

The Earliest Church's Teachings On The Eschatology

Lesson 4

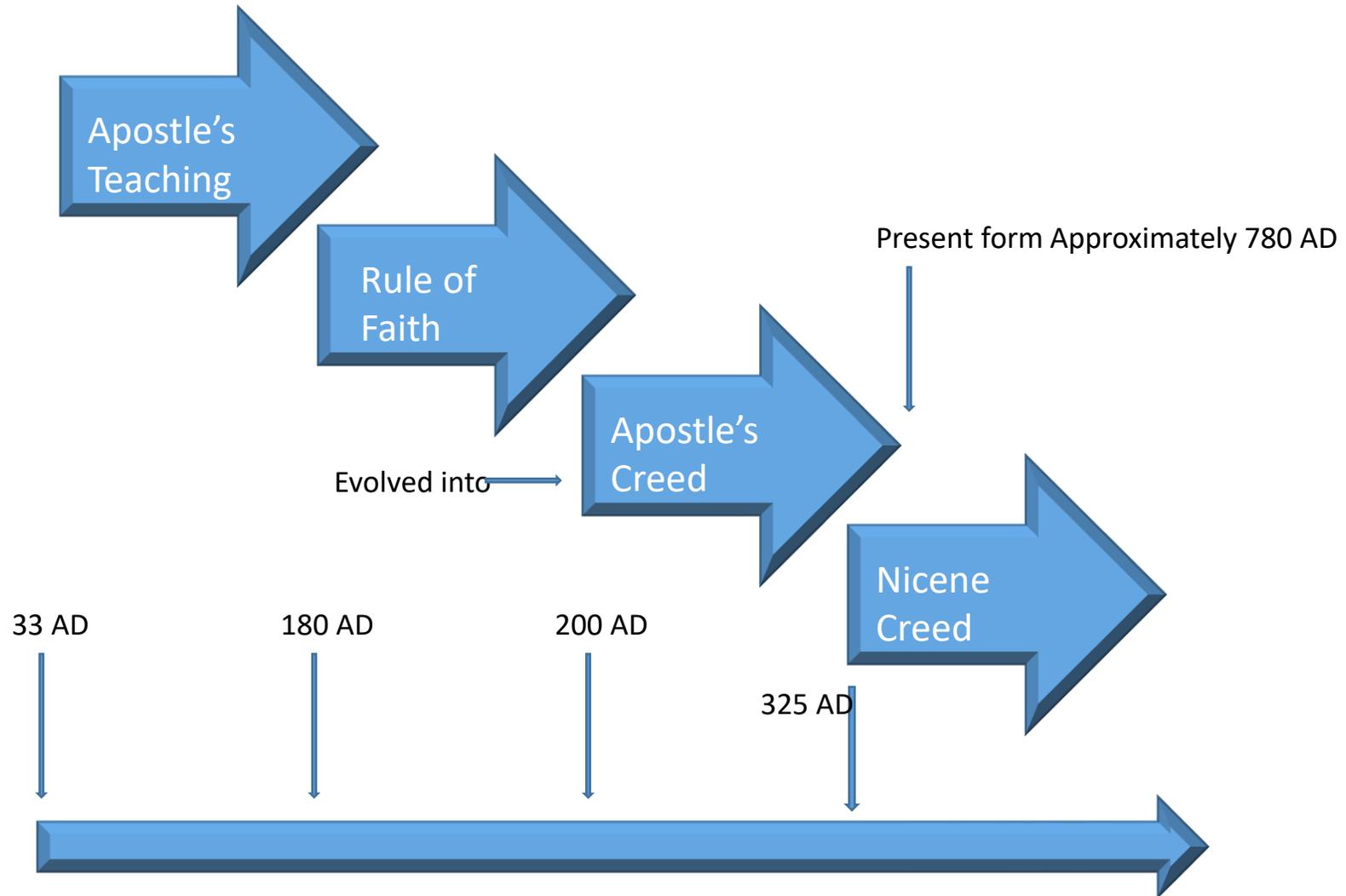
Essential Truths

- As early as the mid-second century AD, faithful Christians were known to disagree about the details of Jesus' return and how time would end.
- Complete consensus among all Christians is not the most important goal when exploring the end times. The goal of God's work and the church's fellowship is to glorify Jesus, the "beginning and the end" of God's plan ([Revelation 22:13](#))
- The question shouldn't be what needs to happen for all Christians to agree. Rather, we should ask how can my (our) knowledge of the end times reveal more of the splendor of Jesus and the wonder of His gospel? And, how will this change my life and my worship of God Almighty?
- Thus, we need to distinguish between essential and non-essential truths.

Three Orders of Theological Issues

- First-order issues: Doctrines that are **essential** to the Christian faith, such as the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, justification by faith, the authority of Scripture, and the bodily return of Jesus. ***First-order doctrines represent the most fundamental truths of the Christian faith, and a denial of these doctrines represents nothing less than an eventual denial of Christianity itself.***
- Second-order issues: **Non-essential** doctrines on which ***believing Christians may disagree but which will result in significant boundaries between congregations.*** Whether to baptize infants or believers is a second-order issue. The question of whether women should be ordained as church leaders also belongs to the second order, etc...
- Third-order issues: **Non-essential** issues over ***which Christians should learn to disagree agreeably.*** “Christians who affirm the bodily, historical, and victorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ may differ over timetable and sequence without rupturing the fellowship of the church. Christians may find themselves in disagreement over any number of issues related to the interpretation of difficult texts or the understanding of matters of common disagreement. Nevertheless, standing together on issues of more urgent importance, believers are able to accept one another without compromise when third-order issues are in question

Early Essential Creeds



Rule of Faith

- As Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire in the first two centuries, false teachers were spreading deviant forms of faith.
- Around 200 AD in order to protect congregations from these false teachings, a summary of essential beliefs that could be traced back to the apostles emerged very early in the church's history. The summary became known as the "Rule of Faith."
 - New believers were required to memorize the truths found in the "Rule" before they were baptized.
 - Although the precise wording of the Rule of Faith varied slightly from church to church, the same essential truths could be found in each variation.
 - Also known as Law of Faith, Rule of Truth, Norm of Truth
- The Rule of Faith affirmed three essential truths when it came to the end times
 - Declares that Jesus sat at the Father's right hand and will come again.
 - Declares the resurrection of the flesh.
 - Declares that Jesus would judge the living and the dead.

Essential/Non-Essential End of Time Teachings since Rule of Faith

Essential Truth about the end of time	Scripture	What early Christians said ...	Non-essential details about this essential truth.
Jesus will return to earth in bodily form at some point in the future	Isaiah 33:13-19 , Matthew 24:36-44 , Mark 13:32-37 , Acts 1:11 , Titus 2:13 , Hebrews 9:28 , 1 John 2:28	The church believes in ... the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Messiah, Jesus our Lord, and in his revelation from heaven in the Father's glory to gather all things into one ...	Whether the return of Jesus will be one single event after a time of tribulation, or if Jesus comes to remove his church before a time of tribulation and then return to reign at the tribulation's end.
Jesus will judge all humanity	Acts 10:42 , 17:31 , 2 Corinthians 5:10 , 2 Timothy 4:11	Jesus will take the holy ones to the enjoyment of eternal life and of the heavenly promises, and he will condemn the wicked to external fire (Tertullian)	Whether Jesus will judge all humanity at the same time or if he will judge Christians at Judgment Seat of Christ and non-believers at the great White Throne judgment.
God will physically resurrect all humanity at some point in the future	Revelation 20:5 , 12-13	Jesus will raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race. Judgment will occur after the resurrection of both these groups (saved/unsaved) ... with the restoration of their flesh.	Whether the resurrection will occur all at once at the end of time, or if some will be resurrected before the great tribulation, some after, and the remainder after a thousand year reign of Jesus.

Three Essential Truths: Apostles' Creed

- Over time, about 20-40 years after the Rule of Faith became standardized in a statement that we know today as the Apostles Creed.
 - An Apostle is an eyewitness of the risen Lord Jesus, commissioned by Jesus to testify authoritatively to the meaning of Jesus identity and ministry ([Acts 1:2, 21-22](#), [Luke 10:16](#))
- The Apostles Creed affirmed that:
 - Jesus will return physically to earth
 - God will physically resurrect all humanity
 - Jesus will judge all humanity

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, his only son, Our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and buried. He descended in hell; On the third day; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father; from thence he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

The Council of Nicaea

- 200 years after the circulation of Rules of Faith and the Apostles Creed a controversy arose in which the deity of Jesus, the trinity, and the salvation work completed by Jesus was seriously under attack.
- More than 300 church leaders gathered in Nicazea (modern Iznik, Turkey) to reaffirm what the churches had long believed about Jesus into another statement of faith called the Nicene Creed.
- Once again, the same three essential truths about the end times remained intact. According to the creed ...
 - Jesus “ascended into heaven, ... (from) thence he shall come again.”
 - “We look for the resurrection of the dead.”
 - “He shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead.”

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; Who for us, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; from thence he shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father (and the Son), who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. In one holy catholic and apostolic church; we acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come, Amen.

What Do The Early Teachings Indicate?

- Christians throughout the world and throughout time have shared a common confession when it comes to the end of time.
 - The same Savior who was crucified also conquered death, and
 - He will return to earth in bodily form; the dead will be raised, and
 - The judge of the living and the dead will be Jesus himself.
- This agreement doesn't end here. There are also three eschatological themes that have also been held in common. ([John 1:9](#))
 - Kingdom,
 - Tribulation,
 - Patient Endurance

Theme #1: The Kingdom of God

- The Kingdom of God is God's people living in God's domain under God's rule.
- Christians in a multitude of times and places have agreed that God inaugurated a kingdom through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus
- From the very beginning of his earthly ministry, the gospel of Jesus was the good news of the kingdom of God.
- This kingdom will not be consummated or fully realized until King Jesus returns to earth – but that doesn't make the kingdom of God any less true or real here and now. ([Matthew 3:2](#), [4:17](#), [23](#), [24:14](#))
- Another term for the kingdom of God is kingdom of heaven.
- Compare [Matthew 8:11](#) with [Luke 13:29](#)
- Compare [Matthew 11:10-11](#) with [Luke 7:27-28](#)

Theme #2: The Reality of Tribulation

- Because the full realization of God's kingdom is yet to come, God's people endure times of tribulation even as they rejoice in the truth of God's eternal kingdom.
- Jesus clearly predicted tribulation for his followers, ([John 16:33](#), [Matthew 24:9](#), [Acts 14:22](#), [Romans 8:35](#), [12:12](#), [Revelation 1:9](#))
 - Christians differ on whether Christians will need to endure The Great Tribulation or Great Distress
 - One point all believers agree: Until the return of Jesus Christ, God's people will experience persecution, tribulation, and distress.
 - Although many of us haven't experienced persecution firsthand, Christians in general around the world suffer terrible persecution and martyrdom for the sake of Christ.

Theme #3: The Responsibility to Endure Patiently

- Jesus repeatedly reminded his disciples to watch for his future arrival. ([Matthew 24:42](#), [25:13](#), [Mark 13:35-37](#), [Luke 12:37](#))
- Every believer in Jesus Christ is a partner with other believers not only in kingdom and tribulation, but also in ‘patient endurance.’ ([Revelation 1:9](#))
- Until the consummation of God’s kingdom, Christians wait and work together ‘patiently’ ([Romans 8:25](#))
- Patient endurance is very different from laziness or passive waiting. Patient endurance means working together to expand the kingdom of Christ into the lives of people around us while finding contentment in the goodness of God’s providential care in each present moment.

How Then Shall We Live?

- We patiently endure tribulation.
 - We stand ready to give back to our Lord Jesus Christ what He has given to us. He gave us life by giving up His life, and we must do no less for Him.
 - Tribulations are not only a test of our faith, but it builds us stronger as we rely more and more on the Lord and know that at all times He is in control.
 - Never curse those who harm you, persecute you and do other terrible things. We are being chosen to share Christ's cross and His sacrifice for us.
- We rejoice in God's ever-present presence
- We never cease to pray .. (Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in the heavens)
- And we wait – we wait and work toward the glorious future that Christians have anticipated in every time and every place, a future in which ...
 - Jesus will return to earth,
 - God will raise the dead to life, and
 - Jesus himself will judge all humanity.