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ORIGEN
HOMILIES ON JOSHUA

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HOMILY 7

*Concerning how Jericho was captured and how Rahab was saved,
and concerning him who stole the tongue of gold and the
pure bracelets from what had been banned.¹*

JERICO IS OVERTHROWN by the trumpets of the priests. For when the noise of the trumpets resounded, immediately the circle of walls was thrown down.²

We had said before that Jericho may possess the sign of the present age, whose forces and defenses we see to have been destroyed.³ For indeed the strength and defenses that that world used as walls was the worship of idols, the deceit of divinations directed by the skill of demons and devised by diviners, soothsayers, and magicians. By all these most powerful walls, as it were, this world was encircled. Moreover, as though with certain tall and strong towers, it was also fortified with diverse dogmas of philosophers and the most eminent assertions of contentions.

But when our Lord Jesus Christ comes, whose arrival that prior son of Nun designated, he sends priests, his apostles, bearing "trumpets hammered thin,"⁴ the magnificent and heavenly instruction of proclamation. Matthew first sounded the priestly trumpet in his Gospel; Mark also; Luke and John each played their own priestly trumpets. Even Peter cries out with trumpets in two of his epistles; also James and Jude. In addition, John also sounds the trumpet through his epistles, and Luke, as he describes the Acts of the Apostles. And now that last

1. Focal passage: Jos 6-7.

2. Jos 6.20.

3. See *Homily* 6.4.

4. Nm 10.2; Ps 98.6; Sir 50.16. See Clement of Alexandria's *Protrepticus* 11.116.

one comes, the one who said, "I think God displays us apostles last,"⁵ and in fourteen of his epistles, thundering with trumpets, he casts down the walls of Jericho and all the devices of idolatry and dogmas of philosophers, all the way to the foundations.

2. It also stirs me when history reports that not only did the priests play the trumpets so that the walls of Jericho might fall, but also, when the sound of the trumpet was heard, it is said the whole people cried out with a great cry, or, as it is held in other copies, they shouted with a great shout.⁶ That word, however, seems improperly translated. For it is written ἀλαλαγμός in Greek, which properly signifies neither "shout" nor "cry," but rather it expresses that sound by which in time of war the army, unanimously raising a loud call together, is accustomed to incite one another to battle. Nevertheless, this word "shout," rather than "cry," is accustomed to be written in Scripture, as in, "Shout to the Lord, all the earth,"⁷ and again, "Blessed the people who know the joyful shout."⁸

That verse deeply moves me. So great indeed is the nature of this word that it makes the people blessed. It did not say, "Blessed are the people who do righteousness" or "Blessed are the people who have knowledge of mysteries or who know the

5. 1 Cor 4.9. The editions of Lommatzsch and Delarue added *et Apocalypsim* after "through his epistles" [*per epistolas suas*], making a complete New Testament canon. See PG 12.857B. Though Harnack saw the authentic Origen here (*Der kirchengeschichtliche Ertrag*, TU 42.3, p. 13), it is possible Rufinus brought the canon up to the standard of his day. See J. E. L. Oulton, "Rufinus' Translation of the Church History of Eusebius," *JThS* 30 (1929): 156–57. According to Eusebius, Origen considered several books doubtful, including 2 Peter and Hebrews. He felt only God knew who wrote Hebrews (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.13). Yet Origen credited Peter with the second epistle in *Homilies on Leviticus* 4.4 and attributed Hebrews to Paul in the *Homilies* (e.g., 9.9).

6. Jos 6.9–10, 20.

7. Ps 100.1.

8. Ps 89.16. It is possible that the explanation concerning ἀλαλαγμός is a contribution of Rufinus. Yet Origen may have contrasted Greek and Hebrew variants. There is evidence that he considered more than one Greek word for this idea. In the LXX version of Jos 6.20, ἀλαλαγμός is used, but a codex of the *Hexapla* shows two marginal variants, a form of κραυγή being one of them. See *Origenis Hexaplorum*, vol. 1, ed. Fridericus Field (Oxonii: Typographo Clarendoniano, 1875), p. 346. For Origen's use of these variants, see Jaubert, *Homélie*, SC 71:198 n. 1. In translating, Rufinus may have used *ululare* (to cry) for κράζω and *jubilasse* (to shout) for ἀλαλάζω.

reckoning of heaven and earth and of the stars"; but "Blessed," it says, "are the people who know the joyful shout." In other places, the fear of God makes someone blessed, but it makes only one person blessed, for thus it says, "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord."⁹ Also, elsewhere, more are made blessed, as the poor in spirit, or the meek, or the peaceable, or the pure in heart.¹⁰ But here the blessedness is lavish, and here the cause of the blessedness is shown to be so great that it makes all the people who know the joyful shout equally blessed.

Whence, it seems to me this shout indicates a certain disposition of concordance and unanimity. If this happens to two or three disciples of Christ, the Father of heaven bestows to them everything they will ask in the name of the Savior. But if, instead, it were so great a blessedness that the whole people remain united and of one mind, that "persevering, they all say the same things in the same frame of mind and in the same way of thinking,"¹¹ then, by such a people lifting up a sound unanimously, that which was written in the Acts of the Apostles will happen. There a great earthquake occurred at the time when "the apostles of one accord were praying with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus."¹² And after the shaking of the earth, all things that are of the earth will be torn down and fall, and the world itself will be overturned. Finally, hear our Lord and Savior himself exhorting his own soldiers to this, as he says, "Be assured; I have overcome the world."¹³ Therefore, with that leader the world has now been overcome by us. And its walls, which persons of this age used as support, have collapsed.

But also, every one of us ought to accomplish this in ourselves. You have in you, through faith, Jesus the leader. If you are a priest, make for yourself "trumpets hammered thin"; no, rather, *because* you are a priest. For you have indeed been made "a kingly race," and it has been said of you that you are "a holy priesthood."¹⁴ Make for yourself trumpets hammered thin from

9. Ps 112.1.

11. 1 Cor 1.10.

12. Acts 1.13-14. No earthquake is mentioned at this time, unless the sound of a "violent wind" [πνοῆς βίαιας] in Acts 2.2 be so interpreted.

13. Jn 16.33.

14. 1 Pt 2.9.

10. Mt 5.3-9.

the Holy Scriptures. From there bring forth perceptions; from there, discourses; for, on that account, they are called trumpets hammered thin. Sing in them, that is, "in psalms, in hymns, in spiritual songs."¹⁵ In the prophetic mysteries, in the secrets of the Law, in apostolic doctrines, sing.

And if you have played on such trumpets and seven times you have carried around the ark of the covenant (that is, if you do not sever the mystic precepts of the Law from the Gospel trumpets¹⁶); if you demand from yourself the harmony of the joyful shout (that is, if the people of your reason and feeling that are within you always bring forth a united and harmonious voice, and you do not at one time tell the truth and at another time stain yourself with a falsehood as you try to impress some person of authority); if at one time a weakness does not make you a flatterer, and at another a proneness to anger make you cruel; if you are not found arrogant toward modest persons or fawning in the presence of haughty ones; and, finally, if a battle is not waged within you when "the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh";¹⁷ if these things within you are now harmonious and united, then send forth the sound of a joyful shout, because for you the world has been overthrown and cast down. Such a one, I believe, was even that one who boldly said, "But let me not glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world."¹⁸

3. Yet something in this passage still moves me. I seem to have perceived too little about the joyful shout, to have said small things about great things.

At the coming of Jesus, the walls of Jericho were overthrown; at the coming of my Lord Jesus, the world is overcome. Yet I want to know more plainly how the world is overcome, and to understand more clearly those things that are said. I myself, I who teach you, want to learn equally with you. Let us summon Paul as a teacher for all of us, for he is a fellow priest¹⁹ of Christ,

15. Col 3.16.

17. Gal 5.17.

19. *Symmystes*. A *mystes* was a priest of the mysteries or of the secret rites of divine worship.

16. See the Introduction, p. 6-7.

18. Gal 6.14.

so that he can disclose to us how Christ overcame the world. Therefore, hear him saying, "That which was opposed to us he took away from our midst and fixed to his own cross; and stripping principalities and authorities he exposed them openly, triumphing over them on the wood of the cross."²⁰ From these words, therefore, I understand that when the heavenly powers saw the fight of Jesus—the principalities and hostile authorities stripped of their authorities, "the strong one bound and his goods plundered"²¹—they thundered with their heavenly trumpets, because with the prince of this world bound, the world was overcome, and the heavenly army gave the joyful shout at the triumph of Christ. Truly, therefore, blessed are the people of the nations, those who know this joyful shout of the heavenly army and who begin to recognize the mysteries and believe.

4. But let us see what it is that is indicated in the following. For Jesus says, "Guard yourself against what has been declared anathema,²² so you do not accidentally desire it and take up what is anathema and make the camp of the sons of Israel anathema, and destroy both yourself and all the congregation of the Lord."²³ This is what is indicated by these words: Take heed that you have nothing worldly in you, that you bring down with you to the Church neither worldly customs nor faults nor equivocations of the age. But let all worldly ways be anathema to you. Do not mix mundane things with divine; do not introduce worldly matters into the mysteries of the Church.

This is what John also sounds with the trumpet of his epistle, saying, "Do not love the world, nor the things that are in the world."²⁴ And likewise Paul, "Do not," he says, "be conformed to this world."²⁵ For those who do these things accept what is anathema. But also those introduce anathema into the churches who, for example, celebrate the solemnities of the nations

20. Col 2.14-15.

21. Mt 12.29.

22. *Anathemate* [ἀνάθεμα] refers to an offering that is irredeemable, forbidden for any other use. It has been devoted to destruction and is under a ban. Anyone partaking of a banned offering brings a curse upon himself and his fellows. Cf. Lv 27.28; Dt 20.10-18; Rom 9.3; 1 Cor 16.22; Gal 1.8-9.

23. Jos 6.18.

25. Rom 12.2.

24. 1 Jn 2.15.

even though they are Christians. Those who eagerly seek the lives and deeds of humans from the courses of the stars, who inquire of the flight of birds and other things of this type that were observed in the former age, carry what is anathema from Jericho into the Church and pollute the camp of the Lord and cause the people of God to be overcome.²⁶ But there are also many other sins through which anathema from Jericho is introduced into the Church, through which the people of God are overcome and overthrown by enemies. Does not the Apostle also teach these same things when he says, "A little leaven spoils the whole lump?"²⁷

5. But let us see just now what follows. When Jericho is overthrown, only the prostitute Rahab is saved. For it is written concerning her, "And Jesus restored Rahab the prostitute and all her father's house; and she was joined to Israel up to this very day."²⁸

I would like to inquire of the Jews and of those who are called Christians, but who still preserve the Jewish interpretation of Scriptures, how they explain that "Rahab the prostitute was joined to the house of Israel up to this very day." How is Rahab said to be "joined up to this very day"?²⁹ For it is the custom of Holy Scripture to say this about things that remain up to the end of life or to the end of the age. For example, when it says, "This one is the father of the Moabites up to this very day,"³⁰ it signifies until the end of the age. And, again, in the Gospel it is said that "this word has been spread abroad among the Jews up to this very day,"³¹ that is, it persists up to that age.

But the woman Rahab, how is she said to be joined to the house of Israel up to this very day? Is a succession of posterity on her mother's side ascribed so that she is considered to be preserved in a renewal of offspring? Or rather must it be understood that she has really been bound and united to Israel up

26. See *Homily* 7.6.

27. 1 Cor 5.6.

28. Jos 6.25.

29. *Usque in hodiernum diem*. Procopius furnishes confirmation for this interpretation in *Cat in Jos* 87.1.1033A. See also *Homilies* 4.4; 14.2; 21.1.

30. Gn 19.37.

31. Mt 28.15.

to this very day? If you want to see more plainly how Rahab is bound to Israel, consider how "the branch of the wild olive tree is implanted in the root of a good olive tree."³² Then you will understand how those who have been implanted in the faith of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob are rightly called attached and "joined to Israel up to this very day." For we have been attached up to this very day in the root of those former ones, we, the branches of the wild olive taken up from the nations, who at one time were dealing with harlots and worshipping wood and stone instead of the true God.³³ And we ourselves have been made "above" through faith in Christ, and that former people who remained unbelieving are "below," according to the prophecy of Deuteronomy.³⁴ If, therefore, anyone holds in himself Christ, who is the head of all,³⁵ this one is made "into the head," for those former ones have denied Jesus Christ and have been made "into the tail,"³⁶ and those who were "first" have been made "last."³⁷

6. But also we should not let it be passed over without comment that by one sinner wrath comes upon all the people.

How does it happen? It happens when the priests who have charge of the people want to seem kind toward those who sin, and they fear the tongues of those sinners who might speak evil of them. Forgetful of priestly severity, they do not wish to discharge that which is written, "Reprove sinners in the presence of all so that the rest may have fear,"³⁸ and again, "Remove the evil one from your midst."³⁹ Nor are they kindled with the zeal of God so as to imitate the Apostle, who said, "Hand over this sort of person to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit may be saved."⁴⁰ And they do not strive to follow the Gospel teaching, that if they have seen someone sinning, they should first come together privately, and afterwards "with two or three witnesses"; but if the sinner is defiant and has not changed his way after the reproof of the Church, "they should

32. Rom 11.17.

34. Cf. Dt 28.13.

36. Dt 28.13.

38. 1 Tm 5.20.

40. 1 Cor 5.5.

33. Dt 28.36.

35. Cf. 1 Cor 11.3.

37. Mt 19.30.

39. 1 Cor 5.13.

consider that person as a pagan and publican," expelled from the Church.⁴¹

When they spare one, they set in motion the destruction of the whole Church. What kind of goodness is that, what kind of compassion to spare one and to draw all into danger? For by one sinner the people are defiled. Just as from one sick sheep, the whole flock is infected, so also by one fornicator—or perpetrator of whatever other wickedness—the whole people are polluted.

Therefore, let us guard one another, and let the manner of life of each be known, especially by the priests and ministers. Let them not think it right to say, "Why look at me if another does evil"? This is for the head to say to the feet, "What does it concern me if they suffer, if my feet are not well? It makes no difference to me if only the head may continue in health." Or if the eye says to the hand, "I do not need your works; what does it concern me if you endure pain, if you are wounded? Shall I, the eye, be disturbed by the infirmity of the hand?"⁴²

Such therefore is what those who lead the churches do who do not consider that all of us who believe are one body, having one God who draws us into one and holds us together—Christ.⁴³ You who preside over the Church are the eye of Christ's body, so that you may especially keep an eye on everything, examine everything, and even foresee things about to come. You are a pastor; you see the lambs of the Lord unaware of danger to be carried to precipices and suspended over steep places. Do you not run? Do you not call them back? Do you not at least restrain them with your voice and deter them with a shout of reproof? The Lord, with the other ninety-nine abandoned in heaven on account of one lamb that had strayed,⁴⁴ descended to earth and found it and carried it back again to heaven on his shoulders.⁴⁵ Are you so unmindful of the mystery of the Lord that when we ourselves care for lambs we do not at all follow the example of the master shepherd?

41. Mt 18.15-17.

43. Cf. Col 1.17.

45. Lk 15.5.

42. Cf. 1 Cor 12.14-21, 26.

44. Mt 18.12.

We do not say this in order that someone may be cut off for a light fault. But if by chance someone makes no amends, although reminded forcibly and reproved for a fault once and again and a third time, then let us use the discipline of a surgeon. If we have anointed with oil, if we have soothed with plaster, if we have softened with emollient, and nevertheless the hardness of the tumor does not yield to the medications, the only remedy that remains is to cut it away. For thus also the Lord says, "If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and thrust it from you."⁴⁶ But does the hand of our body ever cause us to stumble or does the Gospel say concerning this hand of the body, "Cut it off and thrust it from you"? On the contrary, this is what it says, that I, who seem to be a right hand to you and am named a presbyter and seem to preach the word of God, if I should do anything against the teaching of the Church and the rule of the Gospel, so that I create a stumbling block for you the Church, may the whole Church in one accord, acting in concert, cut me off and fling me, their right hand, away. "For it is expedient for you," the Church, to enter into the kingdom of heaven without me, your hand, which, by doing evil, prepared a stumbling block, than with me "to go into Gehenna."⁴⁷

We have said these things, therefore, because we see recorded in the Holy Scriptures that on account of one sinner "the sons of Israel became anathema"⁴⁸ so that they were overcome by enemies.

7. But let us also see what sort of sin this person did. He stole, it says, "a tongue of gold"⁴⁹ and placed it in his own tent.

I do not think so great a force of sin was in that theft of a little gold that it defiled the innumerable Church of the Lord. But let us see if a deeper understanding does not reveal the enormity and severity of the sin. There is much elegance in words and much beauty in the discourses of philosophers and rhetoricians, who are all of the city of Jericho, that is, people of

46. Mt 5.30.

48. Jos 7.12.

47. Ibid.

49. *Linguam auream* (tongue-shaped ingot, bar of gold). Jos 7.21. The more literal translation is used here to accompany Origen's comparison with the metaphorical golden tongue of a philosopher or poet.

this world.⁵⁰ If, therefore, you should find among the philosophers perverse doctrines beautified by the assertions of a splendid discourse, this is the "tongue of gold." But beware that the splendor of the performance does not beguile you, that the beauty of the golden discourse not seize you. Remember that Jesus commanded all the gold found in Jericho to be anathema. If you read a poet with properly measured verses, weaving gods and goddesses in a very bright tune, do not be seduced by the sweetness of eloquence, for it is the "tongue of gold." If you take it up and place it in your tent, if you introduce into your heart those things that are declared by the [poets and philosophers], then you will pollute the whole Church of the Lord. This the unhappy Valentinus did and Basilides; Marcion also did this. Those persons stole the "tongues of gold" from Jericho. They attempted to introduce into the churches sects not fitting to us, and to pollute all the Church of the Lord.⁵¹

But let us follow the example of the fathers going before us. Let us examine more diligently, lest anyone have a tongue of Jericho hidden in their tent, and let us throw away the evil from us because, even if we do nothing, God will reprove in such a way that the thief freely confesses and says, "I stole the tongue of gold and the pure bracelets." Do you see what kind of thing the thief stole? He stole the tongue and pure bracelets. The pure bracelets are works in which nothing divine is mixed, but the whole thing is accomplished according to the will of a human.⁵² Finally, it is our custom in the debates to say that Christ is not a pure man; instead we confess him to be God and man.⁵³ But that which the sinner steals from Jericho is said to be pure,

50. Though Origen warns against the dogmas of the philosophers, he could still advise his students to use the spoils of Egypt. See his letter to Gregory (*Ep.* 2.1-2).

51. Valentinus, Basilides, and Marcion were founders of second-century sects who introduced gnostic teachings into the churches. Origen's repeated polemic against the gnostics may show their attraction for some of his hearers. See *Homily* 10.2; 11.6; 12.3; 14.2; 18.3.

52. Scripture does not mention the pure bracelets in our present texts, but cf. *Homilies on Numbers* 26.2; *Homilies on Genesis* 10.4; *Selections on Ezekiel* 16.

53. In *First Principles* Origen speaks of Christ as both God and man (pref.4; 1.2.1). See J. W. Trigg's summary of Origen's understanding of the nature of Christ in *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), pp. 97-101.

that is, without God, which certainly for the one stealing is the cause of the sin.

Therefore, let us imagine nothing pure and mortal concerning Christ, but let us acknowledge him equally God and man, since even the wisdom of God is called manifold,⁵⁴ so that for this we may deserve to have a share of the wisdom of God, who is Christ Jesus our Lord, "to whom is the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen!"⁵⁵

54. Cf. 1 Cor 1.24; Wis 7.22.

55. 1 Pt 4.11.