

ORIGEN'S COMMENTARY ON JOHN, BOOK 10, Pages 295-299

Entry of the Word into the soul

(174) Jesus, therefore, is the Word of God who enters the soul, which is called Jerusalem, riding on an ass which has been loosed from its bonds by the disciples. Now by the ass I mean the artless letters of the Old Testament which are clarified by the two disciples who loose them. One of these disciples is the person who refers the things which have been written anagogically to the service of the soul and who interprets them allegorically for it, and the other is the one who presents the good and true things which are to be through those things which are found in the shadow.

(175) Now he is also riding the young colt, which is the New Testament. For it is possible to find in both Testaments the word of truth (Cf. 1 Cor 6.7) which cleanses us and drives out all the arguments which are buying and selling in us.

(176) But he does not enter the soul, which is Jerusalem, alone; neither does he enter with a certain few. For there must be many things present in us which precede the Word of God who perfects us, and many others which follow him. All, however, praise and glorify him, and place their own adornment and garment under him, that his mounts might not touch the earth (Cf. Dn 8.5) since they have the one who has come down from heaven resting upon them.

(177) And that the old and new words of the Scriptures which carry him might be even higher above the earth, branches must be cut from the trees that they may walk on things which are set forth reasonably. And the multitudes which go before and follow him can indicate the cooperation of angels, some which prepare the way for him in our souls, through which activities they themselves have been adorned, but others follow his presence in us. Since we have frequently spoken about this presence we have no need of testimonies on it now.

(178) And perhaps [someone] might reasonably compare the sounds which envelop the word which brings them into the soul to an ass, for the beast is a burden bearer, and a great burden and a heavy load are revealed from the text, especially from the Old Testament, as is clear to one who has given attention to the things which are done by the Jews.

(179) The colt, however, is not a burden bearer as the ass. For although every burden of the letter is heavy for those who cannot receive the ascending and very light burden of the spirit, yet at least the new letter is less heavy than the old.

(180) Now I know some who have understood the ass which was bound to be those from the circumcision who believe, and who are released from many bonds by those who have been instructed by the Word in a truly spiritual manner. And they take the colt to be those from the gentiles, who were free and without any imposed yoke so far as rebelliousness and delight in pleasure are concerned before they received the word of Jesus.

Jesus pursues enemies of his people

(181) Although these have not mentioned the multitudes which precede and which follow, it is not unconvincing to apply those who precede to Moses and the prophets, and those who follow to the holy apostles, all of whom enter the city of Jerusalem. We must investigate Jerusalem in relation to this meaning, for it has many selling and buying who are driven out by the Son of God.

(182) Perhaps "the Jerusalem which is above" (Cf. Gal 4.26) is now meant, into which the Lord will ascend conducting those of the circumcision and those of the gentiles who believe, while either prophets and apostles or the angels who minister to him-for these too can be indicated by those who precede and those who follow him-precede him and follow. Before his ascent this city had the so-called "spirits of wickedness in high places," (Eph 6.12) or the Chanaanites and the Hethites and the Amorrhites, and the other enemies of the people, and, in general, foreigners. And perhaps it was possible there for the prophecy to be fulfilled which says, "Your land is desolate, your cities are burned, foreigners devour your country before you." (Is 1.7)

(183) For it is these who defile the heavenly house of the Father, the holy Jerusalem, the house of prayer, and have made it a "den of thieves," (Cf. Mt 21.13) who are none other than themselves. It is these who have money that is not legal tender, and who give those who approach obols and small change, coins that are cheap and contemptible.

(184) These are those who take the more precious things from souls as they wrestle with them, and strip off the better things that they might give them worthless things.

ORIGEN'S COMMENTARY ON JOHN, BOOK 10, Pages 295-299

The ass and the colt

(185) But the disciples go and find the ass tied, and release it. It does not have Jesus because of the veil which is placed on it in the law. (Cf. 2 Cor 3.15)

(186) And the colt is also found with her, since both had been lost before Jesus. Now I mean those of the circumcision and those from the gentiles who believed later.

(187) But there is danger in mentioning how these beasts are sent back immediately after Jesus has been placed on them and has gone up into Jerusalem. It involves the mystery of the change of the saints into angels, who will be sent in the age after this one, in a similar manner to those ministering spirits who were sent to minister because of those who will inherit eternal life, (Cf. Heb 1.14) thanks to these things.

(188) But if the ass and colt should be the Old and New Scriptures on which the Word of God is borne, it will not be difficult at all to show how they are sent away once the Word has appeared in them. After the Word has entered Jerusalem, they do not remain among those who have rejected all the arguments which are buying and selling.

(189) I do not think it is without significance that this place, in which were the ass which was tied and the colt, is a village, and that it is nameless. For the whole earth, where the ass is found tied and the colt, is a village, viewed in relation to the whole cosmos in heaven, and it is sufficiently designated as a village without the addition of another name.

(190) Matthew says that those who were to fetch the ass and the colt were sent from Bethphage, which was a priestly place which means "house of jaws." (Or, "house of cheeks." See Lagarde, *Onomastica*, 188.75)

(191) We have had to make these comments, in accordance with our ability, on the events in Matthew. An account that is complete and more detailed than these words will be related more opportunely whenever it is granted to us to comment on the Gospel According to Matthew. (Origen discusses Mt 21.1-13 in his *Commentary on Matthew* 16.14-23)

(192) Now Mark and Luke say that the two disciples, in accordance with the Lord's command, found a colt tied on which no man had ever sat, which they loosed and brought to the Lord. (Cf. Mk 11.2; Lk 19.30)

(193) Mark adds that "they found the colt tied at the door outside in the street." (Cf. Mk 11.4) And who is outside? Those from the gentiles who were "strangers to the covenants" and aliens from the promise of God, (Cf. Eph 2.12) who were on the street and not resting under a roof or house, bound by their own sins and loosed by the twofold understanding of Jesus' pupils which was mentioned earlier.

(194) But the bonds of the colt which was tied, and the sins which have been committed against the sound Word, which are reproved by him who is the door of life, were not inside, but outside in relation to it (I mean, of course, the door). For it may be that there can be no bond of wickedness inside the door.

(195) And there were some standing beside the bound colt, as Mark says, (Cf. Mk 11.5) (I think they that had bound it), [and] as Luke writes, "The owners of the colt said to the disciples, 'Why are you loosing the colt?'" (Cf. Lk 19.33) For the lawbreakers who have subjected and bound the sinner are owners who cannot look the true owner in the face who is dragging the colt away from their bonds.

(196) It is for this reason that the disciples say, "The Lord has need of him." (Lk 19.34) When the evil owners could make no response, the disciples bring the colt to Jesus bare. They throw their own adornment on it, that when the Lord is seated on it he may rest on the disciples' garments which were thrown upon it.