Fragments on Jeremiah

Origen of Alexandria (c. AD 240–250)

SermonIndex.net / Church Fathers

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Fragment 1

Jeremiah 1:10. The righteous person is not “in youth,” since “having been made perfect in a short time, he fulfilled long years.” For the words “Do not say, I am younger” are addressed to someone who is not in blameworthy ways. Rehoboam was the kind of person who was in them: he “abandoned the counsel of the elders” and followed that of the younger men. For this reason he did not keep the kingdom as he had received it.

Fragment 2

Jeremiah 1:13, 14. The pot that is being heated is heated “from the face of the north,” for this enemy is at the same time an avenger. So the one who has sinned, whether in blasphemy, “is handed over to Satan, that he may be taught not to blaspheme,” or in sexual immorality, is handed over “to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” Whom does it heat? Those who dwell in the land, not those who live there as sojourners. For he looses “fiery arrows” on those who do not guard their hearts with all vigilance, so that they are set on fire by any sin whatever.

Fragment 3

Jeremiah 5:6. He speaks of those who strike them, naming a lion, a wolf and a leopard. It seems that the plotting aimed at people's actions comes from those figuratively called lions, while the plotting aimed at knowledge comes from those who want to harm the soul's power of clear sight. For the leopard is said to leap especially at the eyes. The lion, as the story goes, when it has grown old, haunts the cities, wanting to hunt human beings. It is also said that when its bones are broken or crushed, fire comes out. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar would be both lion and leopard: he took the city and, like a leopard, tore out its eyes, the king together with the leading men, and later he also put out the eyes of Zedekiah. His bones might be understood as Nebuzaradan, who set the city on fire.

Fragment 4

Jeremiah 7:21. He teaches us to examine clearly what the matter of sacrifices is about, and the oracles give a starting point, saying: “A sacrifice to God is a broken spirit,” and “Sacrifice a sacrifice of righteousness.” But the Savior was turning back those who were not like this and who were stirred up about bodily sacrifices, saying: “If you had known what it is, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless.” And that this kind of legislation is about mystical things, Paul taught when he said: “who serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.”

Fragment 5

Jeremiah 8:7. The turtledove and the swallow, the sparrows of the field, are the understanding hearers and those able to say better things. They took care to make their own entrances at the right time, so that what is said reaches those who hear it, the swallow's coming in coinciding with the turtledove's coming in.

Fragment 6

Jeremiah 10:16. Aquila and Theodotion have rendered it: “For he is the one who formed all things, and Israel is the rod of his inheritance.” But if he is that one, and Israel is the rod of his inheritance, and the nations too have received an inheritance, according to “Ask of me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance,” then the nations also will be Israel.

Fragment 7

Jeremiah 11:11, 12. God rightly does not listen to those who did not listen to him. And the demons will not be able to save what is just for those who offered incense to them, when the time of evils comes. So when God does not listen, it is a terrible thing to seek help from demons. Rather, we must hold fast to God, who has turned away because of sins that were committed, but who does not despise a great and persistent flight to him for refuge.

Fragment 8

Jeremiah 11:14 (11). He did not say, “I will not listen to you,” but “to them.” This shows that even then, if they repent and you ask on their behalf, I will listen.

Fragment 9

Jeremiah 15:6, 7. He called the abandonment an active work, for God is said to destroy his own tent when he lifts it up. In another sense, a destruction worthy of God's hand is the change from wickedness to virtue, as in "I will bring my hands upon you, and I will refine you to purity," the former ruinous damage that sin caused in us having been destroyed. "I will scatter them" is of the same kind. Since they were of one accord in their ungodliness toward me, I will break up their most wicked gathering and agreement. In the same way he divided the tongues of those who built the tower, preventing a ungodliness that was growing in unity. The words "they were made childless, they destroyed my people" carry an accusation against the rulers and priests. For these were in the place of fathers to the peoples and became bereft of children, since in place of godly teaching they introduced ungodliness. But perhaps it is not even possible to destroy a people without first making one's own soul childless of the offspring that come from virtue. For no one who is good destroys another.

Fragment 10

The souls of the ungodly may be called widows, because they have lost Christ the bridegroom. When they perish, their mothers suffer too. These are the ones who “gave birth to them in Christ,” who “labored in birth until Christ was formed in them,” and who, after the milk, raised them on solid food to young manhood. The multitude of the widows is not “like the stars of heaven” but like the sand of the sea. According to the letter, very many fell in war, so their wives became widows, and their mothers suffered.

Fragment 11

He commands us not to lift up a load of sins, and not to say, “They have weighed on me like a heavy burden.” In this way we may become kings and rulers, sitting securely on the throne of David, which is the church of Christ, so that it may be said of us, “You set a crown of precious stone upon their head.” People like this also ride on chariots and horses. They hold the body in check with the bridle and restrain its irrational impulses. In this way the city too will be inhabited forever. From every side, because of the virtue of its leaders and the excellent conduct of its inhabitants, there will come those who bring gifts. They will come from the cities of Judah, which are those who confess to God. They will come from those who surround Jerusalem, “Vision of Peace.” They will come from the land of Benjamin, “of the Son,” the level country, which has no “height raised up against the knowledge of God.” They will come from the mountain, which is the gospel word, and from the region toward the south, which is opposed to the one who blows from the north. These people will bring a “holy sacrifice, well-pleasing to God,” the dedication of the soul, and spiritual whole burnt offerings. By the Spirit they burn up all matter that is liable to the eternal fire. Their prayer is “like incense, and the lifting up of their hands an evening sacrifice.” They also offer frankincense, which is translated “Whitening,” because they cast off every dark disposition. So the words fit them, “Who is this that comes up made white?” In this way they will be able to bring their praise into the house of the Lord, “having no spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind” rubbed upon the church of Christ. And if nothing like that comes from us, we will [endure] the things of the threat that is brought upon us.

Fragment 12

The apostle showed what a house built with righteousness is when he said, “You are God’s field, God’s building.” He also says, “No one can lay another foundation besides the one that is laid, which is Christ Jesus. But if anyone builds on it,” and so on. So the believer has Christ Jesus as his foundation through the one who taught him. Then someone builds on that foundation. If he builds well, “gold” is the doctrines of the truth, “silver” is the saving word, and “precious stones” are a structure built from virtues. But if he builds badly, putting evil things on Jesus, I mean “wood, hay, straw,” how is he not ungodly? The “woe” comes upon him, the one who builds his house not with righteousness. The one who makes a lofty building that is not according to the word of God and the truth does not make upper rooms “in judgment.” Understand it in the same way of those who teach either the truth or “falsely named knowledge.” For example, Paul builds the church as a house with righteousness, but Timothy, Luke and people like them he builds as upper rooms in judgment.

Fragment 13

You could say that what is said about the false teachers follows from what came before. Solomon says, “He who stores up treasures with a lying tongue pursues vain things, and will come into a snare of death.” Such people build houses for themselves under the name of “church,” but it is a church “of evildoers.” To them it is said with irony: “You built yourself a well-proportioned house, with airy upper rooms.” In those rooms they thought they had built a place of refreshment. You suppose that through the windows you have lit your buildings with the light of knowledge, and that you used incorruptible timbers to build the house. You paint it with red ochre, imitating the blood of Christ. “But you will not reign, even though you were provoked in the cedar of your father.” The cedar, the father of the sinner, is a tall, proud tree that stands opposed. It stands for the devil, or for the ruler of wicked words. Those who build such houses will perish by famine, for they will neither eat nor drink. They did not even know righteousness, since they did not know Christ. Doing what is right, he says, belongs to those who know God. As for those who are not like that, their eyes are not good, because they do not see the truth. Nor is their heart [good], since it is full of false doctrines. By these doctrines they make others stumble and murder their souls, pouring out innocent blood with a false and deceitful tongue. This is worse than slaughter by the sword.

Fragment 14

Jeremiah calls this Joiakim "Jechoniah." Pharaoh Necho gave the name Joiakim to his father, who was called Eliakim. The Babylonian killed him and threw him out before the gate, as the present prophet says, and as Josephus says in the tenth book of his Antiquities. The word "signet" is given as "seal" by the Rest [of the translators]. Anyone who takes up the image through repentance becomes a seal, or signet ring, in the right hand of God. By the right hand of God, who sets the sheep "on the right," good works are understood. The father gave this seal to the prodigal son when he returned. If Jechoniah had done this, he would have become a pattern of godliness for those who obey. But it did not happen. Still, he seemed to obey the prophet who said, "The one who goes out to join the Chaldeans who have shut you in will live." For he went out, bringing his mother and the mighty men with him, and defected to the Babylonians. But suppose, he says, that he had shown complete repentance, so that he became "a seal of the righteousness [that comes] in circumcision," as the divine apostle puts it, and so seemed to be in God's right hand. Even then he would surely have been handed over to pay the penalty for his earlier sins, though a milder one. For in Babylon he was brought to his senses in prison and in chains. Later, under Evil-merodach, he was moved to relief, sharing the king's table. And so he ended his life in a foreign land.

Fragment 15

He forbids us not simply to listen to a prophet, but to listen to words of prophets that are put forward as imitation. The one who listens to a prophet such as Moses is listening not to Moses but to the Lord, who speaks through him. The false prophets make people vain. By not turning them back, they make their hearer vain, since they speak “a vision of the heart.” For a mind that applies itself to matters without God’s help speaks a vision of the heart. It does not speak from the mouth of the One who supplies the words and gives light. There are times, though, when a vision of the heart and a word from the Lord’s mouth run together. So he does not condemn the vision of the heart simply as such, but only when the other is missing. They do run together in the one who says, “I pray with the mouth, and I pray also with the mind.”

Fragment 16

He prophesies about a shaking and about the Lord's wrath going out against the ungodly. "The anger has not turned back." He does not say this simply, but adds "until it has done it," as if the anger will turn back when it has done it. What "the word of the Lord" has not yet done, the Lord's anger does. What the Lord's anger does, David tells us when he says, "Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger." So the anger does not stop rebuking until it has accomplished the thing for which it rebukes. In the same way the wrath does not stop until it has fully disciplined. And it will not only do it, but also establish it and make it firm. As for "the purpose of his heart," which is a riddle, he says it will be understood at the end. That is, it will be understood concerning what has been said about anger and wrath. So thanks be to the One who has revealed to us what until now had been hidden.

Fragment 17

“Therefore those who pushed my people toward evil did not escape my notice.” The one who lets even a prophet know what happens everywhere knows it much better himself. “The Spirit of the Lord has filled the world,” and “in him we live and move and are,” as Paul told the Athenians. The same sense is in “Do I not fill heaven and earth, says the Lord?” By his power he draws near to all things. So our prayers are not offered as to a God who is far away. It is also said of the Son, “He was in the world, and the world came to be through him.” He is the one who says, “I am a God who draws near.” For he said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I too am in the midst of them.” He is also the one who says, “Behold, I am with you all the days until the end of the age.”

Fragment 18

Our soul leaves no part of the body empty. Where there is sensation, there the soul is, and it reaches the whole body. In the same way nothing is empty of God. Yet although he fills all things, he does not fill the sinner. The sinner has been filled with unclean spirits, and it is impossible for such a person to be filled by God unless he is first set free from the others who fill him. God fills the worthy, in heaven and on earth. Notice that it does not say, “The earth and everything in it belongs to the Lord,” but “the earth and its fullness.” This implies that there are some in the earth who are not the fullness of the earth. The fullness of the earth is those who have been filled by the one who said, “Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord.”

Fragment 19

The false prophets also made a habit of saying “Thus says the Lord,” acting the part of the true prophets. So there had to be signs that distinguished the two groups. Now there was, as the apostle says, the gift of discerning spirits. The one who had it distinguished spirits, divine and evil, as a money-changer tells good coin from counterfeit. But even without that general knowledge, what is said here is enough for discernment. For he says, “My word” is not empty, [nor] food for irrational creatures. It is like wheat, food for rational beings.

Fragment 20

Why did he say “what has the chaff to do with the wheat” and not “with barley”? Because the Lord set out loaves, barley ones for the less rational and wheat ones for the rational. So here too he did not say, “What has the chaff to do with barley?” but “with wheat.” He is showing precisely that this is food for the rational. There is another sign: the words of the Lord are like an axe that cuts rock. When the hearer is reproved and burns, so that he says, “Was not my heart burning within me?”, the word is fire and wheat. But if he enjoys listening to things that suit his pleasure, it is chaff. The word of God is also an axe. It can split not only wood but even rock. This is not the rock [that is, the Word] understood as Christ, but the opposite kind, the one that must be cut, as in “Rocks will be shattered before the Lord.”

Fragment 21

Suppose someone buys a garment from the person he should buy it from. He holds it lawfully. A thief also holds a garment, but not justly. In the same way, among those who teach from Scripture, the ones who bring the words with a spurious and [counterfeit] soul are stealing. Of them it could be said, “All who came before me are thieves and robbers, and the sheep did not hear them.” Such is the person who uses the gospel word but is not disposed toward it in faith and does not live by it. He puts the message of the word to use for some purpose foreign to it. He is a thief, and it will be said to him, “You who preach not to steal, do you steal?”

Fragment 22

Jeremiah 24:1–3. What the whole world is, in a certain proportion, the human being is by himself. For you will find one person called heaven, when he bears "the image of the heavenly." Another is called earth, if he has "the image of the earthly" (for to the one who sinned it was said, "You are earth"). Another has rivers in him "leaping up to eternal life," if he has the most drinkable words. [The text seems defective here: "whom God formed to play with him."] And in particular you will find one called sun, another moon, and others stars, since "so also is the resurrection of the dead." And after a little: But here the parable says that he is a very bad fig. Virtue sweetens a person through ripening, so that the whole soul, spirit and body become sweet, because the quality that comes from the virtues has been put into him. Wickedness, on the other hand, makes him bad and inedible. But if someone looks for figs that are not very good, he looks for them outside the mysteries of godliness and the temple of God, just as he does for those that are not very bad. For if he comes to the discipleship itself, then before the face of the temple of the Lord there are figs that are either very good (the kind Christ knows how to make) or bad. [For not even the bad fig outside cast the words of God behind it; this clause is uncertain.]

So around the temple of God and the divine teachings two baskets are set. The one who does the choosing knows how to place each fig. He will not allow the quality of a bad fig to be mixed in with the very good ones ("a little leaven leavens the whole lump"), nor the reverse. And perhaps the basket of bad figs is the Gehenna of the eternal fire, and the basket of good ones is the kingdom of the heavens. And after a little: But when did the prophet see the baskets? After the captivity, he says. For if you look at the coming of the Savior, and at the captivity of the people, and at us, who were strangers by nature and are now outside Jerusalem but through faith in God and the sweetness of the truth are becoming good figs, you will see the basket of good figs. But if you look at those of the circumcision after this captivity, you will see the basket of bad and inedible figs. It is not enough for the figs to be very good. They should also be like early figs, for a late fig is not what the one being saved is compared to.

Fragment 23

Jeremiah 24:6. Christ is builder and architect. Of him it is said among the prophets: “This one will build my city, and he will turn back the captivity of my people.” So the Lord says: “I will build them, and I will not tear them down.” Though God is good, he does tear down some buildings. For the building of unclean spirits in us must be demolished, and only then can a temple be built for God out of virtues and right teachings, so that his glory may be seen in it. He is also a farmer, planting and grafting in those who are worthy. For the Savior, who as the root holds up all the branches, says: “I am the true vine, and you are the branches, and my Father is the farmer. Every branch in me that remains and bears good fruit, my Father cleans, so that it may bear more fruit. But every branch in me that remains and does not bear fruit, my Father cuts out and throws into the fire.” The one who remains in him and does not bear fruit is found not among the Gentiles but among believers. He is the sort of person who says he is a believer yet does wrong without fear. Such a person is rightly cut out. But the Father cleans the branch that bears fruit, so that if it overlooks anything, as a human being will, it may be set right.

Fragment 24

Jeremiah 25:14. As we were saying, the Seventy placed this one first among the visions against the nations, but the others [that is, the other translators] have the opposite order. Elam is an Arabian nation lying near the Red Sea.

Fragment 25

They prided themselves on their archery and had never learned to sing, “For I will not hope in my bow, and my sword will not save me.” He threatens to stir up nations against him from every side, and so he calls winds from the places where those nations set out. Each of us, according to his condition, is by name an Elamite, or an Edomite, or a Moabite, or an Egyptian, or an Israelite. It is possible to change from one nation to another, for the better or for the worse, since the nations of the soul know how to fall into one another. In any case, each of us, in proportion to what he has stored up, will drink the cup of the Lord’s wrath, either unmixed or mixed. For we have all sinned, some more and some less. Israel took his name from what he did, because he prevailed with God in the wrestling. In the same way there are some who are “Compared,” “Blameworthy” Elamites, for that is how the name is interpreted. [He who sets his mind alongside passions of dishonor (the Greek here is corrupt).] Paul also makes clear who the winds in question are, when he says: “So that we may no longer be tossed about and carried around by every wind of teaching, in the dice-play of men, toward the scheming of error.” The one who is “Compared” is carried around by every wind, whether of teaching, or of anger, or of desire.

There are four general winds that disturb the soul of a human being: desire, fear, pleasure and grief. The Elamite, once God has abandoned him, is handed over to these. But what is the Elamite’s bow, in which the beginning of their power lies? David himself said, as he sang: “Look, the sinners have bent a bow, they have made ready arrows in the quiver, to shoot in the dark of the moon at those who are upright in heart.” And a little later: But the Savior, when he came to live among us, brought the four winds against the Elamites who surround us, in order to scatter them. For opposing powers are handed over to other opposing powers for punishment, as Pharaoh was handed over to Nebuchadnezzar. If you shut up venomous snakes together, the weaker are eaten by the stronger because of hunger. Finally the strongest of all, filled with the snakes it has devoured, becomes what is called the basilisk, which has venom that by its look alone withers a fruit-bearing tree. In the same way the wicked powers are punished by one another, until at last there is left “the last enemy of Christ, death,” the basilisk of which Scripture says, “You will tread on the asp and the basilisk.” For Christ, being stronger than the basilisk, has trodden on it, and has given us “authority to tread on snakes and scorpions.”

Fragment 26

There is a Babylonian man and a Babylonian infant, and we must struggle against both. That is, we must struggle against passions that are already great and against those that are only now beginning. “Blessed is the one who seizes the infants of Babylon and dashes them against the rock” (that is, Christ), before they grow into men. It is more blessed still to destroy the Babylonian seed, meaning a confusing thought. (Opposite to this is the seed of which it is said, “Blessed is he who has seed in Zion,” and “Blessed are those who sow upon every water, where the ox and the donkey tread.”) We must destroy not only a grown man or a child, but even the bare seed, for it can bear fruit if it is cultivated. And what is the water on which the good seed must be sown? It is the washing of regeneration. There “the ox and the donkey tread.” The ox is the clean one, the Israelite. The donkey is the one who is unclean by birth, the Gentile. These animals are symbols of the word announced to the Israelites and of the word proclaimed to the nations.

Fragment 27

The Babylonian holds a sickle, not to save but [to cut off and to reap the holy church] (the Greek here is corrupt). Before the church suffers this, let us destroy him by wiping out the arguments of the heretics. Such was Paul, who said, “Having in readiness to punish every disobedience,” and “tearing down every height that is raised up against the knowledge of God.” Then he bears witness to the power of Greek reasoning, saying that all the nations give way to it, since it seems in some sense to be demonstrative.

Fragment 28

Jeremiah 27:17. He says, “a sheep,” as if speaking of one that has gone astray. In the Gospel he also says, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” In the parable too, only one out of the hundred was lost. The shepherd who came to visit us came to find that one. He lifted it onto his shoulders and restored it to the number of the ninety-nine. For we are all one body and one sheep. One is a foot, another a head, another some other part. The shepherd came and gathered “bone to bone and joint to joint,” and having united them, he took them up into his own place. This unity comes about through love, truth and a good choice of the will. By his own word, then, he united everyone. But if some were found disobedient, they brought on themselves an incurable condition. So every Israelite is one, according to true kinship, “for we are all one body and one bread, and we share in one Spirit.” A straying sheep is one who fails to catch what is fitting, in word and in deed, either by not seeking it or by not finding it.

But the one who knows and does what belongs to true knowledge does not go astray. The one who goes astray is driven out by lions. For “our adversary the devil prowls like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” Already “young lions roaring to seize, and seeking their food from God” are plotting against the righteous. They want to drive us out from the borders of peace. But as David seized the lion by its beard and strangled it, so let us ask the spiritual David, Christ, to seize the lion and destroy the whole gathering of beasts. Now he takes two lions that stand for whole kinds, the Assyrian and the Babylonian. According to the history in the fourth book of Kingdoms, there are two. The Assyrian carried the sons of Israel away “to the Assyrians, until this day,” and the Babylonian carried the sons of Judah “to Babylon.” But the text does not say “first and second” here; it says “first and last.” For the first lion is the opposing devil, “the murderer” himself. The last, at the end of the age, is “the man of sin, the son of destruction, who exalts himself above everything called god or object of worship.”

Fragment 29

Jeremiah 27:17–19. Israel cannot be restored to its pasture unless the two kings suffer what they must suffer, as vengeance for those who suffered evil. Do not take this word as referring only to the devil or the antichrist. For let it be destroyed in me: “Satan crushed under my feet quickly.” When he has destroyed these two, and those between them, he will restore Israel to its pasture. Then he will also graze on Carmel and Bashan, on Mount Ephraim and in Gilead. Though there were so many places in Judea and in the [land] that was to be inherited, he named only these.

Fragment 30

He calls Babylon a hammer, because by its own greed it wore down those on the earth. When Solomon was building the divine temple, the third book of Kingdoms says in praise of it that "a hammer and an axe were not heard in the house of God." The house is the church of God, in which no hammer ought to be heard. The devil is the hammer of the whole earth. The person who pays no attention to him is like a piece of material that is struck by the hammer but does not suffer. For it says, "Behold, a man standing on an adamant wall, and in his hand an adamant." No hammer can crush an adamant. So even if the devil stands over him as the hammer, and the dragon lies beneath him "like an unhammered anvil," the adamant in the Lord's hand and under his shelter will suffer nothing. For the holy person is an adamant wall. Remaining in the Lord's hands, he is unharmed, even if he is caught between the hammer and the dragon. The more he is struck, the more brilliantly he shows his virtue. The devil is like someone who does not know the nature of [stones], and so he tests with many blows the one who is like adamant. God alone knows well the nature of such people. If there were no hammer, there would be no "beaten trumpet" of the law, rousing the hearers to the feasts of God or stirring them up for war. The hammer made Paul such a man through various trials. He suffered nothing from it, yet with a great voice he roused people to the war against evil. So the hammer produces the temptation, and the one who serves the hammer is the descendant of Cain, "the hammer-striker, the smith of bronze and iron." In the time of the Savior, Judas was such a man, and so were those who shouted, "Crucify, crucify him." By such acts they served the hammer.

Fragment 31

The apostle also knows of “vessels of wrath,” “prepared for destruction, in order that he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy.” He divided all people into these two kinds of vessels, those of wrath and those of mercy. The first kind are like Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and the second like Paul and those who believed. But what is the Lord’s treasury, in which the vessels of wrath are kept? Perhaps it is the church, in which such people often go unnoticed. But there will be a time when he opens the church. For now it is shut, and the vessels of wrath feed together with the vessels of mercy. The chaff is there with the wheat, and in one net are both the rejected fish and the chosen ones. The Lord opens his treasury at the time of judgment. When the vessels of wrath are cast out, the one who is a vessel of mercy may fittingly say, “They went out from us, for they were not of us.” But vessels that sin outside the treasury are not yet vessels of wrath. They are lesser ones. For they are “servants who do not know the will of their lord and do not do it.” So they are simply vessels kept for other purposes.

Fragment 32

He says that some of the captives of Judea will come, bringing the good news of vengeance on Babylon. He could also be speaking of those who turn back from idolatry, which he calls Babylon. They come to Zion, the Watchtower, which is the church, and announce the vengeance that comes from the Lord our God.

Fragment 33

Those in Babylon are many, and those in Jerusalem are very few. For it has been said, “The Lord your God did not love you because you are the most numerous, for you are the fewest of all the nations.” Truly “few are those who are saved and who enter through the narrow door.” Everyone who bends a bow is commanded to aim it at Babylon, which is “broad and spacious,” and to keep none of it for himself.

Fragment 34

However many thoughts a person has that stand against godliness, that is how many Babylonians he has. They must be destroyed, since they are sinners of the earth. The one who has been cleansed of them becomes, in the city, one who belongs to God, who avenges the insolence of Babylon. For Babylon supposed that it had conquered by its own power, and it boasted against God. When the temple was burned, the sacred vessels were given to the concubines for their use. Therefore God consumed the fruitless nation with fire, like a thicket. For this reason he says, “Behold, I am against you, you insolent one, says the Lord of hosts.”

Fragment 35

Jeremiah prophesies that the end will come all at once. “For as in the days of the flood” and “in the days of Lot” everyone went about the business of ordinary life, “until the flood came, and the fire, and took everyone away,” so the end will come suddenly. Jericho was a symbol of this, for it fell all at once at a voice and the sound of trumpets alone. Babylon too fell suddenly at the time of the saving passion, when Christ abolished the teachings about the idols of the nations and rescued those from the nations who believed.

Fragment 36

Nebuchadnezzar's cup is gold, "for the deception of men," so that they take it and drink, looking at the gold and not considering the judgment in it. His wretched teachings are decked out with fine language. They lure people by the beauty of their style and by skilled technique. Every poet who thinks himself supreme has likewise made a golden cup, and put into it the poison of idolatry, of shameful speech, and of every evil of the soul. But Jesus did not provide a golden cup, lest he seem to be like that one. (This is why "we have this treasure in earthen vessels.") He provided instead for the salvation that is in him. But the golden cup, Babylon, when it comes to carry out vengeance, comes into the Lord's hand, the hand that once touched Job. It makes the whole earth drunk with anger, grief, passions [or loves] and vainglory. (As many as there are sins, so many are the kinds of drunkenness.) Everything is shaken as if by wine, and nothing stands firm. But the righteous person is not earth. Though he is on earth, he has "his citizenship in heaven." He would not hear, "You are earth, and to earth you will go." Rather, in keeping with what is fitting, he hears, "You are heaven, and to the heavens you will go," for you bear "the image of the heavenly," and you stand firm.

Fragment 37

If Babylon has not been given up on (for he would not have said, “perhaps she will be healed”), what other soul shall we despair of? If she has not been saved, that has come about through her own fault. So the best physicians defend themselves and say, “We tried to heal Babylon, and she was not healed. Let us leave her.” The failure to heal her is not due to them, nor to the physicians [text uncertain], nor to the balm [or resin]. The physicians are angels. They serve under the great physician, God, and are willing to heal those who are obedient. If not, they will say, “Let us leave her, and let each of us go to his own place and his own work, because her judgment has reached up to heaven.” They condemn her as incurable, one who will suffer the consequences of being given up on. Physicians of the body also leave the incurable, so that they do not die in their hands; and this is what the angels do. The more we sin, the more our judgment grows, and it is lifted up as far as the stars, that is, the holy ones. Then God brings out his judgment to humble the judgment that sin has raised high. He humbles the sin and gives back what is deserved.

Fragment 38

Isaiah also prophesied: “On a level mountain raise a signal, lift up your voice to them; beckon with the hand.” The prophets were giving these orders to the Persians and Medes, who were about to take Babylon. They were to hold up the signal of war over her walls, as over a city about to be captured. By this signal they let the soldiers know the moment of attack. He also commands them to keep their weapons ready; the bows, he says, are for the Medes.

Fragment 39

Paul agrees with the saying “every man has been made foolish [away] from knowledge” when he says, “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” The time of visitation is above all the tearing down of idolatry by the coming of Christ. The vessels of war that the Babylonian scattered are the men of Israel and Judah who were experienced in wars. In return for this, he threatens to show no pity to anyone.

Fragment 40

Jer. 28:21–24. The riders of horses are the demons who sit on top of fleshly pleasures. Long ago, too, “horse and rider he threw into the sea” of Egypt. These demons harness various passions in us, set against the four virtues, and so build chariots. The man who is hot-tempered and strong toward evil is “man.” The man who is slack toward pleasures is “woman.” The “old man” is the one “worn out in evil days.” The “young men” are those of whom Isaiah says, “The young will hunger, the youths will grow weary, and the chosen will be powerless.” And on the other side he says, “Those who wait on God will renew their strength, they will grow wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary.” Here, though, he speaks of the “chosen” in a bad sense, as in the phrase “and his food is choice.” People who are chosen in the way of virtue are swallowed up by Nebuchadnezzar. He has virgins too: some are Vestals, some are Pythian priestesses, and some are of other kinds. A soul that has not received the divine seed is also a virgin to him. He has shepherds as well, who train their followers in evil teaching. He has farmers, who sow “the weeds” and cultivate “thorns and thistles,” meaning the worldly cares among people. He also has leaders and rulers in evil, and above all “those against whom our struggle is, the principalities and the authorities.” To all these, then, God gives their due, in the presence of those who have just said, “Come, and let us declare in Zion the great deeds of God.”

Fragment 41

Jer. 28:25, 26. He calls Babylon a mountain because of the height of its kingdom. It was a corrupted mountain, corrupted by idolatry and unjust deeds, by which it corrupted others. The city was also set on a height because of the river beside it. Steps led up from the river to the city, which was in two parts, lying along both banks of the river, and in addition the city's walls were very high. The "hand" is the power that punishes. It brings the city down from its own security and [defense], as if from rocks. It also makes its stones useless by fire, so that no stone is left fit for a sturdier building. In a higher sense the devil too is called a mountain, as in Zechariah: "Who are you, the great mountain before Zerubbabel?" And about the man who had a deaf and mute demon the Savior said, "If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move,' and it will move." So the devil is the mountain. He is corrupted by his own wickedness, and he corrupts all who set their minds on earthly things.

Fragment 42

Jer. 28:27. “Sanctify the nations” means “set them apart.” For sanctification is service to God, even if that service is one of punishment and the person set apart for it is profane. Such was Cyrus, to whom he says through Isaiah, “But you did not know me.” He called some of those who campaigned against Babylon “nations,” and among them he calls the Armenians “Ararat.”

Fragment 43

Jer. 28:29. The earth was shaken. In earlier times the people on it had been firmly settled and secure in their powers and kingdoms, but now they underwent a bad and painful change, into desolation. Likewise every mind that has held a Babylonian land is shaken out of its attachment to such impiety and confusion. It throws off that disposition so that it may take up a spiritual and heavenly state.

Fragment 44

Jer. 28:30–33. For it was God who did this. He is the one who also said to Cyrus through Isaiah, “I will go before you and level the mountains; I will shatter doors of bronze and break bars of iron in pieces.” Among writers outside the faith, too, it is recorded that Babylon had gates like these. It is also recorded that the city was taken by way of the descents into the river that ran through the middle. Each part of the city was joined by bridges at the ascents leading up into it, since the city was divided into two parts. The history also says that when the people at the far edges of the city were being captured, the others, because of the city’s size, did not notice, as they were holding a festival. In the meantime, as one would expect, some ran to carry the news and others came back from there, and the city was full of uproar. Now he seems to call the houses “groupings,” for they stood joined to one another in unbroken rows. Therefore he adds: “The houses of the king of Babylon,” and so on. That is to say, the strongholds [were formed] from what was built together in them.

Fragment 45

Where the text reads “they will tilt him and crush his vessels,” Symmachus said: “they will strain him and empty his vessels.” He kept to the figure of wine, to show that Moab will be emptied of good things. So prosperity is not good for boasters. It was not good for the rich man in Hades either, and it was the reason he was punished. The “mixtures” are spoken of as if they were wine, but Aquila gave “horns.” The horn was an ancient kind of cup, for people used to drink from horns, and that is why the word “to mix” stayed in use. The vessels, then, are the cities, and what is inside them is the people and their wealth. The enemies led off the one and burned the other. The disaster puts to shame the hopes people place in demons, but “hope” in God “does not put to shame.” Jeroboam set up the calves in Bethel, in Samaria. The man who claims to be strong is not saved, for “a king is not saved by great power.” The “day of Moab” is the time of punishment, and the “evil” is the painful things that will overtake him. The text calls on everyone around him to trample on him. That is the meaning of “move him,” plainly to bring him shame and grief, for “God opposes the proud.”

Fragment 46

“Epicheirion” means either the scepter, or those under the ruler’s authority, or hired workers, since “epicheira” means wages.

Fragment 47

"He will clap with his hands." These are the hands with which Moab clapped, rejoicing over Israel and acting boldly against God. Those "who trusted in the fortresses" of their cities gave them up and lived in rocks beside the ravines. They imitated doves in their licentiousness and their folly, for doves sometimes nest in places where anyone who wants can easily take their young. A person is licentious and foolish when he is [initiated] into Beelphegor and clings to useless and empty idols, and Moab was like that. For "the fool said in his heart, There is no God." Such a person is either wholly godless, or he reckons that the God who truly is does not exist at all.

Fragment 48

As has often been said, Jerusalem is taken to mean the church. It is the city of God, built of living stones. When someone sins, he is thrown out of it and handed over to Nebuchadnezzar, that is, to Satan. Paul says about the man who had committed fornication, “to hand such a man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” And in the first letter to Timothy, about blasphemers: “whom I handed over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme.” Let the person cast out of Jerusalem know this: unless he spends enough time outside the church doing what he ought, he will not come back to Jerusalem. A man who sins is cast out even if no human being throws him out. But once he is outside, he must not neglect building a house and planting gardens. If he does not do these things, and does not complete the symbolic number “of the seventy years,” which stands for sabbath and rest, he will not return to share in the church. He stays condemned outside. [The text is corrupt here.] It is as the one who spoke about wisdom said: “I sought to take her as a bride for myself, and I became a lover of her beauty.” We must love her, as Solomon urged in Proverbs when he said, “Love her, and she will keep you,” and “fence her about, and she will lift you high.” Understand also that the other women beside wisdom are the remaining virtues. In this way it will be possible to take many wives, and to father children by them. From wisdom you beget a word of wisdom, so that you may build up others as well. From self-control you beget works of self-control, so that you make others self-controlled in life and in speech. From righteousness you beget works of righteousness in fellowship and in dealings with others. Even in teaching the righteous you will beget children from righteousness. And once you have made sons, you will beget daughters from the sons. The sons are divine thoughts and doctrines, and the daughters are actions.

Fragment 49

When Jerusalem was thrown into turmoil with the Babylonian pressing in on her, people naturally ran to foreknowledge, since they wanted to know what was coming. The false prophets insisted that they were foretelling by the Holy Spirit. Of the others, some brought forward divinations and others dreams. For this reason we must in general refuse every ungodly kind of foreknowledge. If the stars happen to be at work, we pray in vain. So Scripture says, “Let the astrologers of heaven say what the Lord plans for you,” and “There will be no omen-reading in Jacob, nor divination in Israel.” Therefore make yourself worthy of divine foreknowledge. For after “there will be no divination in Israel,” Scripture adds: “At the proper time it will be told to Jacob and to Israel what God will accomplish.”

Fragment 50

Every presbyter who acts in this way will suffer such things at the hands of the king of Babylon. If the one who takes part in the Eucharist unworthily will receive judgment on himself, how much more will the one who sits in the presbytery with a defiled conscience and pollutes the council of Christ? For what devout man sitting beside him will dare to say, "I did not sit with the council of vanity," and the words that follow?

Fragment 51

You could say that he is also showing his own goodness, and that this is why he brings severity on those who need it. So after the painful healing, he says, the city will be built up on its height. What height? “A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden.” Such a city thinks nothing lowly or merely human. By that I mean pleasures, wealth on earth, and petty glories. For “it was raised together with Christ and seeks the things above.” If you do these things, “your city will be built up on its height.”

Fragment 52

He speaks as of something rare. It is the custom of Scripture to speak kindly after bitter words. From Origen's letter to Africanus, on Susanna: "I remember meeting a Hebrew who loved learning and was counted a wise man among them, and talking with him on many subjects. From him I learned, since the story of Susanna is not rejected, that the names of the elders are also found in Jeremiah, in this form: 'May the Lord make you as he made Zedekiah and as Achiab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in fire, because of the lawlessness they committed in Jerusalem.'" And a little later: "I know of another Hebrew who passes on such traditions about these elders. Those in the captivity were hoping to be freed from slavery to the enemy through the [coming] of Christ. These elders pretended to be able to make clear the things concerning Christ. They claimed in secret that God had granted to one of them to sow the Christ."

Then the woman, deceived by the hope of bearing the Christ, gave herself to the deceiver. In this way the elders Achiab and Zedekiah "committed adultery with the wives of their fellow citizens." So Daniel rightly says of one that he was "worn out with evil days," while the other heard, "This is how you used to treat the daughters of Israel," and what follows. These, then, are the two elders who bore false witness against Susanna. There is consolation, and then after the kind words something harsher again, so that people do not despise "the riches of his kindness" and store up for themselves "wrath on the day of wrath." So he says: "If wrath comes, it will not depart until it has done what God wills." God wills, and wrath comes, so that what God wills may be done. For if someone does not want to be within the will of the word of God, wrath is let loose against him. So let us not need a disciplining wrath or anger.

Fragment 53

For they will not go through a desert, as before, but by the lawful road through inhabited land. And figuratively it is said in the way of comfort: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

Fragment 54

"Islands far off" means those tossed by the waves of life, which are far from the truth until they come to salvation. God redeemed Jacob. For "the yoke lying on them has been taken away, and the rod on their neck," as Isaiah says. This also shows that he himself rescued us from the devil's power. For what could we have done against the one who said, among other things, "I will take the whole inhabited world in my hand like a nest"? Against him, through Christ, we say: "Where, death, is your victory? Where, Hades, is your sting?"

Fragment 55

To those who weep and are worthy of blessing, let it be said, “Let your voice rest from weeping.” They are the ones who say in the Holy Spirit: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion.”

Fragment 56

It is also written in Baruch: “Why are you in the land of your enemies? You have been defiled with the dead.” When righteous people set foot on a land, it is a land of saints. When many sinners are in it, it is a land of enemies. “In this way,” he says, “they will return, so that it will be a settled thing for your children to return from the land of enemies.” These are the children who have been helped by you, and who are your fruits. It is also written in Exodus that “God heard the people, their groaning under the works.” That is like what is set down here, except that it is not about everyone, but about Ephraim lamenting. Ephraim is interpreted “Fruitfulness.”

Fragment 57

God hears the voice of weeping from those who repent. But why did he say that Ephraim was lamenting over sins? The third book of Kingdoms shows it. Rehoboam ruled them harshly, and they should have endured and not revolted. Instead they cried out, “We have no portion in David.” Then Jeroboam led the rebels. He belonged to the tribe of Ephraim, and he made calves and drew the ten tribes away from the worship of God. For these things they naturally lamented in repentance. Disciplined by their capture, they cried out: “You disciplined me, Lord, and I was disciplined.” Like a calf that has bolted from the herd, I left your pasture, and now I need your help. If you do not strengthen me, I am too weak to turn back. I ought to have repented before I was captured, and obeyed your prophets. Instead I repented only after the capture. But now that he knows, he groans. For how could anyone groan who did not know he was sinning, having done things worthy of shame in his sins, and above all in his licentiousness? “I have repented so greatly that I point you out to others [?].” Ephraim’s repentance is so great that God takes up the very words of his confession from his mouth, and Ephraim hears the voice saying: “From your youth you have been a beloved son, Ephraim.”

Fragment 58

A certain Nebuchadnezzar the Assyrian held all people, until Christ ransomed us. That is why Matthew, drawing on Isaiah, says: “to proclaim release to captives.” For he did not proclaim it to captives in the literal, historical sense. He himself is also the righteous and holy mountain, for how could the title fit a lifeless thing? If we are in him, as in “and you in me,” let us build on the righteous mountain. A person does this by coming to Judea, which is interpreted “Confessing.” He confesses his sins to God and gives thanks. For it says, “Be the first to state your lawless deeds, so that you may be justified.” There are certain cities of God, and buildings and fields of his. Paul also says: “You are God’s field, God’s building.” In whoever the mysteries of God and his unspeakable teachings are being built up, in that person there is a temple of God and the holy of holies. That person is the mother-city of all Judea.

Fragment 59

“I will not reject Israel” seems to contradict the one who says to them, “and the race of Israel will cease.” Perhaps the one statement was made about the fleshly Israel. As for the word “reject,” it is not found in the other translators, but only in the Seventy. You may also understand it this way: now I reject, but if he is lifted up, I will not reject.

Fragment 60

We are all in prison, and especially those who are being tempted. Then a person acquires a field, but without having left the prison. The acquisition comes by God's will to those who contend well. Now Hilkiah's [relatives] are brothers [?]. For the business of brothers is peace and a portion. The fruit of God's portion is "God's Lifting-up," for that is how Jeremiah is interpreted. The fruit of peace is "Grace of God," for that is what Anameel means. So the grace of God, being the offspring of peace, brings to the prophet in prison his own field, according to God's command.

Fragment 61

This man makes a deed of purchase. Perhaps this stands for the understandings, the memories and the teachings by which we have acquired the field, that is, the labors of the way of life. For the one who is going to practice righteousness must first know about righteousness, and the same can be said of the other virtues. God takes care that the book is put into a jar so that it will last longer. For “we have this treasure in earthen vessels.” These vessels may be our own jars, or the plainness of the wording of Scripture. So “the ruler of this world” was deceived. He despised the word of godliness because it was not in golden vessels adorned with fine diction and persuasive phrasing, and for that reason it remained many days. For the one who holds the deed of purchase says, “My word and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of Spirit and power.” When Jeremiah had done what he was commanded, he gave thanks to God. Notice the prophet’s obedience, which came before any visible advantage. Then he adds a prophecy of the land’s recovery. For prophecy given through deeds makes what is heard visible, and makes the future as if it were present, showing the whole in the part.

Fragment 62

It is not believable that the prophet would give such great thanks for a field bought for “ten and seven shekels,” when he was “sanctified from the womb” and full of the divine Spirit. But look at the sabbath number, the symbol of rest, and at ten, which is perfect and belongs to God. (For tithes are offered on the tenth day of the atonements, and the first lawgiving was the Decalogue.) Then you will know what “the field” is: it is full of fruits fitting for saints. Such was the field of Jacob, which Isaac smelled. “Behold,” he says, “the smell of my son is like the smell of a full field which the Lord has blessed.” Such is the person who “has the fruits of the Spirit,” so that he may “sow to the Spirit and reap eternal life.” For he breathed out patience, kindness, [the text is broken here], and gives thanks, saying, “O Lord, you who are.” For he looks to the one who truly is, “not looking at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen.”

Fragment 63

Jeremiah wrote down not only prophecies but also his own sufferings. By the one he taught some the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, and by the other he taught others examples of endurance, while the false prophets suffered nothing of the kind because of their flattery. So let us be ready, in a time of persecution, to be ranked with Jeremiah and with the apostle who said, “in prisons often.” The statement that the king was not able to oppose them shows that his own intention toward Jeremiah was rather kindly. A righteous king must not be carried along with the wicked men around him. Often, too, it is useful to have the protection of the powerful, through which God often does good.

Fragment 64

"I am afraid," he says, "that I will become a laughingstock to the deserters; for this is what I take into account and worry about." Jerusalem is handed over because of sin, and the church is too. If someone governs it like Hezekiah, it is saved. If he governs it like Zedekiah, then by being separated from it he saves it, but by staying he destroys it. So if someone who is defiling the church goes out, he saves both the church and his own soul. But if, like Zedekiah, he hesitates about going out, then "a little leaven leavens the whole lump."

Fragment 65

Jeremiah tells him what the women being led into exile will say: “Those who spoke peaceably to you have deceived you, saying that they would not hand you over to the Babylonian.” [They will join in the charge, or: they will be named,] as those who were the cause of the fall. For you will certainly be captured. Perhaps he is also blaming the false prophets, who promised peace in words. But the prophet, out of kindness and concern for the king, hid the truth from the rulers. His silence now did no harm to it, since he had already read the words publicly.

Fragment 66

The prophet was given a choice of where he wished to live. He passes over Babylon and chooses Judea. He is fleeing the honor offered by the king, and he chooses Judea for the sake of the poor who stayed behind to farm. In this way he could look after the land for the sake of the poor, and by his prophecies cultivate their souls. For the prophets divided the work between them: this one took Judea, and Daniel and the three young men took Babylon.

Fragment 67

A good man does not suspect anyone of being so wicked as to murder even those who have done no wrong. Why God allowed Gedaliah to be killed would be a matter for another discussion, and belongs among the unsearchable judgments of God.

Fragment 68

Connect the "not" about the incense with "the Lord remembered." It is clear that he is speaking of those who burn incense to idols, since the statements before this follow once they had confessed it. But let us ask whether someone who burns incense to God in the wrong way also becomes responsible for the land becoming impassable. Suppose you offer physical incense, as the Jews do. If you have virtue, you offer it well, because the fragrance within matches the fragrance outside. But if you offer it with wickedness, you taint the outward fragrance, so to speak, and turn it into a stench. Then it could not be said, "The Lord smelled a fragrant aroma," but the opposite. As for the "aroma of fragrance" with God, it is not said of the clean animals Noah offered. It is said of his righteousness and perfection, which he himself had in his generation. For God does not delight in blood and the smoke of fat, as demons do. Let us rather, "raised together with Christ, seek the things above," keeping in mind the words "Let my prayer be as incense before you." For John says in Revelation, "The prayers of the saints are incense."

But if we defile prayer with wicked thoughts, then what happens is "Let their prayer become sin." If instead we pray out of righteousness, the opposite happens. For when people say because of their sin, "My wounds stank and festered because of my folly," their incense becomes foul-smelling. For this reason Isaiah said, "If you bring fine flour, it is vain; incense is an abomination to me." The apostle taught how we should pray, saying, "I want the men to pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without anger and disputing." When Moses' hands were lifted up like that, Israel prevailed; when they were lowered, Amalek prevailed. Whoever prays this way does not fail, for the saying is true: "While you are still speaking, he will say, 'Look, I am here.'" So the Lord, he says, could no longer bear the incense of the wicked. We too may put up with some stench, but when it grows worse we flee from it. God likewise has a measure of patience, and he goes after those who do not repent. He did this in Noah's time, when he could no longer bear the stench of those who were then doing wrong. Therefore he says among the prophets, "I have kept silent; shall I be silent forever?"

Fragment 69

When bodies decay, the surrounding air takes in the decay and is itself corrupted, and it brings plague on those who come near, so that the place becomes impassable. In the same way the sins of souls bring about a plague of souls.

Fragment 70

Baruch suffered with the people and lamented, and he pleaded with God on their behalf. For this reason he receives a promise of help in their troubles, with God saying, in effect, “Those I tear down, I will build up again.” For first “he causes pain, and then he restores,” and so on. The good things cannot be received unless the evils have first been removed. For God, as the architect of “the true tent, which the Lord pitched, and not man,” also pulls down the wretched buildings of unbelievers. Paul speaks of that tent: “You are God’s building.” And like a farmer he pulls up what bears no fruit, for “every plant that my heavenly Father did not plant will be uprooted.” He plants a “fruitful vine.” This is not like the one “turned to bitterness and foreign,” which he cuts down so that he may make it again “true” and “God’s field.” In the same way, according to David, he “took down the hedge” of the vine from Egypt, and David prays for it: “Look down from heaven, and visit this vine.” So these people too are being disciplined for their benefit: “For the Lord disciplines the one he loves.” “For who is it that makes me glad, if not the one who is grieved by me?” “For godly grief produces a repentance without regret that leads to salvation.” “For this reason I bring evils upon all flesh”: upon those who set their minds on earthly things.

Fragment 71

For God finds the souls of the righteous. “The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,” but the souls of sinners are reckoned as though they did not even exist.

Fragment 72

{Just as all God's gifts are immeasurably greater than our mortal frame, so too the exact account of the wisdom behind all these things lies with God, who also arranged for them to be written. If the Father of the Word is willing, it may be given to the soul that has been thoroughly purified, one that approaches with all earnestness and with a sense of human weakness in grasping wisdom. But suppose someone throws himself in too rashly. He has not considered that God's wisdom is unspeakable, nor the Word who was "in the beginning" and "with God" and himself God, nor that these things must be sought and found in keeping with the Word who is God and with the wisdom that is with him. Such a person must fall into fables, idle talk and invented stories, and put himself in danger of impiety. So we should also remember the command about such matters that Solomon gives in Ecclesiastes: "Do not hurry to bring out a word before the face of God. For God is in heaven above, and you are on earth below. Therefore let your words be few."} We ought to believe that no stroke of the holy Scriptures is empty of God's wisdom. For he who commanded me, a man, "You shall not appear before me empty," will much more himself say nothing empty.

The prophets speak because they have received "from his fullness." That is why everything of theirs breathes out of fullness. There is nothing in prophecy, law, gospel or apostle that is not from fullness. Because it is from fullness, it breathes of that fullness to those who have eyes that see the things of fullness, ears that hear what comes from fullness, and a sense of smell for the fragrance of what breathes from fullness. And if you ever stumble while reading Scripture over a thought that is really a fine "stone of stumbling and rock of offense," blame yourself. Do not give up hope that this stone of stumbling and rock of offense holds meanings, so that what was said may come true: "and the one who believes will not be put to shame." Believe first, and under what seems to be an offense you will find much holy benefit.

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able, we strive to make every word that comes out of our mouth do something, both in us who speak and in those who hear. What then should we understand about the prophets, except that every word spoken through their mouth was effective? It is no wonder if every word spoken by the prophets accomplished the work that fits a word. But I think that every wonderful letter written in the oracles of God also does its work. There is not one "iota or one stroke" written in Scripture that does not do its own work for those who know how to use the power of the letters.

Fragment 73

Think of herbs. Each one has its own power, whether for the health of the body or for some other purpose. But not everyone can know what each herb is good for. Only those who have gained that knowledge, the ones who spend their time among herbs, know when to gather a plant, where on the body to apply it, and how to prepare it so that it helps the person who uses it. In the same way, the saint is a kind of spiritual herbalist. He gathers from the sacred writings each single iota and each ordinary letter. He finds the power of the letter, what it is useful for, and that nothing written there is superfluous. If you want to hear a second example, consider that each part of our body was made by God the craftsman for some particular work. But not everyone can know the power and use of each part, even down to the most ordinary ones. Those physicians who have worked at anatomy can say, of each part and even the smallest piece, what use providence made it for. So think of the Scriptures in the same way: as all the herbs, or as one complete body of words. If you are not an herbalist of the Scriptures, and not an anatomist of the prophetic words, do not suppose that anything written is superfluous. Blame yourself rather than the sacred writings when you do not find the meaning of what is written. I have said this by way of introduction. It can be useful in a general way for the whole of Scripture. Let it encourage those who want to give attention to their reading never to pass over any letter without examining and searching it.

Sources. Greek text: Erich Klostermann's edition (Origenes Werke, Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'Sche Buchhandlung, 1901); Erich Klostermann's edition (Origenes Werke, Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1901), digitised by Open Greek and Latin and the First Thousand Years of Greek project (CC BY-SA 4.0). The English is a new translation made by SermonIndex with AI directly from the Greek, as a first reading version; it has not been checked line by line by a person and may contain mistakes. No older English translation was used. Where the digital Greek is flagged as damaged, the English is a best reading. Released under CC BY-SA 4.0.