THE QUESTION

Did the early church believe the Gospel had already been preached to the whole world?

Asked by a THF member on June 30, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 9 numbered quotations · the 22 early Christian passages and 85 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/did-the-early-church-believe-the-gospel-had-already-been-preached-to-the

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

Yes. Several early writers said the apostles had already carried the Gospel to the ends of the earth, and Tertullian read Colossians 1 that way. Yet these same writers still watched for the Lord's future coming, so in their eyes the Gospel's spread did not mean the end had already come.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

IN THIS STUDY

1	The apostles reached the ends of the earth	2	6	Whole world can mean more than geography	4
2	Tertullian read Colossians 1 as already true	2	7	They still watched for the Lord's coming	4
3	Their voice went out into all the earth	2		What these passages don't tell us	4
4	All nations had heard of Christ	3		The Sources: 22 early Christian passages and 85 Bible verses, with links	5
5	Fulfilled, yet still growing every day	3			

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POINT 1 OF 7

The apostles reached the ends of the earth

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Irenaeus says that once the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, they went out to the ends of the earth with the good news. He speaks of this as something already done in the apostles' own lifetime.

1 “They traveled to the ends of the earth, spreading the glad tidings of the good things sent from God to us, and proclaiming the peace of heaven to people, all of whom have the Gospel of God equally and individually.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book III* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 9, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

Tertullian read Colossians 1 as already true

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian quotes Paul saying the Gospel had come to the Colossians as it had in all the world. He takes Paul at his word: the Gospel had already spread everywhere in Paul's day, and even more so by Tertullian's own time.

2 “For if, even at that time, the tradition of the gospel had spread everywhere, how much more is that true now!”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *Against Marcion* 8 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 13, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 7

Their voice went out into all the earth

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Justin applies the psalm's words about a voice going into all the earth to those who announced Christ's coming. Clement likewise calls the apostles who preached through the world the Lord's feet, carrying him to the ends of the earth.

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3 “There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Justin Martyr,** *First Apology* (c. 130–165 AD) **Source 5, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

4 “Therefore, those who traveled through the world and preached the Gospel are figuratively called the Lord's feet.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 2.8 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 10, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

All nations had heard of Christ

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian points to the prophecy that the nations would hear the Lord's Anointed and says it is fulfilled in Christ. He treats the hearing and believing of the nations as a present fact, not a far-off hope.

5 “He is the one whom all nations have heard, that is, whom all nations have believed.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *An Answer to the Jews* 7 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 14, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 7

Fulfilled, yet still growing every day

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Hippolytus says the prophecy of the Gospel reaching the seas and islands has been fulfilled, since churches fill the islands. In the same breath he says the churches keep growing every day, so fulfilled did not mean finished.

6 “And that word has been fulfilled. For churches of Christ fill all the islands and are increasing every day, and the teaching of the Word of salvation is gaining more followers.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hippolytus,** *Exegetical Fragments* (c. 200–236 AD) **Source 17, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

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POINT 6 OF 7

Whole world can mean more than geography

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Origen says the Gospel truly is preached in the whole world, but he takes whole world to reach beyond the earth itself to heaven and earth together. This shows early readers did not always read the phrase as a map of every land.

7 “And when the Gospel is said to be proclaimed throughout the whole world, we conclude that it is actually preached in the whole world. That is, not in this earthly region only, but in the whole order of heaven and earth, or from heaven and earth.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Commentary on John* 1 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 18, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

They still watched for the Lord's coming

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

The Didache tells believers to stay ready because the hour of the Lord's coming is unknown. Hippolytus also lists the Lord's sudden appearing from heaven among the things Scripture still teaches. So belief that the Gospel had spread did not replace their hope of Christ's return.

8 “Instead, be ready, because you do not know the hour when our Lord is coming.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Didache,** *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 16 (c. 50–120 AD) **Source 1, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

9 “and how the sudden appearing of the Lord will be revealed from heaven; and what the burning of the whole world will be”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hippolytus,** *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* 1 (c. 200–236 AD) **Source 16, page 6** Read it in the library ›
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THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not directly explain Matthew 24:14 or say whether it is completely fulfilled.

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- They do not address whether the thousand years of Revelation 20 are already past.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 22 early Christian passages and 85 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–22, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 23–25, in Bible order), then 82 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF's updated English unless marked "1885 English" (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). "… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *22 passages from 12 writers*

Didache, *c. 50–120 AD · source 1*

1 *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 16 (1885 English) **Quote 8, page 4** "then shall appear the signs of the truth… [continues online] **read ›**

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · source 2*

2 *Shepherd* (on point 1) "this law is the Son of God, proclaimed to the ends of the earth… [continues online] **read ›**

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · source 3*

3 *Epistle to the Philadelphians* (1885 English; on point 4) "those things which the prophets announced, saying, "Until He come for whom it is reserved, and He shall be the expectation of the Gentiles," have been fulfilled in the Gospel… [continues online] **read ›**

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · sources 4–6*

4 *Dialogue with Trypho* (on point 3) "sound has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *First Apology* **Quote 3, page 3** "voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *Dialogue with Trypho* (on point 4) "peace until the moon is no more. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth. Ethiopians will bow before Him… [continues online] **read ›**

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · source 7*

7 *Diatessaron* 41 (1885 English; on point 7) "24:14 And 58 this, the gospel of the kingdom, shall be preached in all the world for a testimony to all nations… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 8–9*

8 *Against Heresies: Book III* (on point 1) is not possible for the Gospels to be more or fewer in number than they are. Since there are four zones of the world we live in and four principal… [continues online] **read ›**

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9 *Against Heresies: Book III* **Quote 1, page 2** "have learned about the plan of our salvation from no others than those through whom the Gospel has come down to us. They proclaimed it publicly at one time and… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 10–12*

10 *Instructor* 2.8 **Quote 4, page 3** "preached by them, He came to the ends of the earth… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *Stromata* 4.3 (on point 4) to me to have said that God alone is wise, since the apostle also writes in the Epistle to the Romans, "For the obedience of faith among all nations, being… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Stromata* 5.10 (1885 English; on point 4) "15:29 designating the spiritual gift, and the gnostic communication, which being present he desires to impart to them present as the fullness of Christ, according to the revelation of… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 13–15*

13 *Against Marcion* 8 **Quote 2, page 2** "how will he be proved to have been before all things… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *An Answer to the Jews* 7 **Quote 5, page 3** and Pamphylia; those staying in Egypt, and those living in the region of Africa beyond Cyrene; Romans and foreigners; yes, even Jews in Jerusalem, and all other nations? For example… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Against Marcion* 8 (on point 4) "nations shall serve Him." To whom shall all thus do homage, but Christ… [continues online] **read ›**

Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · sources 16–17*

16 *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* 1 (1885 English) **Quote 9, page 4** "how he shall work error among the people, gathering them from the ends of the earth… [continues online] **read ›**

17 *Exegetical Fragments* (1885 English) **Quote 6, page 3** "these words it is signified that the preaching of the Gospel will be spread abroad over the seas and the islands in the ocean, and among the people dwelling therein… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 18–20*

18 *Commentary on John* 1 **Quote 7, page 4** "why should we discuss any further what the Gospel is… [continues online] **read ›**

19 *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 4.1 "again: "This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached among all nations… [continues online] **read ›**

20 *Against Celsus* 13 "who will not be filled with wonder when he goes back in thought to Him who then taught and said, "This Gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, for… [continues online] **read ›**

Novatian, *c. 240–258 AD · source 21*

21 *Treatise Concerning the Trinity* 26 (1885 English; on point 4) "of me, and I will give You the heathens for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · source 22*

22 *Treatises* "But he who endures to the end, the same will be saved. And this Gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout all the world, as a testimony to all… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *3 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

23 **Romans 10:18** But I say, did they not hear? Indeed: Their sound has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world. **read ›**

24 **Colossians 1:5** because of the hope which is laid up for you in the heavens, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel **read ›**

25 **Colossians 1:6** which has come to you, even as it is in all the world and is bearing fruit and growing, as it does in you also, since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth, **read ›**

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ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *82 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Genesis 3:19

Deuteronomy 18:15

Psalms 19:7 · 72:1

Isaiah 11:1 · 11:2 · 42:1 · 45:1

Daniel 11:31 · 12:1

Jonah 1:17

Matthew 10:18 · 13:32 · 16:16 · 16:17 · 22:44 · 24:10 · 24:11 · 24:13 · 24:14 · 24:21 · 24:30 · 24:42

Mark 16:9

Luke 12:35 · 21:20

John 1:3 · 3:2 · 3:15 · 5:24 · 6:38 · 8:17 · 11:12 · 12:20 · 14:28 · 15:1 · 18:3 · 20:28

Acts 2:9 · 7:53

Romans 1:14 · 3:20 · 6:20 · 6:23 · 7:12 · 8:11 · 13:8 · 15:29 · 16:26

1 Corinthians 1:19 · 1:27 · 15:12 · 15:21 · 15:23 · 15:25

2 Corinthians 5:17

Galatians 3:19 · 5:6

Ephesians 1:10 · 1:23 · 5:8

Colossians 1:15 · 1:19 · 1:20 · 1:21 · 1:22 · 1:24 · 2:8 · 2:13 · 2:16 · 2:18 · 2:22

1 Thessalonians 4:17

1 Timothy 1:9

Hebrews 2:2

1 Peter 4:7 · 4:12

1 John 3:2

Revelation 1:1 · 7:14 · 12:7 · 20:5

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Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “Did the early church believe the Gospel had already been preached to the whole world?” on June 30, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY