

EUSEBIUS
PREPARATION FOR THE GOSPEL

TRANSLATED FROM A REVISED TEXT

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PART I

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soul from them, they ought surely to welcome the good by choice, and anticipate the suppliants by their benefits instead of waiting to be compelled.

But if the transaction was not honourable and not b beneficial, and therefore its occurrence not according to their mind, how then could they be good, if they practised what is neither honourable nor expedient?

Or how can they deserve to be admired and honoured with divine worship who are enslaved by common impostors of the most abandoned character, and compelled to perform what is neither honourable nor expedient contrary to their judgement, and are led and dragged down, not because they approve of men's morality, nor to promote virtue or any branch of philosophy, but by forbidden practices of impostors? Such practices the same author has mentioned again in c his Epistle to the before-mentioned Egyptian, as though he were consulting a prophet upon secret truths, and requesting to be taught by him the words in which they accomplish these results. For he asks as in doubt, and speaks somewhat as follows.

CHAPTER X

'BUT what utterly perplexes me is, how, though invoked as d superiors, they receive orders as inferiors, and while requiring PORPHYRY their worshipper to be just, submit when bidden themselves to do injustice; and, while they would not listen to one who invokes them, if defiled by sensual pleasure, do not hesitate themselves to lead any whom they meet into lawless indulgence.

'They also give orders that their interpreters must be abstainers from animal food, that they may not be tainted with the vapours from the carcasses, though they are themselves mightily allured by the vapours from the sacrifices; also that the initiate must not touch a dead body, though it is by means of dead animals that p. 198 the gods are for the most part brought down.

197 d 1 Porphyry, *Epistle to Anebo*, § 28

PORPHYRY 'But much more absurd than this is the notion that a man under the power of any ordinary master should employ threats, not merely to a daemon perchance or to a dead man's soul, but to the royal Sun himself, or the Moon, or any of the deities in heaven, and try to frighten them by lies, in order that they may speak the truth.

'For to say that he will batter the heavens, and publish the secrets of Isis, and show the forbidden mystery at Abydos, and stop **b** the sacred boat, and scatter the limbs of Osiris for Typhon,—is not this the last excess of stupidity on the part of him who threatens things of which he has neither knowledge nor power, and of degradation to those who have been frightened at so vain an alarm, and at mere fictions, like very silly children?

'And yet Chaeremon the sacred scribe records these things as common talk among the Egyptians, and they say that these and other such methods are most forcible.

'What meaning have the very prayers, which speak of him who **c** arose out of a marsh, and is seated upon the lotus, and voyages in a ship, and changes his shapes hourly, and is transfigured according to the signs of the zodiac? For thus they say he is beheld by our eyes, not knowing that what they are attaching to him is the peculiar affection of their own imagination.

'If these things are spoken symbolically, as being symbols of his powers, let them tell us the interpretation of the symbols. For it is evident that if it was what the sun undergoes, as in eclipses, the same thing would have been seen by all who gaze upon him.

'Further, what is meant by the unintelligible names, and among these the preference of the barbarous names over those which **d** properly belong to each deity? For if he who hears looks to the thing signified, the thought remaining the same is sufficient to show it, whatsoever the name may be.

'For, I suppose, the god invoked was not an Egyptian by birth: and even if he was an Egyptian, yet surely he did not use the Egyptian language, nor any human language at all. For either these were all impostors' tricks, and symbols of the passions which affect us, veiled by the titles which they ascribe to the gods, or else we have been unconsciously holding ideas concerning the deity contrary to his real condition.'