician of Antioch, was, as his writings indicate, not unversed in the Greek language. He was a follower of the Apostle Paul, whom he accompanied on all his journeys, and author of a Gospel. Concerning him the same Paul says, “We have sent a brother with him, whose praise is in the Gospel throughout all the Churches,”<sup>11</sup> whilst to the Colossians he says, “Luke, the most dear physician, sends you his greetings,”<sup>12</sup> and to Timothy, “Only Luke is with me.”<sup>13</sup> He produced another outstanding volume, too, entitled the Acts of the Apostles, recording events down to Paul’s two-year sojourn in Rome, that is the fourth year of Nero; whereby we perceive that this book was composed in the same city. Consequently we reckon the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, and the whole tale of the lion’s baptism, to be among the apocryphal writings. For how is it possible that an inseparable companion of this Apostle in all his other doings should be ignorant of this alone? Moreover, Tertullian, who lived close to their time, reports that a certain presbyter in Asia, a partisan of the Apostle Paul, was proven by John to be the author of this book, and confessed to having written it out of love for Paul, for which he was expelled from office. Some suppose that whenever Paul says in his letters, “according to my Gospel”, he means that of Luke, and that Luke learnt the Gospel not only from the Apostle Paul, who had not been with Our Lord in the flesh, but from the other Apostles too. This indeed is what he says at the beginning of his work, when he declares, “Even as they, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, have delivered unto us.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore he wrote his Gospel according to what he had heard, and composed the Acts of the Apostles according to what he had seen. He is buried in Constantinople, to which city his bones, together with the remains of the Apostle Andrew, were transferred, in the twentieth year of Constantius.<sup>15</sup>

## 8. Mark.

Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, wrote a brief Gospel at the request of the brethren in Rome, according to what he had heard Peter recount. Peter approved when he heard of this, and published it to be read out in the Churches by his authority, as is reported by Clement in his sixth book of *Outlines*, and by Papias the Bishop of Hierapolis. Peter also mentions this Mark in his first Epistle, referring figuratively to Rome under the name of Babylon: “She who is in Babylon, elected together with you, sends her greetings; and so does my son Mark.”<sup>16</sup> Taking therefore the Gospel which he himself had composed, he proceeded to Egypt, and first preaching Christ at Alexandria established a Church so distinguished by its teaching and continence of life, that he constrained all followers of Christ to imitate his example. Accordingly Philo, the most learned of the Jews, seeing that the first Church in Alexandria still followed Jewish customs, wrote a book about their way of life, as being creditable to his own nation. And as Luke recounts that the believers in Jerusalem held all things in common, so too Philo records seeing the same thing at Alexandria under the

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<sup>11</sup> 2 Cor. 8.18.

<sup>12</sup> Col. 4.14.

<sup>13</sup> 2 Tim. 4.11.

<sup>14</sup> Lk. 1.2.

<sup>15</sup> Constantius ruled as junior emperor AD 324-37, and as senior emperor AD 337-61.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Pet. 5.13.

instruction of Mark. He died in the eighth year of Nero and was buried at Alexandria, whereupon he was succeeded by Annianus.

## 9. John.

John, the Apostle whom Jesus most loved,<sup>17</sup> was the son of Zebedee and brother of the Apostle James, whom Herod beheaded after the Passion of Our Lord. He was the last of all the Evangelists to write his Gospel, which he did at the request of the Asian bishops against Cerinthus and other heretics, and especially against the doctrine of the Ebionites, which was then growing in strength; for they held that Christ did not exist before Mary, on account of which it was necessary for John to proclaim Christ's divine nativity. But there is said to have been an additional reason for John's work, namely that when he read the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, although he approved of the substance of their accounts and declared that they had spoken truthfully, still they had only covered the one year in which John<sup>18</sup> was slain after his imprisonment. Accordingly he passed over that year, the events of which had already been set down by the other three, and instead related what had happened earlier, before John was confined in prison: for so it would be manifest to those who diligently read the four Gospels. This consideration also resolves the discrepancy which seems to exist between John and the others. He wrote one Epistle, which opens, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard and seen with our own eyes, which we have beheld, and our hands have touched, concerning the Word of Life,"<sup>19</sup> which is accepted as genuine by all the Churches and every learned man. But the two other epistles, of which one begins, "The Elder to the elect lady and her children," and the other, "The Elder to his dearest Gaius, whom I love in truth," are considered to be the work of John the Presbyter, whose tomb is shown even today at Ephesus, although some think that there are two monuments commemorating John the Evangelist. We will consider this matter further when we get to Papias, his disciple.<sup>20</sup> In the fourteenth year after Nero, Domitian<sup>21</sup> began a second persecution, and John was exiled to the island of Patmos, where he wrote his Revelation, on which Irenaeus and Justin Martyr afterwards produced commentaries. But when Domitian had been slain, and his acts, because of their excessive cruelty, annulled by the Senate, he returned to Ephesus in the reign of Nerva,<sup>22</sup> where he remained until the time of the Emperor Trajan.<sup>23</sup> He founded and ruled Churches throughout the whole of Asia, until, worn out by age, he passed away in the sixty-eighth year after Our Lord's Passion, and was buried just outside the same city of Ephesus.

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<sup>17</sup> Jn. 13.23, 19.26, 20.2, 21.7.

<sup>18</sup> That is, John the Baptist.

<sup>19</sup> 1 Jn. 1.1.

<sup>20</sup> Chap. 18, below.

<sup>21</sup> Emperor AD 81-96.

<sup>22</sup> Ruled AD 96-98.

<sup>23</sup> Trajan ruled AD 98-117.