

**THE DOCTRINE OF “LAST THINGS”**  
**Part I: The Ancient Church**

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**I. INTRODUCTION.**

The final set of lessons will focus on the doctrine of eschatology and will largely encompass the issue of Chiliasm, the thousand year reign of Christ or millennialism. The purpose shall be to determine whether the church conceived it as a literal or symbolic event and how the doctrine fluctuated through the centuries. The initial lesson will take up a consideration of the ancient period of the church.

**II. THE ESCHATOLOGY OF THE CHURCH FATHERS.**

Florovsky, “Eschatology in the Patristic Age,” *Studia Patristica* (2, 250) wrote: “The Fathers never attempted a systematic exposition of eschatology, in a narrow and technical sense. But they were fully aware of that inner logic which had to come from the belief in Christ the Redeemer so the hope for the age to come: the end of the world, the final consummation, the resurrection of the dead, and the life everlasting”. Lampe (*Eschatology*, 17-18) says, “Consistency is not one of the characteristics of the Fathers.” Certain themes do clearly emerge in the Fathers. Kelley wrote (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 462): “Four chief moments dominate the eschatological expectation of early Christian theology—the return of Christ, known as *Parousia*, the resurrection, the judgment, and the catastrophic ending of the present world-order. In the primitive period

they were held together in a naive, unreflective fashion, with little or no attempt to work out their implications or solve the problems they raise”.

### A. The Fathers and a Physical Resurrection

1. There is universal assent among the writers/writings of this period to the resurrection, with the majority of them stressing the resurrection of the flesh. For example note *I Clement* (26): “Do we then think it to be a great and marvelous thing, if the Creator of the universe shall bring about the resurrection of them that have served Him with holiness in the assurance of a good faith, seeing that He showeth to us even by a bird the magnificence of His promise? For He saith in a certain place; And Thou shalt raise me up, and I will praise Thee; and; I went to rest and slept, I was awaked, for Thou art with me.”

Again Ignatius wrote *To the Trallians* (9): “Be ye deaf therefore, when any man speaketh to you apart from Jesus Christ, who was of the race of David, was the Son of Mary, who was truly born and ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died in the sight of those in heaven and those on earth and those under the earth; who moreover was truly raised from the dead, His Father having raised Him, who in the like fashion will so raise us also who believe on Him—His Father, I say, will raise us—in Christ Jesus, apart from whom we have not true life”.

2. All the writers/writings of this period mention the resurrection of believers without discussing the resurrection of the wicked dead. The focus is clearly upon the hope of believers (*I Clement* 11:1, 12:7, 26:1, 27:1, 28:1, 51:1, 57:2, 58:1). *II Clement* (19) clearly teaches that immortality is the result of the resurrection. Ignatius makes it clear that heretics have no part in this resurrection (*Smyrneans*, 7) (cf. *Smyrneans*, 4, 5; *To the Ephesians* 11; *To the Romans*, 4; *To the Trallians*, 9).
3. There is no consistent pattern of when these writers/writings viewed the time of the resurrection. *I Clement* places it at the Second Advent (24), Barnabas before the kingdom (5), and the *Didaché* after the Tribulation but before the Second Advent (16).

### B. The Fathers and the Second Advent

1. The theme of immediacy is dominant in the Fathers. It is clearly set forth in *I Clement* 23; *II Clement* 11, 12; *Barnabas* 2; *Didaché* 10; and *Ignatius* (*To the Romans*, 10; *To Polycarp*, 3).

2. This imminent appearing of Christ is a visible appearing as stated in the *Didaché* (16) and *II Clement* (17). Clement noted: “And let us not think to give heed and believe now only, while we are admonished by the presbyters; but likewise when we have departed home, let us remember the commandments of the Lord, and not suffer ourselves to be dragged off the other way by our worldly lusts; but coming hither more frequently, let us strive to go forward in the commands of the Lord, that we all having the same mind may be gathered together unto life. For the Lord said, I come to gather together all the nations, tribes, and languages. Herein He speaketh of the day of His appearing, when He shall come and redeem us, each man according to his works. And the unbelievers shall see His glory and His might; and they shall be amazed when they see the kingdom of the world given to Jesus, saying, Woe unto us, for Thou wast, and we knew it not, and believed not; and we obeyed not the presbyters when they told us of our salvation”.
3. As indicated in the above quote, the Fathers associated the Advent of Christ with the establishment of the kingdom. Many of the writers/writings perceive the primary purpose of the Second Advent to be the judging of believers and unbelievers (*I Clement*, 34, 35; *II Clement*, 17; *Epistle of Barnabas*, 15).
4. *The Shepherd of Hermas* (ca. A.D. 140) speaks of a possible pretribulational concept of escaping the tribulation.

You have escaped from great tribulation on account of your faith, and because you did not doubt in the presence of such a beast. Go, therefore, and tell the elect of the Lord His mighty deeds, and say to them that this beast is a type of the great tribulation that is coming. If then ye prepare yourselves, and repent with all your heart, and turn to the Lord, it will be possible for you to escape it, if your heart be pure and spotless, and ye spend the rest of the days of your life in serving the Lord blamelessly. *The Shepherd of Hermas*; 1.4.2.

### C. The Fathers and the Kingdom

1. The Fathers vary the time of the establishment of the kingdom. *I Clement* places it at the resurrection of believers (50), *II Clement* at the Second Advent (12) and the resurrection (9), and *The Epistle of Barnabas*, immediately preceding the resurrection (21).
2. The purpose of the kingdom also varies. *II Clement* sees it as rest for believers (6) and world wide rule by Christ (17); *Barnabas* sees it as a time of holiness in which Christians live and rule the earth (6); *Didaché* as

a time prepared for the church (9); and Ignatius as the future home for believers (*To the Ephesians*, 16; *To the Magnesians*, 5).

**N.B.** The time of the judgment of the wicked is seen in *II Clement* as immediately occurring at the Second Advent (16, 17). *Barnabas* speaks of it at the Second Advent (15) also.

**D. The Fathers, The Church and Israel**

While the identification of Israel as the church is an integral historical argument set forth by many in our day, it must not be supposed that this is the view of the earliest fathers. Peter Richardson in *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (Cambridge, 1969) argues that Israel is nowhere seen as synonymous with the Church until A.D. 160 in the apology of Justin Martyr to the Jew Trypho. He wrote (1), “The word ‘Israel’ is applied to the Christian Church for the first time by Justin Martyr ca. A.D. 160.” Again (14): “Justin has provided a fixed starting-point for the Church/Israel relationship. Moving back in time, a lack of unanimity on these matters is uncovered.” “Nowhere from the close of the New Testament canon to Justin is the Church explicitly said to be Israel” (16).

1. The term “Israel” is used once by *I Clement* (29, 2), but “the introduction of the name Israel is incidental to his argument: the assertion that Christians are Israel, far from being explicit, is not made” (15).
2. *Barnabas* makes a clear distinction between Israel and the church (5.2).
3. *The shepherd of Hermas* is silent in Similitudes 8-9 when discussing the church of any identity with Israel.

**E. The Fathers and the “Last Days”**

*II Clement* (14) and Ignatius (*To the Magnesians*, 6) maintain that the “Last Days” began with the incarnation. *Barnabas* (2) and Ignatius (*To the Ephesians*, 11) see special events in the future, such as a Great Tribulation. See also *Didaché*, 16).

Summary:

“Last Days”

ISRAEL	CHURCH	KINGDOM (NOT CHILIASM)
FIRST ADVENT		SECOND ADVENT RESURRECTION (SAVED & UNSAVED)

### III. THE ESCHATOLOGY OF THE APOLOGISTS.

#### A. The Hermeneutical Challenge

In the early church two competing approaches to hermeneutics developed, a literal hermeneutic represented by Antioch and the non-literal hermeneutic which developed in Alexandria under Clement and Origen.

Bernard Ramm says, “The Syrian school fought Origen in particular as the inventor of the allegorical method, and maintained the primacy of the literal and historical interpretation.” (*PBI*, 49)

A literal, historical, grammatical interpretation dominated the first 100 years after the apostles.

#### B. Eschatology Within Literal Hermeneutic

Premillennialism or chiliasm as it was called in the early church, was the pervasive view of the earliest orthodox fathers. This is the consensus of both liberal and conservative scholars who are experts in early Church theology. J.N.D. Kelly, acknowledged internationally as an authority on patristic Christian thought, is typical of the scholarly opinion on this question and notes that the early Church was chiliastic or millenarian in her eschatology. Speaking of the eschatology of the second century he observes,

The clash with Judaism and paganism made it imperative to set out the bases of the revealed dogmas more thoroughly. The Gnostic tendency to dissolve Christian eschatology into the myth of the soul's upward ascent and return to God had to be resisted. On the other hand millenarianism, or the theory that the returned Christ would reign on earth for a thousand years, came to find increasing support among Christian teachers. . . . This millenarian, or 'chiliastic', doctrine was widely popular at this time. (465)

Kelly further notes: “The great theologians who followed the Apologists, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Hippolytus, were primarily concerned to defend the traditional eschatological scheme against Gnosticism. . . . They are all exponents of millenarianism.”(467, 468)

Joseph Cullen Ayer, *A Source Book for Ancient Church History: From the Apostolic Age to the Close of the Conciliar Period* (25) states, Primitive Christianity was marked by great chiliastic enthusiasm,...By chiliasm, strictly speaking, is meant the belief that Christ was to return to earth and reign visibly for one thousand years. That return was commonly placed in the immediate future.

#### 1. Justin Martyr (*ca.* A.D. 100–165)

The reason for focusing upon Justin at this juncture is twofold: first, because his extant writings are extensive and, second, because eschatology was in the forefront of his apologetics for the faith. Osborn wrote (186): “The future meant everything to Justin . . . the return of Christ is glory, the resurrection and the judgment are mentioned on almost every page of the *Apology and Dialogue*.” His ideas can but be briefly sketched.

- a) The Resurrection, Justin maintained, would come about at the Second Advent and consist of believers and the wicked (*Dialogue*, 69; *I Apology*, 18; *Dialogue*, 80, 46; *I Apology*, 52). Justin wrote (*I Apology*, 52): “For the prophets have proclaimed two advents of His: the one, that which is already past, when He came as a dishonoured and suffering Man; but the second, when, according to prophecy, He shall come from heaven with glory, accompanied by His angelic host, when also He shall raise the bodies of all men who have lived, and shall clothe those of the worthy with immortality, and shall send those of the wicked, endued with eternal sensibility, into everlasting fire with the wicked devils. And that these things also have been foretold as yet to be, we will prove. By Ezekiel the prophet it was said: ‘Joint shall be joined to joint, and bone to bone, and flesh shall grow again; and every knee shall bow to the Lord, and every tongue shall confess Him.’ And in what kind of sensation and punishment the wicked are to be, fear from what was said in like manner with reference to this; it is as follows: “Their worm shall not rest, and their fire shall not be quenched””.
- b) The Second Advent is stressed in his polemic with the Jews. He stresses imminence (*I Apology*, 32:4) stating that He will come in judgment upon unbelievers, world rulers, and Satan to institute the eternal kingdom (*Dialogue*, 36). He links the Day of Judgment and the Second Advent together (see *I Apology*, 52).
- c) The Kingdom is anticipated with immediacy. He wrote (*I Apology*, 11): “And when you hear that we look for a kingdom, you suppose, without making any inquiry, that we speak of a human kingdom; whereas we speak of that which is with God, as appears also from the confession of their faith made by those who are charged with being Christians, though they know that death is the punishment awarded to him who so confesses. For it we looked for a human kingdom, we should also deny our Christ, that we might not be slain; and we should strive to escape detection, that we might obtain what we expect. But since our thoughts are not fixed on the present, we are not concerned when men cut us off; since also death is a debt which must at all events be paid”.

It follows a general resurrection (*Dialogue*, 117): “Accordingly, God, anticipating all the sacrifices which we offer through this name, and which Jesus the Christ enjoined us to offer, i.e., in the Eucharist of the bread and the cup, and which are presented by Christians in all places throughout the world, bears witness that they are well-pleasing to Him. But He utterly rejects those presented by you and by those priests of yours, saying, ‘And I will not accept your sacrifices at your hands; for from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is glorified among the Gentiles (He says); but ye profane it.’ Yet even now, in your love of contention, you assert that God does not accept the sacrifices of those who dwelt then in Jerusalem, and were called Israelites; but says that He is then dispersed, and calls their prayers sacrifices. Now, that prayers and giving of thanks, when offered by worthy men, are the only perfect and well-pleasing sacrifices to God, I also admit. For such alone Christians have undertaken to offer, and in the remembrance effected by their solid and liquid food, whereby the suffering of the Son of God which He endured is brought to mind, whose name the high priests of your nation and your teachers have caused to be profaned and blasphemed over all the earth. But these filthy garments, which have been put by you on all who have become Christians by the name of Jesus, God shows shall be taken away from us, when he shall rise all men from the dead, and appoint some to be incorruptible, immortal, and free from sorrow in the everlasting and imperishable kingdom; but shall send others away to the everlasting punishment of fire.”

The kingdom is inaugurated by the Second Advent and is centered in a renewed Jerusalem (*Dialogue*, 113). “And as he, not Moses, led the people into the Holy Land, and as he distributed it by lot to those who entered along with him, so also Jesus the Christ will turn again the dispersion of the people, and will distribute the good land to each one, though not in the same manner. For the former gave them a temporary inheritance, seeing he was neither Christ who is God, nor the Son of God; but the latter, after the holy resurrection, shall give us the eternal possession. The former, after he had been named Jesus (Joshua), and after he had received strength from His Spirit, caused the sun to stand still. For I have proved that it was Jesus who appeared to and conversed with Moses, and Abraham, and all the other patriarchs without exception, ministering to the will of the Father; who also, I say, came to be born man by the Virgin Mary, and lives for ever. For the latter is He after whom and by whom the Father will renew both the heaven and the earth; this is He who shall shine an eternal

light in Jerusalem; this is he who is the king of Salem after the order of Melchizedek, and the eternal Priest of the Most High”.

Justin indicates that the reign in Jerusalem will be a thousand years followed by another judgment and the eternal state. He wrote (*Dialogue*, 81): “For Isaiah spake thus concerning this space of a thousand years: ‘For there shall be the new heaven and the new earth, and the former shall not be remembered, or come into their heart; but they shall find joy and gladness in it, which things I create. For, Behold, I make Jerusalem a rejoicing, and My people a joy; and I shall rejoice over Jerusalem, and be glad over my people. And the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, or the voice of crying. And there shall be no more there a person of immature years, or an old man who shall not fulfill his days. For the young man shall be an hundred years old; but the sinner who dies an hundred years old, he shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and shall themselves inhabit them; and they shall plant vines, and shall themselves eat the produce of them, and drink the wine. They shall not build, and others inhabit; they shall not plant, and others eat. For according to the days of the tree of life shall be the days of my people; the works of their toil shall abound. Mine elect shall not toil fruitlessly, or beget children to be cursed; for they shall be a seed righteous and blessed by the Lord, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call I will hear; Then shall the wolves and the lambs feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent [shall eat] earth as bread. They shall not hurt or maltreat each other on the holy mountain, saith the Lord.’ Now we have understood that the expression used among these words, ‘According to the days of the tree [of life] shall be the days of my people; the works of their toil shall abound,’ obscurely predicts a thousand years. For as Adam was old that in the day he ate of the tree he would die, we know that he did not complete a thousand year. We have perceived, moreover, that the expression, ‘The day of the Lord is as a thousand years,’ is connected with this subject. And further, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem; and that thereafter the general, and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place. Just as our Lord also said, ‘They shall neither may not be given in marriage, but shall be equal to the angels, the children of the God of the resurrection’”.



## MILLENNIUM

ISRAEL	=	CHURCH	ADVENT JUDGMENT	ETERNAL STATE JUDGMENT
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**2. Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 140–202)**

- a) Irenaeus understands human history to be divided into seven eras of one thousand years each. In his day, he understood that he was in the sixth era, the end of which would come with the intense activity of Satan in the personage of the Anti Christ. He wrote (*Against Heresies*. 5, 25, 1, 5):

“And not only by the particular already mentioned, but also by means of the events which shall occur in the time of Antichrist is it shown that he, being an apostate and a robber, is anxious to be adored as God; and that, although a mere slave, he wishes himself to be proclaimed as a king. For he (Antichrist) being endued with all the power of the devil, shall come, not as a righteous king, nor as a legitimate king, [i.e., one] in subjection to God, but an impious, unjust, and lawless one; as an apostate, iniquitous and murderous; as a robber, concentrating in himself [all] satanic apostasy, and setting aside idols to persuade [men] that he himself is God, raising up himself as the only idol, having in himself the multifarious errors of the other idols. This he does, in order that they who do [now] worship the devil by means of many abominations, may serve himself by this one idol, of whom the apostle thus speaks in the second Epistle to the Thessalonians: “Unless there shall come a falling away first, and the man of sin shall be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself as if he were God.’ The apostle therefore clearly points out his apostasy, and that he is lifted up above all that is called God, or that is worshipped—that is, above every idol—for these are indeed so called by men, but are not [really] gods; and that he will endeavour in a tyrannical manner to set himself forth as God.

“From all these passages are revealed to us, not merely revealed to us, not merely the particulars of the apostasy,

and [the doings] of him who concentrates in himself every satanic error, but also, that there is one and the same God the Father, who was declared by the prophets, but made manifest by Christ. For it what Daniel prophesied concerning the end has been confirmed by the Lord, when He said, ‘When ye shall see the abomination of desolation, which has been spoken of by Daniel the prophet’ (and the angel Gabriel gave the interpretation of the visions to Daniel, and he is the archangel of the Creator, who is also proclaimed to Mary the visible coming and the incarnation of Christ), then one and the same God is most manifestly pointed out, who sent the prophets, and made promise of the Son, and called us into His knowledge”.

- b) After the period of Satanic deception, Christ’s advent takes place at which time the first resurrection occurs and the seventh and final millennium commences. He wrote (*Against Heresies*. 5, 28, 3): “For in as many days as this world was made, in so many thousand years shall it be concluded. And for this reason the Scripture says: ‘Thus the heaven and the earth were finished, and all their adornment. And God brought to a conclusion upon the sixth day the works that He had made; and God rested upon the seventh day from all His works.’ This is an account of the things formerly created, as also it is a prophecy of what is to come. For the day of the Lord is as a thousand years; and in six days created things were completed; it is evident, therefore, that they will come to an end at the sixth thousand year”.

Again (*Against Heresies*. 5, 33, 2): “And for this reason the Lord declared, ‘When thou makest a dinner or a supper, do not call thy friends, nor thy neighbours, nor thy kinsfolk, lest they ask thee in return, and so repay thee. But call the lame, the blind, and the poor, and thou shalt be blessed, since they cannot recompense thee, but a recompense shall be made thee at the resurrection of the just.’ And again He says, ‘Whosoever shall have left lands, or houses, or parents, or brethren, or children because of Me, he shall receive in this world, 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”.

- c) After the seventh millennium, corresponding to the seventh day of creation, the earth is destroyed and the eternal state begins with a new heaven and a new earth (*Against Heresies*. 5, 36; 2-3):

“[They say, moreover], that there is this distinction between the habitation of those who produce an hundred-fold, and that of those who produce sixty-fold, and that of those who produce thirty-fold: for the first will be taken up into the heavens, and the second will dwell in paradise, the last will inhabit the city; and that it was on this account the Lord declared, ‘In My Father’s house are many mansions.’ For all things belong to God, who supplies all with a suitable dwelling-place; even as His Word says, that a share is allotted to all by the Father, according as each person is or shall be worthy. And this is the couch on which the guests shall recline, having been invited to the wedding. The presbyters, the disciples of the apostles, affirm that this is the graduation and arrangement of those who are saved, and that they advance through steps of this nature; also that they ascend through the Spirit to the Son, and through the Son to the Father, and that in due time the Son will yield up His work to the Father, even as it is said by the apostle, ‘For He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.’ For in the times of the kingdom, the righteous man who is upon the earth shall then forget to die. ‘But when He saith, All things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son, also Himself be subject unto Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.’

“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 fulfills 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 (*facturam*), that is, to what had been moulded (*plasma*), and that it would 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".

**N.B.** The pattern seen in Justin is also in Irenaeus; this is the dominate pattern until the third century.

### 3. **Tertullian (c ca. A.D. 155–240/60)**

Tertullian does not significantly differ from the eschatological construct of Justin or Irenaeus in that he holds to the same seven-fold millennial theory of eschatology. He wrote (*Against Marcion*. 111, 25): "As for the restoration of Judaea, however, which even the Jews themselves, induced by the names of places and countries, hope for just as it is described, it would be tedious to state at length how the figurative interpretation is spiritually applicable to Christ and His church, and to the character and fruits thereof; besides, the subject has been regularly treated in another work, which we entitle *De Spe Fidelium*. At present, too, it would be superfluous for this reason, that our inquiry relates to what is promised in heaven, not on earth. But 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 *politema*, or citizenship, is in heaven, he predicates of it that it is really a city in heaven. This both Ezekiel had knowledge of and the Apostle John beheld. 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: we shall then be changed in a moment into the substance of angels, even by the investiture of an incorruptible nature, and so be removed to that kingdom in heaven of which we have not been treating, just as if it had not been predicted by the Creator, and as if it were

proving Christ to belong to the other god and as if he were the first and sole revealer of it”.

### C. **Eschatology Within an Allegorical Hermeneutic.**

A shift from a literal to an allegorical hermeneutic took place in the late second century. This due primarily to the fact that errant groups adopted Chiliasm. Sheldon wrote (*History*, I, 146): “Near the close of the second century, a current adverse to this order of ideas was started. An initial cause of this was the great prominence which Montanism gave to the doctrines of Chiliasm. This, in connection with the general reprobation of Montanism, tended naturally to lessen enthusiasm for those doctrines. Then came the positive opposition of the Alexandrian school, which, with its bias to idealism, could hardly fail to challenge the theory of a visible personal reign of Christ upon earth”.

Alexander of Alexandria and Origen (185–254) developed the allegorical approach to biblical interpretation in the early third century.

Joseph Trigg, biographer of Origen wrote (“Introduction,” in R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory & Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen’s Interpretation of p. vi.*), “The fundamental criticism of Origen, beginning during his own lifetime was that he used allegorical interpretation to provide a specious justification for reinterpreting Christian doctrine in terms of Platonic philosophy.”

Origen based his views on Proverbs 22:20 claiming that this supported a three-fold meaning in each passage of Scripture. Frederick Farrar (*History of Interpretation*, 196–97) explains further: “The Bible, he [Origen] argued, is meant for the salvation of man; but man, as Plato tells us, consists of three parts—body, soul, and spirit. Scripture therefore must have a threefold sense corresponding to this trichotomy. It has a literal, a moral, and a mystic meaning analogous to the body, to the soul, to the spirit. . . . But of two of these three supposed senses Origen makes very little use. To the moral sense he refers but seldom; to the literal sense scarcely at all.”

By the end of the third century Chiliasm held a disputed place in the church. In the Alexandrians the shift is away from a premillennialism to a non-millennial position; from realism and literalism to Platonism and allegory.

1. **Origen (ca. 185–253/54 A.D.)** argues strongly that the concept of a post-resurrection millennium with physical bodies is more lustfully sensual than scriptural (*First Principles*, 2, 11, 2): “Certain persons, then, refusing the labour of thinking, and adopting a superficial view of the letter of the law, and yielding rather in some measure to the indulgence of their own desires and lusts, being disciples of the letter alone, are of opinion that the fulfillment of the promises of the future are to be looked for in bodily pleasure and luxury; and therefore they especially desire to have again,

after the resurrection, such bodily structures as may never be without the power of eating, and drinking, and performing all the functions of flesh and blood, not following the opinion of the Apostle Paul regarding the resurrection of a spiritual body. And consequently they say, that after the resurrection there will be marriages, and the begetting of children, imagining to themselves that the earthly city of Jerusalem is to be rebuilt, its foundations laid in precious stones, and its walls constructed of jasper, and its battlements of crystal: that it is to have a wall composed of many precious stones, as jasper, and sapphire, and chalcedony, and emerald, and sardonyx, and onyx, and chrysolite, and chrysoprase, and jacinth, and amethyst. Moreover, they think that the natives of other countries are to be given them as the ministers of their pleasures, whom they are to employ either as tillers of the field or builders of walls, and by whom their ruined and fallen city is again to be raised up; and they think that they are to receive the wealth of the nations to live on, and that they will have control over their riches; that even the camels of Midian and Kedar will come, and bring to them gold, and incense, and precious stones. And these views they think to establish on the authority of the prophets by those promises which are written regarding Jerusalem; and by those passages also where it is said, that they who serve the Lord shall eat and drink, but that sinners shall hunger and thirst; that the righteous shall be joyful, but that sorrow shall possess the wicked. And from the New Testament also they quote the saying of the Saviour, in which He makes a promise to His disciples concerning the joy of wine, saying, 'Henceforth I shall not drink of this cup, until I drink it with you new in My Father's kingdom.' They add, moreover, that declaration, in which the Saviour calls those blessed who now hunger and thirst, promising them that they shall be satisfied; and many other scriptural illustrations are adduced by them, the meaning of which they do not perceive is to be taken figuratively. Then, again, agreeably to the form of things in this life, and according to the gradations of the dignities or ranks in this work, or the greatness of their powers, they think they are to be kings and princes, like those earthly monarchs who now exist; chiefly, as it appears, on account of that expression in the Gospel: 'Have thou power over five cities.' And to speak shortly, according to the manner of things in this life in all similar matters, do they desire the fulfillment of all things looked for in the promises, viz., that what now is should exist again. Such are the views of those who, while believing in Christ, understand the divine Scriptures in a sort of Jewish sense, drawing from them nothing worthy of the divine promises".

Accordingly Origen appears as the first major theologian to spiritualize the future kingdom as a present reign of Christ in the hearts of men. He classically writes in his commentary on Matthew (10, 14). "And one is a scribe 'made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven' in the simpler sense, when he comes from Judaism and receives the teaching of Jesus Christ as

defined by the Church; but he is a scribe in a deeper sense, when having received elementary knowledge through the letter of the Scriptures he ascends to things spiritual, which are called the kingdom of the heavens. And according as each thought is attained, and grasped abstractly and proved by example and absolute demonstration, can one understand the kingdom of heaven, so that he who abounds in knowledge free from error is in the kingdom of the multitude of what are here represented as 'heavens.' So, too, you will allegorize the word, 'Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand,' as meaning that the scribes—that is, those who rest satisfied in the bare letter—may repent of this method of interpretation and be instructed in the spiritual teaching which is called the kingdom of the heavens through Jesus Christ, 'who was in the beginning with God, God the word,' has not His home in a soul, the kingdom of heaven is not in it, but when any one becomes nigh to admission of the Word, to him the kingdom of God are the same thing in reality, if not in idea, manifestly to those to whom it is said, 'The kingdom of God is within you,' to them also it might be said, 'The kingdom of heaven is within you'; and most of all because of the repentance from the letter unto the spirit".

2. **Dionysius of Alexandria (d. 265)**, a disciple of Origen, set out to discredit Chiliasm by discrediting the integrity of the authorship of the Book of Revelation amassing impressive arguments for a non-Johannine origin. Eusebius wrote (*Ecclesiastical History*. 7, 25): "After proving that it is impossible that it should be understood according to the obvious and literal sense, he proceeds: 'The prophet, as I said, having completed the whole prophecy, he pronounces those blessed that should observe it as also himself. 'For blessed', says he, 'is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book, and I, John, who have seen and heard these things.' I do not, therefore, deny that he was called John, and that this was the writing of one John. And I agree that it was the work, also, of some holy and inspired man. But I would not easily agree that this was the apostle, the son of Zebedee, the brother of James, who is the author of the gospel, and the general (catholic) epistle that bears his name. But I conjecture, both from the general tenor of both, and the form and complexion of the composition, and the execution of the whole book, that it is not from him. For the evangelist never prefixes his name, never proclaims himself, either in the gospel or in his epistle".

In summary, Sheldon noted the impact of the Alexandrians on eschatology (*History*. I, 146-47): "At the end of the third century, therefore, Chiliasm held a disputed place in the Church. In the early part of the next century, it became virtually obsolete. As late as writer as Lactantius, it is true, appears as an ardent believer in it, and pictures at length the second advent and the earthly kingdom (*Div. Inst.*, Lib. VII.): but he in no wise

represents the drift of his age, for the cessation of the persecutions and the erection of a Christian Empire gave a new direction to thought and desire. Nothing was ore natural, while the storm of heathen violence was raging, than for Christians to long for the coming of their Deliverer, and for a manifest triumph of His kingdom over the kingdom of this world. The storm, however, having ceased, and the kingdom of this world having passed under a Christian scepter, their desire for the special and open intervention of their Divine Leader was necessarily relaxed”.

#### IV. THE ESCHATOLOGY OF THE THEOLOGIANS.

Belief in a literal, actual millennium rapidly waned in the West, and all but disappeared in the East in the fourth and fifth centuries. In the Age of the Theologians the most prominent name is clearly that of Augustine. Augustine confessed that he was attracted to a literal millennium at one time, but later was repelled by the gross dreams of carnal indulgence that he associated with it. He changed his attitude and favored an allegorical interpretation of the vision of the seer of Patmos. He wrote (*The City of God*. (20, 7):

“Now, those who, on the strength of this passage, got the notion that the first resurrection was to be a bodily one, were influenced in this direction mainly by the matter of the thousand years. The notion was that the saints were destined to enjoy so protracted a sabbath of repose, a holy leisure, that is, after the labors of the six thousand years stretching from the creation of man, his great sin and merited expulsion from the happiness of paradise into the unhappiness of this mortal life. The interpretation was worked out in the light of the Scripture text: ‘One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.’ Thus, there was supposed to follow upon the six thousand years taken as six days a seventh day or sabbath taking up the last thousand, and to be given over to the resurrection saints for celebration.

One might put up with such an interpretation if it included belief in some spiritual delights accruing to the saints from the Lord’s company during that sabbath rest. In fact, I myself at one time accepted such an opinion. But when these interpreters say that the rising saints are to spend their time in limitless gormandizing with such heaps of food and drink as not only go beyond all sense of decent restraint but go utterly beyond belief, then such an interpretation becomes wholly unacceptable save to the carnal-minded. But the spiritual-minded term those who can swallow the literal interpretation of the ‘thousand years’ Chiliasts (from the Greek *chilias*, a thousand) or Millenarians (from the corresponding Latin word). To refute them point by point would take too long. My present obligation will be, rather, to show how the Scriptural passage in question ought to be understood”.

**N.B.** As this study will seek to demonstrate, the anti-chiliastic influence of Augustine in the West will function in the same way that Origen’s



dominance did in the East. Their massive influences, as well as that of others, will cause the church to spiritualize eschatological truth. Another factor, it seems, was the triumph of the church in the empire.

Augustine will introduce a dual hermeneutic, literal for most of Scripture, allegorical for prophecy.

#### A. **Augustine (ca. 354–430 A.D.) and the Meaning of History**

Augustine was the first theologian in the church to attempt a comprehensive history of human politico-religious existence. This was occasioned in 410 when Alaric the Goth pillaged Rome, an event that had a deep demoralizing effect upon the West. To explain such an event Augustine wrote *The City of God*, subtitled *Against the Pagans*, to explain Christian world history. In short, Augustine put forth the idea of the existence of two contemporaneous, yet incompatible societies—one dominated by God, the other of Satan. He wrote (*City of God*. 14, 28):

“What we see, then, is that two societies have issued from two kings of love. Worldly society has flowered from a selfish love which dared to despise even God, whereas the communion of saints is rooted in a love of God that is ready to trample on self. In a word, this latter relies on the Lord, whereas the other boasts that it can get along by itself. The city of man seeks the praise of men, whereas the height of glory for the other is to hear God in the witness of conscience. The one lifts up its head in its own boasting; the other says to God: ‘Thou art my glory, thou liftest up my head.’

In the city of the world both the rulers themselves and the people they dominate are dominated by the lust for domination; whereas in the City of God all citizens serve one another in charity, whether they serve by the responsibilities of office or by the duties of obedience. The one city loves its leaders as symbols of its own strength; the other says to its God: ‘I love thee, O Lord my strength.’ Hence, even the wise men in the city of man live according to man, and their only goal has been the goods of their bodies or of the mind or of both; though some of them have reached a knowledge of God, ‘they did not glorify him as God or give thanks but became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless minds have been darkened. For while professing to be wise’ (that is to say, while glorying in their own wisdom, under the domination of pride), ‘they have become fools, and they have changed the glory of the incorruptible God for an image made like to corruptible man and to birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things’ (meaning that they either led their people or imitated them, in adoring idols shaped like these things), ‘and they worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator who is blessed forever.’ In the City of God, on the contrary, there is no merely human wisdom, but there

is a piety which worships the true God as He should be worshiped and has as its goal that reward of all holiness whether in the society of saints on earth or in that of angels of heaven, which is ‘that God may be all in all’”.

Augustine refuted the charge that Rome fell due to a neglect of the gods by saying the empires come and go as God wills, earthly cities ebb and flow. Rome’s historical mission was accomplished (i.e., peace for propagation of the gospel) and, therefore, fell as a result of her own sin and idolatry.

Eschatologically, Augustine maintained that these two cities were inseparable and incompatible until the end of time in the final judgment when they will be separated.

## **B. Augustine and Eschatology**

Augustine spiritualized the major events of prophetic history. Augustine, as indicated previously, sets the direction of the church in the West relative to prophetic issues.

1. **Augustine and Resurrection.** Augustine maintained two resurrections—one he made a continual action, spiritualizing its meaning, and the other he treated as a historic end time event. The first resurrection is one to life from death, a spiritual event that inaugurates the Christian life, the second transpires for all, saved and otherwise, at the end of the present age. He wrote (*City of God*. 20, 6): “To conclude, then, just as there are the two rebirths, of which I spoke earlier—one in time by faith and baptism, the other in the last judgment by the incorruptibility and immortality of the flesh—so there are two resurrections, the first of which is temporal and spiritual and allows no second death, while the other is not spiritual but corporeal and is to be at the end of time. This resurrection, through the last judgment, will send some into the second death, others into that life which knows no death”.
2. **Augustine and the Kingdom of Heaven.** Augustine spiritualized the kingdom to mean the existence of the church in the world. In a summary, he wrote (*City of God*. 20, 8):

“All men, consequently, without a single exception, were dead through sin, original sin or original with personal sin superadded, either by ignorance of, or conscious refusal to do, what is right. And for all these dead souls one living man died—a man utterly free from sin—with the intention that those who come alive by forgiveness of their sins live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for all on account of our sins, and rose again for our justification. All this was to the end that, believing in Him, ‘who

justifies the impious,' we might be rescued from unbelief like men quickened out of death and belong to the first resurrection which is here and now. For, no one belongs to the first save those who are to be blessed forever. To the second, however, of which Christ is about to speak, belong both the blessed and the damned, as He teaches us. The first resurrection is a resurrection of mercy; the last is to be a resurrection of judgment. Hence the psalm says: 'Mercy and judgment I will sing to thee, O Lord.'

It was of this last judgment that Christ spoke next: 'And He was granted Him power to render judgment, because He is Son of Man.' This passage shows that He will come to judge in that very flesh in which He came to be judged. For such is the sense of the clause, 'because He is Son of Man'".

Again (*City of God*. 20, 9):

"During the 'thousand years' when the Devil is bound, the saints also reign for a 'thousand years' and doubtless, the two periods are identical and mean the span between Christ's first and second coming. For, not only in that future kingdom to which Christ referred in the words, 'Come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you,' but even now those saints reign with Him in some authentic though vastly inferior fashion to whom He said: 'Behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world.' Otherwise, the Church in her temporal stage could not be spoken of as the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of heaven.

"In this text there are surely two kinds of 'kingdom of heaven': one embracing both the 'least' teacher who does not practice and the 'great' teacher who does practice what he preaches; and a different kingdom, open only to him who practices. This makes it clear that the mixed kingdom must be the Church, such as she exists in her temporal stage, while the unmixed kingdom is the Church such as she will be shown she is to contain no evil-doer. Consequently, the Church, even in this world, here and now, is the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of heaven. Here and now Christ's saints reign with Him, although not in the way they are destined to reign hereafter; but the 'weeds' do not reign with Him, even now, though they grow along with the 'wheat' in the Church. The only ones who reign with Him are those who follow out St. Paul's prescription: 'Therefore, if you have risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Mind the things that are above, not the things that are on

earth—those of whom Paul says in another place that their ‘citizenship is in heaven.’ those alone reign with Christ whose presence in His kingdom is such that they themselves are His kingdom; for, of course, we cannot call the ‘kingdom of Christ’ such men as happen to be in it, and will be until all scandals are to be gathered out from it as the world’s end, but who seek in it ‘their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ’”.

**N.B.** Augustine understood that Satan was bound at the beginning of the church era (i.e., the kingdom). He wrote (*City of God*. 20, 8):

“To conclude: The Devil is bound throughout the entire period covered by this Book—from Christ’s first coming to His second coming at the end of the world—but not bound in such a way that this special binding during the period which St. John calls the ‘thousand years’ implies his powerlessness to deceive the Church. It is clear when one reflects that, even when he is loosed, he will not be enabled to do so. There is the argument: If his chaining means that he has no power or no permission to deceive, then his loosing means that he will have power or permission to deceive. But, of course, such a possibility is unthinkable. No, the binding up of the Devil means this: that he is not allowed to exercise his full powers in tempting or deceiving men by violence or fraud, in driving them or tricking them into his camp by main force, or by lying fallacies. If he were allowed this freedom over such a long period, given the weakness of many men, a number of people, whom God wills to protect from such onslaught, would be affected. He would cause many to fall from the faith and keep others from coming to believe. To prevent his doing just this, he has been chained.

When he is let loose at last, there will be little time left, since, as we read, he and his will rage with the fullness of strength only for three years and six months. Moreover, the men upon whom he will make war are to be such men as will be beyond overpowering by his open attack or hidden ambush.”

After the “millennium,” Satan will be released to deceive the nations against the church foresting a grand rebellion at the end of which God reduces Satan and his followers in the final judgment and then inaugurates the eternal state, the single city prevailing. He wrote (*City of God*. 20, 11):

“St. John continued: ‘And when the thousand years are finished, Satan will be released from his prison, and will go forth and deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, and will gather them together for the battle; the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.’

At the time the Devil will have a single objective in his deception, namely, to bring on this battle, rather than deceive by the multifarious means of his previous malice. The expression ‘will go forth’ means that his secret hatred will blaze out into open

persecution. For this is to be the very last of all persecutions immediately preceding the very last of all judgments—a persecution which Holy Church, the world wide City of Christ, is to suffer at the hands of the world wide city of the Devil, in every place where the two cities will then extend”.

Again (*City of God*. 20, 13): “Therefore, during the three and one half years, not only the souls of earlier martyrs but also the souls of martyrs put to death during that final persecution itself will reign with Christ and will continue to reign until the world is no more and then pass to the kingdom where death is no more. We conclude, then, that the reign of Christ with His saints will be longer than the Devil’s bonds and imprisonment, for, even when he is released, they will continue to reign with their King, the Son of God, for these three and a half years”.

He wrote of the conclusion (*City of God*. 21, 1): “The two cities, of God and of the Devil, are to reach their appointed ends when the sentences of destiny and doom are passed by our Lord Jesus Christ, the Judge of the living and the dead. In the present book, therefore, I must try, with the help of God, to discuss in some detail the kind of punishment which the Devil and those who belong to the city of the Devil are to endure, My reason for treating eternal pains before dealing with beatitude is that it seems harder to believe that the bodies of the damned are to remain in endless torment than to believe that the bodies of the saints are to continue without pain in everlasting felicity. Once I have proved the possibility of eternal pain, this will greatly help to show how relatively easy it is to believe in the utterly unperturbed immortality of the bodies of the saints”.

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ISRAEL = CHURCH  
CHURCH = ISRAEL

(THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN)

SATANIC  
REBELLION

FINAL  
JUDGMENT,  
ETERNAL  
STATE

### C. *Pseudo-Ephraem and the Rapture*

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century a writer, who wrote under the pseudonym of Ephraem the Syrian, and is thus called Pseudo-Ephraem, preached a sermon entitled *On the Last Times, the Antichrist, and the End of the World* or *Sermon on the End of the World* includes a concept very similar to the pre-trib rapture more than one thousand year before the writings of John Nelson Darby.

Concerning the timing of the rapture the sermon reads:

We ought to understand thoroughly therefore, my brothers, what is imminent or overhanging. . . . Why therefore do we not reject every care of earthly actions and prepare ourselves for the meeting of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that he may *draw us from* the confusion, which overwhelms all the world? . . . For all the saints and elect of God are gathered together *before the tribulation*, which is to come, and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins. (italics added)

Ice and Demy note that *Pseudo-Ephraem* clearly presents at least three important features found in modern pretribulationism:

- (1) two distinct comings: the return of Christ to rapture the saints, followed later by Christ's Second Advent to the earth,
- (2) a defined interval between the two comings, in this case three and one-half years, and
- (3) a clear statement that Christ will remove the church from the world before the tribulation.

The fact that Pseudo-Ephraem placed the rapture 3 ½ years before the tribulation is not an argument for midtribulationism because it appears that for him the whole tribulation was only 3 ½ years in duration. (Even J. N. Darby first believed that the rapture would occur 3 ½ years before the second coming).

## V. CONCLUSION.

The purpose of this lesson has been to trace the development of the rubrics of eschatology from the Fathers through Augustine. Prior to the Alexandrian theologians, principally Origen, a stress on a literal, material hermeneutic caused the Apologists to be both premillennial and Chiliastic. The Fathers, although vague, felt that they were in the "last days" expecting the immediate second advent of Christ to bring final judgment, a kingdom, and eventually the eternal kingdom. The Apologists prior to Origen, like Irenaeus, Tertullian and Justin Martyr, were clearly Chiliastic. With Origen and the allegorical method, the millennial, future kingdom was spiritualized to mean the present church age from Adam, Amillennialism. Augustine popularized the same eschatological perspective through *The City of God* which became the undisputed eschatology until after the Reformation era.