

The Hope of the Martyrs

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The earliest Christian apologists and martyrs testified to the true hope of the early Church which was handed down to them by the Apostles. It was not some vague notion of *heaven* which tempered their wills to stare down wild beasts, or stand immovable on the pyre while the flames engulfed their bodies. No, their “*anchor of the soul*” was the promise God made to Abraham, which He confirmed with an oath to the “*heirs of the promise.*” He promised to give to Abraham and to his ‘Seed’ (who is Jesus Christ and all who are baptized into Him) the Promised Land as a permanent inheritance. In the resurrection of the Just, they would stand with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in that very Land where these men lived as foreigners in tents, and where their bones were buried.

IRENÆUS:¹

“It behooves the righteous first to receive the promise of the inheritance which God promised to the fathers, and to reign in it, when they rise again to behold God in this creation which is renovated, and that the judgment should take place afterwards. For it is just that in that very creation in which they toiled or were afflicted, being proved in every way by suffering, they should receive the reward of their suffering; and that in the creation in which they were slain because of their love to God, in that they should be revived again; and that in the creation in which they endured servitude, in that they should reign. For God is rich in all things, and all things are His. It is fitting, therefore, that the creation itself, being restored to its primeval condition, should without restraint be under the dominion of the righteous; and the apostle has made this plain in the Epistle to the Romans, when he thus speaks: ‘For the expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creation has been subjected to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope; since the creation itself shall also be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.’”

“Thus, then, the promise of God, which He gave to Abraham, remains steadfast. For thus He said: ‘Lift up thine eyes, and look from this place where now thou art, towards the north and south, and east and west. For all the earth which thou seest, I will give to thee and to thy seed, even forever.’ And again He says, ‘Arise, and go through the length and

¹ Irenaeus was a bishop of Lyons, Gaul in the second century. He had formerly been a student of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, who was himself one of John’s students.

breadth of the land, since I will give it unto thee;’ and [yet] he did not receive an inheritance in it, not even a footstep, but was always a stranger and a pilgrim therein. And upon the death of Sarah his wife, when the Hittites were willing to bestow upon him a place where he might bury her, he declined it as a gift, but bought the burying-place (giving for it four hundred talents of silver) from Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite. Thus did he await patiently the promise of God, and was unwilling to appear to receive from men, what God had promised to give him, when He said again to him as follows: ‘I will give this land to thy seed, from the river of Egypt even unto the great river Euphrates.’ If, then, God promised him the inheritance of the land, yet he did not receive it during all the time of his sojourn there, it must be, that together with his seed, that is, those who fear God and believe in Him, he shall receive it at the resurrection of the just. For his seed is the Church, which receives the adoption to God through the Lord, as John the Baptist said: ‘For God is able from the stones to raise up children to Abraham.’ Thus also the apostle says in the Epistle to the Galatians: ‘But ye, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of the promise.’ And again, in the same Epistle, he plainly declares that they who have believed in Christ do receive Christ, the promise to Abraham thus saying, ‘The promises were spoken to Abraham, and to his seed. Now He does not say, And of seeds, as if [He spake] of many, but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.’ And again, confirming his former words, he says, ‘Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore, that they which are of faith are the children of Abraham. But the Scripture, fore-seeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, declared to Abraham beforehand, That in thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which are of faith shall be blessed with faithful Abraham.’ Thus, then, they who are of faith shall be blessed with faithful Abraham, and these are the children of Abraham. Now God made promise of the land to Abraham and his seed; yet neither Abraham nor his seed, that is, those who are justified by faith, do now receive any inheritance in it; but they shall receive it at the resurrection of the just. For God is true and faithful; and on this account He said, ‘Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.’”²

In this quote, Irenaeus based his view of the inheritance on the very same passages we have used: Romans 8:18-25; Genesis 13:14-15; Acts 7:2-5; Genesis 15:18; Galatians 4:28; Galatians 3:16; Galatians 3:6-9; Matthew 5:5. In this single quote, Irenaeus has summed up our entire teaching on the inheritance from the New Testament.

“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, in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those

² Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. V, ch. xxxii

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.'"³

Irenaeus affirmed the entire eschatological view presented at Answers in Revelation:

- A post-tribulation gathering of Jesus' elect
- Christ's Kingdom to follow the second coming, which is premillennial
- The Kingdom is the 7th Day (7th millennium)
- The inheritance of the righteous is the Land promise made to Abraham

In the following quote, Irenaeus used the expression "Kingdom of Heaven" to refer to Christ's Kingdom from heaven (on earth), not to some supposed Kingdom IN Heaven.

*"This, then, is a clear point, that those who disallow his salvation, and frame the idea of another God besides Him who made the promise to Abraham, are outside the kingdom of God, and are disinherited from [the gift of] incorruption, setting at naught and blaspheming God, who introduces, through Jesus Christ, Abraham to the kingdom of heaven, and his seed, that is, the Church, upon which also is conferred the adoption and the inheritance promised to Abraham."*⁴

*"But that our faith was also prefigured in Abraham, and that he was the patriarch of our faith, and, as it were, the prophet of it, the apostle has very fully taught, when he says in the Epistle to the Galatians: 'He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, [doeth he it] by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted unto him for righteousness. Know ye therefore, that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. But the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, announced beforehand unto Abraham, that in him all nations should be blessed. So then they which be of faith shall be blessed with faithful Abraham.' For which [reasons the apostle] declared that this man was not only the prophet of faith, but also the father of those who from among the Gentiles believe in Jesus Christ, because his faith and ours are one and the same: for he believed in things future, as if they were already accomplished, because of the promise of God; and in like manner do we also, because of the promise of God, behold through faith that inheritance in the kingdom."*⁵

³ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. V, ch. xxx

⁴ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. IV, ch. viii

⁵ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. IV, ch. xxi

Irenaeus did not view the inheritance of Israel as being distinct from the “Church” (as dispensationalists), but that Gentiles are adopted into the covenants and promises of Israel. As the following quote shows, the ‘New Covenant’ was the opening up of the Abrahamic Covenant for the Gentiles. Irenaeus expressly denies a heavenly destiny for believers, which was the hope presented by the various Gnostic cults of his day.

“For this reason, when about to undergo His sufferings, that He [Christ] might declare to Abraham and those with him the glad tidings of the inheritance being thrown open, after He had given thanks while holding the cup, and had drunk of it, and given it to the disciples, said to them: ‘Drink ye all of it: this is My blood of the new covenant, which shall be shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of this vine, until that day when I will drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.’ Thus, then, He will Himself renew the inheritance of the earth, and will re-organize the mystery of the glory of [His] sons; as David says, ‘He who hath renewed the face of the earth.’ He promised to drink of the fruit of the vine with His disciples, thus indicating both these points: the inheritance of the earth in which the new fruit of the vine is drunk, and the resurrection of His disciples in the flesh. For the new flesh which rises again is the same which also received the new cup. And He cannot by any means be understood as drinking of the fruit of the vine when settled down with his [disciples] above in a super-celestial place; nor, again, are they who drink it devoid of flesh, for to drink of that which flows from the vine pertains to flesh, and not spirit.”⁶

JUSTIN MARTYR:

Justin was a contemporary of Irenaeus. In his, “*Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew,*” Justin discussed the differences between Apostolic teaching and the common doctrines of the Jewish teachers who Trypho followed. Justin argued that Jew and Gentile Christians would receive the inheritance promised to Abraham and his ‘Seed,’ but unbelieving Jews, such as Trypho, would be excluded.

“What larger measure of grace, then, did Christ bestow on Abraham? This, namely, that He called him with His voice by the like calling, telling him to quit the land wherein he dwelt. And He has called all of us by that voice, and we have left already the way of living in which we used to spend our days, passing our time in evil after the fashions of the other inhabitants of the earth; and along with Abraham we shall inherit the holy Land, when we shall receive the inheritance for an endless eternity, being children of Abraham through the like faith.”⁷

⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Bk. V, ch. xxxiii

⁷ Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. cxix

“But those [Jews] who have persecuted and do persecute Christ, if they do not repent, shall not inherit anything on the holy mountain. But the Gentiles, who have believed on Him, and have repented of the sins which they have committed, they shall receive the inheritance along with the patriarchs and the prophets, and the just men who are descended from Jacob, even although they neither keep the Sabbath, nor are circumcised, nor observe the feasts. Assuredly they shall receive the holy inheritance of God.”⁸

“But why do you not similarly investigate the reason why the name of Oshea the son of Nave (Nun), which his father gave him, was changed to Jesus (Joshua)? But since not only was his name altered, but he was also appointed successor to Moses, being the only one of his contemporaries who came out from Egypt, he led the surviving people into the Holy Land; and as he, not Moses, led the people into the Holy Land, and as he distributed it by lot to those who entered along with him, so also Jesus the Christ will turn again the dispersion of the people, and will distribute the good Land to each one, though not in the same manner. For the former gave them a temporary inheritance, seeing he was neither Christ who is God, nor the Son of God; but the latter, after the holy resurrection, shall give us the eternal possession.”⁹

“Since, if the law were able to enlighten the nations and those who possess it, what need is there of a new covenant? But since God announced beforehand that He would send a new covenant, and an everlasting law and commandment, we will not understand this of the old law and its proselytes, but of Christ and His proselytes, namely us Gentiles, whom He has illumined, as He says somewhere: ‘Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard Thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped Thee, and I have given Thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, and to inherit the deserted [places].’ What, then, is Christ’s inheritance? Is it not the nations? What is the covenant of God? Is it not Christ? As He says in another place: ‘Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the nations for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession.’”¹⁰

“For when He says, ‘Rejoice, O ye nations, with His people,’ He allots the same inheritance to them, and does not call them by the same name; but when He says that they as Gentiles rejoice with His people, He calls them Gentiles to reproach you [Jews]. For even as you provoked Him to anger by your idolatry, so also He has deemed those who were idolaters worthy of knowing His will, and of inheriting His inheritance.”¹¹

⁸ Justin, Dialogue with Trypho, ch. xxvi

⁹ Justin, Dialogue with Trypho, ch. cxiii

¹⁰ Justin, Dialogue with Trypho, ch. cxxii

¹¹ Justin, Dialogue with Trypho, ch. cxxx

“We, who have been quarried out from the bowels of Christ, are the true Israelitic race. But let us attend rather to the very word: ‘And I will bring forth,’ He says, ‘the seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah: and it shall inherit My holy mountain; and Mine Elect and My servants shall possess the inheritance, and shall dwell there; and there shall be folds of flocks in the thicket, and the valley of Achor shall be a resting-place of cattle for the people who have sought Me.’”¹²

“For I choose to follow not men or men’s doctrines, but God and the doctrines [delivered] by Him. For if you have fallen in with some who are called Christians, but who do not admit this [truth], and venture to blaspheme the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; who say there is no resurrection of the dead, and that their souls, when they die, are taken to heaven; do not imagine that they are Christians, ... But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, [as] the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare.”¹³

“So Christ has come according to the power given to Him from the Almighty Father, and summoning men to friendship, and blessing, and repentance, and dwelling together, has promised, as has already been proved, that there shall be a future possession of all the saints in this same Land. And hence all men everywhere, whether bond or free, who believe in Christ, and recognize the truth in His own words and those of His prophets, know that they shall be with Him in that Land, and inherit everlasting and incorruptible good.”¹⁴

The hope of the martyrs, such as Justin and Irenaeus, was taught by the Apostles of Jesus Christ. It is found most clearly defined in Galatians and Hebrews. Please listen to the audio teachings, verse by verse through these two important books, and you will see why these early Christians held so firmly to this view.

¹² Justin, Dialogue with Trypho, ch. cxxxv

¹³ Justin, Dialogue with Trypho, ch. lxxx

¹⁴ Justin, Dialogue with Trypho, ch. cxxxix