

The Early Church and the Futurity of Daniel's 70 Weeks

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A common claim is that futurism is a modern invention. Yet the early Church left clear evidence that they expected part of Daniel's 70 Weeks prophecy to remain future, culminating in the rise of Antichrist and the return of Christ.

Here are direct citations:

Irenaeus (c. 180 AD)

“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... sending this man and those who follow him into the lake of fire.”
Against Heresies 5.25.4

Irenaeus directly places the final half of Daniel's 70th week in the future, tied to the Antichrist and the Second Coming.

Hippolytus of Rome (c. 200-230 AD)

“For when the 70 weeks are fulfilled, and the world has come to the consummation, then the reign of the Antichrist will appear, the desolator, who will wage war against the saints.” On Christ and Antichrist, 27

Hippolytus clearly affirms that the completion of the 70 weeks coincides with the appearance of Antichrist, which for him was future.

Tertullian (c. 200 AD)

“The times of the coming destruction of the city have been foretold. For Daniel says, ‘And the holy city shall be trodden under foot until seventy weeks are completed.’ This is the period when Antichrist will reign, who shall desolate the earth for 3 years and 6 months, and sit in the temple at Jerusalem.” An Answer to the Jews, 8

Tertullian connects Daniel's prophecy with the future Antichrist, not with a past-only fulfillment.

Julius Africanus (c. 200-240 AD)

“In regard to the seventy weeks which were spoken of in Daniel, it is necessary to understand that of these, sixty-nine weeks are fulfilled until the coming of Christ, after which the last week will be fulfilled at the end, when Antichrist shall appear, who will devastate the holy city, and then the judgment will come upon him.” Chronographiai, Fragment 18.2 (preserved by Eusebius, Praeparatio Evangelica 10.10)

Africanus explicitly taught a futurist view: 69 weeks to Christ's first coming, with the final 70th week still future, fulfilled in Antichrist.

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 350 AD)

“This Antichrist shall come when the times of the Roman Empire shall be fulfilled, and the consummation of the world is approaching. Ten kings of the Romans shall arise together, and a little eleventh shall spring up after them, who is the Antichrist... He shall prevail for three years and a half only.” Catechetical Lectures, 15.15

Cyril interprets Daniel's prophecy of the “little horn” (Daniel 7 and 9) as still future, culminating in Antichrist's short reign.

Jerome (c. 400 AD)

While he himself leans toward a Christological fulfillment (Christ ending sacrifices), he still faithfully records that “many of our church writers” held the futurist position, the 70th week remaining unfulfilled until Antichrist.

“Some of our church writers refer this passage to the Antichrist, and maintain that the last week shall be fulfilled at the end of the world. For he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; and in the middle of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease.” Commentary on Daniel 9:27

Conclusion

Far from being a modern innovation, futurism has deep roots in early Christian exegesis. Leading voices of the first four centuries—Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Tertullian, Cyril, and

Africanus—all testify that the final portion of Daniel's 70 Weeks prophecy remains unfulfilled, awaiting the rise of Antichrist and the return of Christ.

This shows that the futurist understanding is not a novelty, but a recovery of the original expectation of the early Church.