

Quotes From the Early Church Fathers on the 2nd Coming of the Lord

The Didache [The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles]

The "Didache" was probably written in the first century. The word "didache" is the Greek word "teaching." This is the short name for this document which is properly entitled, "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles." Very little is known about this document, except that its internal evidence points to a date sometime between the destruction of Jerusalem, in AD 70, and the end of the first century. The following chapter speaks of Christians preparing themselves to endure the tribulation.

Quote: "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 - Chapter 16]

The Epistle of Barnabas

The Epistle of Barnabas was written in the first century. Some scholars believe it was written by Barnabas, the companion of Paul. This passage is similar to the Didache, in that it is a warning for Christians to be prepared for the tribulation.

Quote: "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 the like manner Daniel says concerning the same, "And I beheld the fourth beast, wicked and powerful, and the 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 ten horns." [see: Dan 7:7,8]... 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 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." [Epistle of Barnabas, IV]

Justin Martyr

Justin was a philosopher - turned Christian. He composed a good deal of Christian literature. The most well known being the transcript of a discussion between Justin and an unbelieving Jew named, Trypho. Justin's defense of Christianity, and the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old Covenant, is nothing short of brilliant. In the following passage, Justin made a statement which clearly shows his views on the rapture. Justin did not take his faith lightly, he was beheaded for his testimony.

Quote: "[T]wo advents of Christ have been announced: the one, in which He is set forth as suffering, inglorious, dishonored, and crucified; but the other, in which He shall come from heaven with glory, when the man of apostasy, who speaks strange things against the Most High, shall venture to do unlawful deeds on the earth AGAINST US THE CHRISTIANS, ... Now it is evident that no one can terrify or subdue us who have believed in Jesus over all the world. For it is plain that, though beheaded, and crucified, and thrown to wild beasts, and chains, and fire, and all other kinds of torture, we do not give up our confession; but the more such things happen, the more do others and in larger numbers become faithful, and worshippers of God through the name of Jesus. [Dialog with Trypho, CX]

Irenaeus

Irenaeus was the pastor of the church at Lyons in the second century. He devoted a large part of his life to learning all the gnostic heretical teachings that had invaded the Church, and composing lengthy and intricate refutations, based on Scripture. In all, he wrote five volumes, which are titled, "Against Heresies, Vol. I-V." In His fifth book, he dealt with eschatology in great detail, clearly expounding the pre-millennial view. And, equally as clear, expounded on the rapture and resurrection after the tribulation. According to Irenaeus, the pre-mill / post-trib view, was the orthodox view, handed down from the Apostles. Incidentally, Irenaeus was a student of Polycarp, the famous martyr of the first century, who was trained personally by the Apostle, John. There are many quotations from this writer which give strong evidence for his views on eschatology, three of which appear below.

Quote: "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, ... These have one mind, and give their strength and power to the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, because He is the Lord of lords, and King of kings. ... 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." [Against Heresies V, XXVI, 1]

"But he indicates the number of the name now, that when this man comes we may avoid him, being aware of who he is:... 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 in 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." [Against Heresies V, XXX, 2,4]

"For all these and other words were unquestionably spoken in reference to 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 of] which [resurrection] the righteous shall reign on the earth, waxing stronger by the sight of the Lord: and through Him they shall become accustomed to partake in the glory of God the Father, and shall enjoy in the kingdom intercourse and communion with the holy angels, and union with spiritual beings; and those whom the Lord shall find in the flesh, awaiting Him from heaven, and who have suffered tribulation, as well as escaped the hands of the Wicked one." [Against Heresies V, XXXV, 1]

The Shepherd of Hermas

The Shepherd of Hermas is a rather odd document from the second century. It contains visions of Hermas. Little is known about Hermas, although his writings were held in high regard by many in the early Church. In some cases, ancient manuscripts [codex] New Testaments, contained the Shepherd of Hermas bound with the books of the New Testament. In the Fourth Vision, Hermas describes a vision of the Church going through the Great Tribulation. Below is a small portion of the Third Vision, and the entire Fourth Vision.

Quote: "You will tell, therefore, those who preside over the Church, to direct their ways in righteousness, that they may receive in full the promises with great glory. Stand steadfast, therefore, ye who work righteousness, and doubt not, that your passage may be with the holy angels. Happy ye who endure the great tribulation that is coming on, and happy they who shall not deny their own life. For the Lord hath sworn by His Son, that those who denied their Lord have abandoned their life in despair, for even now these are to deny Him in the days that are coming." [Third Vision]

"Twenty days after the former vision I saw another vision, brethren a representation of the tribulation that is to come. I was going to a country house along the Campanian road. Now the house lay about ten furlongs from the public road. The district is one rarely traversed. And as I walked alone, I prayed the Lord to complete the revelations which He had made to me through His holy Church, that He might strengthen me, and give repentance to all His servants who were going astray, that His great and glorious name might be glorified because He vouchsafed to show me His marvels. And while I was glorifying Him and giving Him thanks, a voice, as it were, answered me, Doubt not, Hermas; and I began to think with myself, and to say, What reason have I to doubt I who have been established by the Lord, and who have seen such glorious sights? I advanced a little, brethren, and, lo! I see dust rising even to the heavens. I began to

say to myself, Are cattle approaching and raising the dust? It was about a furlong's distance from me. And, lo! I see the dust rising more and more, so that I imagined that it was something sent from God. But the sun now shone out a little, and, lo! I see a mighty beast like a whale, and out of its mouth fiery locusts proceeded. But the size of that beast was about a hundred feet, and it had a head like an urn. I began to weep, and to call on the Lord to rescue me from it. Then I remembered the word which I had heard, Doubt not, O Hermas. **Clothed, therefore, my brethren, with faith in the Lord, and remembering the great things which He had taught me, I boldly faced the beast.** Now that beast came on with such noise and force, that it could itself have destroyed a city. I came near it, and the monstrous beast stretched itself out on the ground, and showed nothing but its tongue, and did not stir at all until I had passed by it. Now the beast had four colors on its head-black, then fiery and bloody, then golden, and lastly white. Now **after I had passed by the wild beast, and had moved forward about thirty feet, lo! a virgin meets me, adorned as if she were proceeding from the bridal chamber, clothed entirely in white, and with white sandals, and veiled up to her forehead, and her head was covered by a hood. And she had white hair. I knew from my former visions that this was the Church,** and I became more joyful. She saluted me, and said, Hail, O man! And I returned her salutation, and said, Lady, hail! And she answered, and said to me, Has nothing crossed your path? I say, I was met by a beast of such a size that it could destroy peoples, but through the power of the Lord and His great mercy I escaped from it. **Well did you escape from it, says she, because you cast your care on God, and opened your heart to the Lord, believing that you can be saved by no other than by His great and glorious name.** On this account the Lord has sent His angel, who has rule over the beasts, and whose name is Thegri, and has shut up its mouth, so that it cannot tear you. **You have escaped from great tribulation on account of your faith,** and because you did not doubt in the presence of such a beast. Go, therefore, and tell the elect of the Lord His mighty deeds, and say to them that **this beast is a type of the great tribulation that is coming. IF THEN YE PREPARE YOURSELVES, and repent with all your heart, and turn to the Lord, it will be possible for you to escape it, if your heart be pure and spotless, and ye spend the rest of the days of your life in serving the Lord blamelessly.** Cast your cares upon the Lord, and He will direct them. Trust the Lord, ye who doubt, for He is all-powerful, and can turn His anger away from you, and send scourges on the doubters. Woe to those who hear these words, and despise them: better were it for them not to have been born. I asked her about the four colors which the beast had on his head. And she answered, and said to me, Again you are inquisitive in regard to such matters. Yea, Lady, said I, make known to me what they are. Listen, said she: the black is the world in which we dwell: but the fiery and bloody points out that the world must perish through blood and fire: but the golden part are you who have escaped from this world. **For as gold is tested by fire, and thus becomes useful, so are you tested who dwell in it. Those, therefore, who continue steadfast, and are put through the fire, will be purified by means of it. For as gold casts away its dross, so also will ye cast away all sadness and straitness, and will be made pure so as to fit into the building of the tower.** But the white part is the age that is to come, in which the elect of God will dwell, since those elected by God to eternal life will be spotless and pure. Wherefore cease not speaking these things into the ears of the saints. **This then is the type of the great tribulation that is to come. If ye wish it, it will be nothing.** Remember those things which were written down before. And saying this, she departed. But I saw not into what place she retired. There was a noise, however, and I turned round in alarm, thinking that that beast was coming. [The Shepherd of Hermas, Fourth Vision]

Tertullian

Like Irenaeus, **Tertullian wrote a considerable amount of material concerning eschatology.** His views on the tribulation and rapture are clear from the quotations below.

Quote: "In the Revelation of John, again, the order of these times is spread out to view, which "the souls of the martyrs" are taught to wait for beneath the altar, whilst they earnestly pray to be avenged and judged: (taught, I say, to wait), in order that the world may first drink to the dregs the plagues that await it out of the vials of the angels, and that the city of fornication may receive from the ten kings its deserved doom, and that **the beast Antichrist, with his false prophet may wage war on the Church of God;** and that, **after the casting of the devil into the bottomless pit for a while, the blessed prerogative of the first resurrection may be obtained from the thrones;** and then again, after the consignment of him to the fire, that the judgment of the final and universal resurrection may be determined out of the books. Since, then, the

Scriptures both indicate the stages of the last times, and concentrate the harvest of the Christian hope in the very end of the world." [On the Resurrection of the Flesh, XXV] [7]

"Now the privilege of this favor [the resurrection] awaits those who shall at the coming of the Lord be found in the flesh, and who shall, owing to the oppressions of the time of Antichrist, deserve by an instantaneous death, which is accomplished by a sudden change, to become qualified to join the rising saints; as he writes to the Thessalonians: "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we too shall ourselves be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

[On the Resurrection of the Flesh, XLI]

Notice the Tertullian interpreted the famous rapture passage, in 1 Thess 4, in a POST-TRIB context.

Hippolytus

Hippolytus was a disciple of Irenaeus. He took up the task of refuting the heresies of the gnostics, that Irenaeus had begun. **Like his mentor, Hippolytus was clearly pre-millennial, and post-tribulational.**

Quote: "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.** [Fragments of Commentaries, II, 7]

"It is proper that we take the Holy Scriptures themselves in hand, and find out from them what, and of what manner, **the coming of Antichrist** is; on what occasion and at what time that impious one shall be revealed; and whence and **from what tribe (he shall come)**; and what his name is, which is indicated by the number in Scripture; and how he shall work error among the people, gathering them from the ends of the earth; and (how) he **shall stir up tribulation and persecution against the saints**; and how he shall glorify himself as God; and what his end shall be; and how the sudden appearing of the Lord shall be revealed from heaven; and what the conflagration of the whole world shall be; and what the glorious and heavenly kingdom of the saints is to be, when they reign together with Christ; and what the punishment of the wicked by fire." [Treatise on Christ and Antichrist, 5]

"With respect to his name, it is not in our power to explain it exactly, as the blessed John understood it and was instructed about it, but only to give a conjectural account of it; for when he appears, the blessed one will show us what we seek to know. ... Wherefore we ought neither to give it out as if this were certainly his name, nor again ignore the fact that he may not otherwise be designated. But having the mystery of God in our heart, we ought in fear to keep faithfully what has been told us by blessed prophets, in order that when those things come to pass, we may be prepared for them, and not be deceived. For when the times advance, he too, of whom these things are said, will be manifest." [Treatise on Christ and Antichrist, 50]

"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." [Treatise on Christ and Antichrist, 60, 61, 64]

Cyprian

In the following quote, Cyprian commented on the Olivet Discourse, which only speaks of a post-trib rapture. He clearly applied this passage to the Church. [Pre-tribbers deny that this passage applies to the Church in order to avoid a post-trib rapture].

"[T]he Lord hath foretold that these things would come. With the exhortation of His foreseeing word, instructing, and teaching, and **preparing, and strengthening the people of His Church for all endurance of things to come.** **He predicted and said that wars, and famines, and earthquakes, and pestilences**

would arise in each place; and lest an unexpected and new dread of mischiefs should shake US, He previously warned us that the adversary would increase more and more in the last times." [Treatise VII, 2]

"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.**" ... For there comes the time, beloved brethren, which our Lord long ago foretold and taught us was approaching, saying, "**The time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.** And these things they will do unto you, because they have not known the Father nor me. **But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them.**" Nor let any one wonder that we are harassed with increasing afflictions, when **the Lord before predicted that these things would happen in the last times,** and has instructed us for the warfare by the teaching and exhortation of His words. Peter also, His apostle, has taught that persecutions occur for the sake of our being proved, and that we also should, by the example of righteous men who have gone before us, be joined to the love of God by death and sufferings. For he wrote in his epistle, and said, "**Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, nor do ye fall away, as if some new thing happened unto you; but as often as ye partake in Christ's sufferings, rejoice in all things, that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.**" [Epistles of Cyprian, LV, 1,2]

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.**"

For the secular contest men are trained and prepared, and reckon it a great glory of their honor if it should happen to them to be crowned in the sight of the people, and in the presence of the emperor. Behold a lofty and great contest, glorious also with the reward of a heavenly crown, inasmuch as God looks upon us as we struggle, and, extending His view over those whom He has condescended to make His sons, He enjoys the spectacle of our contest. **God looks upon us in the warfare, and fighting in the encounter of faith; His angels look on us, and Christ looks on us.** How great is the dignity, and how great the happiness of the glory, to engage in the presence of God, and to be crowned, with Christ for a judge! Let us be armed, beloved brethren, with our whole strength, and **let us be prepared for the struggle with an uncorrupted mind, with a sound faith, with a devoted courage.** Let the camp of God go forth to the battle-field which is appointed to us. Let the sound ones be armed, lest he that is sound should lose the advantage of having lately stood; let the lapsed also be armed, that even the lapsed may regain what he has lost: let honor provoke the whole; let sorrow provoke the lapsed to the battle. The Apostle Paul teaches us to be armed and prepared, saying, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against powers, and the princes of this world and of this darkness, against spirits of wickedness in high places. **Wherefore put on the whole armor, that ye may be able to withstand in THE MOST EVIL DAY,** that when ye have done all ye may stand; having your loins girt about with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the

preparation of the Gospel of peace; taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one; and the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." [Epistles of Cyprian, LV, 7,8]

I find it quite interesting that Cyprian interpreted Paul's instructions about putting on the armor of God, in a tribulation context. The "most evil day" is the tribulation, according to Cyprian.

Victorinus

In the third century, Victorinus wrote a commentary on the book of Revelation. Throughout this commentary, it is abundantly clear, that he believed Christians would go through the tribulation. As in all the other early Church Fathers, there is not the slightest hint that they ever heard of a pre-trib rapture.

"He speaks of **Elias the prophet, who is the precursor of the times of Antichrist, for the restoration and establishment of the churches from the great and intolerable persecution.**" [Commentary on the Apocalypse, 7:2]

"The woman clothed with the sun, and having the moon under her feet, and wearing the crown of twelve stars upon her head, and travailing in her pains, is the ancient Church of fathers, and prophets, and saints, and apostles,..." [Commentary on the Apocalypse, 12:1]

"He shall cause also that a golden image of Antichrist shall be placed in the temple at Jerusalem, and that the apostate angel should enter, and thence utter voices and oracles. ... [T]he Lord, admonishing His churches concerning the last times and their dangers, says: "But when ye shall see the contempt which is spoken of by Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place, let him who readeth understand." [Commentary on the Apocalypse, 13:13]

"[T]he thousand years should be completed, that is, what is left of the sixth day, to wit, of the sixth age, which subsists of a thousand years; after this he must be loosed for a little season. The little season signifies **three years and six months, in which with all his power the devil will avenge himself under Antichrist against the Church.**" [Commentary on the Apocalypse, 20:1-3]

Constitutions of the Holy Apostles

This document is anonymous, and the date uncertain. But, it is **believed to be from the period before the Nicene Counsel, in AD 325.** Like the Didache, and the Epistle of Barnabas, **it gives instruction and warning concerning Christians being prepared for the tribulation.**

"Be watchful for your life. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye like unto men who wait for their Lord, and when He will come, at even, or in the morning, or at cock-crowing, or at midnight. For at what hour they think not, the Lord will come; and if they open to Him, blessed are those servants, because they were found watching. For He will gird Himself, and will make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them." Watch therefore, and pray, that ye do not sleep unto death. For **your former good deeds will not profit you, if at the last part of your life you go astray from the true faith.** For in the last days false prophets shall be multiplied, and such as corrupt the Word; and the sheep shall be changed into wolves, and love into hatred: for through the abounding of iniquity the love of many shall wax cold. For **men shall hate, and persecute, and betray one another.** And **then shall appear the deceiver of the world, the enemy of the truth, the prince of lies,** whom the Lord Jesus "shall destroy with the Spirit of His mouth, who takes away the wicked with His lips; and many shall be offended at Him. But **they that endure to the end, the same shall be saved.** And **then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and afterwards shall be the voice of a trumpet by the archangel; and in that interval shall be the revival of those that were asleep. And then shall the Lord come, and all the saints with Him,** with a great concussion above the clouds, with the angels of His power, in the throne of His kingdom, to condemn the devil, the deceiver of the world, and to render to every one according to his deeds. "Then shall the wicked go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous shall go into life eternal," to inherit those things "which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, such things as God hath prepared for them that love Him." [Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, Book VII, XXXI, XXXII]