Fragments on Lamentations

Origen of Alexandria (c. AD 240–250)

SermonIndex.net / Church Fathers

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Fragment 1

Jeremiah, after the people had been taken captive and while he was in Babylon, mourns for the city, the land and the people because of what had happened. He mourns in sections and divisions, which he marks off in order, beginning with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. After he has finished the lament for each letter, and last of all the one beginning with Tau, which is the final Hebrew letter, he returns to Aleph and laments again. He does this four times, going through the twenty-two letters.

Fragment 2

If we see the soul placed under the hand of the devil, or of his angels, or in short of the hostile powers (the soul, which by nature is able to contemplate, to see what is real and to take its stand upon it), then we will somehow understand the captivity and the one who took the captive. But if we take refuge in Christ, who according to the prophet Isaiah proclaimed "release to captives," we will be set free from the captivity, even if the one who took us captive has gone as far as binding us. For Jesus came "to bring out those who are bound from their chains, and those who sit in darkness from the house of the prison."

Fragment 3

For this reason the Hebrews say that the books of the old Scripture are equal in number to the letters, so that there is a complete introduction to the knowledge of God, just as the letters are the introduction to all wisdom for those who are learning. And it is fourfold, perhaps because the elements of bodies are also four. And a little later: The edition of Aquila and Theodotion is not found in the Lamentations; only that of Symmachus and the Septuagint. And again: Someone might ask how, when the title of the book is in the plural, "Lamentations," in the prologue he speaks of this lament in the singular. But the individual laments are many, divided according to the letters, while all of them are brought back to one, since they all refer to a single subject, Israel.

Fragment 4

Weeping that comes from love is called blessed. For it belongs to the holy person “to weep with those who weep.”

Fragment 5

As the Lord drew near to Jerusalem he wept and said, “If you too had known the things that make for your peace.” “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.”

Fragment 6

So if “blessed are those who weep, for they will laugh,” then Jeremiah, this man of mystery, had to weep this weeping. And in keeping with “blessed are those who mourn,” he had to mourn for those who deserved to be mourned.

Fragment 7

As far as the wording goes, the “multitude of the people” seems to mean the Israelites who lived there, and the “multitude of the nations,” as we said before, the proselytes. But for the higher meaning: since contemplative matters are closer kin to the soul and less distracting than practical ones, the multitude of the people means the wealth of insights, and the multitude of the nations means the great number of good deeds. And a little later: “She who was full of people sits alone.” The bride has cast out the bridegroom, the Word, and so has become like a widow, she who was once full of the nations just mentioned.

Fragment 8

As far as the wording goes, it fits that Jerusalem is spoken of with wonder, because of the change to something more grim: she sits bereft, she who was once full of people, so that her loneliness is her desolation. She had a husband, the living Word who was her protector, when she followed him while he was present and helping her. Now she is widowed and abandoned because of what has been sinned. And after other things: So much for the literal text. As for the meaning, Jerusalem, prospering and full of people and of nations and ruling over regions, is the divine soul. It is no wonder if the perfect soul is called Jerusalem, not merely a house or a farmstead or a village (which is greater than that) or some ordinary city, but one that surpasses all cities and is honored before God. The greatest city is clothed with a greatness worthy of note, and for her wisdom and every virtue [the text is corrupt here: something like "many times over the buildings"] abound. And a little later: Just as one can see Jerusalem flourishing, filling with people and nations and ruling over regions, so, if virtue can be lost, one can see her at some time left alone, widowed and enslaved, so that she even pays tribute to the enemy who has conquered her. This is according to the soul of the person who has fallen away from the truth.

Fragment 9

Lamentations 1:1. Why speak of how she, who once ruled over regions, is enslaved among her enemies to such a degree that she must always pay tribute, [doing everything the masters command]? And they command nothing good. Perhaps for each sin she commits here she pays some tribute to Nebuchadnezzar, whose name is interpreted “Settling-in” and “knowledge of restraint.” And she pays not to Nebuchadnezzar alone, but also to his satraps.

Fragment 10

Lamentations 1:2. In the first lament, the one beginning with Aleph, we were able to keep to the wording. But what could anyone say about this one, where a city is said to have wept in the night so that her tears are on her cheeks? Perhaps someone will say that the people who are called "the city," and who also pay tribute, wept when they remembered from what peace and freedom they had fallen into such great slavery and humiliation. How, then, shall we explain "in the night"? Perhaps it means that at the time of rest common to all people, the city, being reminded, wept while they lay at rest. They wept in streams, with tears running down their cheeks. Their weeping grew especially strong and the tears flowed, because not one of so many who loved her was there to console them. Everyone who was fond of her had rejected the friendship they had with her and turned it into hatred. Who, then, as far as the wording goes, were those who loved her before, and of whom not one was there to console her? Perhaps the other cities of Judea. Perhaps because they loved the mother city, they did not comfort her in her time of distress. And a little later: So much for the literal text. [Now if the word "weep" is taken, as in the earlier passages, of one who has fallen from her own country and come into confusion, then she has a condition opposite to laughing, the laughter that comes from joy and cheerfulness.] Our Lord promises this laughter to those who weep the blessed weeping, saying: "Blessed are those who weep now, for they will laugh." And in Job it says: "He will fill the mouth of the truthful with laughter." Perhaps this is also why one of the patriarchs is called Laughter. The apostle, then, who groans, made this clear when he said: "For indeed we who are in the tent groan, being burdened." Because of the promise of cheerfulness, he weeps a weeping that is most nourishing and that benefits the soul.

Fragment 11

Lamentations 1:2. We think that loving [agapan] is the more divine, and, so to speak, the spiritual kind of love, while being fond [philein] is bodily and more human. Perhaps, since no wicked person loves in the first sense, we should notice that about the better ones it says: "There is no one to console her from all who love her." About the lesser ones it says: "All who were fond of her rejected her; they became enemies to her." The lesser ones both rejected her and became her enemies, while the better ones simply did not console her.

Fragment 12

Lamentations 1:3. As for the literal text, the sense would be this. Judea exchanged her own place. The causes of this were her humiliation (she was humbled by sinning, and she abandoned the high and lofty standing she once had when she lived in godliness), and also her heavy slavery, in which she was enslaved by being subjected to the passions. Removed to a new home, she was settled among the nations, where she was unable to find rest. All her enemies pursued her, overtook her and overpowered her, and she came under the power of the nations who oppressed her.

Fragment 13

On the literal level, the sense is this. The law says, “Three times a year every male of yours shall appear before the Lord your God.” So after the temple was built in Zion, from the time of Solomon, the people hurried to carry out what was commanded. The cities of Judea lay around Jerusalem, and roads led from every direction to Zion. The prophet says that because of the captivity these roads mourn: they are gloomy and wholly deserted. [The text is damaged here.] In those earlier times there was great joy and gladness on them, as Jews from every quarter hurried to Mount Zion for the feast. There were also many gates built in Zion, facing every region, and the text says that all of them have been destroyed. The priests can no longer carry out their [duties] on other days, either because they have been taken captive or because no one is left to come to them and ask for the priestly services. Moreover, he says, the virgins of Zion are being led away, evidently by the enemies who have conquered them.

Fragment 14

On the deeper sense: Zion is the name for the power of the soul that watches and contemplates. To it lead many roads of varied teachings, whether mystical, natural or moral, and perhaps also logical. These roads lead to the understanding and contemplation of the matters set before us. But suppose someone loses the discipline of practicing these things and falls into confusion. Then all these roads mourn, because no one travels them. They keep festival when they are traveled, examined and, so to speak, crossed from end to end. They mourn when they are deserted, when no one searches them or goes through them, because the travelers have fallen away, have been taken captive by the passions, and have been drawn off to worse things.

Fragment 15

Zion, having nothing sweet at all, lives in bitterness by herself. The words “she is embittered” here should not be taken as a kind of anger.

Fragment 16

The plain sense of the wording is something like this. Before the time of the captivity, some were oppressing the land of Judea, or at least wanted to, but they did not prevail, because God shielded the Jews. That was when the Jews showed themselves worthy of help. But when they sinned, and besides not listening to the prophets the sons of Israel even put them to death, then they were handed over into the power of their oppressors. So their enemies became "head," that is, as Symmachus translated it, "rulers." Others, however, who were enemies alongside the oppressors, either in intention or in actual fact, were prospering, while those who had been abandoned because of their sins fell into the power of the oppressors. The Lord humbled the transgressors because of the multitude of their ungodly acts. He did it so thoroughly that no mercy was left even for their little children, but they went into captivity, driven along by every oppressor.

Fragment 17

And those who had not kept their covenants with him, given in the holy oracles, were handed over to humiliation by the Lord because of the multitude of their ungodly acts. Their enemies took the lead and rejoiced over it.

Fragment 18

We must explain the wording as far as we are able. We ask who the daughter of Zion is, and in what her beauty lies. We ask also what the pasture is that the rulers of the daughter of Zion do not have, like rams without grazing, and how, stripped of strength, they walk before the face of the pursuer. Our understanding is this. Mount Zion is the mother of the assembly in it, and the assembly is called the daughter of Zion. The beauty of the daughter of Zion is the wealth she had in her robes. When the enemies plundered, this wealth "went out" from the things it adorned. That is, it was carried off; "went out" is the stronger way he says it. The leaders of the assembly, with the enemies pressing upon them and taking captives, lacked their usual provisions. They became like rams that find no food. Rams that are driven along without being fed walk feebly, giving way to the force of those chasing them. In the same way the rulers became captives and were led away to the country of their captors. They did not walk in strength before the face of the pursuer.

Fragment 19

Lamentations 1:6. As for the deeper meaning, a soul of this kind is a daughter of Zion. Just as the righteous soul is a daughter of righteousness, and the wise soul a child of wisdom, so, since Zion means “Watchtower,” the soul that keeps watch and passes through things by contemplation could be called a daughter of Zion. What else could I fittingly take to be her beauty and her dignity than the wealth of the holy doctrines of truth, seen with wisdom? So when someone, after gaining beauty and dignity, neglects to hold these doctrines fast and to increase the divine wealth, what had been her adornment drains away and goes out from her. The rulers are those who led the way in the word and guided her by the hand to the possession of the beauty just described. Like rams that lead the flock of sheep and find no pasture, they too have fallen into want, because they let go of attention to the things that could feed them and, so to speak, fatten the sheep as well. Because of this they grow weak and are overtaken by the pursuer, who is our adversary the devil. They walk before him, driven wherever he wishes to lead them. But if the daughter of Zion just mentioned takes care of her beauty and her splendor, and takes thought to guard her dignity, she despises and mocks the king of the Assyrians, as we have learned from Isaiah, who says: “The virgin daughter of Zion has despised you and mocked you.”

Fragment 20

Lamentations 1:7. For the one who remembers, in suffering such things, is not remembering the present but the past. And a little later: Having raised these difficulties at this passage, and looking for the reminder of her past humiliation and her rejections (that is, that her people fell into the hand of the oppressor and the things brought upon her came to pass), we ask whether humiliation in the proper sense is anything other than sin, just as exaltation is right conduct. Rejection too comes about through nothing at work except wicked action, for this is enough to cast a person away from God and from everything that is by nature most beautiful. So when Jerusalem, that is, those who live in her, was drunk and beside herself with sin and was being humbled, she did not take pleasure in her failings. But when her repayments came, through her people falling into the hand of the oppressor with no one to help her, then she remembered the things on account of which she was suffering, understanding them to be the causes both of her people's fall and of her being left without help. And a little later: But if a soul of this kind is Jerusalem, it is worth asking who her people are. When they fall into the hand of the oppressor because there is no helper, she herself remembers the days of her humiliation, and also her own rejections by which she was cast away, and in addition all her desires from ancient days. Consider whether the people of Jerusalem are not the insights in the soul that has knowledge. Because the soul has fallen into inattention and carelessness, these insights fall, thrown down by everything that oppresses. For the doctrines of the careless drain away, squeezed out by the sins that gain room in the person who neglects better things, since they no longer have any help from reason.

Fragment 21

Lamentations 1:8. The sense of the passage is this. Since Jerusalem sinned a sin, she has become unstable and troubled, so much so that all who formerly honored her changed their minds and dishonored such a city, when they saw her disgrace. And she, for what she has suffered because of her sins, fallen into turmoil and into dishonor from those who once honored her, groans. She no longer goes forward in her sins but has lessened them and withdrawn backward. And a little later: But if a soul of this kind is called Jerusalem, quick-witted, sharp-sighted, and able to understand the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, then, since it is possible for her to sin for many reasons, the passage shows that she has fallen into turmoil, having withdrawn from good things and come to be among worse ones. Everyone who has fallen from virtue and lives together with vice is rightly said to be in turmoil.

Fragment 22

It shows the checking of Jerusalem's sins. She no longer stretches forward to the failings that lie ahead, nor does she go on in her sins, but turns back, toward what is good and her own.

Fragment 23

Lamentations of Jeremiah 1:9. On the literal, bodily reading, what is said here about Jerusalem is this: the uncleanness of Jerusalem is an obstacle. The prophet leaves us to work out what it is an obstacle to. Perhaps he does not only mean that the uncleanness hinders her journey. Even while she was in that state, he shows that Jerusalem did not remember her last things. Whoever keeps these before his eyes, and sees what will meet him because of his sins, will not sin. So because of this uncleanness there is an obstacle for her. And because she did not remember her last things, she brought down her wonderful and great possessions, which she had when she was worthy of being watched over, and she carried them down into lowliness. Before, they were immense and beyond all praise. Yet even after all this there was no one to comfort her. [The text here is corrupt; the sense seems to be:] "Consider her greatest losses; consider my humiliation, I who say, Lord, since the enemy is magnified over what has happened to my homeland." And after a few lines: But following the rules of allegorical interpretation, we must ask whether it is possible for uncleanness to be in someone who is not the cause of it. Let us also look at the first thoughts of the Lament.

A soul of this kind that has fallen is altogether in uncleanness, and this uncleanness prevents it from walking the holy way. God commanded holy Moses, and Jesus his successor, to take off their sandals when they stepped on a holy place, because it was not fitting to wear a dead skin on the feet in a sacred place. In the same way, if someone is to walk without hindrance, perhaps he must not only take off his sandals but also wash away the uncleanness that the dust has left around his feet. We think the Savior's act is a symbol of this. He put water into the basin and washed the disciples' feet. He spoke to Peter, who did not yet understand the mystery and so tried to stop him: "If I do not wash you, you have no part with me," and "What I am doing you do not know now, but you will know after these things." So it will be necessary [for us to recognize] the uncleanness around the feet, so to speak, of the soul, and to ask Jesus to wash it off, so that we may be able to have a part with him. For if that uncleanness remains, it is an obstacle to our walking the way in accordance with sound doctrine, that is, the Savior who said, "I am the way."

Fragment 24

Lamentations of Jeremiah 1:9. It is clear that the healthy soul, or at least the soul that wants to be healthy, does these things. It looks not so much at the present alone as ahead to what will meet it in the future from what is being done. Suppose something seems good in the present, but the soul foresees bitterness in the future. Then it sets aside what seems sweet and does the opposite, so that it will not later fall into something harsh. But suppose the present is painful, yet good hopes follow what looks hard. Then the soul gives itself willingly to the roughness of what some would think terrible, so that through having endured these hard things it may gain the sweet things that follow them.

Fragment 25

Lamentations of Jeremiah 1:9. He says that after suffering all this, the city more figuratively called Jerusalem did not even find anyone to comfort her. She turned away from the Word within her and gave herself wholly to passion. So she has lost her helper, who always arms against toils and against what are thought to be terrors the disposition that pays attention to him. Then see my humiliation, as the citizen's kinsman of soul might say: the suffering of my fellow citizen, through which I was taught love for people, is my own misfortune. "Consider, then, O Lord, and do not abandon altogether the one who has suffered what was described. Do not overlook her enemy." I mean evil, grown great and poured out against her. The words "See, Lord, my humiliation" can be taken more figuratively as spoken by the Word who is within the soul, who has been dishonored and humbled and, so to speak, has lost his own kingdom.

Fragment 26

The “desirable things” of Jerusalem should be understood as the things in the temple. These are the holy of holies, the [vessels] kept for the priestly service, and the other things believed to be divine because they were stored in the temple, such as the golden lampstand and the rest. The people were convinced that these things were kept in the temple for the glory of God. So they valued them above everything, and would themselves rather have suffered something harsh at the hands of the enemy than see any of these things fall into enemy hands. Those of the circumcision are accustomed to call the temple “the sanctuary.”

Fragment 27

Jerusalem suffered something most astonishing at the time of the captivity. She saw nations that God had commanded not to enter the assembly trampling the sanctuary. Even Israelites are not permitted to enter that place. Only the priests were counted worthy to be there, and only those who had received the purifications. The enemies went even as far as the forbidden places, into a place which the high priest enters only once a year, and then only barely and with great purification. And a little later: If Jerusalem, as we explained above, is a soul of this kind, then the good things that belong to her by nature should be understood as her adornment. By these she served the divine. They are stored in her inner places, which are closed to every word except the high priest, and they are called her "desirable things." Against all these things came the enemy who had won the wrestling match. He had pressed hard on the soul that was not fighting well on her own behalf but was deservedly abandoned by divine help. He stretched himself out with his power, which is active toward what is wicked, and tore her away from her ruling faculty. He left the soul that had fallen away from God empty of good things. The nations in this passage should also be taken allegorically. They are the crowd of vices that has entered the ruling faculty. That faculty was made able to receive God, and to be a true sanctuary for the one who wishes to rest in a pure mind. God forbids these nations absolutely to enter the assembly. For what could we suppose God more properly forbids to enter a soul counted among the assembly of God than the works and mindset of the flesh? They are truly nations hostile to God. "For the flesh wars against the spirit," and the mindset of the flesh is enmity toward God. "For it is not subject to the law of God; indeed, it cannot be."

Fragment 28

They groaned because of famine. For a little food, to bring back a fainting soul, they gave away their most precious things. But how could they give the treasures mentioned above to buy food, when the enemies had carried them off? The enemy “stretched out his hand over everything,” but when he had taken his fill of what he wanted, he left the rest. In exchange for that remainder, they bought food.

Fragment 29

"Look, Lord, at my dishonor" is a prayer from Jerusalem, who has lost her adornment because of the famine. Perhaps the treasures are of two kinds. The first are those described earlier, "against which the enemy stretched out his [hand]." The second are those belonging to each individual of the people. The enemy took the common treasures, and in place of their private ones each person bought food. Now for the higher meaning. Esau sold his birthright for the sake of red stew, from which he got the name Edom, that is, Red Land. He became earthly, since he despised the birthright and put earthly things first. Jacob pursued the same things only in second place, as necessities, because he was in a body. Jerusalem is like this too. But Esau gave Jacob, the worthy one, the desirable things he had, even if he had not chosen them first. The people of Jerusalem also gave their treasures for the sake of food. But they did not give them to a holy man who had prepared the food. They gave them to Babylonians, who were going to treat the treasures they were given with contempt. Jacob knows how to adorn what comes from Esau, but the Babylonians do not use what they are given for any good of their own. In the same way a soul, for lack of necessary provisions, throws away the divine teachings to those who, out of idle curiosity, want to learn them in order to slander and mock.

Fragment 30

Lamentations of Jeremiah 1:13. He has described the fire that came with the capture, which took hold of the strongest buildings, or else the capture of the leading citizens in the city, who were burned, as it were, in soul and in outward things by their calamities. He also shows the seizing of the lower classes into slavery, as in a field of nets. These were the people who had not used their freedom well. They were not stretching forward to the things ahead of them [text uncertain: something seems to be missing], but turned back to the things behind. They turned from glory to dishonor and from freedom to slavery. Instead of being honored, they became dimmed and obscure, through dishonor and outrage. Because of all this the city has fallen into endless grief.

Fragment 31

Lamentations of Jeremiah 1:14. Providence, she says, has not been asleep over my ungodly acts. God, as though taking them into his hands, has examined them and woven them into the works of recompense. They have become for me like a yoke on the neck, and he has laid slavery upon me. For the slavery I served to Nebuchadnezzar is my own ungodliness. So I have become powerless, handed over to masters whose rule I cannot endure. And a little later: "His yoke is on my neck." This present text shows that what is said of God as if it were about our own passions must be taken more figuratively. For how else could Jerusalem's ungodly acts be woven together by the hand of God, except figuratively? No one would say that these things happen in a bodily way. And would it not be absurd to take the neck figuratively, since Jerusalem is a city, and yet not to hear the members spoken of as God's in the same manner? Let it now be said as if by a soul that has fallen asleep into ungodliness. It has kicked free from the saving yoke of sound reason, which the Savior calls "easy," and has slipped under the yoke of its ungodly acts. Through these it grew weak, abandoned by God's oversight and handed over to sin, the ruler of evils. Because wickedness is boundless and without limit, the soul cannot fully serve sin's wishes or ever give it enough. Sin truly humbles, chokes, and makes a person look downward. A yoke, too, is the conscience that always chokes and wounds, will not allow the head to be lifted, and strips away all boldness. It has caused, she says, a slackening even of the strength which I did not use well, and I am undone as I look at the evils that hold me fast.

Fragment 32

Lamentations of Jeremiah 1:15. He did not take them from my midst. For even if I had been deprived of them, it would have been possible to use them for other purposes. Instead he condemned them to suffer in my midst because of the ungodly things I did. My chosen ones have suffered the most grievous things, since the Lord himself trod the wine of his wrath in the winepress, to the full, for me and for the virgin of Judah, the most royal. By “strong men” he might mean those mighty in war who defended the homeland, and by “chosen” the well-born or the wise. The phrase “he trod the winepress” is made clear by what is said in the Psalms about the punishment of sinners: “a cup in the hand of the Lord, full of unmixed mixture.” It is tipped from one person being punished to the next, until “all the sinners of the earth” drink. The dregs are left for those who are still more sinful than these, and into these last “the dregs” will be emptied.

Fragment 33

Lamentations of Jeremiah 1:15. It is not hard to see how the Lord trod a winepress for the virgin daughter of Judah. For “what each person sows, that he will also reap,” and perhaps also what he cultivates, that he will also harvest as grapes. So the one who has made a better wine will rejoice in his own produce. But the one who has cultivated the vine of Sodom and the shoot of Gomorrah, and has borne the grape of gall, the cluster of bitterness, and the incurable wrath of asps, will have all these gathered by the Lord into one winepress. His evil works will be trodden and squeezed, and in keeping with such fruits he will drink, so as to vomit up the gall, the bitterness, and the wrath. And he will drink: according to Jeremiah, in order to vomit it out; according to Isaiah, in order to be roused and to put on the glory that is his by kinship. For the Lord does not tread a winepress for nothing, least of all for the virgin daughter of Judah.

Fragment 34

Lamentations of Jeremiah 1:15. The soul received from its Creator many powerful and choice gifts. Now it has lost them through wickedness and is paying the penalty, and it confesses what it has suffered. The time summoned to crush it is the time of repayment. According to Ezekiel, at that time none of all the righteous deeds the righteous man has done will be remembered in the day of sin. But by mourning over what has happened, the soul is helped, since those who mourn and weep have the promise of comfort and laughter.

Fragment 35

Lamentations of Jeremiah 1:16. She said that the cause of her groaning is that there is no one to turn her soul back, or, in Symmachus's words, no one to restore it. She says also that the sons have been wiped out, because the enemy has grown strong through the things in which they sinned. For when we are godly he has no strength. He grows weak as we advance and is put to death as we are made perfect. He is crushed under our feet, ground fine like dust before the face of the wind, and ground fine like the mud of the streets. For he is fed, and gains power, in proportion to our sins. But when we stop doing wrong, he is destroyed as if by famine. Conversely, when we do well we strengthen the divine powers for ourselves, and when we sin we drive them away. That is why Symmachus, in place of "wiped out," gave "desolate." These words could be spoken by a soul that has been contemplating the truth but through carelessness has lost the Word who gladdened it, and all her fruits, which are called her sons. This happened because evil, her enemy, has been strengthened against her.

Fragment 36

Lamentations of Jeremiah 1:17. By Zion he means the mountain, by Jacob the people, and by Jerusalem the mother city. God gave Jacob commandments, and because they were transgressed, Jacob was surrounded by enemies. But according to Symmachus, and according to another edition of the Seventy, the Lord commanded that those who afflict him be all around him. This was done through the powers assigned to do harm.

Fragment 37

Lamentations of Jeremiah 1:17. By the phrase “as a woman set apart,” he has shown the uncleanness of Jerusalem that came through sin. By “in the midst” he means either between Zion and Jacob, or in the middle of the whole mountain (for Jerusalem is built on only part of it) and of the whole people, with Jacob here meaning the twelve tribes. Taken literally, Zion and Jerusalem can be understood in two ways: either as places or as the people who live in them. If Zion is a place, her hands are her works, such as farming and whatever is made by hand. He says these hands are spread out and not busy, not doing with the hands the fitting work, as in an idle and desolate land. If he means the inhabitants, the hands would be the farmers and workers, who do not set their hands to work because of what has surrounded them. And if the hands of Zion are interpreted figuratively, how much more the “members” of God in Scripture. The mountain itself, so to speak, groans together with the nation, having no comfort, neither God nor any holy man.

Fragment 38

Lamentations of Jeremiah 1:18. By “the mouth of the Lord” we should understand the prophets. Isaiah was one of them, and he said, “For the mouth of the Lord has spoken these things.” Jerusalem was reproached by the Savior as “the one who kills the prophets.” In this sense she also embittered the mouth of the Lord, by handing the prophets over to the most bitter sufferings. God, who seeks the blood of the prophets, hands over her young men and virgins to the sufferings of wars, and then again to captivities. So she confesses for the things she has suffered, offering herself as an example to others, so that they may learn God’s righteousness and not suffer similar things.

Fragment 39

Lamentations of Jeremiah 1:18. Beyond the literal sense, take the virgins to be those who live in purity and incorruption, and the young men to be those who are well regarded for virtue. For often the saints also suffer together with those who are guilty.

Fragment 40

Lamentations of Jeremiah 1:19. Ezekiel has shown who the lovers are. He says to Jerusalem, whom he calls Oholibah: “Thus says the Lord Lord: Look, I am rousing your lovers against you from every side, the sons of Babylon and all the Chaldeans.” These had formerly been friends, but by divine providence they turned into enemies. This often happens when love turns to hatred. For about Samaria he says: “And Holla played the whore away from me and attached herself to her lovers, the Assyrians.” A little later he says: “Therefore he handed her over into the hands of her lovers, into the hands of the sons of the Assyrians.” And he says about Jerusalem: “And her sister Oliba saw it, and she made her attachment more corrupt than the whoring of her sister, and she attached herself to the sons of the Assyrians.”

Fragment 41

Lamentations 1:20. In the prophecy, the soul is in pain as one who is about to suffer terrible things. In the present Lament, as though these things have already happened, she is distressed. She confesses that, because of sin, the kindness of God has made itself most bitter. The result is that she who had many children has been made childless, and, worst of all, by the hand of an enemy. Since this is personification, we should not look for a city's womb that gave birth, or for a heart that has been loosened.

Fragment 42

Lamentations 1:21. Jerusalem divides her speech between the enemies, whom she wants to hear her, and God. But why does she urge the enemies to listen? And why does she tell God about them, that they rejoiced? Perhaps it is because salvation came to the Gentiles through her own and Israel's transgression, to make them jealous. And when the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, then all Israel will be saved. So she speaks the first words prophetically [to those] from the Gentiles, and the second words to God. "I was abandoned to suffer, so that you might receive room. Because of you I have become an enemy of God, although by election I am beloved because of the fathers. So when you hear my groaning, understand also its cause. I have been abandoned completely for the sake of your salvation, and I have no one to comfort me always after the trial of evils. For now a ruler has failed from Judah, and a leader from his thighs. For he came for whom the things laid up were [gap in the text], the expectation of the [gap in the text]. And since his blood is being avenged, there is no one still to comfort Jerusalem."

Fragment 43

Lamentations 1:22. That is: let their wickedness not be allowed to go further, but let it come under your oversight. It is like someone praying that his wounds might come to the eye of a doctor so as to receive a complete cure. This is the meaning of “all.” It is blessed above all not to sin. The second blessing is that all our wickedness be overseen by God.

Fragment 44

Lamentations 1:22. “To glean” means, after the harvest, to gather the small amounts of what was left behind, which is what the poor do. So when you oversaw me carefully, you used to cleanse my vine shoots, removing everything worse, down to the smallest things, [of the grape and of the cluster of bitterness]. In the same way, deal so with my enemies. This is to my advantage, since if they are completely saved, then I too, Lord, will obtain salvation according to your judgment. Seeing them, I am deeply grieved and I condemn myself, because I need your oversight.

Fragment 45

Lamentations 2:3. A similar statement is in David: “He will crush all the horns of sinners.” Here he means the rulers, in whom the strength of the nation lies, as it does in the horned animals. They also stand out above the body, as rulers do above their subjects. Daniel also compared kingdoms to horns. The horn also shows the arrogance of those in command, as in the words, “Do not lift up your horn on high.” So he turned away his saving hand and made them easy prey for their enemies, whom he also called a flame consuming everything. You could also say that every outstanding thought is a horn, and that the “passions of dishonor” are the fire. The wrongdoer is handed over to these, having lost all the help that surrounded him, in line with the words, “The angel of the Lord will encamp around those who fear him.”

Fragment 46

Lamentations 2:4. For the enemies dared to carry out slaughter in the temple, with God allowing it. “As an enemy” is well said, for God does not punish out of enmity. He wants to benefit either those who suffer or those who watch. He calls the temple a “tent,” in keeping with the sanctuary from the beginning. He calls the bow his power to punish, as in Habakkuk: “You will surely stretch your bow against the scepters, says the Lord,” meaning the opposing rulers and authorities. The Son, who is the right hand of God and Father, fought mightily [gap in the text]. He overthrew even the idols that they had set up in the temple of God (for these were “the desire of the eyes”), and in place of the idols he killed the demons who had made their dwelling there.

Fragment 47

He says “baris,” meaning the houses, which Symmachus rendered “royal residences.” He takes up the laments again, like someone racked with grief in mourning. Again he shows that [the soul] has taken on a lowly way of reasoning and a lowly frame of mind. The things that were like dwellings and fortresses, which as it were filled the ruling faculty, have been pulled down. The virtues are the dwellings, for they shelter us, and the strongholds are the irrefutable lines of reasoning. For this time the pulling down is not of the worse kind of height, those that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God, [nor of the humility by which one learns the ordinances of the Lord]. These are matters for joy, and they are not by nature worthy [of mourning].

Fragment 48

By “tent” he means the temple. By “vine” and “vineyard” he means Israel, as in David’s words, “You brought a vine out of Egypt,” and in Isaiah, “a vineyard, a vineyard, came to be for the beloved.” David goes on, “Why did you tear down its hedge?” and what follows. Isaiah says, “You took away its hedge,” and what follows that. The present Lament also made these things plain. For God drew in his own guard and gave them over to the enemies. [The angel of the Lord] no longer encamped around him, because [he] did not fear [the Lord]. He also did away with the appointed times of worship under the law, as he says in Isaiah: “My soul hates your fasting, your idleness and your feasts.” This he called “forgetting,” but not as though it were a human passion. He stirred up king and priest to anger. They were indignant that, though they were God’s own portion, they suffered such things at the hands of the ungodly.

Fragment 49

He gave up the vessels used in worship. He was no longer pleased with sacrifices from the ungodly, as in the words, “I do not want whole burnt offerings of rams, the fat of lambs, or the blood of bulls and goats.” He also gave up the wall that held the city’s houses together, that is, the royal palaces, as Symmachus rendered it. The enemy took the temple as well, as though this were their final victory, and from then on they held a festival, shouting loudly. The altar of the soul is the rational part in us, through which the passions are offered up as sacrifice, being put to death.

Fragment 50

For he took away all her security, stretching out the measure of the punishment. Zechariah also saw this.

Fragment 51

The wall and the outer wall mourn. These are things worthy of mourning, and they become a cause of weeping even for those who see them. As blessed Isaiah says, “For who will scatter the Lord’s counsel? And who will turn back his lifted hand?” When a city, or a soul, mourns such things, so that it becomes a thing trampled by its enemies, it is likely that the angels mourn who formerly guarded it, one after another, both greater and lesser. For if they rejoice over those who are saved, how will they not mourn over those who fall?

Fragment 52

For they have become invisible, as though swallowed up by earth or sea. King and rulers perished, and the false prophets, and her law as well, through the necessity of slavery. In fact they had abolished that law by their own choice even before they were captured. The gates of the soul are the senses. When the soul sins, they are flooded with passions and become earthly. The powers of the soul that guard the senses are also loosened, since the mind that rules and the ruling lines of reasoning are lost among the passions. Then the law and order of the soul are destroyed, and it becomes Babylon, full of confusion, with nothing of providence left that is helped by God.

Fragment 53

He relates grievous sights that happened in the place of gladness. For out of fear they would not even let the elders lament, and they made the foremost virgins look at the ground. They did this so that, if they appeared, they might not draw the enemy [to violence] by the beauty in which they excelled. You could also say this of those who were long ago elders in virtue, which is why they were so called. They have become earthly and settled among irrational passions, so that they no longer do anything according to reason. They have made the ruling spirit in them earthbound. They have made the self-control they once had something worthy of mourning. And they have corrupted the lines of reasoning that they once kept uncorrupted.

Fragment 54

The prophet speaks of their “own glory”: the temple of God and the piety of the fatherland. It was famine that caused the fainting of the infants. You could say something loftier: that he makes his own the sufferings of his kinsmen according to the flesh, as in “Who is weak, and I am not weak?” He takes on their afflictions of soul. These are the withering of true knowledge, the unsteady drift of reasoning toward earthly things, and the loss of the one who lifts up the head, as in “You, Lord, are my helper, my glory, and the one who lifts up my head.”

Fragment 55

He showed complete wickedness, so that it has no testimony of virtue, and no sinner has anything comparable. For what sin is like that of the one who is far from God, or who drew near and then became unruly? “For if I had not come,” he says, “and spoken to them, they would not have had sin.” So also: “I will be sanctified among those who draw near to me.” For the one who does not know the Lord’s will and does not do it will be beaten with few blows, but the one who knows and does not do it will be beaten with many. A suffering this great, which prophets have not been able to heal, needs God alone. That is why he also took on flesh, since the prophets confessed their weakness in the words “Lord, who has believed our report?” Jerusalem also said earlier: “See whether there is any suffering like my suffering.” So the one who struck will heal. For he himself causes pain, and he restores again. The word “who” is used both of what is rare and of what is nothing. For no human being can heal the blow that God brings.

Fragment 56

A vain prophecy is one that has no outcome, and the kind that vain idols provide. Some also prophesied from themselves, supposedly “for a handful of barley and a piece of bread,” as it is written. They do not know how to expose sins or to rescue people from captivity to demons, but twist souls with their smooth talk. What the true prophets receive, and the word they take from God, is true and joins people to God. In the same way, what comes from demons is false, takes people far from God, and drives them out from the inclination that comes from him. Which “banishments” and “receipts” are not vain, as has been shown? Clearly, those that drive out error and bring people to God.

Fragment 57

“For our enemy the devil prowls like a roaring lion, seeking someone to swallow.” He is also like a snake hissing at us. But may it never happen that he says, “I have swallowed him,” or that he [find] in us the day that the scorching sun produces. For it is said: “By day the sun will not scorch you.” The sun scorches with pleasures and anger, and it offers error as if it were light and knowledge. So as we sing the psalms we will say: “If the Lord had not been among us, they would then have swallowed us alive,” and “the lamp of the ungodly will be put out.”

Fragment 58

He says that the enemies did nothing of themselves. It seemed good to God, and so it happened. That is why Nebuzaradan also said: “The Lord your God spoke these evils against this place, and the Lord brought them, because you sinned against him.” So everyone who does not believe will hear the judgment contained in these words. All the prophets foretold these things, and from ancient days Moses indicated them beforehand in Deuteronomy.

Fragment 59

Scripture sometimes makes its words full of feeling and gives perception to what cannot perceive. It introduces hills leaping and mountains skipping, and calls on hills and stones as witnesses. That is impossible in this case, since the wall has already been pulled down by enemies. So the wall here means the king, the rulers, and all who fortify the city with their power. He asks them to pour out unceasing tears of repentance, which the fallen wall constantly causes in those who see it. These tears, he says, belong to them, unless it again signifies the grief of the power that once guarded the city, and he is showing this by exaggeration. “In affliction,” he says, “they remembered the Lord with their whole heart.” So do this, he says: weep night and day, and “be pierced with remorse upon your beds.” Do not think that being released from these things is sobriety, for repentance leads to salvation. A person becomes sober by ceasing from worse things, not from good ones. Keep your mind joined to Christ at all times, so that he may guard you as the apple of his eye and become a wall for you.

Fragment 60

Night calls for attention, because in it the soul is gathered in on itself while the senses are at rest. Then the text tells us to meditate on the commandments of God and to say with David: “By night I meditated with my heart, and my spirit searched.” The night is divided into four watches, so say with David: “My eyes got ahead of the watches.” Say also with Habakkuk: “I will stand at my watch, and I will keep looking out to see what the Lord God will say in me.” For then you will say: “He will speak peace to his people.” So meditate in the night of the present age. “Your wrestling is not against blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities.” “For you do not know when the master of the house is coming, late, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning; he may come suddenly and find you asleep.” And again: “If you had known in what watch the thief was coming, you would have stayed awake and would not have let your house be broken into.”

Fragment 61

Lift up your hands to him by working what is good. The struggle is no small matter. For lack of the divine word, your little ones are fainting. They stand at the beginning of every way out, which is the commandments of God, and they cannot go forward without God's help and without the bread that strengthens the heart.

Fragment 62

After the prophet urged her, Jerusalem was persuaded and says to God: “Do not turn your face away from me.” “Look upon me and have mercy on me.” “Do not reprove me in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath.” The blow is greater than human nature can bear. I know that I broke the law, and I know the penalties that follow from it. Among them is this: “You shall eat the offspring of your womb, the flesh of your sons and daughters.” I thought those words went no further than a threat. But, Lord, “your law is truth.” What I had never heard of was the slaughter of priest and prophet in the middle of the temple.

Fragment 63

All who were too weak for hard labor because of their age lay thrown on the ground. It was a most pitiable sight, as was the slaughter of young men and virgins. [text uncertain] Would that they had been slaughtered before being led off to a more bitter life. The “outlets of the earth” are the affairs of ordinary life. In these they fell asleep, without having kept watch or prayed, and folly had closed the eyes of their souls. And who are these people? If they were children, it would not be so surprising. But now it is those who seemed to have advanced in virtue, everyone whose soul was uncorrupted and strong in battle, who have fallen into the hands of their enemies. You, you, as the good one, put an end to such a life of theirs, and cut to pieces their whole combined strength set against what is good.

Fragment 64

Those around me, he says, who live in Judea, thought of the feast held for me as a refuge, hoping to find salvation from it. Not one of them is left, because of the anger you brought upon them. For through the very things they sinned, their enemies have become many and strong.

Fragment 65

Terrible things happened to the prophet, both before the city was captured and after it had been taken. So he begins another letter of the alphabet and laments for himself, as he sees the poverty and desolation of the city because of the Lord's discipline. He himself came to be no less in want of good things. He was in difficult circumstances when he was rebuking these people, so that he says: "I was mocked all day long." He was also sharing in the calamities of their sufferings, and in the [sympathy] that comes from it [text incomplete]. He says also, in the words of David: "The shadow of death overshadowed me." For whenever he seems to give a brief rest from the labors, he turns back again and makes the punishment unending.

Fragment 66

“All the day” means every day, as in David: “All day long he fought against me and afflicted me.” “He turned his hand” could also mean this: he once supplied me with good things, but now he brings discipline, as if he had changed his hand.

Fragment 67

He means the rottenness that has come upon us from sin.

Fragment 68

For lasting calamity produces the weakness of old age.

Fragment 69

For he did not let me escape the terrors, since I was besieged on every side. He may also mean the hostile wall thrown around the city. He gave voice to the same words as David, who said, “They made me sit in dark places, like those long dead.” This was because of the prisons the enemy made, and at the same time because of the calamities that came from God; for trials are a darkness of the soul. Jeremiah knew this also from the pit into which Pashhur threw him, a place dark and without light, like the cave in which David hid from Saul. The two Lamentations could also be taken as spoken of Christ, of whom Jeremiah was a type, since he suffered so much at the hands of the Jews and in the end was handed over to the tomb.

Fragment 70

He has wrapped me in evils I cannot escape. He has laid on my neck a harsh and bitter people, a burden greater than I am. Though I often prayed to be relieved, I was not heard; for circumstances sometimes prevent the saints from being heard. He may also mean the yoke and the iron collars which, at God's command, he put on in place of wooden ones; for Scripture also says, "He made the bronze on my neck heavy." For he blocked my prayer, and he said to him, "Do not pray for them, for I will not listen to you."

Fragment 71

For though he often set out to do so, he was not permitted to refuse the service. He used to say, “I will not mention the name of the Lord,” and yet he was driven on as if by fire. God also blocks the ways of sinners, not allowing them to sin. But the prophet is not like that, for he says, “I did not sit in the company of those who make sport.”

Fragment 72

He says: he has shot every arrow of his against me, wounding my desire and not allowing me to act as I wish.

Fragment 73

In Scripture the “kidneys” stand for the faculty of desire, and the “arrows” are the shafts. They went on ridiculing me as a liar and made me their song. He had said earlier, “I sat alone, because I was filled with bitterness,” and what follows. For he pleaded on their behalf, while they plotted against him, and still he could not refuse the service. So he was embittered: by what he suffered at their hands, by sharing the pain of those who suffered, and by his deep distress over the ungodly.

Fragment 74

He says “with a pebble” or “by number,” as when each tooth is struck on the jaw, or with a hard stone. And in keeping with David he says, “I ate ashes for my bread,” meaning that under affliction he could not even take bread with pleasure. So the soul could not be at peace, since it was itself troubled and saw besides, outside, uproars, and inside, battles. Therefore, hoping for nothing good, I let out the words of Job: “Mercy has given me up, and my hope from the Lord.” For it was not possible to overcome the terrors that surrounded me.

Fragment 75

For though he is good to all, he asks of us patience. For to the soul that will seek him, the seeking is good, if it endures without being disturbed until mercy meets it, and without moving away, until the salvation of the Lord appears, to hope in another. Perhaps he also means that it will be quiet, not meddling in the judgments of providence. So even if we do not understand, we must not kick against the Lord.

Fragment 76

Because “his yoke is easy and his burden light.” Let no one agree with him about anything, we must not be carried off with him; but even if we are left alone in this, we must hold firm to what has been decided and be firmly rooted. For David says, “The Lord settles the single-minded in a house,” and “I am alone, until I pass over,” clearly meaning that he obtains kindness through the trials.

Fragment 77

For he will humble himself, saying, “But I am earth and ashes,” if he is truly a man, and he is filled with a hope that does not put to shame, like the words, “My soul clung to the ground.”

Fragment 78

This also fits those in the captivity who say what is in the seventy-third Psalm: “Why, O God, have you rejected us to the end? Has your anger burned against the sheep of your pasture?” In agreement is the saying, “The Lord will not reject to the end, nor be angry forever.” And to the one who repents as he deserves, he will say, “Let your voice cease from weeping, and your eyes from tears.”

Fragment 79

From these words we learn that the Lord did not say, and is not the cause, that the prisoners of the earth are humbled by sin. Nor does he bend human judgments aside before God [text corrupt]. “He loves what is just and right.” Nor is he the cause of a man becoming deserving of condemnation. For, he says, opposites cannot come out of the mouth of the Lord, the good things and the evil. Neither does a good tree produce bad fruit, nor a bad tree good fruit. So men being wronged by wicked people is [contrary to] divine judgment. Yet it still happens among those whom God overlooks, as happened to the Israelites at the hands of their enemies, and it is undone when they turn back to God. Therefore those handed over to punishment must look for this turning.

Fragment 80

So when we grumble, we lay the blame on the Creator in vain. A living man cannot do this. Such a choice belongs to those who are dead in sins, unless it exposes the one who lives in sin and blames God. Since, then, we have no other cause than ourselves alone, let us judge what we ourselves have done, and turn back.

Fragment 81

For it is not possible to turn back to the Lord while ignorant of oneself. A person comes to know himself by bringing his mind to bear on his actions. He examines them, and at the same time makes them rational [or: spiritual]. For then "with unveiled face we behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord." Confessing our former deeds, we will say that "we have sinned and fallen away from you," and that "you are righteous in all that you have brought upon us."

Fragment 82

"To lift up our hearts upon our hands" seems to mean this: taking our own thoughts, as it were, into our hands, let us examine whether they are pure.

Fragment 83

These words too are part of the confession already made. For you brought the troubles of terrible things on us like darkness out of a cloud. You pursued us when we were far from you. Through punishment you destroyed us, who were dead in sin. Our sins separated us from you, like a cloud building a wall between us. So our prayer did not reach you. For we did not have “the wings of a dove” to fly over and say, “By my God I will leap over a wall.” It was not easy to get past sin, which is solid and dark and has no share in the Holy Spirit.

Fragment 84

Symmachus: “terror.” “They swallowed us with a whole mouth.” We were carried down into a depth of evils, filled with fear and confusion. For the sinner falls into the pit he dug, paying the penalty for what he sinned. And since, according to Solomon, “arrogance goes before destruction” (that is, pride), we were puffed up and we were crushed. Hence David sings: “Let not the foot of pride come to me, and let not the hand of a sinner shake me.”

Fragment 85

Though he has suffered so much, he grieves deeply for those who did it. So it is that “love does not reckon evil.”

Fragment 86

Where the Septuagint has “my eye was worn out, and will not be silent, so that there is no sobering up,” Symmachus said: “my eye persisted and did not cease, so that there is no relief.” The Seventy show that, although his eyes had been weakened by the great quantity of tears, he did not stop, being unable to recover from his weeping. Symmachus shows that I persisted in tears and did not stop. For earnest prayer and intense tears draw God to mercy.

Fragment 87

"For the tears cut me down," he says, "like a careful grape-harvester cutting a vine." According to Symmachus, "the tears drowned me," a metaphor taken from people choking in water. "But enduring, I will endure the Lord, until he [turns] his face away from us." God's looking down means that he counts us worthy of his oversight. He explains the phrase "beyond all" by adding "upon all," that is, upon their misfortunes. For the female sex is more pitiable than the male.

Fragment 88

Or he is telling what he has suffered. For he was thrown into a pit, and [as far as it went, he died]. But he was saved beyond hope, and says with David: “My soul was delivered like a sparrow from the snare of the hunters.” For, according to the Savior’s word, it was not possible to “fall to the ground without the Father.” So then, either he is speaking of himself, or he is making the sufferings of the people his own. But the words “without cause” would reasonably be said of him. For how did he wrong them? Or rather, did he not do them good?

Fragment 89

God passed judgment by killing the false prophet and handing over the king. In the time of Christ he handed the nation over to be captured. The words “I am before their eyes” mean that I was a burden to them, even just by being seen.

Fragment 90

He also said earlier: “Make an end of them, and your word will be to me for gladness and joy of my heart.” He said this after the plot against the Saviour, when they were scattered everywhere. For [all that is just] came upon them. So this shows that their worship came to an end, and that they are no longer called a nation of God.

Fragment 91

The phrase “the shielding of the heart—toil for them” means this: you will give them toil, so that they come to feel how great a protector of them you were, and so seek you again. If not, you will pursue them in your anger.

Fragment 92

He begins the fourth alphabetic section, which is now before us. He takes up again the lament over the distinguished, in a special way. He says that their splendor has grown dim and has vanished, as if poured out like water.

Fragment 93

“Holy” here means chosen, either on account of the fathers or on account of the holy ones taken captive with Joakim, whom he compared to good figs. And a little later: [the departures] from the holy land lead [away] into the spiritual Babylonian [realm], “that they may be taught not to blaspheme.” You could also say that the lament applies to those who have turned away from godliness, if they were notable and became leaders of error for others. They have left the fountain of living water and have become broken cisterns that cannot hold water. So it is fitting that they are poured out around error, groaning before their time.

Fragment 94

Those who prided themselves on wealth, he says, who were even more precious than gold: how were they led into slavery and likened to cheap, shattered things? It was said that they are compared to such things also when [Jeremiah] went down to the potter's house and took a vessel [...]. Isaiah likewise says of a fallen city, "its ruins will be like the fragments of a vessel."

Fragment 95

He speaks of the famine among the infants of the glorious. Jerusalem could not even offer them the breast as wild animals do. The extremity of the suffering causes even nature to be forgotten. “Dragons,” or “Sirens” in Symmachus, is to be understood of the evil spirits, who nurse their own newborn with evil milk. Such are those who are led in by the teachings of the ungodly.

Fragment 96

For how are they not “daughters,” those who have been made effeminate, whom even Pharaoh keeps alive while he kills the males? They feed on the teaching, the desert of God. They cannot fly away like ostriches, but are always running along the ground. (Symmachus rendered “the sparrow” in this way.) It is not unfitting that he called their teachers Sirens. According to the myth outside the faith, the Sirens destroyed those who came by, through pleasure, just as dragons do once they have sunk in their venom. So he rebukes these supposedly good teachers, because they did not take as much care of their pupils as even these creatures do.

Fragment 97

They suffered these things while under siege and while being led away. You could also say that they endured “a famine, not of bread, nor of water,” as the prophet says, “but of hearing the word of the Lord.” For this reason he prophesies about them as newborn infants.

Fragment 98

In the historical sense he has gone back to what happened in the captivity. But in the deeper sense he is speaking of the famine of the teaching word.

Fragment 99

For the poor who are ill-treated are not so pitiable as these. Paul also laments over these, saying, “to whom belong the adoption and the glory.” For now they busy themselves with empty things, and they take no delight in [Moses] and the prophets, in the words “delight yourself in the Lord.” There is no one to prepare the nourishing word for them. Nor do they share in the fattened calf, even though they themselves have offered the sacrifice. By “outlets” he means the dispersions, or else the distortions of the written letters of the Law.

Fragment 100

Formerly they were brought up in scarlet, hearing beforehand, in prophecy, of the Saviour's blood that was to be poured out. Now, because of their earthly thoughts, they are dressed in rags.

Fragment 101

Symmachus renders one phrase as “as if in haste, suddenly he gave her up,” and the other as “they did not suffer, [she] whom they did not wound.” What is quicker than the divine word, which said, “Behold, your house is left to you desolate,” and handed it over by willing alone? The lawlessness of Jerusalem was made greater than that of Sodom. The Sodomites had only the natural law. These people had the written law as well, and the prophets, and everything God did among them in marvelous ways. Those others sinned against angels and against men like themselves. These sinned against the Savior and Redeemer. Long ago he redeemed them from Egypt, and now from the worship of demons. This is so if they really did receive [him] who came to them first of all. For he says, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Fragment 102

Symmachus: “Her undefiled ones, set apart, [were] snow, brighter than milk, ruddier in bodily condition than the things men gaze at; their limbs were sapphire; their appearance was darker than soot.” He means those who sanctified themselves to God. “Sanctified” indicates the Nazirites. For this is how Symmachus and Theodotion rendered “the sanctified” in Amos, calling them Nazirites. Moses also mentions them, and Samson was one of this kind. They were also distinguished among the Jews. So he compared their purity to snow and their brightness to milk. They were made red as with fire, tested by the discipline of what they had promised to God. Their chosen ones [this is the excerpt] have a heavenly way of life, for that is the color of sapphire. The sapphire also has golden veins, and Symmachus likens their condition to these. It has incorruptibility and a fiery zeal in the worship of God.

Fragment 103

They fell away from spiritual illumination and wasted away with a famine of the mind. So they came to look like dry trees, those not planted beside the channels of the waters. Such now are their priests, who [lack] good spiritual nourishment. Taking the words literally, their faces were blackened with the utmost shame, because they were sinning like the others and were led away. Even now common usage employs this word for those who are put to shame.

Fragment 104

It is better to die quickly in war than to be broken by famine through the lack of the produce of the field. You could say that the word of God is a sword and a blade. For Paul says, “and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” The bride says she is “wounded with love” by it. David also says, “Gird your sword upon your thigh, mighty one, in your splendor and your beauty.” Those struck by such a sword fall under the feet of Jesus, according to the words “peoples will fall under you.” They confess his kingdom, and are not captured by a famine of the soul. For Christ is the produce of the land, he who was born in Bethlehem, which means “House of Bread.” The Jews, having never tasted him, were carried off to the land of demons. The field blessed by the Lord, and very fragrant, which Jacob breathed in, signifies the church of Christ.

Fragment 105

So that the women would not seem to have eaten their children out of cruelty, he says that they were compassionate. He attributes the terrible deed to the pressure of want. The word "they boiled" means they kindled a fire and roasted. This is what happened in the Roman siege. So he calls the total destruction of the nation a "ruin." In the second alphabetical section of the Lamentations he also mentions the present suffering. Josephus recorded this and the other sufferings accurately in his work on the capture of the city.

Fragment 106

For after the coming of Christ these things were brought to completion.

Fragment 107

Perhaps it was because of the strength of the place, the wall, and the might of its inhabitants. But most of all it was because of God, who always shielded the city. Even so, before Nebuchadnezzar the Egyptian came in and often took the treasures from the house of the Lord, yet he did not sack the city. He did not press it too hard, even though he was an enemy, so that it would not seem out of place for the unexpected thing to happen twice and three times. The text could also mean by "kings of the earth" the demons who ruled over the earthly (those made of dust). Of them it was said: "All the kings of the earth stood by, and their rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ." Who these are is made clear by the words "for if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory," and by "so that the manifold wisdom of God might be made known through the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places." For they thought Jerusalem would not be handed over to the end. They supposed the promise made to the fathers reached no further than this nation, and they knew nothing about Christ.

Fragment 108

“Righteous blood” in the proper sense is the blood of the Saviour Christ. When they shed it they were utterly destroyed, whereas for the blood of the prophets they had been only moderately disciplined.

Fragment 109

Symmachus says: “They became unsettled, blind in their goings out; they were defiled with blood, so that they could not touch their garments.” Scripture calls the angels “watchers,” as in Daniel. These were perhaps the ones through whom the law was given by Moses, according to the words “for if the law spoken through angels.” So these angels, who had remained devoted to Jerusalem and to the divine temple, were shaken and departed. For Josephus records, in his work on the capture of the city, that “at night the priests went into the temple, as was their custom for the services. They said that first they felt a movement, and after that a sudden voice: ‘Let us depart from here.’” At that time, according to Symmachus, they became unsettled, wanderers, and “blind in their goings out.” For there was no vision to make distinctions, no prophet, and no leader. They failed because the one had come for whom it was all kept in store, the one who was the expectation of the nations.

Fragment 110

He commands the apostles to flee from the midst of the Jews, who had been defiled by the blood of Christ. But the task of calling them he also entrusted to the angels. Unless, perhaps, he commands the apostles to call these unclean people to repentance, which they did when they said: “It was necessary that the word be spoken to you first.” When the Jews were unwilling, he orders the apostles to flee. That is why they say, of those who were unwilling, “Behold, we turn to the Gentiles.”

Fragment 111

“They were kindled” shows the fire of the capture. “They were shaken” shows their removal into slavery. “They shall not add to sojourn” shows that they will have a lasting sojourn and will no longer need a second one.

Fragment 112

This shows the punishment that comes from Christ. For David says: “[the face] of the Lord is against those who do evil.” They are not looked upon by him; they remain what they are. For when the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, all Israel will be saved, and from then on it is as a believer [that each is saved]. If the reading is “their portion,” he clearly means those who go out from the midst. As for the enemies, “they did not respect the face of priests,” for they led all of them away.

Fragment 113

The words seem to come from the captives, who repent that they had leaned on the Egyptians and the Assyrians for help. They could also be said, fittingly, by those who believed from the circumcision: “We failed in vain, hoping in the law.” For the law saves no one, as Paul said. So those who cling to the law will not be able to help anyone after grace has come.

Fragment 114

The ones who hunted the Jews, who were infants in mind, had been shown by the Saviour to be “fishers of men.” They hunted them so that they would not walk the broad and spacious road of their fathers. The Saviour hinted at these same people when he said: “Let the little children come to me.”

Fragment 115

For Josephus records that not even the mountains saved those who fled. There, then, they dragged us away and seized us; that is, they were kindled against us for judgment. The verse could also be understood of the apostles, whose “youth was renewed like an eagle’s.”

Fragment 116

Lamentations 4:20. Some have said that in the select passages [or: "Excerpts"] he laments Josiah more clearly. They hoped that through Josiah's godliness Jerusalem would be raised up in the midst of the nations for glory, for Jerusalem is in the midst of the nations. This man, they say, is a type of Christ, since he died because of the lawless acts of the people. Yet he was not caught up in the corruptions of the people. Rather, although the prophet had forbidden it, he met Necho Pharaoh, who did not even wish to fight him. Now according to the divine apostle, "a veil lies over the face of the Jews when it is read; but if one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away; and the Lord is the Spirit." Through the prophet he calls the Lord "spirit." So those over whom the veil lies could not say, "The Spirit of our face, Christ the Lord." Only those could say it who "with unveiled face behold the glory of the Lord as in a mirror," those for whom the Lord is always before the eyes of the mind. So it is clear that the Spirit who worked in the prophets was Christ. When he became man he said, "I am present, the very one who speaks," being himself Spirit and Lord and Christ. This is the one they seized, those who had first corrupted in themselves the seeds of godliness. But we, the prophets, do not think that the Spirit of our face is anyone else. After our seizure we no longer have a place among them, and we will live under the shadow of Christ. We will live no longer among the Jews but among all the nations, when "the kingdom of God was taken away from them" because of their daring deed against Christ and "was given to the nations." For look, the prophets are alive, speaking about him and proclaiming him. But they are no longer alive among those who even now wrap him in their own corruptions and blaspheme him day after day.

Aquila said "the spirit of our nostrils," and Symmachus "the breath of our nostrils." For those who love God breathe Christ continually, keeping him before their eyes. It should be noted that, just as Christ, being Spirit, spoke in the prophets, so also did the Father. Paul says in the letter to the Hebrews, "God, having spoken long ago in many parts and in many ways in the prophets, in these last days spoke to us in a Son." So also did the Holy Spirit. The Savior says, "The Holy Spirit spoke well in Isaiah: 'You will hear with your ears, and you will not understand.'" And in the letter to the Corinthians, after listing the gifts, among which is prophecy, Paul says, "One and the same Spirit works all these things, supplying to each one as he wills." That is, he does so with his own authority, not as a servant. You could also say that the "Spirit of our face" is Christ, who gave us the spirit of prophecy. For this

is the face of the prophets; the Spirit is the gift; and the shadow is the law, for the law has "a shadow of the good things to come." So the prophets lived in us, and also in the shadow of the law. The prophetic gift, then, to which the outcome of all prophecy looks, is Christ; that is, it is from Christ. For "Christ is the end of the law and the prophets." It could also be said in the person of the apostles and believers, "In him we live and move and are." So when we said, "We shall live in his shadow," it means by imitation of him. For the divine apostle says, "Become imitators of me, as I am of Christ."

Fragment 117

Lamentations 4:21. The word is addressed to those from Edom and Esau, the brother of Jacob. It announces to them in advance an excess of evils, for this is the meaning of "you will be drunk and pour yourself out." David also speaks about them: "Remember, Lord, the sons of Edom, on the day of Jerusalem, who said, 'Empty it, empty it, down to its foundation.'" Though they were brothers and neighbors, they kept the hatred of their forefathers. Having spoken about Christ for a time, he recalled this too. For Christ was going to lay waste the one called "earthly," and to make a heavenly one. Virtue and knowledge are threatening toward those who delight in errors and passions. For them, drunkenness is the deadening of the flesh, and the pouring out is also the putting to death of its way of thinking.

Fragment 118

Lamentations 4:22. “You have paid a sufficient penalty; in it Edom will [take over].” The words “he will not go on to carry you into exile” may refer to the recall from exile. The sense would be: you will not stay in captivity, because you have filled up the full measure. God reduces the penalty; he does not add to it. Or, if it was said of a second capture, as one that would not happen, how did the later capture by the Romans take place? Perhaps, then, the word is about the last capture, the one that came because of Christ, after which there was no other. “And all Israel will be saved” after the fullness of the [text incomplete: Gentiles?], when Israel has left lawlessness behind. After that comes the end, with the punishment of the earthly-minded, since judgment awaits them. The word could also be spoken to the church, which is the daughter of the old synagogue. “For the gifts of God are irrevocable.” The church’s lawlessness has come to an end through divine baptism. He no longer hands her over to her enemies, the one who said, “Here I will dwell, for I have chosen it,” and “Behold, I am with you all the days until the end of the age.” At that time he also put on public record the ungodliness of those who set their minds on earthly things.

Fragment 119

From the chain on the Octateuch. Origen, on the same passage, from the books on Lamentations. “For who [pursues] what is just, and not justly?” Once we have settled that point, we will easily move on to this one: it is possible to pursue what is unjust justly. Here is the explanation of pursuing the just justly. It is when the thing done is fitting and is carried out from a sound disposition. Joseph is recorded as having practiced self-control in this way, for no other reason than to do it rightly for its own sake. The meaning of pursuing the just unjustly is this. A person carries out what is fitting, but with a wicked purpose. For example, someone who hunts for glory among men shares his possessions with the poor. The Savior forbids this when he says: “When you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be glorified by men.” Doing what is unjust justly may be understood like this. A person chooses on purpose to do what is better, but through ignorance of what is good he does what is worse. Such was Paul at one time, when he persecuted the churches out of zeal for godliness. Doing what is unjust unjustly is when the thing done is unjust and the choice behind it is evil-doing.

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