

The Antichrist, Rebirth of Israel, and Rapture in the Fathers and Medieval Manuscripts

By William C. Watson PhD, Professor of History, Colorado Christian University

Submitted to the 26th Annual Conference of the Pre-Trib Research Center, Dec 5, 2017

Having published a book on eschatology in seventeenth and eighteenth century England,¹ I began a study of these ideas even earlier in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This led me to archives in the UK during the summer of 2016 (British Library, National Archives, Lambeth Palace Library, Oxford University, and several county record offices in the south of England. While searching manuscript collections at the British Library I discovered a seventeenth century copy of a fifteenth century gothic manuscript titled “Treatyse of the Cummyng of Antecryst”.²

A Late Medieval Manuscript: “The Treatyse of the Cummyng of Antecryst”

The anonymous author presents an interpretation of the Antichrist which is consistent with the majority view from the second through fifteenth centuries first outlined by Irenaeus in the late second century and also found in the work of Hippolytus, Cyril of Jerusalem, Jerome, Pseudo-Ephraim, Pope Gregory the Great, Andrew of Caesarea, the Venerable Bede, and others. He cites all the same passages used by prophecy authors throughout church history (Daniel 7-12, Matthew 24, Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians and to Timothy, and the book of Revelation. The author lists four things which shall precede the coming of Antichrist: the collapse of “ye Empyre of Romany” into ten kingdoms, represented by ten horns of the beasts in both Daniel 7 and Revelation 13; the rising of a “little horn”, representing the Antichrist who will overpower three of the previous kingdoms and force into compliance the other seven;³ another thing that will “proceed the cummyng of Antecryst” will be “the devyson of Cherchys pertyculars yt shall

¹ William C. Watson, *Dispensationalism Before Darby: Seventeenth Century and Eighteenth Century English Apocalypticism* (Lampion Press, 2015).

² “The Treatyse of the cummyng of Antechyst”. Add MS 18646. I have not discovered any citations of this work other than it being listed in *Catalogi librorum manuscritorum Angliae et Hiberniae in unum* by Edward Bernard (1697) and by Charlotte D’Evelyn who merely identified the spelling as Middle English in “The Middle English Metrical Version”, *Publications of the Modern Language Association* v.33, no.2 (1918), 135-203. Andrew Dunning, curator of Medieval Historical Manuscripts 1100-1500, identified it as a mid-seventeenth century copy of an early fifteenth century MS in an email to me February 8, 2017.

³ “The Treatyse of the cummyng of Antechyst”. Add MS 18646, 1-2.

separate from the obbedyence of the Church Romanyne;” last will be an abundance of sin and that love will no longer be common among the greater society.⁴

The manuscript goes on to describe the Antichrist, who “shalbe borne in Babylone of some Jews wch shalbe in the liyne of Dan after the prophicye of Jacob in Genese in the xlix chapit...”⁵ The Antichrist will reveal himself when “he shall go into Jerusalem into the temple that ye Jews have than made & redysynd...saynge to ye Jews I am youre cryst & youre messias the which unto youe is promised...”⁶ In response, “the Jewes...him shall recevve for ther messias...Lyue that he is god...constryne the men to worshypp his image...make all his subjects to be sygned & marked with his carecterye...”⁷ Due to the Antichrist seizing power

the tyme shalbe qyght perilous, for at the comynge of Antecyst men & women shall syne so openlye that they shall have no shame to do and accomplyshe ther lecheryes...the persecution that the said anecryst shall do against the christen people...in all the perttys of the erthe...⁸

In summary, this manuscript considers the Antichrist as a Jew of the tribe of Dan, born of Babylon, reveals himself in a rebuilt Jewish temple in Jerusalem, is accepted at first by the Jews, conquers all parts of a shattered Roman Empire, and compels the people to worship him and take his mark. His rule is then ended by the second coming of Christ. The description of the Antichrist found in that fifteenth century manuscript has a long tradition, found in documents only decades removed from the apostles.

Belief in a Jewish Antichrist in the Early Church

The common view of Antichrist in both the early church and medieval periods has been described by Norman Cohn:

Already in the second and third centuries theologians were foretelling that Antichrist would be a Jew of the tribe of Dan; this idea became such a commonplace that in the Middle Ages it was accepted by scholastics such as Thomas Aquinas. Antichrist, it was held, would be born at Babylon; he would grow up in Palestine and would love Jews above all peoples; he would rebuild the Temple for them and gather them together from their dispersion. The Jews would be most faithful followers of Antichrist, accepting him as the Messiah who was to restart the nation.⁹

⁴ Ibid., 2-3.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁸ Ibid., 7-8.

⁹ Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (Oxford, 1970) 74-78,85,215.

The Apocalypse of Peter, which dates to the early second century, warns of the coming of Antichrist, that he will at first deceive the Jews into following him, but God will send Enoch and Elijah to “to teach them that this is the deceiver,” but the Antichrist will slay them.¹⁰

Irenaeus identifies the restrainer of 2 Thessalonians 2 as the Roman Empire, which will splinter into ten kingdoms (based on the horns in Daniel 9 and Revelation 13) until the “little horn” identified as the Antichrist conquers and dominates them all.¹¹ He will force everyone to take his mark of 666 in order to buy or sell, but although Christians will have to endure it, “tribulation is necessary for those who are saved...[that] they may be fitted for the royal banquet.¹² Believers must not endure the entire tribulation, as they will be removed from the world of it: “when in the end the Church shall be suddenly caught up from this, it is said, ‘There shall be tribulation such as has not been since the beginning, neither shall be.’”¹³ According to Irenaeus the Antichrist will be a Jew from the tribe of Dan (based upon Jacob’s prophecy in Genesis 49, and “he will reign for three years and six months, and sit in the temple of Jerusalem” until the Lord returns casting him into “the lake of fire; bringing in for the righteous the times of the kingdom, that is, the rest, the hallowed seventh day.”¹⁴ After “Antichrist and the destruction of all nations under his rule...the righteous shall reign in the earth...[those] who have suffered tribulation, as well as escaped the hands of the Wicked one.” Irenaeus denies an allegorical interpretation stating that “These are all literal things, and Christians who allegorize them are immature Christians.”¹⁵

Hippolytus Of Rome was strongly influenced by Irenaeus, especially his work *On Christ and Antichrist*, which follows the narrative that Antichrist will be a Jew from the tribe of Dan,¹⁶ who will rebuild the temple and cause the Jews to follow him, at least until he desecrates it half-way through the last week of Daniel. In his commentary on Daniel, the oldest commentary which is extant,¹⁷ he distinguishes between Antiochus’s destruction and the Antichrist’s future desolation

¹⁰ “Apocalypse of Peter”, the Ethiopic text §9, translated by M.R. James (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924).

¹¹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5:25, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/irenaeus.html> (accessed Sept 19, 2017).

¹² *Ibid.*, 5:28.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 5:29.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5:30.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5:35.

¹⁶ Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* §14, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/hippolytus-christ.html> (accessed Sept 19, 2017).

¹⁷ Brian Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge University Press, 1991) 38-39.

of the temple in Jerusalem, followed by his rule of 1290 days or 3½ years when he makes war with the saints.¹⁸ In another work he calls it “tribulation and persecution against the saints,” when he will “glorify himself as God, until the “sudden appearing of the Lord” and “the conflagration of the whole world,” followed by the “glorious and heavenly kingdom of the saints...when they reign together with Christ.”¹⁹ Hippolytus also identifies the Antichrist as the “little horn” who overpowers the ten horns to rule the world and becoming “a tyrant [who] shall stir up tribulation and persecution...till the beast was slain and perished...”²⁰ Half way through “the last week which is to be at the end of the whole world...the two prophets Enoch and Elias will take up the half. For they shall preach 1,260 days clothed in sackcloth, proclaiming repentance to the people and to all the nations.” Antichrist will then “overcome them, and kill them...until the beast was slain and perished.”²¹ Hippolytus calls the 3½ years when Antichrist prevails “the tribulation” when the woman of Revelation 13 “fled into the wilderness, where she hath the place prepared of God” and “was given two wings of the great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness...for a time, and times and half a time.”²² He categorically rejects Preterism, claiming “These things, then, shall be in the future...”²³

Tertullian, in considering 2 Thessalonians 2, saw the “falling away” as the end of the Roman Empire and the future “man of sin” as Antichrist. He asked, “What obstacle is there but the Roman state, the falling away of which, by being scattered into ten kingdoms, shall introduce Antichrist upon (its own ruins)?”²⁴ Tertullian goes on to say that the Antichrist would “wage war on the Church of God”,²⁵ that the rapture would be during “the oppression of the time of Antichrist”,²⁶ and that the resurrection would be “after the extirpation of Antichrist”.²⁷

¹⁸ Hippolytus, *On Daniel* §40,43, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/hippolytus-exegetical.html> (accessed Sept 19, 2017).

¹⁹ Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* §5, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/hippolytus-christ.html> (accessed Sept 19, 2017).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, §25.

²¹ *Ibid.*, §43,47.

²² *Ibid.*, §60.

²³ *Ibid.*, §53.

²⁴ Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, xxxiv; in <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0316.htm>, accessed Nov 17, 2017.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, xxv.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, xli.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, xxvii.

Commodian, a mid-third century poet and convert to Christ from North Africa, believed the Antichrist would be Nero “raised up from hell.” Then Elijah shall come, when

the whole earth on all sides, for seven years shall tremble. But Elias shall occupy half of the time, Nero shall occupy half. Then the whore of Babylon, being reduced to ashes, its embers...the Latin conquerer shall then say, I am Christ, who ye always pray to; and, indeed, the original ones who were deceived combine to praise him. He does many wonders... The Jews, recapitulating Scriptures from him, exclaim at the same time to the Highest that they have been deceived.²⁸

Christ then comes for His Church, and the Antichrist, who has been persecuting God’s people on earth, now fears being overthrown, so he gathers his forces from the north, and is destroyed in the mighty battle with God’s army:

The Almighty Christ descends to His elect, who have been darkened from our view for so long a time...that is the true heavenly people. ... He has passed over to our side, they come with the king of heaven...they hasten to defend to captive matron. But the wicked king who possesses her, when he hears, flies into the parts of the north, and collects all his followers. Moreover, when the tyrant shall dash himself against the army of God...they are handed over alive into Gehenna.²⁹

Victorinus of Petrovium, a third century bishop of Petrovium (in modern Slovenia) martyred during the Diocletian persecution, wrote a Commentary on the Apocalypse. He believed that the Antichrist would rule the last three and a half years before the return of Christ, be known by his name which was 666 according to Greek letters, and would desecrate the temple in Jerusalem to begin his reign. He speculates that Domitian may be the Antichrist, but that his reign will end at the return of Christ to set up his 1000 year kingdom of the saints.

“...the beast belongs to the seventh horn, but is an eighth, Antichrist comes to...the Jews...so that they might receive him as the Christ. [The 144,000 are] those among the Jews who will come to believe at the end of time through the preaching of Elijah. ... Before Elijah must preach there must be peaceful times. And when the three and a half years of preaching of Elijah is ended, the dragon along with the apostate angels is to be thrown out of heaven...And the Antichrist is to be aroused from hell...Antichrist will be comingled with a variety of nations and peoples.³⁰

The Apocalypse of Elijah, written in Coptic about 300 AD, suggests that there will be “a double tribulation” when the Antichrist “the son of destruction...the lawless one will appear

²⁸ Commodianus, *Instructions* XLI: Of the Time of Antichrist; in Roberts and Donaldson, eds, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951) iv, 211.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, XLII; in Roberts, iv,211.

³⁰ Victorinus of Petrovium, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, chapters 11-13,20; in William Weinrich ed., *Ancient Christian Texts: Latin Commentaries on Revelation* (Illinois: InterVarsity, 2011) 14-17,20.

in those days in the holy places.” This “king of lawlessness will...stand in the holy places” and be “an enemy to all the saints.”³¹ He will persecute believers in a great tribulation, causing people to stop following him, then Elijah and Enoch would return to earth, kill the antichrist, then “Christ will come from heaven”, “set fire to this earth”, and “spend a thousand years on it.”³²

Lactantius, religious advisor to Constantine and tutor to his son, believed that at the fall of Rome ten kings would emerge to divide up the empire. The Antichrist would be born in Syria, a Jew of the tribe of Dan. For three and a half years Elijah would preach, but then be killed by Antichrist, and then rapt into heaven. Antichrist, identified as “the little horn” seizes power and tries to destroy the temple. This institutes “tribulation such as there has never been,” he demands people take his mark of 666, rules for forty two months, and assembles an army in order to destroy the righteous. As his armies surround the city, God sends Christ and his angels from heaven to destroy the Antichrist and his army. What follows is the resurrection and judgment of human works. Those found righteous will judge and rule the earth for a 1000 years.³³

Cyril of Jerusalem described Antichrist as “the little horn” of Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 rising out of the ruins of the Roman Empire and ruling for three and a half years until Christ returns.

Since the true Christ is to come a second time, the adversary, taking occasion by the expectation of the simple, and especially of them of the circumcision, brings in a certain man who...shall seize for himself the power of Roman empire, and shall falsely style himself Christ, by the name of Christ deceiving the Jews, who are looking for the Anointed...is to come when the times of the Roman empire shall have been fulfilled, and the end of the world is drawing near. There shall rise up together ten kings of the Romans, reigning in different parts...and after these an eleventh, the Antichrist, who by his magical craft shall seize upon the Roman power; and of the kings who reigned before him, *three he shall humble*, and the remaining seven he shall keep in subjection... [describes a great persecution] after perpetrating such things for three years and six months only, he shall be destroyed by the glorious second advent from heaven of the only-begotten Son of God ...who shall slay Antichrist *with the breath of his mouth*, and shall deliver him over to the fire of hell.³⁴

³¹ *The Apocalypse of Elijah*, 29-34; <https://alinsuciu.com/category/apocalypse-of-elijah/> accessed Sept 25, 2017.

³² *Ibid.*, 42-43.

³³ Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, VII, xv-xx; in Roberts & Donaldson eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Eerdmans, 1951) VII,212-216.

³⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture 15*, 11-12; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310115.htm/> accessed Sept 26, 2017.

He will convince the Jews that he is their Messiah and rebuild their temple in Jerusalem in the last days, for the Antichrist

who opposes and exalts himself against all that is call God...so that he seats himself in the temple of God. 2 Thessalonians 2:4 What temple then? He means, the Temple of the Jews which has been destroyed... For if he comes to the Jews as Christ, and desires to be worshipped by the Jews, he will...build up the Temple which was erected by Solomon. ...at first at least making a pretense of benevolence, but afterwards displaying his relentless temper, and that chiefly against the Saints of God. ... But thanks be to God who has confined the greatness of that tribulation to a few days...³⁵

Hillary, fourth century bishop of Poitiers, in his work on the Trinity notes that the Jews did not receive Christ at his first coming, but that when the Antichrist comes they would receive that imposter as their Messiah.³⁶

An author now called Ambrosiaster, but thought for centuries to be Ambrose of Milan, wrote a commentary on Paul's letters in the late fourth century. In it he described the events of Antichrist:

Paul pointed out the time and the signs of Christ's return. The Lord would not come back until the Roman Empire fell and the antichrist appeared, who would kill the saints... He would even sit in Christ's seat in the house of God, as God himself...this person whom [Jews] are expecting to come will be either of the circumcision or at least circumcised himself, so that the Jews will have the confidence to believe him.³⁷

Jerome, the author of the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible and chief Hebrew scholar of the Church Fathers, wrote a Commentary on the Book of Daniel claiming that

Antichrist at the end of the world...is from the Jewish people...pretending to be the prince of the covenant...he is to be born of the Jewish people and come from Babylon... Jews mistakenly imagine that he (i.e. their Messiah) is yet to come, for they are going to receive the Antichrist.³⁸

Theodoret of Cyrus, fifth century Syrian bishop wrote a commentary on Paul's letters. He believed that Rome was the restrainer of 2 Thessalonians 2, and that at the fall of Rome ten kings would arise in its place. The Antichrist, a Jew from the tribe of Dan and king of North,³⁹ will arise and conquer these kings, but Elijah and Enoch will preach in Jerusalem, calling the Jews to

³⁵ Ibid., 15-16.

³⁶ Hillary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity* ix,22; in Schaff & Wace eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, ix, 162.

³⁷ Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on 2 Thessalonians* 2:1-4;115; in Gerald Bray, *Ancient Christian Texts: Ambrosiaster* (InterVarsity, 2009) 2:115.

³⁸ Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, XI,24-26,34-35, translated by Gleason Archer;

www.ccel.org/ccel/morefathers/files/jerome_daniel_02_text.htm (accessed

³⁹ Steven Vicchio, *The Legend of Antichrist: A History* (Oregon: Wiph & Stock, 2009), 90.

faith, but then be killed by the Antichrist.⁴⁰ According to Joel Weaver, Elijah's role in the last days is "not an isolated reading, but part of a larger widespread Elijah expectation in early Christianity."⁴¹ Weaver traces a long list of sources identifying Elijah as a precursor to the return of Christ, including in chronological order: the Book of *Sirach*, the *Sibylline Oracles*, *Fourth Ezra*, First Enoch, *Pseudo-Philo*, the first century Jewish work *Lives of the Prophets*, two fragments in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Mark 9:11, Matthew 17:10, and Justin Martyr. He also lists others which are cited in this paper.⁴²

Belief in a Jewish Antichrist in the Middle Ages

The consensus view of the Fathers that Antichrist would be a Jew continued into the Medieval period. Pseudo-Ephraem, a sixth century Syrian often confused with fifth century Ephraem the Syrian, wrote *On the Last Times, the Antichrist, and the End of the World*. He believed that at the fall of Rome, which was the restrainer of 2 Thessalonians 2, the world would unravel. However, believers would be "gathered , prior to the tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world..."⁴³ He identifies the Antichrist as a Jew from the tribe of Dan, born to a "vile virgin", who will rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, and

sit as God and order that he be adored by all nations...the Jews shall congratulate him, because he gave them again the practice of the first covenant [reinstitution of sacrifices]; then all people from everywhere shall flock together to him at the city of Jerusalem, and the holy city shall be trampled on by the nations for forty-two months...three and a half years...the prophets Enoch and Elijah...heralding of the second coming of Christ, and in order to accuse the enemy.⁴⁴

Pseudo-Ephraem concluded that at the end of the 3½ years Enoch and Elijah would be killed then resurrected. Christ would then come to resurrect his Church, and both Antichrist and Satan would be cast into "the abyss of everlasting fire..."⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Joel Weaver, *Theodoret of Cyrus on Romans 11:26: Recovering an Early Christian Elijah Redivivus Tradition* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 124.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 103-112.

⁴³ Pseudo-Ephraem, *On the Last Times, the Antichrist, and the End of the World*, <http://orthochristian.com/101157.html> (accessed November 20, 2017).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Gregory the Great, bishop of Rome in the late sixth century, wrote in his *Moralia* that the Antichrist would come after the fall of the Roman Empire and be a Jew from the tribe of Dan. The Jews would accept him as messiah until their conversion, which would begin his downfall.⁴⁶

Oecumenius, a late fifth century Syrian Monophysite, also expected that Elijah & Enoch would prophesy in Jerusalem until they were killed by the antichrist, who then “will rule as king of the Jews, whom he will deceive...”⁴⁷

Andrew of Caesarea, an early seventh century bishop in Cappadocia, in his commentary on the Apocalypse believed the Antichrist would come “from eastern regions of Persia, where is the Hebrew tribe of Dan.” He pointed out that Dan is not mentioned as a tribe in Revelation 7, and that “the Jews in the diaspora of the earth are saved in the last days.”⁴⁸

John of Damascus, a Syrian monk who founded a monastery near Jerusalem in the late seventh century, wrote on Antichrist. He believed the Jews would accept him as Messiah in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, at least until the preaching of Enoch and Elijah. Concerning 2 Thessalonians 2 he wrote:

In the temple of God he said; nor our temple, but the old Jewish temple. For he will come not to us but to the Jews: not for Christ or the things of Christ: wherefore he is called Antichrist. ... He is ... the offspring of fornication and is nurtured in secret and of a sudden he rises up and rebels and assumes rule. And in the beginning of his rule, or rather tyranny, he assumes the role of sanctity. But when he becomes master he persecutes the Church of God and displays his wickedness... But Enoch and Elias the Tishbite shall be sent and shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, that is, the synagogue to our Lord Jesus Christ and the preaching of the Apostles: and they (Enoch and Elias) will be destroyed by him (Antichrist). And the Lord shall come out of heaven...and will destroy the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction, with the breath of His mouth.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Gregory the Great, *Moralia*; <http://www.lectionarycentral.com/GregoryMoralia/Book34.html> (accessed November 20, 2017); cited in Stephen Vicchio, 102.

⁴⁷ Oecumenius, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 6th discourse on Revelation 11:1-14; in *Ancient Christian Texts: Greek Commentaries on Revelation* (Illinois: InterVarsity, 2011), 46-49.

⁴⁸ Andrew of Cappadocia, *Commentary on the Apocalypse 7:4-8; 16:12*; in *Ancient Christian Texts: Greek Commentaries on Revelation* (Illinois: InterVarsity, 2011) 139-40,173.

⁴⁹ John of Damascus “On Antichrist” http://www.trueorthodoxy.info/pat_stjohndamascus_on_antichrist.shtml (accessed November 21, 2017).

The Venerable Bede, eighth century Anglo-Saxon monk and church historian, wrote a commentary on the book of Revelation. He too believed that Antichrist would be a Jew from the tribe of Dan, born in Babylon.⁵⁰ Bede seems to have held to a rapture and return to rule on earth:

[T]he Church, which has been redeemed by the blood of Christ and gathered from the nations. And he shows them in heaven by saying ‘and they will reign on earth.’⁵¹

‘[T]he armies that are in heaven followed him on white horses.’ With pure white bodies the church imitates Christ. Because of the struggle of her battle, she has by right received the name of army.⁵²

After being gathered from all nations and taken to heaven, the saints would then follow Christ to “the final battle” against “the kings of the earth, then they would reign with Christ on earth a thousand years.”⁵³

Pseudo-Hippolytus, an anonymous author of the ninth century attempting to pass his work off as that of third century Church Father Hippolytus, wrote *On the End of the World, on Antichrist, and on the second coming of our lord Jesus Christ*. He claimed that Antichrist would be from the tribe of Dan, gather & restore Israel, rebuild the temple, then desecrate it. He would demand all people take his mark, and persecute those who don’t, but Christ will return, destroy the Antichrist and his followers, and resurrect the dead. Then the earth would be “burnt up.”⁵⁴

Adso of Montier-en-Der, tenth century Benedictine abbot in Burgundy, described the Antichrist in a letter to Queen Gerbera, wife of French King Louis IV. “Antichrist [would be] born among Jewish people, out of the tribe of Dan...born in the city of Babylon...will restore the Temple of Solomon...will go to Jerusalem [and] present himself as Christ to the Jews.”⁵⁵ He then cited 2 Thessalonians 2, believing that Antichrist could not have taken power because the apostasy had not yet come. He concluded that Christian kingdoms would defect, which had not yet happened, since Franks continued the control of the Roman church. He believed that a future last Christian king would go to Jerusalem, and lay down his crown. Soon thereafter, Enoch & Elijah would

⁵⁰ Bede, *Explanation of the Apocalypse* 7:5; 17:12 in *Ancient Christian Texts: Latin Commentaries on Revelation* (Illinois: InterVarsity, 2011) 133, 170.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 5:9-10; in *Ibid.*, 128.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 19:14; in *Ibid.*, 176.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 19:16-19; in *Ibid.*, 176-177.

⁵⁴ Pseudo-Hippolytus, *On the End of the World, and on Antichrist, and on the second coming of our lord Jesus Christ*, 16-20,23-25,29,33,36; in Roberts & Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Eerdmans, 1951), 246-251.

⁵⁵ Marina Vukovic, “The Idea of Antichrist: Tyconius & Adso”, (Grin Verlag fur akademische Texte, Document Nr. V154122, 2008) 7-8.

preach three and a half years, converting the Jews and ushering a Golden Age until the arrival of Antichrist, who takes Jerusalem, desecrates the temple, and kills Enoch and Elijah. This begins a three and a half year tribulation killing all Christians who won't apostatize, by taking the mark of 666. At the end of the three and a half years Christ (or St. Michael) will return to slay the Antichrist, and after an unspecified time of penance would be Judgment Day.⁵⁶

The early fifteenth century middle English gothic manuscript I discovered in the British Library in the summer of 2016 was strongly influenced by (and at times even copied from) the works of Pseudo-Hippolytus and Adso of Montier-en-Der. It repeats the consensus throughout the Church Fathers and early Medieval period of a Jewish Antichrist, from Irenaeus in the second century to Adso in the tenth. This idea of a Jewish antichrist began to disappear after the Crusades and was replaced by a papal antichrist by the Ghibellines, the Heterodox, and the Reformers.

Belief in a Last Godly Roman Emperor before the Coming of Antichrist

Another view popular in the Middle Ages is of a final godly emperor preceding the coming of Antichrist. It was first seen in the Tiburtine Sibyl of the fourth century, then Pseudo-Methodius in the seventh century and in Adso's work in the tenth. According to the Sibyl, a godly Roman emperor will convert the Jewish people, repel the invasion of Gog and Magog from the north, then go to Jerusalem to lay down his crown, ending the Roman Empire. Then the Antichrist, a Jew from the tribe of Dan, will be able to take power in Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Enoch and Elijah will prophesy in Jerusalem warning people not to follow the Antichrist. The Antichrist will kill them, but they will be resurrected. Antichrist will then desecrate the temple and rule tyrannically in "a great persecution" until St. Michael and his angels destroy him and prepare the way for Christ's return.⁵⁷

Pseudo-Methodius wrote his *Revelations* in late seventh century Syriac. His legend of the last godly emperor became widely spread throughout Europe, becoming a dominant theme especially during the Crusades. We know that the author wasn't actually the early fourth century martyr Methodius, because the hero emperor was expected to drive out invading "Ishmaelites" from the south, but Arabs were not a threat until the sixth century. The next invasion would be from Gog & Magog in the north, but according to Pseudo-Methodius it was only stopped by intervention of

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Tiburtine Sybil, <https://sites.google.com/site/canilup/home/tiburtine-sibyl-1> (accessed November 21, 2017).

St. Michael and his angels. The emperor would then go to Jerusalem, lay down his crown, and breathe his last, ending to the Roman Empire. This would provide an opening for the Antichrist to seize power and rule tyrannically from Jerusalem, until Christ returned to defeat him.⁵⁸

The legend of the last Roman emperor was revived during the Crusades when the Holy Roman Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa died in route to the Third Crusade in 1190. Prophecies of his return, or of some future Emperor Friedrich continued in German legend. Barbarossa's grandson Friedrich II, a later Holy Roman Emperor, actually took Jerusalem in 1229, reviving the myth.⁵⁹ Whereas the early church fathers appealed to a hermeneutic more closely in line with the Jewish and Christian scriptures, this medieval legend of a godly last Roman emperor had no perceivable basis in biblical eschatology.

Belief in a Papal Antichrist in the Late Middle Ages and Reformation

As tension began to develop between the papacy and Holy Roman emperors, the latter began to identify the Pope as antichrist. The first was Arnulf of Reims, illegitimate son of the last Carolingian king who had been named archbishop of Reims in 988 then deposed three years later. Arnulf's reaction was to attack the papacy:

Looking at the actual state of the papacy, what do we behold? ... wallowing in the sty of filthy concupiscence... Boniface, a very monster of iniquity, reeking with the blood of his predecessor, mounts the throne of Peter. ... What would you say of such a one, when you behold him sitting upon the throne glittering in purple and gold? Must he not be the 'Antichrist, sitting in the temple of God, and showing himself to be God'?⁶⁰

This connection with the pope and antichrist became more common during the investiture struggle between pope and monarchs from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. Gregory VII was called antichrist in 1084 as was Gregory IX in 1241. In the twelfth century both Bernard of Clairvaux and Hildegard of Bingen envisioned a future anti-pope who would lead two-thirds of the Roman Church astray, which actually happened when the papacy was moved to Avignon. Shortly thereafter Joachim of Fiore and the Rigorist Franciscans believed that Antichrist would come and destroy a corrupt and worldly Roman church, leading to a glorious revival, and Age of the Holy Spirit. Brother Arnold of Swabia, an early thirteenth century

⁵⁸ Ernst Sacur, "Pseudo-Methodius" in *Sybyllinische Texte* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1898) 89-94; translated into English in <https://www.scribd.com/doc/117558338/Pseudo-Methodius> (accessed November 21, 2017).

⁵⁹ Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (Oxford, 1957) 31-35, 112-114.

⁶⁰ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Eerdmans, 1910) 4:290-291.

Dominican believed Christ would return to defeat a Roman antichrist. The Flagellants of the fourteenth century were influenced by Joachim, the Rigorists, Brother Arnold, and the Apostolic Brethren, which got them in trouble with the pope.⁶¹ Calling the pope antichrist became common with the Waldensians, Wycliffe and his Lollards, Huss and his Taborites, and then finally the Reformers: Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, the Anabaptists, and the Puritans.⁶²

Hope in a Restoration of Israel: Not much between Chrysostom and Theodore Beza

Whereas the Jewish scriptures are replete with a hope in a future restoration of Israel and Jewish history continued that hope down through the millennia, it began to fade in Christian theology and nearly disappeared between John Chrysostom and Theodore Beza. Victoria Clark, in her history of Christian Zionism noticed when the hope for a restoration of Israel in the last days began to reappear after having disappeared for a thousand years.

Beza's marginal note [in Romans 11 of the Geneva Bible] instructed his readers to remember the 'debt the Gentiles owe to the Jews' and to understand that 'the nation of the Jews is not utterly cut off, without hope of recovery'. In another note he firmly stated that all God's old promises to the Jews about their ownership of their land could not be 'frustrate and vain'... King James hated Beza's influential marginal notes so much that he banned all such commentary from his 1611 version... 'Where Israel, Judah, Tsion, Ierusalem etc, are named in his argument, the Holy Ghost meaneth not the spirituall Israel or the Church of God collected of the Gentiles...but Israel properly descended out of Jacob's loynes.'⁶³

Tertullian, an early third century father from North Africa reflected an ante-Nicene and pre-Chrysostom view that still expected a restoration of Israel:

...what matters it to me, provided there be also a resurrection of the body, just as there is a restoration of the Jewish state? In fact, by the very circumstance that the recovery of the Jewish state is prefigured by the reincorporation and reunion of the bones [Ezekiel 37], proof is offered that this event will also happen to the bones themselves; for the metaphor could not have been formed from bones, if the same thing exactly were realized in them also.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Cohn, 80-84, 110-112.

⁶² Cohn, 205-206, 210-211, 254, 261.

⁶³ Victoria Clark; *Allies for Armageddon: The Rise of Christian Zionism* (Yale, 2007) 30. The earliest citation of Beza's contribution to a renewed expectation of a rebirth of Israel was in the dissertation of Ed Hindson, "The Puritans' Use of Scripture in the Development of an Apocalyptic Hermeneutic", unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa, 1984.

⁶⁴ Tertullian, *On the Resurrection XXX*; in Roberts, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Eerdmans, 1951), III:566-567.

Oh, most excellent God, when He restores in amnesty what He took away in wrath! Oh, what a God is yours, who both wounds and heals... Oh, what a God, that is merciful even down to Hades! ... As for the restoration of Judea, which even the Jews themselves... hope for just as it is described...in another work.⁶⁵

Victorinus of Petovium, a late third century bishop in modern Slovenia martyred during the reign of Diocletian, wrote the earliest commentary on Revelation which reflects his Ante-Nicene perspective that Rome was an enemy of God. He believed the antichrist to be the Roman Empire:

I send to you Elijah...to turn the hearts of the fathers...that is, at the time of the calling to recall the Jews to faith...he shows the number of those from the Jews who will believe...144,000... Jews who at the end of time will come to faith through the preaching of Elijah.⁶⁶

Ambrosiaster wrote a commentary on Paul's letters attributed until the Renaissance as the work of Ambrose of Milan. Likely written in Rome during the late fourth century, it shows a philo-Semitism more common before the trend set by Chrysostom to impugn the Jews.

Christians should not insult Jews, because they know that the mercy of God has been set aside for them, even though they have fallen away... They were partially hardened, so that during the time of their unbelief, the Gentiles might be admitted into the faith...but when the full number of the Gentiles has admitted, the darkness will be taken away from their eyes so that they may believe.⁶⁷

Jerome, late fourth century translator of the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible used throughout Roman Catholic history, wrote many commentaries on the scripture. He too believed that in the last days God would again gather the Jews to their land, which would result in the great battle:

For those who believe, salvation is in Mt. Zion and Jerusalem. In the latter days, the Lord will gather the called remnant from the people of Judah...He will return the captives of Judah to Jerusalem... He will gather all the nations who are unwilling to believe, however, and throw them into the Valley of Jehosaphat.⁶⁸

...namely what is going to happen to the people of Israel, not in the near future, but in the last days, at the end of the world.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Tertullian, *Against Marcion* III,25; in Roberts, III:342

⁶⁶ Victorinus of Petrovium, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* 7.1; 20.1; in *Ancient Christian Texts: Latin Commentaries on Revelation* (InterVarsity, 2011), 11-12, 20.

⁶⁷ Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Romans* 11:23,25; in Gerald Bray ed., *Ancient Christian Texts: Ambrosiaster* (InterVarsity, 2009) I:92.

⁶⁸ Jerome, *Commentary on Joel* 3:1; <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.vii.iv.xii.html> (accessed November 22, 2017).

⁶⁹ Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel* 10:14 "what things shall befall thy people in the Last Days"; www.ccel.org/ccel/morefathers/files/jeromme_daniel_02_text.htm (accessed November 22, 2017)

Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria in the early fifth century also looked forward to the calling of the Jews. “Israel will be saved in its own time and will be called at the end, after the calling of the Gentiles.”⁷⁰ In like manner, Theodoret of Cyrus, Antiochene theologian of the early fifth century, saw a conversion of the Jews when Elijah came.

After the Gentiles accepted the gospel, the Jews would believe, when the great Elijah would come to them and bring them the doctrine of faith. The Lord himself said as much: ‘Elijah will come and will restore all things.’ [Mt17:11]’⁷¹

Caesarius of Arles, early sixth century bishop in southern France, identified Jews as the woman in Revelation 12 who would be converted in the tribulation and be joined to “bad Christians” who were left behind in the rapture, while “good Christians” would “dwell in heaven.”

the woman who flew into the desert to be the...church in which...the synagogue will come to believe at the end of time when Elijah comes...the two wings...are the two prophets [Elijah +? during reign of Antichrist] allowed to exercise authority for 42 months...the last persecution. It speaks of all, namely of those who dwell on the earth, not those who dwell in heaven.”⁷²

Oecumenius, a Syrian Monophysite of the late sixth century, also expected the conversion of the Jews at the time of the fullness of the Gentiles.

now the Lord is shown having come to Mount Zion represents the conversion of Israel by faith in the last days, when indeed the Lord will make them his own possession and bring them to himself. For this was proclaimed through Isaiah, saying, ‘The Redeemer will come from Zion and will remove ungodliness from Jacob’ and the apostle in agreement says ‘When the full number of the Gentiles come in, then all Israel will be saved.’⁷³

Andrew of Caesarea, early seventh century bishop in Cappadocia, interpreted the meaning of the 144,000 in Revelation as Jews converted in the Great Tribulation:

⁷⁰ Cyril of Alexandria, *Explanation of the Letter to the Romans*, 11:26; in *Ancient Christian Commentary* 6:298-299.

⁷¹ Theodoret of Cyrus, *Interpretation of the Letter to Romans*, 11:26; in *Commentaries on the Epistles of Saint Paul*, trans. J.A. Weaver, “Theodoret of Cyrus on Romans 11:26”; *Recovering and Early Christian Redivivus Tradition* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007); in Michael Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel* (B&H Academic, 2010), 48.

⁷² Caesarius of Arles, *Exposition on the Apocalypse*, Homily 10; in *Ancient Christian Texts: Latin Commentaries on Revelation* (InterVarsity, 2011) 86-87.

⁷³ Oecumenius, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* 14.1-5; in *Ancient Christian Texts: Greek Commentaries on Revelation*, 62.

This refers either to those believers from the Jews who fled the siege of the Romans...or what is more likely, to those from the Jews who are saved at the consummation when, as the apostle puts it, after 'the full number of the Gentiles come in, all Israel will be saved.' Either interpretation is acceptable. ...the Jews in the diaspora of the earth are saved in the last days."⁷⁴

The Venerable Bede, an early eighth century Anglo-Saxon monk, saw "the hour of testing" in Rev 3:10 as a future conversion of the Jews in the midst of Antichrist's persecution:

Although the church is always struggling against adversaries, it is possible in this passage that the hour of temptation and the humiliation of the Jews at the time of Antichrist are indicated. During this persecution, certainly those of the Jews...through the teaching of that great prophet Elijah, being incorporated with members of the church, they will believe.⁷⁵

Although Tertullian in the third century still expected a restoration of Israel, the massive assault in the fourth century on what remained of Jewish Christianity had their effect. Jerome, who spent much time in Jerusalem and interacting with Jews, still held to a return to the land in the late fourth century, but he was the exception and after him the concept of a restoration became more of a conversion to Christianity than a restoration to the land.

Belief in a Pre-Wrath Rapture in the Early Church and Medieval Periods

The view that the Church will be taken just before the destruction of the world is known as either the pre-wrath or pre-conflagration rapture. It is not too different from a post-tribulation rapture, which implies a rapture before the destruction of God's enemies, then a millennial reign.

Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon in the second century, probably was the first to teach pre-wrath rapture:

they are both ignorant of God's dispensations, and of the mystery of the resurrection of the just, and of the [earthly] kingdom which is the commencement of incorruption. ... Now God made promise of the earth to Abraham and his seed; yet neither Abraham nor his seed...do now receive...it; but they shall receive it at the resurrection of the just.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on Apocalypse 7:4-8*; in *Ancient Christian Texts: Greek Commentaries on Revelation*, 138-140.

⁷⁵ Bede, *Exposition of the Apocalypse 3:10*; in *Ancient Christian Texts: Latin Commentaries on Revelation*, 122.

⁷⁶ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies V, XXXII, 1*; in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:561.

Commodian, a mid-third century North African poet, also believed in a pre-wrath rapture: “The whole nature is converted in flame, which yet avoids the camp of the saints. The earth is burned up...the mountains melt...but the righteous are placed in inner dwelling-places.”⁷⁷

Lactantius, religious advisor to the Emperor Constantine and family tutor, also taught pre-wrath:

Then the righteous shall go forth from their hiding places, and shall find all things covered with carcasses and bones. But the whole race of the wicked shall utterly perish; and there shall no longer be any nation in this world, but the nation of God...there shall be no war, but peace and everlasting rest...1000 years.⁷⁸

Methodius of Olympus, late third century bishop of Lycia, also held to a pre-wrath rapture:

“Souls made safe and sealed shall be preserved from wrath in the burning of the world, whilst the ...sons of Satan shall be destroyed,”⁷⁹ as was the author of the mid-fourth century work the *Apocalypse of Thomas*:

Then also shall they be lifted up into the air on a cloud of light, and shall go with me rejoicing into heaven...the sixth day. And on the seventh day shall mine elect be sought out by the holy angels from the destruction of the world. Then shall all men see that the hour of their destruction draweth near.⁸⁰

Hilary, bishop of Poitiers in the mid-fourth century, believed believers would be hidden from the wrath to come: “When the wrath of God rises, the saints will be hidden in God’s chambers, but the faithless will be left exposed to celestial fires.”⁸¹

Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria in the early fifth century who expelled the Jews and opposed both supposed-heretic Nestorius and the Neoplatonist philosopher Hypatia, was pre-wrath:

He will send His Angels, and they shall choose the righteous from among the sinners, and bring them near unto him: but those others they will be left on earth, as doomed to torment and condemned to punishment by fire.⁸²

⁷⁷ Commodianus, *Instructions Against the Heathen*, XLV: Day of Judgment; in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 4:212.

⁷⁸ Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, VII:xxvi; in Roberts, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 7:221.

⁷⁹ Methodius of Olympus, Banquet of the Ten Virgins 9:1

⁸⁰ *Apocalypse of Thomas*, citation is found only in the varian text from the 11th or 12th centuries translated by Dom Bihlmeyer found in the Munich Clm. 4563; <http://gnosis.org/library/apcthom.htm> (accessed November 22, 2017).

⁸¹ Hilary of Poitiers in *Ancient Christian Commentaries* (Intervarsity, 2009), 1b:209, Matthew 24.

⁸² Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Luke*, Sermon 118; in *Ancient Christian Commentaries*, “Luke”.

Augustine, bishop of Hippo in the fifth century, also held to the pre-wrath view: “where shall the saints be during the conflagration, and before it is replaced by a new heavens and a new earth... in the upper regions,”⁸³ as did Oecumenius, a Syrian Monophysite in the early sixth century:

He sees the countless thousands from the Gentiles who...have been allotted a place in the heavenly choir... They are clothed in white robes...they were rescued from the universal destruction of the world. ... ‘These are they who have come out of the Great Tribulation.’ For the righteous endured not a small struggle but indeed an exceedingly great struggle during the rule of the antichrist.⁸⁴

Second Apocalypse of John, a seventh century apocryphal work also presented a pre-wrath rapture: “I will send my angels over all the earth’s surface. They will burn up the earth...all the rocks will be melted and turned to dust,”⁸⁵ as did the eighth century Anglo-Saxon monk the Venerable Bede, who claimed the saints would be raptured before the conflagration, then “he shows them in heaven” and returns with him to reign over the earth:

when the Lord descends for the judgment...the saints are immediately caught up to meet him in the air. [cites 1Thess 4:15-16] ...fire will cover the whole surface of the earth, and the unjust...will be unable to be caught up into heaven.⁸⁶

And you have redeemed us for God by your blood from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” is “the church which has been redeemed by the blood of Christ and gathered from the nations. And he shows them in heaven by saying, ‘and they will reign over the earth.’⁸⁷

Francis Gumerlock cites five other pre-wrath sources in the eighth to eleventh centuries. The eighth century Irish monk Brendan claimed that his monks would be raised “high over the fire of Doom”, then return to the earth afterwards.⁸⁸ Paschasius Radbertus, ninth century Carolingian

⁸³ Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, XX:xviii; in Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (1st series) II:437.

⁸⁴ Oecumenius, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* Fifth Discourse, 7:9; in *Ancient Christian Texts: Greek Commentaries on Revelation*, 35-36.

⁸⁵ *The Second Apocalypse of John*; in John M. Court, *The Book of Revelation and the Johannine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Bloomsbury, 2000) 39.

⁸⁶ Bede, *De Temporeum Ratione*, 70. CCSL 123B:541; in Francis Gumerlock, “Apocalyptic Spirituality in the early Middle Ages: hope for escaping the fire of doomsday through a pre-conflagration rapture”, 107; <http://franciscgumerlock.com/wp-content/uploads/Gumerlock-Apocalyptic-Spirituality-in-the-Early-Middle-Ages.pdf> (accessed November 22, 2017).

⁸⁷ Bede, *Exposition of the Apocalypse* 5:9-10; in *Ancient Christian Texts: Latin Commentaries on Revelation*, 128.

⁸⁸ Francis Gumerlock, “Apocalyptic Spirituality in the early Middle Ages: hope for escaping the fire of doomsday through a pre-conflagration rapture” chapter 6 in *The Pure Flame of Devotion: The History of Christian Spirituality*, edited by G. Stephen Weaver, Jr. and Ian Hugh Clary, 108; and in “The Development of the Pretribulation Rapture in Medieval Christianity”, 4-5

theologian and abbot in Picardy, wrote, “The one who seeks the things that are of God will be taken, but the one who seeks the things that are of the world will be left in the fire.”⁸⁹ Pseudo-Alcuin, an eleventh century writer purporting to be the real Alcuin who was in the court of Charlemagne, wrote “when the Lord comes for judgment, there will be a white cloud which, screening the saints, would protect them from the fire of the burning world.”⁹⁰ Bruno, an eleventh century Carthusian monk, wrote that “the faithful will be preserved unharmed from the fire.”⁹¹ The expectation that faithful Christians would avoid the conflagration at the end of the world and then go on to reign in a new heavens and new earths has endured throughout history.

Expectations of a Pretribulation Rapture in the Church Fathers and Medieval Sources

The early second century document *Shepherd of Hermas* may allude to a rapture: “You have escaped a great tribulation on account of your faith...a type of the great tribulation which is to come.”⁹² This may not be the Great Tribulation in the future, but if they escape in the type, doesn't it insinuate that they would escape in the real one?

Ireneaus of Lyon, disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of the apostle John, also made an allusion to the rapture, “...when in the end the Church shall be suddenly caught up from this, it is said, ‘There shall be tribulation such as not been since the beginning, neither shall be.’ For this is the last contest of the righteous, win which, when they overcome, they are crowned with incorruption.”⁹³

The Apocalypse of Elijah is a third century work discovered in Egypt and existing in Greek and Coptic fragments. It is both Orthodox and Millenarian, not Gnostic, and cited by church fathers.

According to chapter 3 of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* the “lawless one,” that is, the Antichrist, will arrive on the world scene, will claim to be Christ, will set himself up in Jerusalem... Enoch & Elijah will return & oppose him... executing them...when the end-time persecution of the Antichrist intensifies, Christ will take pity on His people by sending Angels from heaven to snatch up those having the seal of God on their hands & foreheads...remove them from the wrath, and lead them to paradise. There raptured saints will receive white robes...& dwell in

⁸⁹ Gumerlock, *Apocalyptic Spirituality*, 106.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁹² *Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision 4, 2; in Roberts & Donaldson eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Eerdmans, 1951) II: 18.

⁹³ Ireneaus, *Against Heresies* 5:29; in Roberts & Donaldson eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Eerdmans, 1951) I: 558.

safety from Antichrist... After this Christ will return with His saints, who reign with Him for a thousand years.⁹⁴

According to Gumerlock, this is not a pre-wrath but pre-trib rapture: “the removal of the saints from the presence of the Antichrist seems to take place before the death of Antichrist and the return of the Lord to reign a thousand years...the natural disasters and events that take place on earth after the rapture leave the impression that the gap will have been a lengthy duration...one of the main distinguishing features of the pretribulational rapture position [and] shows close affinity with the pretribulational view.”⁹⁵ However the text of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* has only a 3½ year tribulation and is from Revelation chapter 12, the ‘woman protected in the wilderness’ with no mention of Daniel’s 70 weeks or Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians chapter 4.

Victorinus of Petrovium was a third century bishop in modern Slovenia martyred during the reign of Diocletian. In his Commentary on the Apocalypse he understood “the heaven withdrew as a scroll that is rolled up’ in Revelation 6:14 to be the rapture. He wrote, “the heaven will be rolled away, that is, that the Church shall be taken away...the good will be removed, seeking to avoid the persecution.”⁹⁶

Caesarius of Arles, an early sixth century bishop in southern France, seems to have taught a pre-tribulation rapture, for in Homily 8 he ties Revelation 4:1 to 1 Thessalonians 4: “‘Come up hither! And they went up to heaven in a cloud.’ The Apostle spoke of this when he said, ‘We shall be caught up in the clouds to meet Christ.’”⁹⁷ In Homily 9 he ties the dragon cast to the earth and causing the worst persecutions in Revelation 12:9 with the rapture: “For the saints cannot become heaven unless the devil has been expelled.”⁹⁸ In Homily 12, Caesarius writes that the bowls of wrath would be poured out on the earth after the church was in heaven: “the tent of witnesses in heaven was opened...the temple is to be interpreted as the church, the angel who

⁹⁴ Francis Gumerlock, “The Rapture in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*; in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170 (Oct-Dec 2013) 420.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 424-425.

⁹⁶ Victorinus of Petrovium, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* 6:14; in *The Sacred Writings of Victorinus* (Jazzy bee Verlag, 2012), 6:14.

⁹⁷ Caesarius of Arles, *Exposition on the Apocalypse*, Homily 8; in *Ancient Christian Texts: Latin Commentaries on Revelation* (Intervarsity, 2011), 84.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, Homily 9; in *Ibid.*, 85.

came out of the temple...was said to be the rule of God.” Then seven angels are sent to pour bowls of wrath upon the earth.⁹⁹

Pseudo-Ephraem, a sixth century text purported to have been written by Ephraem the Syrian, clearly teaches a pre-tribulation rapture: “For all the saints and elect of God are gathered, prior the tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord, lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins.”¹⁰⁰

Aspringius of Beja, sixth century bishop in southern Portugal, finds rapture in Revelation 3:10: “he promises that he will preserve his church in the last times, when the demon, enemy of the human race, will come to tempt those who live on the earth.”¹⁰¹ This is clearly pre-tribulation, and not pre-wrath, as the church is preserved not from a conflagration, but the Antichrist.

Expectations of a Mid-tribulation Rapture in the Church Fathers and Medieval Sources

Tertullian, early third century church father from North Africa, considered the restrainer of 2 Thessalonians 2:6 as the Roman Empire, which upon its fall would break up into ten kingdoms, then the Antichrist must be revealed by his desecration of the temple in Jerusalem.¹⁰² Tertullian lists more events that must take place before the return of Christ: the Jews must first see the sign of the Son of Man in the heavens, Babylon must fall, Elijah must preach, and the church must have escaped the persecution of Antichrist.

Up to the present moment they have not, tribe by tribe, smitten their breasts, looking upon Him whom they have pierced. No one has as yet fallen in with Elias; no one has as yet escaped from Antichrist; no one has yet to bewail the downfall of Babylon. And is there now anybody who has risen again...¹⁰³

Methodius, late third century bishop of Lycia on the south coast of Asia Minor, connected the virgins taken by the bridegroom in Matthew 25 and the woman taken to safety in the wilderness in Revelation 12 with the rapture of the church to heaven in 1 Thessalonians 4. He wrote,

⁹⁹ Ibid., Homily 12; in Ibid., 91.

¹⁰⁰ Pseudo-Ephraem, *Sermon at End of the World*, 3; in <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/101157.html> (accessed November 24, 2017). See also: <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/rapture-in-pseudo-ephraem>

¹⁰¹ Aspringius of Beja, *Explanation of the Revelation 3:10*; in *Ancient Christian Texts* (InterVarsity, 2011), 37.

¹⁰² Tertullian, *On the Resurrection XXIV*; in Roberts, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, III, 562-563.

¹⁰³ Tertullian, *On the Resurrection XXII*; in Ibid., III, 561.

midnight is the kingdom of Antichrist...But the cry which was made when it was said, 'Behold the Bridegroom cometh...is the voice which shall be heard from heaven and the trumpet, when the saints, all their bodies being raised, shall be caught up, and shall go on to the clouds to meet the Lord. ...as also Paul intimates, that the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: the dead in Christ shall rise first.¹⁰⁴

the 1260 days that we are staying here, Oh virgins, is the accurate and perfect understanding ...throughout this time, until the restitution of the new dispensation, when, coming into the assembly in the heavens, she will no longer contemplate the I AM through the means of human knowledge, but will clearly behold entering in together with Christ."¹⁰⁵

Tyconius, a late fourth century North African moderate Donatist quoted favorably by Augustine, believed that the resurrection would take place at the last trumpet in Revelation 11.¹⁰⁶ He also believed, according to Revelation 3:10, that the church would be kept from the hour of trial:

the hour of temptation may also refer to the time of antichrist who will come in the future. From this hour Christ the Lord promises that he will free every church that remains firm in his [commandments]."¹⁰⁷

Primasius of Hadrumentum, sixth century bishop in North Africa, connected the eagle flying in Revelation 8 and the flight of the woman in Revelation 12 to the rapture of the church. The church would be rescued, for "He speaks of the church flying in mid-heaven for she is going to possess the whole world, she says 'Our abode is in the heavens!' ... God works his way in the midst and 'works salvation in the midst of the earth.'"¹⁰⁸

Andrew of Caesarea, early seventh century bishop in Capadocia, connected Revelation 11 with the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4.

By the 'hour of trial' he [Christ] speaks either of the persecution against the Christians that occurred almost immediately by those who ruled Rome badly at that time...or he speaks of the universal coming of the antichrist against the faithful at the end of time. From this coming He pledges to free those who are zealous, for they will beforehand be seized upward by a departure from there, lest they be tempted beyond what they are able to endure. He says well, 'I am coming soon,' for 'after the tribulation of those days, the Lord will immediately come'¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Methodius, *Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, VI.iv; in Roberts, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, VI, 330.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, VIII, xi; in *Ibid.*, VI, 339.

¹⁰⁶ Tyconius, *Commentary on the Apocalypse 10:7*; in William Weinrich, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: IX Revelation* (InterVarsity, 2005) 150.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 3:10; in *Ibid.*, IX, 45.

¹⁰⁸ Primasius of Hadrumentum, *Commentary on the Apocalypse 8:13*; in *Ancient Christian Commentary XII*, 130.

¹⁰⁹ Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse 3:10-11*; in ACT: Greek on Revelation, 125-126.

Concerning the two witnesses of Revelation 11, Andrew of Caesarea wrote

trampled by the nations for 42 months signifies, I believe, that at the appearance of the antichrist those who are faithful and trustworthy will be trampled and persecuted for 3½ years... Enoch and Elijah [will] prophesy 3½ years... will guide those away from the deception of antichrist. These are the same whom Zechariah saw in the form of two olive trees and lampstands.¹¹⁰

Antichrist then kills the two witnesses, they lay unburied in the street, and Antichrist establishes his kingdom in Jerusalem, which would be accepted by Jews.

The saints are caught up in the midst of temptations, lest they be subdued by difficulties beyond their powers. And they will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” [cites 1 Thess 4:17] “the 3½ years are reckoned the 1,260 days during which the apostasy will rage. During this time the great judge will not think to tempt us beyond what we are able to bear, but freeing us will present us a strong mind free from any weakness against the onslaughts on it.”¹¹¹

The phrase ‘in mid-heaven’ indicates that the angel...has been sent from above to people who came from the ground, so that...it might...lead them...to heaven. And so the body of the church will be united to Christ... Fear God, but have no fear of antichrist...”¹¹²

Andrew of Caesarea believed there was no need to fear Antichrist, because the church would be taken “beforehand” to safety in heaven.

Brother Dolcino, the late thirteenth century head of the Apostolic Brethren monastic community in northern Italy influenced by Joachim of Fiore, held to a mid-tribulation rapture:

the Antichrist was coming into the world within the bounds of the said three and a half years; and after he had come then he [Dolcino] and his followers would be transferred into Paradise, in which are Enoch and Elijah. And in this way they will be preserved unharmed from the persecution of Antichrist. And that Enoch and Elijah themselves would descend on the earth for the purpose of preaching [against] Antichrist. Then they would be killed...and Antichrist would reign for a long time. But when the Antichrist is dead, Dolcino...and his preserved followers will descend on the earth, and preach the right faith of Christ to all, and will convert those who will be living then to the true faith of Jesus Christ.¹¹³

Dolcino and his monks would be in heaven, escaping the worst of the tribulation, but return afterwards to preach to those living on the earth after the tribulation ended, presumably in the millennium.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11:1-4; in *Ibid.*, 151-152.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12:5-6; in *Ibid.*, 156-157.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 14:6; in *Ibid.*, 164.

¹¹³ *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, v.9; in Francis Gumerlock, “A Rapture Citation in the Fourteenth Century”, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (July-September 2002) 349-362.

Francis Gumerlock lists many others who held to a Mid-Tribulation Rapture in the Medieval period, among them: the Venerable Bede, Autpert Ambrose, Haimo of Auxerre, Pseudo-Alcuin, Rupert of Deutz, and Peter of Tarantaise (also known as pseudo- Albertus Magnus).¹¹⁴ Gumerlock also noticed that Arnold of Villanova, an early fourteenth century religious reformer and physician to the king of Aragon, saw the rapture occurring at the last trumpet in Revelation 10:7, when it says “the mystery of God is finished.”¹¹⁵

Ancient and Medieval Examples of a Post-Tribulation (and Post-Post-Trib) Rapture

Irenaeus believed that the rapture took place at the end of Antichrist’s rule: “the resurrection of the just, which takes place after the coming of Antichrist, and the destruction of all nations under his rule; in [the times which] the righteous shall reign in the earth.”¹¹⁶

Ambrosiaster does not stipulate chronological order in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:

At the coming of the Lord the saints will also rise again, and those who are still alive will be caught up into the air... In this rapture death and resurrection shall occur simultaneously... In the time of the antichrist, the rest of the Gentiles will be either apostates or guilty...and the Lord Jesus will slay them, along with their ruler the antichrist...¹¹⁷

but is more specific on a Post-Tribulation rapture in his commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:

Christ the Lord will come down...and will wage war in God’s name against the antichrist. After he has been wiped out, the dead will rise again at his command. To come down with the sound of God’s trumpet means to wage war in the name of God. ... Those who have died in Christ will rise first, and then we who are still alive will be caught up together with those processional clouds to meet Christ in the air. Thus everyone will come with Christ to the battle, and those who had killed them will see them alive...¹¹⁸

Two examples of what I call Post-Post-Trib were discovered. Jerome claimed there was a delay of forty-five days between when Antichrist is slain and the Lord returns. “Blessed is

¹¹⁴ Francis Gumerlock, “Apocalyptic spirituality in the early Middle Ages: hope for escaping the fires of doomsday through a pre-conflagration rapture” (August 13, 2015) in <http://francisgumerlock.com/wp-content/uploads/Gumerlock-Apocalyptic-Spirituality-in-the-Early-Middle-Ages.pdf> (accessed November 25, 2017).

¹¹⁵ Francis Gumerlock, “A Rapture Citation in the Fourteenth Century” 16; in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (July-September 2002): 349-362.

¹¹⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.35

¹¹⁷ Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on 1Corinthians* 15:53; in *Ancient Christian Texts: Ambrosiaster* (InterVarsity, 2009).

¹¹⁸ Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on 1 Thessalonians* 4:15-18; in *Ibid.*, 109.

he, who when the Antichrist is slain, beyond 1290 days, that is, three years and a half, waits for the forty-five days, in which the Lord and Savior is to come in His majesty.”

Bede called this period after the death of Antichrist “some little rest in the church”:

after the death of Antichrist there will be some little rest in the Church, which Daniel foretold: ‘Blessed is he who waiteth and cometh to the 1,335 days...’ Now for what reason, after the destruction of Antichrist, there is silence for 45 days, is a subject of divine knowledge.¹¹⁹

If one wishes to believe in a post-tribulation rapture, there are a few problems. There must be enough time after the rapture for the church to be prepared in white garments, for the wedding, and for the supper of the Lamb to take place in heaven, and for the armies of the earth to assemble and invade the land God promised to Israel. This point was noticed by several theologians in the early medieval period:

Aspringius of Beja insisted that “We interpret the armies of heaven to be the bride herself, who [is] to be prepared for the marriage of the Lamb. When it says that they were “on white horses” ...white linen the righteous works of the saints.”¹²⁰

Primasius of Hadrumantum reminded us that “In heaven the churches [are] made whiter than snow by grace, and said to follow Christ... They always go forward on white horses, that is with pure bodies... following the footsteps of Christ.”¹²¹

Bede points out that the church goes first to heaven, then returns to earth: “the church, which has been redeemed by the blood of Christ and gathered from the nations. And he shows them in heaven by saying ‘and they will reign on earth.’”¹²² For they follow Christ wherever He goes: “the armies that are in heaven followed him, with pure white bodies the church imitates Christ. Because of the struggle of her battle she has by right received the name of army.”¹²³

¹¹⁹ Bede, *Explanation of the Apocalypse*, 8:1, 9:13-14, 11:11; in *Ancient Christian Texts: Latin Commentaries on Revelation* (Intervarsity, 2011) 137,142.

¹²⁰ Aspringius of Beja, *Tractate on the Apocalypse* 19.14; in *Ancient Christian Texts: Latin Commentaries on Revelation*, 47.

¹²¹ Primasius of Hadrumantum, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* 19.14; in *Ancient Christian Commentaries, Revelation*, XII:312.

¹²² Bede, *Explanation of the Apocalypse* 5:10; in *Ancient Christian Texts: Latin Commentaries on Revelation*, 128.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 19.14; in *Ibid.*, 176.

Conclusion

Admittedly there is no one who exactly matches what John Nelson Darby taught in the nineteenth century, but every doctrine of Dispensationalism has a precedent in Church History, not merely isolated examples, but concepts found in numerous texts throughout history and in every region where the gospel of Christ was held to be true. The expectations of a restored Israel in the last days, with Antichrist raging in the great tribulation, and a rapture rescuing the church from the persecution of Antichrist and judgments God will pour out upon the earth have been believed throughout Church History.

Dispensationalists expect and speculate upon the Apocalypse, while anti-dispensationalists disparage those who speculate, and call their interpretations new. Prophecy is a major theme of the Bible and of Christ's teaching. Throughout Church history most Christian authors speculated on the Apocalypse. Only in our modern and secular world has eschatology fallen out of favor. Most current theologians seldom consider eschatology, unless they are disparaging it. One must therefore conclude, that it is those who mock dispensationalism who are new, being influenced by modernism & liberalism, rather than seriously studying "all the counsel of God."¹²⁴

Down to the Enlightenment, biblical apocalyptic was read with seriousness throughout Christendom, at all social and educational levels, for the clues it offered to God's divine plan. But as skepticism and rationalism gained ground in the eighteenth century, the academic and popular views of these texts gradually diverged. . . . At the popular level, particularly in America, the apocalyptic Texts remained what they had always been: a vital source of doctrine, reassurance, and foreknowledge. Ordinary believers continued to pore over their pages and to look expectantly for the events they found predicted there.¹²⁵

Prophecy was thus one of the bonds between medieval and Renaissance thought. This was so because there was still a shared experience of history. But prophecy has now ceased to be of importance, except on the fringes of modern civilization. When did this change take place? Certainly not at the time when scholars began to apply modern, so-called scientific, methods in their scholarship, for, as we have seen, sixteenth-century thinkers could hold together new concepts of knowledge and belief in the efficacy of ancient oracles. . . . Perhaps we might say that only when intelligent and educated men ceased to take prophecy seriously were the Middle Ages truly at an end. The contention here is that this change hinges on a change in our whole attitude to history and to our own participation in it.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Acts 20:27, the Bible in King James Version.

¹²⁵ Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), p.45. Thanks to Tommy Ice for providing me this quote.

¹²⁶ Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study of Joachimism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 508. Thanks to Tommy Ice for providing me this quote.