

The Abrahamic Faith & The Sabbath Rest

According to the Early Christians

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The earliest Christians closest to the time of the Apostles, whose eschatology can be determined from their writings, were “Chiliasts” (from the Greek word χίλια {chilia} meaning “millennium”). This eschatology is similar to what is today called “Premillennialism” in that its focus was on the return of Jesus Christ to establish the Kingdom of God on the earth for a thousand years centered in restored Jerusalem. However, unlike modern Premillennialism, which only defines Christ’s Kingdom as a millennium (from Rev. 20), ancient Chiliasm taught that Christ’s Millennial rule will be the seventh millennium from creation, the “*Seventh Day*,” the “*Sabbath Rest*,” preceded by exactly six millennial “*Days*” of man’s struggle under the curse. The term “Chiliasm” (Millennialism) refers to the whole “week” of seven millennia, not just the millennium of Christ’s reign over the nations.

The Millennial-Week eschatology was a foundational part of the earliest-known Christian eschatology after the Apostles.¹ In fact, all those who believed in the literal fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the restoration of the Promised Land and resurrection of the body to the inheritance promised in the Abrahamic Covenant, were Chiliasts. Those who rejected Chiliasm did so, not because of a rejection of the six millennial days preceding Christ’s return, but because of their rejection of the concept of an earthly inheritance. They had instead given in to syncretism with Platonism, adopting Plato’s heavenly destiny concept along with his “immortality of the soul.” They resorted to allegorizing the Old Testament Covenants and Land inheritance promises.

Chiliasm, however, was rooted squarely upon the literal fulfillment of the Abrahamic inheritance in Genesis and the many Old Testament prophecies which support it, primarily from Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. Several New Testament passages were harmonized with this literal interpretation, showing that it was taught by Jesus Christ and the Apostles. The following second century quote from Irenaeus of Lyons gives a snapshot of this viewpoint and its biblical support.

¹ In the mid-second century, Justin Martyr wrote that there were many Christians who rejected the belief that Jerusalem would be restored and Christ would reign from there (Dialogue with Trypho, ch. 80). However, this does not translate into rejection of the Millennial Week (Chiliasm), but only that Jerusalem will be restored.

*“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 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 earth 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.’*

“For this reason, when about to undergo His sufferings, that He might declare to Abraham and those with him the glad tidings of the inheritance being thrown open, [Christ], 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 reorganize 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.²

In the following quotation, the Abrahamic inheritance and the essential elements of Chiliasm can be seen tied together:

- The resurrection and gathering of Jesus' elect after a brief period of persecution by Antichrist (post-tribulational)
- The future hope of the Abrahamic Land inheritance for Christians
- The seventh millennium, "*the rest, the hallowed seventh day,*" after six millennia of man's struggle under the curse.

*"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 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*

One can clearly see in this quotation the connection between Chiliasm's "Seventh Day" (7th millennium), the "Sabbath Rest" and the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic Land inheritance, which includes the gentiles who have become Abraham's seed through Jesus Christ.

The early Christians believed that the seven-day creation week in Genesis one was an accurate historical record. God created everything in six twenty-four hour days. Yet they also understood the creation week to be prophetic. God's six days of labor and His rest on the Sabbath formed a precedent and pattern for His entire plan of redemption. God would instruct and discipline humanity for six millennia, bringing mankind to completion and perfection in the seventh Millennium, the Sabbath Rest.

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

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

Clement of Rome⁴ (AD. 30-100)

“And the fact that it was not said of the seventh day equally with the other days, ‘And there was evening, and there was morning,’ is a distinct indication of the consummation which is to take place in it before it is finished, as the fathers declare, especially St. Clement, and Irenaeus, and Justin the martyr and philosopher, who, commenting with exceeding wisdom on the number six of the sixth day, affirms that the intelligent soul of man and his five susceptible senses were the six works of the sixth day. Whence also, having discoursed at length on the number six, he declares that all things which have been framed by God are divided into six classes, ...”⁵

Papias⁶ (AD. 70-155)

“Taking occasion from Papias of Hierapolis, the illustrious, a disciple of the apostle who leaned on the bosom of Christ, and Clemens, and Pantaenus ... of the Alexandrians, and the wise Ammonius, the ancient and first expositors [of Scripture], who agreed with each other, who understood the work of the six days as referring to Christ and the whole Church.”⁷

Barnabas⁸ (AD. 100?)

“‘And God made in six days the works of His hands, and made an end on the seventh day, and rested on it, and sanctified it.’ Attend, my children, to the meaning of this expression, ‘He finished in six days.’ This implieth that the Lord will finish all things in six thousand years, for a day is with Him a thousand years. And He Himself testifieth, saying, ‘Behold, today will be as a thousand years.’ Therefore, my children, in six days, that is, in six thousand years, all things will be finished. ‘And He rested on the seventh day.’ This meaneth: when His Son, coming [again], shall destroy the time

⁴ Clement of Rome knew the Apostle Paul, being called by him a “fellow worker” in Phil. 4:3 (Eusebius, History, Book III, ch. iv)

⁵ Justin, Frag. XV, Anastasius’ comments concerning Clement, Irenaeus, and Justin

⁶ Papias was one of the Apostle John’s students. He was a bishop in the church at Hierapolis while John lived at Ephesus (just a few miles to the north) after his release from Patmos. Papias also had personal contact with others who had heard Jesus teach. He wrote a great deal about Chiliasm. Unfortunately, all of his original works are lost. All that remains are references to him and quotations from his works by later writers.

⁷ Fragments of Papias, IX

⁸ Early Christian writers attributed this Epistle to Barnabas, Paul’s companion (see: Tertullian, On Modesty, ch. xx; Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, Bk II, ch. xx). It was held in extremely high regard, so much so, that it was included along with the inspired New Testament books in some early Christian copies of the Scriptures (e.g. Codex Sinaiticus). In general, the book seems to have been written to counter the Judaizing tendencies by Jewish Christians. One striking feature of this epistle is its clear dependence on the book of Hebrews, using very similar arguments and terminology. As we will demonstrate in later chapters, Chiliasm itself was rooted largely in the teaching of the 4th chapter of Hebrews.

of the wicked man, and judge the ungodly, and change the-sun, and the moon, and the stars, **then shall He truly rest on the seventh day.**"⁹

Justin Martyr (AD 110-165)

We have perceived, moreover, that the expression, 'The day of the Lord is as a thousand years,' is connected with this subject. And further, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem; and that thereafter the general, and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place. Just as our Lord also said, 'They shall neither marry nor be given in marriage, but shall be equal to the angels, the children of the God of the resurrection.'"¹⁰

Irenaeus:¹¹ (AD. 120-202)"[He gives this] as a summing up of the whole of that apostasy which has taken place **during six thousand years.**¹² "**For in as many days as this world was made, in so many thousand years shall it be concluded.** And for this reason the Scripture says: 'Thus the heaven and the earth were finished, and all their adornment. And God brought to a conclusion upon the sixth day the works that He had made; and God rested upon the seventh day from all His works.' This is an account of the things formerly created, **as also it is a prophecy of what is to come. For the day of the Lord is as a thousand years; and in six days created things were completed: it is evident, therefore, that they will come to an end at the sixth thousandth year ... the whole apostasy of six thousand years, and unrighteousness, and wickedness, and false prophecy, and deception; for which things' sake a cataclysm of fire shall also come [upon the earth].**"¹³

"These are [to take place] in **the times of the kingdom, that is, upon the seventh day,** which has been sanctified, in which God rested from all the works which He created,

⁹ Epistle of Barnabas, XV

¹⁰ Justin, Dialogue with Trypho, ch. LXXXI

¹¹ Irenaeus was a student of Polycarp, who was a student of John. Polycarp was bishop of the Church in Smyrna, most likely when Jesus dictated the letter to Smyrna contained in Rev. 2. Jesus had no criticism, only praise for the faithfulness of this church. His prophetic exhortation to this church, "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. ... Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life," (Rev. 2:10) was certainly heeded by Polycarp. He stood boldly and confidently on the pyre, without being bound to the stake, while he was burned to death for his faithfulness to Christ. His pupil, Irenaeus, carried on his master's teachings and included some of them in his own works. Irenaeus also died for his faith along with many of the members of the church he pastored in Lyons, Gaul.

¹² The 6,000 years are counted from the fall of man, when the curse was put into force, and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden.

¹³ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. V, xxviii

which is the true Sabbath of the righteous, which they shall not be engaged in any earthly occupation; but shall have a table at hand prepared for them by God, supplying them with all sorts of dishes.”¹⁴

Hippolytus:¹⁵ (AD. 170-236)

“And six thousand years must needs be accomplished, in order that the Sabbath may come, the rest, the holy day on which God rested from all His works. For the Sabbath is the type and emblem of the future kingdom of the saints, when they shall reign with Christ, when He comes from heaven, as John says in his Apocalypse. ‘For a day with the Lord is as a thousand years.’ Since, then, in six days God made all things, it follows that six thousand years must be fulfilled.”¹⁶

Commodianus:¹⁷ (AD. 240)

“Adam was the first who fell, and that he might shun the precepts of God, Belial was his tempter by the lust of the palm tree. And he conferred on us also what he did, whether of good or of evil, as being the chief of all that was born from him; and thence we die by his means, as he himself, receding from the divine, became an outcast from the Word. We shall be immortal when six thousand years are accomplished.”¹⁸

“This has pleased Christ, that the dead should rise again, yea, with their bodies; and those, too, whom in this world the fire has burned [martyrs], when six thousand years are completed,... Those who are more worthy, and who are begotten of an illustrious stem, and the men of nobility under the conquered Antichrist, according to God’s command living again in the world for a thousand years, ... They who make God of no account when the thousandth year is finished shall perish by fire, ...”¹⁹

Cyprian:²⁰ (AD. 200-258)

“It is an ancient adversary and an old enemy with whom we wage our battle: six thousand years are now nearly completed since the devil first attacked man.”²¹ All

¹⁴ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. V, xxxiii

¹⁵ Hippolytus was a student of Irenaeus, who was a student of Polycarp, who was a student of John. He was a presbyter and possibly bishop of the church in Rome. He was martyred about AD 236.

¹⁶ Hippolytus. On the Hexaëmeron, Or Six Days' Work, Fragments from Commentaries on Various Books of Scripture

¹⁷ Commodianus was a bishop of a church in North Africa.

¹⁸ Commodianus, Christian Discipline, xxxv

¹⁹ Commodianus, Instructions of Commodianus, lxxx

²⁰ Cyprian was bishop of Carthage (N. Africa), and was martyred for his faith in AD 258.

²¹ A few writers spoke of the 6,000 years as being nearly complete in their day. These writers thought that the Antichrist was about to appear, after which Christ would return. (Other writers, such as Irenaeus and

kinds of temptation, and arts, and snares for his overthrow, he has learned by the very practice of long years. If he finds Christ's soldier unprepared, if unskilled, if not careful and watching with his whole heart; he circumvents him if ignorant, he deceives him incautious, he cheats him inexperienced. But if a man, keeping the Lord's precepts, and bravely adhering to Christ, stands against him, he must needs be conquered, because Christ, whom that man confesses, is unconquered."²²

Methodius:²³ (AD. 260-312)

"For since in six days God made the heaven and the earth, and finished the whole world, and rested on the seventh day from all His works which He had made, and blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, so by a figure in the seventh month, when the fruits of the earth have been gathered in, we are commanded to keep the feast to the Lord, which signifies that, when this world shall be concluded in the seventh thousand years, when God shall have completed the world, He shall rejoice in us. ... Then, when the appointed times shall have been accomplished, and God shall have ceased to form this creation, **in the seventh month**,²⁴ the great resurrection-day, it is commanded that the Feast of our Tabernacles shall be celebrated to the Lord,²⁵ of which the things said in Leviticus are symbols and figures."²⁶

"For I also, taking my journey, and going forth from the Egypt of this life, ... celebrate with Christ the millennium of rest, which is called the seventh day, even the true Sabbath."²⁷

Hippolytus, expected a considerable delay before Antichrist would appear). The error was based on their use of the Septuagint's erroneous ages of the patriarchs in the Genesis genealogies. The LXX has been systematically altered, adding 100 years per generation to most of the people mentioned when they had their child. The use of such calculations necessarily placed the end of the 6,000 years within a hundred or so years of some of the later writers.

²² Cyprian, Treatise xi

²³ Methodius was a bishop of the churches of Olympus and Patara in Lycia (Turkey), and was martyred for the Faith in AD 312. He was an outspoken opponent and critic of Origen. The philosophical speculations and allegorical approach to Scripture made popular by Origen eventually led to the decline and eventual extinction of Chiliasm in Christianity.

²⁴ The reason the resurrection occurs in "*the seventh month*" is because when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, a new calendar was given for all of the festivals. The new calendar began in the spring, the first month being when Passover was to be kept (Exod. 12:2). However, the original calendar began in the fall, which is why "Rosh Hashannah" (Head of the Year) is in the fall on the 7th month of the new feast calendar. The original calendar was also kept for agricultural purposes and counting the Sabbatical and Jubilee years Lev. 25). These begin and end in the fall.

²⁵ Feast of Tabernacles (see Zech. 14:16-21)

²⁶ Methodius, Discourse IX, ch. i

²⁷ Methodius, Discourse IX, ch. v

*Lactantius:*²⁸ (AD. 260-330)

“Therefore let the philosophers, who enumerate thousands of ages from the beginning of the world, know that the six thousandth year is not yet completed, and that when this number is completed the consummation must take place, and the condition of human affairs be remodeled for the better ... Therefore, since all the works of God were completed in six days, the world must continue in its present state through six ages, that is, six thousand years. ... And again, since God, having finished His works, rested the seventh day and blessed it, at the end of the six thousandth year all wickedness must be abolished from the earth, and righteousness reign for a thousand years; and there must be tranquility and rest from the labors which the world now has long endured. ... “For six thousand years have not yet been completed, and when this number shall be made up, then at length all evil will be taken away, that justice alone may reign.””²⁹

Victorinus: (AD. 300?)

*“And in Matthew we read, that it is written Isaiah also and the rest of his colleagues broke the Sabbath — that that true and just Sabbath should be observed in the seventh millenary of years. Wherefore to those seven days the Lord attributed to each a thousand years; for thus went the warning: “In Thine eyes, O Lord, a thousand years are as one day.” Therefore in the eyes of the Lord each thousand of years is ordained, for I find that the Lord’s eyes are seven. Wherefore, as I have narrated, that true Sabbath will be in the seventh millenary of years, when Christ with His elect shall reign.”*³⁰

“So great a cloud of witnesses” have testified to the eschatology handed down by the Apostles of Jesus Christ. They include early writers who were instructed by the Apostles or by those who knew them personally. They include faithful martyrs of the early Church, paying for their faithfulness with their own blood. And they include the earliest shepherds of the local churches, to whom the true apostolic Faith had been entrusted. These men all believed and taught the same thing – Chiliasm.

The question that begs to be asked is, why? Where did Chiliasm originate? The proverbial elephant in the room is that Chiliasm is actually taught in Scripture, and was

²⁸ Lactantius “boldly confessed the Faith amid the fires of the last and most terrible of the great persecutions” (editor of his works). Justin had written to the Roman Emperor in his day, defending Christianity and overthrowing the pagan gods of the Empire. Lactantius followed in Justin’s footsteps, writing to instruct the Emperor Constantine himself in the Christian Faith. He was a Christian teacher of great renown, being charged with the personal instruction of the Emperor Constantine’s son, Crispus.

²⁹ Lactantius, *The Epitome of the Divine Institutes*, LXX

³⁰ Victorinus, *On the Creation of the World*

taught orally by the Apostles, just as Irenaeus indicated, “*the presbyters, the disciples of the Apostles*” repeated what they had heard from the Apostles.³¹

Go to: [The Millennial Week in Scripture \(4windsfellowships.net\)](http://www.4windsfellowships.net)
http://www.4windsfellowships.net/articles/Chronology/millennial_week.pdf

³¹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Bk. V, ch. xxxvi