

That the Scriptures are Divinely Inspired

4.1.1.¹ But, since it is not sufficient, in discussing topics so great and important, to leave the conclusion of the matter to human opinion and common conceptions² and, so to speak, to pronounce on things invisible as if visible, we must also adduce, for the proof of what we have said, the testimonies of the divine Scriptures. And that these testimonies may possess an assured and indubitable conviction, both regarding what we have to say and what we have already said, it seems necessary first to show that the Scriptures themselves are divine, that is, inspired by the Spirit of God. We shall, therefore, as briefly as we can, establish even this point, by offering from the divine Scriptures themselves passages that can suitably make an impression upon us, that is, first from Moses, the lawgiver of the Hebrew nation, and [then] from the words of Jesus Christ, the author and leader of the Christian religion and teaching.

¹ Photius, *Bibl.* 8 (ed. Henry 1, 4a15–16), speaks of *Princ.* 4 as treating (besides ‘Concerning the End’, which we have as *Princ.* 3.6) ‘that the Scriptures are divine; finally, how the Scriptures ought to be read and understood’ (ὅτι θεῖαι αἱ γραφαί· τέλος ὅπως δεῖ ἀναγινώσκειν καὶ νοεῖν τὰς γραφάς). For *Princ.* 4.1–3, we also have the Greek text (set below) from the *Philocalia*. As will be clear, Rufinus has not infrequently extended the text in his translation; those places where it is likely that the *Philocalia* has either omitted a passage or abridged it are noted.

² The ‘common conceptions’ (κοινὰ ἔννοιαι) were widely appealed to in ancient philosophy, either as ‘innate ideas’ or commonly held positions, to which appeal could be made before developing an argument. See also Origen, *Cels.* 1.4; 3.40; 8.52.

On the Divine Inspiration of the Divine Scriptures

4.1.1.¹ Since, in investigating matters of such importance, not being satisfied with the common conceptions and the evidence of things that are seen, adducing in addition, for the manifest proof of our assertions, testimonies from what are believed by us to be divine writings, both from that which is called the Old Testament and that which is called the New, we endeavour by reason to confirm our faith, and, as we have not yet spoken of the Scriptures as divine, come and let us treat of a few points regarding them, as in an epitome, laying out for this purpose the reasons that move us [to regard them] as divine

¹ The full title given at the beginning of *Philocalia* 1 is: ‘Concerning the divine inspiration of the divine Scripture and how it is to be read and understood; what is the reason for the obscurity in it and for what is impossible or irrational in some cases when taken according to what is said’; this heading covers *Princ.* 4.1–3, which is then followed by extracts from *Hom. Jer.* 39, *Comm. Ps.* 50, and *Hom. Lev.* 5. The paragraph divisions of this lengthy extract from *Princ.* 4.1–3 in editions and translations of the *Philocalia* are numbered continuously.

For although there have been very many lawgivers among the Greeks and Barbarians, and also countless teachers and philosophers professing that they declare the truth, we remember no lawgiver who was able to instil in the minds of foreign nations a certain desire and eagerness such that they adopted his laws willingly or defended them with every effort of mind.³ No one, then, has been able to introduce and implant what seemed to himself the truth not only among many foreign nations but even among a single nation, in such a way that knowledge of and belief in this should extend to all. And yet it cannot be doubted that the lawgivers would have wished their laws to be observed by all human beings, if it were possible, while the teachers would have wished that what appeared to themselves to be the truth should become known to all. But knowing that they were altogether incapable of this, and that they did not possess such power as would summon foreign nations to the observance of their laws and teaching, they did not dare to attempt or to try this at all, lest an ineffective and futile effort at this should brand them as foolhardy. And yet throughout the whole world, throughout the whole of Greece and every foreign nation, there are innumerable and immeasurable people who have abandoned their ancestral laws and those whom they had reckoned gods, and handed themselves over to the observance of the Law of Moses and to the discipleship and worship of Christ, and this despite the fact that an intense hatred has been incited against them by those who worship idols, such that they are frequently subjected by them to tortures and sometimes even led to death; yet they nevertheless embrace and guard, with all affection, the word of Christ's teaching.⁴

³ This, and what follows, is a major theme throughout Origen's *Contra Celsum*, e.g. 1.27; 1.64; 3.51 etc.

⁴ Cf. *Cels.* 1.27.

writings. And first of all, <before> making use of the words in the writings themselves and the things set forth in them, one must treat these points regarding Moses and Jesus Christ, the lawgiver of the Hebrews and the author of the saving doctrines of Christianity.

For although there have been very many lawgivers among the Greeks and Barbarians, and teachers who proclaimed doctrines declaring the truth, we have no record of a lawgiver able to instil zeal for the acceptance of his words among the other nations; although a great apparatus of supposed logical demonstration has been brought forward by those professing to philosophize about truth, no one has been able to impress upon diverse nations what was deemed by him the truth, or even upon any credible number of persons in a single nation. And yet not only would the lawgivers have wished to enforce

4.1.2. And one can see how in a short time this religion has increased, making progress through the punishment and death of its worshippers, and also by the plundering of their goods and every kind of torture endured by them. **And this is especially wonderful since its teachers themselves are neither very skilful nor very numerous; yet this word is preached in all the world,⁵ so that Greeks and barbarians, wise and foolish,⁶ adopt the Christian religion.** From which there is no doubt that it is not by human strength or assistance that the word of Christ Jesus comes to prevail, with all force and conviction, in the minds and hearts of all. Moreover, that this was foretold by him and confirmed by his divine utterances is clear, as when he says, *You shall be brought before governors and rulers for my sake, for a testimony to them and to the nations,*⁷ and also, *This Gospel will be preached to all nations,*⁸ and again, *Many will say to me on that day: 'Lord, Lord, have we not eaten and drunk in your name, and in your name cast out demons?' And I will say to them: 'Depart from me, you workers of*

⁵ Matt. 24:14; cf. Ps. 18:5.

⁶ Rom. 1:14.

⁷ Matt. 10:18.

⁸ Matt. 24:14. This quotation is not in the *Philocalia*; Koetschau and Bardy (*Recherches*, 43–4) held that it belongs to the original text of Origen, but dropped out from the *Philocalia* due to the same words ('the nations') concluding this and the previous quotation. But, as Simonetti and Crouzel (SC 269, p. 156, n.13–13a) point out, Rufinus omits this second quotation from his translation of this passage in Pamphilus *Apol.* 84.

those laws which appeared to be good, if possible, upon the whole race of human beings, but the teachers also would have wished that what they imagined to be the truth should have spread throughout the world. But being unable to summon those of other languages and from many nations to the observance of [their] laws and the acceptance of [their] teachings, they did not at all attempt to do this, considering, not unwisely, the impossibility of such a result happening for them. Yet every land, Greek and barbarian, throughout our world, contains thousands of devotees, who have abandoned ancestral laws and those reckoned to be gods for the observance of the laws of Moses and the discipline of the words of Jesus Christ, even though those who adhere to the Law of Moses are hated by the worshippers of idols, and those who accept the word of Jesus Christ in addition to being hated are in danger of death.

4.1.2. And if we consider how in a very few years, although those professing Christianity are persecuted, and some of them are put to death on this account, while others suffer the loss of their possessions, yet the word has been able, despite there not being many teachers, *to be preached everywhere throughout the*

*iniquity; I never knew you.*⁹ If these sayings, indeed, had been thus uttered by him, and yet those things foretold had not come to fulfilment, they might perhaps hardly appear to be true and not to possess any authority. But now, when the things foretold by him do indeed come into effect, and since they were foretold with such power and authority, he is most clearly shown to be truly God who, having become human, has delivered the saving commandments to human beings.

4.1.3. But what, then, is to be said of this, that the prophets had foretold beforehand of him that *Rulers will not cease from Judah, nor leaders from his loins, until he should come, for whom it is reserved, that is, the kingdom, and until the expectation of the nations shall come?*¹⁰ For it is most abundantly evident from history itself and from what is clearly seen at the present day that from the times of Christ onwards kings have not existed among the Jews. Moreover, all those ceremonies of the Jews, of which they made such a great deal of boasting and in which they exulted, whether regarding the adornment of the temple or the ornaments of the altar, and all those priestly head-bands and the robes of the high priests, were all destroyed together. For the prophecy has been fulfilled which said, *For the children of Israel will sit for many days without a king, without a ruler; there will be no sacrifice nor altar nor priesthood nor oracles.*¹¹

⁹ Matt. 7:22–3.

¹⁰ Gen. 49:10. See also Heb. 7:14; Rev. 5:5; Justin, *1 Apol.* 32; *Dial.* 52; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.10.2; *Dem.* 57; Tertullian, *Marc.* 4.40.6; Clement, *Paed.* 1.6.47.3; Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 1.143; 13.154; *Hom. Jer.* 9.1.

¹¹ Hos. 3:4.

*world, so that Greeks and barbarians, wise and foolish, have submitted themselves to the worship of God through Jesus, we shall not hesitate to say that the matter is more than human, Jesus having taught with all authority and persuasiveness that his word should prevail;*² so that one may reasonably regard as oracles those utterances of his, such as, *You shall be brought before governors and rulers for my sake, for a testimony to them and to the nations, and, Many will say to me on that day: 'Lord, Lord, have we not eaten in your name and drunk in your name and cast out demons in your name?' And I will say to them: 'Depart from me, you workers of iniquity; I never knew you.'* That he uttered these words speaking in vain, so that they were not true, was perhaps possible; but when what was said with so much authority has come to pass, it shows that God, having truly become human, delivered to human beings the doctrines of salvation.

² Cf. Mark 13:31.

We use these testimonies, then, against those who seem to assert that what is said by Jacob in Genesis is said of Judah and say that there remains to this day a prince from the race of Judah, that is, he who is the prince of their nation, whom they call 'the Patriarch', and that neither can there fail [a ruler] of his seed, who will remain until the arrival of that Christ as they picture him to themselves. But if what the prophet says is true, *The children of Israel will sit for many days without king, without ruler; there will be no sacrifice nor altar nor priesthood*, and if, indeed, from the time when the temple was overthrown, no sacrifices are offered, nor is an altar found, nor does a priesthood exist, then it is most certain that *rulers have ceased from Judah*, as it is written, *and a leader from his loins, [when] he came, for whom it is reserved*. It is established, then, that *he came, for whom it is reserved*, and in whom also is *the expectation of the nations*. This is clearly seen to have been fulfilled in the multitude of those who, from different nations, have believed through Christ in God.

4.1.3. What need is there to mention also [how] Christ was foretold, that then those called 'rulers' *would cease from Judah and leaders from his loins, when he should come for whom it is reserved*,³ the kingdom clearly, *and the expectation of the nations should sojourn*? For it is abundantly clear from the history and from what is seen today that from the times of Jesus there were no longer those who were called kings of the Jews, all those Jewish institutions in which they prided themselves having been destroyed, I mean those relating to the temple and the altar and the performance of worship and the robes of the high priest. For the prophecy was fulfilled which said, *The children of Israel will sit for many days, there being neither king nor ruler, neither sacrifice, nor altar, nor priesthood, nor oracles*.

And these sayings we use in response to those who, in being perplexed by what was said in Genesis by Jacob to Judah, assert that the Ethnarch, being of the race of Judah, rules the people, and that those of his seed will not cease until the sojourn of Christ, as they imagine him. For if *The children of Israel will sit many days, there being neither king nor ruler, neither sacrifice nor altar nor priesthood nor oracles*, [and] from the point when the temple was razed to the ground there is neither sacrifice nor altar nor priesthood, it is clear that *a ruler has ceased from Judah and a leader from his loins*. And since the prophecy says, *A ruler would not cease from Judah nor a leader from his loins until there should come the things reserved for him*, it is clear that *he has arrived to whom*

³ On the difference between the way this verse is cited here and below, see Justin, *Dial.* 120; he asserts that the reading 'when he should come for whom it is reserved' is that of the Seventy, while 'until there should come the things reserved for him' is the Jewish one.

4.1.4. In the song in Deuteronomy, also, it is indicated through prophecy that, on account of the sins of the former people, there will be an election of a foolish nation, none other certainly than that which has come to pass through Christ. For it says this, *They have provoked me with their idols, and I will drive them to jealousy; I will enrage them with a foolish nation.*¹² It is therefore evident enough to perceive how the Hebrews, who are said to have *provoked God with those which are no gods* and to have *enraged him with their idols*, have themselves also *been enraged in jealousy* by means of the *foolish nation*, which God chose through the arrival of Christ Jesus and his disciples. For the Apostle speaks in this way, *For consider your calling, brethren, that not many among you were wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God chose the foolish things of the world and those which are not, that he might destroy the things which formerly were.*¹³ Therefore, *Israel according to the flesh*, for such is it called by the Apostle, should not glory: *Let no flesh, I say, glory in the presence of God!*¹⁴

¹² Deut. 32:21. Cf. Justin, *Dial.* 119; Irenaeus, *Dem.* 95; Tertullian, *Marc.* 4.36.1; Clement, *Strom.* 2.9.43.1.

¹³ 1 Cor. 1:26–8.

¹⁴ 1 Cor. 10:18; 1:29.

it is reserved, the expectation of the nations. And this is clear from the multitude of the nations who have believed, through Christ, in God.

4.1.4. And in the song of Deuteronomy the future election of foolish nations on account of the sins of the former people is prophetically made known, which has come to pass through none other than Jesus. *For*, it says, *they made me jealous with what is no god, they enraged me with their idols; so I will make them jealous with what is no nation, and enrage them with a foolish nation.* Now it is possible to understand very clearly in what manner the Hebrews, who are said to have *made God jealous with what is no god* and to have *enraged him by their idols*, have *been enraged to jealousy by what is no nation, by a foolish nation*, which God chose through the sojourn of Christ Jesus and his disciples. *We see, then, our calling, that not many were wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God chose the foolish things of the world, in order to shame the wise, and God chose the low and the despised, even things that are not, in order to bring to naught things that formerly were, and so that Israel according to the flesh* (which is called by the Apostle *flesh*) *should not boast in the presence of God.*

4.1.5. What is to be said, moreover, regarding those prophecies regarding Christ in the Psalms, especially in that one which is entitled *A Song for the Beloved*, in which it is said that his *tongue is the pen of a scribe swiftly writing, fairer than the children of human beings, that grace was poured on his lips*?¹⁵ Now, a proof that *grace was poured on his lips* is this, that although the time of his teaching was brief (for he taught for but a year and some months¹⁶), the whole world, nevertheless, has been filled with his teaching and faith in his religion. There has arisen *in his days righteousness and an abundance of peace*, abiding even to the end, which end is called *the taking away of the moon*; and *he has dominion from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth*.¹⁷ A sign was also given to the house of David. *For a virgin has conceived in the womb and born Emmanuel, which is interpreted 'God with us'*.¹⁸ There is also

¹⁵ Ps. 44:1–3.

¹⁶ As maintained by the Valentinians, according to Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.3.3, and Clement, *Strom.* 1.21.145.3. Irenaeus himself, *Haer.* 2.22.3–6, on the basis of the question 'You are not yet fifty years old, and yet you have seen Abraham' (John 8:57) and a tradition going back to the elders in Asia, concluded that Christ must have reached at least forty years old. In *Hom. Luc.* 32.5, Origen accepts that it might have been one year; but in *Comm. ser. Matt.* 40 and *Cels.* 2.12, he also accepts a three-year period.

¹⁷ Ps. 71:7–8.

¹⁸ Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23. See *Cels.* 1.34–5 for Origen's comments on the difference between *παρθένος*, as found in the LXX, and *νεάνις*, as found in other versions. See also Justin, *Dial.* 66; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.21; Tertullian, *Adv. Jud.* 9.

4.1.5. And what need is there to speak about the prophecies regarding Christ in the Psalms, there being a certain ode with the superscription *For the Beloved*, whose *tongue* is said to be *the pen of a swift writer; fairer in beauty than the sons of men*, since *grace was poured upon his lips*? A proof that *grace was poured upon his lips* is that although the period of his teaching was short (for he taught for about a year and a few months) the world has been filled with his teaching and the religion that came through him. For, *In his days righteousness has arisen and an abundance of peace* abiding until the consummation, which is called *the taking away of the moon*; and he remains *having dominion from sea to sea and from the rivers to the ends of the earth*. And a sign has been given to the house of David: *for the virgin [did bear and] conceived and bore a son, and his name is Emmanuel, which is God with us*. Also fulfilled is, as the same prophet says, *God is with us; Understand, you nations, and be defeated; you who are strong, be defeated*. For we have been defeated and vanquished, we who have been captured from the nations by the grace of his word. But even the

fulfilled that which the same prophet says, *God is with us. Understand, you nations, and be defeated.*¹⁹ For we have been conquered and overcome, we who are of the nations and who are as it were the spoils of his victory, who have bowed our necks to his grace. Even the place of his birth was foretold in the prophet Micah, saying, *And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for from you shall come a leader, who shall rule my people Israel.*²⁰ And, also, the weeks of years until Christ the leader, which the prophet Daniel had foretold, has been fulfilled.²¹ He is, moreover, at hand, who was foretold by Job, *who is about to destroy the great beast,*²² who also gave to his familiar disciples *the power to tread upon serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy,* without being harmed in any way by them.²³ But if anyone will consider the journeys of the apostles of Christ throughout each place, in which, sent by him, they preached the Gospel, he will find both that what they ventured to undertake is beyond human and also that it is from God that they were able to accomplish what they had ventured. If we consider how human beings, when hearing that a new teaching is being introduced by these [apostles], were able to receive them, or rather, when often desiring to bring them to destruction, were prevented by some divine power that was present with them, we will find that nothing in this matter was effected by human strength, but the whole by divine power and providence, *signs and wonders,*²⁴ manifest beyond all doubt, bearing witness to their word and teaching.

¹⁹ Isa. 8:8–9.

²⁰ Matt. 2:6; cf. Micah 5:2. Cf. Justin, *1 Apol.* 34; *Dial.* 78; Irenaeus, *Dem.* 63; Tertullian, *Adv. Jud.* 13.2; Origen, *Cels.* 1.51.

²¹ Dan. 9:24. Rufinus omits 'seventy'. On this passage, see also Tertullian, *Adv. Jud.* 8.2; Clement, *Strom.* 1.21.125; Origen, *Comm. ser. Matt.* 40.

²² Job 3:8.

²³ Luke 10:19.

²⁴ Cf. Acts 5:12; Heb. 2:4.

place of his birth has been foretold in Micah: *For you, Bethlehem, he says, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.* And the seventy weeks until Christ the ruler, according to Daniel, were fulfilled. And he came, the one who, according to Job, *has subdued the great beast and has given to his genuine disciples authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions and over all power of the enemy,* without being harmed by them in any way. Let anyone also consider the universal sojourn of the apostles sent by Jesus to announce the Gospel, and he will see both that the daring venture was not human and that the command was divine. And if we examine how human beings, on hearing new teachings and strange words, accepted these men, being defeated, in their desire to plot

4.1.6. These points having briefly been demonstrated, that is, regarding the divinity of Jesus Christ and the fulfilment of all that was prophesied regarding him, I reckon that it has also been proved at the same time that the Scriptures themselves, which have prophesied about him, were divinely inspired, those which had either foretold his advent or the power of his teaching or the gathering in of all the nations. To which must also be added that the divine character and the divine inspiration both of the predictions of the Prophets and the Law of Moses have been most clearly brought to light and proved from the point that Christ arrived in this world. For before those things which were foretold by them were fulfilled, although they were true and inspired by God, they nevertheless could not be shown to be true because they were not yet proved to have been fulfilled; but the arrival of Christ proclaimed what had been said to be true and divinely inspired, whereas before it would certainly have been held doubtful whether the accomplishment of those things which had been foretold would be fulfilled.²⁵ Moreover, if anyone consider the

²⁵ Cf. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.26.1; Clement, *Strom.* 4.21.134; Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 1.32-6; 13.305-6; 19.28; *Frag. Luc.* 251.

against them, by some divine power watching over them, we will not disbelieve that they even wrought miracles, *God bearing witness to their words by signs and wonders and various miracles.*

4.1.6. In demonstrating, in summary fashion, the divinity of Jesus and using the prophetic words regarding him, we simultaneously demonstrate that the writings prophesying him are divinely inspired and that the words announcing his sojourn and teaching were spoken with all power and authority and on this account they have prevailed for the election from the nations. It must also be said that the inspiration of the prophetic words and the spiritual character of the Law of Moses shone forth with the sojourn of Jesus. For it was not at all possible to bring forward clear arguments concerning the inspiration of the ancient Scriptures before the sojourn of Christ; but the sojourning of Jesus led those who might have suspected the Law and the Prophets not to be divine to the clear conviction that they were composed by heavenly grace. One who reads the prophetic words with care and attention, experiencing from the act of reading itself a trace of divine inspiration, will be persuaded, through the things he experiences, that the words believed by us to be of God are not

prophetic sayings with all the diligence and reverence they deserve, it is certain that, in the very act, while he reads and carefully scrutinizes, his mind and senses having been touched by a divine breath, he will recognize what he reads to be not human utterances but the words of God; and in himself he will discern that these books have been composed not by human skill, nor mortal eloquence, but, if I may so speak, in a style that is divine. The splendour of Christ's arrival, therefore, illuminating the Law of Moses with the brightness of truth, has taken away that veil which had covered the letter and disclosed, for everyone who believes in him, all the good things which were concealed, buried within.²⁶

4.1.7. It is, however, a considerably laborious matter to recount how and when every instance of what the prophets of old foretold has been fulfilled, so as to appear by this to confirm those who are in doubt; although it is possible for everyone who wishes to become more thoroughly acquainted with these things to gather proofs in abundance from the books of the truth themselves. But if the sense, which is beyond human beings, does not appear to present itself immediately, on the first sight of the letter, to those who are less versed in the divine disciplines, it is not at all surprising, because divine things are conveyed to human beings in a somewhat more obscure manner and are the more hidden in proportion as one is either unbelieving or unworthy. For²⁷ although it is

²⁶ Cf. 2 Cor. 3:15–16; Heb. 10:1.

²⁷ Simonetti and Crouzel (SC 269, p. 164, n.41–41a) suggest that although the following sentences are much more developed and bold than what is found in the *Philocalia*, they are certainly in the spirit of Origen, and that the *Philocalia* probably abridges this passage out of prudence.

compositions of human beings. And the light contained in the Law of Moses, but hidden by a veil, shone forth at the sojourn of Jesus, when the veil was taken away and the good things, of which the letter had a shadow, came gradually to be known.

4.1.7. It would be a huge task to recount now the most ancient prophecies regarding each future event, in order that the doubter, being impressed by them as divine and putting aside every hesitation and distraction, may devote himself with his whole soul to the words of God. But if the supra-human [sense] of the meanings of every part of the writings does not seem to present itself to the uninstructed, no wonder; for, with respect to the works of that providence which embraces the whole world, some appear most clearly to be works of providence, while others are concealed in such a way as to seem to

certain that all things that exist or take place in this world are arranged by the providence of God, there are some things which clearly enough appear to have been disposed by the government of providence, but others are unfolded so obscurely and incomprehensibly that the design of divine providence regarding them is completely concealed, so that occasionally some things are not believed by some to belong to providence, because the design, by which the works of divine providence are arranged with certain ineffable art, is hidden from them, although this design is not equally concealed from all. For even among human beings themselves, it is pondered upon less by one and more by another; whoever is an inhabitant of heaven knows more than every human being who is upon earth. And the design of bodies is clear in one way, that of trees in another way, that of animals in yet another way, but that of souls is concealed in yet another way; and the manner in which the diverse movements of rational minds are arranged by divine providence eludes to a greater degree human beings, and even, I think, in no small degree the angels. But just as divine providence is not refuted, especially for those who are certain of its existence, because its workings and arrangements cannot be comprehended by human minds, so also neither will the divine inspiration of holy Scripture, which extends throughout its entire body, be believed to be non-existent because the weakness of our understanding is not able to trace out the obscure and hidden meaning in each single word, for the treasure of divine wisdom is hidden in the paltry and inelegant vessels of words, as the Apostle also points out, saying, *We have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the strength of divine power might*

furnish ground for disbelief in that God who orders all things with unspeakable skill and power. For the skilful plan of the providential ruler is not so evident in matters upon the earth as it is with the sun and moon and stars, and not so clear in matters regarding human events as it is with the souls and bodies of animals, where the purpose and the reason of the impulses and the mental images and the nature of animals, and the structure of their bodies, are accurately discovered by those who attend to these things. But just as providence is not annulled, by those who have once for all accepted it rightly, on account of those things which are not understood, so neither is the divinity of Scripture, which extends to it all, annulled because our weakness cannot in every expression approach the hidden splendour of the teachings concealed in poor and humble language. *For we have a treasure in earthen vessels, so that the transcendent power of God might shine forth* and not be thought to be from us human beings. For if it had been the hackneyed methods of demonstration

shine out the more,²⁸ when no taint of human eloquence is mingled with the truth of the doctrines.²⁹ For if our books enticed human beings to believe because they were composed either by rhetorical art or by philosophical skilfulness, then undoubtedly our *faith* would be considered to be based upon the art of words or *upon human wisdom* and not *upon the power of God*.³⁰ But now it is well known to all that this *word of preaching* has been so accepted by multitudes throughout almost the whole world that they have understood that they believed *not in persuasive words of wisdom but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power*.³¹ On this account, being led by a heavenly, or rather more than heavenly, power to faith and belief, for this reason, that is, that we may worship the sole Creator of all things, our God, let us also endeavour to strive earnestly, that *leaving behind the teaching of the first principles of Christ*, which are but the elementary principles of knowledge, *we may press on to perfection*,³² in order that that wisdom, which is delivered to the perfect, may also be delivered to us.³³ For such does he, to whom was entrusted the preaching of this wisdom, promise, saying, *Yet we speak wisdom among the perfect, but not the wisdom of this world, nor of the rulers of this world, who will be destroyed*.³⁴ By this he shows that this wisdom of ours, so far as concerns the beauty of language, has nothing in common with the wisdom of this world. This wisdom, then, will be inscribed more clearly and perfectly in our hearts, if it is made known to us

²⁸ 2 Cor. 4:7.

²⁹ For the divine power at work through the 'paltry and inelegant' words of Scripture, see the various passages drawn from *Cels.* in Origen, *Philoc.* 15.

³⁰ Cf. 1 Cor. 2:5. ³¹ 1 Cor. 2:4. ³² Heb. 6:1.

³³ Cf. Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 1.42–6; 2.21–31; 13.26–39; *Frag. Jo.* 63 (GCS 4, pp. 531–2); *Dial.* 15; *Frag. Prov.* 1.6 (PG 13, 20); *Comm. Matt.* 10.4; 12.30–3; 16.8; *Hom. Gen.* 7.4; *Hom. Ex.* 12.4; *Hom. Lev.* 4.6. See also Clement, *Strom.* 2.6.25–31; 2.9.45; 5.1.2.4–5; 5.1.1–13; 5.4.19–26; 7.3.13.

³⁴ 1 Cor. 2:6.

used by human beings, laid up in books, that had prevailed over human beings, our *faith* might reasonably be supposed to rest *upon the wisdom of human beings* and not *upon the power of God*; but now, for one lifting up their eyes, it is clear that *the word and the preaching* have prevailed among the multitude *not in persuasive words of wisdom but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power*. Therefore, since a celestial or super-celestial power compels us to worship only the one who created us, let us endeavour, *leaving behind the teaching of the first principle of Christ*, that is, of the elements, *to press on to perfection*, in order that the wisdom spoken to the perfect may be spoken to us also. For he who acquired wisdom promises *to speak it among the perfect*, but another wisdom besides *the wisdom of this age and the wisdom of the rulers of*

*according to the revelation of the mystery which has been hidden from eternity but is now manifest through the prophetic Scriptures, and through the arrival of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,*³⁵ to whom is the glory unto eternal ages. Amen.³⁶

³⁵ Rom. 16:25–7 and 2 Tim. 1:10 (cf. 1 Tim. 6:14); Origen frequently combines these verses, e.g. *Comm. Jo.* 6.25; 13.101; 13.306; *Cels.* 2.4; 3.61.

³⁶ Here, and at the end of *Princ.* 3.5.8 are the only two places where Origen concludes with a doxology and 'Amen'; in *Princ.* 4.3.14 he concludes with a doxology but no 'Amen'.

this age, which is being destroyed. And this wisdom will be stamped upon us distinctly, *according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret through times eternal, but now made manifest through the prophetic scriptures and the appearance of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for all ages. Amen.*

How One Must Read and Understand the Scriptures

4.2.1.¹ These points, then, being briefly noted, concerning the fact that the divine Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit, it seems necessary also to explain this: in what way certain people, not reading or understanding them correctly, have given themselves over into many errors, inasmuch as the way that ought to be followed for the understanding of the divine writings is unknown to many. For the Jews, through their hardness of heart, and because they wish to appear wise in their own sight, have not believed in our Lord and Saviour, supposing that those things which were prophesied of him ought to be understood according to the letter, that is, that he ought, perceptibly and visibly, to *proclaim release to the captives*, and that he ought at first to build a city such as they think *the city of God* truly to be, and at the same time to *cut off the chariots of Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem*, but also to *eat butter and honey in order to choose the good before he should know to bring forth evil*; they also think that it has been prophesied that at the arrival of Christ, *the wolf*,

¹ The Latin manuscripts, and previous editions following them, have, for *Princ.* 4.2, 'Many, not understanding the Scriptures in a spiritual sense and interpreting badly have fallen into heresy', and for *Princ.* 4.3, 'Illustrations from Scripture of the method in which Scripture should be understood'. However, as *Princ.* 4.2 deals not only with misunderstandings, but, from *Princ.* 4.2.4 onwards, how to read and understand Scripture, and as *Princ.* 4.3 continues the same subject by giving illustrations exemplifying such a reading, I have followed Photius (see note to title of *Princ.* 4.1) in taking *Princ.* 4.2–3 as a single chapter with the title given by Photius.

How the Divine Scripture is to be Read and Understood

4.2.1. After having spoken, as in summary, about the inspiration of the divine Scriptures, it is necessary to proceed to the manner of reading and understanding them, since many errors have occurred from the fact that the way by which the holy readings ought to be examined has not been discovered by the multitude. For the hard-hearted and ignorant of the people of the circumcision have not believed in our Saviour, thinking they follow the language of the prophecies regarding him, and not seeing him visibly *proclaiming release to the captives*, nor building up what they consider to be truly a *city of God*, nor *cutting off the chariots from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem*, nor *eating butter and honey*, and *before knowing or preferring evil, choosing the good*; and thinking it was prophesied that the *wolf*, the four-footed animal, was to *feed with the lamb and the leopard to lie down with the kid, the calf and the bull and the lion to feed together, being led by a little child, and the ox and the bear to pasture together, their young ones growing up together, and*

that four-footed animal, is to feed with the lambs, and the leopard is to lie down with the kids, and the calf and the bull are to feed together with the lions and to be led to the pasture by a little child, and the ox and the bear are to lie down together in the green fields, and their young ones are to be fed together, and the lions are to stand at the stalls with the oxen and be fed on straw.² Therefore, seeing that of all these things, which were prophesied of him and in which they believed that the signs of the arrival of Christ were especially to be observed, none was enacted in history, they refused to accept the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ; or rather, indeed, contrary to all propriety and justice, that is, contrary to the faith of prophecy, they nailed him to the cross for taking upon himself the name of Christ. Then, again, the heretics, reading what is written in the Law, *A fire has been kindled from my anger*,³ and, *I am a jealous God, repaying the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation*,⁴ and, *I regret that I anointed Saul to be king*,⁵ and, *I am God, who makes peace and creates evil*,⁶ and again, *There is no evil in the city which the Lord has not done*,⁷ and, *Evils came down from the Lord upon the gates of Jerusalem*,⁸ and, *An evil spirit from God throttled Saul*,⁹ and reading many other passages of Scripture similar to these they did not dare to say that these are not

² Cf. Isa. 61:1; Ezek. 48:15–35; Ps. 45:5; Zech. 9:10; Isa. 7:15; Isa. 11:6–7.

³ Deut. 32:22; Jer. 15:14. ⁴ Exod. 20:5. ⁵ 1 Rgns 15:11.

⁶ Isa. 45:7. ⁷ Amos 3:6. ⁸ Micah 1:12.

⁹ 1 Rgns 16:14. See also 1 Sam. 18:10, a verse not in the LXX, but one known to Origen, as evidenced by the *Hexapla* (ed. Fields, 1.519).

the lion to eat straw like the ox—seeing none of these things visibly happening in the sojourn of him believed by us to be Christ, they did not accept our Lord Jesus, but they crucified him as having improperly called himself Christ. While those from the heretical sects reading this, *A fire has been kindled from my anger*, and, *I am a jealous God, repaying the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third or fourth generation*, and *I regret that I anointed Saul to be king*, and, *I am God, who makes peace and creates evil*, and, amongst others, *There is no evil in the city which the Lord has not done*, and again, *Evils came down from the Lord upon the gates of Jerusalem*, and, *An evil spirit from God throttled Saul*, and numberless other passages like these, have not dared to disbelieve that these are Scriptures of God, but believing them to be of the creator, whom the Jews worship, they thought that, as the creator was imperfect and not good, the Saviour had sojourned announcing a more perfect God, who they say is not the creator, motivated in various ways

Scriptures of God, but they supposed them, however, to be of that creator God whom the Jews worshipped and whom they esteemed should be believed to be merely just and not also good; but that when the Saviour had come, he proclaimed to us a more perfect God, whom they say is not the creator of the world, yet being divided with different opinions about him, since having once fallen away from the faith in God the Creator, who is the God of all, they have given themselves over to various fictions and fables, imagining certain things and saying that some things are visible and made by a certain one, but other things are invisible and created by another, just as the fancy and vanity of their own minds suggest to them. Yet also not a few of the more simple of those who appear to be enclosed within the faith of the Church esteem that there is no greater than the creator God, holding in this a correct and sound belief, but believe such things about him as would not be believed even of the most unjust and savage of human beings.¹⁰

4.2.2. Now, the reason for the false apprehension of all these points by those whom we have mentioned above is nothing other than this, that holy Scripture is not understood by them according to its spiritual sense, but according to the sound of the letter. On this account we shall endeavour, according to our

¹⁰ Cf. Origen, *Princ.* 2.10.3 for a similar comment regarding the impoverished understanding of the resurrection by some believers. See also Origen, *Princ.* 1.1.1; 2.11.2; *Comm. Rom.* 1.19; *Hom. Lev.* 16.4; *Hom. Num.* 22.1. On the question of punishments, see Origen, *Princ.* 2.5.2.

regarding this; and once fallen away from the Creator who is the only uncreated God, they have given themselves up to fictions, mythologizing for themselves hypotheses according to which they suppose that there are some things that are seen and certain others which are not seen, which their own souls have idolized. However, even the more simple of those who claim to be of the Church have supposed that there is none greater than the Creator, doing so soundly; but they suppose such things about him that would not be supposed of the most savage and unjust human being.

4.2.2. The reason, in all the cases mentioned, for the false beliefs and impious or ignorant assertions about God appears to be nothing else than Scripture not being understood according to its spiritual sense, but taken as regarding the bare letter. Therefore, for those who are persuaded that the sacred books are

moderate understanding, to demonstrate for those who believe the holy Scriptures to be composed not by merely human words, but written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and handed down and entrusted to us by the will of God the Father through his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, what appears to us to be the right way of understanding [the Scriptures], as we observe that rule and discipline which, delivered to his apostles by Jesus Christ, they handed down in succession to their posterity, the teachers of the heavenly Church.¹¹

Now, that there are certain mystical economies indicated through the holy Scriptures, everyone, I think, even the most simple of believers, admits. But what these are or of what kind they are, one who is of right mind and not plagued by the vice of boasting will reverently acknowledge himself to be ignorant. For if anyone, for example, were to ask us about the daughters of Lot, who seem to have had unlawful intercourse with their father,¹² or about the two wives of Abraham,¹³ or of the two sisters who were married to Jacob,¹⁴

¹¹ On the 'rule' and 'succession' or 'tradition,' see Origen, *Princ.* Pr.2 and the material cited in the notes there.

¹² Cf. Gen. 19:30–6; Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 5.5. In *Cels.* 4.45, Origen gives a different interpretation of this passage, similar to Philo, *QG* 4.56, and Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.31, who is reporting the exegesis of a presbyter before him, almost certainly Polycarp.

¹³ Cf. Gen. 16; Gal. 4:24. ¹⁴ Cf. Gen. 29:21–30.

not compositions of human beings, but that they were composed and have come down to us from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by the will of the Father of all through Jesus Christ, one must indicate the apparent ways [of understanding Scripture followed] by those who keep the rule of the heavenly Church of Jesus Christ through succession from the apostles.

Now, that there are certain mystical economies made known through the holy Scriptures all, even the most simple of those adhering to the Word, have believed; but what these are, sensible and modest people confess that they do not know. If, for instance, one were to be perplexed about the intercourse of Lot with his daughters, and about the two wives of Abraham, the two sisters married to Jacob, and the two handmaids who bore children by him, they can say nothing except that these are mysteries not understood by us. But when [the passage about] the preparation of the tabernacle is read, persuaded that what is written is a type, they seek to attach what they can to each detail mentioned about the tabernacle; not erring insofar as they are persuaded that the tabernacle is a type of something, but insofar as they rightly attach the word of Scripture to something specific, of which the tabernacle is a type, they sometimes fall short. And they declare that

or of the two handmaids who increased the number of his sons,¹⁵ what else can be answered than that they are certain mysteries and forms of spiritual things, but that it is unknown by us of what kind they are? When, also, we read about the construction of the tabernacle, we hold it as sure that the things that are written are figures of certain hidden things;¹⁶ however, I reckon that it is very difficult, not to say impossible, to apply to them their appropriate standards and to uncover and discuss each separate detail. But that, as I have said, that description is full of mysteries does not escape even the most common mind. And all those narratives, which appear to be composed about marriages or about the begetting of children or about different kinds of battles or about any other narratives whatever, what else can they be believed to be, except the forms and figures of hidden and sacred things? But either because human beings make little effort to exercise their minds, or because, before they learn, they think that they already know, the consequence is that they never begin to know; on the other hand, if neither zeal nor a master is lacking, and if these things are examined as divine, not as if human—that is, in a religious and pious manner, and [as mysteries] which are hoped will be opened by revelation of God, at least in most cases, since to human sense they are exceedingly difficult and obscure—then, perhaps, one who thus seeks will find what it is proper to find.

4.2.3. But perhaps this difficulty is supposed to exist only in the prophetic words, seeing that it is certain to all that the prophetic style is always strewn with figures and enigmas,¹⁷ what, then, [do we find] when coming to the Gospels? Is

¹⁵ Cf. Gen. 30:1–13.

¹⁶ Cf. Exod. 25–31. See also Philo, *Mos.* 2.89–94; *QE* 2.68; Clement, *Strom.* 5.6; *Exc.* 27; Origen, *Hom. Exod.* 9.

¹⁷ Cf. Prov. 1:6. Used also in Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 2.173; *Cels.* 3.45; 7.10.

every account, which is thought to speak about marriage or childbearing or wars, or any other narratives that are accepted by the multitude, are types; but regarding the detail of each case, partly because their disposition is not fully trained, partly because of rashness, and sometimes, even if someone is well trained and deliberate, because the discovery of these things is excessively difficult for human beings, the rationale of each detail regarding these types is not altogether clearly articulated.

4.2.3. And what is the need to speak about the prophecies, which we all know to be filled with enigmatic and dark sayings? Even if we come to the Gospels, the precise sense of these also, as being *the mind of Christ*, requires the grace

there not hidden even there an inner sense, as being *the mind* of the Lord, which is revealed by that grace alone which he had received, who said, *But we have the mind of Christ, that we might know the gifts bestowed upon us by God, which also we speak, not in the words of the teaching of human wisdom but in the teaching of the Spirit?*¹⁸ And, again, if someone were to read the things revealed to John, how would he not be amazed at the great obscurity of the ineffable mysteries contained therein? In these, it is clearly understood, even by those who are not able to understand what is concealed in them, that something is nevertheless concealed. And also the epistles of the Apostles, which to some seem to be plainer, are they not filled with meanings so profound that by means of them, as through some small receptacle, the brightness of immeasurable light seems to be poured into those who are able to understand the meaning of divine wisdom? Therefore, since these things are so and there are many who go astray on this path, I do not think that anyone can without danger lightly claim to know or understand those things for which, in order that they might be opened up, *the key of knowledge* is necessary, which key is said by the Saviour to be with those skilled in the law.¹⁹ At this point, although by a certain digression, I think it should be asked of those who say that before the arrival of the Saviour there was no truth among those who were occupied with the law, how it could be said by our Lord Jesus Christ that the *keys of knowledge* were with those, who had the books of the law and the prophets in their hands. For the Lord spoke thus: *Woe unto you, teachers of the law, for you have taken away the key of knowledge: you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those wishing to enter.*²⁰

¹⁸ 1 Cor. 2:16, 12–13.

¹⁹ Luke 11:52. Cf. Origen, *Sel. Ps. 1* (PG 12, 1077); *Philoc.* 2.2.

²⁰ Luke 11:52.

that was given to him who said, *We have the mind of Christ, that we might know the gifts bestowed upon us by God; which also we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom but in those taught by the Spirit.* And who, on reading the revelations made to John, would not be struck with amazement at the obscurity of the unspeakable mysteries, evident even to one who does not understand what is written? And to whom of those skilled in investigating words would the epistles of the apostles seem to be plain and easily understood, since there are in them thousands of passages providing, as if through a lattice, a narrow opening to the greatest and deepest thoughts? Therefore, this being the case, and with countless people falling into error, it is not without danger when reading to profess lightly to understand things that need *the key of knowledge*, which the Saviour says is with the lawyers; and those who will not allow that

4.2.4. But, as we began to say, the way that seems to us to be correct for understanding the Scriptures and investigating their sense, we consider to be of the following kind, just as we are indeed taught by Scripture itself how we ought to think of it. We find some such observation regarding the divine Scriptures prescribed by Solomon in Proverbs. *And you, he says, represent these things for yourself thrice, in counsel and knowledge, so that you may answer the words of truth to those who have asked you.*²¹ Each one, therefore, ought to represent in his own soul the sense of the divine letters thrice; that is, in order that the more simple may be edified from, if I may speak thus, the very body of Scripture (for such do we term that common and narrational sense); while if some have begun to make considerable progress and are able to perceive something more, they may be edified from the very soul of Scripture; and those who are perfect and resemble those of whom the Apostle says, *We speak wisdom among the perfect, yet a wisdom not of this world nor of the rulers of this world, who will be brought to nought; but we speak the wisdom of God, hidden in a mystery, which God has foreordained before the ages for our glory,*²² such as these may be edified from that *spiritual law* which has a *shadow of the good things to come*,²³ as if from the Spirit. Just as the human being, therefore, is said to consist of body and soul and spirit, so also does holy Scripture, which has been granted by the divine bounty for human salvation.

²¹ Prov. 22:20–1. Cf. Origen, *Hom. Num.* 9.7. In *Hom. Gen.* 2.6, Origen proposes a threefold interpretation a propos of Gen. 6:16. For the analogy with the human being, see Origen, *Hom. Lev.* 5.1; *Sel. Lev.* (PG 12, 421 = *Philoc.* 1.30). See also Philo, *Migr.* 93; *Contempl.* 78; Clement, *Strom.* 6.15.132.

²² 1 Cor. 2:6–7.

²³ Rom. 7:14; Heb. 10:1.

the truth was with these before the sojourn of Christ, let them explain how *the key of knowledge* was said by our Lord Jesus Christ to be with those who, as they allege, did not have the books containing the secrets of knowledge and perfect mysteries. For the passage is thus: *Woe to you lawyers, for you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.*

4.2.4. The way, then, as it appears to us, in which we ought to deal with the Scriptures and gather their sense, is such as the following, which has been traced out from the writings themselves. We find something such as this enjoined by Solomon in Proverbs regarding the divine teachings of the writings: *You are to register them thrice in counsel and knowledge, to answer words of truth to those who challenge you.* It is, therefore, necessary to register

This we see indicated also in the book of *The Shepherd*, which seems to be despised by some, where Hermas is commanded to ‘write two books’, and afterwards, ‘to announce to the presbyters of the Church what he learned from the Spirit’. For it is written in these words: ‘And you,’ he says, ‘will write two books and you will give one to Clement and one to Grapte. And let Grapte admonish the widows and orphans, and let Clement send throughout all the cities, which are abroad, while you shall announce to the presbyters of the Church.’²⁴ Grapte, therefore, who is commanded to admonish the orphans and widows, is the bare understanding of the letter itself, by which the young souls are admonished, who have not yet deserved to have God as Father, and on that account are termed orphans. The widows, in turn, are those who have departed from the wicked husband to whom they had been united contrary to the law, but remain widows because they have not yet advanced to the point of being united to the heavenly bridegroom. But Clement is ordered to send what was said to those who are already departing from the letter into ‘the cities which are abroad,’ as if he meant to those souls who, being built up by these means, have begun to be above the cares of the body and the desires of the flesh. And what he had learnt from the Holy Spirit, he himself is commanded to announce, not by letters nor by a book, but by the living voice, to the presbyters of the Church of Christ, that is, to those who, by their capacity for receiving spiritual teaching, possess a mature mind of wisdom.

²⁴ Hermas, *Vis.* 2.4.3. Hermas is also cited in Origen, *Princ.* Pr.4 and 1.3.3.

in one’s own soul the senses of the sacred writings thrice: so that the simple may be edified from the flesh, as it were, of Scripture, for so we designate the obvious interpretation; while one who has ascended a certain measure may be edified from the soul, as it were; and the person who is perfect and like those spoken of by the Apostle—*We speak wisdom among the perfect, a wisdom not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are being brought to nought; but we speak the wisdom of God hidden in a mystery, which God foreordained before the ages unto our glory*—[may be edified] from *the spiritual law, having a shadow of the good things to come*. Just as the human being consists of body and soul and spirit, in the same way so also does Scripture, arranged by God to be given for the salvation of human beings.

On this account we also explain in this way that passage in the book, *The Shepherd*, which is despised by some, where Hermas is commanded to ‘write two books’, and after doing so ‘to announce to the presbyters of the church’

4.2.5. This point indeed is not to be disregarded, that there are certain passages in Scripture in which what we have called ‘the body’, that is, the sequence of the narrational meaning, is not always found, as we shall demonstrate in the following pages; and there are places where what we have called ‘the soul’ or ‘the spirit’ are alone to be understood. I think that this is indicated in the Gospels, when *six jars* are said to be set down *for the purification of the Jews, each containing two or three firkins*,²⁵ by which, as I have said, the evangelical word seems to indicate those who are called by the Apostle *Jews in secret*²⁶ because they are purified by the word of Scripture, receiving indeed sometimes *two firkins*, that is accepting the meaning of the soul and of the spirit, as we have said above, and sometimes even *three*, when the reading is also able to preserve, for edification, the bodily meaning, which is that of the narrative. And *six jars* are appropriately mentioned regarding those who are being purified while placed in this world. For we read that in six days (which is a perfect number²⁷) the world and all things in it were finished.

²⁵ John 2:6; a ‘firkin’ is a unit of liquid volume (usually 9 gallons); this archaic term is used so as to retain the reference to ‘two’ or ‘three’.

²⁶ Rom. 2:29. Cf. Origen, *Princ.* 4.3.6; *Comm. Jo.* 1.1; 1.259; 13.103; *Frag. Jo.* 8 and 114 (GCS 4, pp. 489–90, 557–8); *Hom. Jer.* 12.13.

²⁷ Cf. *Comm. Jo.* 28.1: ‘Those who investigate the nature of numbers have said that six is the first perfect number, being equal to its own parts, both from the combination of what is doubled from the unity, one and two, which is three, a prime number, and the doubling of the number arrived at, now I mean from the two, for when the two has been multiplied by the three it makes six’ (Preuschen indicates this as follows: $6 = (1+2) \times 2$ or $6 = 1+2+3$). See also Philo, *Opif.* 3.13: ‘If we start with 1 it [i.e. 6] is the first perfect number, being equal to the product of its factors [i.e. $1 \times 2 \times 3$] as well as made up of the sum of them [i.e. $1+2+3$], its half being 3, its third part being 2, its sixth part 1.’

what he learnt ‘from the Spirit.’ The wording is this: ‘You will write two books, and give one to Clement and one to Grapte. And let Grapte admonish the widows and the orphans, and let Clement send to the cities abroad, while you shall announce to the presbyters of the church.’ Grapte, who admonishes the widows and the orphans, is the mere letter, admonishing the young souls who are not yet able to be enrolled with God as Father and therefore called ‘orphans’, admonishing also those who no longer associate with the unlawful bridegroom, but remain ‘widows’ because they have not yet become worthy of the Bridegroom. But Clement, who has already risen above the letter, is said to send the sayings ‘to the cities abroad’, as if we were to say the ‘souls’ who are outside bodily and lower thoughts; while the disciple of the Spirit himself is commanded to announce, no longer by letters, but by living words, to the presbyters of the whole Church of God, who have grown grey through wisdom.

4.2.6. How great the usefulness is in this first, what we have called the narrational, sense is witnessed by the entire multitude of believers, who believe quite faithfully and simply; nor does it need much argument, because it is openly manifest to all. But of that sense, which we have spoken above as being the soul, as it were, of Scripture, the Apostle Paul has given us numerous examples, as for example in the First Epistle to the Corinthians. *For it is written*, he says, *you shall not muzzle the ox when it is treading out the grain*. And, then, when explaining how this precept ought to be understood, he adds, saying, *Is it for the ox that God is concerned? Or does he speak altogether for our sake? It was written for our sake, so that he who ploughs ought to plough in hope and he who threshes in hope of partaking*.²⁸ Moreover, very many other similar passages of the Law, which are explained in this way, impart great instruction to those who hear them.

²⁸ 1 Cor. 9:9–10; Deut. 25:4. Cf. Origen, *Cels.* 4.49.

4.2.5. But since there are certain passages which do not at all contain the bodily sense, as we will show in the following, there are places where it is necessary to seek only the soul and the spirit, as it were, of the Scriptures. And perhaps on this account the *jars*, as we read in the Gospel according to John, are said *to be placed for the purification of the Jews, containing two or three firkins each*; the language alludes to those who [are called] by the Apostle *Jews in secret*, as these are purified by the word of the Scriptures, which contain, in some cases, *two firkins*, that is, so to speak, the psychical and the spiritual principle, and sometimes *three*, since some have, in addition to those already mentioned, the bodily one also, which is capable of edifying. And there are rightly *six jars*, for those being purified in the world, which came to be in six days, the perfect number.

4.2.6. That there is benefit to be had from the first interpretation, which in this respect is profitable, the multitude of genuine and simple believers bears witness; while of that explanation referring to the soul, an illustration is provided by Paul in the first [Epistle] to the Corinthians: *For it is written*, he says, *you shall not muzzle the ox when it is treading out the grain*. Then, explaining this precept, he adds: *Is it for the ox that God is concerned? Or does he speak altogether for our sake? It was written for our sake, so that he who ploughs ought to plough in hope and he who threshes in the hope of partaking*. And most of the interpretations in circulation, being adapted to the multitude and edifying those unable to understand the higher meanings, have somewhat the same character.

But a spiritual interpretation is like this: when one is able to show of what *heavenly realities they, who are Jews according to the flesh, serve the patterns and shadow*, and of what *good things to come the Law has a shadow*,²⁹ and any other such expressions which may be found in holy Scripture; or when it is asked what is that *wisdom hidden in a mystery, which God foreordained before the world for our glory, which none of the rulers of this world knew*;³⁰ or that which the same Apostle says, when he employs certain illustrations from Exodus or Numbers and affirms that *these things happened to them in a figure, but they were written for our sake, upon whom the ends of the ages has come*,³¹ and offers us an opportunity for understanding, so that we can perceive of what those things that happened to them were figures, when he says, *For they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ*.³² In another epistle, also, he mentions that command, which was enjoined upon Moses, regarding the tabernacle, *You shall make, he says, all things according to the figure which was shown to you on the mountain*.³³ And writing to the Galatians and as if reproaching some who seem to themselves to read the Law, yet do not understand it, because they are unaware that there are allegories in what is written, he says to them in a certain tone of rebuke: *Tell me, you who*

²⁹ Heb. 8:5; 1 Cor. 10:18; Heb. 10:1.

³⁰ 2 Cor. 2:7–8. ³¹ 1 Cor. 10:11.

³² 1 Cor. 10:4. Cf. Origen, *Hom. Exod.* 11.2.

³³ Heb. 8:5; Exod. 25:40. Cf. Origen, *Princ.* 4.2.2, and the material cited there in n.16.

But spiritual interpretation is for one who is able to show of what *heavenly realities the Jews according to the flesh serve the pattern and shadow*, and of what *good things to come the Law has a shadow*. And, generally speaking, according to the apostolic promise one must seek everywhere *the wisdom hidden in a mystery, which God foreordained before the ages for the glory of the righteous, which none of the rulers of this age knew*. The same Apostle says somewhere, after mentioning certain passages from Exodus and Numbers, that *these things happened to them figuratively, but they were written on our account, upon whom the ends of the ages has come*. And he offers an opportunity for ascertaining of what things these were types, when he says, *For they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ*. And, when sketching out the various matters pertaining to the tabernacle in another epistle, he makes use of this: *You shall make all things according to the figure which was shown to you on the mountain*. Moreover, in the Epistle to the Galatians, as if reproaching those who think they read the Law and yet do not understand it, judging that those who do not think that there are allegories in

*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, the other by a free woman. But he who was born of the slave was born according to the flesh; while he of the free woman, according to the promise. These things are allegorical; for these are the two covenants, and the rest.*³⁴ Here this point must be noted, how carefully the Apostle said, *You who desire to be under the Law*, and did not say ‘who are under the Law, *do you not hear the Law?*’ *Do you hear*, that is, do you understand and know? And, again, in the Epistle to the Colossians, briefly summing up and condensing the sense of the whole Law, he says, *Let no one, therefore, judge you in matters of meat or drink or holy days or a new moon or a sabbath, which are a shadow of things to come.*³⁵ Writing to the Hebrews, also, and discussing those who are of the circumcision, he says, *They serve a pattern and shadow of heavenly things.*³⁶ Now, probably, through these examples no doubt will appear regarding the five books of Moses for those who accept the writings of the Apostle as divine sayings. But should they ask, regarding the rest of the narrative, whether the events related therein may also be said to have *happened in a figure*³⁷ to those about whom it is written, we have noted that even this has been stated in the Epistle to the Romans, where the Apostle cites an example from the third book of Reigns, which says, *I have left for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.*³⁸ This Paul takes as spoken figuratively of those who are called Israelites *according to election*,³⁹ in order to show the arrival of Christ to have been beneficial not only to the Gentiles, but also that very many of the race of Israel are called to salvation.

³⁴ Gal. 4:21–4. Cf. Origen, *Hom. Num.* 11.1.

³⁵ Col. 2:16–17.

³⁶ Heb. 8:5.

³⁷ 1 Cor. 10:11.

³⁸ Rom. 11:4; cf. 3 Rgns 19:18.

³⁹ Rom. 11:5.

what is written do not understand it, he says, *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 the other by a free woman. But he who was of the slave was born according to the flesh, but he who was of the free woman, according to the promise. These things are allegorical; for these are the two covenants, and the rest.* One must observe carefully each thing said by him, for he says, *You who desire to be under the Law*, not ‘you who are under the Law’, and, *do you not hear the Law?* *To hear* is taken to mean ‘to understand’ and ‘to know’. And in the Epistle to the Colossians, briefly abridging the intent of the whole legislation, he says, *Let no one, therefore, judge you in matters of meat or drink or with*

4.2.7. These things being so, we shall sketch out the manner in which holy Scripture is to be understood by us on these several points, using what may occur to us by way of illustration and example, in the first instance repeating and pointing out that the Holy Spirit, who by the providence and will of God through the power of his only-begotten *Word*, who *was in the beginning God with God*,⁴⁰ enlightened the ministers of the truth, the prophets and apostles,⁴¹ to know the mysteries of those things or causes which take place among human beings or with respect to human beings. And by human beings I now mean souls that are placed in bodies.⁴² These mysteries, which were made known and revealed to them through the Spirit, they portrayed figuratively, as if narrating certain human deeds or handing down certain legal observances and precepts; so that not anyone who wished might have them placed under his feet as something to be trampled upon,⁴³ but that one who had devoted himself to studies of this kind, with all chastity and sobriety and nights of watching,

⁴⁰ John 1:1.

⁴¹ Koetschau, followed by other editors, suspects a lacuna at this point, suggesting something like 'wished above all to form them.'

⁴² Cf. Origen, *Cels.* 7.38.

⁴³ Cf. Matt. 7:6.

regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath, which are a shadow of things to come. And again, in that to the Hebrews, discussing those who are of the circumcision, he writes, *They serve a pattern and shadow of heavenly things.* Now it is probable that, from these illustrations, those who have once for all accepted the Apostle as a divine man will have no doubt regarding the five books ascribed to Moses; but regarding the rest of the history, they wish to learn whether those things also *happened figuratively*. One must note the quotation in [the Epistle] to the Romans, *I have left for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal*, occurring in the third book of Reigns: Paul has taken it on the part of the Israelites *according to election*, for not only were the nations benefitted by the sojourn of Christ, but also some from the divine race.

4.2.7. These things being so, one must outline what seems to us the characteristics of the intellectual apprehension of the Scriptures. And in first place, it must be pointed out that the aim of the Spirit, who, by the providence of God through *the Word in the beginning with God*, illumines the ministers of the truth, the prophets and apostles, was pre-eminently concerned with the unspeakable mysteries regarding the affairs of human beings (and by human beings I now mean souls making use of bodies) in order that one who is

might perhaps through these means be able to trace out the sense of the Spirit of God hidden in profundity and concealed by an ordinary narrative style, pointing in another direction, and that thus he might become an associate in the Spirit's knowledge and a partaker in the divine counsel, because the soul cannot come to the perfection of knowledge otherwise than by being inspired with the truth of divine wisdom. Therefore, it is [the teaching] about God, that is about the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, which is primarily described by these men, filled with the divine Spirit; then, [the teaching] of the mysteries relating to the Son of God—how *the Word became flesh* and for what reason he went even to the point of *assuming the form of a servant*⁴⁴—have been made known, as we have said, by those filled with the divine Spirit. It next followed, necessarily, that they should instruct the race of mortals by divine teaching concerning rational creatures, both heavenly and earthly, the more blessed ones and the lowlier ones, and also concerning the difference among souls and how these differences arose; and then what this world is, and why it was made, and also why it is that wickedness is so widespread and terrible over the world, and whether it is only upon this earth or in some other places as well, it was necessary for us to learn from the divine teaching.

⁴⁴ John 1:14; Phil. 2:7.

capable of being taught may, by *searching out* and devoting himself to *the deep things* of the sense of the words,¹ become a participant in all the doctrines of the Spirit's counsel. And in matters regarding souls, who cannot otherwise attain perfection apart from the rich and wise truth about God, the [doctrines] concerning God and his only-begotten Son are necessarily ranked as primordial—of what nature he is, and in what manner he is the Son of God, and what are the reasons he descends to human flesh and completely assumes the human being, and what also is his activity and to whom and when it is exercised. Necessarily also the subject of kindred beings and other rational beings, both those more divine and those fallen from blessedness, together with the reasons for their fall, should be included in the accounts of the divine teaching, and also that of the difference between souls, and whence these differences came about, and what is the world and why it exists, and again whence evil came to be so widespread and terrible upon the earth, and whether it is not upon the earth only but also elsewhere—[all this] it is necessary that we should learn.

¹ 1 Cor. 2:10.

4.2.8. Thus, while it was the intention of the Holy Spirit to enlighten those holy souls, who had devoted themselves to the service of the truth, about these and similar matters, there was, in second place, this aim, namely—for the sake of those who either could not or would not give themselves up to this labour and toil so that they might deserve to be taught and come to know things of such value—to wrap up and conceal, as we have said before, in ordinary language, under the cover of some history and narrative of visible things, hidden mysteries. There is, therefore, introduced the narrative of visible creation, and the creation and formation of the first human being,⁴⁵ and then the offspring which followed from him in succession; some of the actions done by the righteous amongst them are recounted, and occasionally also certain of their transgressions are mentioned, inasmuch as they were human; and then also a number of things done shamelessly and wickedly by the impious are described. In a wonderful manner, also, the account of battles is presented, and the alternation, now of the conquerors, now of the conquered, is described, by which certain ineffable mysteries are made known to those who know how to examine statements of that kind. But also, by the marvellous teaching of Wisdom, the law of truth is implanted and prophesied in the writings of the Law, each of which are woven by the divine art of Wisdom as a kind of covering and veil of the spiritual meanings; and this is what we have called the body of holy Scripture, so that even through this, which we have called the covering of the letter, woven by the art of Wisdom, very many may be edified and progress, who otherwise could not.

⁴⁵ The 'creation' and 'formation' refers, respectively, to Gen. 1 and 2; a distinction also made by Philo. See also, Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 20.182 (cited in *Princ.* 2.2.2, n.20) and the discussion in the introduction, section 3.

4.2.8. While these and similar subjects were placed before the Spirit, who enlightens the souls of the holy ministers of the truth, there was a second aim for the sake of those unable to bear the toil of investigating matters of such importance, [that is,] to conceal the doctrine regarding the previously mentioned items in words expressing an account containing a report about the visible works of creation, and the creation of the human being, and the successive descendants of the first human beings until they became numerous, and other narratives reporting the acts of the righteous and the sins occasionally committed by the same, as being human, and deeds of wickedness and licentiousness and greed done by the lawless and impious. And what is most striking is that by the narratives of wars and of conquerors and conquered certain ineffable [mysteries] are indicated to those able to examine them. And even more wonderful still, the laws of truth are prophesied through the written legislation, all these having been recorded in a series with a power truly appropriate to the wisdom

4.2.9. But since, if, in every detail of this covering, that is of the history <and> of the Law, the sequence had been kept and the order preserved, we would, possessing a continuous series of meaning, certainly not believe that there is anything else contained within the holy Scriptures except what was indicated on the surface, for this reason divine Wisdom took care that certain *stumbling-blocks* or interruptions of the narrational sense should occur, by inserting into the midst certain *impossibilities and incongruities*,⁴⁶ so that the very interruption of the narrative might make the reader pause, as if by casting certain obstacles before him, on account of which he might refuse to proceed along the path of the ordinary sense and, by excluding and debarring us, it might recall us to the beginning of another way, in order that, by entering upon a narrow path,⁴⁷ it might unfold, as a loftier and more sublime road, the immense breadth of divine knowledge. We must also know this, that, as the principle object of the Holy Spirit is to preserve the coherence of the spiritual sense, either in those things which ought to be done or in those things which have already been performed, whenever he found things, done according in history, capable of being adapted to a spiritual meaning, he composed a texture of both kinds in a single style of

⁴⁶ Cf. Rom. 8:3; 9:33; 14:3.

⁴⁷ Cf. Matt. 7:13.

of God. For it was intended to make even the covering of the spiritual aspects, I mean the bodily part of Scripture, not profitless in many respects, but able to improve the multitude as far as they receive it.

4.2.9. But since, if the usefulness of the legislation and the sequence and the beauty of the narrative were clearly evident from the outset throughout, we would not have believed that any other meaning could be understood in the Scriptures besides the obvious, the Word of God has arranged that certain *stumbling blocks*, as it were, and *obstacles and impossibilities* be inserted into the midst of the Law and the narrative, in order that we may not be drawn away completely by the sheer attractiveness of the language and so we either completely reject the teachings, learning nothing worthy of God, or, not moving away from the letter, we learn nothing more divine. It is also necessary to know that, the principal aim being to announce the connection amongst spiritual events, both those that have happened and those to be done, wherever the Word found that things that have happened according to the narrative could be harmonized with these mystical events, he made use of them, concealing from the multitude the deeper sense; but wherever in the account the action of certain people here, recorded for the sake of the more mystical meanings, did not follow the sequence of intellectual realities, the Scripture interwove in the narrative something that did not happen, sometimes what could not happen, and sometimes what could happen but did

narrative, always concealing the secret sense more deeply; but where the narrative of deeds done could not be made appropriate to the spiritual coherence, he sometimes inserted certain things which either less likely happened or could not have happened at all, and sometimes things which might happen, but however did not; sometimes he does this with a few words, which, according to their bodily sense, do not seem able to preserve the truth, at other times by inserting many words, which is principally found to happen in the legislative material, where there are many things which are manifestly useful among the bodily precepts, but also a considerable number in which no principle of utility appears at all, and sometimes even impossibilities are decreed. Now the Holy Spirit took care of all this, as we have said, in order that, when those things on the surface can be neither true nor useful, we should be recalled to the search for that truth demanding a loftier and more diligent examination, and should eagerly search for a sense worthy of God in the Scriptures that we believe to be inspired by God. Nor was it only with those Scriptures that were written up to the arrival of Christ that the Holy Spirit took care of these things, but, as being one and the same Spirit and proceeding from the one God, he has acted in the same way in the Gospels and [the writings of] the apostles.⁴⁸ For even those narratives, which he inspired through them, were not woven together without the art of that Wisdom of his, the nature of which we have explained above. And so in them also he has mingled not a few things by which, interrupting and breaking up the historical order of the narrative, he might turn about and recall the attention of the reader, by the impossibility of the case, towards an examination of the inner sense.

⁴⁸ Cf. Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 10.18–20.

not, and occasionally a few words are inserted which are not true according to the bodily sense, and occasionally a greater number. A similar practice is also to be noticed in regard to the legislation, in which is often to be found what is useful in itself, appropriate to the times of the legislation; sometimes, however, no good reason is apparent. And at other times, even impossibilities are legislated for the sake of the more skilful and inquisitive, in order that, giving themselves to the toil of investigating what is written, they may gain a sound conviction concerning the necessity of seeking in such instances a meaning worthy of God. The Spirit arranged these things not only regarding the [Scriptures composed] prior to the advent [of Christ], but, as being the same Spirit and from the one God, he has done the same with the Gospels and [the writings] of the apostles, for neither is the narrative of these completely unmixed, there being things interwoven according to the bodily sense which did not happen; nor do the legislation and the commandments therein entirely exhibit what is reasonable.

4.3.1.⁴⁹ But that what we say may be acknowledged from the matter itself, let us now consider the actual passages of Scripture. For to whom, possessed of understanding, I ask, will it seem a reasonable statement that the first day and the second and the third, in which are also mentioned both evening and morning, existed without sun and moon and stars, and the first day without even a sky?⁵⁰ And who is found so foolish as to suppose that *God*, as a human gardener, planted trees *in paradise, in Eden towards the east*, and planted a *tree of life* in it, that is, a visible and palpable tree of wood, so that anyone eating of this tree with bodily teeth would gain life, and again eating of another tree would lay hold of the knowledge of *good and evil*?⁵¹ And again when God is said to *walk in paradise in the afternoon* and Adam to *hide himself behind a tree*,⁵² no one, I reckon, really doubts that these things are related by Scripture figuratively, so that certain mystical truths are indicated through them. And *Cain going out from the presence of God* clearly stirs a careful reader such that he will seek what *the presence of God* is and how one can *go out* from it.⁵³ But that we do not extend the work we have in hand beyond its due limits, it is very easy for anyone who wishes to gather out of holy Scripture things which are recorded as having been done but which are not, however, appropriately and reasonably believed to have been done in history. This kind of writing is illustrated sufficiently and abundantly even in the Gospel

⁴⁹ The Latin manuscripts have here the title 'Illustrations from Scripture of the method in which Scripture should be understood', but see note to *Princ.* 4.2.1.

⁵⁰ Or 'heaven' (*caelo*); cf. Gen. 1:5–13.

⁵¹ Gen. 2:8–9. ⁵² Gen. 3:8.

⁵³ Gen. 4:16. On the 'presence' or 'face' of God, see Origen, *Princ.* 2.10.7; *Hom. Isa.* 4.1.

4.3.1. For who possessed of understanding will suppose that the first and the second and the third day, evening and morning, happened without a sun and moon and stars? And that the first day was as it were also without a sky? And who is so foolish as to suppose that *God*, after the manner of a human farmer, *planted a paradise in Eden towards the east*, and placed in it a visible and perceptible *tree of life*, so that one tasting of the fruit by bodily teeth would obtain life, and again that one could partake of *good and evil* by chewing what was received from the tree there? And if God is said to *walk in the paradise in the afternoon*, and Adam to *hide himself behind the tree*, I do not think that anyone doubts that these figuratively indicate, through apparent narratives

books, as when the devil is said to have placed Jesus *on a high mountain*, that he might from there show him *all the kingdoms of the world and their glory*.⁵⁴ How will this appear to have possibly been done according to the letter, either that Jesus should have been led by the devil onto a high mountain, or that the devil should have shown to his fleshly eyes, as if they were lying below or adjacent to one mountain, all the kingdoms of the world, that is, the kingdoms of the Persians and Scythians and Indians, and, also, how their kings were glorified by human beings? And anyone who has read carefully will find in the Gospels many other instances similar to this, from which he will note that in those narratives, which appear to be recorded according to the letter, there are inserted and interwoven things which are not accepted as history but which may hold a spiritual meaning.⁵⁵

4.3.2. Moreover, similar things are found in the passages containing the commandments. For in the Law it was commanded by Moses that every male who has not been circumcised on the eighth day is to be destroyed, which is most illogical, since it would certainly be proper, if the Law was delivered to be observed according to the narrative, to command that the parents who did not

⁵⁴ Cf. Matt. 4:8.

⁵⁵ Cf. Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 10.18–20.

and through things that did not happen bodily, certain mysteries. Moreover, *Cain*, also, *going out from the presence of God*, clearly appears to thoughtful people to move the reader to inquire <what> is *the presence of God* and *going out* from it. And what need is there to say more, as those who are not altogether blind can collect countless examples of a similar kind, recorded as having occurred, but which did not take place according to the letter? But even the Gospels are full of the same kind of passages, [as, for example,] the devil leading Jesus up *to a high mountain* in order to show him from there *the kingdoms of all the world and their glory*. For who is there among those who do not read such passages carelessly who would not condemn those who suppose that with the eye of the flesh—which requires a great height that what lies below and adjacent may be seen—the kingdoms of the Persians and the Scythians and the Indians and the Parthians, and the way in which their kings were glorified by human beings, were seen? The careful reader will observe innumerable other passages like these in the Gospels so that he will be convinced that with the narratives of things which happened according to the letter are interwoven others, which did not occur.

4.3.2. And if we come to the legislation of Moses, many of the laws exhibit the irrationality and others the impossibility as regards the observance itself.

circumcise their sons be punished, or else those who were bringing up the infants; but as it is Scripture says, *The uncircumcised male, that is, who shall not have been circumcised, shall be cut off from his people.*⁵⁶ And if the impossibilities of the Law should be investigated, we find an animal called the *goat-stag*,⁵⁷ which cannot possibly exist, but which, along with the clean animals, Moses commands to be eaten, and a *griffin*, which no one has ever recorded or has heard of as having come into human hands, but which the lawgiver forbids to be eaten.⁵⁸ Concerning the celebrated observance of the Sabbath, he speaks thus: *You shall sit, every one in your dwellings; no one shall move from his place on the Sabbath day.*⁵⁹ It is certainly impossible for this to be observed according to the letter; for no human being can sit for the whole day so as not to move from the place in which he sat down. Regarding each one of these points, those who are of the circumcision, and whoever would have it that in the holy Scripture nothing more is to be understood than what is indicated by the letter, reckon that no inquiry need be made concerning the *goat-stag* and the *griffin* and the *vulture*, but they make up certain empty and frivolous fables, drawing from I know not what traditions about the Sabbath, claiming that each one's place is calculated as inside two thousand cubits.⁶⁰ Others, again, among whom is Dositheus the Samaritan,⁶¹ censure expositions of this kind,

⁵⁶ Gen. 17:14.

⁵⁷ Deut. 14:5.

⁵⁸ Lev. 11:13; Deut. 14:12.

⁵⁹ Exod. 16:5.

⁶⁰ Cf. Num. 35:5.

⁶¹ On Dositheus, see Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 13.162; *Cels.* 1.57; 6.11; *Comm. ser. Matt.* 33; *Hom Luc.* 25.4; Ps. Clement, *Recogn.* 2.8; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 13.

Examples of the irrational are these: the prohibition to eat *vultures*,² as no one, not even in the direst famines, was ever driven by need to turn to this animal; and, *uncircumcised eight day old infants* are ordered *to be destroyed from their kin*, it being necessary, if what is legislated regarding them is really something [meant] according to the letter, that their fathers or those by whom they were being cared for should be ordered to be put to death. But as it is, Scripture says: *Every uncircumcised male, who shall not be circumcised on the eighth day shall be destroyed from among his kin.* And if one wishes to see the impossibilities that are legislated, let us observe that the *goat-stag*, which Moses commands us to offer as a clean offering, is an animal of the class of things that cannot exist, while a *griffin*, which is not recorded ever to have come into human hands, the lawgiver forbids to be eaten. Moreover, for one who is scrupulous, the famous [injunction about the] Sabbath—*You shall sit, every one in your dwellings; no*

² Cf. Lev. 11:14.

but themselves decree something even more ridiculous, that everyone, in whatever posture or place or position he is found on the Sabbath day, must remain thus until the evening; that is, if he is sitting, he should sit the whole day, or if reclining, then he should recline the whole day. Moreover, the saying, *Do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day*,⁶² seems to me an impossibility. From these words, the teachers of the Jews have sunk into endless fables, as the holy Apostle says,⁶³ saying that it is not to be counted a *burden* if someone wears shoes without nails, but it is a *burden* if someone wears galoshes with nails; and they consider it a *burden* if someone carries something on one shoulder, but if on both, they deny it is a *burden*.

4.3.3. If we now seek for similar statements in the Gospels, how will it not appear absurd if that saying, *Salute no one on the road*,⁶⁴ is taken according to the letter? Yet the more simple folk reckon that this is what our Saviour

⁶² Jer. 17:21.

⁶³ Cf. 1 Tim. 1:4.

⁶⁴ Luke 10:4.

one shall go out from his place on the seventh day—is impossible to be kept according to the letter, for no one living is able to sit for the whole day and not move from a sitting position. Therefore, those who are of the circumcision and all who desire that nothing more than the actual wording is signified, do not investigate at all such matters as *the goat-stag* and *griffin* and *vulture*, while on others they sophisticatedly trifle with words, bringing in insipid traditions, as, for example, with regard to the Sabbath, saying each one's place is two thousand cubits, while others, among whom is Dositheus the Samaritan, condemning such an interpretation, think that in whatever position someone is found on the day of the Sabbath, he is to remain until the evening. Moreover, the commandment, *Do not bear a burden on the day of the Sabbath*, is impossible, and therefore the Jewish teachers have entered into interminable arguments, saying that a shoe of such a kind was a *burden*, but not one of another kind, and that a sandal having nails was one, but not one that was without nails, and similarly that what was borne upon one shoulder was, but not that which was carried on both.

4.3.3. If we also, coming to the Gospel, seek similar examples, what could be more irrational than this, *Salute no one on the road*, which simple people think the Saviour enjoined on the apostles? But speaking of *the right cheek being*

prescribed for the apostles. How also can it appear possible for that order to be observed that one should not possess two coats nor shoes, especially in those countries where the winter bitterness is exacerbated by icy frost?⁶⁵ And also this, that when one is struck on the right cheek, he is ordered to present the left as well,⁶⁶ since everyone who strikes with the right hand will strike the left [cheek]? But this precept also, which is written in the Gospel, must be counted among the impossibilities, that *If the right eye offend you, let it be plucked out*,⁶⁷ since, even if we were to suppose that this was spoken of eyes of flesh, how will it seem appropriate that, when both eyes see, the blame of the offence should be attributed to one [only], and that the right one? Or who will be held free of the greatest crime, that of laying hands upon oneself? But perhaps the epistles of the Apostle Paul will seem free of these things? Yet this is what he says: *Was anyone circumcised when he was called? Let him not draw forward the foreskin*.⁶⁸ This expression, in the first place, if one considers it carefully, does not seem to be said with reference to the subjects that he had in hand, for his discourse provided precepts regarding marriage and chastity, and in such a context mention of this would certainly seem to be superfluous. In the second place, what harm is done if, for the sake of avoiding that indecency, which comes from circumcision, someone were able to draw forward the foreskin? In third place, it is certain that that is in every way impossible.

⁶⁵ Cf. Matt. 10:10.⁶⁶ Cf. Matt. 5:39.⁶⁷ Matt. 5:29; 18:9. Cf. Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 15.2.⁶⁸ 1 Cor. 7:18.

struck is most incredible, since everyone who strikes, unless he suffers from some unnatural defect, strikes the left cheek with his right hand. And it is impossible to accept [the precept] from the Gospel about *the right eye that offends*, for, while we grant the possibility of someone *being offended* by the faculty of sight, how, when there are two eyes that see, should the blame be laid upon the right eye? And who, condemning himself for having looked *at a woman to lust [after her]*, and attributing the blame to the *right eye* alone, would rationally *throw it away*? The Apostle, moreover, legislates, saying, *Was anyone circumcised when he was called? Let him not draw forward the foreskin*. In the first place, anyone who wishes can see that he says these things apart from the discussion set before him; for how, when legislating about marriage and purity, will it not appear that they have been introduced at random? And, second, who will say that a man does wrong who attempts to pull forward the foreskin, if it is possible, in view of the disgrace that is considered by many to attach to circumcision?