

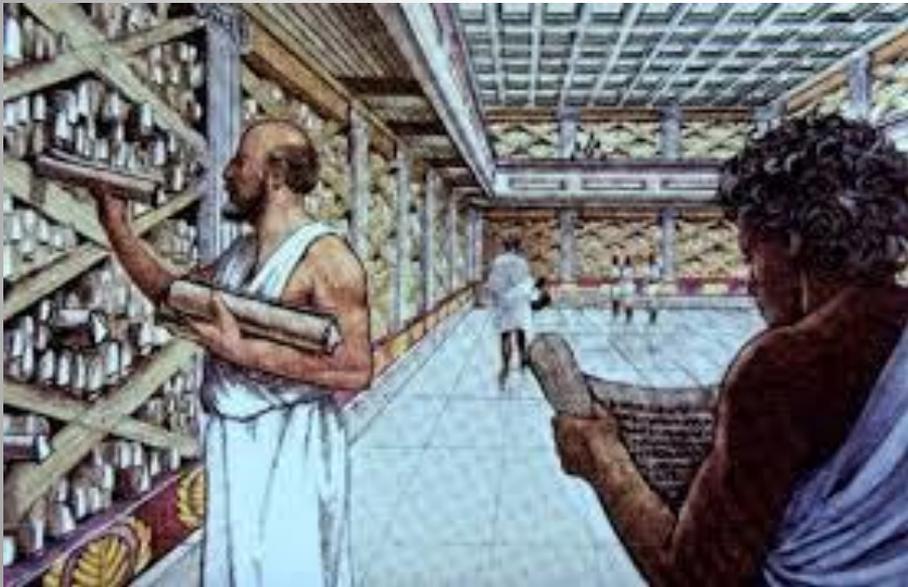
# The Alexandrians

Origen – Master of the Sacred  
Scriptures

# Alexandria – Intellectual Capital of the Ancient World

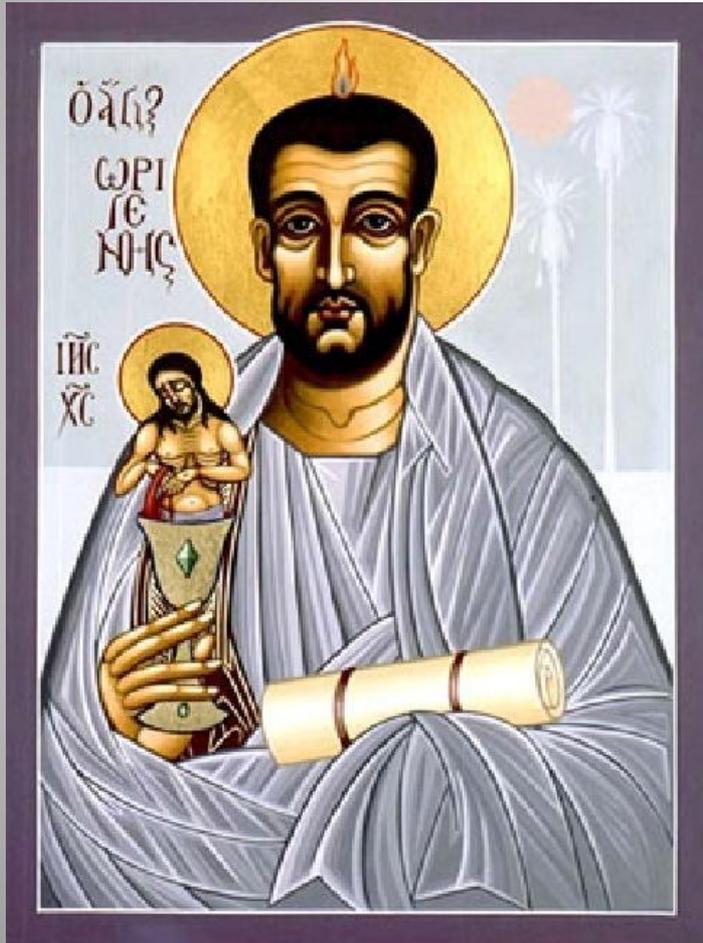


# The Library



- Goal: copy of every known book
- Think tank and study centre dedicated to the Muses (Museon)
- Scientific studies – mathematics, geography, medicine
- Critical textual studies and exegesis of Greek classics
- Suffered several fires; nothing survives
- Culture of metaphysical speculation

# Origen (184-253 CE)



- Father Leonides killed during persecution of Septimus Severus in 202
- Student of great Platonist Ammonius Saccus
- Headed Catechetical School at Alexandria
- During lifetime wrote some 6,000 books (scrolls) on various topics
- Fused together the OT and NT
- Refuted both Marcion and Gnostics

# Who is the Real Origen?

- Ordained in Caesarea; Bishop Demetrius in Alexandria furious – Origen fled, never to return, took up work in Caesarea
- Tortured during persecution of 250, died shortly afterwards
- Was accused of saying many things that he denied; he was always controversial
- Many of his works condemned long after his death (553)
- Metaphysical speculations; universal salvation (apokatastasis); pre-existence of souls; redemption of devil

# Output

- Systematic and scientific approach to Scripture
- Knowledge of texts and languages
- First to write commentaries on whole books of scripture
- Scholia, homilies, and commentaries
- In harmony with previous exegetes: OT in light of Christ; single testament; 1 God and 1 Lord

# Hexapla

- Hebrew
- Greek transliteration of Hebrew letters
- Aquila
- Symmachus
- LXX – with symbols indicating where Greek text does not reflect Hebrew
- Theodotian
- Influence on textual tradition

# Hexapla

Hebrew.	Hebrew Transliterated.	Aquila.	Symmachus.	LXX.	Theodotion.	Variants.
לְבַרְכֵי	λαμανασσα	τῷ νικοποιῷ	ἐπινίκιος	εἰς τὸ τέλος	τῷ νικοποιῷ	εἰς τὸ τέλος
לְבַרְכֵי	βνη κορα	τῶν υἱῶν κορέ	τῶν υἱῶν κορέ	ὑπὲρ τῶν υἱῶν κορέ (τοῖς υἱοῖς)	τοῖς υἱοῖς κορέ	
עַל-עֲלָמוֹ	αλ· αλαμωδ	ἐπὶ νεανιοτήτων	ὑπὲρ τῶν αἰωνίων	ὑπὲρ τῶν κρυφίων	ὑπὲρ τῶν κρυφίων	
שִׁיר	σιρ	ᾄσμα	ψῆδῃ·	ψαλμός	ψῆδῃ	ψαλμός
לְבַרְכֵי	ἐλωειμ λαου	<ὁ θεὸς ἡμῖν>	ὁ θεὸς ἡμῖν	ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν	ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν	
וְעַל-קַרְנֵי	μαασε· ουος	ἐλπίς καὶ κράτος	πεποιθήσις καὶ ἰσχύς	καταφυγὴ καὶ δύνα- μις	καταφυγὴ καὶ δύνα- μις	
עֲרֵב	εζρ	βοήθεια	βοήθεια	βοηθῶν	βοηθῶν	
בְּרֵצֵף	βσαρωδ	ἐν θλίψεσιν	ἐν θλίψεσιν	ἐν θλίψεσι	ἐν θλίψεσιν	
מִן מִצְרַיִם	νεμσα· μωδ	εὐρεθεὶς σφόδρα	εὐρισκόμενος σφόδρα	ταῖς εὐρούσαις ἡμᾶς σφόδρα (εὐρεθήσεται ἡμῖν)	εὐρέθῃ σφόδρα (ταῖς εὐρούσαις ἡμᾶς)	
עַל-לְבַרְכֵי	αλ· χεν	ἐπὶ τούτῃ	διὰ τοῦτο	διὰ τοῦτο	διὰ τοῦτο	
לְבַרְכֵי	λω· νιρα	οὐ φοβηθησόμεθα	οὐ φοβηθησόμεθα	οὐ φοβηθησόμεθα	οὐ φοβηθησόμεθα	
בְּרֵצֵף	βααμιρ	ἐν τῷ ἀνταλλάσσεσθαι	ἐν τῷ συγγείσθαι	ἐν τῷ ταράσσεσθαι	ἐν τῷ ταράσσεσθαι	
רָצַף	[a]αρσ	γῆν	γῆν	τὴν γῆν	τὴν γῆν	
וּבְרֵצֵף	ου βαμωτ	καὶ ἐν τῷ σφάλλεσθαι	καὶ κλίνασθαι	καὶ μετατίθεσθαι	καὶ σαλεύεσθαι (μετατίθεσθαι)	
מִן הָרִים	αριμ	ὄρη	ὄρη	ὄρη	ὄρη	
בְּלַב	βλεβ	ἐν καρδίᾳ	ἐν καρδίᾳ	ἐν καρδίᾳ	ἐν καρδίᾳ	
מִן הַיָּם:	ιαμιμ	θαλασσῶν	θαλασσῶν	θαλασσῶν	θαλασσῶν	

# View of Scripture

- All books of Scripture part of an organic unity fully reflecting the divine author
- Goal is to lead the soul to full perfection
- Body of text – literal, grammatical sense
- Soul – figurative spiritual meaning
- OT meaning back through apostles to Jesus
- But method too for discovering meaning also apostolic
- Both OT and NT contain hidden allegorical meanings

# Levels of Meaning

- Scripture is the actual voice of the logos and incarnation of logos
- 3 meanings of Scripture (spirit, soul, body)
- The simple or beginners; those who had made some progress; and the perfect
- Its parallel is literal sense, moral sense, and spiritual or mystical sense

# Holy Spirit

- Holy Spirit author of all Scripture
- Not like fundamentalism – inspiration does not mean accurate historical or scientific accounts
- Not everything in Bible historically accurate – note *Commentary on John* chapter 10
- Truth and historicity are not necessarily linked
- Scientific information not necessarily accurate

# Aims of Holy Spirit

- Perfection of souls – note that this is different from ordinary salvation history.
- Focus always on interior – ‘be transformed’
- Conceal spiritual doctrines necessary for this perfection in secondary historical or creation accounts
- Impart these hidden doctrines to advanced souls so that they can achieve perfection

# Technique

- Origen uses techniques of classical scholars of Alexandria
  - Textual variants
  - Geography
  - Word etymologies
  - Grammar
  - Logic
  - Allegory (used for Homer and other texts)

# New Testament

- Hidden meanings also in NT
- Favorite key text: 1 Cor 2:10-16
- Others: 1 Cor 9:9-10; 10:11; Rom 7:14; 2 Cor 3:6; 3:15-16; Gal 4:24

# 1 Cor 2:10-16 - Spirit

- these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.<sup>11</sup> For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God.<sup>12</sup> Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.<sup>13</sup> ***And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.***<sup>14</sup> Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.<sup>15</sup> Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny.<sup>16</sup> "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:10-16 NRS)

# The Keys

- This means comparing texts – interpreting Scripture by Scripture
- Classical technique
- Commentary on Psalm 1: house with locked rooms; key before each door but not for that door
- Necessary to be ‘in Christ’ can effectively use this technique
- Having the ‘mind of Christ’
- I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and no one shall shut; he shall shut, and no one shall open. (Isaiah 22:22 NRS)

# John and Synoptics

- The truth of these matters must lie in that which is seen by the mind. **If the discrepancy between the Gospels is not solved, we must give up our trust in the Gospels, as being true and written by a divine spirit, or as records worthy of credence, for both these characters are held to belong to these works. Those who accept the four Gospels, and who do not consider that their apparent discrepancy is to be solved anagogically (by mystical interpretation),** will have to clear up the difficulty, raised above, about the forty days of the temptation, a period for which no room can be found in any way in John's narrative; and they will also have to tell us when it was that the Lord came to Capernaum. If it was after the six days of the period of His baptism, the sixth being that of the marriage at Cana of Galilee, then it is clear that the temptation never took place, and that He never was at Nazara, and that John was not yet delivered up. Now, after Capernaum, where He abode not many days, the passover of the Jews was at hand, and He went up to Jerusalem, where He cast the sheep and oxen out of the temple, and poured out the small change of the bankers. In Jerusalem, too, it appears that Nicodemus, the ruler and Pharisee, first came to Him by night, and heard what we may read in the Gospel. "After these things,<sup>2</sup> Jesus came, and His disciples, into the land of Judæa, and there He tarried with them and baptized, at the same time at which John also was baptizing in Ænon near Salim, because there were many waters there, and they came and were baptized; for John was not yet cast into prison." On this occasion, too, there was a questioning on the part of John's disciples with the Jews about purification, and they came to John, saying of the Saviour. "Behold, He baptizeth, and all come to Him." They had heard words from the Baptist, the exact tenor of which it is better to take from Scripture itself. Now, if we ask when Christ was first in Capernaum, our respondents, if they follow the words of Matthew, and of the other two, will say, After the temptation, when, "leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea." But how can they show both the statements to be true, that of Matthew and Mark, that it was because He heard that John was delivered up that He departed into Galilee, and that of John,<sup>3</sup> found there, after a number of other transactions, subsequent to His stay at Capernaum, after His going to Jerusalem, and His journey from there to Judæa, that John was not yet cast into prison, but was baptizing in Ænon near Salim? **There are many other points on which the careful student of the Gospels will find that their narratives do not agree; and these we shall place before the reader, according to our power, as they occur. The student, staggered at the consideration of these things, will either renounce the attempt to find all the Gospels true, and not venturing to conclude that all our information about our Lord is untrustworthy, will choose at random one of them to be his guide; or he will accept the four, and will consider that their truth is not to be sought for in the outward and material letter.**

# Differences in Gospels

- We must, however, try to obtain some notion of the intention of the Evangelists in such matters, and we direct ourselves to this. Suppose there are several men who, by the spirit, see God, and know His words addressed to His saints, and His presence which He vouchsafes to them, appearing to them at chosen times for their advancement. There are several such men, and they are in different places, and the benefits they receive from above vary in shape and character. And let these men report, each of them separately, what he sees in spirit about God and His words, and His appearances to His saints, so that one of them speaks of God's appearances and words and acts to one righteous man in such a place, and another about other oracles and great works of the Lord, and a third of something else than what the former two have dealt with. And let there be a fourth, doing with regard to some particular matter something of the same kind as these three. And let the four agree with each other about something the Spirit has suggested to them all, and let them also make brief reports of other matters besides that one; then their narratives will fall out something on this wise: God appeared to such a one at such a time and in such a place, and did to him thus and thus; as if He had appeared to him in such a form, and had led him by the hand to such a place, and then done to him thus and thus. The second will report that God appeared at the very time of the foresaid occurrences, in a certain town, to a person who is named, a second person, and in a place far removed from that of the former account, and he will report a different set of words spoken at the same time to this second person. And let the same be supposed to be the case with the third and with the fourth. And let them, as we said, agree, these witnesses who report true things about God, and about His benefits conferred on certain men, let them agree with each other in some of the narratives they report. He, then, who takes the writings of these men for history, or for a representation of real things by a historical image, and who supposes God to be within certain limits in space, and to be unable to present to several persons in different places several visions of Himself at the same time, or to be making several speeches at the same moment, he will deem it impossible that our four writers are all speaking truth. To him it is impossible that God, who is in certain limits in space, could at the same set time be saying one thing to one man and another to another, and that He should be doing a thing and the opposite thing as well, and, to put it bluntly, that He should be both sitting and standing, should one of the writers represent Him as standing at the time, and making a certain speech in such a place to such a man, while a second writer speaks of Him as sitting.

# Spiritual Truth/Material Falsehood

- In the case I have supposed where the historians desire to teach us by an image what they have seen in their mind, their meaning would be found, if the four were wise, to exhibit no disagreement; and we must understand that with the four Evangelists it is not otherwise. They made full use for their purpose of things done by Jesus in the exercise of His wonderful and extraordinary power; they use in the same way His sayings, and in some places they tack on to their writing, with language apparently implying things of sense, things made manifest to them in a purely intellectual way. I do not condemn them if they even sometimes dealt freely with things which to the eye of history happened differently, and changed them so as to subserve the mystical aims they had in view; so as to speak of a thing which happened in a certain place, as if it had happened in another, or of what took place at a certain time, as if it had taken place at another time, and to introduce into what was spoken in a certain way some changes of their own. **They proposed to speak the truth where it was possible both materially and spiritually, and where this was not possible it was their intention to prefer the spiritual to the material. The spiritual truth was often preserved, as one might say, in the material falsehood.**

# It's in the Details

- Gen 18:8: Abraham stood under the tree.
- So what? What is saving truth?
- All details significant
- Numbers: 2=matter; 3=Trinity; 4=Gospel; 5=senses; 6=creation
- Etymologies – Hebrew place names. 42 stations in the desert journey as the stages of spiritual growth
- Material: wood=cross; water=baptism; manna=Eucharist
- Christ master interpretive key. Prayer and contemplation

# Transfiguration

- But you will ask if, when He was transfigured before those who were led up by Him into the lofty mountain, He appeared to them in the form of God, in which He formerly was, so that He had to those below the form of a servant, but to those who had followed Him after the six days to the lofty mountain, He had not that form, but the form of God. But hear these things, if you can, at the same time giving heed spiritually, that it is not said simply, “He was transfigured,” but with a certain necessary addition, which Matthew and Mark have recorded; for, according to both, “He was transfigured before them. And according to this, indeed, you will say that it is possible for Jesus to be transfigured before some with this transfiguration, but before others at the same time not to be transfigured. But if you wish to see the transfiguration of Jesus before those who went up into the lofty mountain apart long with Him, behold with me the Jesus in the Gospels, as more simply apprehended, and as one might say, known “according to the flesh,” by those who do not go up, through works and words which are uplifting, to the lofty mountain of wisdom, but known no longer after the flesh, but known in His divinity by means of all the Gospels, and beholden in the form of God according to their knowledge; for before them is Jesus transfigured, and not to any one of those below. But when He is transfigured, His face also shines as the sun, that He may be manifested to the children of light, who have put off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light, and are no longer the children of darkness or night, but have become the sons of day, and walk honestly as in the day; and being manifested, He will shine unto them not simply as the sun, but as demonstrated to be the sun of righteousness.

*Comm in Matt XI:l.37*

# End of Apocalyptic

- 2. Certain persons, then, refusing the labour of thinking, and adopting a superficial view of the letter of the law, and yielding rather in some measure to the indulgence of their own desires and lusts, being disciples of the letter alone, are of opinion that the fulfilment of the promises of the future are to be looked for in bodily pleasure and luxury; and therefore they especially desire to have again, after the resurrection, such bodily structures<sup>1</sup> as may never be without the power of eating, and drinking, and performing all the functions of flesh and blood, not following the opinion of the Apostle Paul regarding the resurrection of a spiritual body. And consequently they say, that after the resurrection there will be marriages, and the begetting of children, imagining to themselves that the earthly city of Jerusalem is to be rebuilt, its foundations laid in precious stones, and its walls constructed of jasper, and its battlements of crystal; that it is to have a wall composed of many precious stones, as jasper, and sapphire, and chalcedony, and emerald, and sardonyx, and onyx, and chrysolite, and chrysoprase, and jacinth, and amethyst. Moreover, they think that the natives of other countries are to be given them as the ministers of their pleasures, whom they are to employ either as tillers of the field or builders of walls, and by whom their ruined and fallen city is again to be raised up; and they think that they are to receive the wealth of the nations to live on, and that they will have control over their riches; that even the camels of Midian and Kedar will come, and bring to them gold, and incense, and precious stones. And these views they think to establish on the authority of the prophets by those promises which are written regarding Jerusalem; and by those passages also where it is said, that they who serve the Lord shall eat and drink, but that sinners shall hunger and thirst; that the righteous shall be joyful, but that sorrow shall possess the wicked. And from the New Testament also they quote the saying of the Saviour, in which He makes a promise to His disciples concerning the joy of wine, saying, "Henceforth I shall not drink of this cup, until I drink it with you new in My Father's kingdom."<sup>2</sup> They add, moreover, that declaration, in which the Saviour calls those blessed who now hunger and thirst,<sup>3</sup> promising them that they shall be satisfied; and many other scriptural illustrations are adduced by them, the meaning of which they do not perceive is to be taken figuratively. Then, again, agreeably to the form of things in this life, and according to the gradations of the dignities or ranks in this world, or the greatness of their powers, they think they are to be kings and princes, like those earthly monarchs who now exist; chiefly, as it appears, on account of that expression in the Gospel: "Have thou power over five cities."<sup>4</sup> And to speak shortly, according to the manner of things in this life in all similar matters, do they desire the fulfilment of all things looked for in the promises, viz., that what now is should exist again. **Such are the views of those who, while believing in Christ, understand the divine Scriptures in a sort of Jewish sense, drawing from them nothing worthy of the divine promises.**

# Linguistic Analysis

- Greeting, my lord and son, most worthy Origen, from Africanus<sup>1</sup> In your sacred discussion with Agnomon you referred to that prophecy of Daniel which is related of his youth. This at that time, as was meet, I accepted as genuine. Now, however, I cannot understand how it escaped you that this part of the book is spurious. For, in sooth, this section, although apart from this it is elegantly written, is plainly a more modern forgery. There are many proofs of this. When Susanna is condemned to die, the prophet is seized by the Spirit, and cries out that the sentence is unjust. Now, in the first place, it is always in some other way that Daniel prophesies—by visions, and dreams, and an angel appearing to him, never by prophetic inspiration. Then, after crying out in this extraordinary fashion, he detects them in a way no less incredible, which not even Philistion the play-writer would have resorted to. For, not satisfied with rebuking them through the Spirit, he placed them apart, and asked them severally where they saw her committing adultery. And when the one said, “Under a holm-tree” (*prinos*), *he answered that the angel would saw him asunder (prisein); and in a similar fashion menaced the other who said, “Under a mastich-tree” (schinos), with being rent asunder (schisthenai). Now, in Greek, it happens that “holm-tree” and “saw asunder,” and “rend” and “mastich-tree” sound alike; but in Hebrew they are quite distinct. But all the books of the Old Testament have been translated from Hebrew into Greek.*
- 2. Moreover, how is it that they who were captives among the Chaldæans, lost and won at play,<sup>2</sup> thrown out unburied on the streets, as was prophesied of the former captivity, their sons torn from them to be eunuchs, and their daughters to be concubines, as had been prophesied; how is it that such could pass sentence of death, and that on the wife of their king Joakim, whom the king of the Babylonians had made partner of his throne? Then if it was not this Joakim, but some other from the common people, whence had a captive such a mansion and spacious garden? But a more fatal objection is, that this section, along with the other two at the end of it, is not contained in the Daniel received among the Jews. And add that, among all the many prophets who had been before, there is no one who has quoted from another word for word. For they had no need to go a-begging for words, since their own were true; but this one, in rebuking one of those men, quotes the words of the Lord: “The innocent and righteous shalt thou not slay.” From all this I infer that this section is a later addition. Moreover, the style is different. I have struck the blow; do you give the echo; answer, and instruct me. Salute all my masters. The learned all salute thee. With all my heart I pray for your and your circle’s health.

# Did It Really Happen?

(III, 5) The conscientious interpreter, however, will be in a quandary in certain cases; he will be unable to decide without painstaking examination whether a particular incident claimed to be historical actually happened as the text reads, or whether the letter of a particular law should be obeyed or not. The conscientious reader who observes the Savior's command, "Search the Scriptures!" [John 5:39] must therefore carefully examine where the literal sense is true and where it is impossible. He must search out as far as he can the sense of those passages which are impossible according to the plain text, a sense scattered throughout Scripture, beginning his examination with expressions resembling each other. It will be clear to him that a serious effort must be made to comprehend the sense of a text as a whole when the textual sequence taken literally is impossible, yet its primary sense is not impossible but true. In such cases he must provide the connection on the level of intelligible reality between a statement impossible in its literal sense and those statements which are not only possible but true according to the historical narrative, allegorizing the latter along with the texts which did not happen according to the letter. For with regard to divine Scripture as a whole we are of the opinion that all of it has a spiritual sense, but not all of it has a bodily sense. In fact, in many cases the bodily sense proves to be impossible. This is the reason so much diligence must be applied by the person approaching the divine books reverently as divine writings. To me, this mode of understanding seems to be the correct one.

# Stumbling Blocks

(II, 9) But if the usefulness of the legal prescriptions as well as the logical coherence and the smooth flow of the historical narrative were automatically evident everywhere, we would not believe that it is possible to find some other sense in the Scriptures besides the obvious one. For this reason the Word of God has arranged the insertion of certain offensive features, of stumbling blocks and impossibilities amid the law and historical narrative. He wanted to avoid that, being totally carried away by the plain text and its unspoiled charm, we either would disregard its teachings altogether because we did not find any lessons worthy of God, or would refuse to move beyond the letter and not learn anything more divine.

One must also be aware of another feature. Since the (Spirit's) primary goal was to present the logical system of spiritual realities by means of events that happened and things that were to be done, the Word used actual historical events wherever they could be accommodated to these mystical (meanings), hiding the deeper sense from the multitude. But where the recorded actions of a specific person did not fit the account of the inner coherence of intelligible realities in terms of the deeper mystical meaning, Scripture has woven into the historical narrative some feature which did not happen; sometimes the event is an impossibility; sometimes, though possible, it actually did not happen. Sometimes only a few phrases which are not true in the bodily sense are inserted, sometimes more. We must assume an analogous situation in regard to the law. Frequently one can find commandments which are useful in themselves and appropriate for the time of legislation. Sometimes, however, their usefulness is not self-evident. At other times, even impossible things are commanded; such instances challenge the more skillful and inquisitive to devote themselves to a painstaking examination of the text and become seriously convinced that a sense worthy of God needs to be sought in these commandments.

# Be Transformed

- **I beseech you, therefore, be transformed.** Resolve to learn that in you there is the capacity to be transformed, and to put off the form of a swine, which is in an impure soul, and the shape of a dog, which is that of a man who barks and reviles and pours out abuse. It is also possible to be transformed from the shape of snakes; for a wicked man is described as a serpent and "the offspring of vipers." If, then, we are willing to understand that in us there is the power to be transformed from being serpents, swine, and dogs, let us learn from the apostle that the transformation depends upon us. For he says this: "We all, when with unveiled face we reflect the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image." If you are like a barking dog, and if the Word has moulded and transformed you, you have been transformed from being a dog to being a man. If you were impure and the Word came to your soul and you submitted yourself to the moulding of the Word, you changed from being a swine to being a man. If you were a savage beast, and heard the Word that tames and softens, that changes you into a man, by the will of the Word you will no longer be called a serpent, the offspring of vipers. For if it were impossible for these serpents, serpents in their soul because of wickedness, to be changed, the Saviour (or John) would not have said: "Do therefore fruits worthy of repentance." After repentance you are no longer a serpent, the offspring of vipers. (Dialogue with Heracleides)