

Creeds of the Kehillah ~ Part 44

The Nicene Creed ~ Part 30

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 **and the life of the world to come** 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.

AND THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME ~ *Blessedness and Condemnation*

Both the second and third articles of the **Nicene Creed** conclude with eschatology. In this second section, commenting on **the life of the world to come**, we expand on the themes found in the second article in light of **the life which is yet to come**. The final section of the second article of the **Nicene Creed** includes the themes of **Messianic** eschatology—namely, **Yeshua's** glorious return to earth, the final judgment, and the kingdom of **Yeshua**. In this final section of the commentary on this last phrase, we may observe how the complexity of ancient **Messianic** eschatology makes any attempt at schematization quite tricky. Numerous factors influenced the reflection of the Fathers. The patristic reflection on eschatology takes shape following historical-cultural shifts, which are influenced by the expansion of the **Messianic movement**. New times and situations led **Messianic** thinkers to formulate eschatological beliefs in a renewed way, even though they remained substantially faithful to the biblical spirit. New questions constantly arose concerning the final or last realities, thanks to the meeting of the **Messianic movement** with Greco-Roman pagan culture, to the influence of **Gnosticism** and the different **Messianic** heretical movements the dramatic experience of persecutions.

We will also notice the variety of language, symbols, and images used by the Fathers, at least up to **Augustine**. He was the first to give an organic arrangement to the eschatological questions, influencing most future reflections in this regard. The primary reference of patristic teaching is centered on the **Yeshua** event, with all its anthropological and soteriological reflections. **Yeshua** appears to be the hermeneutical key to any eschatological speech, the crucial element that resolves all questions.

The thematic kernels presented here are four in number: the glorious return of **Yeshua**, the **final judgment**, the **intermediate state**, and **eternal life**. The **Parousia**, or **Yeshua's** second coming in glory, is the horizon within which all the final events of history find their position, so that history, according to the teaching of **Sha'ul**, assumes a global meaning that includes the victory of **Yeshua** over sin and death, the resurrection of the dead and the judgment. From this point of view, the passages from the Fathers reflect the complexity of the envisioned event, sometimes highlighting its most spiritual aspects, sometimes those which are more sensational and grotesque.

The theme of the **final judgment** is closely connected to the **Parousia**, which is presented both as a universal and individual event, even though it mostly appears to be universal and final. The judge is **Yeshua**, who will separate the good from the bad, destining the former to life and the latter to eternal damnation. We will notice that the Fathers linger on certain particularly terrifying elements of the judgment they indulge in graphic detail. These reflections offered them the opportunity to call the sinners to a worthy way of life and deter the believers from a sinful existence.

In the context of the end of the world, the Fathers do not neglect questions concerning the individual's destiny. They face the theme of the so-called **intermediate state**. The souls of the dead are in a condition of waiting before the **final resurrection** when they will be reunited with their bodies and will fully receive their due reward. In particular, **Augustine** supposes a specific judgment for the individual immediately after death, which involves a specific reward. However, it is not the definitive one, and without precisely describing the location of this reward.

By presenting specific constant motifs in the early church's heritage of faith, such as **Yeshua's** glorious return, the **final judgment**, and the individual's survival after death, this chapter reveals the Fathers' efforts to comprehend faith in the first centuries of the **Messianic** age. Despite their disagreements, in the end, the comfort it afforded to those who look forward to that life that is yet to come cannot be overestimated.

Eternal life with God brings an incomparable blessing: communion with God amid the communion of the saints with God and with all who reflect God's, holy love. This community embraces both the living faithful and the faithful departed who now enjoy eternal life with God. There is a unique union between the faithful on earth and in heaven, enabled by their mutual communion with the one Head and each other, a communion sustained by prayer, faith, hope, and love. The community or fellowship of the saints is a recurrent theme of the **Brit Hadashah** that points to communion with God and communion with all who share God's life. The **Son** prayed to the Father that the whole community of faith *"may be one, as we are one."*

The general scriptural term for the final state of the blessed is **eternal life**. This life is transmuted into a future life of glory that does not reach full expression until the general resurrection, final judgment, and the final destiny of the faithful. The living **God** permits the new life with **God** to continue without ceasing. **Eternal life** brings to completion the work of grace begun in this life, where one is delivered from sin, its roots, and consequences, fulfilling **God's** purpose in creation, redemption, and consummation. The transformation begun in faithful baptism does not come to nothing but lives on. The spiritual life begun in penitent faith is imparted in spiritual rebirth, grows by sanctifying grace, and lives on by completing grace. The characteristic feature of eternal life is the complete and unending enjoyment of life with **God**.

In **Messianic** teaching, heaven is both a place and a condition of eternal rest and joy in the Lord. It is **to be present with the Lord**. Heaven is where the blessed clearly see **God** and incomparably enjoy the blessings of divine glory. Heaven is represented as a secure lodging of unutterable glory, joy, and peace. Its most prominent features are tranquility, holiness, light, beholding, happiness, and the presence of the **Lord**. What happens in heaven is complete and endless participation in God's goodness and happiness. **Those whose names are written in heaven** have **come to God**. They **are the spirits of righteous men made perfect**. **Yeshua** promised his disciples: ***I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.***¹

In my next post, we continue to dig into the third article of the **Nicene Creed: AND THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME ~ Yeshua's Return, the Judgment, and Eternal Life.**

¹ Di Berardino, A., & Oden, T. C. (Eds.). (2010). **We Believe in One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church** (Vol. 5, p. 175).