

name of the Lamb, and the name of His Father. Now these taken from the tribes are, as we showed before, the same persons as the virgins. But the number of believers is small who belong to Israel according to the flesh; one might venture to assert that they would not nearly make up the number of a hundred and forty-four thousand. It is clear, therefore, that the hundred and forty-four thousand who have not defiled themselves with women must be made up of those who have come to the divine word out of the Gentile world. In this way the truth of the statement may be upheld that the first fruits of each tribe are its virgins. For the passage goes on: "These were brought from among men to be a first fruits to God and to the Lamb; and in their mouth was found no guile, for they are without blemish." The statement about the hundred and forty-four thousand no doubt admits of mystical interpretation; but it is unnecessary at this point, and would divert us from our purpose, to compare with it those passages of the prophets in which the same lesson is taught regarding those who are called from among the Gentiles.

3. IN THE SPIRITUAL ISRAEL THE HIGH-PRIESTS ARE THOSE WHO DEVOTE THEMSELVES TO THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE.

But what is the bearing of all this for us? So you will ask when you read these words, Ambrosius, thou who art truly a man of God, a man in Christ, and who seekest to be not a man only, but a spiritual man.¹ The bearing is this. Those of the tribes offer to God, through the levites and priests, tithes and first fruits; not everything which they possess do they regard as tithe or first fruit. The levites and priests, on the other hand, have no possessions but tithes and first fruits; yet they also in turn offer tithes to God through the high-priests, and, I believe, first fruits too. The same is the case with those who approach Christian studies. Most of us devote most of our time to the things of this life, and dedicate to God only a few special acts, thus resembling those members of the tribes who had but few transactions with the priest, and discharged their religious duties with no great expense of time. But those who devote themselves to the divine word and have no other employment but the service of God may not unnaturally, allowing for the difference

of occupation in the two cases, be called our levites and priests. And those who fulfil a more distinguished office than their kinsmen¹ will perhaps be high-priests, according to the order of Aaron, not that of Melchisedek. Here some one may object that it is somewhat too bold to apply the name of high-priests to men, when Jesus Himself is spoken of in many a prophetic passage as the one great priest, as² "We have a great high-priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God." But to this we reply that the Apostle clearly defined his meaning, and declared the prophet to have said about the Christ, "Thou³ art a priest for ever, according to the order of Melchisedek," and not according to the order of Aaron. We say accordingly that men can be high-priests according to the order of Aaron, but according to the order of Melchisedek only the Christ of God.

4. THE STUDY OF THE GOSPELS IS THE FIRST FRUITS OFFERED BY THESE PRIESTS OF CHRISTIANITY.

Now our whole activity is devoted to God, and our whole life, since we are bent on progress in divine things. If, then, it be our desire to have the whole of those first fruits spoken of above which are made up of the many first fruits, if we are not mistaken in this view, in what must our first fruits consist, after the bodily separation we have undergone from each other, but in the study of the Gospel? For we may venture to say that the Gospel is the first fruits of all the Scriptures. Where, then, could be the first fruits of our activity, since the time when we came to Alexandria, but in the first fruits of the Scriptures? It must not be forgotten, however, that the first fruits are not the same as the first growth. For the first fruits⁴ are offered after all the fruits (are ripe), but the first growth⁵ before them all. Now of the Scriptures which are current and are believed to be divine in all the churches, one would not be wrong in saying that the first growth is the law of Moses, but the first fruits the Gospel. For it was after all the fruits of the prophets who prophesied till the Lord Jesus, that the perfect word shot forth.

¹ Reading with Neander and Lommatzsch (note), διαφέρον τι for διαφέροντες.

² Heb. iv. 14.

³ Ps. cx. 4; Heb. v. 6. Cf. vii. 11.

⁴ ἀπαρχή, Exod. xxii. 29.

⁵ πρωτογέννημα, Exod. xxiii. 16.

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

5. ALL SCRIPTURE IS GOSPEL ; BUT THE GOSPELS ARE DISTINGUISHED ABOVE OTHER SCRIPTURES.

Here, however, some one may object, appealing to the notion just put forward of the unfolding of the first fruits last, and may say that the Acts and the letters of the Apostles came after the Gospels, and that this destroys our argument to the effect that the Gospel is the first fruits of all Scripture. To this we must reply that it is the conviction of men who are wise in Christ, who have profited by those epistles which are current, and who see them to be vouched for by the testimonies deposited in the law and the prophets,¹ that the apostolic writings are to be pronounced wise and worthy of belief, and that they have great authority, but that they are not on the same level with that "Thus sayeth the Lord Almighty."² Consider on this point the language of St. Paul. When he declares that³ "Every Scripture is inspired of God and profitable," does he include his own writings? Or does he not include his dictum,⁴ "I say, and not the Lord," and⁵ "So I ordain in all the churches," and⁶ "What things I suffered at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra," and similar things which he writes in virtue of his own authority, and which do not quite possess the character of words flowing from divine inspiration. Must we also show that the old Scripture is not Gospel, since it does not point out the Coming One, but only foretells Him and heralds His coming at a future time; but that all the new Scripture is the Gospel. It not only says as in the beginning of the Gospel,⁷ "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world;" it also contains many praises of Him, and many of His teachings, on whose account the Gospel is a Gospel. Again, if God set in the Church⁸ apostles and prophets and evangelists (gospelers), pastors and teachers, we must first enquire what was the office of the evangelist, and mark that it is not only to narrate how the Saviour cured a man who was blind from his birth,⁹ or raised up a dead man who was already stinking,¹⁰ or to state what extraordinary works he wrought; and the office of the evangelist being thus defined, we shall not hesitate to find Gospel in such discourse also as is not narrative but hortatory and intended to strengthen belief in the mission of Jesus; and thus we shall arrive at the position that whatever was written by the

Apostles is Gospel. As to this second definition, it might be objected that the Epistles are not entitled "Gospel," and that we are wrong in applying the name of Gospel to the whole of the New Testament. But to this we answer that it happens not unfrequently in Scripture when two or more persons or things are named by the same name, the name attaches itself most significantly to one of those things or persons. Thus the Saviour says,¹ "Call no man Master upon the earth;" while the Apostle says that Masters² have been appointed in the Church. These latter accordingly will not be Masters in the strict sense of the dictum of the Gospel. In the same way the Gospel in the Epistles will not extend to every word of them, when it is compared with the narrative of Jesus' actions and sufferings and discourses. No: the Gospel is the first fruits of all Scripture, and to these first fruits of the Scriptures we devote the first fruits of all those actions of ours which we trust to see turn out as we desire.

6. THE FOURFOLD GOSPEL. JOHN'S THE FIRST FRUITS OF THE FOUR. QUALIFICATIONS NECESSARY FOR INTERPRETING IT.

Now the Gospels are four. These four are, as it were, the elements of the faith of the Church, out of which elements the whole world which is reconciled to God in Christ is put together; as Paul says,³ "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself;" of which world Jesus bore the sin; for it is of the world of the Church that the word is written,⁴ "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." The Gospels then being four, I deem the first fruits of the Gospels to be that which you⁵ have enjoined me to search into according to my powers, the Gospel of John, that which speaks of him whose genealogy had already been set forth, but which begins to speak of him at a point before he had any genealogy. For Matthew, writing for the Hebrews who looked for Him who was to come of the line of Abraham and of David, says:⁶ "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." And Mark, knowing what he writes, narrates the beginning of the Gospel; we may perhaps find what he aims at in John; in the beginning the Word, God the Word. But Luke, though he says at the beginning of Acts, "The former treatise did I make about all that Jesus began to do and to teach," yet

¹ This passage is difficult and disputed.

² 2 Cor. vi. 18.

³ 2 Tim. iii. 16.

⁴ 1 Cor. vii. 17.

⁵ 2 Tim. iii. 11.

⁶ Ephes. iv. 11.

⁷ John ix. 1.

⁸ 1 Cor. vii. 12.

⁹ John i. 29.

¹⁰ John xi. 39.

¹ Matt. xxiii. 8, 9.

² 2 Cor. v. 19.

³ Ambrosius.

⁴ διδάσκαλοι, Ephes. iv. 11.

⁵ John i. 29.

⁶ Matt. i. 1.

leaves to him who lay on Jesus' breast the greatest and completest discourses about Jesus. For none of these plainly declared His Godhead, as John does when he makes Him say, "I am the light of the world," "I am the way and the truth and the life," "I am the resurrection," "I am the door," "I am the good shepherd;" and in the Apocalypse, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last." We may therefore make bold to say that the Gospels are the first fruits of all the Scriptures, but that of the Gospels that of John is the first fruits. No one can apprehend the meaning of it except he have lain on Jesus' breast and received from Jesus Mary to be his mother also. Such an one must he become who is to be another John, and to have shown to him, like John, by Jesus Himself Jesus as He is. For if Mary, as those declare who with sound mind extol her, had no other son but Jesus, and yet Jesus says to His mother, "Woman, behold thy son,"¹ and not "Behold you have this son also," then He virtually said to her, "Lo, this is Jesus, whom thou didst bear." Is it not the case that every one who is perfect lives himself no longer,² but Christ lives in him; and if Christ lives in him, then it is said of him to Mary, "Behold thy son Christ." What a mind, then, must we have to enable us to interpret in a worthy manner this work, though it be committed to the earthly treasure-house of common speech, of writing which any passer-by can read, and which can be heard when read aloud by any one who lends to it his bodily ears? What shall we say of this work? He who is accurately to apprehend what it contains should be able to say with truth,³ "We have the mind of Christ, that we may know those things which are bestowed on us by God." It is possible to quote one of Paul's sayings in support of the contention that the whole of the New Testament is Gospel. He writes in a certain place:⁴ "According to my Gospel." Now we have no written work of Paul which is commonly called a Gospel. But all that he preached and said was the Gospel; and what he preached and said he was also in the habit of writing, and what he wrote was therefore Gospel. But if what Paul wrote was Gospel, it follows that what Peter wrote was also Gospel, and in a word all that was said or written to perpetuate the knowledge of Christ's sojourn on earth, and to prepare for His second coming, or to bring

it about as a present reality in those souls which were willing to receive the Word of God as He stood at the door and knocked and sought to come into them.

7. WHAT GOOD THINGS ARE ANNOUNCED IN THE GOSPELS.

But it is time we should inquire what is the meaning of the designation "Gospel," and why these books have this title. Now the Gospel is a discourse containing a promise of things which naturally, and on account of the benefits they bring, rejoice the hearer as soon as the promise is heard and believed. Nor is such a discourse any the less a Gospel that we define it with reference to the position of the hearer. A Gospel is either a word which implies the actual presence to the believer of something that is good, or a word promising the arrival of a good which is expected. Now all these definitions apply to those books which are named Gospels. For each of the Gospels is a collection of announcements which are useful to him who believes them and does not misinterpret them; it brings him a benefit and naturally makes him glad because it tells of the sojourn with men, on account of men, and for their salvation, of the first-born of all creation,¹ Christ Jesus. And again each Gospel tells of the sojourn of the good Father in the Son with those minded to receive Him, as is plain to every believer; and moreover by these books a good is announced which had been formerly expected, as is by no means hard to see. For John the Baptist spoke in the name almost of the whole people when he sent to Jesus and asked,² "Art thou He that should come or do we look for another?" For to the people the Messiah was an expected good, which the prophets had foretold, and they all alike, though under the law and the prophets, fixed their hopes on Him, as the Samaritan woman bears witness when she says:³ "I know that the Messiah comes, who is called Christ; when He comes He will tell us all things." Simon and Cleopas too, when talking to each other about all that had happened to Jesus Christ Himself, then risen, though they did not know that He had risen, from the dead, speak thus,⁴ "Dost thou sojourn alone in Jerusalem, and knowest not the things which have taken place there in these days? And when he said what things? they answered, The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth,⁵ which was a prophet, mighty in

¹ John xix. 26.

² 1 Cor. ii. 12, 16.

³ Gal. ii. 20.

⁴ Rom. ii. 16.

¹ Col. i. 15.

² Luke xxiv. 18-21.

³ Matt. xi. 3.

⁴ Ναζαρηθού.

⁵ John iv. 25