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## The New Jerusalem in Tertullian

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## CHAPTER SIX

# THE NEW JERUSALEM IN TERTULLIAN

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### *Introduction*

In the West before the time of Constantine, the contemporary city of Jerusalem (or Aelia Capitolina as it was called after its rebuilding by Hadrian), was of no great interest for most Christians, other than the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 AD being used to some degree as a motif in anti-Jewish texts. The idea of pilgrimage to Jerusalem had not yet begun to flourish.<sup>1</sup> Instead, many Christians directed their thoughts towards the future New Jerusalem, promised in the apostolic texts. One of the most prominent examples of this is Tertullian of Carthage.

Eusebius, in *Church History* 5.18.2, tells us that the Montanists expected the New Jerusalem to descend near the little towns of Pepuza and Tymion in Phrygia.<sup>2</sup> Archeological evidence confirms that Pepuza was actually a center for the Montanist/New Prophecy movement<sup>3</sup> and a goal for pilgrimage.<sup>4</sup> The most famous adherent of this movement in

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1 I have discussed the beginnings of Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem in my article "What Makes the Holy Land Holy? A Debate between Paula, Eustochium and Marcella (Jerome, Ep. 46)" in E. Koskenniemi & J.C. de Vos, eds., *Holy Places and Cult* (SRB 5; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 169-199.

2 Cf. Epiph. *Pan.* 49.1-3; 48.2.6. Their belief was possibly based on Rev 3:12, a text addressed to a Church of Philadelphia in Asia Minor. See William Tabbernee, ed., *Early Christianity in Contexts. An Exploration across Cultures and Continents* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 286; E. Osborn, *Tertullian - First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 210.

3 Tertullian never uses the word "Montanism" but always "New Prophecy"; and because there are clear differences between Montanism in Phrygia and New Prophecy movement in Africa, it is meaningful to maintain this terminology.

4 Since 2001 the archeological site of these towns is being excavated by Peter Lampe (University of Heidelberg) and William Tabbernee (Tulsa). See William Tabbernee and Peter Lampe, *Pepouza and Tymion: The Discovery and Archaeological Exploration of a Lost Ancient City and an Imperial Estate* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2008); Peter Lampe, "Die montanistischen Tymion und Pepouza im Lichte der neuen Tymioninschrift," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 8 (2004):498-512; Tabbernee, *Early Christianity in Contexts*, 286.

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North Africa, Tertullian, does not show, however, a slightest hint of ever having heard of this idea.<sup>5</sup> It is evident that even if the New Prophecy movement in North Africa had many of the convictions and practices in common with their Phrygian fellows, at the same time it differed from them in several ways.<sup>6</sup> If Tertullian did not share the Montanist's views on the New Jerusalem, how did he, then, understand this concept? In this article, my aim is to study his interpretations of the biblical passages he uses when talking about the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city, or citizenship in heaven, i.e., Gal 4:26; Phil 3:20; Hebr 12:22 and Rev 3:12; 21:2.9-11.

*Early Texts*

In recent scholarship, there is a growing consensus that Tertullian never left the Catholic Church when he joined the New Prophecy movement.<sup>7</sup> However, there is a noticeable difference between Tertullian's writings before and after the year 207/208 when he became acquainted with this movement.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, we shall discuss passages from these two periods separately.

Most of the passages in which Tertullian quotes or alludes to any of the above mentioned biblical texts, are in *Adversus Marcionem*, written in his New Prophecy period.<sup>9</sup> There are only two exceptions. Firstly, in *Scorpiace*, written as an encouragement for Christians in the midst of persecution, he lists rewards the martyrs will receive, and alludes to Rev 3:12 and Hebr 12:22 about the inscription of the name of the

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5 C. Trevett, C. *Montanism. Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996), 98.

6 D. Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 43-51; Trevett, *Montanism*, 67-69.

7 See D. Powell, 'Tertullianists and Cataphrygians', VC 29, (1975): 33-54; Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church*, 3;27ff; J. Dunn *Tertullian*, (London and New York: Routledge 2004), 6-7; W. Tabbernee, "Initiation/Baptism in the Montanist Movement" in David Hellholm, Tor Vegge, Øyvind Norderval, Christer Hellholm, eds., *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism. Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity II* (Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter, 2011), 917-945, esp. 924, 927.

8 Rankin (*Tertullian and the Church*, 41) lists topics where Tertullian's attitudes changed: strict asceticism, prophecy, dreams, ban for a second marriage.

9 In chronology, I follow T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian – A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon 1984).

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heavenly Jerusalem on the martyrs. He writes:<sup>10</sup>

Then to every conqueror the Spirit promises now the tree of life, and exemption from the second death; now the hidden manna with the stone of glistening whiteness, and the name unknown (to every man save him that receiveth it); now power to rule with a rod of iron, and the brightness of the morning star; now the being clothed in white raiment, and not having the name blotted out of the book of life, and being made in the temple of God a pillar with the inscription on it of the name of God and of the Lord, and of the heavenly Jerusalem. (*Scorp.* 12.8)

Most of the contents of this passage come from Rev 3:12, but the exact term, *Hierusalem* (or *Ierusalem*) *caelestis*, does not occur in the Book of Revelation. Tertullian may have taken it from Hebr 12:22-23.

Secondly, in *De spectaculis*, Tertullian uses the idea of the New Jerusalem in another kind of context. He advises Christians not to participate in public shows, and says instead that the only spectacles that belong to the Christians are Christian worship and life (*Spect.* 29). He culminates his argumentation in the closing chapter by crying:<sup>11</sup>

But what a spectacle is that fast-approaching advent of our Lord, now owned by all, now highly exalted, now a triumphant One! What that exultation of the angelic hosts! What the glory of the rising saints! What the kingdom of the just thereafter! What the city New Jerusalem! (*qualis civitas nova Hierusalem!*)” (*Spect.* 30.1).

The New Jerusalem is identified here as the reign of the holy and righteous ones after the coming of the Christ and after their resurrection. It is a city that awaits first of all the martyrs, but eventually all Christians. It is evident that expectation of the swift return of Christ and the descending of the heavenly Jerusalem was always a part of Tertullian’s theology, and thus it is not something that occurs only after his being influenced by the New Prophecy movement.

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<sup>10</sup> Translated by S. Thelwall. *ANF* 3.

<sup>11</sup> Translated by S. Thelwall. *ANF* 3.

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*The New Prophecy period*

Tertullian wrote the first three books of *Adversus Marcionem* shortly after he had started his involvement with the New Prophecy in 207/208 AD, and books four and five somewhat later. The most interesting and most discussed passage is *Adversus Marcionem* 3.24, the only preserved passage in which Tertullian combines the New Jerusalem with millennialistic ideas.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, the treatise he refers to in this passage and in which he focusses on Christian and Jewish eschatological hopes, *De spe fidelium* (On the Hope of the Faithful), is lost, but even in *Adversus Marcionem* he tells something about its contents.<sup>13</sup>

Tertullian first claims that he, unlike Marcion, believes that after the resurrection but before entering heaven, an earthly kingdom of a thousand years is promised to the Christians. He motivates his millennialism by combining Gal 4:26 and Phil 3:20,<sup>14</sup> and, surprisingly, uses a Greek word within a Latin text when he writes:<sup>15</sup>

For we do profess that even on earth a kingdom is promised us: but this is before we come to heaven, and in a different polity—in fact after the resurrection, for a thousand years, in that city of God's building, Jerusalem brought down from heaven, which the apostle declares is our mother on high: and when he affirms that our *politeuma*, our citizenship, is in heaven, he is evidently locating it in some heavenly city. This is the city which Ezekiel knows, and the apostle John has seen.

Tertullian, who was fluent in Greek and Latin, alludes here to Phil 3:20

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<sup>12</sup> See Osborn, *Tertullian*, 216-217.

<sup>13</sup> “As for the restoration of Judaea, which the Jews, misguided by the names of towns and territories, hope for exactly as described, it would be tedious to explain how the allegorical interpretation of it is spiritually applicable to Christ and the Church and to the possession and enjoyment of it. I have discussed this in another work, which I entitle *Of the Hope of the Faithful*. At present too it would be superfluous, not least because we are not discussing an earthly but a heavenly promise”. *Adv. Marc.* 3.24.

<sup>14</sup> The same passage is quoted even in *Res. carn.* 47.

<sup>15</sup> *In mille annos in civitate divini operis Hierusalem caelo delata, quam et apostolus matrem nostram sursum designat: et πολιτεύμα nostrum, id est municipatum.* Engl. transl. E. Evans. *Tertullian Adversus Marcionem, Latin Edition and Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972).

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in a slightly different version than in *Adv. Marc.* 5.20, which we shall look at later, and feels a need to translate the Greek word he uses. For him it is common to use Greek in a Latin text, for example in quotations. However, this time, by using a Greek political term, he possibly wanted to stress the idea that the city in heaven is a real city with real citizens. After this composed quotation, Tertullian gives an additional two biblical proofs: this Jerusalem is this city which Ezekiel had known (Ez 48) and which the Apostle John had seen (Rev 21:2).

After the biblical arguments, Tertullian even offers non-biblical proofs for his idea of the New Jerusalem descending from heaven. He states that in the New Prophecy movement it had been prophesied that an image of this city would be seen, and in recent times in Judea, even some non-Christians had witnessed that, for forty days, early in the morning, a city was suspended from the sky. Tertullian is, as far as we know, the only source for this miraculous apparition.

Further, he tells that in this city, the Christians enjoy spiritual refreshments and blessings in compensation for their sufferings in this world. At the end of these thousand years, they would be changed into angelic substance and transferred into the final heavenly kingdom. Against Marcion he claims that this heavenly kingdom, which even Marcion hopes for, has in fact been promised by the Creator God; and against the Jews he claims that they, in the image of Esau, would have only earthly blessings. Only the Christians, in the image of Jacob, would come to heaven, the ladder being a symbol for a gate. They would be taken up into the clouds to meet the Lord, and be with the Lord forever.<sup>16</sup>

### *One and the Same God*

In *Adversus Marcionem* 5, Tertullian uses biblical passages about the heavenly Jerusalem in his polemics against Marcion's idea of two Gods. In *Adv. Marc.* 5.4.8, he discusses Marcion's alterations to and interpretations of Gal 4:26, and approves something, namely the identification of *mater* with *sancta ecclesia*, but refutes the other ideas.<sup>17</sup> In Marcion's text—as quoted by Tertullian—neither the heavenly nor the earthly Jerusalem is mentioned by name; Marcion has

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<sup>16</sup> In *De anima* 55-58 Tertullian presents his thoughts on an interim state, a time between death and the Last Judgement. See also *An.* 7; *Res. carn.* 17.

<sup>17</sup> How *ecclesia* in Marcion's text should be understood is a complicated question.

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clearly rewritten Gal 4:25-26 in his own words. Tertullian's citation of Marcion's text is given here in the cursive.<sup>18</sup>

Now it does happen to thieves that something let fall from their booty turns to evidence against them: and so I think Marcion has left behind him this final reference to Abraham—though none had more need of removal—even if he has changed it a little. *For if Abraham had two sons, one by a bondmaid and the other by a free woman, but he that was by the bondmaid was born after the flesh, while he that was by the free woman was by promise: which things are allegorical, which means, indicative of something else: for these are two testaments—or two revelations, as I see they have translated it—the one from Mount Sinai referring to the synagogue of the Jews, which according to the law gendereth to bondage: the other gendering above all principality, power, and domination, and every name that is named not only in this world but also in that which is to come (Eph 1:21) for she is our mother, that holy church, in whom we have expressed our faith: and consequently he adds, So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.*

What Marcion has not understood, says Tertullian, is that both the synagogue and the church come from the same God. Tertullian does not discuss the heavenly Jerusalem more thoroughly here.

Subsequently, in *Adv. Marc.* 5.15.4 and 5.20.6, Tertullian uses the idea of the heavenly Jerusalem against Marcion's idea of two Gods once again, and claims that the Creator God and the God of Christ speak about the same things. First, the promise in 1 Thessalonians that by the coming of Christ, the Christians will be the first to rise again and will be caught up in the clouds into the air to meet the Lord (1 Thess 4:16-17), as has already been spoken of by Isaiah and Amos:<sup>19</sup>

I tell myself it was even so long ago with all this in prospect that the celestial existences held in admiration that Jerusalem which is above, and cried in the words of Isaiah, *Who are they that fly hither as the clouds, and as doves with their nestlings towards me?* (Isa 60:8). If this is the ascent

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18 Transl. Evans, *Tertullian Adversus Marcionem*.

19 Transl. Evans, *Tertullian Adversus Marcionem*.

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Christ has in store for us, Christ will be he of whom Amos speaks: *Who buildeth up his ascent into the heavens, surely for himself and his own*" (Am 9:6).

A little later, in *Adv. Marc.* 5. 20.6-7, Tertullian again quotes Phil 3:20 (this time in Latin only) and argues for bodily resurrection and for the unity of the two testaments, as he writes:<sup>20</sup>

Our citizenship (*municipatus*) is in heaven. I recognize here the Creator's very old promise to Abraham: *And I will make thy seed as the stars in heaven* (Gen 26:4). Consequently also, *One star differeth from another star in glory* (1 Cor 15:41). But if Christ when he comes from heaven is to transform the body of our humility into conformity with the body of his glory, then that which is to rise again is this body of ours, which is humbled by what it undergoes, and is cast down to earth by nothing but the law of death. For how shall it be transformed, if it does not exist? Or if this is spoken of those who at God's coming are to be found still in the flesh and will then be changed what shall those do who rise first? Will they have nothing from which to be transformed? And yet he says, *With them we shall be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord* (1 Thess 4:17). If with them we are to be lifted up, with them we shall also have been transformed.

### *Where Did Tertullian Get His Ideas?*

Different forms of millennialism or chiliasm – the belief that Christ and the martyrs will reign on earth in a visible kingdom for a thousand years before the final judgement – were popular among theologians of the first centuries, for example Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Pseudo-Cyprian.<sup>21</sup> The radical millennialism of the New Prophecy movement and its influence on Tertullian has earlier been taken as given, but more lately put into question.<sup>22</sup> I shall now shortly discuss the possible sources for Tertullian's views.

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20 Transl. Evans, *Tertullian Adversus Marcionem*.

21 Later it came to be rejected. For example Jerome in his *Commentary on Isaiah*, severely attacks millennialism at least fifty times, even if he knows that theologians such as Papias, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Victorinus and Lactantius adhered to it. E.g. *Comm. Isa* 18.1

22 Trevett, *Montanism*, 95-100.

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Already Justin Martyr witnesses a belief in a thousand-year-kingdom in Jerusalem. In *Dialogue* 80-81, the Jew Trypho asks Justin what he thinks of the Jewish hope of rebuilding of Jerusalem. Do the Christians hope to be collected there together with Christ, the patriarchs, prophets and the holy ones from the Jewish people? Justin answers with a lengthy interpretation of Isa 65:17-25, which according to him describes a thousand year period in Jerusalem. This will happen after the resurrection of the body. Apart from Isaiah, even Ezekiel “and others” have prophesied this. Justin tells Trypho that John stated in Revelation that those who believe in “our Christ” shall live in this Jerusalem for a thousand years; after that period a general resurrection and judgement will follow. Elsewhere Justin has stated, on the basis of passages from Isaiah, that Jesus’ second coming would take place in Jerusalem (*Dial.* 40.4) and that the Christians would subsequently then inherit the holy mountain (*Dial.* 25-26).

Another exponent of the early Christian expectation of a thousand-year-kingdom in Jerusalem is Irenaeus, who explains his views in *Adv. haer.* 5.33-36. He gives several proof-texts from Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Daniel for the idea of an earthly kingdom and a re-built Jerusalem. Irenaeus knows also gematrical world-week calculations: just as the creation happened in six days followed by one day’s rest, and one day represents a thousand years, so shall there be a period of a thousand years when the just shall reign with Christ in a renewed earthly Jerusalem.<sup>23</sup> He argues against Valentinian Gnostics, who, according to him, understood *ecclesia* to be an Aeon in their cosmology. On the contrary, he says in *Adv. haer.* 5.35.2, the New Jerusalem is a very real city which will descend after the judgement:<sup>24</sup>

And the apostle, too, writing to the Galatians, says in like manner, ‘But the Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.’ (Gal 4:26). He does not say this with any thought of an erratic Aeon, or of any other power which departed from the Pleroma, or of Prunicus, but of the Jerusalem which has been delineated on [God's] hands. And in the Apocalypse John saw this new [Jerusalem] descending upon the new earth

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23 *Adv. Haer.* 3.36.3. J. Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons. Identifying Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 181-182.

24 Transl. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut. ANF 1.

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(Rev 21:2).

About the same time as Tertullian, another North African theologian, known as Pseudo-Cyprianus, described the New Jerusalem in his tractate *De duobus montibus Sina et Sion*, which basically is an interpretation of Gal 4:26 and Isa 2:3—both of which are central texts even in Tertullian's *Adv. Marc.* 3.24.<sup>25</sup> In chapter 10, on the basis of Rev 21, the anonymous author describes the heavenly New Jerusalem as the Church:<sup>26</sup>

The earlier mentioned prophetic word was fulfilled (Out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of God from Jerusalem): Jerusalem is a new city that comes down from heaven, it is mad square by four Gospels, and it has twelve foundations in twelve apostles: on the basis of their announcement about Christ they will enter this holy and new city, that is, the spiritual Church.

In chapters 14-15, Pseudo-Cyprian returns to the idea of a connection between the church and the heavenly New Jerusalem in an original parable of a vineyard. The vineyard is “the Christian people” or “The Lord’s people”.<sup>27</sup> In the middle of it is a watch-hut, lifted up on a tree. This watch-hut is described as the heavenly Jerusalem (instead of “Jerusalem” the author writes “city”): it is high above the vineyard, it is four-sided and square, with three openings on each side. Inside this hut, which is made of bruised reeds (Isa 42:1-4), is a heavenly guardian-servant (*puer/παις*), the Lord’s Son, who watches it and drives the robbers away. In this parable, the heavenly Jerusalem and the church are connected through the cross of Christ. *De montibus* also contains a rather similar gematrical apocalyptic tradition as Irenaeus has: Christ died in the year 6000 and then the time of the church begun (*De mont.* 4.3). Similarities with Tertullian include the use of several of the same biblical proof-texts in connection with the New Jerusalem (Gal 4:26; Isa 2:3; Rev 21:2.10-14). This does not prove direct

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<sup>25</sup> For this treatise, see C. Burini, *Pseudo Cipriano I due monti Sinai e Sion* (Fiesole: Nardini Editore, 1994); Anni Maria Laato, *Jews and Christians in De duobus montibus Sina et Sion: An Approach to Early Latin Adversus Iudaeos Literature* (Åbo: Åbo Akademis förlag, 1998).

<sup>26</sup> Transl. Laato, *Jews and Christians*, 179.

<sup>27</sup> In this second part of the treatise, the author does not use the word *ecclesia*.

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dependence, but rather that around this time similar apocalyptic ideas were known in North Africa.

Apart from mainstream Christianity sources, even New Prophecy has been seen as a background for Tertullian's understanding of the New Jerusalem and milleniarism.<sup>28</sup> Christine Trevett notes against earlier views, that even if the Montanists did hold ideas of both a New Jerusalem and milleniarism, there is no evidence of their connecting these two.<sup>29</sup> She maintains that the prophecy about Pepuza/Tymion, referred to by Eusebius, belongs to Quintilla whom she dates to the third century and thus later than Tertullian. Moreover, she suggests that Quintilla's prophecy should be interpreted as realized in spiritual experience.<sup>30</sup> Pepuza and Tymion were namely called "Jerusalem" already by the New Prophecy prophets, and there is no evidence that this name would have its origin in the (later) prophecy of the descending New Jerusalem.<sup>31</sup> Trevett and Powell suggest that Montanism in its original form (and the one Tertullian knew) probably represented common views in their time on the descending New Jerusalem, and its special features come later.<sup>32</sup>

Be it as it may, Tertullian's texts about the New Jerusalem do show influences from the New Prophecy movement of his own time. In *Adversus Marcionem*, written in his New Prophecy period, Tertullian combines the idea of the heavenly Jerusalem descending on earth with the thousand-year-kingdom. In the same treatise, he also *expressis verbis* says that in the New Prophecy movement, it had been prophesied that an image of this city would be seen.

### *Conclusions*

Tertullian had an eschatological emphasis throughout his life, but it became more intense and more defined in his New Prophecy period. For him the New Jerusalem is a real city that descends on earth from above. Christian citizenship is a citizenship of this city, and is the place

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28 Trevett, *Montanism*, 95-100.

29 Trevett, *Montanism*, 99.

30 Trevett, *Montanism*, 100, 104.

31 Trevett, *Montanism*, 15, 19.

32 Trevett, *Montanism*, 100; Powell, *Tertullinians*, 43.

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where they wait for Christ to return soon. In this city, the Christians will live for a thousand years in peace, and it is from there where they will be translated into heaven.

We have too little precise information pertaining to the eschatological beliefs of the New Prophecy movement to evaluate with certainty to what degree Tertullian was influenced by them in his teaching on the New Jerusalem. He, for sure, shared their hope of New Jerusalem descending on earth, but the mere expectation of a thousand-year-kingdom does not prove dependence; it was common enough in the early Church. When it comes to the expectation of New Jerusalem descending only to Pepuza/Tymion, one may ask whether Tertullian would not have commented the idea of the place being Pepuza had he known about it. Trevett suggests that the prophecy of New Jerusalem descending to Pepuza/Tymion is later than Tertullian, but he may also simply have not known it, or it is possible he may not have accepted the idea.

Apart from vision of the New Jerusalem seen in Judaea, Tertullian's views do not substantially differ from those of Justin, Irenaeus or Pseudo-Cyprian. In all their texts, the idea of the New Jerusalem as a kingdom of peace upon earth is motivated by the Revelation of John, but also by several texts from the Old Testament. In Justin's and Pseudo-Cyprian's texts there are clear connections with Jewish eschatological hopes, and even if Tertullian does not show as clear an influence from contemporary Jewish traditions, it is plausible to see at least an indirect impact.

It is usual for Tertullian to adapt his language, and partly even the contents of his teaching, according to his audience.<sup>33</sup> This is true even in the way he formulates his eschatological hopes, depending on to whom he writes. To non-Christians, in *Apologeticum* 39.2, he writes that the Christians pray for the delay of the last day, but in *De oratione* 5.1, written to his catechumens, he says that the Christians pray that "our kingdom" should come as soon as possible.

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33 Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church*, 43.