

Creeds of the Kehillah ~ Part 42

The Nicene Creed ~ Part 28

In our last post, we continued to explore the **Nicene Creed**. In this post, we continue to dig into the third article of faith, keeping with the phrase We Acknowledge One Baptism **for the forgiveness of sins** in the **Nicene Creed**.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son, He is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We acknowledge one baptism **for the forgiveness of sins**.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Questions on the individual's destiny are closely connected with the looming problems that concern the end times. This post presents how the early Fathers viewed the resurrection of the flesh and the immortality of the soul, themes that constitute the center of patristic end times thoughts.

In the earliest times, faith in the resurrection of the flesh was attested to and needed no particular explanation. Very soon, however, the renewed cultural circumstances in which the faith was transmitted and the problems deriving from specific deviating doctrinal trends, such as **Gnosticism**, prompted the Fathers to investigate this theme further.

The passages by the Fathers on the resurrection that we are excerpting are divided into two sections: the first one presents us with texts concerning the resurrection in general; the second presents texts in which the resurrection of bodies and the flesh are discussed.

The first group of passages faces this question in a mostly philosophical sense, relying on the excellent connection between the omnipotence of **God** and the resurrection of the dead. The other passages, by connecting the resurrection of human beings with that of **Yeshua**. In particular, **Tertullian** raised his voice against the **Gnostics** and the **Marcionites**, asserting the truth of faith in the resurrection of the flesh. He based his reasoning on the work of **God**, who had the power to create as well as the power to re-create. He also based his argument on the substantial identity of the present body with the resurrected one.

Among the end-time themes connected to the questions concerning the resurrection is the doctrine on the advent of the millennial kingdom. This doctrine, which is more simply known as millenarianism, circulated among a particular segment of **Messianics** in the first centuries, even though it was never officially received into the **kehillah**. It maintains that the universal judgment and the end of the world will be preceded by a future earthly kingdom of one thousand years, which will be entirely new and will be the seat of the heavenly **Jerusalem** descended to earth where the resurrected righteous will reign with **Yeshua**, enjoying immense happiness and abundance of blessings.

From **Judaism**, millenarianism is traced in antiquity in the **Asiatic** milieu to **Cerinthus** and **Papias of Hierapolis** in **Phrygia**. In contrast, the key representatives of the **Messianic** millenarianism appear to be **Justin, Irenaeus, and Tertullian**, who established this belief based on Revelation 20:4–6. In any case, the importance of millenarianism in ancient **Messianic** eschatology was not destined to last: very soon, **Origen** would radically criticize this doctrine for the excessive literalism that the millenarians attributed to the passages of Scripture that they quoted.

In conclusion, the passages from the Fathers gathered in this section highlight specific problems inherent in discussing eschatological questions. In this regard, a modern **Messianic** eschatology cannot help but consider, or at least examine, these abundant and valuable sources.¹

In my next post, we continue to dig into the third article of the **Nicene Creed: We Look for the Resurrection of the Dead.**

¹ Di Berardino, A., & Oden, T. C. (Eds.). (2010). **We Believe in One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church** (Vol. 5, pp. 87–90).