

# THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the  
21st-Century Church

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## Go Deeper Excursus 21 The Future Restoration of Israel in the Early Church

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The following survey of second- and third-century writings points to lingering vestiges of an expectation of the conversion of ethnic Israel and their resulting regathering and restoration as a nation in the land under the Messiah. Though the position was not the only view in the early church, it does seem to be part of the classic Irenaean premillennial eschatological expectation.

### **The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (Late Second Century)**

On the provenance, date, integrity, and purpose of the Testaments, Kugler notes, “The dominant view is that Jews first wrote the Testaments, and only later were they redacted to serve the interests of the early Christian movement.”<sup>1</sup> Most date the Christianized version as we have it today to between AD 100 and 200.<sup>2</sup> The Testaments are twelve apocryphal (that is, fictional) speeches put on the lips of the twelve sons of Jacob as heads of the tribes of Israel. Each speech rehearses each son’s life, including lessons they learned, both good and bad, exhortations to righteous living, and, finally, a prophetic conclusion, most often regarded as later Jewish-Christian additions to an earlier Jewish text.<sup>3</sup>

How are the fictional words of Israel’s patriarchs, written centuries after those twelve sons of Israel lived, helpful in answering the question of a future restoration of Israel in the early church? Because the Christianized version of the Testaments comes from sometime between the first and second centuries, the content of the prophetic portions of the speeches function like a window into the beliefs of the early Christian community that originally produced and received the Testaments.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Kugler, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, Guides to the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 31.

<sup>2</sup> Kugler, *Testaments*, 31–37.

<sup>3</sup> Kugler, *Testaments*, 11.

They introduce important themes to consider as we read the words of second-century fathers related to Israel in their historical-theological contexts.

The first clear indication of a future restoration of the nation of Israel is found in the Testament of Levi 16.4–5: “And your holy places shall be laid waste even to the ground because of him. And ye shall have no place that is clean; but ye shall be among the Gentiles a curse and a dispersion until He shall again visit you (ἕως αὐτος πάλιν ἐπισκέψηται), and in pity shall receive you [through faith and water].”<sup>4</sup> The reference here is to the destruction of the temple in AD 70, their resulting dispersion, with a hope of mercy in the future.

The Testament of Judah 22.1–3 says, “Among men of another race shall my kingdom be brought to an end, until the salvation of Israel shall come, until the appearing of the God of righteousness, that Jacob and all the Gentiles may rest in peace. And he shall guard the might of my kingdom for ever: for the Lord swore to me with an oath that the kingdom should never fail from me, and from my seed for all days, even for ever.” Though the kingdom “will be brought to an end (συντελεσθήσεται ἡ βασιλεία μου),” this condition is temporary: “until (ἕως) the salvation of Israel shall come” (22.2). In Romans 11:25–26, Paul also referred to a partial hardening of Israel “until (ἄχρι) the fulness of the nations enter in, at which point “all Israel will be saved (πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται).”

In the Testament of Zebulun 9.9, after a description of the coming of the Messiah as “God in the fashion of a man” (9.8), we read, “And again through the wickedness of your works shall ye provoke Him to anger, and ye shall be cast away by Him unto the time of consummation.” This rejection of Israel after the Messiah is not permanent, but it will be “unto the time of consummation” (καὶ ἀπορριφήσεσθε ἕως καιροῦ συντελείας). This implies a prolonged period of rejection that concludes with a restoration. It might very well be that Paul intended something like this in 1 Thessalonians 2:16 with his enigmatic phrase, “but wrath has come upon them [Israel] to the end” (ἔφθασεν δὲ ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς ἡ ὀργὴ εἰς τέλος): that is, the judgment of God will remain upon them until the end, when they will be restored (cf. Rom 11:25–27).

The Testament of Dan 6.1–6 says:

Therefore is the enemy eager to destroy all that call upon the Lord. For he knoweth that upon the day on which Israel shall repent [believe] (ἐν ἣ ἡμέρᾳ πιστεύσει Ἰσραὴλ), the kingdom of the enemy shall be brought to an end. For the very angel of peace shall strengthen Israel, that it fall not (μὴ ἐμπεσεῖν αὐτόν) into the extremity of evil. And it shall be in the time of the lawlessness of Israel, that the Lord will not depart from them, but will transform them into a nation that doeth His will, for none of the angels will be equal unto him.

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<sup>4</sup> Translation from Robert Henry Charles, ed., *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913).

The promise in 6.5 that Israel will not fall (μὴ ἐμπεσεῖν) into evil echoes the language of Paul in Romans 11:11—“So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall (ἵνα πέσωσιν)? By no means!” The Testament of Dan 6.4 looks forward to the day when Israel believes, which will mark the end of the enemy’s kingdom.

The Testament of Asher 7.6–7 declares, “And therefore shall ye be scattered as Gad and Dan my brethren, and ye shall know not your own lands, tribe, and tongue. But the Lord will gather you together in faith (ἐπισυνάξει ὑμᾶς Κύριος ἐν πίστει) through His tender mercy, and for the sake of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Note the use of the term ἐπισυνάγω, used also in Matthew 24:31, which we earlier identified as the eschatological regathering of the tribes of Israel after they were scattered (see *The Fathers on the Future*, chapter 7): “He will send out his messengers with a great trumpet, and they will gather (ἐπισυνάχουσιν) his elect from the four winds” (cf. Mark 13:27). This language provides an insight into how early Jewish Christians would have likely understood the promise of regathering the elect in the Olivet discourse.

Additional examples from the Testaments could be added to this sampling.<sup>5</sup> Regarding their eschatological content, Kugler summarizes:

Altogether the future-oriented passages claim a number of things about what lies ahead for the patriarchs and for the early Common Era recipients of the *Testaments*. First, they predict the futures of the patriarchs’ descendants—their successes and failures, righteousness and sins—up to the coming of Jesus. Second, they foretell the tribes’ rebellion against the descendants of Levi (priests) and Judah (kings), and against the saviour who will come from those two tribes; at the same time they admonish obedience to the two tribes and to the messiah. Nonetheless, third, they predict that Israel, and most especially the tribe of Levi, will reject the messiah. After that, the messiah will turn away from Israel to the Gentiles, and Israel will sporadically keep the commandments in the period between the first advent of the messiah and his second coming. And fourth, the patriarchs announce that the messiah will come to complete God’s plan of salvation for Israel.<sup>6</sup>

Thus the Christianized conclusions of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs demonstrate the on-the-ground reality that, at least in some circles of the second-century church, Christians expected a future repentance, regathering, and restoration of ethnic Israel to the land in accordance with Old Testament promises.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. T. Reu. 6.7–12; T. Sim. 6.5; T. Iss. 6.1–4; T. Naph. 8.1–4.

<sup>6</sup> Kugler, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, 15.

### Justin Martyr (c. 160)

Peter Richardson observes that “the word ‘Israel’ is applied to the Christian Church for the first time by Justin Martyr c. A.D. 160. It is a symptom of the developing take-over by Christians of the prerogatives and privileges of Jews.... In the creative step in which the equation is made explicit—‘Church’ = ‘true Israel’—Justin gives accurate expression to a long-standing tendency to increase the degree to which Christianity views itself as the heir of all which Israel once possessed.”<sup>7</sup> Justin’s language of the church replacing rejected Israel and inheriting its promises is often cited as evidence of Justin’s stark supersessionism (cf. *Dial.* 11, 123, 135). However, in light of the second-century both/and approach to Old Testament prophecy, affirming that Christ and the church in the present constitute “spiritual Israel” does not in itself rule out the possibility that Justin also anticipated an eschatological repentance and restoration of ethnic Israel as foretold by the prophets.

In fact, Justin’s language elsewhere suggests just that when he speaks of a repentance and restoration of ethnic Israel among Old Testament prophecies that were “foretold, but are yet to happen,” that “shall with certainty come to pass” (*1 Apol.* 52). He writes:

What the tribes of the Jews will say and do when they see Him coming in glory has been thus foretold by Zacharias the Prophet: “I will order the four winds to collect together the scattered children; I will command the north wind to carry them, and the south wind not to strike against them. And then there shall be great lamentation in Jerusalem, not the lamentation of mouths or of lips, but the lamentation of the heart; and they shall tear not their clothing, but their thoughts; they shall lament tribe by tribe, and then they shall look upon the One whom they pierced, and they shall exclaim, ‘Why, O Lord, have You made us wander from Your way? The glory which our fathers blessed has for us become a shame.’” (*1 Apol.* 52 [Falls])

Falls discerns language and imagery from several Old Testament passages here: primarily, Zechariah 2:6 and 12:10–12, but also Joel 2:13, Isaiah 63:17, and 64:11.<sup>8</sup> That the Zechariah passages are counted among the texts that contribute to the Old Testament collage of images of the coming kingdom suggests Justin had some concept of a future regathering and restoration of Israel upon their repentance, despite their present rejection and temporary displacement by the church.

After quoting snippets from Isaiah 55:3–13, Justin makes a similar case to his Jewish interlocutors in *Dialogue with Trypho*: “Some of these and similar passages from the Prophets refer to the first coming of Christ, in which He is described as coming in disgrace, obscurity, and

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, SNTSMS, vol. 10 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Falls, *Saint Justin Martyr*, 90n4.

mortality; other passages allude to His second coming when He shall appear from the clouds in glory; and your people [the Jewish people] shall see and recognize Him whom they have crucified, as Osee, one of the twelve Prophets, and Daniel have predicted” (*Dial.* 14). We have already seen that Justin’s expectation of a future millennial kingdom involved a “rebuilt, embellished, and enlarged city of Jerusalem, as was announced by the Prophets Ezechiel, Isaias and the others” (*Dial.* 80).

Thus, with a both/and approach, Justin can read these Old Testament prophecies of the repentance, regathering, and restoration of ethnic Israel rather literally while also applying promises spiritually to the church, which in the present age is the “spiritual Israel.”

### **Irenaeus of Lyons (Late Second Century)**

At about the same time that Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs was in circulation, Irenaeus wrote *Against Heresies* (c. AD 180). In that work, he promoted an earthy view of the kingdom of God that included a fulfillment of promises to Israel. For example, he writes:

But when this Antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for three years and six months, and sit in the temple at Jerusalem; and then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who follow him into the lake of fire; but bringing in for the righteous the times of the kingdom, that is, the rest, the hallowed seventh day; and restoring to Abraham the promised inheritance, in which kingdom the Lord declared, that “many coming from the east and from the west should sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” (*Haer.* 5.30.4)

That Irenaeus envisioned a future salvation for a regathered Israel in terms similar to that of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs seems evident based on a brief but lucid statement earlier in that same chapter regarding the coming of the antichrist:

And Jeremiah does not merely point out his sudden coming, but he even indicates the tribe from which he shall come, where he says, “We shall hear the voice of his swift horses from Dan; the whole earth shall be moved by the voice of the neighing of his galloping horses: he shall also come and devour the earth, and the fullness thereof, the city also, and they that dwell therein.” This, too, is the reason that this tribe is not reckoned in the Apocalypse along with those which are saved. (*Haer.* 5.30.2)

Irenaeus’s reference is unmistakably to the twelve tribes of Israel sealed in Revelation 7:4–8, among which Dan is conspicuously missing. It is clear that Irenaeus understood the antichrist to

arise from the Hebrew tribe of Dan—that is, from among ethnic Israelites. It is therefore equally clear that Irenaeus understood Revelation 7 and the sealing of the twelve thousand from each tribe of Israel to be a reference to actual ethnic Israelites, not “spiritual Israel” as it is so often interpreted today. This is consistent with the perspective of the (Jewish) Christian redactors of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.

A few chapters later, Irenaeus also seems to suggest a possible regathering of the nation of Israel in fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. The ANF translation renders the difficult passage this way:

Now I have shown a short time ago that the church is the seed of Abraham; and for this reason, that we may know that He who in the New Testament “raises up from the stones children unto Abraham” is He who will gather, according to the Old Testament, those that shall be saved from all the nations, Jeremiah says: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that they shall no more say, The Lord liveth, who led the children of Israel from the north, and from every region whither they had been driven; He will restore them to their own land which He gave to their fathers.” (*Haer.* 5.34.1 [ANF 1:563–64])

In this older rendering, though it may first appear that Irenaeus is equating the spiritual “seed of Abraham”—the church—with those who will be gathered “from all the nations,” thereby setting the church in the place of Israel as the New Testament children of Abraham.<sup>9</sup> However, in light of the fact of the (Jewish) Christian understanding evident in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, which uses this same language in reference to the gathering of the literal “children of Israel” from the nations during the future kingdom, it may be that Irenaeus is advancing a similar tradition. However, the ANF reading is not the only approach one can take with this passage.

Though the ANF translation seems straightforward enough, the passage is riddled with textual problems. In the chart below, I compare the Sources Chrétiennes edition (2013) with the old Migne edition (1857) and Unger’s translation notes from the 2024 ACW translation.

Sources Chrétiennes Edition	Migne Edition	Unger Translation Note
Et propter hoc, <b>ut sciamus</b> <sup>10</sup> quoniam in novo Testamento <b>haec erunt</b> , <sup>11</sup> quae ex omnibus	Et propter hoc, ut sciamus quoniam in Novo Testamento <b>a Veteri qui</b> <sup>12</sup> ex omnibus	<i>Et propter hoc, ut sciamus, quoniam in novo testamento a veteri &lt;unus</i>

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Antonio Orbe, *Teología de San Ireneo: Comentario al Libro V del «Adversus haereses»*, vol. 3, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos 33 (Madrid: La Editorial Católica, 1988), 450–53.

<sup>10</sup> Per SC: the Armenian translates *videbimus*—“we will see”—or *videamus*—“let us see.” In either case, no critical editions follow this reading.

<sup>11</sup> SC follows the supposed Latin underlying the Armenian translation, which has *haec erunt quae* instead of *a veteri qui* or *ac veteri quae*.

<sup>12</sup> Per Migne, Codex Vossianus (1494) reads *ac veteri quae* but Migne favors the reading *a veteri qua*.

gentibus colliget eos qui salvabuntur, ex lapidibus suscitans filios Abrahae, Jeremias ait:	gentibus colliget eos qui salvabuntur, ex lapidibus suscitans filios Abrahae, Jeremias ait:	<i>sit Deus</i> <sup>13</sup> <i>qui ex omnibus gentibus colliget eos, qui salvabuntur, ex lapidibus suscitans filios Abrahae, Jeremias ait.</i>
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The differing text-critical decisions are based on how one navigates the diverse readings of the Armenian and Latin texts and whether one must supply a subject for the verbs, as Unger does.

The translation of Unger and Moringiello renders the passage in a direction completely different from that of the ANF:

Shortly before, we showed that the Church is the offspring of Abraham, for this reason, too, that we may know that <there is one God> in the new covenant and the old who will assemble from all the Gentiles those who will be saved—*raising up children from stones*. Jeremiah said: *Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when it shall no longer be said, “As the Lord lives, who brought up the people of Israel <out of the land of Egypt>”; but, “As the Lord lives who brought up the children> out of the north country, and out of all the countries where he had driven them, and he shall restore them to their land which he gave to their Fathers.”* (Unger)

Another approach may be to combine elements of the underlying Armenian text and the Latin testimony, rendering something like the following:

Ostendimus autem paulo ante quoniam Ecclesia est semen Abrahae: et propter hoc, ut sciamus quoniam in Novo Testamento haec erunt a Veteri qui ex omnibus gentibus colliget eos qui salvabuntur, ex lapidibus suscitans filios Abrahae, Jeremias ait:

We have shown a little before that the Church is the seed of Abraham: and for this reason, that we may know that in the New Testament these things will be from the Old, [the one]

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<sup>13</sup> Unger explains, “I inserted in angular brackets what I think fell out of the text. The Latin MSS have *a veteri* or *ac veteri* (Voss). The first makes no sense, whatever one might think of supplying. The second does make sense. Arm. Iren. Does not have this at all. Now let us work backward. *Suscitans* has as subject God, not the Church of the preceding sentence. That is certain. But the subject of *colliget*, on which *suscitans* depends, must be the same God. That justifies the relative *qui* of the Latin and disqualifies *quae* of Arm. Iren. Arm. Iren., having omitted *ac veteri*, tried to patch the matter, very poorly, by inserting *haec erunt quae*. Since God is nowhere in sight here, but is needed as subject, that word must have fallen out. If we insert it, as I did, we have the simple oft-repeated teaching of Irenaeus that there is one God in the New and the Old Testaments.” St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies*, books 4 and 5, trans. and annotated by Dominic Unger, with introduction and rev. by Scott D. Moringiello, *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, vol. 72 (New York: Newman, 2024), 304–305n3.

who will gather from all nations those who will be saved, is raising up the children of Abraham from the stones, Jeremiah says:

Unger may be right that an explicit reference to God may be missing, but without textual support, I am simply supplying “the one” to provide a subject. With my own very tentative rough reconstruction and translation, I make a case for the following interpretation. Irenaeus begins 5.34.1 by quoting Isaiah 26:19, a clear reference to bodily resurrection, which he places at the time of the kingdom. He adds to this a quotation of Ezekiel 37:12, again emphasizing bodily resurrection and a restoration of God’s people to their “own land.” Irenaeus then he leaps forward to paraphrase Ezekiel 37:24–25. In that passage God is the one who will—according to Irenaeus, in the future era of resurrection—gather Israel from among the nations (*Colligam Israel ab omnibus gentibus, ubi disperse sunt illic*). The passage in its context refers to the regathering of the tribes of Israel from exile, returning them to their own land under the new King David who will rule over them in the future kingdom.

A closer reading of Irenaeus here reveals that he affirms the present New Testament truth that God is currently raising up children of Abraham who constitute the “seed” (*ex lapidibus suscitans* [present active participle] *filios Abrahae*) in the “New Testament” period. On this point there is no dispute.<sup>14</sup> Yet, in keeping with the Old Testament promises (if we read *a Veteri* versus *ac Veteri*), in the future God “will gather (*colliget* [third-person plural future active indicative]) out of all the nations those who will be saved (*salvabuntur* [third-person plural passive future indicative]).”

Because bodily resurrection is in the immediate context and because the unity of the Old and New Testaments is Irenaeus’s overall rhetorical goal, a fulfillment of those Old Testament promises related to the land must be in Irenaeus’s mind. Thus, a dual fulfillment makes sense—that in the present time of the New Testament the spiritual seed of Abraham is being raised spiritually from the stones to constitute the church, but in the future, from the Old Testament promises, the literal

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<sup>14</sup> Irenaeus does mention that “earlier” he had established that the “seed of Abraham” is the “church” who, together with Abraham, will inherit the blessing of the literal land. This he argued in *Against Heresies* 5.32. There, he urged a literal resurrection of the just as well as an earthly kingdom that will fulfill the explicit promises to Abraham in the Old Testament (5.32.1). God had promised that he would give the land to Abraham and to his “seed” (citing Gen 13:13–14). He concludes, “If, then, God promised him the inheritance of the land, yet he did not receive it during all the time of his sojourn there, it must be, that together with his seed, that is, those who fear God and believe in Him, he shall receive it at the resurrection of the just” (*Haer.* 5.32.2). Then he states, “For his seed is the Church (*semen autem ejus Ecclesia*).” In support of this, he quotes the words of John the Baptist (Luke 3:8) that God could raise up children of Abraham from stones, as well as Galatians 3:16 and 4:28. In particular, Irenaeus makes the case that the church constitutes the “seed” by virtue of their union with Christ: “He [Paul] plainly declares that they who have believed in Christ do receive Christ, the promise to Abraham thus saying, ‘The promises were spoken to Abraham, and to his seed. Now He does not say, And of seeds, as if [he spoke] of many, but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.’” Irenaeus firmly establishes that by virtue of their union with Christ and justification by faith, the church will receive the promise of the inheritance: “they shall receive it at the resurrection of the just” in the kingdom on earth (*Haer.* 5.32.2). Though Irenaeus indisputably includes the church, united with Christ by faith, in the promise to Abraham and his “seed,” he does not thereby rule out a further fulfillment applying to ethnic Israel.



seed of Abraham will be gathered from among the nations and restored to the land. The real question, then, is whether the eschatological gathering from among the nations is due to resurrection of the Old Testament saints or a restoration of the remnant of Israel at the time. Due to the complexities of the textual reconstruction and translation, this issue cannot be firmly resolved.

In the next chapter, Irenaeus connects the promise of the new covenant established at the Last Supper with the future inheritance of the land:

For this reason, when about to undergo His sufferings, that He might declare to Abraham and those with him the glad tidings of the inheritance being thrown open, [Christ], after He had given thanks while holding the cup, and had drunk of it, and given it to the disciples, said to them: “Drink ye all of it: this is My blood of the new covenant, which shall be shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of this vine, until that day when I will drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” (*Haer.* 5.33.1)

Irenaeus concludes that Christ will “renew the inheritance of the earth” in the future and will “drink of the fruit of the vine with His disciples” when the earth is renewed and his disciples are resurrected “in the flesh.”

In light of Irenaeus’s demonstrable both/and approach to prophecy, even though it is true that he viewed the New Testament church to be “the legitimate spiritual successor of the Hebrew nation, the new and true Israel of God,”<sup>15</sup> this fact alone does not rule out a future regeneration, repentance, and restoration of ethnic Israel in Irenaeus’s eschatological expectations. Only if he insisted on an either/or approach to eschatology would this be the case. So, when he makes assertions such as “God has justly rejected [those Jews who rejected the Son of God], and given to the Gentiles outside the vineyard the fruits of its cultivation” (*Haer.* 4.36.2), such language must be understood in light of his both/and approach in 5.34.2.

### **Tertullian of Carthage (Early Third Century)**

Tertullian’s premillennial eschatology has already been discussed in Go Deeper Excursus 8. Within that basic premillennial framework, he also anticipated a future repentance and restoration of the Jewish people associated with the return of Christ in terms similar to those of Justin and Irenaeus before him. In *Against Praxeas* (c. 210), Tertullian writes that Christ “is ‘exalted at the right hand

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<sup>15</sup> John Lawson, *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus* (London: Epworth, 1948; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 79; cf. also 252.

of God,' as Peter declares in the Acts; is the Lord of hosts, because all things are by the Father made subject to Him; is the King of Israel because to Him has especially been committed the destiny of that nation" (*Prax.* 17 [ANF 3]). Tertullian does not develop what he means by "the destiny of that nation"—Israel—at this point, but further passages shed light on his intention. In *On Modesty* (c. 220?), commenting on the parable of the prodigal son, Tertullian writes:

And accordingly the Jew at the present day, no less than the younger son, having squandered God's substance, is a beggar in alien territory, serving even until now its princes, that is, the princes of this world. Seek, therefore, the Christians some other as their brother; for the Jew the parable does not admit. Much more aptly would they have matched the Christian with the elder, and the Jew with the younger son, "according to the analogy of faith," if the order of each people as intimated from Rebecca's womb permitted the inversion: only that (in that case) the concluding paragraph would oppose them; for it will be fitting for the Christian to rejoice, and not to grieve, at the restoration of Israel, if it be true, (as it is), that the whole of our hope is intimately united with the remaining expectation of Israel. (*Pud.* 8 [ANF 4])

The first portion of this sounds like doom for Israel, not dissimilar to the judgment and dispersion of Israel envisioned in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs or even Paul's own language of hardening in Romans 11. Yet the latter part of the text indicates that Israel will one day be restored—and with this restoration of Israel, "the whole of our hope" is united.

In his lengthy polemic against the heretic Marcion (c. 207), Tertullian writes, "To Christ, however, 'the order of Melchizedek' will be very suitable; for Christ is the proper and legitimate High Priest of God. He is the Pontiff of the priesthood of the uncircumcision, constituted such, even then, for the Gentiles, by whom He was to be more fully received, although at His last coming He will favour with His acceptance and blessing the circumcision also, even the race of Abraham" (*Adv. Marc.* 5.9 [ANF 3]). Elsewhere, Tertullian proves to his opponents, who rejected a future resurrection in favor of a spiritual, realized resurrection, by pointing to the fact that certain prophecies of the future had not yet occurred: "Up to the present moment they have not, tribe by tribe, smitten their breasts, looking on Him whom they pierced. No one has as yet fallen in with Elias; no one has as yet escaped from Antichrist; no one has as yet had to bewail the downfall of Babylon" (*Res.* 22 [ANF 3]).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Here Tertullian echoes similar language as used by Justin, *Dial.* 14 and *1 Apol.* 52.

### Third-Century Fathers and Beyond

Origen of Alexandria (early third century) was quite explicit in his rejection of a restoration of Israel. He asserts that Jerusalem was destroyed as judgment for crucifying Christ: “One fact, then, which proves that Jesus was something divine and sacred, is this, that Jews should have suffered on His account now for a lengthened time calamities of such severity. And we say with confidence that they will never be restored to their former condition” (*Cels.* 4.22 [ANF 4]). Because they committed such an unholy crime against Jesus, “it accordingly behooved that city where Jesus underwent these sufferings to perish utterly, and the Jewish nation to be overthrown, and the invitation to happiness offered them by God to pass to others” (*Cels.* 4.22). Of course, because Origen rejected a literal earthly kingdom, he would have had no space or time period in which such a future restoration could possibly occur.

At the same time, though, the earlier idea of a future restoration of Israel persisted. Like Irenaeus before him, Victorinus of Pettau (late third century) held to a future for Israel, drawing on the vision of the 144,000 from the twelve tribes of Israel in Revelation 7.<sup>17</sup> On the angel descending from heaven to seal the 144,000, Victorinus writes:

He speaks of Elias the prophet, who is the precursor of the times of Antichrist, for the restoration and establishment of the churches from the great and intolerable persecution. We read that these things are predicted in the opening of the Old and New Testament; for He says by Malachi: “Lo, I will send to you Elias the Tishbite, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, according to the time of calling, to recall the Jews to the faith of the people that succeed them.” And to that end He shows, as we have said, that the number of those that shall believe, of the Jews and of the nations, is a great multitude which no man was able to number. [*On the Apocalypse* 7.2 (ANF 7)]

The interpretation that the 144,000 from the twelve tribes in Revelation 7:4–8 referred to the future salvation and restoration of ethnic Israel would not stand. Later commentators would simply combine the two groups in Revelation 7—the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel and the “great multitude” from all nations—as Jews and Gentiles in the church of the present age. Tyconius [fourth century] understood the 144,000 in Revelation 7 as “the whole entire church” [*Exp. Apoc.* 7:8].<sup>18</sup> Not much should be made of this, though, since Tyconius was eager to identify numerous symbols in Revelation as the church. He has no allowance for a future for Israel in the teachings of

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<sup>17</sup> Gumerlock notes, “Some early interpreters of the Book of Revelation saw the 144,000 as Jewish people who would believe in Christ during the future reign of the Antichrist (Victorinus)” (Francis X. Gumerlock, Francesca Lecchi, and Tito Orlandi, *Pseudo-Cyril of Alexandria: Commentary on the Apocalypse* [Middletown, RI: Stone Tower Press, 2021], 8).

<sup>18</sup> Tyconius of Carthage, *Exposition of the Apocalypse*, trans. Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 134 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 85.

Jesus or the apostles: “For the Lord in the Gospel describes the whole church, which is both from the Jews and from the nations, as being the twelve tribes of Israel, saying: ‘You will sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel,’ although it is obvious that the whole church, which is from every nation, not from only the circumcision, is going to be judged” [*Exp. Apoc.* 7:10].<sup>19</sup> Cassiodorus [c. AD 580], too, conflates the 144,000 and the great multitude, noting, “Then the multitude and congregation of the saints [*Exp. Apoc.* 7.9; cf. 14.1–5].<sup>20</sup> This is consistent with Tyconius before him.<sup>21</sup> Cassiodorus also understood the references to Jerusalem and the temple in Revelation 11 as indicating “the places which Christian people held” [*Exp. Apoc.* 11.1].

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<sup>19</sup> Gumerlock, *Tyconius*, 86.

<sup>20</sup> Francis X. Gumerlock, “Cassiodorus: *Brief Explanations on the Apocalypse*,” in *Cassiodorus, St. Gregory the Great, and Anonymous Greek Scholia: Writings on the Apocalypse*, trans. Francis X. Gumerlock, Mark Delcogliano, and T. C. Schmidt, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, ed. David H. Hunter et al. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 24.

<sup>21</sup> Gumerlock, “Cassiodorus,” 24n34.