

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

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

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Go Deeper Excursus 8

The Coming Kingdom in Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Hippolytus

The following essay presents the basic contours of the eschatological expectations of the coming kingdom in Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–200), Tertullian of Carthage (c. 160–220), and Hippolytus of Rome (c. 170–235).

The Coming Kingdom in Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–200)

Irenaeus asserts that after the reign of the antichrist for “three years and six months”—which constitutes the second half of the seventieth “week” of years in Daniel 9:27 (cf. *Haer.* 5.25.4; 5.30.4), Christ will come and destroy him, then usher in the kingdom. Thus, without doubt, Irenaeus presents a premillennial return of Christ.

Irenaeus associates several things with the anticipated end-times judgment: the reign of the antichrist in the temple of Jerusalem for three and a half years; the destruction of the antichrist and his followers by the coming of Christ from heaven; the establishment of the “times of the kingdom” for the righteous, which Irenaeus calls “the hallowed seventh day”; and the restoration of the promises to Abraham (*Haer.* 5.30.4). Irenaeus’s understanding of the return of Christ is quite clearly premillennial and futurist in its orientation. He adopts the view earlier reflected in the Epistle of Barnabas (see Go Deeper Excursus 7) that following the six thousand years of human history, Christ will return to usher in the seventh thousand-year period, the “millennium,” which will precede the “eighth day” of the eternal new creation. Irenaeus’s futurist millennialism has no room for a postmillennial return, in which the church triumphs over the world’s institutions and establishes a kingdom prior to the coming of Christ.¹

¹ Ayroulet and Chaieb note, “En outre, Irénée ne reporte pas non plus son espérance sur un triomphe terrestre ou politique de l’Église, ce qui a pu être ultérieurement une des manifestations du millénarisme deviant” (Élie Ayroulet and Marie L. Chaieb, “Quelle fin des temps? L’eschatologie d’Irénée de Lyon,” *NRTh* 143.1 [2021]: 41).

Irenaeus also places the establishment of the kingdom in the future in connection with the resurrection of the righteous: “If therefore the great God showed future things by Daniel, and confirmed them by His Son; and if Christ is the stone which is cut out without hands, who shall destroy temporal kingdoms, and introduce an eternal one, which is the resurrection of the just” (*Haer.* 5.26.2). Note that the kingdom itself is called “the resurrection of the just,” with Irenaeus focusing on the condition, not specifically the chronology.

Irenaeus interprets the six days of creation as both a historical account of the creation as well as a prophecy of the six thousand years of history, noting that all things will come to an end after six thousand years (*Haer.* 5.28.3). Like Justin Martyr before him (*Dial.* 80), Irenaeus also observes that some among the orthodox “go beyond the pre-arranged plan for the exaltation of the just, and are ignorant of the methods by which they are disciplined beforehand for incorruption” (5.31.1). This statement immediately follows his discussion of the events of the end time and the millennial kingdom:

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)

The question is, do the “methods by which they [the just] are disciplined beforehand for incorruption” refer to a quasi-purgatorial state in paradise, the future tribulation period of purgation, or to the millennium? Irenaeus answers this in 5.32.1. However, he first contrasts it with the view of the heretics: “For the heretics, despising the handiwork of God, and not admitting the salvation of their flesh, while they also treat the promise of God contemptuously, and pass beyond God altogether in the sentiments they form, affirm that immediately upon their death they shall pass above the heavens and the Demiurge, and go to the Mother (Achamoth) or to that Father whom they have feigned” (*Haer.* 5.31.1). The heretics, under whose influence some orthodox had fallen, taught that immediately upon death they pass above the heavens to the eternal, invisible Father or Mother—that is, they experience the fullness of their salvation, which is unfettered ascension into the heavens in a purely spiritual existence (cf. Justin, *Dial.* 80). Irenaeus gives the reason for this view of salvation as strictly spiritual and heavenly: the heretics do not admit the salvation of their flesh and therefore treat the promise of God contemptuously. We are clear on what “resurrection of the flesh” means. But is Irenaeus’s statement regarding the “promise of God” merely oppositional—the promise of God as the resurrection of the flesh? In the immediate context, the “promise of God” refers to the kingdom promised to Abraham (*Haer.* 5.30.4).

When Irenaeus switches to “those persons,” we are not clear whether he is still referring to the heretics or to those who are counted among the orthodox. The former seems to be the case, as he picks up his discourse regarding those among the orthodox again in 5.32.1. His chief complaint, therefore, regarding the heretics is that they fail to hold to a view of progressive personal salvation that aligns with the model of Christ. It seems best to interpret Irenaeus’s words as consistent with Justin Martyr’s own view of three categories: the heretics (gnostics), the orthodox premillennialists (like Irenaeus), and the orthodox who had fallen under the influence of the spiritualizing tendencies of the heretics with regard to eschatology (early amillennialists?).² He notes:

Those persons, therefore, who disallow a resurrection affecting the whole man, and as far as in them lies remove it from the midst [of the Christian scheme], how can they be wondered at, if again they know nothing as to the plan of the resurrection? For they do not choose to understand, that if these things are as they say, the Lord Himself, in whom they profess to believe, did not rise again upon the third day; but immediately upon His expiring on the cross, undoubtedly departed on high, leaving His body to the earth. But the case was, that for three days He dwelt in the place where the dead were, as the prophet says concerning Him: “And the Lord remembered His dead saints who slept formerly in the land of sepulture; and He descended to them, to rescue and save them.” And the Lord Himself says, “As Jonas remained three days and three nights in the whale’s belly, so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth.” Then also the apostle says, “But when He ascended, what is it but that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth?” This, too, David says when prophesying of Him, “And thou hast delivered my soul from the nethermost hell;” and on His rising again the third day, He said to Mary, who was the first to see and to worship Him, “Touch Me not, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to the disciples, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and unto your Father.” (*Haer.* 5.31.1)

In other words, just as Jesus first went to paradise, the place of the departed saints (Luke 23:43), before ascending to the Father, so believers must go to a place of waiting until the resurrection of the flesh. However, it is not clear that New Testament believers go to the same place as those of the

² However, Craig Blaising sees only two groups in Irenaeus and, after a thorough analysis of the passage, concludes, “As Irenaeus expressed, his so-called orthodox opponents seemed to disregard the salvation of the flesh in their construal of Christian hope. The expectation of ascension to heaven at death strongly resembled Gnostic teaching. Their so-called orthodox view of the afterlife made bodily resurrection superfluous at best, even if they did not reject it altogether” (Craig A. Blaising, “Early Christian Millennialism and the Intermediate State,” *BSac* 177.2 [2020]: 232–33). Blaising could be correct here, but I am not convinced Irenaeus’s language of “some who are reckoned among the orthodox (*quidam ex his qui putantur recte credidisse*)” (*Haer.* 5.31.1) means that outsiders reckon them as orthodox, but they are not (thus fitting Justin’s category of the heretics in *Dialogue* 80) or that Irenaeus’s associates reckon them among the orthodox even though they have faulty details of eschatology (thus fitting in Justin’s category of pious Christians who think otherwise). I have opted for a more charitable reading of Irenaeus, consistent with Justin’s three categories.

Old Testament. Irenaeus notes that Christ descended to them “to rescue and save them.” This suggests that he did, in fact, save them and led them with him to heaven. Irenaeus makes this clear:

For as the Lord “went away in the midst of the shadow of death,” where the souls of the dead were, yet afterwards arose in the body, and after the resurrection was taken up [into heaven], it is manifest that the souls of His disciples also, upon whose account the Lord underwent these things, shall go away into the invisible place allotted to them by God, and there remain until the resurrection, awaiting that event; then receiving their bodies, and rising in their entirety, that is bodily, just as the Lord arose, they shall come thus into the presence of God. “For no disciple is above the Master, but every one that is perfect shall be as his Master.” (*Haer.* 5.31.2)

Here the disciples “go away into the invisible place allotted to them by God.” This seems to be some sort of intermediate, heavenly place, where they remain until the resurrection. When they receive their resurrection bodies, they will rise and “come thus into the presence of God.” This is important as we try to envision Irenaeus’s eschatological scheme as it relates to the future tribulation and millennium. It seems that when the disciples are resurrected, they will go—at least for a season—into the presence of God, while prior to this they are not yet in the presence of God. In any case, they are not raised up to meet the Lord Jesus on earth and begin reigning with him. Thus, he says, “As our Master, therefore, did not at once depart, taking flight [to heaven], but awaited the time of His resurrection prescribed by the Father, which had been also shown forth through Jonas, and rising again after three days was taken up [to heaven]; so ought we also to await the time of our resurrection prescribed by God and foretold by the prophets, and so, rising, be taken up, as many as the Lord shall account worthy of this [privilege]” (*Haer.* 5.31.2). In this way, Irenaeus deals with personal salvation, including resurrection: upon the death of the just, their spirits will go to an invisible place prepared by God, where they await bodily resurrection. When the resurrection occurs and they receive their resurrected bodies, they will be taken up to the presence of God in heaven. This is not necessarily the same location as the Old Testament saints where Jesus went, but it does seem to be a lower stage in the heavenly journey. Ever-loftier heights of spiritual glory await the departed saints.

Next, Irenaeus returns to the opinions of certain orthodox people that derive from heretical discourses: “Since, therefore, they are brought over by some of the opinions from the words of heretics, and are ignorant of the dispensations of God and of the mystery of the resurrection and kingdom of the just, which is the beginning of incorruption, by which kingdom those who will be worthy, are progressively accustomed to comprehend God (*capere Deum*)” (*Haer.* 5.32.1 [my translation]). This statement gives us a hint at what Irenaeus meant by the “methods by which they [the just] are disciplined beforehand for incorruption.” It is the earthly kingdom, “which is the beginning of incorruption, by which kingdom those who will be worthy, are progressively accustomed to comprehend God” (5.32.1). So, in Irenaeus’s eschatology, the resurrection and

kingdom of the just (i.e., the millennium) is the beginning of the gradual, progressive glorification of redeemed humanity, during which they will grow deeper and deeper in their grasp of God and thus greater and greater in glory.³ Matthew Steenberg writes:

The Jerusalem of this world is one ‘in which the righteous are disciplined beforehand for imperishability’ and ‘prepared for salvation’. Thus, say Irenaeus, the new Jerusalem will be of similar function, gradually rendering the human person ‘capable of receiving the Father’s glory’.... Thus does Irenaeus take up at *AH* 5.34.4 Isaias’ descriptions of the new Jerusalem (cf. Is 32.1, 54.11–14, 65.18–23), as a description of those particular characteristics (beautiful paving, crystal gates, extreme longevity, etc.) by which humanity will be further ‘disciplined for perfection’.⁴

We also discover what Irenaeus meant by those who “treat the promise of God contemptuously”: “It is necessary to tell them respecting those things, that it behooves the righteous first to receive the promise of the inheritance which God promised to the fathers, and to reign in it, when they rise again to behold God in this creation which is renovated, and that the judgment should take place afterwards” (*Haer.* 5.32.1). The promised inheritance refers to the earthly kingdom promised to Abraham, which they begin to experience after their resurrection.

One purpose for a millennial reign, according to Irenaeus, is the recompense for the suffering humans experienced:

For it is just that in that very creation in which they toiled or were afflicted, being proved in every way by suffering, they should receive the reward of their suffering; and that in the creation in which they were slain because of their love to God, in that they should be revived again; and that in the creation in which they endured servitude, in that they should reign. For God is rich in all things, and all things are His. It is fitting, therefore, that the creation itself, being restored to its primeval condition, should without restraint be under the dominion of the righteous. (*Haer.* 5.32.1)

He then quotes Romans 8:19ff, also reaffirming the promise of God to Abraham through the millennial reign and recounting the history of the promises to the Hebrews:

Thus, then, the promise of God, which He gave to Abraham, remains steadfast.... Thus, then, they who are of faith shall be blessed with faithful Abraham, and these are the children of Abraham. Now God made promise of the earth to Abraham and his seed; yet neither

³ See Ayroulet and Chaieb, “Quelle fin des temps?,” 42–44.

⁴ Matthew Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption*. (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 57, 58.

Abraham nor his seed, that is, those who are justified by faith, do now receive any inheritance in it; but they shall receive it at the resurrection of the just. For God is true and faithful; and on this account He said, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” (*Haer.* 5.32.2)

By virtue of the church’s union with Christ, the church will inherit the promise of Abraham’s seed, as Christ is the Seed of Abraham. This means the reign of Christ must be earthly after the resurrection of the just.

However, it must be observed that while Irenaeus views this spiritual fulfillment to be taking place presently in the church—the spiritual “seed of Abraham”—this spiritual application to the church in the present does not replace a future, literal fulfillment with the physical seed of Abraham. He writes:

Now I have shown a short time ago [cf. 5.32.2] 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” (*ex lapidibus suscitans* [present active participle] *filios Abrahae*) is He who will gather (*colliget* [third-person plural future active indicative]), according to the Old Testament, those that shall be saved (*salvabuntur*) from all the nations (*ex omnibus gentibus*), Jeremiah says: “Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that they shall no more say, The Lord lives, who led the children of Israel from the north, and from every region where they had been driven; He will restore them to their own land which He gave to their fathers.” (*Haer.* 5.34.1)⁵

In this passage, Irenaeus clearly applies the promise of the salvation of the seed of Abraham spiritually to the church in the present; but he may also be applying the promise physically to the those that “shall be saved” from among the nations. In one reading of this exegetically challenging text (see Unger), *ex omnibus gentibus* could be understood as a reference to Gentiles saved from among the nations in the future. However, in another reading, which I adopt here, the passage he cites in Jeremiah refers to the gathering of the children of Israel from *among* the nations, literally *ex omnibus gentibus*. This company of Israel—Abraham’s physical seed—is called “those that shall be saved (*salvabuntur*),” which is the same term used in 5.30.2 where he mentions that “Dan” is left out of the tribes of Israel that are “saved” (*salvantur*) in the future tribulation. This confirms that Irenaeus envisioned a future, literal fulfillment of the restoration of the actual sons of Abraham despite the fact that the church—the spiritual seed of Abraham today—experiences a spiritual

⁵ For a different translation and interpretation (requiring different text-critical decisions as well as amending the text by inserting allegedly missing words), see 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.

fulfillment of these promises in the present. For Irenaeus, fulfillment of these prophecies was not *either* present and spiritual *or* future and physical. Rather, they applied to both.

In this both/and interpretation of the passage, even though Irenaeus sees a literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in which Israel—both resurrected and regathered—will experience a literal fulfillment of earthly promises, he does not anticipate a restoration of temple sacrifices. Ayroulet and Chaieb observe:

It is necessary, however, to emphasize that in Irenaeus there is a strong pronounced originality with regard to Jewish messianic hope. He makes a selection, in light of the Good News, and he does not preserve what Jewish hope might have been political in this expectation of a kingdom in which the messiah would triumph over the Roman occupation. This dimension, illustrated in particular by the hope of the re-establishment of the Temple sacrifices, is completely missing in his work.⁶

Irenaeus also ties the fulfillment of the blessings of the kingdom to the time of the millennial reign:

For what are the hundred-fold [rewards] in this word [Matt 19:29], the entertainments given to the poor, and the suppers for which a return is made? These are [to take place] in the times of the kingdom, that is, upon the seventh day, which has been sanctified, in which God rested from all the works which He created, which is the true Sabbath of the righteous, which they shall not be engaged in any earthly occupation; but shall have a table at hand prepared for them by God, supplying them with all sorts of dishes. (*Haer.* 5.33.2)

In discussing the prophecies of Isaiah regarding the wolf and the lamb and the harmony of the animals of the earth (Isa 60), he insists on a literal interpretation:

I am quite aware that some persons endeavour to refer these words to the case of savage men, both of different nations and various habits, who come to believe, and when they have believed, act in harmony with the righteous. But although this is [true] now with regard to some men coming from various nations to the harmony of the faith, nevertheless in the resurrection of the just [the words shall also apply] to those animals mentioned. For God is rich in all things. And it is right that when the creation is restored, all the animals should obey and be in subjection to man, and revert to the food originally given by God (for they had been originally subjected in obedience to Adam), that is, the productions of the earth. (*Haer.* 5.33.4)

⁶ Ayroulet and Chaieb, “Quelle fin des temps?,” 41. Translated from the original French.

Note here that the phrase “the resurrection of the just” does not refer to a momentary event in a particular chronology, but to the whole era of the millennial kingdom itself, for it is “in the resurrection of the just” that “those animals mentioned” will live in peace and harmony. Irenaeus also links numerous Old Testament prophecies with the coming millennial blessings (*Haer.* 5.34), and he notes that Christ will reign in Jerusalem: “Then again, speaking of Jerusalem, and of Him reigning there, Isaiah declares, ‘Thus saith the Lord, Happy is he who hath seed in Zion, and servants in Jerusalem. Behold, a righteous king shall reign, and princes shall rule with judgment [Isa 31:9; 32:1]’” (*Haer.* 5.34.4). Irenaeus explicitly rejects allegorizing these earthly prophecies: “If, however, any shall endeavour to allegorize [prophecies] of this kind, they shall not be found consistent with themselves in all points, and shall be confuted by the teaching of the very expressions [in question]” (*Haer.* 5.35.1). In this context, he explains in clear terms his eschatological expectations:

For all these and others [passages of Scripture] were without controversy spoken with regard to the resurrection of the just, which will happen after the advent of Antichrist and the perdition of all nations existing under him; at which time the righteous will rule in the earth, growing greater by the vision of the Lord, and through Him they will become accustomed to receive the glory of God the Father, and, with the holy angels, they shall receive in the kingdom conversation and fellowship and union with spiritual beings, and [the words of the prophecies about the Millennium were spoken with reference to] those whom the Lord shall find in the flesh, expecting him from heaven, and suffered tribulation, which also escaped the hands of the Wicked One. For it is in reference to them [those in the flesh expecting him after the reign of the antichrist] that the prophet says: “And those that remain will multiply on the earth” [Isa 6:12]. And however many of the believers God has prepared for this, to multiply those remaining on the earth, and to both be under the rule of the saints and to minister to this Jerusalem, and reigning in it, Jeremiah the prophet speaks about. (*Haer.* 5.35.1 [my translation])

The importance of this section cannot be exaggerated. Irenaeus asserts that the resurrection of the just (which refers to the period of the millennium in which the just have been raised) will take place after the coming of the antichrist and his destruction (that is, the millennial reign follows the tribulation). Then the righteous will reign over the earth, becoming “accustomed to partake in the glory of God the Father.” At the same time, the Lord at his coming will find many “in the flesh” who were awaiting Christ and who had suffered tribulation at the hands of the antichrist. These mortals—not the resurrected saints—will procreate and multiply on the earth (*Haer.* 5.35.1). Again, Irenaeus writes, “But in the times of the kingdom, the earth has been called again by Christ [to its pristine condition], and Jerusalem rebuilt after the pattern of the Jerusalem above,” and “after the times of the kingdom,” Irenaeus refers to the great white throne of judgment (5.35.2).

Irenaeus also ties the real existence of humanity to the real existence of the universe:

For since there are real men, so must there also be a real establishment (*plantationem*), that they vanish not away among non-existent things, but progress among those which have an actual existence. For neither is the substance nor the essence of the creation annihilated (for faithful and true is He who has established it), but “the *fashion* of the world passeth away;’ [1 Cor 7:31] that is, those things among which transgression has occurred, since man has grown old in them. (*Haer.* 5.36.1)

We see further glimpses of the eternal growth in relationship with God: “But when this [present] fashion [of things] passes away, and man has been renewed, and flourishes in an incorruptible state, so as to preclude the possibility of becoming old, [then] there shall be the new heaven and the new earth, in which the new man shall remain [continually], always holding fresh converse with God” (5.35.1). Yet, he also notes that some of the saved will dwell in heaven, some in paradise, and others in the holy city (5.35.1). There will be a distinction of reward in eternity based on differences in faithfulness and fruitfulness (5.35.2).

In stunning terms, Irenaeus sums up the whole eschatological goal for creation and humanity through Christ:

John, therefore, did distinctly foresee the first “resurrection of the just,” and the inheritance in the kingdom of the earth; and what the prophets have prophesied concerning it harmonize [with his vision]. For the Lord also taught these things, when He promised that He would have the mixed cup new with His disciples in the kingdom. The apostle, too, has confessed that the creation shall be free from the bondage of corruption, [so as to pass] into the liberty of the sons of God. And in all these things, and by them all, the same God the Father is manifested, who fashioned man, and gave promise of the inheritance of the earth to the fathers, who brought it (the creature) forth [from bondage] at the resurrection of the just, and fulfils the promises for the kingdom of His Son; subsequently bestowing in a paternal manner those things which neither the eye has seen, nor the ear has heard, nor has [thought concerning them] arisen within the heart of man, For there is the one Son, who accomplished His Father’s will; and one human race also in which the mysteries of God are wrought, “which the angels desire to look into;” and they are not able to search out the wisdom of God, by means of which His handiwork, confirmed and incorporated with His Son, is brought to perfection; that His offspring, the First-begotten Word, should descend to the creature, that is, to what had been moulded, and that it should be contained by Him; and, on the other hand, the creature should contain the Word, and ascend to Him, passing beyond the angels, and be made after the image and likeness of God. (*Haer.* 5.36.3)

Tertullian of Carthage (c. 160–220)

Tertullian was born in Carthage, western north Africa, educated well, and trained in law. Converted sometime later in life, he remained in Carthage, wrote a number of apologetic and theological treatises, and famously drifted toward the Montanist sect (“the New Prophecy”) later in his life.⁷ Jaroslav Pelikan notes, “Eschatology occupies a prominent place in many of Tertullian’s writings. The eschatological theme occurs and recurs throughout the corpus of treatises which tradition has preserved for us. Nor does it occur only in isolated passages. It is, rather, set into the context of an overall world-view.”⁸ And with regard to that eschatology, Daley observes that “Tertullian drew freely on biblical eschatology and on the writings of earlier Christian writers, particularly Justin and Irenaeus.”⁹

Tertullian appears more eager than his predecessors to understand some aspects of the coming millennium more spiritually and figuratively. He writes,

We do confess that a kingdom is promised to us upon the earth, although before heaven, only in another state of existence; inasmuch as it will be after the resurrection for a thousand years in the divinely-built city of Jerusalem, “let down from heaven,” which the apostle also calls “our mother from above;” and, while declaring that our πολιτευμα, or citizenship, is in heaven, he predicates of it that it is really a city in heaven. (*Adv. Marc.* 3.25 [ANF 3])¹⁰

Tertullian also outlines the events of the end times this way according to Revelation. Satan will be bound in the future during the millennial kingdom and then cast into the fire: “After the casting of the devil into the bottomless pit for a while, the blessed prerogative of the first resurrection may be ordained from the thrones; and then again, after the consignment of him to the fire, that the judgment of the final and universal resurrection may be determined out of the books” (*Res.* 25).

Tertullian had a fairly pessimistic view of the present world contrasted with a firm hope for the next. Pelikan writes, “Tertullian looked to the *parousia*, and perhaps only to it, as the source of his hope for the future. His pessimism about the historical process and particularly about conditions in his own time was relieved, then, not by a hope that historical process would produce its own corrective, but by the hope that the return of Christ would set it straight.”¹¹ And Eric Osborn

⁷ See S. L. Greenside, *Early Latin Theology: Selections from Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose and Jerome*, The Library of Christian Classics, Ichthus Edition (Louisville: Westminster, 1956), 21.

⁸ Jaroslav Pelikan, “The Eschatology of Tertullian,” *CH* 21.2 (1952): 109. For a good introduction to the life, writings, and thought of Tertullian, see Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian, The Early Church Fathers* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁹ Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1991), 34.

¹⁰ Unless noted, all quotations in this chapter from Tertullian are from the ANF series.

¹¹ Pelikan, “Eschatology of Tertullian,” 111–12.

observes, “The second advent of Christ is pivotal in Tertullian’s eschatology, but the four main elements (return of Christ in glory, resurrection of the body, universal judgement and a renewed earth) are not discussed in every place.”¹²

He calls the coming kingdom the “millennial interspace” and asserts that after that period has passed, “when even the outward fashion of the world itself...passes away, then the whole human race shall be raised again, to have its dues meted out according as it has merited in the period of good or evil” (*Apol.* 48). That is, the restoration of creation will occur during that millennial span, after which comes the general resurrection unto judgment.

However, Tertullian has a unique perspective on resurrection during the millennial intermediate period: “After its thousand years are over, within which period is completed the resurrection of the saints, who rise sooner or later according to their deserts there will ensue the destruction of the world and the conflagration of all things at the judgment” (*Adv. Marc.* 3.25). Osborn comments, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, “This is an attractive idea. Early risers will enjoy the freshness of the first hundred years. Others will emerge about the year 200; but many should not be expected before 950.”¹³

Osborn further notes, “The spectacular millenarianism of Irenaeus finds but one, albeit extended, reference in Tertullian’s writings (*Marc.* 3.24.3–6). A kingdom is promised on earth, a city let down from heaven (*Rev.* 21.2–10)... This city has been provided by God for his risen saints in order to refresh them with all spiritual blessings and to compensate them for all that they have not enjoyed in this world... Then the world will be destroyed in conflagration, all shall be changed into incorruptible, angelic substances and translated into the kingdom of heaven. The purpose of the millennium is to provide reward of joy in the presence of God.”¹⁴

Hippolytus of Rome (c. 170–235)

Before describing the eschatology of Hippolytus of Rome, the first step is to determine his authentic writings from which to draw this eschatological outlook. This process is complicated by the controversy surrounding Hippolytus in contemporary scholarship.¹⁵ Though the extant book

¹² Eric Osborn, *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 215.

¹³ Osborn, *Tertullian*, 217n17.

¹⁴ Osborn, *Tertullian*, 216–17.

¹⁵ For a history of historical-critical debate surrounding Hippolytus, see David Dunbar, “The Problem of Hippolytus of Rome: A Study in Historical-Critical Reconstruction,” *JETS* 25.1 (1982): 63–74. For a good overview of views on authorship of extant texts, see T. C. Schmidt, *Hippolytus of Rome: Commentary on Daniel and ‘Chronicon’*, Gorgias Studies in Early Christianity and Patristics, vol. 67 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2017), 2–7. In the fourth century, Eusebius of Caesarea, provided this list of Hippolytus’s works, which he himself concedes is partial list: *On the Hexaëmeron, On what followed the Hexaëmeron, Against Marcion, On the Song, On Parts of Ezeiel, On the Pascha, Against All the Heresies* (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.22.1–2). In the fifth century, Jerome supplements this partial list with the following: *On the six days of creation, On Exodus, On the Song of Songs, On Genesis, On Zechariah, On the Psalms, On Isaiah, On Daniel, On the Apocalypse, On the Proverbs, On Ecclesiastes, On Saul, On the Pythonissa, On the*

Refutation of All Heresies is anonymous, I (along with many others¹⁶) regard Hippolytus as its author. I also receive as authentic his commentary on Daniel, written around AD 204 in Rome.¹⁷

Following a common tradition among premillennialists before him, Hippolytus reckons the history of the world in terms of consecutive thousand-year periods, estimating that his own day was nearing the end of the sixth-thousand-years age. He writes, “For the Sabbath is the type and emblem of the future kingdom of the saints, when they ‘shall reign with Christ,’ when He comes from heaven, as John says in his Apocalypse: for ‘a day with the Lord is as a thousand years’” (*On Daniel* 2.4 [ANF 5]). Despite what many regard as a desperate and absurd typology of the six days of creation, one thing is certain: Hippolytus believed that the seventh-day Sabbath rest in Genesis 1 was a type of the coming seven-thousandth-year period of the kingdom on earth, which is the period referred to by John in the Apocalypse—obviously, the millennium of Revelation 20. Thus Hippolytus was both a futurist and premillennialist in his eschatology. He very likely received this traditional reading from the popular Epistle of Barnabas as well as from Irenaeus.

This characterization of Hippolytus’s millennialism has been challenged. After acknowledging that “the six days prior to the first Sabbath represent the time on earth before the kingdom of the saints commences,” Schmidt asserts, “Nowhere in his *Commentary on Daniel* does Hippolytus specify whether he believes in a literal millennial reign of Christ after the 6000 years are completed, but he does believe that when Jesus returns he will usher in an ‘eternal kingdom’ and ‘consume’ all of those who oppose him ‘in an eternal fire’ (4.14.3). This seems to leave little room for a millennial kingdom and a renewed battle with evil.”¹⁸ However, Schmidt’s interpretation is based on a false choice fallacy, as if Hippolytus (and, indeed, millennialists in general) must hold that *either* the reign of Christ with his saints is only a thousand years *or* the reign of Christ with his saints is eternal. It has always been the view of classic (Irenaeus) premillennialism that the reign of Christ with his saints will be eternal, but that the first thousand years of that eternal reign will have unique characteristics as a transition period between the first and second resurrection, as well as the period of the redemption and transformation of the creation.

For example, Irenaeus writes, “Therefore the great God showed future things by Daniel, and confirmed them by His Son; and...Christ is the stone which is cut out without hands, who shall destroy temporal kingdoms, and introduce an eternal one, which is the resurrection of the just” (*Haer.* 5.26.2; cf. 5.30.4, 5.32.1). Likewise, Justin Martyr—whose millennialism is uncontested (*Dial.* 80)—spoke of the eternal kingdom when Christ “raises all of us up, and makes some incorruptible, immortal, and free from pain in an everlasting and indissoluble kingdom, and banishes others into the eternal torment of fire” (*Dial.* 117 [Falls]; cf. 34, 46, 76, 120). It is therefore

Antichrist, On the resurrection, Against Marcion, On the Passover, Against all heresies, and On the praise of our Lord and Saviour (Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 61).

¹⁶ Dunbar, “The Problem of Hippolytus of Rome,” 66.

¹⁷ See W. Brian Shelton, *Martyrdom from Exegesis in Hippolytus: An Early Church Presbyter’s Commentary on Daniel*, Paternoster Studies in Christian History and Thought (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 1-21; Schmidt, *Hippolytus of Rome*, 8-9.

¹⁸ Schmidt, *Hippolytus of Rome*, 18, 19.

a non sequitur to argue that Hippolytus’s reference to an eternal kingdom leaves “little room” for a literal thousand-year kingdom as the first thousand years of an eternal reign of Christ and his saints. It is far more likely that Hippolytus meant to extend the literal chronological reckoning of the six thousand years of creation to the seventh thousand-year period into the future, and thus conceive of a millennial period that commences the eternal reign of Christ—as in Barnabas, Justin, and Irenaeus. Because he took the first six thousand years from the time of creation literally, there is no reason to assume Hippolytus would take the seventh thousand-year period as a figure for an eternal kingdom. That the future Sabbath rest could refer to an eternal heavenly kingdom is highly improbable, especially in light of both his predecessors and contemporaries who had a similar typological interpretation of the seven-thousandth year of history as the future millennial reign. What Hippolytus does not do, though, is speculate about the details of this period—merely that Christ’s kingdom will be present on earth and the saints will rule with him.

In his commentary on Genesis, Hippolytus makes the following assertion based on a rather allegorical reading of Old Testament figures: “The word of God here is the promise anew of the blessing and the hope of a kingdom to come, in which the saints shall reign with Christ, and keep the true Sabbath” (*On Genesis* [ANF 5]). This is in keeping with other treatments of the future millennium as a fulfillment of the Sabbath typology. In his commentary on Daniel, Hippolytus notes that those who “survive [the antichrist’s] days”—that is, the survivors of his great persecution during the second half of the tribulation—“to him the kingdom of heaven comes.... The saints shall inherit the kingdom along with Christ” (*On Daniel* 2.40 [ANF 5]). This “kingdom of heaven” inherited by the saints is none other than the millennial earthly kingdom that arrives with the return of Christ.

Like others, Hippolytus’s typological approach to premillennial eschatology allows for dual fulfillments: one spiritual and partial for the present church age, and one complete and literal for the future coming of Christ. He could speak of the binding of Satan as a present spiritual reality: “Whomsoever, therefore, Satan bound in chains, these did the Lord on His coming loose from the bonds of death, having bound our strong adversary and delivered humanity” (*On Daniel* 2.18). Also, he does not hesitate to interpret narrative Scriptures as having both a historical fulfillment and a future eschatological fulfillment, as is the case of the identity of Samson from the tribe of Dan as a partial fulfillment of Genesis 49:16. He writes, “Well, the prophecy had its partial fulfillment in Samson, but its complete fulfillment is reserved for Antichrist” (*On Christ and Antichrist* 16 [ANF 5]).

It is important to recall that just as Hippolytus held to a millennial reign, this was properly the first thousand years of an eternal kingdom, not one that would end. It would thus be characterized by certain unique features and punctuated by a second resurrection of the wicked, in its most common second-century form. He could also write of the eternal kingdom of heaven: “When at length the Judge of judges and the King of kings comes from heaven, who shall subvert the whole dominion and power of the adversary, and shall consume all with the eternal fire of punishment. But to His servants, and prophets, and martyrs, and to all who fear Him, He will give an everlasting

kingdom; that is, they shall possess the endless enjoyment of good” (*Scholia on Daniel 7.22* [ANF 5]). It is possible, then, that Hippolytus viewed the millennium as the period during which the kingdom from heaven—with the return of Christ—fills the whole world, as indicated in the vision of Daniel 2:34, 45.