

*Modernus ille synagoge alumpnus [= alumnus], totius litterature fundamentum, pater Ieronymus.*<sup>1</sup>

## Jerome (347-420) and the Latin Vulgate<sup>2</sup>



We left the story of the Latin Bible in some chaos last week but now a new figure enters the scene. He has a towering intellect and a brilliant skill with Greek and Latin. What is more he understands the need to go back to the Hebrew for a translation of the Old Testament. He has a somewhat bitter and grumpy personality and he is an enthusiast for such unbiblical ideas as the worship of Mary, withdrawing from the world into monasteries and the collecting of relics of departed “saints”<sup>3</sup> but his Latin translation of the Bible will dominate the world for centuries to come. His name is Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus or Εὐσέβιος Σωφρόνιος Ἱερώνυμος but we know him as Jerome.

There is a good article about Jerome here: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Saint-Jerome.html>  
Read it now and then answer the questions below.

- What is Jerome's translation of the Bible commonly called?
- What does this name mean?
- Why did Jerome initially learn a number of languages?
- What step did Jerome take to ensure the accuracy of his Old Testament Translation?
- Did he translate the whole Bible?
- What is the meaning of “dynamic equivalence”?
- Why did Jerome think it necessary to use this method of translation?
- What objections did some people raise to Jerome's translation?
- What task did Jerome turn his attention to after finishing his Bible translation?

When learning Latin for IGCSE you are primarily learning to translate written Latin into written English. This is the same kind of translation that Bible translators do, although they are working from Greek and Hebrew not Latin, of course. This is different to the kind of learning needed in modern languages where speaking the language is very important. It is also different from the way in which Latin used to be learned. In the past, there was equal emphasis on translating from English to Latin. You are learning then, to be a Latin translator. It is therefore interesting to consider the different ways that translation can be approached.

When legal documents are translated the principle employed is called Formal Equivalence. Here the translator aims for a word for word translation and tries to preserve the grammatical structure as far as possible. When a novel is translated a better method is Dynamic Equivalence. Here the translator

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<sup>1</sup> That modern disciple of the synagogue, the foundation of all learning, Father Jerome. (Herbert of Bosham *Commentary on the Psalms* c.1190.)

<sup>2</sup> Jerome himself used the term Vulgate for the Greek translation of the Old Testament – not for the Latin Bible. The term was later attached to Jerome's Latin translation by mistake at the Council of Trent (1545-1563).

<sup>3</sup> All true Christians are saints – they are not just some special class of “super Christians”!

aims to translate the ideas of the original in such a way that the reader of the translation will gather the meaning of the original. It was this problem between Hebrew and Latin that led Jerome into extensive dynamic equivalence translation.

In Bible translation these two methods become very significant. A translator using dynamic equivalence strives to ensure that the reader of the translation can grasp what the Bible *means*. A translator using formal equivalence strives to ensure that the reader is given what the Bible *says*. Both these aims are laudable.<sup>4</sup> But the use of dynamic equivalence assumes that the translator himself has a correct understanding of what any given passage means. The use of formal equivalence leaves the task of deducing meaning, by prayerful comparison of Scripture with Scripture, to the reader. This means that formal equivalence is preferable in Bible translation. We all need to know what God says and we need to strive to understand it. However, there are some places where dynamic equivalence is unavoidable since there is not equivalent direct translation of a word or grammar pattern for the translator to use.

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4 Praiseworthy. From the Latin verb *laudare* – to praise.