

He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum

was assigned with the task of producing a good Classical Latin text, *The Vulgate*.

Jerome began with the translation of the New Testament, a task of some two years duration. He then moved on to the Old Testament, recognizing that he would not get an accurate translation from the popular Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, but rather he would have to use the original Hebrew. That translation took another 15 years.

Jerome's Vulgate offered a single, stylistically consistent Latin text translated from the original tongues. The *Vetus Latina* very gradually fell out of use, yet parts of it such as the psalms were still in use for 1000 years or more. In a letter Jerome complained that his new version was initially disliked by Christians who were familiar with the phrasing of the old translations. However, as copies of the complete Bible *Vetus Latina* were infrequently found,¹ Old Latin translations of various books of the Bible were copied into manuscripts alongside the new Vulgate translations, inevitably exchanging readings; Old Latin translations of single books can be found in manuscripts as late as the 13th century, but the Vulgate generally displaced the *Vetus Latina* and was acknowledged as the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent about 1550.

The Bible was still hard to read and especially hard to find one's place. Obviously, something else had to be done.

Next Week: Steven Langdon Archbishop of Canterbury and Robert Stephanus, a Parisian book printer.

Please prepare Saint John 6:56-69 for next Sunday.

¹ Because the manuscripts were done in large "uncials" (what we call "capitals"), the Bible was necessarily divided into several volumes. About 800 what we term "lower case" was developed. The combined use of large and small letters made single volume Bibles possible.

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The Synagogues at Capernaum

Where Jesus Preached

Above: The IV-V century AD Limestone synagogue (a.k.a. *white synagogue*), We are looking north. This structure was built on top of an earlier synagogue that founded in the first century AD and constructed out of basalt (a.k.a. *black synagogue*). Only the foundation walls and cobblestone floor remain from this earlier building (see below). Column drums made out of gray marble have also been discovered in a lower stratum of fill material. It is the basalt synagogue which is referred to in the four Gospels, the site of Jesus' teaching today in John's Gospel.



Left: View of trench 25, looking north.

A. East column foundation wall of the Limestone synagogue (*white synagogue*);

B. Basalt Stone wall of the I AD synagogue (*black synagogue*);

C. First century BC stone pavement.

Overview of the two Synagogues

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Aside from various references to Capernaum in the Gospels, the earliest literary attestation of Capernaum is from Josephus (died about 100 AD), who refers to the village in connection with a fertile spring. The Jewish historian reports he spent a night there with a fever during the second year of the Jewish War (c. 69 AD).

For centuries Capernaum has traditionally been identified as a site located on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, about three miles west of the upper Jordan River. In 1838, Edward Robinson correctly identified there the remains of a synagogue. It was partly excavated by Charles Wilson between 1865 and 1866. More extensive excavations took place in the early twentieth century. In 1921 the synagogue was partially restored by Gaudenzio Orfali. In more recent times, Virgilio Corbo and Stanislao Loffreda conducted nineteen seasons at Capernaum between 1968 and 1986, excavating not only the synagogue, but also a nearby church that had long been associated with the house of St. Peter.

The most recent excavations have revealed two synagogues, a **white limestone synagogue** dating from the fourth to fifth centuries BC, and a **black basalt synagogue** dating from the first half of the first century BC. Only foundation walls, gray marble column fragments and a cobblestone floor remain from the earlier structure, which measured 24.5 by 18.7 meters on the exterior and possessed walls over a meter thick.

Today's Gospel: Saint John 6:51-58

✠ JESUS SAID, "I AM THE LIVING BREAD THAT CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. **(1) Those who eat** (πρω'γων - **progon - munch**) **my flesh and drink** (πίνων - **pinon - drink up, absorb**) **my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.** Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. **(2) This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.**' [The following informational sentence is not appointed in the lectionary. **He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.**] [© NRSV]

Crude Theology

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Sometimes the pungency of Christ's words seems too rough, too crude, for Bible translators. Here the Eucharist is the obvious topic. The Eucharist is the continuation of a reality that first happened on a Thursday night, the night before the Passover preparation day (our Good Friday). Jesus, literally, asked us then and always, to *munch* on him. Further, he rings the changes on the Jewish idea that *the life is in the blood*. Since Jews do not eat *life*, that is *blood*. food animals must be carefully bled or they are not kosher, Jesus would have us *drink up, absorb* his Blood, his *life*, into our veins. Thus:

(1) Those who eat (πρω'γων - *progon - munch*) my flesh and drink (πίνων - *pinon - drink up, absorb*) my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.

But more:

(2) This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.'

The Body and Blood of Jesus: the Body is munched and swallowed to become part of us; the Blood is absorbed and flows in our veins. The eternal life of God/man transmits his gift of Everlasting Life.

Bible History, continued from last Sunday

Second of three articles. (The Series was first printed in June)

Synopsis of last week's article: *Most Mediterranean Early Christians worshiped in Greek, a language spoken from Spain to the gates of India. Greek was the most common language in Rome itself. Latin was the upper class language. In the 4th century Rome had very few churches that still worshipped in Greek: Latin had gradually taken over. The Latin Bible, the Vetus Latina was available but the translations were both poor, inconsistent and inaccurate.*

Obviously, something had to be done. It was done by St. Jerome in 382, when, perhaps 250 years late, Pope St. Damasus I (366-83) had a council which determined which books were to be in the Bible. Jerome, his former secretary,