

Novel 146.

Concerning the Hebrews.

(De Hebraeis)

The same Augustus (Justinian) to Ariobindus, glorious  
praetorian prefect.

Preface.

The Hebrews, hearing the sacred scriptures, should not indeed have adhered to the bare letter, but should have considered the prophecies contained therein, by which these announce the great God and Jesus Christ the Saviour of the human race. But though they have given themselves over to foolish interpretations and even up to this time have wandered away from the correct meaning, still, learning that they were disputing among themselves, we could not bear to leave their disputes undetermined. From the reports made to us, we learn that some, knowing only the Hebrew language, want to use it in reading the holy scriptures, while others think that the Greek language also ought to be used, and they have for a long time disputed among each other in reference thereto. We, informed of this matter, think that those are the better, who also want to employ the Greek language in reading the holy scriptures, and every other language which the (particular) place makes the more appropriate and better known to the hearers.

c. 1. We therefore ordain that the Hebrews who wish it, may in their synagogues in the places where there are Hebrews, read the holy books to the audience in the Greek language, or, perhaps, in our native language -- that is to say, the Latin -- or in any other, changing the language and reading according to the (particular) place, so that what is read may be plain to the hearers, and live

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and act accordingly. No permission is given to the interpreters among them, who only use the Hebrew language, to corrupt it as they wish, covering up their badness through the ignorance of the many. Those who read in the Greek language, shall use the translation of the seventy interpreters, the most accurate of all, and having preference over the others mainly because it happened during the interpretation, the interpreters being divided into twos, and being located in different places, nevertheless, all produced the same translation. <sup>(a)</sup> 1. Besides that, who would not admire it in these men also, that while they came before the soul-saving appearance of the great God and of the Saviour Jesus Christ, nevertheless foresaw it, as though seeing it with their eyes, and perfected the translation of the holy books, as though they were enlightened by prophetic favor? And all shall rather use this translation. However, in order that we may not be deemed to exclude them from other interpretations, we give them the right to use the version of Aquila, who belonged to a different race, and does not differ a little from the seventy interpreters. <sup>(b)</sup> The so-called Deuterosis, a secondary translation, <sup>(c)</sup> however, is entirely forbidden, since it is not contained in the holy books, was not divinely delivered by the prophets, but is the invention of men speaking only with early wisdom and having nothing that was divine. They (the readers) shall read the holy scriptures themselves, opening up the book; they shall not conceal what is contained in them, and shall not make foolish statements written nowhere but taken from outside, invented by them for the destruction of the uninstructed. Giving this permission, those who use the Greek language, or other languages,

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shall not be subjected to any wrong, and shall not be hindered by anyone; nor shall those who are called archiphrecitae <sup>(d)</sup> among them, or, perhaps, presbyters or masters, have any right to hinder this by any evil-practice or by anathemas, unless they want to be chastized by corporal punishment, have their property confiscated, and unwillingly yield to us who strive after and direct better things and which are agreeable to God.

(a) The translation here mentioned is the so-called Septuagint, supposed to have been made about 265 B.C. under one of the kings of Egypt, and undertaken by 72 translators (for brevity's sake called 70), and who, while each worked separately, produced, miraculously, an identical translation. Justinian says here that the workers were distributed into twos.

(b) Aquila was a Greek by birth, first was a Christian, then turned to Judasim, translating the bible in the time of Hadrian, but warping, it was thought, the prophecies as to the appearance of Christ.

(c) This was a book of the Jews, containing traditions and remarks of the ancients. Out of this book, and additions thereto, the so-called Talmud arose subsequently.

(d) These persons explained the scriptures in conjunction with the Talmud.

c. 2. If any of them attempts to introduce impious and foolish statements, denying the resurrection, the great judgment or that angels are the work and creatures of God, they shall be expelled from every place, and not use such foul-mouthed voice, plainly

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showing ignorance of the knowledge of God. Those who attempt to say anything of the kind, will be subjected to extreme punishment by us, purging the Hebrew race from an error thus introduced.

c. 3. We most earnestly wish, moreover, that those who hear the holy scriptures in this or that language, must be beware of the depravity of interpreters, not adhere to the mere letter, but penetrate the subject and comprehend the true divine meaning, so that they may learn what is better, and desist from error and to sin in connection with that which is the gravest of all -- hope is God. We open up to them the reading of the holy books in every language, in order that all of them may receive knowledge and become more suitable for learning better things; since it is clear, that he who is nourished by the holy books and has but little which needs correction, is better prepared to discern the truth and to choose the better, than he who knows nothing of these things, and adheres to the bare name of worship as to a holy anchor, and thinks the divine doctrine to be but a name for heresy.

Epilogue.

This our will, declared by this imperial law, must be maintained by Your Glory and the official staff under you; it must be maintained also by every magistrate, who, for the time being holds your office, you must not permit the Hebrews to do anything contrary hereto; but must subject those who resist or obstruct it in any way, first to corporal punishment and then compel them to live in exile, deprived of property, lest they exhibit their audacity equally against God and the empire. You will also employ your orders to the presidents of the provinces, sending our law

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to them, so that they, learning of it, may post it up in every city, knowing that it is necessary for them to comply herewith, under fear of our indignation.

Given at Constantinople, February 8 553. A.D.