

Early Church Fathers on the Timing of the Rise of Antichrist

2 Th 2:1 Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,
2 Th 2:2 That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.
2 Th 2:3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;
2 Th 2:4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.
2 Th 2:5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?
2 Th 2:6 And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.
2 Th 2:7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.
2 Th 2:8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:
2 Th 2:9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,
2 Th 2:10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.
2 Th 2:11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:
2 Th 2:12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Note that in the above passage, Paul tells the church at Thessalonica that the second coming is not near, that there must be a falling away from the faith, a great apostasy that must happen first. Second, the man of sin, the Antichrist must be revealed, but he was being prevented from rising to power by an entity that the Thessalonians already knew about (v.6), because Paul had already told them about it (v.5).

Paul distinctly tells us that he knew, and that the Thessalonians knew, what that hindrance was, and that it was then in existence. The early Church, through the writings of the Fathers, tells us what it knew upon the subject, and with remarkable unanimity affirms that this "let," or hindrance, was the *Roman empire as governed by the Caesars*; that while the Caesars held imperial power, it was impossible for the predicted antichrist to arise, and that on the fall of the Caesars he *would* arise. Here we have a point on which Paul affirms the existence of knowledge in the Christian Church. The early Church knew, he says, what this hindrance was. The early Church tells us what it did know upon the subject, and no one in these days can be in a position to contradict its testimony as to what Paul had, by word of

mouth only, told the Thessalonians. It is a point on which ancient tradition alone *can* have any authority. Modern speculation is positively impertinent on such a subject.¹

¹ As to the "let" or hindrance to the manifestation of the "man of sin" referred to in 2 Thess. ii., Mr. Elliott says: "We have the consenting testimony of the early Fathers, from Ireneus, the disciple of the disciple of St. John, down to Chrysostom and Jerome, to the effect that it was understood to be the *imperial power* ruling and residing at Rome." — "Horae Apocalypticae," vol. iii., p. 92.

Romanism and the reformation: from the standpoint of prophecy, by Henry Grattan Guinness, Hodder and Stoughton, 1887, [pg. 194](#).

St. Justin Martyr (c. 100-165)

DIALOGUE WITH TRYPHO

CHAPTER XXXII -- TRYPHO OBJECTING THAT CHRIST IS DESCRIBED AS GLORIOUS BY DANIEL, JUSTIN DISTINGUISHES TWO ADVENTS.

... and he whom Daniel foretells would have dominion for a time, and times, and an half, is even already at the door, about to speak blasphemous and daring things against the Most High. ...

Source: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0128.htm>

St. Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-202)

Adversus haereses (inter A.D. 180/199)

Book V, Chapter 26

John and Daniel have predicted the dissolution and desolation of the Roman Empire, which shall precede the end of the world and the eternal Kingdom of Christ. The Gnostics are refuted, those tools of Satan, who invent another Father different from the Creator.

1. 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. He teaches us what the ten horns shall be which were seen by Daniel, ...

Source: <http://newadvent.org/fathers/0103526.htm>

Book V, Chapter 30

Moreover, another danger, by no means trifling, shall overtake those who falsely presume that they know the name of Antichrist. For if these men assume one [number], when this [Antichrist] shall come having another, they will be easily led away by him, as supposing him not to be the expected one, who must be guarded against.

2. These men, therefore, ought to learn [what really is the state of the case], and go back to the true number of the name, that they be not reckoned

among false prophets. But, knowing the sure number declared by Scripture, that is, six hundred sixty and six, let them await, in the first place, the division of the kingdom into ten; then, in the next place, when these kings are reigning, and beginning to set their affairs in order, and advance their kingdom, [let them learn] to acknowledge that he who shall come claiming the kingdom for himself, and shall terrify those men of whom we have been speaking, having a name containing the aforesaid number, is truly the abomination of desolation. ...

3. It is therefore more certain, and less hazardous, to await the fulfillment of the prophecy, than to be making surmises, and casting about for any names that may present themselves, inasmuch as many names can be found possessing the number mentioned; and the same question will, after all, remain unsolved. For if there are many names found possessing this number, it will be asked which among them shall the coming man bear. It is not through a want of names containing the number of that name that I say this, but on account of the fear of God, and zeal for the truth: for the name Evanthas (EUAN QAS) contains the required number, but I make no allegation regarding it. Then also Lateinos (LATEINOS) has the number six hundred and sixty-six; and it is a very probable [solution], this being the name of the last kingdom [of the four seen by Daniel]. For the Latins are they who at present bear rule: ...

Source: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103530.htm>

Tertullian (2nd-3rd Century)

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now hinders must hinder, until he be taken out of the way." 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)? "And then shall be revealed the wicked one, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming: even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish."

Source: <http://newadvent.org/fathers/0301.htm>

CHAP. XXXII.

There is also another and a greater necessity for our offering prayer in behalf of the emperors, nay, for the complete stability of the empire, and for Roman interests in general. For we know that a mighty shock is (43) pending over the whole earth--in fact, the very end of all things threatening dreadful woes---is only retarded by the continued existence of the Roman empire. We have no desire, then, to be overtaken by these dire events; and in praying that their coming may be delayed, we are lending our aid to Rome's duration.

Source: <http://newadvent.org/fathers/0301.htm>

Hippolytus (3rd Century)

TREATISE ON CHRIST AND ANTICHRIST.

25. Then he says: "A fourth beast, dreadful and terrible; it had iron teeth and claws of brass." And who are these but the Romans? which (kingdom) is meant by the iron--the kingdom which is now established; for the legs of that (image) were of iron. And after this, what remains, beloved, but the toes of the feet of the image, in which part is iron and part clay, mixed together?

And mystically by the toes of the feet he meant the kings who are to arise from among them; as Daniel also says (in the words), "I considered the beast, and lo there were ten horns behind it, among which shall rise another (horn), an offshoot, and shall pluck up by the roots the three (that were) before it."

And under this was signified none other than Antichrist, who is also himself to raise the kingdom of the Jews. He says that three horns are plucked up by the root by him, viz., the three kings of Egypt, and Libya, and Ethiopia, whom he cuts off in the array of battle. And he, after gaining terrible power over all, being nevertheless a tyrant, shall stir up tribulation and persecution against men, exalting himself against them. For Daniel says: "I considered the horn, and behold that horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them, till the beast was slain and perished, and its body was given to the burning of fire."

26. ...

27. 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.

28. 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.

Source: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0516.htm>

St. Cyprian of Carthage (3rd Century)

TREATISE XI.

EXHORTATION TO MARTYRDOM, ADDRESSED TO FORTUNATUS.

PREFACE.

1. You have desired, beloved Fortunatus that, I 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.

Source: <http://newadvent.org/fathers/0507.htm>

Lactantius Firminianus (4th Century)

Divine Institutions (Divinae Institutiones)

Book VII, Chapter 25, OF THE LAST TIMES, AND OF THE CITY OF ROME:

These are the things which are spoken of by the prophets as about to happen hereafter: ... The subject itself declares that the fall and ruin of the world will shortly take place; except that while the city of Rome remains it appears that nothing of this kind is to be feared. But when that capital of the world shall have fallen, and shall have begun to be a street, which the Sibyls say shall come to pass, who can doubt that the end has now arrived to the affairs of men and the whole world? It is that city, that only, which still sustains all things; and the God of heaven is to be entreated by us and implored -- if, indeed, His arrangements and decrees can be delayed -- lest, sooner than we think for, that detestable tyrant should come who will trade-take so great a deed, and dig out that eye, by the destruction of which the world itself is about to fall.

Source: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/07017.htm>

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315-386) Doctor of the Church

Catechetical Lectures

LECTURE XV.

ON THE CLAUSE, AND SHALL COME IN GLORY TO JUDGE THE QUICK AND THE DEAD; OF WHOSE KINGDOM THERE SHALL BE NO END, DANIEL vii. 9--14.

12. But this aforesaid Antichrist is to come when the times of the Roman empire shall have been fulfilled, and the end of the world is now drawing near. There shall rise up together ten kings of the Romans, reigning in different parts perhaps, but all about the same time; 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 to himself. At first indeed he will put on a show of mildness (as though he were a learned and discreet person), and of soberness and benevolence: and by the lying [108] signs and wonders of his magical deceit a having beguiled the Jews,

as though he were the expected Christ, he shall afterwards be characterized by all kinds of crimes of inhumanity and lawlessness, so as to outdo all unrighteous and ungodly men who have gone before him displaying against all men, but especially against us Christians, a spirit murderous and most cruel, merciless and crafty. And 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, our Lord and Saviour Jesus, the true Christ, who shall slay Antichrist with the breath of His mouth, and shall deliver him over to the fire of hell.

Source: <http://newadvent.org/fathers/310115.htm>

St. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407) Doctor of the Church

Homilies on Second Thessalonians

HOMILY IV. 2 THESSALONIANS ii. 6--9.

"And now ye know that which restraineth, to the end that he may be revealed in his own season. For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work: only there is one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of His coming: even he whose coming is according to the working of Satan."

ONE may naturally enquire, what is that which withholdeth, and after that would know, why Paul expresses it so obscurely. What then is it that withholdeth, that is, hindereth him from being revealed? Some indeed say, the grace of the Spirit, but others the Roman empire, to whom I most of all accede. Wherefore? Because if he meant to say the Spirit, he would not have spoken obscurely, but plainly, that even now the grace of the Spirit, that is the gifts, withhold him. And otherwise he ought now to have come, if he was about to come when the gifts ceased; for they have long since ceased. But because he said this of the Roman empire, he naturally glanced at it, and speaks covertly and darkly. For he did not wish to bring upon himself superfluous enmities, and useless dangers. ... And he did not say that it will be quickly, although he is always saying it--but what? "that he may be revealed in his own season," he says, "For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work." He speaks here of Nero, as if he were the type of Antichrist. For he too wished to be thought a god. And he has well said, "the mystery"; that is, it worketh not openly, as the other, nor without shame. For if there was found a man before that time, he means, who was not much behind Antichrist in wickedness, what wonder, if there shall now be one? But he did not also wish to point him out plainly: and this not from cowardice, but instructing us not to bring upon ourselves unnecessary enmities, when there is nothing to call for it. So indeed he also says here. "Only there is one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way," that is, when the Roman empire is taken out of the way, then he shall come. And naturally. For as long as the fear of this empire lasts, no one will willingly exit himself, but when that is dissolved, he will attack the anarchy, and endeavor to seize upon the government both of man and of God. For as the kingdoms before this were destroyed, for example, that of the Medes by the Babylonians, that

of the Babylonians by the Persians, that of the Persians by the Macedonians, that of the Macedonians by the Romans: so will this also be by the Antichrist, and he by Christ, and it will no longer withhold. And these things Daniel delivered to us with great clearness.

"And then," he says, "shall be revealed the lawless one." And what after this? The consolation is at hand. "Whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of His coming, even he whose coming is according to the working of Satan."

Source: <http://newadvent.org/fathers/23054.htm>

St. Jerome (c. 340-420) Doctor of the Church

Commentary on Daniel, Chapter 7, Verse 8:

"... We should therefore concur with the traditional interpretation of all the commentators of the Christian Church, that at the end of the world, when the Roman Empire is to be destroyed, there shall be ten kings who will partition the Roman world amongst themselves. Then an insignificant eleventh king will arise, who will overcome three of the ten kings, ..."

Source: http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/jerome_daniel_02_text.htm

Letter CXXIII

TO AGERUCHIA (409)

16. But what am I doing? Whilst I talk about the cargo, the vessel itself founders. He that letteth is taken out of the way, and yet we do not realize that Antichrist is near. Yes, Antichrist is near whom the Lord Jesus Christ "shall consume with the spirit of his mouth." "Woe unto them," he cries, "that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days." ...

17. ... For thirty years the barbarians burst the barrier of the Danube and fought in the heart of the Roman Empire. Long use dried our tears. For all but a few old people had been born either in captivity or during a blockade, and consequently they did not miss a liberty which they had never known. Yet who will hereafter credit the fact or what histories will seriously discuss it, that Rome has to fight within her own borders not for glory but for bare life; ...

Source: <http://newadvent.org/fathers/3001123.htm>

St. Augustine of Hippo (345 - 430) Doctor of the Church

City of God, Book XX, Chapter 19

For what does he [Paul] mean by "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now holdeth, let him hold until he be taken out of the way: and then shall the wicked be revealed?" [2 Thess 2] I frankly confess I do not know what he means. ... However, it is not absurd to believe that

these words of the apostle, "Only he who now holdeth, let him hold until he be taken out of the way," refer to the Roman empire, as if it were said, "Only he who now reigneth, let him reign until he be taken out of the way." "And then shall the wicked be revealed:" no one doubts that this means Antichrist.

Source: <http://newadvent.org/fathers/120120.htm>

The testimony is clear, the early church fathers quoted above generally expected the Antichrist to rise to power very soon after the fall of pagan Rome as prophesied in the book of Daniel, chapter 7. At the time that Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, the Caesars ruled, and until they were removed they restrained the Antichrist from rising to prominence and exercising his power. This is why Paul could not speak openly about the restrainer in his letter, because he did not want to invite unnecessary persecution by identifying Rome openly and predicting its demise. Pagan Rome's rule ended in 476 A.D., so the above fathers were writing, in some cases, hundreds of years before the event, demonstrating that they understood prophecy, at least on that point.

There is only one entity that fulfills the timing spoken of by Paul, and expounded upon by the above quoted church fathers, which rose in prominence after the fall and division of the Roman empire in the 5th century, and subsequently took control of *both* civil and ecclesiastical governments, ruling for 1260 years (3 1/2 times) exactly as prophesied, and that is the papacy of the Roman Catholic Church, from 538 A.D. to 1798 A.D.

Pope Pius IX (1846-1878) gave this remarkable testimony, which when examined in conjunction with Daniel chapter 7, precisely identifies the little horn, the man of sin, the Antichrist power:

The Catholic Church which was founded and instituted by Our Lord Jesus Christ to procure the eternal salvation of men, has, by reason of this divine institution, the form of a perfect society. Therefore, she must possess liberty such that she cannot be subject to any civil power in the execution of her sacred ministry.

To act with freedom, as it is just she should, she has always needed the assistance which was suitable to the conditions and the necessities of the age. It is, therefore, by a particular decree of Divine Providence that, at the fall of the Roman Empire and its partition into separate kingdoms, the Roman Pontiff, whom Christ made the head and center of his entire Church, acquired civil power.

Certainly, it was by a most wise design of God Himself that in the midst of so great a multitude and variety of temporal princes, the Sovereign Pontiff enjoyed political liberty, which is so necessary for him to exercise his spiritual power, his authority, and his jurisdiction over the whole world.—
Pius IX, Apostolic Letter *Cum Catholica Ecclesia*, March 26, 1860.

Source: *Papal Teachings: The Church*, selected and arranged by the Benedictine Monks

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