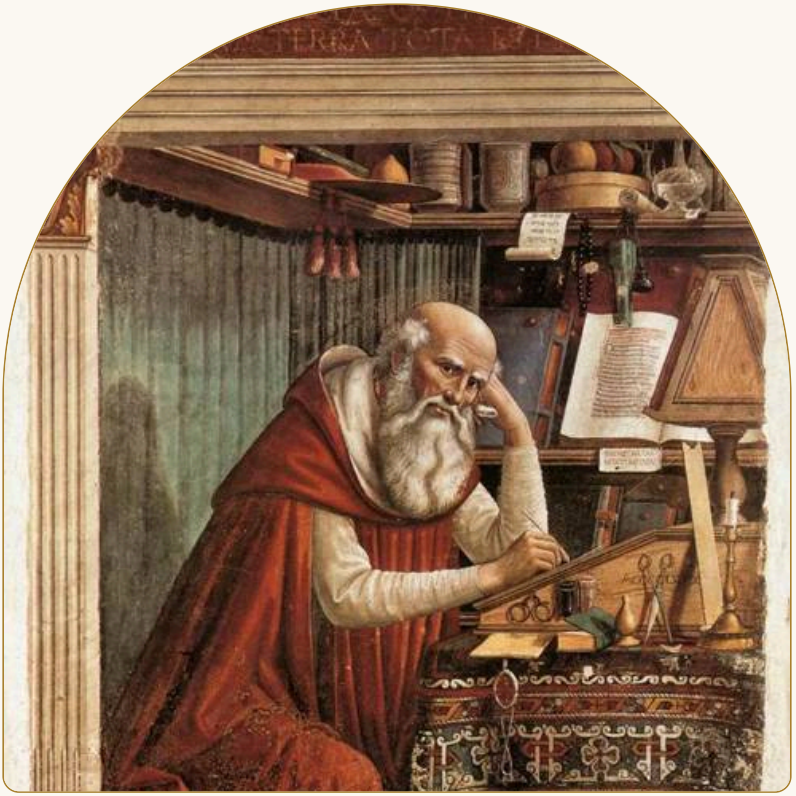


BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Jerome

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: September 30

Saintspedia · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

Saint Jerome

Priest and monk, translator of the Bible into Latin, Father and Doctor of the Church.

Feast day	September 30
Born	c. 347, Stridon (on the border of Dalmatia and Pannonia)
Died	September 30, 419 or 420, Bethlehem
Canonized	pre-congregation (immemorial veneration); Doctor of the Church in 1298
Era	5th century
Patron saint of	translators, biblical scholars, librarians, students

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Jerome to Love the Word of God

Novena to Saint Jerome

The Caves of Saint Jerome in Bethlehem

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Jerome

Saint Jerome is the great translator of the Bible in early Christianity. A passionate scholar and a monk with a fiery temper, he devoted most of his life to the study of Scripture and translated the Old Testament directly from Hebrew into Latin. His work forms the basis of the Vulgate, the Latin Bible used in the Western Church for more than a thousand years. He died in Bethlehem around 420, and his feast day is September 30. He is a Father and Doctor of the Church.

Who was Saint Jerome?

Eusebius Hieronymus was born around 347 in Stridon, a small town on the border between Dalmatia and Pannonia, whose exact location is still debated. His parents, Christian and well-off, sent him to Rome to study under the grammarian Donatus. There he acquired a solid classical education and a lasting love for Cicero and Virgil. It was also in Rome that he was baptized as a young man. He then traveled to Gaul, notably to Trier, and stayed in Aquileia, where he joined a circle of friends drawn to the ascetic life.

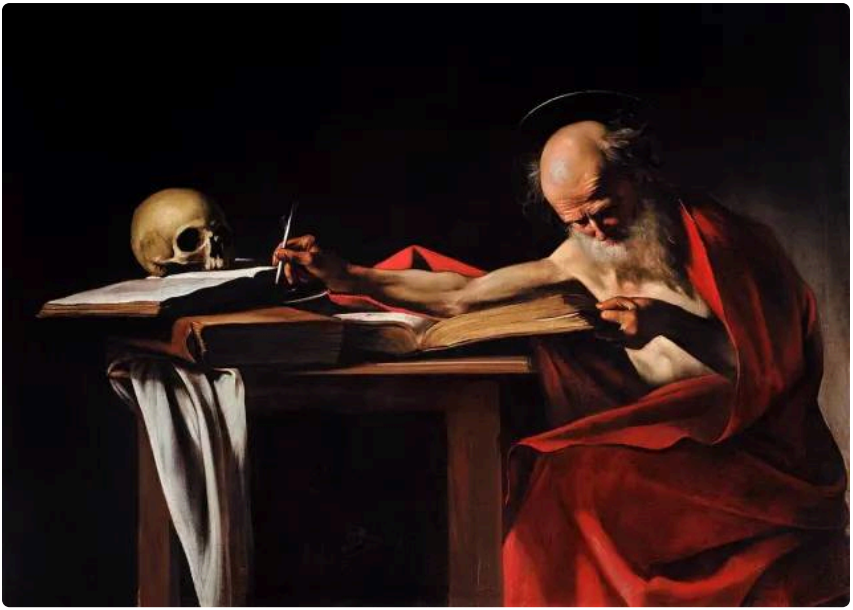
Key dates

- **c. 347**: Born in Stridon.
- **c. 360-366**: Studies in Rome, where he is baptized.
- **c. 373**: Leaves for the East; stays in Antioch.
- **c. 375-377**: Lives as a hermit in the desert of Chalcis, Syria, and learns Hebrew.
- **c. 379**: Ordained a priest in Antioch.
- **380-381**: In Constantinople, he listens to Saint Gregory of Nazianzus.

- **382-385**: In Rome, secretary to Pope Damasus; revises the Latin Gospels.
- **385**: Leaves Rome for the East, followed by Paula and Eustochium.
- **386**: Settles for good in Bethlehem, where monasteries for men and women are founded.
- **c. 390-405**: Translates the Old Testament from the Hebrew.
- **404**: Death of Saint Paula.
- **September 30, 419 or 420**: Dies in Bethlehem.
- **1298**: Pope Boniface VIII proclaims him a Doctor of the Church, with Ambrose, Augustine and Gregory the Great.

From scholar to monk

Around 373, Jerome set out for the East. In Antioch, while ill, he had a dream that he later described in a famous letter to Eustochium: dragged before the judgment seat of God, he heard himself accused of being "a Ciceronian, not a Christian." He promised never again to prefer secular books to the Scriptures. He then withdrew for a time to the desert of Chalcis, southeast of Antioch, where he led a harsh life of penance and learned Hebrew from a converted Jew. There he discovered that study itself could become a form of asceticism.



Saint Jerome Writing, by Caravaggio (c. 1605-1606, Galleria Borghese, Rome).

Secretary to Pope Damasus

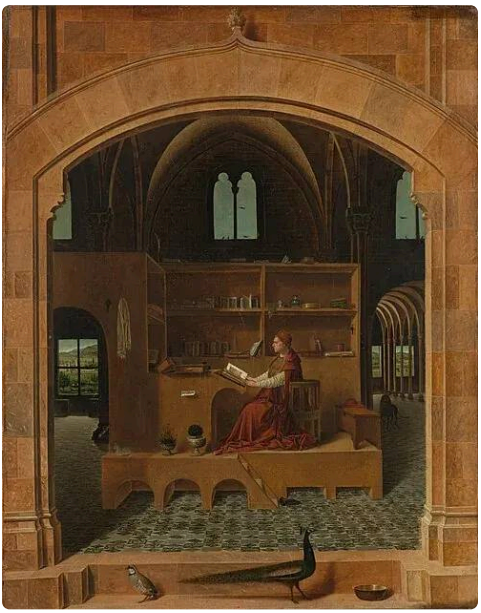
Ordained a priest in Antioch, he went on to Constantinople, where he attended the teaching of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus. In 382 he accompanied bishops traveling to Rome for a council, and Pope Damasus kept him at his side. The pope asked him to revise the Latin translations of the Gospels, which were then numerous and often faulty.

On the Aventine Hill, Jerome also guided a group of women from the Roman aristocracy, among them Marcella, Paula and her daughter Eustochium, introducing them to the study of the Bible and to the ascetic life. His bluntness and his criticism of worldly clergy earned him solid enemies: after the death of Damasus in 384, he had to leave Rome.

Bethlehem and the Vulgate

In 386 Jerome settled in Bethlehem, near the Grotto of the Nativity. With Paula, who financed the foundations, he organized a monastery for men, a monastery for women and a guesthouse for pilgrims. For more than thirty years he worked there tirelessly.

His great work was the translation of the Old Testament into Latin from the original Hebrew, rather than from the Greek translation of the Septuagint, as had been done until then. This choice, bold for its time, drew criticism, including from his correspondent Saint Augustine. His translations, gathered with other texts, became the Vulgate, which the Council of Trent declared "authentic" in the sixteenth century.



Saint Jerome in His Study, by Antonello da Messina (c. 1475, National Gallery, London).

A passionate saint

Jerome also wrote many biblical commentaries, lives of monks and more than one hundred twenty letters, lively and often biting. He threw himself into the controversies of his time, against Jovinian, against Vigilantius, against the Pelagians, and fell out with his old friend Rufinus over Origen. He never hid his anger, and tradition has never made him a model of gentleness. His holiness is that of a passionate man who put his temperament at the service of the Word of God. He died in Bethlehem at a great age, on a September 30, in 419 or 420.

Why is Saint Jerome the patron saint of translators and librarians?

Because he gave Western Christians the Bible in the language they spoke at the time, Jerome is the patron saint of translators, biblical scholars and librarians, and of students and everyone who works with books. His feast day, September 30, is also International Translation Day.

Jerome reminds us that the Bible is not a distant book but a word to be read, studied and prayed every day. His famous saying, "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ," is quoted by the Second Vatican Council. His difficult character also makes him close to anyone who struggles with their temperament. In 2020, for the 1,600th anniversary of his death, Pope Francis dedicated an apostolic letter to him, *Scripturae Sacrae Affectus*.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Jerome in art

Painters often show Jerome dressed as a cardinal, with a lion lying at his feet. Neither is historical: the rank of cardinal did not exist in his time, and the story of a wounded lion healed by a monk who removed a thorn from its paw comes from an ancient legend, first told of another Palestinian monk, Saint Gerasimus, and attributed to Jerome in the Middle Ages.

- **A cardinal's red hat and robe**.

- **A lion** at his side.
- **Books, a quill and a desk**: the scholar at work in his study.
- **A stone and a skull**: the penitent in the desert, striking his chest with a stone.



Saint Jerome in His Study, engraving by Albrecht Dürer (1514).

Where to pray to Saint Jerome

- **Bethlehem**: the Grottoes of Saint Jerome, beneath the Church of Saint Catherine, next to the Grotto of the Nativity.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, where tradition places his relics, brought from Bethlehem in the Middle Ages.
- **Rome**: the Aventine Hill, where he gathered Marcella, Paula and Eustochium to study the Scriptures.

- **Florence**: the Church of Ognissanti, with Ghirlandaio's fresco of him at his desk.

To pray with him, you can say the prayer to Saint Jerome to love the Word of God, or follow the novena to Saint Jerome from September 22 to 30.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Jerome to Love the Word of God

Saint Jerome did not leave a short prayer that is recited today under his name. He did, however, leave a sentence that became famous and sums up his whole life devoted to the Scriptures. This page presents it in context, followed by an original prayer to Saint Jerome to love the Word of God.

"Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ"

Around 408-410, in Bethlehem, Jerome began a long commentary on the book of the prophet Isaiah. In the prologue, he explains why he puts so much effort into studying the Bible:

> *"Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ."*

Source: Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah*, prologue ("Ignoratio Scripturarum ignoratio Christi est"). Translated from the Latin by Saintspedia; the original text is in the public domain. The Second Vatican Council quotes this sentence in the constitution *Dei Verbum* (no. 25).



Saint Jerome at prayer.

A word to meditate on

In a letter to Eustochium, around 384, Jerome describes the place the Bible should hold in a life of prayer: you read, then fall asleep with the book in your hand, and the sacred page receives your face as it sinks into sleep. This is not a formula to recite, but an image of the closeness he desired with the Word.

Source: Saint Jerome, *Letter* 22, to Eustochium (summarized by Saintspedia).

Prayer to Saint Jerome to love the Word of God

Saint Jerome, you spent your life reading, translating and meditating on the Scriptures: give me a taste for the Word of God.

When the Bible seems obscure or distant, help me to keep reading. Teach me to open it every day, to read it slowly, and to look for the face of Christ in it.

You knew anger and conflict, and you gave them over to God in penance: help me to turn my temperament toward the good and to admit when I am wrong.

I entrust to you translators, Bible scholars, students and all who work with books. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Jerome's feast day is September 30, the anniversary of his death in Bethlehem. This day is also International Translation Day. You can pray to him before reading the Bible, at the start of a school year or a course of study, before an exam, or during translation work. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Jerome, and read about the life of Saint Jerome.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Jerome

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life and letters of Saint Jerome. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, begin on September 22; it ends on September 30, the feast of Saint Jerome. You can also pray it at any time of the year, for example at the start of a school year or before a period of study.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation and, if you can, a few verses of the Bible. Then say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father. The small act suggested for each day helps you carry the prayer into your daily life. Keep a Bible close at hand: this novena is above all an invitation to open it.

Day 1: A love of learning

In Rome, the young Jerome fell in love with books and with the beauty of language. Later he would put this talent at the service of God. Our natural gifts can become paths of faith.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the gifts you have given me. Teach me to use them in your service.

Today: Name one talent you have received and look for a way to use it for others.

Day 2: Ciceronian or Christian?

In a dream, Jerome heard himself accused of preferring Cicero to Christ. He understood that he had to put his loves in order. Each of us can ask what holds first place in our life.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, take first place in my heart, before my books, my plans and my pleasures.

Today: Give up one distraction today to read a page of the Gospel.

Day 3: The desert

In the desert of Chalcis, Jerome discovered solitude, penance and inner struggle. Silence reveals our temptations, but also the presence of God. Jerome did not run from this struggle: he brought it into prayer.

Prayer: Faithful God, when I am alone with my struggles, stay close to me and strengthen me.

Today: Take fifteen minutes of complete silence.

Day 4: Learning Hebrew

To understand the Bible better, Jerome learned a difficult language, at the cost of years of effort. Love for the Word sometimes asks for patience and hard work. What costs us effort often becomes what we treasure most.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me the perseverance to seek to understand your Word, even when it is hard for me.

Today: Read a Bible passage with a footnote or a commentary to understand it better.

Day 5: Serving the Church

In Rome, Pope Damasus entrusted Jerome with revising the Gospels. He put his learning at the service of the whole Church, not of his own reputation. Every gift of the mind finds its fullness when it builds up others.

Prayer: Lord, I pray for the pope, the bishops and all who teach the faith. Keep them faithful to your Word.

Today: Pray for a priest, a catechist or a teacher you know.

Day 6: Spiritual friendship

Paula, Eustochium and Marcella studied the Bible with Jerome. Their friendship, nourished by prayer and by questions, bore fruit for many years. We do not read the Scriptures alone.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for those with whom I share my faith. Make our friendship grow and bring us closer to you.

Today: Share with someone close to you a verse that has touched you.



Praying with Saint Jerome.

Day 7: Bethlehem

Jerome chose to live near the Grotto of the Nativity. There, next to the place where the Word became flesh, he translated the Word of God. Christ is the heart of the Scriptures, and every page of the Bible, read in faith, leads back to him.

Prayer: Jesus, born in Bethlehem, help me to recognize you on every page of the Bible.

Today: Read the prologue of the Gospel of John (John 1:1-18).

Day 8: A temperament to convert

Jerome was quick-tempered and sometimes unfair in his anger. He knew it and did penance for it. Holiness does not erase our character: it gradually turns it toward God.

Prayer: Lord, you know my outbursts. Teach me gentleness, and the humility to admit my wrongs.

Today: Make amends for a harsh word you spoke recently.

Day 9: Knowing Christ

"Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." At the end of his life, Jerome left the Church a Bible she would read for centuries. To read the Word is to come to know the One it proclaims.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Jerome, help me to love your Word and to know you better each day. Amen.

Today: Choose one book of the Bible to read in full over the coming weeks.

Closing prayer

Saint Jerome, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have presented. Pray for me, for translators, and for all who study the Scriptures. Obtain for us the grace to find Christ in his Word and to live it every day. Amen.

To go further, read about the life of Saint Jerome and pray the prayer to Saint Jerome to love the Word of God.

PILGRIMAGE

The Caves of Saint Jerome in Bethlehem

In Bethlehem, beneath the Church of Saint Catherine, next to the Basilica of the Nativity, a complex of caves has been associated with Saint Jerome for centuries. Tradition places there the spot where he lived, prayed, and worked on his translation of the Bible, a few steps from the cave where Christ was born. It is the main pilgrimage site dedicated to the saint.

Jerome in Bethlehem

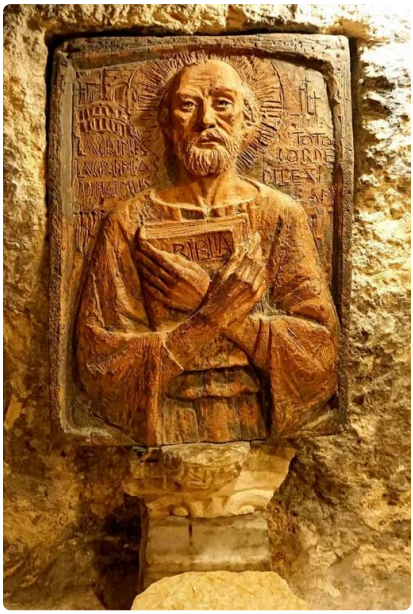
Saint Jerome settled in Bethlehem in 386, with Paula and Eustochium. He spent more than thirty years there, until his death in 419 or 420. He himself stressed how much he valued living near the place of the Nativity. The monasteries he founded with Paula have disappeared, but the memory of his presence was preserved in the caves north of the Nativity Grotto, with which they connect.

The Caves of Saint Jerome

You go down into these caves from the Church of Saint Catherine, the Latin parish church of Bethlehem, entrusted to the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land. They include several chambers cut into the rock: one is presented as Jerome's cell, others as the tombs of Saint Jerome, Saint Paula, and Saint Eustochium, as well as a chapel dedicated to the Holy Innocents. These attributions rest on tradition: Roman tradition, for its part, holds that Jerome's relics were taken to Rome, to the Basilica of Saint Mary Major.

Praying in the Caves of Saint Jerome

Before your visit, you can reread the life of Saint Jerome. On site, slowly reading a passage of the Bible, for example the prologue of the Gospel of John, is a fine way to pray where he translated the Scriptures. The prayer to Saint Jerome can accompany this moment. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia for a personal visit.



The Caves of Saint Jerome in Bethlehem, the interior.

Other places of Saint Jerome

- **Rome**: the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, where tradition places his relics.
- **Rome**: the Aventine, where he gathered a Bible study circle.
- **Florence**: the church of Ognissanti and Ghirlandaio's fresco (1480) showing him at his writing desk.
- **Rome**: the Galleria Borghese and Caravaggio's *Saint Jerome Writing*.

Practical information

Bethlehem is in the West Bank, about ten kilometers (6 miles) south of Jerusalem. It can be reached by bus or taxi, but access depends on the situation on the ground: consult official travel advisories before leaving. The caves are usually visited along with the Basilica of the Nativity; hours vary with celebrations, and it is advisable to check with the Custody of the Holy Land or a pilgrimage organizer.

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