

# Dispensationalism — Futurism (Early Church Fathers)

“In this survey of the early centuries we have found that the Church interpreted the book of Revelation along futurist lines; i.e., they understood the book to predict the eschatological events which would attend the end of the world. The Antichrist was understood to be an evil ruler of the end-times who would persecute the Church, afflicting her with great tribulation. Every church father who deals with the subject expects the Church to suffer at the hands of Antichrist.”

— George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope: A Biblical Study of the Second Advent and the Rapture*, (Grand Rapids, Mich., Eerdmans, 1990), 31.

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Hippolytus (AD. 170-236)

Didache: (1st Century)

Barnabas: (1st Century)

Irenaeus (AD120-202)

Cyprian: (AD200-258)

“**As these things, then, are in the future**, and as the ten toes of the image are equivalent to (so many) democracies, and the ten horns of the fourth beast are distributed over ten kingdoms, let us look at the subject a little more closely, and consider these matters as in the clear light of a personal survey. The golden head of the image and the lioness denoted the Babylonians; the shoulders and arms of silver, and the bear, represented the Persians and Medes; the belly and thighs of brass, and the leopard, meant the Greeks, who held the sovereignty from Alexander’s time; the legs of iron, and the beast dreadful and terrible, expressed the Romans, who hold the sovereignty at present; the toes of the feet which were part clay and part iron, and the ten horns, were emblems of the kingdoms **that are yet to rise**; the other little horn that grows up among them meant the Antichrist in their midst; the stone that smites the earth and brings judgment upon the world was Christ.”

— Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, 27-28.

“**When the times are fulfilled, and the ten horns spring from the beast in the last (times), then Antichrist will appear among them.** When he makes war against the saints, and persecutes them, then may we expect the manifestation of the Lord from heaven.”

— Hippolytus, *On Daniel*, II, 7.

“For when the threescore and two weeks are fulfilled, and Christ is come, and the Gospel is preached in every place, the times being then accomplished, **there will remain only one week, the last**, in which Elias will appear, and Enoch, and in the midst of it the abomination of desolation will be manifested, viz., Antichrist, announcing desolation to the world....”

— Hippolytus, *On Daniel*, II, 22.

“Thus, then, does the prophet set forth these things concerning **the Antichrist, who shall be shameless, a war-maker, and despot, who, exalting himself above all kings and above every God, shall build the**

**city of Jerusalem, and restore the sanctuary.** Him the impious will worship as God, and will bend to him the knee, thinking him to be the Christ. He shall cut off the two witnesses and forerunners of Christ, who proclaim His glorious kingdom from heaven, as it is said: 'And I will give (power) unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.' As also it was announced to Daniel: 'And one week shall confirm a covenant with many; and in the midst of the week it shall be that the sacrifice and oblation shall be removed' - that the one week might be shown to be divided into two. **The two witnesses, then, shall preach three years and a half; and Antichrist shall make war upon the saints during the test of the week** and desolate the world, that what is written may be fulfilled: 'And they shall make the abomination of desolation for a thousand two hundred and ninety days.'"

— Hippolytus, On Daniel, II, 39.

"By the stretching forth of His two hands He signified His passion; and by mentioning 'a time, and times, and an half, when the dispersion is accomplished,' He indicated the three years and a half of Antichrist. For by 'a time' He means a year, and by 'times' two years, and by an 'half time' half a year. These are the thousand two hundred and ninety days of which Daniel prophesied for the finishing of the passion, and the accomplishment of the dispersion **when Antichrist comes. In those days they shall know all these things.** And from the time of the removal of the continuous sacrifice there are also reckoned one thousand two hundred and ninety days. (Then) iniquity shall abound, as the Lord also says: 'Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.' And that divisions will arise when the falling away takes place, is without doubt. And when divisions arise, love is chilled. The words, 'Blessed is he that waiteth and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days,' have also their value, as the Lord said: 'But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.' Wherefore let us by no means admit the falling away, lest iniquity abound, and the abomination of desolation - that is, the adversary - overtake us."

— Hippolytus, On Daniel, II, 43-44.

"And I inquired about the fourth beast.' It is to the fourth kingdom, of which we have already spoken, that he here refers: that kingdom, than which no greater kingdom of like nature has arisen upon the earth; **from which also ten horns are to spring, and to be apportioned among ten crowns. And amid these another little horn shall rise, which is that of Antichrist.** And it shall pluck by the roots the three others before it; that is to say, he shall subvert the three kings of Egypt, Libya, and Ethiopia, with the view of acquiring for himself universal dominion. And after conquering the remaining seven horns, he will at last begin, inflated by a strange and wicked spirit, to stir up war against the saints, and to persecute all everywhere, with the aim of being glorified by all, and being worshipped as God."

— Hippolytus, On Daniel, III, 7:19.

"For the deceiver seeks to liken himself in all things to the Son of God. Christ is a lion, so Antichrist is also a lion; Christ is a king, so Antichrist is also a king. The Savior was manifested as a lamb; so he too, in like manner, **will appear** as a lamb, though within he is a wolf. ... The Savior raised up and showed His holy flesh like a temple, **and he will raise a temple of stone in Jerusalem. And his seductive arts we shall exhibit in what follows.** But for the present let us turn to the question in hand."

— Hippolytus, Treatise on Christ and Antichrist, 6.

"But it becomes us further diligently to examine and set forth the period at which these things shall come to pass, and **how the little horn shall spring up in their midst. For when the legs of iron have issued in the feet and toes, according to the similitude of the image and that of the terrible beast, as has been shown in the above, (then shall be the time) when the iron and the clay shall be mingled together.** Now Daniel will set forth this subject to us. For he says, **And one week will make a covenant with many, and it shall be that in the midst (half) of the week my sacrifice and oblation shall cease.**

**By one week, therefore, he meant the last week which is to be at the end of the whole world of which week the two prophets Enoch and Elias will take up the half.** For they will preach 1,260 days clothed in sackcloth, proclaiming repentance to the people and to all the nations. For John says, And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. That is the half of the week whereof Daniel spake. These are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks standing before the Lord of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire will proceed out of their mouth, and devour their enemies; and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed."

— Hippolytus, Treatise on Christ and Antichrist, 43, 47.

"Now concerning the tribulation of the persecution which is to fall upon the Church from the adversary, John also speaks thus, "And I saw a great and wondrous sign in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, ... And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent." That refers to the one thousand two hundred and threescore days (the half of the week) during which the tyrant is to reign and persecute the Church.... These things then, being come to pass, beloved, and the one week being divided into two parts, and the abomination of desolation being manifested then, and the two prophets and forerunners of the Lord having finished their course, and the whole world finally approaching the consummation, what remains but the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ from heaven, for whom we have looked in hope."

— Hippolytus, Treatise on Christ and Antichrist, 60, 61, 64.

**"For he says, I shall make a covenant of one week, and in the midst of the week my sacrifice and libation will be removed. For by one week he indicates the showing forth of the seven years which shall be in the last times. And the half of the week the two prophets, along with John, will take for the purpose of proclaiming to all the world the advent of Antichrist, that is to say, for a thousand two hundred and sixty days clothed in sackcloth; and they will work signs and wonders with the object of making men ashamed and repentant, even by these means, on account of their surpassing lawlessness and impiety.** And if any man will hurt them, fire will proceed out of their mouth, and devour their enemies. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of the advent of Antichrist, and to turn waters into blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues as often as they will.' And when they have proclaimed all these things they will fall on the sword, cut off by the accuser. **And they will fulfill their testimony, as Daniel also says; for he foresaw that the beast that came up out of the abyss would make war with them, namely with Enoch, Elias, and John, and would overcome them, and kill them,** because of their refusal to give glory to the accuser. That is the little horn that sprang up. And he, being lifted up in heart, begins in the end to, exalt himself and glorify himself as God, persecuting the saints and blaspheming Christ."

— Appendix to the Works of Hippolytus, XXI.

"And at first, indeed, that deceitful and lawless one, with crafty deceitfulness, will refuse such glory; but the men persisting, and holding by him, will declare him king. And thereafter he will be lifted up in heart, and he who was formerly gentle will become violent, and he who pursued love will become pitiless, and the humble in heart will become haughty and inhuman, and the hater of unrighteousness will persecute the righteous. **Then, when he is elevated to his kingdom, he will marshal war; and in his wrath he will smite three mighty kings, - those, namely, of Egypt, Libya, and Ethiopia.** And after that he will build the temple in Jerusalem, and will restore it again speedily, and give it over to the Jews. And then he will be lifted up in heart against every man; yea, he will speak blasphemy also against God, thinking in his deceit that he shall be king upon the earth hereafter for ever; not knowing, miserable wretch, that his kingdom is to be quickly brought to nought, and that he will quickly have to meet the fire which is prepared for him, along with all who trust him and serve him. For

when Daniel said, 'I shall make my covenant for one week,' he indicated seven years; and the one half of the week is for the preaching of the prophets, and for the other half of the week - that is to say, for three years and a half - **Antichrist will reign upon the earth. And after this his kingdom and his glory shall be taken away.** Behold, ye who love God, what manner of tribulation there shall rise in those days, such as has not been from the foundation of the world, no, nor ever shall be, except in those days alone. Then the lawless one, being lifted up in heart, will gather together his demons in man's form, and will abominate those who call him to the kingdom, and will pollute many souls."

— Appendix to the Works of Hippolytus, XXV.

**"As these things, therefore, of which we have spoken before are in the future, beloved, when the one week is divided into parts,** and the abomination of desolation has arisen then, and the forerunners of the Lord have finished their proper course, and the whole world, in fine, comes to the consummation, what remains but the manifestation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of God, from heaven, **for whom we have hoped; who shall bring forth fire and all just judgment against those who have refused to believe in Him?** For the Lord says, 'For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be; for wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together."

— Appendix to the Works of Hippolytus, XXXVI.

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"Watch for your life's sake. Let not your lamps be quenched, nor your loins unloosed; **but be ye ready, for ye know not the hour in which our Lord cometh.** But often shall ye come together, seeking the things which are befitting to your souls: for the whole time of your faith will not profit you, if ye be not made perfect in the last time. **For in the last days false prophets and corrupters shall be multiplied, and the sheep shall be turned into wolves, and love shall be turned into hate; for when lawlessness increaseth, they shall hate and persecute and betray one another, and then shall appear the world-deceiver as Son of God, and shall do signs and wonders, and the earth shall be delivered into his hands, and he shall do iniquitous things which have never yet come to pass since the beginning.** Then shall the creation of men come into the fire of trial, and many shall be made to stumble and shall perish; but they that endure in their faith shall be saved from under the curse itself. And then shall appear the signs of the truth; first, the sign of an out-spreading in heaven; then the sign of the sound of the trumpet; and the third, the resurrection of the dead; yet not of all, but as it is said: **The Lord shall come and all His saints with Him. Then shall the world see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven.**"

— Didache, XVI.

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**"The final stumbling-block (or source of danger) approaches,** concerning which it is written, as Enoch says, 'For for this end the Lord has cut short the times and the days, that His Beloved may hasten; and He will come to the inheritance.' And the prophet also speaks thus: 'Ten kingdoms shall reign upon the earth, and a little king shall rise up after them, who shall subdue under one three of the kings. In like manner Daniel says concerning the same, 'And I beheld the fourth beast, wicked and powerful, and more savage than all the beasts of the earth, and how from it sprang up ten horns, and out of them a little budding horn, and how it subdued under one three of the great horns.' Ye ought therefore to understand. ... We take earnest heed in these last days; for the whole [past] time of your faith will profit you nothing, unless now in this wicked time we also withstand coming sources of danger, as becometh the sons of God. That the Black One may find no means of entrance, let us flee from every vanity, let us utterly hate the works of the way of wickedness. ... Take heed, lest resting at our ease, as those who are the called [of God], we should fall asleep in our sins, and the wicked prince, acquiring power over us, should thrust us away from

the kingdom of the Lord. And all the more attend to this, my brethren, when ye reflect and behold, that after so great signs and wonders were wrought in Israel, they were thus [at length] abandoned. Let us beware lest we be found [fulfilling that saying], as it is written, 'Many are called, but few are chosen.'"

— Epistle of Barnabas, IV.

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"In a still clearer light has John, in the Apocalypse, indicated to the Lord's disciples **what shall happen in the last times, and concerning the ten kings who shall then arise, among whom the empire which now rules [the earth] shall be partitioned.** ... And they shall lay Babylon waste, and burn her with fire, and **shall give their kingdom to the beast, and put the Church to flight.** After that they shall be destroyed by the coming of our Lord."

— Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book V, XXVI.

"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 failing 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 endeavor in a tyrannical manner to set himself forth as God. 2. Moreover, he (the apostle) has also pointed out this which I have shown in many ways, **that the temple in Jerusalem was made by the direction of the true God.** For the apostle himself, speaking in his own person, distinctly called it the temple of God. Now I have shown in the third book, that no one is termed God by the apostles when speaking for themselves, except Him who truly is God, the Father of our Lord, by whose directions the temple which is at Jerusalem was constructed for those purposes which I have already mentioned; **in which [temple] the enemy shall sit, endeavoring to show himself as Christ, as the Lord also declares:** 'But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, which has been spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let him that readeth understand), then let those who are in Judea flee into the mountains; and he who is upon the house-top, let him not come down to take anything out of his house: for there shall then be great hardship, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall be.'"

— Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book V, XXV,1-2.

"This is also the unjust judge, whom the Lord mentioned as one 'who feared not God, neither regarded man,' to whom the widow fled in her forgetfulness of God, - that is, the earthly Jerusalem, - to be avenged of her adversary. Which also he shall do in the time of his kingdom: he shall remove his kingdom into that city, and shall sit in the temple of God leading astray those who worship him, as if he were Christ. To this purpose Daniel says again: '**And he shall desolate the holy place; and sin has been given for a sacrifice, and righteousness been cast away in the earth, and he has been active (fecit), and gone on prosperously.**' ... And then he points out the time that his tyranny shall last, during which the saints shall be put to flight, they who offer a pure sacrifice unto God: And in the midst of the week, he says, **the sacrifice and the libation shall be taken away, and the abomination of desolation shall be brought into the temple: even unto the consummation of the time shall the desolation be complete. Now three years and six months constitute the half-week.**'"

— Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book V, XXV, 2.

"But when this Antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, **he will reign for three years and six months, and sit in the temple at Jerusalem;** and then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who follow him into the lake of fire; but bringing in

for the righteous the times of the kingdom, that is, the rest, the hallowed seventh day; and restoring to Abraham the promised inheritance, in which kingdom the Lord declared, that 'many coming from the east and from the west should sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.'"

— Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book, V, XXX, 4.

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**"For even Antichrist, when he shall begin to come, shall not enter into the Church because he threatens; neither shall we yield to his arms and violence, because he declares that he will destroy us if we resist. ... It matters nothing to us by whom, or when we are slain, since we shall receive from the Lord the reward of our death and of our blood. Their concision is to be mourned and lamented, whom the devil so blinds, that, without considering the eternal punishments of Gehenna, they endeavor to imitate >>>the coming of Antichrist, who is now approaching."**

— Cyprian, Epistle LIV, 19.

"For you ought to know and to believe, and hold it for certain, **that the day of affliction has begun to hang over our heads, and the end of the world and the time of Antichrist to draw near**, so that we must all stand prepared for the battle; nor consider anything but the glory of life eternal, and the crown of the confession of the Lord; and not regard those things which are coming as being such as were those which have passed away. **A severer and a fiercer fight is now threatening, for which the soldiers of Christ ought to prepare themselves** with uncorrupted faith and robust courage, considering that they drink the cup of Christ's blood daily, for the reason that they themselves also may be able to shed their blood for Christ. For this is to wish to be found with Christ, to imitate that which Christ both taught and did, according to the Apostle John, who said, 'He that saith he abideth in Christ, ought himself also so to walk even as He walked.' Moreover, the blessed Apostle Paul exhorts and teaches, saying, 'We are God's children; but if children, then heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.'"

— Cyprian, Epistle LV, 1.

"Nor let any one of you, beloved brethren, be so terrified by the fear of **future persecution, or the coming of the threatening Antichrist**, as not to be found armed for all things by the evangelical exhortations and precepts, and by the heavenly warnings. **Antichrist is coming**, but above him comes Christ also. The enemy goeth about and rageth, but immediately the Lord follows to avenge our sufferings and our wounds. The adversary is enraged and threatens, but there is One who can deliver us from his hands. He is to be feared whose anger no one can escape, as He Himself forewarns, and says: 'Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.' And again: 'He that loveth his life, shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal.' And in the Apocalypse He instructs and forewarns, saying, 'If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead or in his hand, the same also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, mixed in the cup of His indignation, and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torments shall ascend up for ever and ever; and they shall have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image.'"

— Cyprian, Epistle LV, 7.

"Nor let it disturb you, dearest brethren, if with some, in these last times, either an uncertain faith is wavering, or a fear of God without religion is vacillating, or a peaceable concord does not continue. These things have been foretold as about to happen in the end of the world; and it was predicted by the voice of the Lord, and by the testimony of the apostles, that now that the world is failing, and the **Antichrist is drawing near**, everything good shall fail, but evil and adverse things shall prosper."

— Cyprian, Epistle LVXVII, 7.

“Lo, virgins depart in peace, safe with their glory, not fearing the threats of **the coming Antichrist**, and his corruptions and his brothels.”

— Cyprian, Treatise VII, 15.

“You have desired, beloved Fortunatus that, 1 since the burden of persecutions and afflictions is lying heavy upon us, **and in the ending and completion of the world the hateful time of Antichrist is already beginning to draw near**, I would collect from the sacred Scriptures some exhortations for preparing and strengthening the minds of the brethren, whereby I might animate the soldiers of Christ for the heavenly and spiritual contest.”

— Cyprian, Treatise, XI, 1.