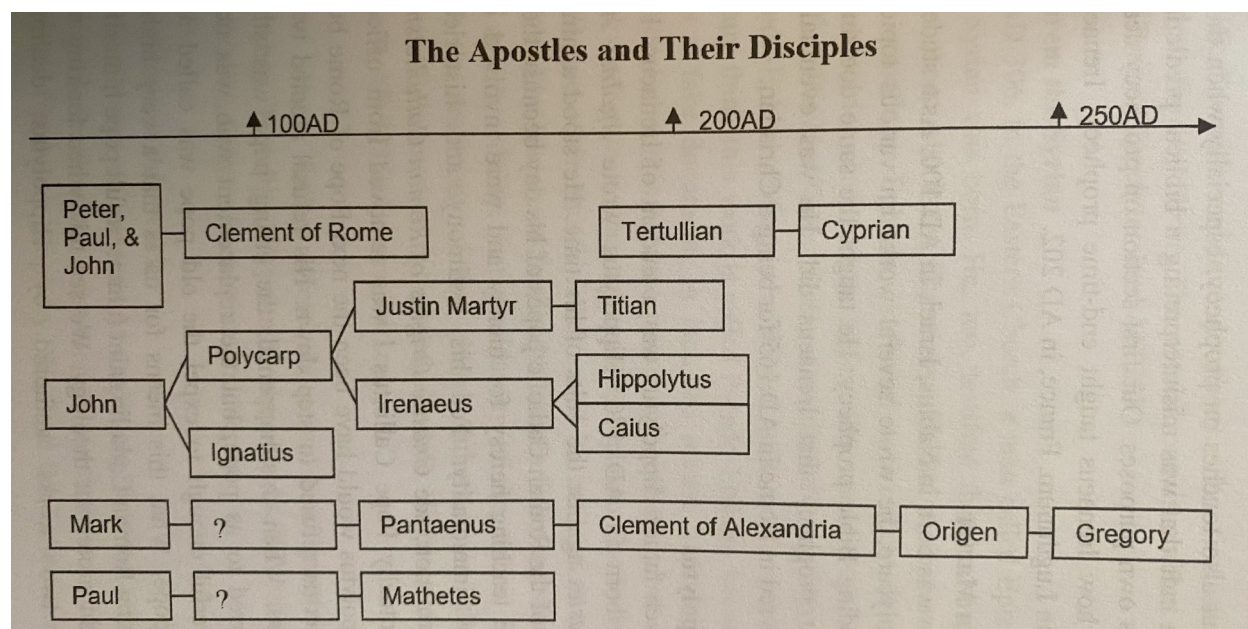


## Teachings Passed Down, Pt 1

(December 29, 2023)

If you want to know what Jesus taught, reading the Bible provides us that picture, whether it was directly from Jesus Himself or from those who followed Him, correct? Isn't that why we read both testaments because in them, we learn about the prophecies that direct our attention to Jesus and we also learn exactly what Jesus taught, either directly or indirectly from those who followed Him for three and a half years. In the case of Paul, we know that he was specifically given information about what he referred to as mysteries that were heretofore unknown. A mystery, as far as Paul is concerned, is something that was simply kept secret (*Ephesians 3:1-9*). Paul was given the privilege of revealing several mysteries pertaining to believers and the Church.



So, if that is why we read the Scriptures, would it also be safe to say that if we read many of the ancient church fathers, we can, in some cases, gain even more information regarding what the *apostles* taught since many to most of the original church fathers were disciples of at least one of the original apostles? I've included a chart from Dr. Ken Johnson's book, *The End-Times by the Ancient Church Fathers*.

I'd like to state clearly that I understand that their writings were not necessarily included in the Canon of Scripture for a variety of reasons, so their writings should not be taken as *inspired* in the way Scripture is inspired. However, they can offer support or additional clarification on specific areas of the Bible because of who they were and the apostles who taught them. In other words, it is safe to say that the ancient church fathers, who were disciples of the original apostles were taught directly by the apostles (as we are when we read Scripture). It is safe to say as well that not everything the apostles taught made it into the Bible. What we have, God provided so that we would know the truth. Studying the writings of the ancient church fathers can flesh out important information.

And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.  
Amen. (John 21:25)

John's point is that he heard and was taught many things by Jesus that did not wind up in God's Word, but none of what John heard or saw is any less inspired. God did not see fit to include everything in Scripture but what He did provide gives us a grand picture of who Jesus is, His authority over humanity and Creation and the fact that He is God the Son, who lived a sinless life, died a sinner's death (without having His own sin), and rose from the dead because death could not hold Him. Because of this, salvation is granted to those who exercise faith in His salvific work.

...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will...(Ephesians 1:4-5)

That's what we need to know. But studying the ancient church fathers provides us with insight into what was taught to *them* and what was generally accepted by those early believers. If we follow that through-line, we will learn that for the first several centuries, things were consistently taught, first by the apostles, then by those who were disciples of the apostles. Things began to go crooked during the third and following centuries. Why? Namely because Gnosticism grew to become a very big deal. In fact, many trace Gnosticism with the origins of the Roman Catholic Church. While I personally believe God *can* and *does* save some within Catholicism who come to believe that salvation has nothing to do with works, the entire theology of Roman Catholicism is built on the lies of faith plus works, which is essentially a form of Gnosticism.

If we read Paul's letters in the New Testament and then read some of the writings of the ancient church fathers, it becomes clear that they all fought the same error: Gnosticism. It began crippling the visible church and continues today.

Reading the ancient church fathers sheds a bit more light on the actual problems of Gnosticism and how it grew to be such a huge problem, even causing the Roman Catholic Church to come to fruition. Once RC came to the fore, it eclipsed mainline Christianity, literally shoving it off the table. People were told they should not read the Bible because only those trained in understanding it would explain it to them. By the way, this is the same argument that Muslim Imams use to keep other Muslims from studying the Qur'an on their own.

It is safe to say that if the ancient church fathers gained their knowledge regarding the Scriptures from the apostles, by and large, the same ancient church fathers would then simply pass along what they had personally learned from those apostles. Interestingly enough, we see this very clearly as we study the church fathers' writings.

One such topic has to do with the End Times, including the Tribulation and the Rapture. Many continue to inaccurately portray the Rapture itself (specifically the PreTrib Rapture), as being new (circa 1800s),

from Darby, then C I Scofield. The problem with this view is that it is not accurate *IF* we go back to the early church fathers and their specific writings.

If the argument that the PreTrib Rapture was a fairly modern contrivance, then we would *not* expect to see any sign of it in the writings of the ancient church fathers. However, this is not the case and it is not merely the Rapture that they discuss either.

It is interesting to learn for instance, that most of the early church fathers believed Jesus would return to this earth in the Jewish year 6,000. They believe His first coming occurred 4,000 after God had created (**Genesis 1-2**). What this means if the math is done is that an approximate date or range of His return could fall between 2030 and 2067. Barnabas covers this in detail in *The Epistle of Barnabas*. Other church fathers like Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Commodianus, Victorinus, Methodius and Lactantius also discuss this same topic, citing that they believe the coming physical Millennial Kingdom represents not only 1,000 years, but the final “sabbath rest” for all believers.

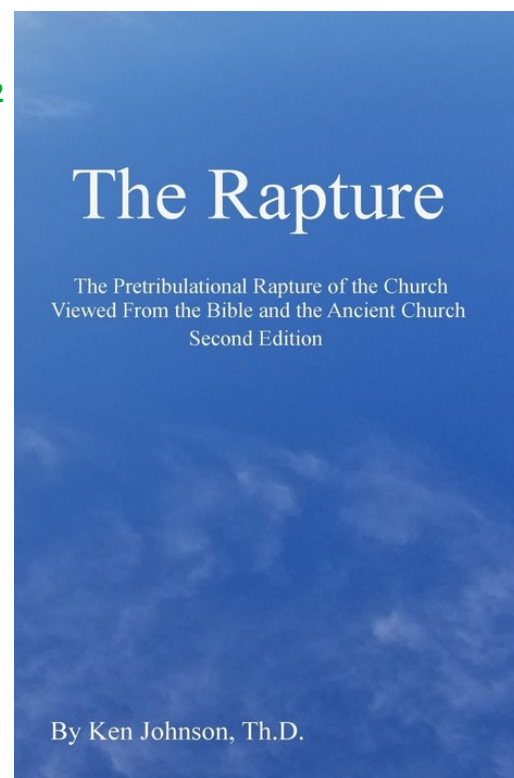
In another book by Ken Johnson, titled *The Rapture*, he cites many references to the Rapture, including Paul’s first and second letter to the Thessalonians. He also speaks of the order that Paul defines in **2 Thessalonians 2**. In fairness to all, the author deals with arguments *against* the Pretribulationism itself as well as scriptural objections against it. He also goes back to the first and second centuries to see what the ancient church fathers believed and taught regarding the Rapture itself and gleans information from the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures as well.

Dr. Johnson outlines the fact that he believes the first century church was PreMillennial and discusses the “day of the Lord” and the “day of Christ.” There’s a great deal here, including Johnson’s commentary on many prophecies dealing with the End Times and specifically the seven-year Great Tribulation. He takes the time to break things down, making things very understandable. It’s well-written, in my opinion, and should be at least considered with respect to the information contained within.

It is interesting to see just how many ancient church fathers were PreTrib and PreMillennial. This would lead one to assume that since they learned their theology from the apostles, that the apostles also were PreTrib and PreMillennial. This is, in my opinion, why the Thessalonians were so upset, thinking they had missed the “day of the Lord.” Paul had to remind them what they had talked about though he chose not to elaborate in his letters to them except very briefly.

**Irenaeus believed the following:**

- The Church would apostatize
- Antichrist born in Dan



#### Start of Seven Years

- Rapture of the Church
- Rebuilding of the Temple
- Ten nations destroy Mystery Babylon

#### Middle of Seven Years

- Antichrist sets up desolation of abomination
- Ten nations persecute believers

#### End of Seven Years

- Second Coming
- Establishment of the Millennium
- Building of the Millennial Temple

#### **Ephrem believed the following:**

- Nation of Israel dissolved (AD 132)
- Roman Empire divided (AD 395)
- Christian Byzantine Empire forms (AD 395)
- Western Roman Empire dissolved (AD 476)
- Byzantine-Persian Wars (AD 602-628)
- Christian Byzantine Empire overtaken (AD 1453)
- Desert peoples become warlike (senseless)
- Antichrist born in the Golan
- Worthless ten nations rise

#### Seven Years Begin

- Rapture of the Church
- Antichrist craftily takes the kingdom
- Antichrist appeases the Jews by re-instituting circumcision
- Enoch and Elijah testify 1260 days
- Antichrist wars – Ps 83
- People hide in the rocks from the wars
- Ammon and Moab surrender to Antichrist first

#### Middle of the Seven Years

- Antichrist slays the two witnesses
- Temple sacrifices stopped
- Abomination set up in Temple
- Mark of the Beast implemented

#### End of Seven Years

- Second Coming of Messiah
- Destruction of Antichrist and his kingdom
- Christ's Millennial Kingdom established

#### **Hippolytus believed the following:**

- Jerusalem destroyed by Rome AD 70
- Antichrist born of the circumcision
- Antichrist born of the Tribe of Dan
- Antichrist restores Roman Empire from four pieces

#### Seven Years Begin

- Rapture of believers
- Antichrist raises up a Jewish kingdom
- Antichrist builds the Jerusalem Temple
- Enoch and Elijah witness 1260 days
- Antichrist wars begin
- Jordan submits to Antichrist
- Tyre and Beirut, the first to fall to Antichrist
- Antichrist destroys Egypt, Libya, and Sudan
- the ten nations destroy Babylon

#### Middle of the Seven Years

- Temple sacrifices stopped
- Abomination set up
- Persecution begins

#### End of the Seven Years

- Millennial reign begins

By the way, note that in each case, the Rapture occurs at the start of the Seven Year Tribulation. In essence, they seem to think it would occur just prior to the official start of it. In essence though, as I've said numerous times before, we do not know how bad things will get before the Tribulation begins, do we? We simply know when the Tribulation officially begins, things will be terrible throughout the world. We are certainly seeing that increase now.

If we pull together all that Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Ephrem and the rest of the ancient church fathers taught, a picture emerges.

Approximately two thousand years after Jesus' death on the cross, the Second Coming will occur. This will be the Jewish year 6,000...We could pinpoint the exact day of the Second Coming if the Jewish Calendar were accurate, but we know it is off somewhere between 150 and 220 years. Jesus Christ will physically return to earth and set up a kingdom that will last one thousand years.[1]

Johnson then outlines the beliefs and teachings of these ancient church fathers under the following headings:

- Ancient Rome
- The Church Would Apostatize
- Prior to the Tribulation
- The Birth of the Antichrist
- Toward the Beginning of the Seven Years
- During the First Half of the Tribulation Period
- At the Middle of the Tribulation
- During the Second Half of the Tribulation
- The Second Coming

There are many points including under each heading. What I find fascinating is the fact that we ignore the writings of the ancient church fathers by and large, yet they seem to provide us with a fascinating picture of the burgeoning first century church, what they believed and how error began to creep in.

By the time of the Middle Ages, Roman Catholicism was literally the only real game in town and they kept the average person from not only having their own copy of the Bible but even reading it. Many were martyred who tried to get the Bible into the hands of average Christians. Once the Roman Catholic Church had lost a good amount of power, it was then in the 1700-1800s that people began reading the Bible for themselves.

I would encourage readers to avail themselves of the information presented by the early church fathers. Again, while they are *not* part of the Canon (inspired), they do present a picture of what was believed and taught during their day. More information can be found at this link [2].

[1] Ken Johnson, ThD, *The Rapture*, p138

[2] <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/index.html>