

LUMINOUS DARKNESS

ENCOUNTERING CHRIST IN UNCOMFORTABLE SCRIPTURES



AN OBLATE RETREAT
WITH
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"FIRST THINGS" FIRST

RULES FOR READING THE BIBLE

"LUMINOUS DARKNESS"

- I. **Exodus 20:18:** ¹⁸ Now as all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the blast of the shofar and the mountain smoking, they became afraid and trembled. So they took up a position farther away ¹⁹ and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we shall die." ²⁰ Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid, for God has come only to test you and put the fear of him upon you so you do not sin." ²¹ So the people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the dark cloud where God was.
- II. **Gregory of Nyssa:** What does it mean that Moses entered the darkness and then saw God in it? ... Leaving behind everything that is observed, not only what sense comprehends but also what the intelligence thinks it sees, [the mind] keeps on penetrating deeper until by the intelligence's yearning for understanding it gains access to the invisible and the incomprehensible, and there it sees God. This is the true knowledge of what is sought; this is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness. Wherefore John the sublime, who penetrated into the luminous darkness, says, *No one has ever seen God*, thus asserting that knowledge of the divine essence is unattainable not only by men but also by every intelligent creature. When, therefore, Moses grew in knowledge, he declared that he had seen God in the darkness, that is, that he had then come to know that what is divine is beyond all knowledge and comprehension, for the text says, *Moses approached the dark cloud where God was*. What God? He who *made darkness his hiding place*, as David says, who also was initiated into the mysteries in the same inner sanctuary. (*The Life of Moses* 2.162–164)

"THE 'DARK' PASSAGES OF THE BIBLE"

- III. **Pope Benedict XVI:** In discussing the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments, the Synod also considered those passages in the Bible which, due to the violence and immorality they occasionally contain, prove obscure and difficult... It would be a mistake to neglect those passages of Scripture that strike us as problematic. Rather, we should be aware that the correct interpretation of these passages requires a degree of expertise, acquired through a training that interprets the texts in their historical-literary context and within the Christian perspective which has as its ultimate hermeneutical key "the Gospel and the new commandment of Jesus Christ brought about in the paschal mystery". I encourage scholars and pastors to help all the faithful to approach these passages through an interpretation which enables their meaning to emerge in the light of the mystery of Christ. (*Verbum Domini* 42)
- IV. **Flannery O'Connor:** The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make these appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural; and he may well be forced to take ever more violent means to get his vision across to this hostile audience. When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax a little and use more normal means of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock—to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures. ("The Fiction Writer & His Country," in *Mystery and Manners*, 33–34)

STUMBLING BLOCKS

- V. **Origen of Alexandria:** The divine wisdom has arranged for there to be certain stumbling blocks or interruptions of the narrative meaning, by inserting in its midst certain impossibilities and contradictions, so that the very interruption of the narrative might oppose the reader, as it were, with certain obstacles thrown in the way. By them wisdom denies a way and an access to the common understanding; and when we are shut out and hurled back, it calls us back to the beginning of another way, so that by gaining a higher and loftier road through entering a narrow footpath it may open for us the immense breadth of divine knowledge. (*On First Principles* 4.2.9)
- VI. **Origen of Alexandria:** All these things, as we have said, the Holy Spirit arranged so that from them, since what first appears cannot be true or useful, we might be called back to examine the truth to be sought more deeply and to be investigated more diligently, and might seek a meaning worthy of God in the Scriptures, which we believe were inspired by God. (*On First Principles* 4.2.9)

THE THREE SENSES OF SCRIPTURE

- VII. **Origen of Alexandria:** A person ought to describe threefold in his soul the meaning of divine letters, that is, so that the simple may be edified by, so to speak, the body of the Scriptures; for that is what we call the ordinary and narrative meaning. But if any have begun to make some progress and can contemplate something more fully, they should be edified by the soul of Scripture. And those who are perfect are like those concerning whom the Apostle says, "Yet among the perfect we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this world or of the rulers of this world, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification" (1 Cor. 2:6–7). Such people should be edified by that spiritual Law (cf. Rom. 7:14) which has a shadow of the good things to come (cf. Heb. 10:1), edified as by the spirit of Scripture. Thus, just as a human being is said to be made up of body, soul, and spirit, so also is sacred Scripture, which has been granted by God's gracious dispensation for man's salvation. (*On First Principles* 4.2.4)
- A. **The Body: Ephesians 6:** ¹Children, obey your parents [in the Lord], for this is right. ²"Honor your father and mother" [Exodus 20:12]. This is the first commandment with a promise, ³"that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life on earth." ⁴Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up with the training and instruction of the Lord. (Cf. *On First Principles* 4.3.4)
- B. **The Soul: 1 Corinthians 9:** ⁹It is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain" [Deuteronomy 25:4]. Is God concerned about oxen, ¹⁰or is he not really speaking for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope, and the thresher in hope of receiving a share. (Cf. *On First Principles* 4.2.6)
- C. **The Spirit: 1 Corinthians 10:** ¹I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea, ²and all of them were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³All ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Christ [cf. Exodus 17:1–7; Numbers 20:7–11]. ⁵Yet God was not pleased with most of them, for they were struck down in the desert. ⁶These things happened as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil things, as they did. ⁷And do not become idolaters, as some of them did, as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel." ⁸Let us not indulge in immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell within a single

day.⁹ Let us not test Christ as some of them did, and suffered death by serpents.¹⁰ Do not grumble as some of them did, and suffered death by the destroyer.¹¹ These things happened to them as an example, and they have been written down as a warning to us, upon whom the end of the ages has come. (Cf. *On First Principles* 4.2.6)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

VIII. **Origen of Alexandria:** The person who reads accurately, observing the commandment of the Savior to 'search the Scriptures' (Jn. 5:39), must carefully test where the meaning according to the letter is true and where it is impossible, and must, so far as he is able, track down from similar expressions scattered everywhere through Scripture the meaning of what is impossible according to the letter. (4.3.5, see footnote 73)

A. **John 5:**³⁹ Search the scriptures, because you think you have eternal life through them; even they testify on my behalf.

B. **Luke 24:**⁴⁴ "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled."⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.⁴⁶ And he said to them, "Thus it is written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day⁴⁷ and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

IX. **Dei Verbum 12:** Since [Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written], no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith. (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 111–114)

THE LAW OF LOVE

X. **Augustine of Hippo:** If it seems to you that you have understood the divine scriptures, or any part of them, in such a way that by this understanding you do not build up this twin love of God and neighbor, then you have not yet understood them. If on the other hand you have made judgments about them that are helpful for building up this love, but for all that have not said what the author you have been reading actually meant in that place, then your mistake is not pernicious, and you certainly cannot be accused of lying. . . . [You] are mistaken in the same sort of way as people who go astray off the road, but still proceed by rough paths to the same place as the road was taking them to. (*Teaching Christianity* 1.36.40, 41; quoted in Ambrose Stewart, "Christ the Lord is a Mountain Curdled Into Cheese')



"THE WARS THAT ARE WAGED THROUGH JESUS"

JOSHUA 10 AND ORIGIN OF ALEXANDRIA

"THE BAN"

- I. **Deuteronomy 20:** ¹⁶In the cities of these peoples that the Lord, your God, is giving you as a heritage, you shall not leave a single soul alive. ¹⁷You must put them all under the ban—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites—just as the Lord, your God, has commanded you...
- II. **Joshua 6:** ²⁰... The wall collapsed, and the people attacked the city straight ahead and took it. ²¹They observed the ban by putting to the sword all living creatures in the city: men and women, young and old, as well as oxen, sheep and donkeys. (Cf. Joshua 10:28–39)
- III. **Joshua 10:** ⁴⁰Joshua conquered the entire land; the mountain regions, the Negeb, the Shephelah, and the mountain slopes, with all their kings. He left no survivors, but put under the ban every living being, just as the Lord, the God of Israel, had commanded.

THE "HISTORICAL LITERARY-CONTEXT"

- IV. **Gary Anderson:** Archeological work in the land of Israel has demonstrated that the conquest of Canaan as described in the book of Joshua simply did not happen... the stories of a violent conquest and expulsion of the native population were written down long after the period they purport to document. In short, these stories are not historical records of what really happened, but after-the-fact literary fictions. Israel did not wipe out the Canaanites in a genocidal fashion. ("What About the Canaanites?" 271–272)
- V. **Gary Anderson:** The Deuteronomistic historian understood this particular narrative of Israel's origins as a means of focusing the mind on the horrors of turning aside from the worship of the one true God. In other words, the elimination of the Canaanites was a metaphoric way of addressing the purity of heart that Israel was to strive for in her devotion to God. ("What About the Canaanites?" 272)
- VI. **Deuteronomy 4:** ²⁵When you have children and children's children, and have grown old in the land, should you then act corruptly by fashioning an idol in the form of anything, and by this evil done in his sight provoke the Lord, your God, ²⁶I call heaven and earth this day to witness against you, that you shall all quickly perish from the land which you are crossing the Jordan to possess. You shall not live in it for any length of time but shall be utterly wiped out. ²⁷The Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and there shall remain but a handful of you among the nations to which the Lord will drive you.

JOSHUA = JESUS (Ἰησοῦς)

- VII. **Origen of Alexandria:** In the book of Exodus I find the name Jesus for the first time... When I become acquainted with the name of Jesus for the first time, I also immediately see the symbol of a mystery. Indeed, Jesus leads the army. (*Homilies on Joshua* 1.1)
- VIII. **Exodus 17:** ⁸Then Amalek came and waged war against Israel in Rephidim. ⁹So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some men for us, and tomorrow go out and engage Amalek in battle. I will be

standing on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.”¹⁰ Joshua did as Moses told him: he engaged Amalek in battle while Moses, Aaron, and Hur climbed to the top of the hill.¹¹ As long as Moses kept his hands raised up, Israel had the better of the fight, but when he let his hands rest, Amalek had the better of the fight.¹² Moses’ hands, however, grew tired; so they took a rock and put it under him and he sat on it. Meanwhile Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other, so that his hands remained steady until sunset.¹³ And Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the sword.¹⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses: Write this down in a book as something to be remembered, and recite it to Joshua: I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under the heavens.¹⁵ Moses built an altar there, which he named Yahweh-nissi;¹⁶ for he said, “Take up the banner of the Lord! The Lord has a war against Amalek through the ages.”

- IX. Origen of Alexandria:** The book [Joshua] does not so much indicate to us the deeds of the son of Nun, as it represents for us the mysteries of Jesus my Lord. For he himself is the one who assumes power after the death of Moses; he is the one who leads the army and fights against Amalek. What was foreshadowed there on the mountain by lifted hands was the time when “he attaches [them] to his cross, triumphing over the principalities and powers on it.” (*Homilies on Joshua* 1.3; quoting Colossians 2:14–15)

A CONTRADICTION?

- X. Matthew 5:**⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.”
- XI. Origen of Alexandria:** If those things that were dimly sketched through Moses concerning the tabernacle or the sacrifices and the entire worship are said to be a “type and shadow of heavenly things” [Hebrews 8:5], doubtless the wars that are waged through Jesus, and the slaughter of kings and enemies must also be said to be “a shadow and type of heavenly things,” namely, of those wars that our Lord Jesus with his army and officers—that is, the throngs of believers and their leaders—fights against the Devil and his angels. For it is he himself who strives with Paul and with the Ephesians “against sovereigns and authorities and the rulers of darkness, against spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places” [Ephesians 6:12]... Does not the Lord also plainly indicate this in the Gospel when he says, “From the days of John the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and those committing violence seize it” [Matthew 11:12]? (*Homilies on Joshua* 12.1)
- XII. Origen of Alexandria:** Within us, indeed, are all those breeds of vices that continually and incessantly attack the soul. Within us are the Canaanites; within us are the Perizzites; here are the Jebusites. In what way must we exert ourselves, how vigilant must we be or for how long must we persevere, so that when all these breeds of vices have been forced to flee, “our land may rest from wars” at last [Joshua 11:23]? (*Homilies on Joshua* 1.7)

CASE STUDY: JOSHUA 10

- XIII. Joshua 10:**⁵ The five Amorite kings, of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon, gathered with all their forces, and marched against Gibeon to make war on it...⁹ After an all-night march from Gilgal, Joshua made a surprise attack upon them, and the Lord threw them into disorder before Israel. The Israelites inflicted a great slaughter on them...¹⁶ The five kings who had fled hid in the cave at Makkedah...²² Then Joshua said, “Open the mouth of the cave and bring me those five kings from the cave.”²³ They did so; they brought out to him from the cave the five kings, of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon.²⁴ When they brought the five kings out to Joshua, he summoned all the army of Israel and said to the commanders of the soldiers who had marched with

him, "Come forward and put your feet on the necks of these kings." They came forward and put their feet upon their necks. ²⁵Then Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid or dismayed, be firm and steadfast. This is what the Lord will do to all the enemies against whom you fight." ²⁶Thereupon Joshua struck and killed the kings, and hanged them on five trees, where they remained hanging until evening. ²⁷At sunset Joshua commanded that they be taken down from the trees and be thrown into the cave where they had hidden; over the mouth of the cave large stones were placed, which remain until this very day.

THE FIVE KINGS = THE FIVE SENSES

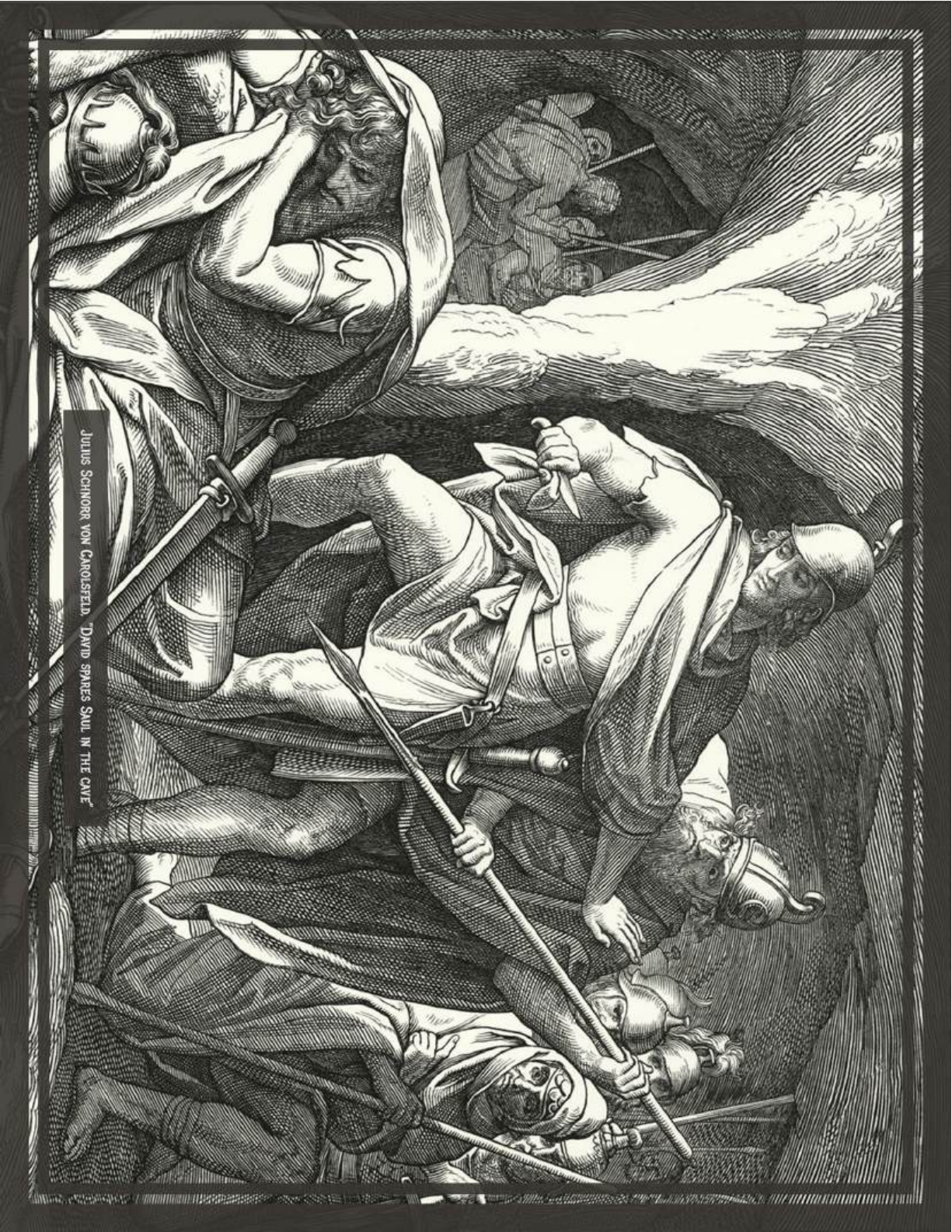
- XIV. Origen of Alexandria:** Now these five kings indicate the five corporeal senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell; for it must be through one of these that each person falls away into sin. (*Homilies on Joshua* 11.4)
- XV. Origen of Alexandria:** Jesus destroyed the enemies, not teaching cruelty through this, as the heretics think, but representing the future sacraments in these affairs, so that when Jesus destroys those kings who maintain a reign of sin in us, we can fulfill that which the Apostle said, "Just as we presented our members to serve iniquity for iniquity, so now let us present our members to serve righteousness for sanctification" [Romans 6:19]. (*Homilies on Joshua* 11.6)

THE WOOD OF THE CROSS

- XVI. Origen of Alexandria:** If faith in Christ overcomes those malignant powers and they are suspended on the wood of his cross so that "he triumphs" over them "on the wood of his cross" [Colossians 2:14–15] and they are taken away from his kingdom and cast down, then the soul becomes God's portion, then Jerusalem becomes God's kingdom, and the temple is built in it for the Lord. (*Homilies on Joshua* 11.5)

"SET YOUR FEET UPON THEIR NECKS..."

- XVII. Origen of Alexandria:** Would that you might be the sort of person who can "set your feet upon serpents and scorpions and upon every hostile power" [Luke 10:19] and "tread underfoot the dragon and the lizard" [Psalm 91:13], the petty king who once reigned in you and maintained in you a kingdom of sin. Thus, with all those destroyed who used to rule in you by the work of sin, Christ Jesus our Lord alone will reign in you. (*Homilies on Joshua* 11.6)



JULIUS SCHNORR VON CARLSFELD. "DAVID SPARES SAUL IN THE CAVE"

"DESTROY THEM IN ANGER... DESTROY NOT"

PSALMS 57-59 AND GREGORY OF NYSSA

"A HAPPY TUNE?"

- I. **Psalm 137:1-6 [Bonaventure Zerr]:** On the banks of the rivers of Babylon we sat wailing, as we remembered Zion. We left our harps hanging there on the poplar trees, because our captors required the lyrics of a song from us, our tormentors, a happy tune. They said: "Sing us a song of Zion!" How could we sing the song of the Lord on foreign soil? If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand wither. Let my tongue stick in my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not wear you upon my head, Jerusalem, like a crown on a day of festivities...
- II. **Psalm 137:7-9 [Bonaventure Zerr]:** ...O Lord, remember what the sons of Edom said at the time Jerusalem was condemned: "Shame her, shame her, down to her very foundation!" O Babylon, you plunder-loving city, how blest will be the one who pays you back in full for the treatment you meted out to us! How blest the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against a rock.

DASHED AGAINST CHRIST

- III. **Matthew 5:** ⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you."
- IV. **Benedict of Nursia:** He has foiled the evil one, the devil, at every turn, flinging both him and his promptings far from the sight of his heart. While these temptations were still young, he caught hold of them and dashed them against Christ. (*Holy Rule*, Prologue 28)
- V. **Benedict of Nursia:** As soon as wrongful thoughts come into your heart, dash them against Christ and disclose them to your spiritual father. (*Holy Rule*, 4.50)

PSYCHOLOGICAL DIFFICULTY

- VI. **General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours:** Three psalms (58, 83 and 109) are omitted from the psalter cycle as heavily imprecatory in character. In the same way, some verses are omitted from certain psalms, as noted at the head of each. These texts are omitted because of the difficulty they can cause because of their psychology, even though the psalms of imprecation are used as prayer in the New Testament, for example, Revelation 6:10, and their purpose is in no sense to encourage cursing. (131)
 - A. **Revelation 6:** ⁹ When he broke open the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered because of the witness they bore to the word of God. ¹⁰ They cried out in a loud voice, "How long will it be, holy and true master, before you sit in judgment and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?"
 - B. **Psalm 79:** ¹⁰ Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Before our eyes make known to the nations that you avenge the blood of your servants which has been poured out.

CASE STUDY: PSALM 58

- VII. Psalm 58:** ¹ For the leader. Do not destroy. A *miktam* of David.
² Do you indeed pronounce justice, O gods; do you judge fairly you children of Adam? ³ No, you freely engage in crime; your hands dispense violence to the earth.
⁴ The wicked have been corrupt since birth; liars from the womb, they have gone astray. ⁵ Their venom is like the venom of a snake, like that of a serpent stopping its ears, ⁶ So as not to hear the voice of the charmer or the enchanter with cunning spells.
⁷ O God, smash the teeth in their mouths; break the fangs of these lions, Lord! ⁸ Make them vanish like water flowing away; trodden down, let them wither like grass. ⁹ Let them dissolve like a snail that oozes away, like an untimely birth that never sees the sun. ¹⁰ Suddenly, like brambles or thistles, have the whirlwind snatch them away. ¹¹ Then the just shall rejoice to see the vengeance and bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked. ¹² Then people will say: “Truly there is a reward for the just; there is a God who is judge on earth!”
- VIII. Psalm 59:** ¹ For the director. Do not destroy. A *miktam* of David, when Saul sent people to watch his house and kill him...
⁶ You, Lord God of hosts, are the God of Israel! Awake! Punish all the nations. Have no mercy on these worthless traitors...
¹² Slay them, God, lest they deceive my people. Shake them by your power; Lord, our shield, bring them down. ¹³ For the sinful words of their mouths and lips let them be caught in their pride. For the lies they have told under oath ¹⁴ destroy them in anger, destroy till they are no more [Abbot Bonaventure: “Exterminate them in your burning anger, exterminate them, annihilate them”]...

SEEK THINGS ABOVE

- IX. Gregory of Nyssa:** ...The thoughts of the psalm might be accommodated to the words in the inscription... (*Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms* 231)
- A. Psalm 57:** ¹ For the director. Do not destroy. A *miktam* of David, when he fled from Saul into a cave.
- B. Psalm 58:** ¹ For the leader. Do not destroy. A *miktam* of David.
- C. Psalm 59:** ¹ For the director. Do not destroy. A *miktam* of David, when Saul sent people to watch his house and kill him.

DAVID AND SAUL

- X. 1 Samuel 24:** ³ So Saul took three thousand of the best men from all Israel and went in search of David and his men in the direction of the wild goat crags. ⁴ When he came to the sheepfolds along the way, he found a cave, which he entered to relieve himself. David and his men were occupying the inmost recesses of the cave. ⁵ David's servants said to him, “This is the day about which the Lord said to you: I will deliver your enemy into your hand; do with him as you see fit.” So David moved up and stealthily cut off an end of Saul's robe. ⁶ Afterward, however, David regretted that he had cut off an end of Saul's robe. ⁷ He said to his men, “The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, to lay a hand on him, for he is the Lord's anointed.” ⁸ With these words

David restrained his men and would not permit them to attack Saul. Saul then left the cave and went on his way.

- XI. 1 Samuel 26:** ⁷ So David and Abishai reached Saul's soldiers by night, and there was Saul lying asleep within the camp, his spear thrust into the ground at his head and Abner and his troops sleeping around him. ⁸ Abishai whispered to David: "God has delivered your enemy into your hand today. Let me nail him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I will not need to strike him twice!" ⁹ But David said to Abishai, "Do not harm him, for who can lay a hand on the Lord's anointed and remain innocent? ¹⁰ As the Lord lives," David declared, "only the Lord can strike him: either when the time comes for him to die, or when he goes out and perishes in battle. ¹¹ But the Lord forbid that I lay a hand on the Lord's anointed! Now take the spear at his head and the water jug, and let us be on our way."

THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

- XII. Gregory of Nyssa:** [David] was a man, and anger was an essential part of his nature. (*Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms* 245)
- XIII. Gregory of Nyssa:** The Word teaches rather by this story that the one who excels in virtue does not fight bravely against those of his own race, but fights against the passions. (*Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms* 230)
- XIV. Athanasius of Alexandria:** These words [of the Psalm] become like a mirror to the person singing them, so that he might perceive himself and the emotions of his soul... from the Psalms he who wants to do so can learn the emotions and dispositions of the souls, finding in them also the therapy and correction suited for each emotion. (*Letter to Marcellinus* 12–13)
- XV. Gregory of Nyssa:** Whenever the soul swells with revenge against someone who is provoking it, and the blood around the heart boils with anger against the one who has grieved the soul, then, when one has looked up at this stela which the Holy Spirit set up for David, and has read the word on it which David uttered on behalf of him who was eager for his own blood, he will not fail to calm the troubled thoughts in his soul, and appease his passion by his desire to imitate the same things. (*Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms* 247)
- XVI. Gary Anderson:** The imprecatory psalms give witness to that deep abyss of personal hatred that David, through divine grace, was able to overcome. ("King David and the Psalms of Imprecation" 272)

AN ICON OF THE PSALTER

- XVII. 1 Samuel 16:** ¹⁴ The spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and he was tormented by an evil spirit from the Lord... ²³ Whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take the harp and play, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, for the evil spirit would leave him.



JULIUS SCHNORR VON CAROLSFELD, "DAVID CATCHES SIGHT OF BATHSHEBA BATHING."

"NOT EVERY ADULTERY MUST BE CONDEMNED"

2 SAMUEL II AND AMBROSE OF MILAN

SCANDALOUS SCRIPTURES

- I. **Ambrose of Milan:** Perhaps the title of the Psalm that you heard read out will have upset many, namely: "Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba" [Psalm 51:1]. At the same time, the reading from the Gospel that has been treated could stir the concern of the inexperienced in no small measure, for in it you note that the adulterous woman has been presented to Christ and that she is sent off without condemnation [John 8:1–11]. For indeed if anyone takes in these matters with idle ears, he comes upon an incentive for sin, since he reads of the adultery of a holy man and the exoneration of an adulterous woman. (*The Second Defense of David* 1.1)
- II. **2 Samuel 11:** ¹At the turn of the year, the time when kings go to war, David sent out Joab along with his officers and all Israel, and they laid waste the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. David himself remained in Jerusalem. ²One evening David rose from his bed and strolled about on the roof of the king's house. From the roof he saw a woman bathing; she was very beautiful. ³David sent people to inquire about the woman and was told, "She is Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam, and wife of Uriah the Hittite, Joab's armor-bearer." ⁴Then David sent messengers and took her. When she came to him, he took her to bed, at a time when she was just purified after her period; and she returned to her house... ¹⁴The next morning David wrote a letter to Joab which he sent by Uriah. ¹⁵This is what he wrote in the letter: "Place Uriah up front, where the fighting is fierce. Then pull back and leave him to be struck down dead." ¹⁶So while Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to a place where he knew the defenders were strong. ¹⁷When the men of the city made a sortie against Joab, some officers of David's army fell, and Uriah the Hittite also died...

DAVID = MAN

- III. **Ambrose of Milan:** I acknowledge that David was a man, and that is nothing unusual; I acknowledge that, generally, man sins. For this is not some new weakness of the human condition, and, indeed, it would be more surprising that a man lacks sin than that he falls into it. Thus holy David committed sin—I will accept your claim without any discussion—he committed adultery, he plotted a murder; he plotted it and accomplished it. He sinned as kings are accustomed to do, but he did penance and he wept, which kings are not accustomed to do. He asked pardon, not clinging to his power, but acknowledging his weakness; falling prostrate on the ground, he covered himself with sackcloth, forgetting his power and remembering his fault. (*The Second Defense of David* 3.7)
- IV. **Psalm 51:** ³Have mercy on me, God, in accord with your merciful love; in your abundant compassion blot out my transgressions. ⁴Thoroughly wash away my guilt; and from my sin cleanse me. ⁵For I know my transgressions; my sin is always before me. ⁶Against you, you alone have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your eyes so that you are just in your word, and without reproach in your judgment. ⁷Behold, I was born in guilt, in sin my mother conceived me. ⁸Behold, you desire true sincerity; and secretly you teach me wisdom. ⁹Cleanse me with hyssop, that I may be pure; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. ¹⁰You will let me hear gladness and joy; the bones you have crushed will rejoice...

DAVID = CHRIST

- V. **Ambrose of Milan:** The Hebrew term “David” is interpreted as *humiliatum* (“humiliated”) in Latin. For who is truly humiliated if not the one who “did not judge it robbery that he be equal to God, but accepting the form of a servant he humiliated himself, becoming obedient unto death”? Thus this man is the one who is meant by “David,” for he is exalted by nature, but humiliated through mercy, sublime in his divinity, but meek in his body. (*The Second Defense of David* 7.39)
- A. **Philippians 2:** ⁵ ... Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. ⁷ Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, ⁸ he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.
- VI. **Ambrose of Milan:** There was an adultery, there was a murder... I say that the adultery became a prefiguration of salvation; for not every adultery must be condemned. (*The Second Defense of David* 10.50)

BATHSHEBA = THE CHURCH

- VII. **Ambrose of Milan:** This does not seem like the truth, that a woman was stripped in front of the house of the king, that a wife would wash herself before the house of the king, as though there could be no other place more appropriate for bathing: it does not square, it does not fit, and does not align with faith... Then, if this does not fit with faith, let us ask what this naked woman means: clearly it refers to the human condition stripped of all coverings of its nature, lacking the clothing of immortality and stripped of the veil of innocence; for he is naked who is naked through sin and guilt... (*The Second Defense of David* 8.40–41)
- A. **Genesis 3:7:** Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

BLACK AND BEAUTIFUL

- VIII. **Ambrose of Milan:** Let us learn that the Church is naked, let us learn that she is seeking, she is hastening and washing herself before the house of Christ... saying, “Tell me whom my soul loves” [Song of Songs 1:7], recalling the very source of the desire, the very reason for her baptism, just as you have it written: “I am black and beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem, like the tent of Kedar, like the fleece of Solomon” [Song of Songs 1:5] ... Because she is black, she longs to be washed; because she is beautiful, she does not fear to be seen naked. (*The Second Defense of David* 8.42)
- IX. **Ambrose of Milan:** She not only washed herself, but she also called to him, as we have it in the same book of Scripture, where the holy Church says: “Come, my brother, let us go out into the field; let us rest in the fortresses; let us rise at dawn to go to the vineyards; let us see if the vines are blossoming” [Song of Songs 7:12–13]. Thus she not only bathes, but she even beckons Christ to come to her and invites him, saying: “I will give my breasts to you” [Song of Songs 7:13]. (*The Second Defense of David* 9.47)
- A. **Song of Songs:** [The man:] ⁷ How beautiful you are, how fair, my love, daughter of delights! ⁸ Your very form resembles a date-palm, and your breasts, clusters. ⁹ I thought, “Let me climb the date-palm! Let me take hold of its branches! Let your breasts be like clusters of the vine and the fragrance of your breath like apples, ¹⁰ And your mouth like the best wine—

- B. [The woman:] that flows down smoothly for my lover, gliding over my lips and teeth. ¹¹I belong to my lover, his yearning is for me. ¹²Come, my lover! Let us go out to the fields, let us pass the night among the henna. ¹³Let us go early to the vineyards, and see if the vines are in bloom, If the buds have opened, if the pomegranates have blossomed; There will I give you my love [LXX: “breasts”].

URIAH = THE LAW

- X. **Ambrose of Milan:** Christ desired the beauty of his Church and prepared to acquire her as his wife. But because she was under the Law—for Peter, John, and the other apostles were under the Law—he first decided that we needed to be freed from the chains of bodily observance... Thus Uriah was killed as a type of the Law to show that the Synagogue would be loosed from the tethers of the Law. (*The Second Defense of David* 9.48)

- A. **Romans 7:** ¹Are you unaware, brothers (for I am speaking to people who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over one as long as one lives? ²Thus a married woman is bound by law to her living husband; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law in respect to her husband. ³Consequently, while her husband is alive she will be called an adulteress if she consorts with another man. But if her husband dies she is free from that law, and she is not an adulteress if she consorts with another man. ⁴In the same way, my brothers, you also were put to death to the law through the body of Christ, so that you might belong to another, to the one who was raised from the dead in order that we might bear fruit for God.

“AN ILLEGITIMATE INCARNATION”

- XI. **Ambrose of Milan:** A holy cohabitation took place from unequal partners, when the Word became flesh. For there is no lawful wedlock between divinity and the flesh... God assumed flesh, he took up a soul, he made there to be a lawful wedlock through an unprecedented and illegitimate Incarnation, so that God might be all things and in all. (*The Second Defense of David* 10.50)

- XII. **Ambrose of Milan:** Thus taking this woman to himself, God the Word made the union lawful. This mystery has also been indicated by those marriage rites that are in the Song of Songs, by which the Church weds Christ and the flesh weds the spirit. And thus she was running about and seeking where the word of God was, because she was wounded, because she was naked, because she was an adulteress in all things. (*The Second Defense of David* 10.51)

- A. **Song of Songs 3:** ¹On my bed at night I sought him whom my soul loves—I sought him but I did not find him. ²“Let me rise then and go about the city, through the streets and squares; Let me seek him whom my soul loves.” I sought him but I did not find him. ³The watchmen found me, as they made their rounds in the city: “Him whom my soul loves—have you seen him?” ⁴Hardly had I left them when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him and would not let him go until I had brought him to my mother’s house, to the chamber of her who conceived me.

- XIII. **Ambrose of Milan:** Christ joined this woman [that is, human nature] to himself, so that he might render her immaculate; he accompanied her, so that he might bear away her adultery. And because she was under the Law, death was necessary, so that she might be liberated from the Law, so that through her death, the marriage, as it were, between the Law and the flesh might be destroyed. (*The Second Defense of David* 10.52)

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ORIGEN

AN EXHORTATION TO MARTYRDOM, PRAYER
FIRST PRINCIPLES: BOOK IV
PROLOGUE TO THE COMMENTARY ON
THE SONG OF SONGS
HOMILY XXVII ON NUMBERS

TRANSLATION AND INTRODUCTION

BY

ROWAN A. GREER

PREFACE

BY

HANS URS VON BALTHASAR



PAULIST PRESS

1979

ORIGEN

of Christ, which are the first beginnings of knowledge; and let us go on to perfection so that the wisdom that is delivered to the perfect may also be delivered to us (cf. Heb. 6:1; 1 Cor. 2:6). For this is what the one to whom the preaching of this wisdom was entrusted promises when he says, "Yet among the perfect we impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this world or of the rulers of this world, who are doomed to pass away" (1 Cor. 2:6). By this he makes it clear that this wisdom of ours, so far as beauty of speech goes, has nothing in common with the wisdom of this world. This wisdom, therefore, is written more clearly and perfectly in our hearts, if it has been revealed to us according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret for long ages, but is now disclosed through the prophetic writings and through the appearing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forevermore. Amen (cf. Rom. 16:25-27; 2 Tim. 1:10; 1 Tim. 6:14).

CHAPTER TWO:

THAT MANY BY NOT UNDERSTANDING THE SCRIPTURES

SPIRITUALLY

AND BY BADLY UNDERSTANDING THEM FALL INTO HERESIES

1. Now that we have briefly discussed the inspiration of divine Scripture by the Holy Spirit, it seems necessary also to explain how certain people by failing to read or understand Scripture correctly have given themselves up to a great many errors, since the way one ought to approach the understanding of divine letters is unknown to a great many people. And so, the Jews, through the hardness of their heart and because they wish to seem wise in themselves, have not believed in our Lord and Savior. They suppose that what was prophesied of Him should be understood according to the letter, that is, that He ought to have "proclaimed release to the captives" (Is. 61:1; cf. Lk. 4:19) in a perceptible and visible way, and that He ought first to have built the city that they think is truly the city of God and at the same time to have "cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem" (Zech. 9:10; cf. Ezek. 48:15ff.; Ps. 46:4). He should have "eaten butter and honey before He knew how to refuse the evil and choose

the good" (Is. 7:15). And they suppose that the wolf, that footed animal, as was prophesied for the coming of Christ, ought to have "fed with the lambs, and the leopard lie down with the kids, and the calf and bull together feed with the lions and be led to pastures by a little child, and the ox and the bear lie down together in fields and their young be brought up in common, and the lions stand in the mangers with the oxen and eat straw" (Is. 11:6-7). Thus, since they see that none of these things that were prophesied of Him have happened according to the narrative meaning of Scripture,⁵⁹ and since they hold the belief that in them especially the signs of the coming of Christ were to be observed, they have been unwilling to accept the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. On the contrary, against law and divine right, that is, against the faith of prophecy, they crucified Him as though He had taken the name of Christ for Himself.

Then, indeed, the heretics read what was written in the Law, "In my anger a fire is kindled" (Jer. 15:14) and "I am a jealous god, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation" (Ex. 20:5) and "I repent that I have anointed Saul king" (1 Sam. 15:11) and "I am God, who make peace and create evil" (Is. 45:7) and again "Does evil befall a city, unless the Lord has done it?" (Amos 3:6) and "Evils have come down from the Lord upon the gates of Jerusalem" (Mic. 1:12) and "An evil spirit from God choked Saul" (1 Sam. 18:10) and many other passages in Scripture like these. When they read them, the heretics did not dare say that they were not the Scriptures of God, but they nevertheless suppose they are that Creator God's whom the Jews worshiped and who they think should be believed to be only just but not good. They think that the Savior came to proclaim to us a more perfect God, whom they deny to be the Creator of the world. But even about this very thing they disagree, holding various opinions, since those who once deserted belief in the Creator God, who is God of all, gave themselves up to various fictions and fables, devising falsehoods and saying that some things are visible and made by one God, while other things are invisible and created by another, just as the imagination and vanity of their soul suggested

59. Latin, *historia*. "Narrative meaning" will be adopted as the translation throughout.

to them. Moreover, some of the simpler people who seem to be included within the faith of the Church, while they do not think there is a God greater than the Creator God and in this preserve a right and sound opinion, nevertheless hold opinions about Him that should not be held concerning the most unjust and cruelest man.

2. Now the reason those we have just mentioned have a false understanding of these matters is quite simply that they understand Scripture not according to the spiritual meaning but according to the sound of the letter. For this reason, as far as our modest perception admits, we shall address those who believe the sacred Scriptures were not composed by any human words but were written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and were also delivered and entrusted to us by the will of God the Father through His Only Begotten Son Jesus Christ. And we shall try to make clear to them what seems to us the right way of understanding Scripture, observing that rule and discipline⁶⁰ which was delivered by Jesus Christ to the apostles and which they delivered in succession to their followers who teach the heavenly Church.

Now the fact that certain mysterious dispensations are disclosed by the holy Scriptures is something everyone, I think, even the more simple believers, will admit. But what they are or of what sort is something anyone of a right mind and who is not plagued with the vice of boasting will confess in the spirit of true religion he does not know. For if someone, for example, points out to us the stories of Lot's daughters and their apparently unlawful intercourse with their father, or of Abraham's two wives, or of the two sisters who married Jacob, or of the two maidservants who increased the number of his sons, what else can we answer than that these are certain mysteries and types of spiritual matters, but that we do not know of what sort they are? Moreover, when we read of the building of the tabernacle, we are, of course, certain that the things that have been described are types of certain obscure matters. But I think it is extremely difficult, I might almost say impossible, to fit them to their own measures and to uncover and describe each one of them. Nevertheless, as I have said, the fact that the description is

60. The Rule of Faith.

filled with mysteries does not escape even an ordinary understanding. Indeed, the entire narrative, which seems to be written about weddings or the births of sons or different battles or whatever other stories one wishes, what else must it be believed to be than the forms and types of hidden and sacred matters? But either because people bring too little zeal to the training of their minds or because they think they know before they have learned, it happens that they never begin to learn. On the other hand, if neither zeal nor a teacher is actually lacking and if these matters are sought after as divine and not as though they were human, that is religiously and piously and as matters we hope to be revealed in as many cases as possible through God's revelation, since they are, of course, extremely difficult and obscure for human perception, then perhaps the person who seeks this way will at last find what is right to find.

3. But perhaps this difficulty will be supposed present only in the prophetic words, since it is certainly clear to everyone that the prophetic style is always strewn with types and enigmas. What shall we say when we come to the Gospels? Does not an inner meaning, the Lord's meaning, also lie hidden there that is revealed only by that grace he received who said, "But we have the mind of Christ . . . that we might understand the gifts bestowed upon us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:16, 12-13)? And if anyone reads the revelations made to John, how can he fail to be amazed at how great an obscurity of ineffable mysteries is present there? It is evident that even those who cannot understand what lies hidden in them nevertheless understand that something lies hidden. And indeed, the letters of the apostles, which do seem to some clearer, are they not so filled with profound ideas that through them, as through some small opening, the brightness of an immense light seems to be poured forth for those who can understand the meaning of divine wisdom? Since all this is the case and since there are many in error in this life, I do not think that anyone can without danger proclaim that he knows or understands those things that require "the key of knowledge" before they can be opened. This key the Savior said was with those skilled in the Law. At this point, granted it is something of a digression, I think the question should nonetheless be put to those who say that before the coming of the Savior

there was no truth with those acquainted with the Law, how it could be said by our Lord Jesus Christ that the "keys of knowledge" are with those who held in their hands the books of the Law and the prophets. For this is what the Lord said, "Woe to you, teachers of the Law, for you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who wanted to enter" (Lk. 11:52).

4. Nevertheless, as we began to say, we think that the way that seems to us right for understanding the Scriptures and seeking their meaning is such that we are taught what sort of understanding we should have of it by no less than Scripture itself. We have found in Proverbs some such instruction for the examination of divine Scripture given by Solomon. He says, "For your part describe them to yourself threefold in admonition and knowledge, that you may answer words of truth to those who question you" (Prov. 22:20-21 LXX). Therefore, a person ought to describe threefold in his soul the meaning of divine letters, that is, so that the simple may be edified by, so to speak, the body of the Scriptures; for that is what we call the ordinary and narrative meaning. But if any have begun to make some progress and can contemplate something more fully, they should be edified by the soul of Scripture. And those who are perfect are like those concerning whom the Apostle says, "Yet among the perfect we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this world or of the rulers of this world, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification" (1 Cor. 2:6-7). Such people should be edified by that spiritual Law (cf. Rom. 7:14) which has a shadow of the good things to come (cf. Heb. 10:1), edified as by the spirit of Scripture. Thus, just as a human being is said to be made up of body, soul, and spirit, so also is sacred Scripture, which has been granted by God's gracious dispensation for man's salvation.

We see this also indicated in the book of the Shepherd (which some apparently despise) when Hermas is ordered "to write two books," and afterwards he is himself to "announce to the presbyters of the Church" what he has learned from the Spirit. This is what it says, "And you shall write two books, and give one to Clement and one to Grapte. And Grapte shall admonish the widows and orphans; and Clement shall send the message to all the cities outside;

and you shall announce it to the presbyters of the Church" (Hermas, Vis. II.4.3). Grapte, then, who is commanded to admonish the orphans and widows, is the plain meaning of the letter itself by which are admonished childlike souls, who have not yet deserved to have God as their Father and for this reason are called "orphans." And the "widows" are those souls that have left that unjust husband to whom they had been joined against the Law, but remain "widows" because they have not yet made sufficient progress to be joined to the heavenly bridegroom (cf. Mt. 25:1ff.). But Clement is ordered to send what has been said to those who have already left the letter for those "cities which are outside," just as if it said, to those souls which have been edified by the letter and have begun to be outside concern for the body and outside the desires of the flesh. And Hermas himself is ordered to announce what he had learned from the Holy Spirit not by letters or a book but by his living voice to the presbyters of the churches of Christ, that is, to those who because of their capacity for spiritual teaching support the mature meaning of wisdom.

5. But, of course, we must not ignore the fact that there are certain passages in Scripture in which what we have called the body, that is a logically coherent narrative meaning, is not always to be found, as we shall show in what follows. And there are places where only what we have called the soul and the spirit may be understood. I think this is also indicated in the Gospels, when "six stone jars" are said to be "standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding two or three measures" (Jn. 2:6). As I have said, this verse in the Gospel seems to refer to those whom the Apostle calls "Jews inwardly" (Rom. 2:29), because they are purified by the word of Scripture, sometimes holding "two measures," that is, receiving the meanings of the soul and of the spirit, according to what we have just said, and sometimes holding "three measures," when a reading for edification can keep the bodily meaning, which is the narrative meaning. And "six stone jars" are mentioned because they bear a logical relation to those who are placed in this world to be purified. For we read that in six days (which is a perfect number⁶¹) this world and everything in it were finished.

61. Cf. Philo, *De op. mund.* 3. Six is perfect because it is the sum of its parts, 1 + 2 + 3.

6. Now the whole multitude of believers, which believes quite faithfully and simply, is a witness to what great profit lies in the first meaning, which I have called narrative. Nor is much argument needed, since the point is perfectly clear to everyone. And the Apostle Paul has given us a great many examples of that meaning which we have called above the soul, as it were, of Scripture, first, for example, the passage in his letter to the Corinthians, "For it is written, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain'" (1 Cor. 9:9; Deut. 25:4). He goes on to explain how this commandment should be understood and says, "Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does He not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the ploughman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of a share in the crop" (1 Cor. 9:9-10). Moreover, a great many other sayings like this one, which are interpreted from the Law in this way, bestow the greatest instruction upon those who hear them.

Then, the spiritual explanation refers, for example, to someone who can make clear the heavenly things of which those who are Jews according to the flesh served the copies and shadows (Heb. 8:5; Rom. 8:5) and the good things to come of which the Law has a shadow (Heb. 10:1), and any similar things found in the holy Scriptures. And the spiritual meaning is involved when it is asked what is that "secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification, which none of the rulers of this world understand" (1 Cor. 2:7-8), or in what the Apostle himself observes when he is using certain examples from Exodus or Numbers and says, "Now these things happened to them in a type, but they were written down for us, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:11). And he gives us an opportunity of understanding how we can direct our minds to the things of which their experiences were types by saying, "For they drank from the spiritual Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4).

Moreover, concerning the tabernacle he makes mention in another letter of the command that had been given to Moses, "You shall make everything according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain" (Heb. 8:5; Ex. 25:40). And when he writes to the Galatians and rebukes those who are apparently reading the

Law for themselves but do not understand it, because they are unaware that there are allegories in the Scriptures, he says to them with a certain amount of chiding, "Tell me, you who desire to be under the Law, do you not hear the Law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, the son of the free woman through promise. Now this is an allegory: These women are two covenants, and the rest" (Gal. 4:21–24). In this passage we must also consider how carefully the Apostle said what he did, "You who desire to be under the Law"—and not "you who are under the Law"—"do you not hear the Law?" that is, "do you not understand?" or "do you not know?"

Further, in the letter to the Colossians, embracing and drawing together concisely the meaning of the Law as a whole, he says, "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are a shadow of what is to come" (Col. 2:16–17). And when he writes, as well, to the Hebrews and discusses those who are from the circumcision, he says, "They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things" (Heb. 8:5). Now those who accept the Apostle's writings as divinely spoken will probably not doubt this conclusion with respect to the five books of Moses because of the preceding examples. But about the rest of the Old Testament narrative they may ask whether what is included in it may also be said to have happened "in a type" (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11) to those about whom it is written. We have noticed that the point is addressed in the letter to the Romans, where Paul uses an example from 1 Kings and says, "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal" (Rom. 11:4; 1 Kings 19:18). Paul takes this as spoken in a type about those who are called Israelites "by election" (Rom. 11:5), in order to show that the coming of Christ brought help not only to the Gentiles but also to a great many of the nation of Israel, who were called to salvation.

7. Since these points have been established, we shall sketch out how we should understand divine Scripture in particular points by using as examples and models what we have been able to find. First, we shall repeat and demonstrate the point that the Holy Spirit, who enlightened the ministers of truth, the prophets and the

apostles, by the providence and will of God through the power of His Only Begotten Word, who was God in the beginning with God (cf. Jn. 1:1) [wished first to teach them how]⁶² to understand the mysteries of those events or purposes that happen among human beings or from human beings. By human beings I now mean souls placed in bodies. They portrayed those mysteries, known and revealed to them by the Spirit, by narrating them as human deeds or by handing down in a type certain legal observances and rules. They did this so that not anyone who wanted would have these mysteries laid bare and ready, so to speak, to be trodden underfoot, but so that the person who devoted himself to studies of this sort with all purity and continence and careful watching might be able in this way to inquire into the profoundly hidden meaning of God's Spirit that had been woven together with an ordinary narrative looking in another direction. And in this way they thought someone might become an ally of the Spirit's knowledge and a participant in the divine counsel. And this is because no soul can arrive at the perfection of knowledge in any other way than by becoming inspired by the truth of divine wisdom. Therefore, it is chiefly the doctrine of God, that is, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that is described by those men filled with the divine Spirit. And then, as we have said, filled with the divine Spirit, they brought forth the mysteries of the Son of God, how the Word was made flesh (Jn. 1:14) and for what purpose He went so far as to take the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7). And then it necessarily followed that they taught the race of mortals with divine words about rational creatures, heavenly as well as earthly, the blessed and the lower, and also about the differences among souls and how these differences arose. And finally, it was necessary for us to learn from the divine words what this world is, why it was made, and why there is so much and such great evil on earth, and whether it is only on earth or also in other places.

8. Therefore, although it is the Holy Spirit's purpose to enlighten holy souls, which have dedicated themselves to the service of the truth, concerning such matters and others like them, He

62. Koetschau conjectures that these words must be added.

has in the second place an aim in regard to those who either cannot or will not give themselves to the effort and diligence by which they might deserve to be taught or to know matters so great and excellent. As we have already said, His aim is to envelop and hide secret mysteries in ordinary words under the pretext of a narrative of some kind and of an account of visible things. Therefore, the account of the visible creation is introduced and the making and fashioning of the first man; then his offspring follow in succession. Also some of the exploits done by certain righteous men are recounted, while along with them certain of their crimes as men are recorded; then some instances of the unchastity or wickedness of the impious are described. Moreover, an account of battles is related in order in a marvelous way; and the different fates, now of those who conquer and now of those who are conquered, are described, by which certain ineffable mysteries are revealed to those who know how to examine accounts of this kind. Moreover, in the legal passages of Scripture the law of truth is sown and prophesied by the amazing teaching of wisdom; each one by some divine art of wisdom is woven into a kind of garment and veil for the spiritual meanings. And this is what we have called the body of sacred Scripture—so that even by what we have called the garment of the letter itself, since it has been woven by the art of wisdom, a great many can be edified and make progress who otherwise would be unable to do so.

9. But if in all the parts of this garment, that is, the narrative, the logical coherence of the Law had been kept and its order preserved, because we should have a continuous way of understanding, we should not believe that there was anything shut up within the sacred Scriptures in addition to what is disclosed on the first appearance. For this reason the divine wisdom⁶³ has arranged for there to be certain stumbling blocks or interruptions of the narrative meaning, by inserting in its midst certain impossibilities and contradictions, so that the very interruption of the narrative might oppose the reader, as it were, with certain obstacles thrown in the way. By them wisdom denies a way and an access to the common

63. The *Philocalia* has "the Word of God" throughout the discussion.

understanding; and when we are shut out and hurled back, it calls us back to the beginning of another way, so that by gaining a higher and loftier road through entering a narrow footpath it may open for us the immense breadth of divine knowledge.

Moreover, we should also know that since the chief aim of the Holy Spirit was to keep the logical order of the spiritual meaning either in what is bound to happen or in what has already taken place, if anywhere He found that what happened according to the narrative could be fitted to the spiritual meaning, He composed something woven out of both kinds in a single verbal account, always hiding the secret meaning more deeply. But where the narrative of events could not be coherent with the spiritual logic, He sometimes interspersed either events less likely or absolutely impossible to have happened and sometimes events that could have happened but in fact did not. Sometimes He did this with a few words that seem unable to preserve the truth according to the bodily meaning, sometimes by interspersing many words.

This is found with special frequency in the Law, where there are many commandments that are obviously useful in their bodily form, but where there are a good many in which no straightforward useful purpose is evident; and sometimes impossibilities may even be discerned. All these things, as we have said, the Holy Spirit arranged so that from them, since what first appears cannot be true or useful, we might be called back to examine the truth to be sought more deeply and to be investigated more diligently, and might seek a meaning worthy of God in the Scriptures, which we believe were inspired by God. And not only did the Holy Spirit arrange this for what had been written up to the coming of Christ, but since He is one and the same Spirit and proceeds from the one God, He likewise did the same thing also in the Gospels and the writings of the apostles. For even those accounts He inspired through them He did not weave together apart from the art of His wisdom, whose character we have already explained. Thus, even in these writings He mingled not a few things by which the order of the narrative account is interrupted or cut up so that by the impossibility He might turn and call back the mind of the reader to the examination of the inner meaning.

CHAPTER THREE:
EXAMPLES FROM THE SCRIPTURES
OF HOW SCRIPTURE SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD

1. So that what we say may be understood quite concretely, let us now bring the argument to bear upon actual passages in Scripture. To what person of intelligence, I ask, will the account seem logically consistent that says there was a "first day" and a "second" and "third," in which also "evening" and "morning" are named, without a sun, without a moon, and without stars, and even in the case of the first day without a heaven⁶⁴ (Gen. 1:5–13)? And who will be found simple enough to believe that like some farmer "God planted trees in the garden of Eden, in the east" and that He planted "the tree of life" in it, that is a visible tree that could be touched, so that someone could eat of this tree with corporeal teeth and gain life, and, further, could eat of another tree and receive knowledge "of good and evil" (Gen. 2:8–9)? Moreover, we find that God is said to stroll in the garden in the afternoon and Adam to hide under a tree (cf. Gen. 3:8). Surely, I think no one doubts that these statements are made by Scripture in the form of a type by which they point toward certain mysteries. Also Cain's going away "from the face of God" (Gen. 4:16) obviously stirs the wise reader to ask what "the face of God" is and how any one could "go away" from it. But there is no need for us to enlarge the discussion too much beyond what we have in hand, since it is quite easy for everyone who wishes to collect from the holy Scriptures things that are written as though they were really done, but cannot be believed to have happened appropriately and reasonably according to the narrative meaning. And this form of Scripture also finds abundant and copious expression in the Gospels, when, for example, the devil is said to have placed Jesus on "a very high mountain" to show Him from there "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them" (Mt. 4:8). How could it possibly happen according to the letter either that the devil led Jesus to a very high mountain or that to His fleshly eyes he "showed," as though they were below and

⁶⁴ Koetschau compares this sentence with fragment 29, Justinian's Letter to Mennas (Mansi IX.533).

next to that one mountain, "all the kingdoms of the world," that is, the kingdoms of the Persians, the Scythians, the Indians, and how their kings are glorified by men? Moreover, whoever reads with special care will find a great many other passages like this in the Gospels. In this way he will notice that into these accounts that seem to have been described according to the letter there have been sown in and woven together things that the narrative meaning will not admit but that preserve the spiritual meaning.

2. Moreover, similar passages may be found in contexts where commandments are given.⁶⁵ In the Law of Moses it is commanded that "every male who was not circumcised on the eighth day shall be destroyed" (Gen. 17:14 LXX). This is completely contradictory, since if the Law was handed down to be obeyed according to the narrative meaning, it ought to have ordered that parents or those who bring up the children should be punished if they did not circumcise their children. But as it is, Scripture says, "The uncircumcised male," that is, "who was not circumcised on the eighth day . . . shall be destroyed from his people" (Gen. 17:14 LXX).

But if we must ask also about impossible laws, we find an animal called the "goat-stag," which does not even exist, listed among the clean animals Moses orders to be eaten; and the lawgiver prohibits eating the "griffin," which no one has ever mentioned or heard of being able to fall into human hands (cf. Deut. 14:5; Lev. 11:13 LXX). Moreover, concerning the quite well-known observance of the sabbath, it says, "You shall sit, each one of you, in your houses; no one shall move from his place on the seventh day" (Ex. 16:29). It is impossible to observe this commandment according to the letter, for no human being can sit for a whole day so as not to move from the place where he is sitting.

In regard to these points of detail even those who are of the circumcision and who are unwilling that anything in the holy Scriptures should be understood beyond what is made clear by the letter do not believe that the laws about the goat-stag, the griffin, and the vulture need to be examined; but concerning the sabbath they bring to mind idle and frivolous tales, and arguing from I know not what traditions say that one person's "place" is to be

⁶⁵ The *Philocalia* gives as the first example the prohibition of eating vultures, to which Rufinus alludes in his summary list in the last paragraph on this page.

reckoned within two thousand cubits (cf. Num. 35:5). But others, among whom is the Samaritan Dositheus,⁶⁶ find fault with interpretations of this sort, but order something still more absurd, that everyone should remain until evening in the posture, the place, and the position he happened to be in on the sabbath day, that is, if he was sitting, he must sit the whole day, or if he was lying down, he must lie down the whole day.

Moreover, the commandment "Do not bear a burden on the sabbath day" (cf. Jer. 17:21) seems to me impossible. For by these words the Jewish teachers have fallen into "endless fables," as the holy Apostle says (1 Tim. 1:4), by saying that it is not reckoned a "burden" if someone has shoes without nails, but that it is a "burden" if someone has Gallic shoes with nails. And if someone carries something on one shoulder, they judge it a "burden," but if he carries it on both shoulders, they will deny it is a burden.

3. And now if we look for similar examples from the Gospels, how will it fail to seem ridiculous if we understand according to the letter the statement "Salute no one on the road" (Lk. 10:4)? For certain of the simpler believers think that our Savior gave the apostles this order. Moreover, how will it be possible, especially in those places where an extremely harsh winter is rough with icy frosts (cf. Vergil, *Geor.* II.263), to observe the commandment that no one should have "two tunics or sandals"?⁶⁷ (Mt. 10:10)? And what about the commandment that the person struck on the right cheek should offer also the left one, since anyone who struck with the right hand would hit the left cheek (cf. Mt. 5:39; Lk. 6:29)? Also to be considered one of the impossibilities is the verse in the Gospel "If your right eye has offended, let it be plucked out" (cf. Mt. 5:29, 18:9). For even if we refer the saying to fleshly eyes, how will it appear logical that the blame for the offense is referred to one eye, the right one, when a person sees with both eyes? Or who would be considered innocent of a great crime if he laid hands on himself?⁶⁸

Perhaps the letters of the Apostle Paul will appear free from these difficulties. But consider what he says, "Was any one at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek uncircumci-

66. Founder of an ascetic sect. Cf. *Contra Celsum* VI.11.

67. This sentence is not found in the *Philocalia*.

68. The *Philocalia* also cites Mt. 5:28.

sion" (1 Cor. 7:18). In the first place, if one examines the passage carefully, it will not appear addressed to the subjects that are being discussed in the context. For Paul's discussion concerns instructions for marriage and chastity, and the verse that has been cited will appear beside the point in such matters. Second, what would be the objection if someone could return to uncircumcision in order to escape the disfigurement that comes from circumcision? Third, this certainly cannot be done by any manner of means.⁶⁹

4. Now we have brought all these examples in order to show that the aim of the Holy Spirit, who thought it right to give us the divine Scriptures, is not that we might be able to be edified by the letter alone or in all cases, since we often discover that the letter is impossible or insufficient in itself because by it sometimes not only irrationalities but even impossibilities are described. But the aim of the Holy Spirit is that we should understand that there have been woven into the visible narrative truths that, if pondered and understood inwardly, bring forth a law useful to men and worthy of God.

But someone might suspect us of the opinion that no narrative in Scripture actually happened, since we believe that some of them did not happen, or that no commandment of the Law can be established according to the letter, since we have said that some cannot be observed according to the letter because either reason or the possibility of the matter does not allow it, or that what is written of the Savior should not be thought fulfilled in a way also perceived by the senses, or that His commandments ought not to be preserved according to the letter. Our response, therefore, must be that we judge it evident that in a great many cases the truth of the narrative meaning both can and ought to be preserved. For who could deny that Abraham was buried in the double cave in Hebron, as were Isaac and Jacob and one wife of each of them? Or who would doubt that Shechem was given in Joseph's portion?⁷⁰ or that Jerusalem is the chief city of Judea and that the temple of God was built in it by Solomon? Countless other examples could be given. For the passages that can be established according to the narrative meaning are far more numerous than those that contain only the spiritual mean-

69. The *Philocalia* does not include the third reason.

70. The *Philocalia* does not include this example.

ing. Then, too, who would not affirm the commandment that orders "Honor your father and your mother, that it may be well for you" (Ex. 20:12) and say that it is sufficient without any spiritual meaning and must necessarily be observed? This is especially so since Paul, as well, repeated the commandment in the same words and confirmed it (cf. Eph. 6:2-3). And what should be said about the verses "You shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill or steal, you shall not bear false witness, and the rest" (Ex. 20:13-16)? Or what about the commandments given in the Gospel, can anyone doubt that most of them must be observed according to the letter? For example,⁷¹ when He says, "But I say to you, do not swear at all" (Mt. 5:34); and when He says, "Everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt. 5:28). And we may add the instructions of Paul the Apostle, "Admonish the idlers, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all" (1 Thess. 5:14), and a great many others.⁷²

5. Nevertheless, if someone reads with great care, I do not doubt that in a great many cases he will hesitate whether this narrative or that should be thought true according to the letter or less true, and whether this or that commandment should be observed according to the letter or not.⁷³ For this reason we must rely on great zeal and effort so that each reader may with all reverence understand that he is pondering words that are divine and not human and that have been sown into the holy books. Therefore, the understanding that we consider should be observed rightly and

71. The *Philocalia* gives Mt. 5:22 as the first example.

72. The *Philocalia* completes the sentence: "... even if with the more zealous each one of them can be kept without rejecting that commandment according to the phrase 'the depths of the wisdom of God'" (Rom. 11:33; 1 Cor. 2:10).

73. The *Philocalia* completes section 5 as follows: "Therefore, the person who reads accurately, observing the commandment of the Savior to 'search the Scriptures' (Jn. 5:39), must carefully test where the meaning according to the letter is true and where it is impossible, and must, so far as he is able, track down from similar expressions scattered everywhere through Scripture the meaning of what is impossible according to the letter. Therefore, as will be clear to the readers, when the entire passage is impossible according to the letter, but its chief point is not impossible or even true, every effort must be made to grasp the meaning as a whole, linking together intellectually the account of what is impossible according to the letter with what is not only not impossible but even true in the narrative, treating it allegorically in common with what did not happen according to the letter. For we are disposed to think concerning all of divine Scripture that everything has a spiritual meaning, but not everything a bodily meaning. For often the bodily meaning is proved to be impossible."

logically in interpreting the holy Scriptures is, we think, of this kind.

6. The divine writings proclaim that a certain nation on earth was elected by God. And they give this nation a number of different names, for sometimes the entire nation is called Israel, sometimes Jacob; and in particular, when the nation was itself divided by Jeroboam the son of Nebat into two parts (cf. 1 Kings 12:2ff.), the ten tribes constituted under him were called Israel, while the other two, with which was also the tribe of Levi and which included the tribe from which the royal family of David descended, were named Judah. Moreover, all those places which that nation held and which it had received from God were called Judea, in which Jerusalem was the metropolis; it is called a metropolis as a kind of mother of a great many cities. You will find the names of these cities mentioned frequently in passages scattered in the other divine books, but they are included woven together in one place in the book of Joshua, son of Nun. Therefore, although all these facts are the case, the holy Apostle, wishing us to lift our understanding and raise it somehow from earth, says in one place, "Consider Israel according to the flesh" (1 Cor. 10:18). By this he means that there is another Israel, which is not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.⁷⁴ And in another place he says, "For not all who are from Israel are Israel" (Rom. 9:6).

8. Therefore, since we have been taught by Paul that there is

74. Rufinus's translation resumes with section 8. At this point the *Philocalia* has the following lengthy passage: "And elsewhere he says, 'It is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God' (Rom. 9:8), 'for not all who are from Israel are Israel' (Rom. 9:6). Moreover, neither 'is he a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and in the flesh. He is a Jew who is one in secret, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal' (Rom. 2:28-29). Now if the distinguishing mark of the Jew is taken from the phrase 'in secret,' it must be understood that just as there is a nation of bodily Jews, so also there is a nation of Jews 'in secret,' since the soul has acquired this noble birth by certain ineffable words. Moreover, many prophecies are found concerning Israel and Judah, describing what would happen to them. Surely, do not such promises written for them, so far as they are lowly according to the letter and show nothing lofty or worthy of God's promise, require a mystical interpretation? And if the promises proclaimed through what can be perceived by the senses are spiritual, so those to whom the promises were made are not bodily. 7. But lest we should dwell upon the subject of the Jew 'in secret' and the Israelite of 'the inner man' (cf. Rom. 7:22), since these questions are obvious to those who are not dull minded, we shall return to the previous topic. Now we say that Jacob was the father of the twelve patriarchs, and they of the rulers of the people, and they of the Israelites who came later. Therefore, the bodily Israelites trace their ancestry to the rulers of the people,

one Israel according to the flesh and another according to the Spirit, when the Savior says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt. 15:24), we do not understand Him as do they who have an earthly wisdom, that is, the Ebionites, who are also called by their name itself "the poor" (for poor is translated *ebion* by the Hebrews).⁷⁵ Rather, we understand that there is a nation of souls named Israel. Even the meaning of the name itself suggests this, since Israel is translated "the mind seeing God" or "man seeing God."

Moreover, the Apostle makes such revelations about Jerusalem as "The Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother" (Gal. 4:26). And in another of his letters he says, "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the Church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" (Heb. 12:22–23). If, therefore, there are certain souls in this world that are called Israel, and in heaven a certain city that is named Jerusalem, it follows that those cities that are said to belong to the nation of Israel have as their metropolis the heavenly Jerusalem. And we understand all of Judea in this way. We also think that the prophets spoke about it in certain mysterious accounts when they prophesied something about Judea or about Jerusalem or if the sacred narrative proclaims that different sorts of invasions happened to Judea or Jerusalem.⁷⁶ Therefore, whatever is either told or prophesied about Jerusalem, if we hear the words of Paul as of Christ speaking in him (cf. 2 Cor. 13:3), we should understand according to his opinion to have been

and the rulers of the people to the patriarchs, and the patriarchs to Jacob and to those still earlier. So, the spiritual Israelites of whom the bodily were a type, are they not from the peoples, the peoples having come from the tribes, and the tribes from one person who had not a bodily birth like the rest, but a better one, since he was born of Isaac, and Isaac descended from Abraham, and all traced their ancestry to Adam, who the Apostle says is Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 15:45)? For the entire beginning of the families that are with the God of all traces its origin down from Christ, who after the God and Father of all is the Father of every soul, just as Adam is the father of all men. And if Eve has been interpreted by Paul to refer to the Church, it is not surprising, since Cain was born of Eve and everyone thereafter traced their ancestry to Eve, that they should be types of the Church, since everyone is born from the Church in a higher sense.⁷⁷ The main point of the passage is to elaborate the allegorical meaning of "Jew" by use of the Adam-Christ typology, but an allusion may also exist, as Butterworth suggests, to the two genealogies of Christ.

75. The *Philocalia* does not include the phrase in parenthesis.

76. The *Philocalia* does not include this sentence.

spoken of that city which he calls the heavenly Jerusalem and of all those places or cities that are said to be cities of the holy land of which Jerusalem is the metropolis. We must also suppose that the Savior, wishing to call us forth to a higher understanding, promises some of these cities to those who have made good use of the money entrusted to them by Him, telling them to have authority "over ten cities" or "over five cities" (cf. Lk. 19:17–19).

9. Therefore, if the prophecies made about Judea, Jerusalem, Israel, Judah, and Jacob, so long as they are not understood by us in a fleshly way, point to certain divine mysteries, it follows that also those prophecies given about Egypt and the Egyptians or about Babylon and the Babylonians, Sidon and the Sidonians, should not be understood as prophecies about the Egypt or Babylon or Tyre or Sidon that is on earth (cf. Ezek. 26ff.). Certainly, the prophecies Ezekiel the prophet made concerning Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, are quite impossible to apply to any human being who appears to have ruled in Egypt, as the passage itself taken as a whole makes perfectly clear. Likewise, what is said about the Prince of Tyre cannot be understood of any human being or king of Tyre. As well, how can we possibly suppose that what is said in many places by Scripture, especially in Isaiah, about Nebuchadnezzar are said about a human being? For no human being is said to have "fallen from heaven" or to have been "Lucifer" or the one who "arose every morning" (Is. 14:12). No less do we find a similar problem with what is said in Ezekiel about Egypt, for example, that it is to be made desolate for "forty years" so that "no foot of man" will be found in it, that it will be so taken by assault that through the entire land human blood will rise up to the knees (cf. Ezek. 29:11–12; 30:7, 10–12; 32:5–6, 12–13, 15). I do not know how anyone with sense could apply all this to that earthly Egypt which borders on Ethiopia.⁷⁷

But we must see whether it is not possible to find a more worthy interpretation for these passages. Now just as there is a heavenly Jerusalem and Judea and, doubtless, a nation that dwells in it that is called Israel, so it is possible that near them there are certain places apparently called Egypt, Babylon, Tyre, or Sidon,

77. The rest of section 9 is not included in the *Philocalia*.

and that the princes and souls of these places, if any live in them, are called Egyptians, Babylonians, Tyrians, and Sidonians. And in the case of some of these souls, in accordance with that way of life they have there, some sort of captivity seems to have taken place, by which they are said to have descended from Judea into Babylon or into Egypt from better and higher places or to have been scattered among certain other nations.

10. For perhaps, just as those who leave this world by that death common to all are ordered according to their acts and to what they deserve, in proportion to which their worth has been judged, and are assigned, some to the place that is called "the lowerworld," others to "Abraham's bosom," and others to different places or homes,⁷⁸ so also they die, so to speak, there and from those places they descend from higher things to this lower world.⁷⁹ For I believe that it is to make this distinction that the lowerworld to which the souls of the dead are led from here is called by Scripture "the lower lowerworld," as it says in Psalms, "And you have delivered my soul from the lower lowerworld" (Ps. 85:13 LXX, reading *eks badou katōterou* instead of *katōtatou* — Ps. 86:13). Therefore, each one of those descending to earth is ordered in accordance with what it deserves or with its place that it had held there, and is born in this world in different places, nations, ways of life, or weaknesses and is the offspring either of devout or much less religious parents, with the result that sometimes it happens that an Israelite descends among the Scythians and a poor man from Egypt is led up to Judea. Nevertheless, our Savior came to gather the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt. 11:23; Lk. 16:22), and since a great many of the Israelites did not accept His teaching, those who were from the Gentiles were called.⁸⁰

And so it will appear to follow logically that the prophecies made concerning the different nations ought rather to be applied to souls and to their different homes in heaven. Moreover, as to the narratives of events that are said to have happened to the nation of Israel, to Jerusalem, or to Judea, when they were at war with

78. The *Philocalia* does not include "others to 'Abraham's . . . homes'."

79. The *Philocalia* does not include the next sentence or the part of the following sentence ending with "or weaknesses."

80. The *Philocalia* does not include the rest of section 10.

different nations, we must thoroughly examine and question how, since in a great many cases the bodily deeds did not happen, they may rather be applied to those nations of souls that dwelt or must be thought to dwell in that heaven which is said to pass away⁸¹ (cf. Mt. 24:35).

Because we have compared the souls going down from this world to the lower world to those souls that have died in a sense and come down from the higher heaven to our dwelling places, we must search out with wise questioning whether we can say the same thing in regard to the birth of individuals. This would imply that just as the souls born on this earth of ours either come back from the lower world to higher places by their desire of better things and so take a human body or descend as far as to us from better places, so also those places that are above in the firmament are inhabited by some souls that have progressed from our abodes to better things, and also by other souls that have fallen from heavenly places as far as to the firmament but have not sinned so greatly as to be thrust down to the lower places that we inhabit. . . . The firmament is a lower world by comparison with the higher heaven, and this earth that we inhabit is called a lower world by comparison with the firmament, and further, by comparison with the lower world that is under us, we are said to be heaven, so that what to some is the lower world is to others heaven.

11. But if someone asks of us plain and completely clear proofs of these conclusions from the holy Scriptures, we must answer that it was the Holy Spirit's purpose to hide these things more completely and to bury them more deeply in what appear to be narratives of events in which people are said to go down to Egypt or to be taken captive into Babylon, where some were greatly humiliated and put in the service of masters, while others were considered so famous and noble in the very places of their captivity that they held authority and office and were placed over the people to rule them.⁸² Now all these truths, as we have said, are concealed hidden and buried in the narratives of holy Scripture, because "the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and

81. The following paragraph is added by Koetschau, who takes it from Jerome's Letter to Avitus, Ep. 11, PL 22.1069f.

82. The *Philocalia* does not include this sentence.

covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Mt. 13:44). Consider very carefully whether this passage does not point to the fact that the soil and surface, so to speak, of Scripture, that is, the meaning according to the letter, is the "field" filled and flowering with plants of all kinds, while the deeper and more profound spiritual meaning is "the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3), which the Holy Spirit through Isaiah calls "obscure, invisible, and hidden treasures" (cf. Is. 45:2-3).

To be able to find them we need the help of God, who alone can "break in pieces the doors of bronze" by which they are shut up and hidden and who "cuts asunder the bars of iron" (Is. 45:2) and the bolts by which access was prohibited for attaining all the truths that were written and hidden in Genesis: concerning the different kinds of souls, concerning the seeds and generations that either pertain directly to Israel or are separated much further from his offspring, and what that "descent of seventy souls into Egypt" is, where the seventy souls became "as the stars of heaven for multitude" (cf. Deut. 10:22; Gen. 46:27; Ex. 1:5). But because not all who were from them are the light of this world (cf. Mt. 5:14)—for not all who are from Israel are Israel (cf. Rom. 9:6)—some who came from those seventy souls became "as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore"⁸³ (cf. Heb. 11:12; Gen. 15:5, 22:17).

12. This descent of the holy fathers into Egypt, that is into this world, can be regarded to have been permitted by God's providence for the enlightening of others and for the instruction of the human race, so that through them other souls might be helped and enlightened. For, to begin with, they are entrusted with the oracles of God (Rom. 3:2), since it is only that nation that is said "to see God"; this is what the name *Israel* means when it is translated. And so it follows that this is how we ought to apply and interpret the stories of Egypt's being chastised with ten plagues to allow the people of God to leave (cf. Ex. 7:14-12:36), or of what happened to the people in the wilderness (cf. Ex. 19ff.), or of the building of the tabernacle from what was collected from all the people (cf. Ex. 25ff.), or of the making of the priestly robe (cf. Ex. 28), or of what is

83. The parallel text from the *Philocalia* stops at this point.

told about the vessels of the temple service (cf. Ex. 30:17ff.), because they truly contain in themselves, as it is written, "the shadow" and type "of heavenly things." For Paul clearly says of them that "they serve a shadow and copy of heavenly things" (Heb. 8:5). In this same Law there are no less included the laws and customs by which they were to live in the holy land. Moreover, threats are placed against those who transgress the Law; as well, various kinds of purifications for those who need purification are handed down (cf. Lev. 12-15) as though for people who would be quite often polluted, so that through them they might come to that one purification after which no further pollution is permitted (cf. Heb. 9 and 6:6).

Moreover, the people itself is enumerated, though not entirely (cf. Num. 1-4, 26). For childlike souls do not yet have enough time to be numbered by the divine command, and not even those souls that cannot become the head of someone else but are themselves subjected to others as their head, which Scripture calls "women," are included in the numbering ordered by God (cf. Num. 1:2, 4; 1 Cor. 11:3). Only those are numbered who are called "men," so as to show that the others could not be numbered on their own, but could be included with those who are called "men."

Of special prominence among those who came to the holy number are those prepared to march to the wars of Israel, who are able to fight against those enemies and foes whom the Father subjects to the Son sitting at His right hand that He may destroy every principality and power (cf. Eph. 1:20, 22; 1 Cor. 15:27, 24). God's purpose is that through those numbered as His soldiers, who as soldiers on service to God do not get entangled in worldly pursuits (2 Tim. 2:4), He may overturn the kingdoms of the Adversary.⁸⁴ By them the shields of faith are carried and the weapons of wisdom brandished; on them the helmet, the hope of salvation, gleams; and the breastplate of love protects their breast filled with God (cf. Eph. 6:16; 1 Thess. 5:8). This is what I think is meant by the soldiers, and these are the kinds of wars for which those are prepared who are commanded in the divine books by the order of God to be numbered.

84. Cf. Jerome's Letter to Avitus 11.

But singled out as much more distinguished and perfect than these are those "the hairs of whose head" are said to be numbered (cf. Mt. 10:30). On the other hand, those who were punished for their sins, whose bodies fell in the wilderness, appear to resemble those who have made not a little progress, but have been unable to arrive at the goal of perfection for various reasons—because they are said to have murmured or worshiped idols or committed fornication or considered any sin that should not even be entertained by the mind (cf. Num. 11, 14, 16, 21, 25; Ex. 32; 1 Cor. 10:5–10; Heb. 3:17).

And I think that not even that passage is empty of all mystery in which some who had much cattle and much other livestock go before and take ahead of time a place suitable for grazing and feeding cattle, which the right hand of Israel defended in war the first of all (cf. Num. 32). By asking Moses for this place, they were separated beyond the Jordan river and cut off from possession of the holy land. This Jordan can be seen when taken as a type of heavenly things (cf. Heb. 8:5) to moisten and to flood the thirsty souls and minds next to it. And it will not even seem useless that Moses hears from God the laws described in Leviticus, but in Deuteronomy the people becomes a hearer of Moses and learns from him what it could not hear from God (cf. Lev. 1:1, etc.; Deut. 1:1, 5:1). For that reason Deuteronomy is called, as it were, a second Law. To some this fact will appear to mean that when the first Law, which was given through Moses, came to an end (cf. Jn. 1:17), there was apparently a second Law formed that was handed down in a special way from Moses to Joshua, his successor (cf. Deut. 31). And Joshua is believed to preserve the type of our Savior, by whose second Law, that is, the commandments of the Gospel, everything is led to perfection.

13. But we must see whether it may not further appear to show that just as in Deuteronomy the Law is declared more plainly and openly than in the books that were written first, so also from the coming He fulfilled in humility, when He took the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7), an indication is found of the second clearer and more glorious coming of the Savior in the glory of His Father (Mt. 16:27). And by it the type of Deuteronomy is fulfilled, when in the kingdom of heaven all the saints will live by the laws of that "eternal

Gospel" (cf. Rev. 14:6).⁸⁵ And just as by coming now He fulfills the Law that has a shadow of the good things to come (Heb. 10:1), so also through His glorious coming the shadow of this coming will be fulfilled and brought to perfection. For so the prophet spoke of Him, "The Spirit of our countenance is Christ the Lord, of whom we said that under His shadow we shall live among the Gentiles" (Lam. 4:20). The fulfillment will come when He rightly transfers all the saints from the temporal Gospel to the "eternal Gospel," according to what John in Revelation describes with respect to "the eternal Gospel" (Rev. 14:6).⁸⁶

14. But in all these speculations let our understanding have sufficient coherence with the rule of piety, and let us think of the Holy Spirit's words not as something that shines as a speech fashioned by frail human eloquence, but, as it is written, "All the king's glory is within" (Ps. 44:14 LXX–45:13) and the treasure of divine meanings is confined, shut up within the frail vessel of the common letter (cf. 2 Cor. 4:7). Then if someone seeks in a more speculative way an explanation of individual points, let him come and let him hear together with us how Paul the Apostle by the Holy Spirit, who searches out even the depths of God (1 Cor. 2:10) and examines the depth of divine wisdom and knowledge (cf. Rom. 11:33), is yet not strong enough to attain the end and, so to speak, intimate knowledge; he proclaims and says in hopelessness and amazement, "Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God" (Rom. 11:33). And with what hopelessness of perfect understanding he proclaims this, hear him say, "How unsearchable are the judgments of God and how inscrutable His ways" (Rom. 11:33). For he did not say it was difficult to search out the judgments of God, but that it was altogether impossible. Nor did he say that it was difficult to investigate His ways, but that they could not be investigated. For no matter how far a person advances in his investigation and makes progress by a keener zeal, even if the grace of

⁸⁵ Cf. Jerome's Letter to Avitus 12.

⁸⁶ Koetschau inserts here fragment 30: Justinian's Letter to Menas (Mansi IX.532) = Jerome's Letter to Avitus 12. The fragment speaks of a repetition of Christ's crucifixion in the heavenly places and in succeeding ages. Cf. Theophilus Alex. Ep. synod. 4 (Jerome Ep. 92) and Ep. pasch. I. 10–11 (Jerome Ep. 96).

God is within him and enlightens his mind (cf. Eph. 1:18), he cannot arrive at the perfect end of the truths he seeks. No mind that is created has the ability to understand completely by any manner of means, but as it finds some small part of the answers that are sought, it sees other questions to be asked. And if it arrives at those answers, it will again see beyond them to many more questions that they imply must be asked. This is why that wisest Solomon in his contemplation of nature by wisdom said, "I said, 'I will be wise,' but wisdom itself was far from me, further than it was. Who will find its profound depth?" (Eccles. 7:24–25 LXX). Moreover, Isaiah knew that the first principles of the universe cannot be found by mortal nature and not even by those natures that are somehow more divine than human nature but are nonetheless themselves made or created. Thus, he knew that by none of them can either the beginning or the end be described; and he said, "Tell us the former things, what they are, and we shall know that you are gods. Or proclaim the last things that are, and then we shall see that you are gods" (Is. 41:22–23 LXX).

As well, my Hebrew teacher used to impart the following tradition. With regard to the fact that neither the beginning nor the end of all things can be understood by anyone, unless only by the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit, he used to say that Isaiah by the type of his vision had spoken of two seraphim alone who with two wings cover the face of God, with two wings His feet, and with two wings fly, crying to one another and saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Sabaoth, the whole earth is full of your glory" (Is. 6:2–3). Thus, because the two seraphim alone have their wings over God's face and His feet, we must dare to say that not even the army of the holy angels (cf. Lk. 2:13) nor the holy thrones, dominations, principalities, and powers (cf. Col. 1:16) can correctly know the beginning of everything and the ends of the universe. But we must understand that those holy beings whom we have listed are spirits and powers near to the first principles themselves and touch upon them to a degree the others are not strong enough to attain. Nevertheless, whatever those powers say by the revelation of the Son of God and the Holy Spirit, and however many truths they have been able to overtake, the higher much more than the

powers below them, it is still impossible for them to understand everything, since it is written, "Most of God's works are concealed" (Sir. 16:21).

Therefore, it is desirable that everyone always should, so far as his powers allow, strain forward to what lies ahead, forgetting what lies behind (Phil. 3:14), striving both for better deeds and for a purer understanding and knowledge through Jesus Christ our Savior, to whom be glory forever (cf. Tit. 3:6, 8; Rom. 16:27).

15. Therefore, everyone who is concerned with truth should be little concerned with names and words (cf. 1 Tim. 1:4), because different nations have different customs about words. And he should pay more attention to what is meant than to how it is expressed in words, especially in the case of such great and difficult matters. For example, suppose we ask whether there is any substance in which neither color nor shape nor touch nor size may be understood, which is perceptible to the mind alone, and which a person can call by whatever name he wishes. The Greeks call it *asōmaton*, that is, "incorporeal"; but the divine Scriptures use the word "invisible," since the Apostle proclaims that God is "invisible" and says that Christ is "the image of the invisible God." Moreover, he says further that through Christ "all things, visible and invisible, were created" (Col. 1:15–16). By this it is made clear that even among creatures there are some that are "invisible" substances by their own properties. But although they are not corporeal, they nevertheless make use of bodies, though they are themselves better than corporeal substances. But the substance of the Trinity, which is the first principle and cause of everything, from which are all things and through which are all things and in which are all things (Rom. 11:36), must not be believed to be a body or to exist in a body, but to be completely incorporeal.

Even though we have digressed, let what we have been obliged to say briefly as an implication of the main argument suffice to show that there are some things the meaning of which cannot in any way rightly be explained by any words of a human language (cf. 1 Cor. 2:4), but are made plain by a purer intellectual apprehension rather than by any properties words have. As well, the understanding of divine letters must be kept to that rule by which what is said is judged not according to the common character of the word but

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according to the divinity of the Holy Spirit, who inspired their writing.

CHAPTER FOUR A SUMMARY CONCERNING THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT AND OTHER MATTERS PREVIOUSLY DISCUSSED

1. The time has now come in our discussion to sum up one by one, so far as we are able, the subjects we have treated and that we have discussed in a scattered way, and first of all to repeat what we have said about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Since God the Father is invisible and inseparable from the Son, the Son is not generated by a production from Him, as some think. For if the Son is a production of the Father and *production* is defined as the sort of generation by which the offspring of animals or of men are accustomed to come into existence, then necessarily both He who produces and He who is produced will be bodies.⁸⁷ For we do not say, as the heretics suppose, that any part of God's substance has been turned into the Son or that the Son has been generated from the Father from no substance at all, that is, outside His own substance, so that there would be a time when He was not. But we remove all notion of corporeality and say that the Word and Wisdom is generated from the invisible and incorporeal God apart from any corporeal passion, as will proceed from mind. Nor will it seem absurd if it is thought of by the analogy of will, since He is said to be "the Son of love" (Col. 1:13).⁸⁸ Moreover, John points out that "God is light" (1 John 1:5), and Paul points out that the Son is "the splendor of eternal light" (cf. Heb. 1:3). Therefore, just as light can never exist without splendor, so neither can the Son, who is said to

87. Koetschau places here fragment 31: Marcellus apud Eusebius's *Contra Marcellum* II.4. The content of the fragment is substantially the same as Rufinus's translation.

88. Koetschau inserts here three fragments: fragment 32: Justinian's *Letter to Mennas* (Mansi IX.525), citing Col. 1:15, Heb. 1:3, Prov. 8:22; fragment 33: Athanasius, *Ep. de decret. Nic. Syn.* 27 (PG 25.465), citing Col. 1:15, 1 John 1:5, Heb. 1:3; and fragment 34: *ibid.* The content of these fragments insists on the distinct identity of the Word, but agrees substantially with Rufinus's translation, even to the extent of refuting what resemble the slogans of the later Arians.

ORIGEN

HOMILIES ON JOSHUA


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HOMILY 1

OD GAVE THE NAME that is above every name¹ to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For this "name that is above every name" is Jesus. Because this is the "name that is above every name, at the name of Jesus, every knee is bowed of those in heaven and on earth and beneath the earth."² And because this is "the name above every name," for many generations it was given to no one.

Moses wrote the book of Genesis, where we read of Abraham and of those who were begotten by him. As many as possible of these persons were upright, but none deserved to be called Jesus. Abel was not named Jesus, nor the one who "began to call upon the name of the Lord God."³ Not the one who "pleased God and was translated," whose corpse "was not found";⁴ nor Noah, the one who alone "in his generation"⁵ was found righteous before God. Not even Abraham himself, who had received the promises of the covenant,⁶ nor Isaac, who was born from him. Not Jacob the supplanter,⁷ nor any one of his sons. "Moses was faithful in all of God's house,"⁸ and yet not even he was called Jesus.

But in the book of Exodus I find the name Jesus for the first time, and I want to consider closely when it was first given.

Scripture says, "Amalek came and was fighting against Israel, and Moses spoke to Jesus in Raphidim."⁹ This is the first men-

1. Phil 2.9.

2. Phil 2.10. The same verse, quoted again in *Homily* 4.2, uses the present subjunctive "should bow," or "bend," instead of "is bowed." Such variety is typical throughout the *Homilies* and may be due either to the translator and copyists or to Origen.

3. Gn 4.26 (Enosh).

4. Gn 6.8-9.

5. Gn 27.36.

6. Ex 17.8. Concerning the name "Jesus" used for both Joshua and Jesus, see the Preface of Rufinus n. 4. See also Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 11.3: "Here

4. Gn 5.22-24 (Enoch).

6. Gn 17.2-14.

8. Nm 12.7; cf. Heb 3.2.

tion of the name Jesus. Moses said, "Choose mighty men for yourself from among all the sons of Israel, and go out and fight tomorrow with Amalek."¹⁰ Moses acknowledges that he cannot lead the army; he acknowledges that he cannot even gather it, although "he led the people out of the land of Egypt."¹¹ Therefore he called Jesus and said, "Choose men for yourself and go out." You see whom [Moses] allowed to carry on the war against Amalek.

Thus we first become acquainted with the name Jesus when we see him as the leader of the army; not as one with whom Moses joined his leadership, but the one to whom Moses granted primacy. Moses was not able to choose mighty men. "You," he says, "choose mighty men for yourself from among the sons of Israel." Therefore, when I become acquainted with the name Jesus for the first time, I also immediately see the symbol of a mystery.¹² Indeed, Jesus leads the army.¹³

2. "And it happened that when Moses lifted up his hands, Israel prevailed; but when he put his hands down, Amalek prevailed."¹⁴ So, too, Jesus grows stronger and conquers when Moses raises up his hands. When Moses, however, did not lift

first the splendor of the name shines forth" [*Hic primum vocabuli huius splendor effulsit*].

10. Cf. Ex 17:9.

11. Cf. Ex 32:1.

12. *Mysterii video sacramentum*. *Sacramentum* is variously rendered "symbol," "mystery," or "sacrament," according to the context. In the *Homilies*, the term is used especially in reference to baptism (4.1; 5.1), to Jesus' power to destroy sin (11.6), to being equipped for battle through the revelation of Jesus' divinity (5.3), and to the high standards necessary to receive the revelation (22.4; 23.4). At times the word seems to be used interchangeably with *mysterium* (e.g., Hom. 4.1; 23.4). Both terms may be translations of Origen's use of *μυστήριον*. See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "μυστήριον, μύησις." To translate *μυστήριον*, the West eventually used *sacramentum*, a term claimed by the army for the soldiers' oath of initiation. This military connotation blended with the Christian concept of the Church as the *militia Christi*. See Christine Mohrmann, "Sacramentum dans les plus anciens textes," in *Études sur le latin des chrétiens* (Rome, 1958), 1:233-44.

13. Origen found it significant that the first appearance of the name of Jesus in Scripture speaks of him as the "leader of the army." The motif runs throughout the *Homilies*, e.g., 9.10; 15.1. But Origen stresses that the battle is within, against principalities and powers that incite to sin. See *Homilies* 1.6; 5.2; and 15.1.

14. Ex 17:11.

up his hands but let them sink downwards, the people were conquered by Amalek. Such people are those to whom Jesus said, "If you believed Moses, you would certainly believe me,"¹⁵ and, "Behold, do you seek to kill me, you who do not keep the Law?"¹⁶ Since the Law and the works of the Law are meaningless among those who "seek to establish their own righteousness and are not submissive to the righteousness of God,"¹⁷ the hands of Moses were lowered, disbelief prevailed, and the people were conquered.

Nadab, Abihu, and Eleazar¹⁸ are left behind in the camp to judge the people. Jethro, too, is left to judge the people with them.¹⁹ But Jesus is not left behind; he follows Moses into the mountain. The addition of a marvelous word reveals that "he was assisting Moses."²⁰ How was he assisting him? Not as a follower; not as an inferior; but as a minister and defender.

But why is it that when Jesus is first mentioned, the name of his father is not indicated, even in the second or third time? But when his father, Nun, is mentioned, Jesus is not called Jesus, but Hoshea.²¹ For his name is written as Hoshea among the list of those who were sent to spy out the land.²² It seems to me that possibly for the purpose of his office of spying, he is called Hoshea, not Jesus, and he is named the son of Nun. But when he returns after that work is completed and all the people are terrified, and when he alone encourages the people who stumbled and raises up their despair,²³ then he was named Jesus by Moses. Not the son of Nun, but the one to whom Moses had said, "Lead the army and fight with Amalek."

We see his greatness even more when we consider that, during the transfiguration Moses' face so weakened the vision of

15. Jn 5:46.

17. Rom 10:3.

19. Cf. Ex 18.13-27.

21. Cf. Nm 13.8, 16.

16. Jn 7:19.

18. Cf. Ex 28.1.

20. Cf. Ex 24.13.

22. There are times when the name Jesus is given along with the name of his father, even when reference is made to the spying incident, e.g., Nm 14.6, 30, 38. But when first chosen to go, he is designated "Hoshea, son of Nun."

23. In stressing the greatness of Jesus, Origen overlooked the encouragement Caleb gave (unless these are explanatory phrases added by Rufinus), e.g., Nm 13.30; 14.6-9. Later in *Homilies* 18 and 20, he mentions Caleb's constancy.

the sons of Israel that no one could look at his face,²⁴ Jesus, however, not only looks directly at his face but even stays inside the tabernacle as a sharer of the mysteries.²⁵

3. To what then do all these things lead us? Obviously to this, that the book does not so much indicate to us the deeds of the son of Nun, as it represents for us the mysteries of Jesus my Lord. For he himself is the one who assumes power after the death of Moses; he is the one who leads the army and fights against Amalek. What was foreshadowed there on the mountain by lifted hands was the time when "he attaches [them] to his cross, triumphing over the principalities and powers on it."²⁶

Thus Moses is dead; for the Law has ceased, because "the Law and the Prophets extend only up to John."²⁷ Do you want me to bring forth proofs from the Scriptures that the Law is called Moses? Hear what he says in the Gospel: "They have Moses and the Prophets, let them listen to them."²⁸ Here, without any doubt, he calls the Law Moses.

Therefore "Moses, the servant of God, is dead";²⁹ for the Law is dead, and the legal precepts are now invalid. Or, if what I propose does not hold enough authority for you, follow the authority of the Apostle, who says, "A woman, so long as her husband lives, is bound by the Law; and she will be called an adulteress, if she should be with another man. If her husband dies, however, she is released from the law of the husband and is not an adulteress if she should be with another man."³⁰ The word "woman" doubtless stands for the soul that was held fast by the Law of Moses, and about which it is said, "so long as her husband lives, she is bound by the Law." But if her husband, doubtless, the Law, has died, he calls her soul, which seems to be bound, "released." Therefore it is necessary for the Law to die so that those who believe in Jesus should not commit the sin of adultery.

²⁴ Ex 34:29-35.

²⁶ Col 2:14-15.

²⁷ Mt 11:13. Four small sections of this homily are given in Procopius of Gaza's *Catena on the Octateuch: Joshua* (referred to, in this volume, as *Cat in Jos*).

²⁸ Lk 16:29. The equation of Moses with the Law is a constant theme. See, e.g., *Homilies* 2.1; 5.4; and 16.5.

²⁹ Dt 34:5.

³⁰ Rom 7:2-3.

²⁵ Ex 33:11.

4. Thus Jesus, my Lord and Savior, assumed the leadership. If it seems fitting, let us compare the deeds of Moses with the leadership of Jesus.

When Moses led the people out of the land of Egypt,³¹ there was no discipline among the people, no ritual order among the priests. They passed through the water of the sea, a salty water with no sweetness at all in it, and "there was for them a wall of water to the right and to the left."³² We know these are the deeds of Moses when he was the leader.

But when my Lord leads the army, let us see what things were already foreshadowed at that time. "The priests precede, and the ark of the covenant is carried on the shoulders of the priests."³³ Nowhere now is the sea, nowhere does the salty billow roll; but with my Lord Jesus as the leader I come to the Jordan, not in the confusion of flight and not terrified by fear, but with the priests who carry on their necks and shoulders the ark of the covenant of the Lord in which the Law of God and the divine letters are kept. I enter the Jordan, not in furtive silence, but with the sound of trumpets blaring something mystical and divine, so that I may step to the proclamation of the heavenly trumpet.³⁴ There it was said that "the water was divided into two parts, and one part became a wall on the right, the other on the left." But here "the one who comes to destroy the center wall of the partition makes both one."³⁵ Indeed, on one side, the water was straight up; but the other side flowed into the sea.³⁶

Hence Jesus says, "Prepare food for yourself for the jour-

³¹ Cf. Procopius *Cat in Jos* 87.1.1004B and Erich Klostermann, "Griechische Excerpte aus Homilien des Origenes," TU 12.3 (1894), p. 10. Since Procopius strung extracts from different writers together without giving the sources, his citations are not precise.

³² Ex 14:22, 29.

³³ Jos 3:6, 14-17.

³⁴ Although there is no mention of trumpets at the crossing of the Jordan, Joshua had told the people to move out following the ark (Jos 3:3), and the sounding of trumpets had been prescribed for such times (Nm 10:5-6). Since Origen connected the crossing of the Jordan with baptism, he may also have had in mind the rousing of the soul by meditation on the trumpets of Scripture. See *Homilies* 1.7 and 12.1.

³⁵ Eph 2:14.

³⁶ Jos 3:16.

ney."³⁷ And today, if you are listening, Jesus says to you, "If you will follow me, prepare food for yourself for the journey." For these foods are the works that accompany us like a trusty satchel on the journey to come. Since it is not fitting to read the divine message carelessly and as if in passing, let us consider from what source he orders those who have no provisions to acquire food; for manna used to be their food.³⁸ But when we have crossed over the banks of the river, "the manna ceases,"³⁹ and so anyone who has not prepared food for himself will not be able to follow Jesus as he enters the land of promise.

But consider what fruit he took first in the land of promise: "At that time," Scripture says, "they first ate the fruits of the region of palms, and they first ate unleavened bread."⁴⁰ You see, therefore, that to us who first depart from the way of this world, if we rightly follow Jesus, the first palm of victory is presented, and when "the yeast of malice and wickedness" are rejected "the unleavened bread of integrity and truth"⁴¹ are prepared for us.

Nevertheless, our Jesus sends spies to the king of Jericho, and they are received hospitably by a prostitute.⁴² But the prostitute who received the spies sent by Jesus was no longer a prostitute since she received them. Indeed, every one of us was a prostitute in his heart as long as he lived according to the desires and lusts of the flesh. But she received the spies of Jesus, "messengers whom he sent before his face to prepare his way."⁴³ If any soul receives such messengers in faith, it must not lodge

³⁷. Jos 1.11.1. Cf. Procopius, *Cat in Jos* 87.1.996B.

³⁸. See *Homily* 6.1. Origen often equates manna with the word of God. In *Homilies on Exodus* 7.5, he speaks of "the bread of heaven, which is the word of God," and proclaims that, for the Christian, even now manna descends from God when Scripture is read. See also *Homilies on Numbers* 3.1.

³⁹. Jos 5.12. In *Homilies on Exodus* 7.5, Origen also speaks of the manna ceasing. Thus Christians must store up the food—in the form of good works, justice, mercy, and piety—to have provisions for the world to come. Here, Origen's idea of the land of promise as both present and future breaks through.

⁴⁰. Cf. Jos 5.12 (LXX, where the Greek has "from the region of palm trees" [φοινίκων]). Located in a region of rich soil and a perennial spring, Jericho was known as "the city of palms." Cf. Dt 34.3 and Jgs 1.16; 3.13. In *Homily* 6.1, Origen applies this food from "the region of palms" to the eschatological sphere.

⁴¹. 1 Cor 5.8.

⁴³. Mk 1.2. Cf. *Homily* 3.3.

⁴². Jos 2.1.

them in low or inferior places, but in lofty and high ones. For we did not receive the Lord Jesus from low and earthly places, but as proceeding from the Father and coming from heaven.

5. But I do not interpret the flax straw in which the spies hid themselves apart from symbols.⁴⁴ For flax is used for priestly garments.⁴⁵ This means either that a priestly stalk was offered to those who were to have been invited, as the apostle Peter says, "You are a holy people, a priestly kingdom,"⁴⁶ or else that there was a secret summoning of this people who are "from the nations"⁴⁷ hidden in the symbol of the Law, where something is said about priests.

Immediately, therefore, the prostitute came under the wrath of the king of Jericho. Why was this, if not because "the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh"?⁴⁸ Again Scripture says, "The world hates you because it hated me before you."⁴⁹ There is therefore a certain king, the enemy of this prostitute, who is "prince of this world."⁵⁰ He pursues and wants to seize the spies of Jesus, but he cannot accomplish that, for they make their journey through the mountains.⁵¹ They do not go through low places, nor are they charmed by valleys, but they eagerly pursue the highest hills and mountain peaks. Indeed, our prostitute says, "I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains. From where will help come to me?"⁵² "The prince of this world" is not able to ascend to that place, nor can he reach Jesus by the highest road. On the contrary, if, to tempt him, he should place him in the heights, he says, "Cast yourself down,"⁵³ because he always loves low and fallen things. It is among these things that he reigns, it is among these things that he establishes his throne, and among them he would descend into hell.

44. Jos 2.6.

45. Cf. Ex 39.27–29. Elsewhere Origen considers linen, the cloth made from flax, a symbol of the Church. It is black by nature. Much must be done before Christians lose the color of earth and become white (*Homilies on Jeremiah* 11.6 [FOTC 97:108–9]). For the symbolic significance Origen attached to priestly garments, see *Homilies on Leviticus* 6.2–5 (FOTC 83:116–26).

46. 1 Pt 2.9.

47. Rom 9.24.

48. Gal 5.17.

49. Jn 12.31.

50. Jn 12.31.

51. Cf. Jos 2.16, 22.

52. Mt 4.6.

47. Rom 9.24.

49. Jn 15.18.

51. Cf. Jos 2.16, 22.

53. Mt 4.6.

Moses did not say, "Let the sun stand still."⁵⁴ Nor did he command the greatest elements as Jesus did. Jesus says, "Let the sun stand still over Gibeon and the moon over the valley of Ajalon." Scripture adds to this and says, "Never in this way did God listen to a man."⁵⁵

Not at that time only did my Jesus make the sun to stand, but also, and in a much greater way, at his coming.⁵⁶ When we wage war against our enemies and "fight against principalities and powers and rulers of these dark things, against the spirits of wickedness in the heavens,"⁵⁷ "the sun of our righteousness"⁵⁸ constantly stands by and never, at any time, deserts us or hastens to go down. For he himself said, "Behold, I am with you for all days."⁵⁹ He is not only with us for a doubled day, but "he is with us for all days until the end of the age," until we prevail over our adversaries.

6. But let us also see what it is that Jesus promises to his soldiers. He says, "Every place you have set the soles of your feet will be yours."⁶⁰ He had said this to those living at that time concerning the territories of the Canaanites, of the Perizzites, of the Jebusites, and of the rest of the people whose territories they seized as an inheritance after expelling the unworthy inhabitants. But let us consider what is promised to us in these words.

There are certain diabolical races of powerful adversaries against whom we wage a battle and against whom we struggle in this life. However many of these races we set under our feet, however many we conquer in battle, we shall seize their territories, their provinces, and their realms, as Jesus our Lord appor-tions them to us. For they were once angels; they were glorified in the kingdom of God.⁶¹ Or do we not read that Isaiah says of one of them, "How did Lucifer fall, the one who rose in the

54. Jos 10.12. See Procopius, *Cat in Jos* 87.1.1020D-21A.

55. Jos 10.14.

56. Cf. *Homily* 11.3.

57. Eph 6.12.

58. Mal 3.20.

59. Mt 28.20.

60. Jos 1.3.

61. For Origen's understanding of the principalities and powers that fell through their own will, see *First Principles* 1.5 and 3.2. See also Jean Daniélou, *Origen*, trans. Walter Mitchell (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), pp. 220-45.

morning?"⁶² That Lucifer, without a doubt, had a throne in the heavens until he became a fugitive angel. If I should conquer him and set him under my feet, if I should deserve that the Lord Jesus "crush Satan under my feet,"⁶³ I shall deserve as a consequence to receive the place of Lucifer in heaven.

Thus we understand the promise to us from our Lord Jesus that "every place we set the soles of our feet" will be ours. But let us not imagine that we may be able to enter into this inheritance yawning and drowsy, through ease and negligence. The wrath of his own race possesses the angel [Lucifer]. Unless you vanquish this [wrath] in yourself and cut off all violent impulses of anger and rage, you will not be able to claim as an inheritance the place that angel once had. For you will not expel him from the land of promise by your slothfulness. In like manner, some angels incite pride, jealousy, greed, and lust and instigate these evil things. Unless you gain the mastery over their vices in yourself and exterminate them from your land—which now through the grace of baptism⁶⁴ has been sanctified—you will not receive the fullness of the promised inheritance.

7. In the time of Moses it was not said, as it is in Jesus' time, that "the land rested from wars."⁶⁵ It is certain that also this land of ours, in which we have struggles and endure contests, will be able to rest from battles by the strength of the Lord Jesus alone. Within us, indeed, are all those breeds of vices that continually and incessantly attack the soul. Within us are the Canaanites; within us are the Perizzites; here are the Jebusites. In what way must we exert ourselves, how vigilant must we be or for how long must we persevere, so that when all these breeds of vices have been forced to flee, "our land may rest from wars" at last? It is for this purpose that the prophet urges that we meditate on

62. Is 14.12.

63. Rom 16.20.

64. For a study of baptism in Origen's thought see J. W. Trigg, "A Fresh Look at Origen's Understanding of Baptism," *Studia Patristica* 17.2 (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982), pp. 959-65. Trigg identifies two strands of thought: the perfectionist, which calls for a final renunciation of sin, and the pastoral, which regards freedom as a gradual process. In the *Homilies*, both ideas are present. See, e.g., *Homilies* 1.7; 4.1-2; 5.1, 3, 6; 6.1; 9.4; 26.2.

65. Jos 11.23.

the Law of the Lord day and night."⁶⁶ This continual meditation on the divine word is like some trumpet rousing your souls for battle, so that you do not sleep while the enemy is awake. Since the day is not sufficient for meditation, night is also added.

But what will you do, you who not only sleep at night but also devote the entire day to worldly occupations or carnal delights, and hardly even come to church on appointed days? Indeed, some of you, even when you come, do not come, because you spend time coming for gossip, not for the word of God.⁶⁷

On account of this, the divine word says to you, "Arise, you who sleep, arise from the dead, so that you may take hold of Christ."⁶⁸ "Rise from the dead" is said to those who continue in the works of death, persisting in their filthiness and heinous ways that, although they are not evident to human beings, are known to God. Repent of this and turn back to the Lord with your whole heart. Spend time in prayers. Spend time in the Word of God. What good is it if we fast for our sins and then commit them again? What good is it to wash and then wallow again in the mire? Have you fasted for some time? This is just as if you have marched away from Egypt for a while. You have crossed the Red Sea, and you have followed Moses by observing the precepts and commandments of the Law. But now Jesus receives you from Moses and even circumcises you a second time in the place that is called "the hill of foreskins."⁶⁹ It is not only the worship of idols that you cast away in the beginning that needs to be circumcised, but greed, which is a more subtle worship of idols, you must circumcise anew.

Therefore Jesus, circumcising the people with a second circumcision, says, "Today I have taken away from you the reproach of Egypt."⁷⁰ As long as we sin, as long as the vices of the

66. Ps 1.2.

67. See Introduction, pp. 19–20, concerning the laxity of some of the Christians in Origen's latter days. Cf. *Homilies on Genesis* 10.1, 11.3; *Homilies on Exodus* 12.2, 13.3.

68. Eph 5.14.

69. Jos 5.3. For the crossing of the Red Sea and the crossing of the Jordan as images of baptism, see *Homily* 4.1 n. 7. For the second circumcision, see *Homilies* 5.5–6 and 6.1.

70. Jos 5.9.

passions reign in us (even if by forsaking images we may seem to have departed from Egypt), "nevertheless, the reproach of Egypt" has not been taken away from us.

If therefore you receive this second circumcision of the vices and cut off every defect of wrath, pride, jealousy, lust, greed, partiality, and other such things from yourself, then the reproaches of Egypt are wiped away from you and, transported to the land of promise, you will receive the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven through the true Jesus, Christ our Lord and Savior, "to whom is glory forever and ever. Amen."⁷¹

71. Gal 1.5. Origen uses some such closing for each of the *Homilies*. Other times he uses 1 Pt 4.11 or Rev 5.13, or a combination of the two.

Certainly these deeds, according to history, proclaim the wonders of the divine power to all ages, and, since their light flashes from within, they do not need interpretation from without. But, nevertheless, let us inquire what the spiritual interpretation finds within these things.

2. There is no doubt that when a human soul associates itself with the Word of God, it is immediately going to have enemies, and that those it once considered friends will be changed into adversaries. The soul should not only expect to suffer this from humans, but it should also know that such will likewise be forthcoming from opposing powers and spiritual iniquities. Thus it happens that whoever longs for friendship with Jesus knows he must tolerate the hostilities of many. Hear the apostle Paul confirming these same things when he says, "All who wish to live piously in Christ will suffer persecution."⁵ But also Solomon says similar things, "My son, he says, "when you draw near for the service of the Lord, prepare your soul for temptation."⁶

Even now, therefore, the Gibeonites, such as they are, are assailed because of friendship with Jesus, even though they are "hewers of wood and carriers of water." That is, although you are the least worthy in the Church, nevertheless, because you belong to Jesus, you will be assailed by five kings.

The Gibeonites, however, are not abandoned or scorned by Jesus or by the leaders and elders of the Israelites; instead they offer help for their weakness.

Does it not seem to you that the commandment of the Apostle aims at this in us and anticipates this, where he says, "Comfort the fainthearted, sustain the weak, and be patient toward all,"⁷ and again, "But you, the stronger, put up with the feebleness of the weak?"⁸ In this manner, therefore, Jesus with his chiefs and princes comes to those who are attacked for his name by opposing powers, and not only does he furnish assistance in war, but he also extends the length of the day and, prolonging the extent of light, dispels the approaching night.

3. Therefore, if we are able, we want to disclose how our

5. 2 Tm 3.12.

6. Sir 2.1.

7. 1 Thes 5.14.

8. Rom 15.1.

HOMILY 11

*Concerning the auxiliary troops of Jesus by which he helped the Gibeonites; and how he made the sun and the moon to stand still.*¹

AFTER THE FRIENDSHIP and association with the sons of Israel, all those who at first were friends became enemies to those who united themselves to the sons of Israel. Jebus, king of Jerusalem,² after summoning the other four kings as allies, undertakes to assault the Gibeonites, who had received a pact of peace from the sons of Israel. But when the Gibeonites see that five kings had conspired against them for battle, they do not rely on their own strength and forces, but send for Jesus, asking for auxiliary troops. And, with divine permission, Jesus appears, hastening to bring aid to the Gibeonites.³ At this point, wondrous deeds are displayed from heaven. The Lord rains large hailstones from above and devastates the army of the five kings who were fighting against Jesus. But when Jesus sees the divine right hand fighting with him and everything progressing with favorable results, he lifts up a certain unusual and extraordinary prayer to heaven saying, "Let the sun stand still above Gibeon and the moon above the valley of Aijalon until I subdue this people." And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed in its place, until the Lord completely defeated their enemies. The sun stood in the middle of heaven and did not go down for a whole day. There was not such a day before this, nor did God ever so listen to a person. For the Lord fought for Israel. And the five kings fled and hid themselves in the cave at Makkedah.⁴

1. Focal passage: Jos 10:1–16.

2. The name Jebus refers to the Jebusites, the clan that controlled Jerusalem. Their king at this time was Adonizedek, though it is possible some sources identified him as Jebus. The name is correctly given in section 5.

3. Jos 10:1–11.

4. Jos 10:12–16.

Lord Jesus prolonged the light and made a longer day, both for the salvation of humans and for the destruction of opposing powers.

Immediately after the Savior appeared, it was already the end of the world. Even he himself said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near."⁹ But he restrained and checked the day of consummation and forbade it to come. For God the Father, seeing that the salvation of the nations can be established only through him, says to him, "Ask from me, and I shall give you the nations for your inheritance and the ends of the earth for your possession."¹⁰

Therefore, until the promise of the Father is fulfilled and the churches spring forth in the various nations and "the whole fullness of the nations" enter so that then "all Israel may be saved,"¹¹ the day is lengthened and the setting is deferred and the sun never sinks down but always rises as long as "the sun of righteousness"¹² pours the light of truth into the hearts of believers. But when the measure of believers is complete and the already weaker and depraved age of the final generation arrives, when "the love of many persons will grow cold by increasing iniquity"¹³ and very few persons remain in whom faith is found, then "the days will be shortened."¹⁴

In the same way, therefore, the Lord knows to extend the day when it is time for salvation and to shorten the day when it is time for tribulation and destruction. We, however, while we have the day and the extent of light is lengthened for us, "let us walk becomingly as in the day"¹⁵ and let us perform the works of light.

4- But let us also see what it means when it says there were five kings and they fled into caves.¹⁶

We have often said the battle of Christians is twofold. Indeed, for those who are perfect, such as Paul and the Ephesians, it was not, as the Apostle himself says, "a battle against flesh and blood, but against principalities and authorities,

9. Mt 4.17.

11. Rom 11.25-26.

13. Mt 24.12.

15. Rom 13.13.

10. Ps 2.8.

12. Mal 3.20. See *Homily* 8.7 n. 53.

14. Mt 24.22.

16. Jos 10.16.

against the rulers of darkness in this world and spiritual forces of iniquity in the heavens."¹⁷ But for the weaker ones and those not yet mature, the battle is still waged against flesh and blood, for those are still assaulted by carnal faults and frailties.

I think this is indicated even in this passage; for we said that a war was declared by five kings against the Gibeonites, whose figure I maintained was of those who are immature.¹⁸ These, therefore, are assaulted by five kings. Now these five kings indicate the five corporeal senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell; for it must be through one of these that each person falls away into sin. These five senses are compared to those five kings who fight the Gibeonites, that is, carnal persons.¹⁹

That they are said to have fled into caves can be indicated, perhaps, because a cave is a place buried in the depths of the earth. Therefore, those senses that we mentioned above are said to have fled into caves when, after being placed in the body, they immerse themselves in earthly impulses and do nothing for the work of God but all for the service of the body.

5. Nevertheless, we must understand that those kingdoms, whose kings are now conquered by Jesus and are taking refuge in the caves, afterwards come into the share of the saints and are called the portion of the Lord, such as the kingdom of Jerusalem or Lachish or Hebron. I think this indicates the fact that even these five senses that we explained above are deposited in the body, when they are subdued through Jesus so that infidelity and disbelief are expelled from them and when their sins die so that they desist from the service of sin, then the soul uses these very servants to work the righteousness of God. And so it happens that Jerusalem, where a faulty and very wicked king first reigned, is later ruled by the strong hand of David or the peaceful Solomon.²⁰

And indeed these malignant powers lay siege to peoples'

17. Eph 6.12. Concerning the battles being gauged according to a person's strength, see *Homilies on Numbers* 7.5 and *First Principles* 3.2.3.

18. See *Homily* 10.1.

19. See *Homilies on Genesis* 16.6 and *Homilies on Numbers* 5.2. Philo also used the number five as a symbol of the senses (*On Planting* 133).

20. In *Stromateis* 4.25, Clement of Alexandria emphasized righteousness as this peace of life and stability. Concerning Solomon as "peace," see Wurtz, *Onomastica sacra*, 1:109, and Philo, *On the Preliminary Studies* 177.

very bodily senses, of which we have spoken, that they may entice them to exhibit evil desires and shameful works of the soul. If faith in Christ overcomes those malignant powers and they are suspended on the wood of his cross so that “he triumphs” over them “on the wood of his cross”²¹ and they are taken away from his kingdom and cast down, then the soul becomes God’s portion, then Jerusalem becomes God’s kingdom, and the temple is built in it for the Lord.

Did not he discern this, who said, “Once we ourselves were unperceiving, unbelieving, erring, serving various desires and pleasures”²² For this is nothing but the fact that Jerusalem is written to have been once under the king Adonizedek, or other cities under other kings.

6. But meanwhile Jesus destroyed the enemies, not teaching cruelly through this, as the heretics think, but representing the future sacraments in these affairs, so that when Jesus destroys those kings who maintain a reign of sin in us, we can fulfill that which the Apostle said, “Just as we presented our members to serve iniquity for iniquity, so now let us present our members to serve righteousness for sanctification.”²³

What is it then that is condemned by them in this place as cruelty? It is this, it says, that is written, “Set your feet upon their necks and slay them.”²⁴ But this is discovered to be humanness and kindness, not cruelty, is it not?

Would that you might be the sort of person who can “set your feet upon serpents and scorpions and upon every hostile power”²⁵ and “tread underfoot the dragon and the lizard,”²⁶ the petty king who once reigned in you and maintained in you a kingdom of sin. Thus, with all those destroyed who used to rule in you by the work of sin, Christ Jesus our Lord alone will reign in you, “to whom is the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen!”²⁷

21. Col 2.14–15.

23. Rom 6.19.

25. Lk 10.19.

26. Ps 91.13. The type of crested lizard mentioned is the basilisk. The Latin word is *basiliscus*, taken from the Greek βασιλεῖς. In the Greek, therefore, there would have been a play on words, since “petty king” [*regulum*] is βασιλισκός in Greek, a diminutive of βασιλεῖς.

27. 1 Pt 4.11.

22. Ti 3.3.

24. Jos 10.24.

HOMILY 12

*Concerning the fact that the wars that Jesus waged ought to be understood spiritually and that when the people returned after the victory they did not mutter with their tongue.*¹

F THOSE THINGS that were dimly sketched through Moses concerning the tabernacle or the sacrifices and the entire worship are said to be a “type and shadow of heavenly things,”² doubtless the wars that are waged through Jesus, and the slaughter of kings and enemies must also be said to be “a shadow and type of heavenly things,” namely, of those wars that our Lord Jesus with his army and officers—that is, the throngs of believers and their leaders—fights against the Devil and his angels. For it is he himself who strives with Paul and with the Ephesians “against sovereigns and authorities and the rulers of darkness, against spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places.”³

Consider, ungrateful heretic, how the new things harmonize fully with the old.⁴ The kingdom of a holy land was promised by the old, “a land pouring forth milk and honey,”⁵ a land that was then held by sinners and the worst inhabitants and kings. Jesus comes into this land with the army of the Lord and the leaders of the Israelites; he subdues all, destroys, and prevails, and for the reward of victory, he receives the kingdoms of those whom he conquered.

The kingdoms of earth are not promised to you by the Gos-

1. Focal passage: Jos 10.20–26.

2. Cf. Heb 8.5.

3. Eph 6.12.

4. For Origen’s emphasis on the harmony of the Old and New Testaments, see *Homilies on Genesis* 10.5. See also *Homily 7.2* and *Commentary on Matthew* 14.4.

5. Lv 20.24.

pels, but kingdoms of heaven. These kingdoms, however, are neither deserted nor abandoned; they have their own inhabitants, sinners and vile spirits, fugitive angels. Paul, sounding the apostolic trumpet, exhorts you to the battle against those who dwell there. Just as Jesus said then that your war would be against the Amorites and Perizzites and Hivites and Jebusites, likewise Paul also declares to you here, saying, "Your fight will not be against flesh and blood," that is, we shall not fight in the same manner as the ancients fought. Nor are the battles in our land to be conducted against humans "but against sovereigns, against authorities, against the rulers of darkness of this world."⁶ Certainly you understand now where you must undertake struggles of this kind. Or if this understanding is not enough for you, unless the places are clearly indicated to you by an utterance, listen to the following words: "Against spiritual forces of wickedness," it says, "in the heavenly places." You have heard whom you are to expel from the heavenly places by war and by force, so that you yourself can receive those places of the kingdom of heaven in a share of the inheritance. But does not the Lord also plainly indicate this in the Gospel when he says, "From the days of John the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and those committing violence seize it?"⁷

2. Therefore, why do you delay, O heretic, to also make malicious charges against our Lord and Savior, "who commands the kingdom of heaven," which he had promised to those who believe in him, "to be seized through violence"? By all means, if force must be used, it must certainly be used by those who are taking possession. For to commit violence is to expel the possessor and to seize the possession. Declare, therefore, what else you accuse Jesus the successor of Moses to have done.

Indeed, would that we might be worthy for the Lord Jesus to throw open the courtyard of his wisdom and bring us into the treasure vaults of his knowledge and deem it fitting to reveal

6. Eph 6.12.

7. Mt 11.12. Origen has two lines of interpretation concerning spiritual battles. The battles of the Israelites are shadows of the Christians' battles while placed in this life. These in turn also indicate heavenly battles. Concerning the places of the rulers of darkness being given to the Christians, see *Homily* 1.6.

more fully to us and uncover more completely those things whose figures we now haltingly try to behold in part and examine "as if through a mirror and in a riddle."⁸ As it would become clear to us, you would see from these spiritual enemies who now assail spiritual Israel whose figure this chief of "Magedah" primarily represented, and that of "Lachish" and of "Libnah."⁹ You would see within your very self the symbol of vice or error by which your soul is entangled, the symbol that each of those hold whom the people of the Lord with their leader Jesus destroyed. The people of the Lord are clearly those who hear his commands and observe the precepts, and to whom he has granted "the ability to tread over serpents and scorpions and over every authority of the foe."¹⁰ Therefore, let us pray that our feet may be like this, so beautiful¹¹ and strong that they can tread on the necks of foes and tread upon the head of the serpent so that it cannot bite our heel.¹²

Whoever fights under the leadership of Jesus against opposing authorities ought to merit that which is written about those former warriors: "And the whole people," it says, "returned safely to Jesus and not one of the sons of Israel muttered with his tongue."¹³ You see, therefore, that the person who serves as a soldier under Jesus must come back safely from battle and ought not even receive a wound "from the fiery darts of the wicked one";¹⁴ he ought to be neither polluted in heart nor defiled in thought, and ought not allow any place for demonic wounds—not through wrath, lust, or any other occasion.

Moreover, what is added, "No one muttered with his tongue," seems to me to have been expressed because no one boasted about the victory, no one attributed it to his own power that he conquered. Indeed, knowing that it is Jesus who bestowed the victory, they do not mutter with their tongue. Understanding that well, the Apostle said, "Not I, but the grace of God that is in me."¹⁵ I think, in addition, that he has in mind that command of the Lord in which he said, "But when you have

8. 1 Cor 13.12.

10. Lk 10.19.

12. Gn 3.15.

14. Eph 6.16.

9. Jos 10.10, 23, 31.

11. Rom 10.15; Is 52.7.

13. Jos 10.21.

15. 1 Cor 15.10.

done all these things, say, 'We are unprofitable servants; we have only done what we should have done.'¹⁶ For in this similar manner he also seems to prohibit boasting about things well done.

3. But Marcion and Valentinus and Basilides and the other heretics with them, since they refuse to understand these things in a manner worthy of the Holy Spirit, "deviated from the faith and became devoted to many impieties,"¹⁷ bringing forth another God of the Law, both creator and judge of the world, who teaches a certain cruelty through these things that are written. For example, they are ordered to trample upon the necks of their enemies and to suspend from wood the kings of that land that they violently invade.¹⁸

And yet, if only my Lord Jesus the Son of God would grant that to me and order me to crush the spirit of fornication with my feet and trample upon the necks of the spirit of wrath and rage, to trample on the demon of avarice, to trample down boasting, to crush the spirit of arrogance with my feet, and, when I have done all these things, not to hang the most exalted of these exploits upon myself, but upon his cross. Thereby I imitate Paul, who says, "the world is crucified to me,"¹⁹ and, that which we have already related above, "Not I, but the grace of God that is in me."²⁰

But if I deserve to act thus, I shall be blessed and what Jesus said to the ancients will also be said to me, "Go courageously and be strengthened; do not be afraid nor be awed by their appearance, because the Lord God has delivered all your enemies into your hands."²¹ If we understand these things spiritually and manage wars of this type spiritually and if we drive out all those

¹⁶ Lk 17.10.

¹⁷ 1 Tm 6.10.

¹⁸ Jos 10.24-26. Marcion and the Gnostics were offended by the violence and denied that the God of the Old Testament could be the Father of Jesus. Origen used allegory to spiritualize the battles and counter their arguments, but also, as in this section, he found evidence even in the New Testament for violence in the heavens. See Harnack's discussion in *Militia Christi*, trans. David McInnes Gracie (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), pp. 46-53.

¹⁹ Gal 6.14.

²⁰ 1 Cor 15.10.

²¹ Jos 10.25.

spiritual iniquities from heaven, then we shall be able at last to receive from Jesus as a share of the inheritance even those places and kingdoms that are the kingdoms of heaven, bestowed by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, "to whom is the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen!"²²

²² 1 Pt 4.11.

Gregory of Nyssa's Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms

Introduction, Translation, and Notes

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the things forbidden by the commandment and hid himself from shame in the shadow of the fig tree. When, therefore, he has again received boldness, he is restored to *the living light*. For '*I shall be pleasing to the Lord*', he says, '*in the light of the living*',³⁹⁸ whence he was banished at the beginning because of sin. And there are so many things about these matters. For I do not think it is necessary to prolong our treatise to excess by scrutinizing the matters related to each point laboriously.

(223) But since there are many psalms of victory in the sacred songs, which the inscription about *the end* indicates, and the victory against the rivals is contemplated in various ways in these psalms, the victory against the wrestling opponent which is signified through the figures of the story appears to have a specific message, I mean in this story in which the events concerning Saul are related. The order of these psalms is not based on the sequence of the historical events, but has followed those being perfected according to their progress through virtue. Each of the things which is made known in the events is appropriately applied to an indication of the growth related to virtue. The things which are first and those which are last have been arranged sequentially according to the logic³⁹⁹ of virtue, and the order is not subject to the material occurrence of the events.

(224) This is why the coming together of Saul, who was in pursuit of murder, and of David, who was shunning murder, in the *cave* is described after many events which it had preceded. The authority to kill was reversed in this event, since the one who was being pursued for execution had authority over the slaughter of his killer, and although he had the right, so far as retribution against his enemy was concerned, he stayed his power so far as consisted with the right and killed his own anger in himself instead of his enemy.⁴⁰⁰

(225) These points of the story, then, are certainly evident to all who do not study the divine words in a cursory manner. We will tell the story, however, in a few words, shortening the tale concerning this into as small a space as possible

(226) There was a *wilderness* area in Judaea in which David encamped out of necessity when he was being pursued, and in this *wilderness* there was a roomy *cave* with a single entrance. Now

³⁹⁸ Ps. 55: 14.

³⁹⁹ *Λόγος*.

⁴⁰⁰ 1 Kgs. 24: 4-8; Ps. 56: 1.

when Saul was searching for David, and was combing the wilderness with his whole army, David and those with him fled into the cave by necessity. And while these men were already in the cave, Saul, too, entered the mouth after them, to *prepare himself* for one of those things which have to be done, unaware of the command concerning his salvation which spontaneously came to pass.

(227) When, therefore, he was alone and had removed his *robe* and laid it down somewhere beside him, the light from the mouth of the cave made him visible to those hidden within in the darkness. All of David's companions wanted to rush upon the enemy, and avenge themselves on the one who had come to kill them, since God had given the enemy into the hands of those who were being pursued for slaughter. But David forbid them to attack, considering an assault against their king unlawful. He drew his own sword from its sheath and imperceptibly stood behind Saul. There was no witness to his undertaking against Saul, for the darkness in the cave concealed his appearance and prevented scrutiny of what was happening. When, then, he could have driven his whole sword through Saul's heart from behind with one blow, he neither touched his body nor was he about to. But he secretly cut off the *end of his robe* with his sword, so that the garment might be a witness later of his clemency towards Saul, and prove the power that he had had to strike a blow against Saul's body by means of the cut at its end.

(228) By this it became obvious that David had been trained in forbearance. When he held the bare sword in his palm, and the body of his enemy lay under his hand, he had the power to kill him, but he conquered his anger with reason, and his power to strike the blow with the fear of God. Not only did he become superior to his own anger, but he also restrained his shield-bearer who was eager to murder Saul, addressing him with that saying famous in song, *Destroy not the anointed of the Lord*.⁴⁰¹

(229) Saul, therefore, came forth from the *cave* unaware of what had happened, wearing the little garment which had been trimmed all around. David came out behind him in self-assurance, and having seized the hill lying above the cave in advance, held forth

⁴⁰¹ 1 Kgs. 26: 9. Gregory has here conflated the story in 1 Kgs. 26: 1 ff. with that in 1 Kgs. 24: 1 ff. The story which he has been relating in the preceding lines comes from 1 Kgs. 24: 1 ff. and not from 1 Kgs. 26: 1–12 to which McDonough has referred it.

the *end* [of Saul's robe] in his hand. This was nothing other than a bloodless trophy against his enemies. And he cried out to Saul in a loud voice, and told him about this new and marvellous heroism, which was unstained by the defilement of blood, in which the hero was victorious, and the one worsted was saved from death. For David's excellence is not attested in the fall of his enemy, but the superiority of his power is made clearer in the salvation of his opponent from danger. He had such an excess of confidence that he did not think that his own salvation lay in the destruction of those arrayed against him, but even when those who plotted against him survived he was confident that no one would harm him.

(230) But the Word teaches rather by this story that the one who excels in virtue does not fight bravely against those of his own race, but fights against the passions. The anger in both men, then, was destroyed by such excellence as David had, in the one, when he destroyed his own wrath by means of reason and quenched the urge to take vengeance, and in the other, when Saul put to death his evil against David because of the clemency which he had experienced. For one can learn from the story itself the kind of things Saul uttered afterwards to the victor when he was submerged in shame for what he had undertaken, and demonstrated his spontaneous turning away from evil by his lament and tears.⁴⁰²

(231) This, then, is the occasion of the fifty-sixth Psalm, so far as the events revealed by the story are concerned. But the words themselves of the inscription through which the incident related to the cave is made known are as follows. '*Unto the end, destroy not, for David, for an inscription of a title, when he fled from Saul into the cave*.'⁴⁰³ But so that the thoughts of the psalm might be accommodated to the words in the inscription, it would be appropriate for us briefly to go through the inspired words to perceive the spiritual sense in them.

(232) '*Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, because my soul has trusted in you, and I will hope in the shadow of your wings until iniquity pass away*.'⁴⁰⁴ The psalmist prays that the divine mercy be given in exchange for his confidence in God and his firm hope in him, '*Until*', he says, '*iniquity pass away*.' Now so that the thought may become more obvious to us, we will treat the argument

⁴⁰² 1 Kgs. 24: 17 ff.

⁴⁰³ Ps. 56: 1.

⁴⁰⁴ Ps. 56: 2.

as follows. The nature of sin is unstable and transient. It neither came into existence at the first with the creation from the one who conceived the universe and invested it with being, nor does it continue to exist into perpetuity with the things which have being. For some things have being from the one who is being and continue always in being. But if something is outside the one who is being, its essence is not in being, but it has its substance in not being in respect to good. This is the *grass on the house top*,⁴⁰⁵ without roots, 'unsown and without tillage'.⁴⁰⁶ Even if it is an annoyance for the present with its unsubstantial growth, nevertheless it will *pass away* and disappear at the proper times, when the universe is restored to the good, so that no trace of the evil which now prevails over us remains in the life which lies before us in hope. For 'yet a little while', he says, 'and the sinner will not be, and you will seek his place, and it will not be found'.⁴⁰⁷

(233) The Word, therefore, in the opening words of the psalm, carries out a philosophical investigation into the nature of evil with doctrines that are sublime. For he teaches that we have need of the alliance of *mercy* until that time when *the iniquity* which resides wickedly in life should *pass away* from our life. And *trusting* in the power of our ally and being fully armed in *the shadow of God's wings* bestow such an alliance on us.

(234) Now one will not err if he thinks that the virtues are the *shadow of the divine wings* which serves as a covering for us. For, on the one hand, the divine itself, whatever it is in nature, remains unattainable and incomprehensible to human nature, flying ineffably somewhere above the thought of humanity. But, on the other hand, an impress of the ineffable nature through the shadow-outline⁴⁰⁸ of the virtues occurs in those who look to it, i.e. all wisdom and prudence and knowledge and every approach of thought which conveys direct apprehension are not themselves the divine wings, but are the *shadow of the divine wings*.

(235) Now this is a great benefit to us even if it is a *shadow*. For 'I shall cry', he says, 'to God the most high, to the God who has

⁴⁰⁵ Ps. 128: 6; Isa. 37: 27.

⁴⁰⁶ Homer, *Od.* 9. 123.

⁴⁰⁷ Ps. 36: 10.

⁴⁰⁸ Gregory's word is *σκιαιπνοφία*, chosen, probably, because of the word *σκιά* (shadow) in Ps. 56: 2. Plato had also spoken of the *σκιαιπνοφία* of virtue (*Resp.* 365c; *Phd.* 69b), though for him it was a negative concept, i.e. a façade as opposed to real virtue.

benefited me' by means of this *shadow* which he *sent* from *on high* to my life below.⁴⁰⁹ For 'he saved me'⁴¹⁰ through the Spirit which *overshadowed* (me) *in the cloud*,⁴¹¹ and he has now driven those who *trod upon* (me) in the previous psalms back into the rank of those who are *reproached*.⁴¹²

(236) For 'God sent his mercy and his truth, and delivered my soul from the midst of the young lions'.⁴¹³ Now sins were truly young lions for me formerly, or whelps of lions, which tore [me] in pieces with their fearful gaping mouths and their pointed claws. But the allies came, *mercy* and *truth*, that lovely pair. For mercy is not without judgement, nor is truth without mercy. And by means of these I am set free from my way of life with the young lions.

(237) Now these beasts, he says, are 'sons of men, whose teeth are weapons and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword'.⁴¹⁴ The constitution of our nature does not know these perceptible arrows which lie in human mouths in place of teeth, but whenever one becomes like the passion, and has been transformed into the prevailing evil, he loses his natural form and becomes a beast. This is why, when he has mentioned lions, he designates the beasts *sons of men, whose teeth and tongue* are instruments of war.

(238) He, then, who has been lifted so far above those who oppose him, so that he encamps under the *shadow* of the divine wings, and is taken up from the earth into the heavenly sphere (for he says, 'He sent from heaven and saved me')⁴¹⁵ no longer looks to the things of the earth, but is occupied with the glory in the heavenly places, saying, 'Be exalted, O God, above the heavens, and your glory above all the earth'.⁴¹⁶

(239) When he describes the attacks of his enemies, he says that they are turned round on themselves by their own evils and fall into the pits. For he says, 'They prepared a snare for my feet, and bowed down my soul. They dug a pit before my face, and fell into it'.⁴¹⁷

⁴⁰⁹ Ps. 56: 3-4.

⁴¹⁰ Ps. 56: 4.

⁴¹¹ Cf. Exod. 40: 35; Matt. 17: 5 and parallels.

⁴¹² Ps. 56: 4.

⁴¹³ Ps. 56: 4-5.

⁴¹⁴ Ps. 56: 5.

⁴¹⁵ Ps. 56: 4.

⁴¹⁶ Ps. 56: 6.

⁴¹⁷ Ps. 56: 7.

(240) But he says that he is *ready* to sing of the divine glory in praise.⁴¹⁸ How blessed is that person of so great nobility whose heart has been *prepared* for praise of the divine glory, since it contains in itself that which cannot be contained. He says that he is *prepared* and *ready*, and does not begin to sing the song, but summons his own living instruments, calling them by name to the service of singing praise, saying, '*Arise psaltery and harp*.'⁴¹⁹ This proves the harmonious concord for the divine praise of the twofold person, i.e. the manifest and the hidden person, and corresponds to the one naming the instruments.

(241) Now the proper time for such music is *early*. For the glory of God does not arise in one who has not laid aside the works of darkness. Therefore, he says to the one calling '*Psalterly and harp*', '*I will arise early*.'⁴²⁰ In this way he promises to perform thanksgiving to God, which he calls *exomologēsis*,⁴²¹ which is performed *among the peoples and nations*.⁴²²

(242) For the gift of faith is distributed equally to these two, both to the *peoples*, and the *nations*. For he is not '*God of the Jews only*', but also '*of the nations*'.⁴²³ '*Since it is one God who will justify the circumcision from faith, and the uncircumcision through faith*',⁴²⁴ because the divine blessing was poured out upon both like a twofold stream, at one time being distributed to the *peoples*, at another to the *nations*, the prophecy offers thanksgiving to God for both, because when sin had increased to infinity, the mercy of God exceeded it in its own magnitude, becoming higher than the height of heaven itself. For he says, '*Your mercy is great above the heavens*'.⁴²⁵

(243) And I think the final words of the psalm are the words of praise for these, in which he says, '*Be exalted, O God, above the heavens, and your glory above all the earth*.' For to the extent that the glory of God abounds on earth, being increased through those who are being saved by faith, to this extent the powers above the

⁴¹⁸ Ps. 56: 8.

⁴¹⁹ Ps. 56: 9.

⁴²⁰ Ps. 56: 9.

⁴²¹ See I. 79 above.

⁴²² Ps. 56: 10.

⁴²³ Rom. 3: 29.

⁴²⁴ Rom. 3: 30.

⁴²⁵ These words are found in Ps. 107: 5, but Gregory must intend them here to represent the words of Ps. 56: 11a, '*Your mercy is magnified unto the heavens*'.

cosmos rejoice in our salvation and praise and glorify God, just as the *heavenly host* says in the case of the *shepherds*, when the *angels* saw the *peace on earth* which appeared for *goodwill among men* in our life, '*Glory to God in the highest*'.⁴²⁶

Chapter XV

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(244) It is possible to learn from the things which have been written themselves to what extent the excellent succession surpasses this sublimity of the Psalter in being more magnificent. In the case of runners, the one who outran the one who won over the others won a greater glory than the former, because he was shown to be better than the one who ran first. In the same way, although the psalm treated previously was shown to be great in its conception, the fifty-seventh Psalm seems to conquer it with the nobility in its own thoughts. For as that psalm held the prizes of victory against the others, so this one has the advantage over the one which excels the others. For indeed, the inscription, '*Unto the end*', testifies to the victory for this psalm.⁴²⁷ But, in the case of this victory, the Word seems to attest not so much the defeat of rivals, but the superabundance in good things.

(245) The text of the inscription is as follows. '*Unto the end, destroy not, for David, for an inscription of a title*'.⁴²⁸ How many times does the judge of the contest himself extol the champion of patience for the crown of this victory? Perhaps even the Holy Spirit himself often recalls this word in astonishment, since the word is superior to the capacity of mankind, and exceeds the boundaries of human nature. For one could say such a thing of the incorporeal and immaterial nature alone, to which no human passion pertains. But he was a man, and anger was an essential part of his nature. He had suffered badly from one who had received no occasion for evil, but who had been considered worthy of good things which were numerous and great. And because of the rule which they held in common, and the things which had happened to that man

⁴²⁶ Luke 2: 14.

⁴²⁷ Ps. 57: 1.

⁴²⁸ Ps. 57: 1.

himself,⁴²⁹ this man became a wanderer before the very man who had obtained beneficence; he became a fugitive from his own home under penalty of death, forced out by the one who had been benefited.

(246) On another occasion, when he was fleeing to the mountain ridges, having become a suppliant of foreigners, and was in distress from want of supplies, he came upon another place from lack of resources, and encamped in the wilderness. He was patiently bearing many things openly, having frequently submitted to danger even to death from him who had rushed to murder him with his own hand by means of a spear,⁴³⁰ and who, again, seized the house in which he was staying by means of spearmen,⁴³¹ so that he might not escape death. Next he inquired everywhere (to learn) in what places he was camping, and where he was fleeing, and in whose company he was travelling, and to whom he was migrating. After that, the opportunity to kill the enemy presented itself to him twice. Once in the cave Saul fell into David's hands unawares, and again in the tent when he was relaxed in sleep. David stood over him when he was asleep, and when he could have satisfied all his anger by murdering the one who pursued him, he did not lay a hand on him himself, and he said to the one eager for the kill, '*Destroy not*'.⁴³² The voice which prevents destruction in the case of this man is obviously the voice of God.

(247) For this reason, just as those who produce the more notable inscriptions on stones cut the characters deeply by frequently applying the chisel with blows to the carving of the letters, so the Holy Spirit contrives, by means of continuous repetition, that this great saying may become more distinct and quite clear on the stela of our memory, so that this inscription, having been carved in us

⁴²⁹ These two phrases are very obscure in Gregory's text, both as to their precise meaning in and of themselves, and concerning their syntactical relationship to the sentence. Syntactically, they could go either with what immediately precedes (the Greek text is one long sentence from the words, 'But he was a man', to the words, 'forced out by the one who had been benefited'), or with what follows. I have taken them with what follows, as they seem to me to make no sense with what precedes. The other ambiguity is the word which I have translated 'rule'. It could also be translated 'origin'. I have taken it to be an allusion to the fact that David had already been anointed to be king of Israel (See II. 266).

⁴³⁰ I Kgs. 19: 9–10.

⁴³¹ I Kgs. 19: 11.

⁴³² I Kgs. 26: 9. The exact words are found in the LXX text of Origen and Lucian.

distinctly and without confusion, might be known well in the time of misfortunes. For, in my opinion, the goal of the economy of the Holy Spirit is to set forth the previous accomplishments of holy men for guidance for the life after these accomplishments, the representation leading us forward to good which is equal and similar. For whenever the soul swells with revenge against someone who is provoking it, and the blood around the heart boils with anger against the one who has grieved the soul, then, when one has looked up at this stela which the Holy Spirit set up for David, and has read the word on it which David uttered on behalf of him who was eager for his own blood, he will not fail to calm the troubled thoughts in his soul, and appease his passion by his desire to imitate the same things.

(248) It is possible also, in respect to the greatness of the one who has progressively ascended to the step of this psalm, to look down through the words themselves of the psalm on how much past greatness he has excelled. For he no longer complains that he is *trodden on by enemies*,⁴³³ nor does he draw *mercy* into alliance,⁴³⁴ but since he is now on high, he cries out these words critically, as from some lofty hilltop, to those spending their lives in the valleys below at the foot of the mountain of human life, and says, Men, What are you *saying* and doing? Is what is being *said justice*? Do you apply *judgement rightly*?⁴³⁵ Furthermore, I see that your *hearts* are in the *earth*, and that every movement in your *heart* is a *work* and not a thought. For at the same time evil comes into existence in your understanding, the *work* is *interwoven* with the thoughts by means of your *hands*.⁴³⁶ Having paraphrased these matters of the text of the psalm a little for the sake of clarity, I set forth the words which are as follows. '*If truly then you speak justice, judge right things, sons of men. For in your heart you work iniquity in the earth. Your hands weave injustice.*'⁴³⁷ Then, complaining about those who have fallen away from salvation, he adds the words after these, saying, '*Sinners are alienated from the womb; they have gone astray from the womb.*'⁴³⁸

⁴³³ Ps. 55: 3.

⁴³⁴ Ps. 56: 2.

⁴³⁵ Ps. 57: 2.

⁴³⁶ Ps. 57: 3.

⁴³⁷ Ps. 57: 2–3.

⁴³⁸ Ps. 57: 4.

(249) You would understand what has been said, if you had investigated what the first *womb* of human existence is, and what *womb* has been pregnant with humanity. For I think it is nothing other than the beneficence and goodness of God, from which we were formed and begotten. For 'he who formed their hearts individually',⁴³⁹ said, 'Let us make man according to our image and likeness.'⁴⁴⁰ Again he says, 'I have begotten sons, and exalted them, and they have rejected me.'⁴⁴¹ And countless numbers of such statements can be collected from the Holy Scripture, through which one can come to know what the *womb* is which formed us, and what the *womb* is which brought us into the light through birth.

(250) Looking to these matters, then, the one who is complaining laments the loss of those who have departed, for the word with which he bewails the *sinners* is obviously a dirge. How '*sinners are alienated from the womb*', he says, how '*they have gone astray from the womb*', having honoured *falsehood* more than truth, whose *madness* has a likeness to the father of *falsehood*, the first serpent.⁴⁴² 'Like the deaf asp which stops her ears, which will not hear the voice of the charmers', when she is being wisely bewitched.⁴⁴³ For those who are wise concerning these matters have observed this nature of the beast. She swells with anger and retains the breath in her throat, and swelling all around like a bag by the retention of the breath she does not let it go, so that all the charms of beasts which have been discovered by those wise in such matters remain useless and ineffective in her case due to a natural counteraction. Now he grants us to understand through these words that the heart of those who are held by evil continues unhearing, when healing is brought to them by teachers.

(251) And everything which follows in the psalm has been uttered as a dirge by the one who bemoans the destruction of the wretched. For he predicts what will be bestowed on them, when he says, 'God will crush their teeth in their mouth.'⁴⁴⁴ What sort of teeth? Clearly those eaters of the fruit of disobedience, those servants of the pleasures of the belly (which he called *weapons and arrows* in the

⁴³⁹ Ps. 32: 15.

⁴⁴⁰ Gen. 1: 26.

⁴⁴¹ Isa. 1: 2.

⁴⁴² Ps. 57: 4-5; John 8: 44; Gen. 3: 1 ff.

⁴⁴³ Ps. 57: 5-6.

⁴⁴⁴ Ps. 57: 7.

preceding psalm)⁴⁴⁵ by which the word of truth⁴⁴⁶ is torn to pieces.

(252) And 'the Lord has broken the grinders of the lions', he says.⁴⁴⁷ Now you would know whom he has called *lions*, if you had learned the distinctive features of these beasts. For they say that lions are perverted in their eyes, and that their nature is carnivorous and takes pleasure in blood. And you certainly know the figure of the perverted eyes of those who do not look to what is upright, and that of the unpleasant breath of those who have used their mouth for blasphemy, and consequently are akin to the stench of sin. And all these things which are brought to mind by means of the breath, are to be rejected for the kingdom of God, because they are flesh and blood,⁴⁴⁸ which especially nourishes the nature of lions. For at the time when those who are worthy are honoured, 'these', he says, 'will come to nothing', flowing down together with the unstable nature of the material things with which they were associated in life. For 'they will come to nothing', he says, 'like water running down'.⁴⁴⁹

(253) For the archer who is malicious against our souls, and aims the fiery darts⁴⁵⁰ of sin against human life, does not stop shooting at them until he has enfeebled their strength. For 'he will bend his bow', he says, 'until they be weakened', and become wax which is melted⁴⁵¹ and is readily shaped to every form of the impress of sin.

(254) In addition, he adds to these statements those sad words against the wretched, saying, 'Fire has fallen, and they have not seen the sun.'⁴⁵² Another of the translators clarifies the sense of this saying by translating it with the following words, in relation to the slipping from the womb which occurs in an untimely abortion, 'The untimely birth of a woman will not see the sun.'⁴⁵³

(255) Since, then, he says near the beginning of the psalm, '*Sinners are alienated from the womb, and have gone astray from*

⁴⁴⁵ Ps. 56: 5.

⁴⁴⁶ Eph. 1: 13, etc.

⁴⁴⁷ Ps. 57: 7.

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. 1 Cor. 15: 50.

⁴⁴⁹ Ps. 57: 8.

⁴⁵⁰ Eph. 6: 16.

⁴⁵¹ Ps. 57: 8-9.

⁴⁵² Ps. 57: 9.

⁴⁵³ The text of Aquila reads this way, and those of Symmachus and Theodotion are very similar (Field ii. 185).

the womb',⁴⁵⁴ which is the same as saying, 'they were abortive', and he says that the reason that they suffer in this way is their *likeness* to the *serpent* and the *asp*,⁴⁵⁵ he now takes up the same manner of speaking again. He says that because they were imperfect in their natural understanding, and abortive by means of evil, they themselves slipped and *fell* from that *womb* intended for us, and by means of their material choice, became *fire* against themselves, wherefore they did not look up at the *sun*.⁴⁵⁶ By the *sun* he means the *true light*⁴⁵⁷ to which the immature race of the Jews did not look.

(256) His next word corresponds to the preceding one sequentially. For what he there called a *deaf asp*, he now changes and speaks of as a *thorn without understanding*,⁴⁵⁸ for *understanding* comes from hearing, and the one who has not admitted hearing has certainly cast off *understanding* along with the hearing.

(257) For this reason, just as there, after he has mentioned the name *serpent* in a more generic way, he adds that species of the beast which is the most bitter in the genus when he speaks of the *asp*, so too here, after he has set forth the name *thorn*, as if it were the genus, he adds the more irksome species among *thorns*, i.e. the *briar*,⁴⁵⁹ whose points are sharp, whose offshoots are dense, and whose scratches are painful and poisonous to those who approach.

(258) But nevertheless, he says even if you are *thorns*, even if you are the *briar* among *thorns*, so that you think you are still *alive* (for the one who does not have the true life is not truly alive), *wrath* *swallows you*.⁴⁶⁰ And just as the life of sinners is not truly what it is said to be, but is only given the name (for what has been separated from the true life is not life), so also *wrath* in the case of God, even though it appears to be this to sinners and is named this by them, none the more is it *wrath*, but (appears) as *wrath* to those who so designate the recompense which is repaid in relation to the justice of God. This then is the meaning of 'as if alive'.⁴⁶¹ And, 'as

⁴⁵⁴ Ps. 57: 4.

⁴⁵⁵ Ps. 57: 5.

⁴⁵⁶ Ps. 57: 9.

⁴⁵⁷ John 1: 9ff.

⁴⁵⁸ Ps. 57: 10.

⁴⁵⁹ Ps. 57: 10. Gregory uses the technical vocabulary of Aristotle's *Categories*

(5. 3) in this discussion when he distinguishes between the genus and the species.

⁴⁶⁰ Ps. 57: 10.

⁴⁶¹ Ps. 57: 10.

if in *wrath* he *swallows you*' who are not in true life, neither is that one who is being considered truly in *wrath*.⁴⁶²

(259) Then he says, 'The just will rejoice when he sees *revenge*',⁴⁶³ not because he rejoices at those who are perishing, but because he compares his own affairs parallel to the affairs of those, and then pronounces himself blessed for good judgement, because he has not fallen into those circumstances in which he sees the *revenge* of sinners. For he will see rather the purity of his own hands in comparison to the defilement of the sinners.

(260) 'He will wash his hands', he says, 'in the blood of the sinner'.⁴⁶⁴ Now we know that we are washed for no other reason than that we might wash away our filth by means of the water. The defilement of blood, however, does not get rid of the pre-existing filth, but itself becomes filth. Therefore, just as the colour white becomes more conspicuous when contrasted with blood, so too the purity of the hands of the just is more manifest by comparison with its opposite. For what is now disbelieved, that there is a participation in what is superior by those who have willingly suffered ill because of their labours for virtue, will then be made manifest by experience. For he who sees these things *will say* that there was, as it seems, *fruit* stored up for the just in the just *judgement of God*.⁴⁶⁵ Do you see on what sort of heights the Word has set foot? Do you see to what extent its greatness exceeds the heights previously attained in the Psalms?

Chapter XVI

(261) But not even this psalm is the limit of the ascent to the height for those advancing by means of virtue. For the psalm which is after this one in the sequence of the order is found to be beyond this one too in the nobility of its vision. The inscription again proclaims the wearer of the crown. The stela to him again testifies

⁴⁶² This was Origen's view of God's wrath. 'It only appears to be anger to those who experience it; it is not that God is angry and chastises' (Jerome, *In psalm. 2, PL Suppl. 2. 32*). Cf. Origen, *Cels. 4. 72*.

⁴⁶³ Ps. 57: 11. Cf. Gregory's similar discussion of Ps. 57: 11 in *On Infants Early Deaths* (NPNF 5. 381).

⁴⁶⁴ Ps. 57: 11.

⁴⁶⁵ Ps. 57: 12.

that such a victory was on behalf of humanity. For he says, '*Unto the end, destroy not*'.⁴⁶⁶ It has often been said that victory is what is meant by *the end*, and there is no need to explain again in our treatise what is known. But this benevolent word which surpasses every extremity of patience, '*Destroy not*', has attained a greater meaning in this passage.

(262) For who does not know that each of even the ordinary run of people is ready to do good to those who have shown no previous evil to them, and often also, if some slight grief has previously occurred, the generous person, on the one hand, has borne the unpleasantness in trivial things and, at the time of beneficence, has not been deterred from doing good to the one who has caused him grief in trivial matters. The person who is petty in understanding, on the other hand, even if he has experienced some insignificant provocation, has seized some opportunity to do evil and has unleashed on him his full power to take vengeance. The sense of wonder, therefore, is not the same, even if the kindness is similar, in the case of the one who has suffered nothing evil previously, and in the case of the one who repays with beneficence the one who has previously injured him.

(263) For this reason, so that the incomparable and inimitable nature of David's patience, which all but portrays the impassibility itself of the divine nature, might be pointed out in a special way, he places it beside that wicked madness of Saul. For the word, '*Destroy not*', which he engraves in the memory of those who have been born after him, was spoken by David, he says, not when the tyrant was friendly towards him, but when Saul '*had sent to his house to put him to death*'. But you certainly are not ignorant, my learned friend, of that portion of the story indicated by the inscription.

(264) The story relates how, when the vehement emotion of the demonic spirit had settled on Saul, and the holy David quieted the disturbance of the passion by means of his psalter, Saul found the spear that was standing by him, aimed it straight at David, and hurled it against his benefactor. David, however, avoided the attack on himself by means of the divine alliance, and the assault of the spear fixed itself deeply in the wall.⁴⁶⁷ He fled the royal dwellings

⁴⁶⁶ Ps. 58: 1.

⁴⁶⁷ 1 Kgs. 19: 9–10.

and was in his own house, in the hope that repentance would alter the king's anger. But Saul placed his spearmen around David's house, and ordered the executioners to kill him. He barely escaped the dangers by letting himself down into the open through a *window* and avoiding detection by the guard.⁴⁶⁸

(265) And on another occasion, when he had left his country, he came to another place because he lacked resources when he was wandering about with men unlike himself. And thus he was overtaken by Saul who, with his entire army, surrounded the hill to which David fled with his companions. When nightfall delayed his death (for Saul deferred the slaughter of the pursued man till dawn), and he stood by the tent of his enemy, and had the man who was relaxed in sleep on his bed in his possession, he not only restrained his own hand, which was perhaps eager to indulge his anger, but he also diverted his armour-bearer from wrath, who was already stooped over to slay Saul (for '*I will smite*' him, he says, '*and I will not need a second time*'),⁴⁶⁹ with this great saying, famous in song, when he said, '*Destroy not*',⁴⁷⁰ in relation to the one who urges destruction against us.

(266) But this is marvellous not only for the fact that he grants life to the one who is doing everything against his life, but because David, although he had been anointed to the office of king and knew that he would not otherwise partake of that position unless Saul were out of the way, judged it better to suffer ill patiently in his private low estate than to enter upon the kingship by satisfying his anger against the one who had caused him grief. For this reason, there is added to the word of clemency the words, '*when Saul sent to the house of David to put him to death*'.⁴⁷¹ For this was not said at the time that these things occurred, but to intensify the sense of wonder, the Word sets it forth that the one who had suffered those things spoke these words.

(267) I think it superfluous now to insert in our treatise as it hastens to other matters, what is sought after in the story, how, when the Word said that *Saul struck David* with the spear, the story adds that the *spear* hit the *wall*, but *David was saved*.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁸ 1 Kgs. 19: 11–12.

⁴⁶⁹ 1 Kgs. 26: 8.

⁴⁷⁰ Ps. 58: 1; cf. 1 Kgs. 26: 9.

⁴⁷¹ Ps. 58: 1.

⁴⁷² 1 Kgs. 19: 10.

Furthermore, it adds that David was not found on his *bed*, but in his place an *image* and the *liver of goats*.⁴⁷³ This was a practice of people at that time for averting death by expiatory sacrifice. The person who was ill was removed from the bed, and the garment which was put on the dead was laid on the couch along with the liver of goats. For it would be obvious to the more industrious that the story is a prophecy of the economy related to the Lord.

(268) There were demons in the tyrant Saul. The one who had been anointed to the kingship drove them out with the instrument of his lyre, having terrified them. The one, however, who had been possessed by the demons which were with him smote with his spear the one who had demonstrated his power against the demons with his lyre, but the *wall* received the blow instead of David, and *he was saved*. After this, the one against whom Saul had plotted was sought upon his bed. He was not found, but in his place the bed had an *image* and the *liver of goats*.

(269) Now it is certainly obvious what the sequence is looking to through the figures of the story. The one of *David*⁴⁷⁴ is predicted by means of David, and the one who was anointed signifies the Christ. And the lyre is a human instrument, but the song which comes from it is the Word which has been made manifest to us through the one who was made flesh, whose work is to destroy the derangement that comes from demons so that '*the gods of the nations*' may no longer be '*demons*'.⁴⁷⁵

(270) That king, however, who had the demons in himself, when the spirits withdrew at the song of him who adapted his instrument to this purpose, smote him with his spear (now a spear is wood which has been equipped with iron), but the *wall* received the spear instead of him. And we think that the *wall* is the earthly *building*,⁴⁷⁶ by which we understand the body, in relation to which we see the wood of the cross and the iron. But that David, who is both Christ and king, is without suffering. For the deity does not experience the cross and the nails.⁴⁷⁷

(271) And when we hear of Michal, who was born of Saul, to

⁴⁷³ 1 Kgs. 19: 13.

⁴⁷⁴ Cf. Rom. 1: 3; 2 Tim. 2: 8.

⁴⁷⁵ Ps. 95: 5.

⁴⁷⁶ Cf. 2 Cor. 5: 1.

⁴⁷⁷ Gregory's statement here carefully avoids attributing suffering to the divine nature. The wall (i.e. the physical body of Jesus) received the spear (i.e. the cross) instead of him (i.e. the Logos).

whom David was married, we are not surprised when we look to the sequence. For we know that God did not make death, but the king of evil, who deprived himself of life, became the father of death. For '*by the envy of the devil, death entered*'.⁴⁷⁸ And '*death reigned from Adam*'⁴⁷⁹ up to the law, which the apostle wishes no longer to *reign* in us, that is in our *mortal bodies*.⁴⁸⁰

(272) He, therefore, who *tasted death for all*⁴⁸¹ is born in the house of the one born of the one thought by us to be Saul, and her name is Michal. Now this name means *reign*, because sin *reigned* over our nature up to that time.⁴⁸² And at the very time he himself was born, he went out through a *window*. And the *window* indicates the return to the light again of the one who made himself known to those *sitting in darkness and the shadow of death*.⁴⁸³

(273) And his *image* is seen on the *bed*. For the angel says to those seeking the Lord in the tomb, '*Why do you seek the living with the dead? He is not here; he is risen*'.⁴⁸⁴ '*Behold the place*' in which *he lay*.⁴⁸⁵ Those seeking the Lord saw the tomb in which he was buried empty of the body of the one they were seeking. Only the burial sheets were in it. We think, therefore, that the *image* of David on the *bed* signifies the resurrection of the Lord in the tomb, through which the true averting of our death through expiatory sacrifice occurs.

(274) But since the *wall* which was wounded, which we took to represent the body, does not have blood, so that the principal element of the things considered in relation to the mystery by which we were redeemed, I mean the blood, was omitted, this is found with the *image*. For the *liver* is the sole source and place of production of blood among the internal organs. Without it, it is impossible for the nature of blood to exist. If then, the blood comes from the *liver*, and the *liver* was with the *image*, not even the *blood*

⁴⁷⁸ Wisd. 2: 24.

⁴⁷⁹ Rom. 5: 14.

⁴⁸⁰ Rom. 6: 12.

⁴⁸¹ Heb. 2: 9.

⁴⁸² Gregory treats the name of Saul's daughter *Mikal* as if it were from the Hebrew verb *malak* which means to be king. The spelling of the name in the LXX, *Μελχὶλ*, would have suggested this misunderstanding. He is undoubtedly relying on a source for this etymology.

⁴⁸³ Matt. 4: 16.

⁴⁸⁴ Luke 24: 5f.

⁴⁸⁵ Matt. 28: 6; Mark 16: 6.

is lacking in the averting of death through expiatory sacrifice which occurred for the nature of mankind.

(275) And the species of this animal whose *liver* was taken had been appointed for the propitiatory sacrifices for sins.⁴⁸⁶ And not only this, but animals from the same species were also used for the Passover. Moses says that this animal must be offered to dispatch the sin of the people, when it is allotted a twofold activity. And when two male goats have been set forth by the casting of lots, the one is dedicated to God and the other is sent off into the wilderness with the sin.⁴⁸⁷ For all these and similar reasons, therefore, the *liver* of this animal was used to indicate the blood by which the averting of death by expiatory sacrifice for those who had suffered the condemnation of death occurred through the resurrection of our Lord from the dead, which the *image* signifies.

(276) But it would also be appropriate now briefly to run through the meaning in the psalm, which is as follows. The prophecy divides the manner of speaking. For the one part, which is presented from the commonality of our nature, occurs for us to God. But the other occurs to us from the one who has taken suffering upon himself on our behalf.

(277) These, then, are the words for us. '*Deliver me*', he says, '*from my enemies, O God, and redeem me from those who rise up against me*', and '*from those who work iniquity, and from men of blood*', who '*have caught my soul*', and strongly '*attack*' when they have suffered nothing evil from us. For I have not *sinned* against them, nor is there any *iniquity* which we have executed to the harm of our *enemies* for which they are provoked. Our first *running* was '*without iniquity*'. But behold of what sort all these things are, he says. Behold, and '*attend to visit*'. And do not delay revenge, on the basis of mercy, against those who have offended. For '*have no mercy*', he says, '*on all those who work iniquity*'.⁴⁸⁸

(278) Then he transfers his manner of speaking to the person of the transcendent one and says, as if from the person of the one who has heard the prayer, that these *enemies shall return* to their own evening,⁴⁸⁹ which is nothing other than saying that they will

⁴⁸⁶ Num. 7: 16ff.

⁴⁸⁷ Lev. 16: 5ff.

⁴⁸⁸ Ps. 58: 2-6.

⁴⁸⁹ Ps. 58: 7.

be forced *into the outer darkness*.⁴⁹⁰ For *evening* is the beginning and mother of darkness. '*And they shall be hungry as a dog*'.⁴⁹¹ For the hardship of the famine of good things will necessarily pursue those who have no means of salvation. So the *rich man was hungry in Hades*, being without the *divine dew*,⁴⁹² and was consumed by the *flame* because he was not provided with such a good.⁴⁹³

(279) But he also says, '*They shall go round about the city*'.⁴⁹⁴ This seems to me to hint at something like this. Everything useless and to be thrown away so far as usefulness in respect to living beings is concerned is thrown outside the city, whether it is something dead and corrupted, or stinking dung, and dogs are found around these things, compelled by hunger, living in the filth which is thrown out of the city. By this means, therefore, the Word teaches the difference between those living in virtue and those living in evil, pointing it out by the figure of the *city*. When he says *city*, [he means] that orderly and well-arranged society which is joined together as a city by means of virtue, but the things outside the city reveal the evil which is taken into account on the contrary, in which is found everything cast away by the refined life, which is stinking sin, which consists of decaying bodies and filthy dung.

(280) The inhabitant of the *city*, therefore, is that great and honoured creature, the true human being who also has the imprint which was imposed on our nature from the beginning and which has been given substantial form through his life. The one who dwells around the things outside the *city*, however, is a *dog*, and not a human being. Consequently, it is clear to everyone how we must distinguish the dogs from those who are humans in nature. I do not mean on the basis of the appearance of the form of the body, but on the basis of the difference in life. For the inhabitant of the virtuous *city* is truly a human being, but if someone is eager for stinking licentiousness, or for excretal covetousness, which could properly be called dung, or for the other *forms of evil*,⁴⁹⁵ wandering and walking about outside the circle of that *city*, he is shouting out against himself that he is a *dog*, since his nature has been refashioned

⁴⁹⁰ Cf. Matt. 8: 12, etc.

⁴⁹¹ Ps. 58: 7.

⁴⁹² Gen. 27: 28, 39.

⁴⁹³ Luke 16: 19-24.

⁴⁹⁴ Ps. 58: 7.

⁴⁹⁵ Cf. I Thess. 5: 22.

from likeness to God to dog-likeness. Now by the *dogs*, you certainly understand that original flesh-eating, murderous⁴⁹⁶ dog, as the Scripture says.

(281) The next words of the psalm describe the *dog*-like life. For he says that instead of barking, *speech* comes through *their mouth*, and instead of the teeth of a dog, a *sword* is hidden by their *lips*. His words are as follows, '*Behold they shall speak with their mouth, and a sword is in their lips*.'⁴⁹⁷

(282) But these fearful things are an *occasion for laughter* for those who have God in themselves. For he says, '*You, Lord, laugh at them*', and '*I will guard my strength with you*.'⁴⁹⁸ And after a few words, he predicts the economy which has been ordained by God for his own image. For he says, '*Do not kill them*', but '*bring them down*' from the height of evil to the level and even region of citizenship with God. Indeed, both the great Paul and John the Baptist did this. On the one hand, *every height which raises itself against the divine knowledge* is put down in Paul,⁴⁹⁹ and on the other hand, *every mountain and hill* is pulled down to *lowliness* by John, in accordance with the prophecy of Isaiah.⁵⁰⁰

(283) We learn through these things that there will be no destruction of humanity, in order that the divine work not be rendered useless, being obliterated by non-existence. But in its stead *sin* will be destroyed and will be reduced to non-being. For he says, The '*sin of their mouth*' and the word '*of their lips*', and their *pride and cursing and lying will not exist in the wrath of the consummation*.⁵⁰¹ When these no longer exist, '*They will know*', he says, '*that God rules Jacob*' and '*the ends of the earth*.'⁵⁰² For when evil nowhere remains, the Lord will by all means be *ruler of the ends*, once sin, which now rules the majority, has been put out of the way.

(284) Then he again repeats the same word about those who *return 'at evening'*, and who *are hungry 'as a dog'*, and who go around *the city in a circle*,⁵⁰³ showing, I think, through the repetition of the word, that men, insofar as they are now in either wickedness

⁴⁹⁶ Cf. John 8: 44.

⁴⁹⁷ Ps. 58: 8.

⁴⁹⁸ Ps. 58: 9–10.

⁴⁹⁹ 2 Cor. 10: 5.

⁵⁰⁰ Luke 3: 5.

⁵⁰¹ Ps. 58: 13–14.

⁵⁰² Ps. 58: 14.

⁵⁰³ Ps. 58: 15.

or in that which is better, will also be in the same afterwards. For the person who now goes about in a *circle* in disregard for God, and does not live in the *city*, nor guard the human imprint on his own life, but is changed into a beast by his choice and has become a *dog*, will also be punished at that time by being cast out of the *city* above in a *famine* of good things.⁵⁰⁴ The conqueror of the adversaries, however, who advances (as the psalmist says somewhere in another passage) '*from strength to strength*',⁵⁰⁵ and exchanges victory for victory, says, '*I will sing to your strength, and I will extol your mercy in the morning [because you have become my protector and my refuge]*',⁵⁰⁶ and praise is appropriate to you forever and ever. Amen.]⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁴ Cf. Amos 8: 11.

⁵⁰⁵ Ps. 83: 8.

⁵⁰⁶ Ps. 58: 17.

⁵⁰⁷ Five of the seven MSS cited by McDonough omit the bracketed words.

divinity, that has been disclosed in the Gospel reading, which you have followed with pious attention when you heard it read that the Son of God said: "I and the Father are one"⁹¹, for the Son and the Father are one in divinity, but the sacrament of the body and the eternity of the divinity are not one. Yet it was not only the Apostle who said that the Lord was humbled, but the Lord himself stated that he was humble in saying: "Take my yoke because it is light, since I am meek and humble of heart."⁹² And yet this is indicated not only by that interpretation but also by a clear identification, because it is written: "I found David my servant, in my holy oil I have anointed him,"⁹³ and further on: "He will say to me: 'You are my father,'"⁹⁴ and, "I will say to him: 'You are my son.'"⁹⁵ Thus the David whom we were seeking we found to be in fact a servant in appearance but the Lord in truth.

8.40. Thus this David was wandering about his home. And what is the house of Christ unless the one about which he says: "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places?"⁹⁶ Located, then, in that royal home, he saw the naked human condition and had mercy on it, loving it, for it was still stripped of virtues. Through the deceits of the serpent, it was stripped of the clothing of its nature with which it had been born. But this does not seem like the truth, that a woman was stripped in front of the house of the king, that a wife would wash herself before the house of the king, as though there could be no other place more appropriate for bathing: it does not square, it does not fit, and does not align with faith: it is far from the truth, it is repugnant to the senses. The king could not have loved, but rather despised someone so unwholesome and audacious. Could that woman possibly not have been ashamed before men's gaze or at least not have feared the king's gaze? Or could it be that her servants did not protect her before the king saw her?

8.41. Then, if this does not fit with faith, let us ask what this

91. Jn 10.30.

92. Mt 11.29.

93. Ps 89.21.

94. Ps 89.27.

95. Ps 2.7.

96. Jn 14.2.

ST. AMBROSE

TREATISES ON NOAH AND DAVID

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naked woman means: clearly it refers to the human condition stripped of all coverings of its nature, lacking the clothing of immortality and stripped of the veil of innocence; for he is naked who is naked through sin and guilt. Thus that first sinner of our race and he alone, before he sinned, did not feel that he was naked; after he sinned, he saw that he was naked, and he thought he should be covered by leaves, because he knew he was naked. Thus he became naked to himself after he became guilty of sin. In him the entire human condition is naked; through the transmission of his nature it is subject not only to sin, but also to hardship. Thus he sensed and he saw that he was naked. So too our condition is like this: that whoever considered himself naked both sees it and senses it. And so whoever desires riches is naked, and he who disregards them is wealthy. Therefore, each one's sensitivity is a hardship, but each one's virtue has no part in wrongdoing. Thus Christ vindicated the human condition first through the Law (which he would later repudiate) by uniting it to himself in marriage.⁹⁷ Hence he also says: "What is the bill of your mother's divorce by which I sent her away?"⁹⁸ Therefore, by this account Christ saw his family naked and loved them; for Christ loves the holy soul. Thus Jesus loved Lazarus and Mary; Christ loved his Church although she was nude, although she was not yet clothed in the beauty of any virtues.⁹⁹

8.42. Thus to know that the chronicle of the Scriptures fits with the proposed outline, let us learn that the Church is naked, let us learn that she is seeking, she is hastening and washing herself before the house of Christ, when John baptized in the Jordan, saying: "In fact I baptize you in water unto repentance, but the one coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit."¹⁰⁰ Thus when the people were baptized to repentance, they were now near to his house seeking Christ in order to come to grace. And therefore the Church was looking for Christ in the person

97. On the three stages of the "marriage" in Ambrose's account of God's union with Israel, see *Apol. Dau.* 9.11.

98. Is 50.1.

99. Cf. Jn 11.5.

100. Mt 3.11.

of John, saying: "Tell me whom my soul loves,"¹⁰¹ recalling the very source of the desire, the very reason for her baptism, just as you have it written: "I am black and beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem, like the tent of Kedar, like the fleece of Solomon."¹⁰² You have here the reason why she rejoices to wash herself, because she recalls that she is black. For it is as though she is speaking to John asking why the numerous people gather together and rejoice to be washed; she says: "I am black and beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem." Because she is black, she longs to be washed; because she is beautiful, she does not fear to be seen naked. "Do not look on me," she says, "because I am darkened, because the sun has not gazed on me."¹⁰³ Thus we are darkened when we are not seen by Christ, but when we are seen we are brilliant white. Thus he sees her; he is the one for whom all things are naked and the inmost parts of the breast cannot be hidden because he is an investigator of the heart and the inmost part,¹⁰⁴ nothing is hidden to him, nothing is covered over. He saw his Church naked, and, as he saw her, he loved her. He saw the beloved naked, and as though a son of charity he loved her.

8.43. See how he allures her, see how he beckons her. In this passage there is no charge of adultery, but only the mysteries of chastity. He says, "You are entirely beautiful, my darling, and there is no blame in you. Come here from Lebanon, my bride, come here from Lebanon; you will cross and cross over from the beginning of faith."¹⁰⁵ And rightly he says "from the beginning of faith." Thus, when you have faith, you should not fear adultery; for faith is characteristic of marriage, while deceit is characteristic of adultery. But that she can come from Lebanon, he established beforehand saying: "Rise, come, my darling, my lovely, my dove, my perfect one."¹⁰⁶ In fact she is his darling in

101. Song 1.7.

102. Song 1.6.

103. Ibid.

104. Cf. Ps. 7.9.

105. Song 4.7-9.

106. Song 2.10. Much of this section, until "my heart loves" in 8.44, was included in a twelfth-century compilation identified as Ambrose's "Commentary on Song of Songs"; William of Saint-Thierry, *Excerpta de libris beati Ambrosii super Cantica canticorum*.

her desire for the faith, lovely by the beauty of her virtue, and a dove by spiritual grace. For the phrase "the silvered feathers of the dove"¹⁰⁷ indicates her eternal power, and the flight of the dove has declared the presence of the Holy Spirit. Thus Christ calls her to himself so that she comes, since she came endowed with spiritual gifts, because "Behold," he says, "the winter has passed away, the rains have left and departed to themselves, the flowers have appeared on the earth."¹⁰⁸ See how the holy Church is invited. He says "the winter has departed to itself," lest the naked one fear the winter; I do not speak of the winter of a certain season, but of weakness, which despoils the fertile field of the soul of every flower. For the winter is not the one of the earthly sun; it is the winter of the soul, when the cold licks the spirit, when the warmth of the spirit vanishes, when the vigor of the senses dissipates, when too much fluid overflows and weighs down the mind, when the interior of one's vision goes cloudy.¹⁰⁹ And thus the Lord says: "See that your flight not happen in winter or on the Sabbath."¹¹⁰ For it is good that the day of judgment or death may come at the time when the soothing balance of the soul flourishes, when the heavenly mystery shines out with a comforting light, when our hearts burn within us. For then Christ is present, just as in the Gospel Ammaon and Cleopas attest when they say:¹¹¹ "Was not our heart burning within us on the road, when he opened for us the Scriptures?"¹¹² Indeed, the soul thrives at the time when the blossom appears on the earth. Who is that sweet-smelling blossom if not the one who said: "I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valley?"¹¹³ It is also written about him in Isaiah: "The branch will sprout from the root of Jesse, and the branch will reach up from the root, and

107. Ps 68.14.

108. Song 2.11.

109. Cf. Vergil, *Georgics* 1.88.

110. Mt 24.20.

111. See Hugh Connolly, "Some Disputed Works of St. Ambrose," *Downside Review* 65 (1947): 14-15, on the name Ammaon for the second of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus.

112. Lk 24.32.

113. Song 2.1.

the flower will go up from the branch."¹¹⁴ In fact, the root is the people of the Jews, the branch is Mary, the blossom of Mary is Christ, and when he shines out in our land and spreads his perfume in the field of the soul or is verdant in his Church, we cannot fear the cold or be afraid of the rain, but we can await the day of judgment.

8.44. And thus when the Church sees this flower, she hastens with all eagerness, just as she herself attests, saying: "All night long on my bed I looked for the one my soul loves; I looked for him but did not find him. I called him, but he did not hear me. I will get up now and go into the house, into the city center and its squares; I will search for the one my heart loves. So I looked for him but did not find him. The watchmen found me as they made their rounds in the city; they struck me, and they took the covering from me."¹¹⁵ You see in what sort of way she seeks the one she desires to find, so that she may not be afraid to be wounded. But these wounds should not be feared, but longed for, because they are the wounds of love, just as she herself said: "I have been wounded by love."¹¹⁶ The wounds of love are good. Thus more valuable are wounds from a friend than kisses of desire from an enemy.¹¹⁷

9.45. Thus it is fitting that she is naked, because she lost her covering, or perhaps therefore naked because it is sometimes virtuous not to cover the chest, not to conceal the heart. Thus is that other woman concealed, namely the Synagogue, which was cloaked by a veil in the reading of the Old Testament, and therefore she is not unveiled—since the veil is taken away in Christ—for this reason I say that Christ despises and spurns the veiled Synagogue, and thus even today a veil is placed on the heart of the Jews.¹¹⁸ But if a woman is converted to the Lord in her whole heart, she is naked and visible. For when anyone has been converted to the Lord, the veil is removed, so that as we gaze we might see the glory of God. Thus even elsewhere there

114. Is 11.1.

115. Song 3.1-3.

116. Song 5.7-8.

117. Cf. Prv 27.6.

118. Cf. 2 Cor 3.14.

is an indication that being naked is a mark of virtue, because it is written: "I have removed my tunic; how shall I place it on again? I have washed my feet; how will I soil them?"¹¹⁹

9-46. Let us find out from the Scriptures, then, which tunic she removed and how she did not find a way to put it on again, if we can. For it is a certain bodily tunic, which is somehow embroidered with coverings of desires, and thus sometimes it is better to be naked in body than veiled in heart. For Paul also cautions us that to be stripped is much better than to be clothed when he states at one point: "Strip off from yourselves the old man with his deeds, and put on the new one, the one who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of him who created him."¹²⁰ In this passage she has been stripped, and she has washed her feet and, because she is washing, she does not know how she can be soiled again; for she forgets through grace what she had imbibed through nature. This, then, is a great and just love, which characterizes the woman washing herself in front of the palace of David.

9-47. But she not only washed herself, but she also called to him, as we have it in the same book of Scripture, where the holy Church says: "Come, my brother, let us go out into the field; let us rest in the fortresses; let us rise at dawn to go to the vineyards; let us see if the vines are blossoming."¹²¹ Thus she not only bathes, but she even beckons Christ to come to her and invites him, saying: "I will give my breasts to you."¹²² And she promises not only what is her own but also the new and the old, as you read: "I have saved for you, my brother, the new and the old."¹²³ And as though she is impatient of any delay for her love, she seeks someone for support who might beg Christ to come. See her panting, see her desiring. "Who will give you," she says, "my brother, to nurse at the breasts of my mother?"¹²⁴ And the passage shows the reason she seeks and why she invites and in what way she can hold to him; it demonstrates how she waits out-

119. Song 5.3.

120. Col 3.9-10.

121. Song 7.12-13.

122. Song 7.12.

123. Song 7.13.

124. Song 8.1.

side as he delays and how she implores him to enter her house, when she says: "Finding you outside I will kiss you, I will take you and I will lead you into the home of my mother and into its hidden parts, where she conceived me."¹²⁵ You see how she is naked, as one who cannot keep covered the hidden parts of a nature that is entirely undefiled, the hidden parts of her inmost conscience that are not marked by any foolhardy vices. For this enclosed garden is the holy Church and immaculate is her virginity, which earns this grace from Christ because she sought the word of God and desired it and found it, holding vigil before the gates of wisdom, just as she herself says: "Blessed is the man who hears me, and the person who watches my ways, keeping vigil by my gates daily, guarding the fences of my entrance; for my gateways are the gateways of life."¹²⁶

9-48. For Christ desired the beauty of his Church and prepared to acquire her as his wife. But because she was under the Law—for Peter, John, and the other apostles were under the Law—he first decided that we needed to be freed from the chains of bodily observance. For although the Law is religious, although the Law is just, it is like the person of Uriah, who was so religious and chaste that when he returned from war he did not acknowledge his wife and he did not enter into her presence. Yet when Uriah knew of the union of David [with Bathsheba], that is, when he knew that the union was with a humble man, he prepared a place for the future wedding rites of the Church by departing from union with the Synagogue.¹²⁷ Hence John the Baptist accepted the Law as a type, who, although he was from the patriarchs, announced that the ways of the Lord were to be prepared, and he prophesied a union of the Church; and for this reason John is presented as being killed so that he might show the end of the observance of the Law; for "the Law and the prophets lasted until John."¹²⁸ Thus Uriah was killed as a type of the Law to show that the Synagogue would be loosed from the tethers of the Law, since "the woman is bound by the

125. Song 8.1-2.

126. Prv 8.34-35.

127. An allegorical reading.

128. Lk 16.16.

Law under her husband while her husband is alive; but when the husband has died, she is freed from the law of her husband. Thus while her husband lives, the woman who couples with another man will be called an adulteress; but if her husband has died, she is freed from the law of her husband so that she is not an adulteress if she should be with another man.¹²⁹ Thus the human condition is not an adulteress; although it was under the Law, it was restored to grace when the observance of the Law was somehow abolished.

9-49. For Christ did not abolish the observance of the Law. In the same way David did not kill Uriah, but he allowed him to be killed by warriors; that is, Christ allowed the ritual observance that came from the Law to be profaned through the incursions of barbarians and through the captivity of the Jews. In fact, "Uri" means "my light."¹³⁰ For what is the light of Christ if not the Law and the Gospel: "For if you believed Moses you would also believe me; for that one wrote about me"¹³¹—because the light of Christ appeared earlier in the Law; and in the Gospel his grace afterward filled the entirety of the world as though in the *hep-tamyxos* (that is, septiform) Spirit. Thus he submitted his flesh to this Law and joined the Church to himself. A hostile people threatened the light of this Law when it violated the holy precepts of this Law. Thus the light of God was diminished in the people of the Jews, because partial blindness occurred in Israel, until the fullness of the nations entered in and so all of Israel was saved.¹³²

10-50. Still remaining is the fourth mystery, which I ask that you listen to with tranquil ears, and I ask that you attend to our intention and not our words; for the kingdom of God is not in the word, but in the underlying force. There was an adultery, there was a murder. This is what was said to the prophet: "Take for yourself the branch of an almond tree."¹³³ And we read else-

129. Rom 7.2-3.

130. Throughout the treatise Ambrose uses the name "Uri," which I have translated "Uriah."

131. Jn 5.46.

132. Cf. Rom 11.25.

133. Jer 1.11.

where "branch of an almond tree,"¹³⁴ by which we understand a kind of law and a summary of prophecy; for in the manner of the almond, it is bitter in the skin that covers it, hard in the middle of its coating, but tender and fruitful within. And yet in the account [of David] you hear quite bitter things, in the prefiguration you recognize hard things, yet in the mystery take hope in fruitful things. I say that the adultery became a prefiguration of salvation; for not every adultery must be condemned. Thus it was said to the prophet: "Go and take to yourself a fornicator as a wife."¹³⁵ The Lord commands that the marriage take place with a woman who had been a fornicator; and from this marriage, as we said above, Christ is born. For the name Jezreel, which means "divine generation," has been imposed by the Lord on the son who was born from fornication.¹³⁶ Therefore, if that coupling in fornication was pious, then this coupling in adultery is also a pious companionship. But that concerns the Jews. While in divine matters I of course do not dare to call an adultery "pious," lest even the sound of the expression offend someone, still there is available a more respectable interpretation, which can be more carefully, if not more compellingly, stated: A holy cohabitation took place from unequal partners, when the Word became flesh.¹³⁷ For there is no lawful wedlock between divinity and the flesh, since their natures do not fit together by a distinctive bond, as the flesh does to the soul and the soul to the flesh; thus even the divinity and the flesh observe the law of a rightful marriage bed, in a certain sense. God assumed flesh, he took up a soul, he made there to be a lawful wedlock through an unprecedented and illegitimate Incarnation, so that God might be all things and in all.¹³⁸

10.51. Therefore, interpret the individual words so that you might grasp the mystery. For you understand David as a type of Christ, and Bathsheba is understood to be the "daughter of the Sabbath" and "full daughter" and "the well of oath-taking." What, then, is clearer than that the "daughter of the Sabbath" is

134. Nm 17.23.

135. Hos 1.2.

136. Cf. Hos 1.4.

137. Jn 1.14.

138. Cf. Col 3.11.

the flesh of Christ because God sent his Son made from a woman, made under the Law?¹³⁹ The same thing for “full daughter,” because in his Passion is the fullness of the Law or because he is full of the Holy Spirit; for Jesus returned from the Jordan full of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁰ But she is also “the well of oath-taking,” that is, of religion and faith. And it is fitting that it is a well, because the streams of living water flow from his stomach.¹⁴¹ Thus taking this woman to himself, God the Word made the union lawful. This mystery has also been indicated by those marriage rites that are in the Song of Songs, by which the Church weds Christ and the flesh weds the spirit. And thus she was running about and seeking where the word of God was, because she was wounded, because she was naked, because she was an adulteress in all things; even though she was immaculate in Christ, her wretched flesh was seeking a redeemer.

10.52. Christ joined this woman [that is, human nature] to himself, so that he might render her immaculate; he accompanied her, so that he might bear away her adultery. And because she was under the Law, death was necessary, so that she might be liberated from the Law, so that through her death, the marriage, as it were, between the Law and the flesh might be destroyed. Thus the flesh is dead in Christ, so that dead to the Law, as the Apostle said, through the body of Christ we might belong to the one who rose from the dead; and the passions and desires of the flesh and the thoughts of sins, which were in our members because of the Law, might die in his death, while we who are freed from the law of death might rise in the newness of the Spirit as though by a new union with Christ.¹⁴²

10.53. And yet all those who have abolished the Law in the flesh of Christ and have thought the Law should be violated have been slain by soldiers at the command of David. By this sign—because they taught what was prefigured for later times—it shows that none of those who killed Christ escaped, and it is clearly revealed that those whom Christ took to himself before

¹³⁹. Cf. Rom 13.10.

¹⁴⁰. Cf. Lk 4.1.

¹⁴¹. Cf. Jn 6.38.

¹⁴². Cf. Rom 7.46.