

**THE DOCTRINE OF “LAST THINGS”
Part II: The Medieval and Reformation Church**

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I. INTRODUCTION.

In this final area of historical-theological investigation, the focus is now on the doctrine of eschatology, specifically Chiliasm. In the Ancient Church prior to Origen, in the earliest apologists, the church treated prophetic subjects with a literal, realistic hermeneutic and set forth a Historic Premillennialism. In Origen and afterwards the almost universal trend was to allegorize prophetic passages and, with Augustine’s *City of God*, a systematic amillennialism emerges. Augustine’s view dominated, without significant alteration, the entire Medieval Period. Sheldon wrote (*History*. 1, 405): “Scarcely any place was given to chiliasm proper in mediaeval thought. There was, indeed, in the tenth century, a wide-spread reference to a thousand years’ reign of Christ. But the thousand years were regarded as dating from the beginning of the Christian era. The belief entertained, therefore, was quite unlike the chiliastic theory of a visible reign of Christ upon earth; it was simply a popular conviction that the year 1000 would witness the end of the world. In general the mediaeval mind seems to have imitated Augustine in looking to the past, rather than to the future, for the beginning of the millennial reign.”

II. THE DOCTRINE OF THE “LAST THINGS” IN THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH

A couple of things are worth noting in the Middle Ages. First, allegorical interpretation became more entrenched and, with reference to the end times, more divorced from the literal meaning of the text. Second, Joachim of Fiore initiated a firestorm of apocalyptic expectation at the turn of the first millennium A.D. Third, some evidence of a pre-trib rapture doctrine has surfaced.

A. Hermeneutics in the Medieval Church.

1. One key principle of hermeneutics was the belief that every sentence in the pages of Scripture has to be understood as referring to Christ. This was based upon a misapplication of Luke 24:44, “Now He said to them, ‘These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ ” This passage does not say that every word or sentence in the Old Testament has to refer to Jesus, the Messiah, but instead it says Jesus is the one being referenced in the Old Testament when it speaks of the Messiah.

This would mean that a clearly historical passage like 1 Chronicles 26:18, which says, “At the Parbar on the west there were four at the highway and two at the Parbar,” would have to be interpreted as referring to Christ. This sentence is not speaking about Christ, but through allegory it was explained as referring to Christ. Farrar notes (*History of Interpretation*, 244-245) “During these nine centuries we find very little except the ‘glimmerings and decays’ of patristic exposition much of the learning which still continued to exist was devoted to something which was meant for exegesis, yet not one writer in hundreds showed any true conception of what exegesis really implies.”

B. Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1135–1202)

Joachim is considered one of the most fascinating figures of medieval theology, and his views are still hotly debated among scholars.

1. **Joachim’s hermeneutics.** Joachim was a noted mystic, whose alleged direct insights from God were the backbone of his hermeneutic. Joachim scholar Marjorie Reeves (*Dict of Hist Theology*, s.v. Joachim of Fiore) noted: “Joachim’s own life of meditation centred on the interpretation of the Scriptures. He went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land c. 1167. Early legends point to the first of three visionary experiences, reputedly on Mount Tabor; the other two are clearly documented in his writings (Expos., f. 39r-v; Psalt., f. 227r-v). From these experiences he drew his conviction that, through patient study, the *Spiritualis Intellectus* would break through the barriers of the letter to reveal the full inner meanings of the symbols and patterns of Scripture.”

This emphasis on a future age of the Spirit where the *Ecclesia Spiritualis* ruled, was a time where the monastic communities would convert the world generated an anticipation of a soon-coming change in history.

Joachim is thought to have been the first to utilize a historicist interpretation of “Revelation” and the first to speculate that the antichrist would be the pope. (R. H. Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse*, 23).

2. **Joachim and history.** Like Augustine, Joachim becomes famous for his sweeping overview and interpretation of history. Joachim posited three overlapping ages in history based on his meditations on the Trinity: the age of the Father from the Creation to the Incarnation (Law); the age of the Son beginning either in time of King Uzziah in the OT, reaching its fullness in the Incarnation or beginning with John the Baptist (sources disagree) and lasting to the second generation after Joachim *ca.* 1260 (Grace); the age of the Spirit to the end of time (liberty and illumination). This threefold progression is a significant departure from Augustine's view that history reached its consummation with the Incarnation.

Neander wrote (*Church History*, IV, 229): "His fundamental argument is that the Christian aera closes with the year 1260, when a new aera would commence under another dispensation. Thus the three persons of the Godhead divided the government of ages among them: the reign of the Father embraced the period from the creation of the world to the coming of Christ; that of the Son, the twelve centuries and a half ending in 1260, and then would commence the reign of the Holy Spirit. This change would be marked by a progress similar to that which followed the substitution of the new for the old dispensation. Thus man, after having been carnal under the Father, half carnal and half spiritual under the Son, would, under the Holy Ghost, become exclusively spiritual. So there have been three stages of development in society, in which the supremacy belonged successively to warriors, the secular clergy, and monks."

3. **Joachim and eschatology.** Joachim saw seven Tribulations in the history of the Church related to the seven seal judgments (historicist interpretation), each progressively worse, each to be endured by the faithful, culminating in the last and final Antichrist. Following the Church's victory over the Antichrist, she would "cross over the river" into the promised land of the Spirit, symbolized by the Sabbath "rest." Although he has Satan bound only in this last period, he is not a pure millennialist for his time frame is not a literal, 1,000 years.

The "radical" nature of Joachim's eschatology was his view that the age of the Spirit would entail a radical transformation of the current Church, the Papacy, sacrament, and organization. His rejection of the Catholic Church being the final form of the City of God led to his anathematization. This view also suggests a shift to Chiliasm on Joachim's part.

In a recent article ("Joachim of Fiore's Breakthrough to Chiliasm," Robert E. Lerner, *Cristianesimo Nella Storia* 6 (October 1985): 489-512.), it is argued that Joachim was "the most profoundly original and inherently progressive theologian of history of the Middle Ages." Lerner states that Joachim promoted Chiliasm in the face of the dominant Augustinian

consensus. He also documents others who followed Joachim in his millennial views: Haimo of Auxerre and the Venerable Bede. Within their thinking, Lemer argues, an incipient dispensationalism can be seen.

C. Brother Dolcino, the Apostolic Brethren, and the Rapture

1. Gerard Sagarello founded a monastic order in N. Italy called the Apostolic Brethren in 1260. Because they lacked official sanction, the order was persecuted. In 1300 Gerard was burned at the stake. Leadership transferred to Brother Dolcino.
2. Under Dolcino's leadership the order grew, eventually counting thousands in its membership.
3. Following Dolcino's death (1307), a brief treatise was written in Latin on the beliefs and history of the Apostolic Brethren. An unnamed notary of the diocese of Vertelli had penned *The History of the Brother Dolcino*.
4. Francis Gumerlock, a non-dispensational scholar, uncovered this document and asserts that it indeed demonstrates that Brother Dolcino held to a pretribulation Rapture (cf., Francis Gumerlock, "A Rapture Citation in the Fourteenth Century," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (159:635, 349-362).
5. The key paragraph in *Brother Dolcino*:

“Again, [Dolcino believed and preached and taught] that within those three years Dolcino himself and his followers will preach the coming of the Antichrist. And that the Antichrist was coming into this world within the bounds of the said three and a half years; and after he had come, then *he [Dolcino] and his followers would be transferred into Paradise*, in which are Enoch and Elijah. And in this way they will be *preserved unharmed from the persecution of Antichrist*. And that then Enoch and Elijah themselves would descend on the earth for the purpose of preaching [against] Antichrist. Then they would be killed by him or by his servants, and thus *Antichrist would reign for a long time*. But when the Antichrist is dead, Dolcino himself, who then would be the holy pope, and his preserved followers, will descend on the earth, and will preach the right faith of Christ to all, and will convert those who will be living then to the true faith of Jesus Christ.” (italics added)
6. Several points in this statement are very similar to modern pretribulationism.

—The Latin word *transferrentur*, meaning “they would be transferred,” is the same word used by medieval Christians to describe the rapture of Enoch to heaven.

—The subjects of this rapture were to be Brother Dolcino and his followers. This was not a partial rapture theory because Brother Dolcino considered the Apostolic Brethren to be the true church in contrast to the Roman Catholic Church.

—The purpose of the rapture was to preserve the people from the persecution of the Antichrist.

—The text presents the “transference” of believers to heaven and the “descent” of believers from heaven as two separate events.

—The text also shows that quite a long gap of time must intervene between the rapture of the saints to heaven and the return of the saints from heaven.

7. Gumerlock affirms this to be a pre-trib rapture statement. He concludes:

This paragraph from *The History of Brother Dolcino* indicates that in northern Italy in the early fourteenth century a teaching very similar to modern pretribulationism was being preached. Responding to distressing political and ecclesiastical conditions, Dolcino engaged in detailed speculations about eschatology and believed that the coming of the Antichrist was imminent. He also believed that the means by which God would protect His people from the persecution of the Antichrist would be through a translation of the saints to paradise.

Our attention, then, turns to the Reformation era, a millennium later, and to a discussion of Eschatology among the reformers. In essence, the major reformers perpetuated Augustine’s construct.

II. THE DOCTRINE OF “LAST THINGS” IN MARTIN LUTHER.

A discussion of Luther’s eschatology must be prefaced with some general comments. First, in terms of futuristic events, Luther saw the Great Tribulation and the bodily return of Christ. He believed that he was in the midst of the first one and hoped for the second. Second, Luther did not attempt to develop a synthesis of his eschatological views; his stress was soteriological. Third, Luther interpreted Scripture with an immediatist, presentist perspective for apologetic and polemical value. Luther shifted to a more literal hermeneutic, though he did not apply it consistently in eschatology.

A. Luther and the Book of Daniel

It is imperative to remember that Luther tended to be subjective and contemporary in his interpretation of prophecy (i.e., historicism). Luther believed that the four world empires of Daniel chapter 2 were Babylonian, Assyrian or Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman. He thought that the same nations were depicted in chapter seven. Luther's identification of the "Little Horn" was not always consistent. At first, he favored identification with the papacy (1521), but he later distinctly expounded the Little Horn as the Turks (1538). The political situation of Luther's time, with the threatened invasion of the onrushing Ottoman Turks, made this conceivable to Luther.

Luther seems to have interpreted the seventy weeks of Daniel, chapter 9, on a day-year principle as equaling 490 years. Luther believed that the seventy weeks began in the second year of Darius. For Luther, the 69th week ended with the death of Christ which instituted the final week wherein the Gospel was preached with power. This showed the dual hermeneutic, the first 483 years were interpreted literally, the final 7, allegorically.

The "willful king" of Daniel 11:36 is unmistakably rendered as a prophetic reference to the papacy. The final point of interest in an eschatology survey of Luther's main concepts is that of Daniel 12:4, concerning the sealing of the book till the last days. Luther says, (*Table Talks*, 194):

"This is the work we are doing at the present time. And as formerly stated prophecies can only be perfectly understood after they have been fulfilled."

"69 Weeks"	A.D. 33	70 th Week
DARIUS	A.D. 33	"Last Days"

B. Luther and the Book of Revelation

Luther worked on the Apocalypse prior to Daniel, and he found the book to be confusing because of the symbolism. In fact, Luther questioned the authenticity of the book and mentioned his doubts freely in his first introduction to it. However, in 1545 he wrote a synopsis of the book with a new preface. In brief, Luther viewed the chapters as follows:

Chapter

- 2-3 The list of churches referred to historical churches of Asia Minor in John's time.
- 6-8 The descriptions of terrific distress and tribulation was considered by Luther as vivid pictures of that which the church was to pass. The sixth chapter the descriptions of wars, famines, and pestilence, depicted the physical sufferings of the church, while chapters seven and eight described spiritual affliction. (Froom, *Prophetic Faith*, 274, in this connection stated that Luther interpreted "the great mountain burning with fire, and cast into the sea" as referring to Marcion and the Manicheans whose heretical teachings led many astray.)
- 9-10 The misery of the church became extreme as physical and spiritual afflictions are united.
- 11-12 These chapters offer comfort and consolation through the two witnesses and the women.
- 13 In this chapter, Luther holds that the papacy received its power to rule both the state and the church. The two beasts of the same chapter represent the power of imperial Rome and the papacy.
- 14 In Luther's mind the Babylon of this chapter can only be associated with Rome. Herein is the decline of spiritual Babylon prophesied.
- 15-16 Seven vials are given by an angel. The Word of God increases and the papacy is brought to ruin.
- 17 The imperial papacy and the papal imperium are again pictured from their origin to end. A trial scene is created as the papacy is on trial before everyone to reveal their evil deeds and experience public condemnation.
- 18 With the trial over, the verdict is cast, and the papacy is totally destroyed by the One who rides the white horse, Christ (19).
- 20 Luther holds that Gog, Magog, and the Turks, who are bound with Satan for 1,000 years, are loosed.
- 21 Then follows the last judgment and eternity.

The key to understanding Luther on Revelation is twofold. First, he symbolized Revelation to fit into his own times; the *Revelation* as a divine church-history-through-the-centuries book. Luther felt that this was, perhaps, the proper way to understand the Book. Secondly, he admitted that he could not understand the book

in parts and that one must wait until the prophecy is fulfilled to really understand it. Revelation was a vague book for him and he handled as best he could at that time.

C. **Luther and the Meaning of History**

Although one must realize that Luther did not formulate an eschatological theology, he did write much concerning various elements of prophecy. Luther simply did not set his thoughts in this area into a system. However, Luther's thoughts, when considered as a unit, can be arranged in a rather loose order.

To understand Luther's concept of eschatology, it is imperative to see his theory of the divisions of world history. Luther, as many in his day, divided history into six ages of about one thousand years each, which would culminate in the so called "eternal sabbath rest", typified by the six days of the creation week. Luther wrote (*Works*. 54, 407): "I divide the (history of the) world into six ages: the age of Adam, of Noah, of Abraham, of David, of Christ, and of the Pope. Each of the first five has attained about a thousand years together with its prosperity. The Pope began about five thousand years after the creation of the world, this is, when Hildebrand openly ridiculed the marriage of priests in the time of Henry IV. That was when Bernard was born. But the Pope won't complete his thousand years."

Luther reflected that the supremacy of Hildebrand over Henry IV at Canossa (1076) marked the beginning of the final thousand years. Luther understood that the fifth age began seven years after the death of Christ (A.D. 41). The Reformer saw strongly that the final age characterized by papal damnation would be shortened in duration. Proof for this point was sustained by Luther based upon the fact that Christ did not remain in the tomb a full three days.

So, Luther considered himself to be living in the final years before the Advent. While for Luther II Thessalonians supplied the clues to identify the pope as Antichrist, the Book of Revelation offered a preview of history including his own time. Rather than deny the Great Tribulation, he believed that he was in the midst of it while battling with Rome. The Reformer felt Antichrist's kingdom (i.e., papal rule) was characterized under the persecuting beast of Revelation 13.

The next event in the Reformer's mind was the return of Christ at the last judgment. For Luther, the hope of the Advent of Christ was a very imminent reality. He wrote (quoted in Froom, *Prophetic Faith*. 2, 275): "We have reached the time of the white horse of the Apocalypse. This world will not last any more, if God wills it, than another hundred years . . . This came upon me by the signs (i.e., celestial signs of Matthew 24, progress of the gospel, abominations of the pope) and by the admonitions of Christ Himself".

The last judgment at the return of Christ constituted several eschatological events. Christ upon His return will do battle with the papal system and cause its total destruction. At which time Satan and all his followers would be cast into the sea of fire. Also, Luther believed in a literal resurrection of the dead at this time to either blessing or cursing. With the papal system destroyed and mankind judged, Luther then felt (Froom. II, 282): “That the last clap of thunder will be heard, which will suddenly destroy heaven and earth and all that is on it. After which we shall be translated, and this corruptible will put on incorruption, and this mortal will put on immortality.”

Luther’s concept of the eternal abode of the believer is not an uncommon one, even today. Following the events of the Last Judgment, Luther felt that the earth was going to be restored to its original excellence, and it would be the residence of the glorified saints. The kingdom of the popes would be a thing of the past and the kingdom of the saints would last forever. Christ then would be Lord of lords for all eternity. The topic of Eternal Life reoccurs in Luther’s *Table Talks* frequently alluding to the fact that he often mused about it. Luther stated (*Works*. 54, 291): “I often think about it but I can’t imagine what it’s like, can’t understand how we’ll spend our time. . . . But I think we’ll have enough to do with God.”

He concluded (*Table Talks*, 250): “Therefore, let them be afraid and wither for fear, who know nothing else nor ask for anything else than this temporal life. . . . But let us be full of cheer and hope, because our life and our treasure is not here but hidden with Christ in God, and soon Christ will be revealed before the whole universe in His eternal brightness.”

In pictorial summary:

CREATION
OF WORLD

ADAM

NOAH

ABRAHAM

DAVID

CHRIST

POPE

1090

5,000 YRS.

6th Millennium/ ”Millennial”

Rest

III. THE DOCTRINE OF “LAST THINGS” IN JOHN CALVIN.

In essence, John Calvin was eschatologically Amillennial as is the entire Reformed Tradition.

ISRAEL = CHURCH

ETERNITY

“BLESSED
HOPE”

A. Calvin’s Concept of Eschatology.

1. It is readily apparent that to Calvin the culmination of redemption is the resurrection at the Second Advent of Christ. This expectation is a means of grace, a benefit of Christian growth. He wrote (*Institutes*. 3, 25, 1): “Hence the reason why faith is so rare in the world; nothing being more difficult for our sluggishness than to surmount innumerable obstacles in striving for the prize of our high calling. To the immense load of miseries which almost overwhelm us, are added the jeers of profane men, who assail us for our simplicity, when spontaneously renouncing the allurements of the present life we seem, in seeking a happiness which lies hid from us, to catch at a fleeting shadow. In short, we are beset above and below, behind and before, with violent temptations, which our minds would be altogether unable to withstand, were they not set free from earthly objects, and devoted to the heavenly life, though apparently remote from us. Wherefore, he alone has made solid progress in the gospel who has acquired the habit of meditating continually on a blessed resurrection.”

Again, he wrote (*Institutes*. 3, 25, 2): “For since Adam by his fall destroyed the proper order of nature, the creatures groan under the servitude to which they have been subjected through his sin; not that they are at all endued with sense, but that they naturally long for the state of perfection from which they have fallen. Paul therefore describes them as groaning and travailing in pain (Romans 8:19); so that we who have received the first-fruits of the Spirit may be ashamed to grovel in our corruption, instead of at least imitating the inanimate elements which are bearing the punishment of another’s sin. And in order that he may stimulate us the more powerfully, he terms the final advent of Christ our redemption. It is true, indeed, that all the parts of our redemption are already accomplished; but as Christ was once offered for sins (Hebrews 9:28), so he shall again appear without sin unto salvation. Whatever, then, be the afflictions by which we are pressed, let this redemption sustain us until its final accomplishment.”

2. At the advent of Christ, the day of resurrection, Christ will separate the sheep from the goats, assigning to each their eternal destiny. He wrote (*Institutes*. 3, 25, 9): “We know that in Adam all died. Christ has come to be the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). Is it to revive the whole human race indiscriminately? But what is more incongruous than that the ungodly in their obstinate blindness should obtain what the pious worshippers of God receive by faith only? It is certain, therefore, that there will be one resurrection to judgment, and another to life, and that Christ will come to separate the kids from the goats (Matthew 35:32).”

For the saints, the object of Christ’s return, eternal happiness is their portion (*Institutes*. 3, 25, 10): “But since the prophecy, that death shall be swallowed up in victory (Hosea 13:14), will then only be completed, let us always remember that the end of the resurrection is eternal happiness, of whose excellence scarcely the minutest part can be described by all that human tongues can say. For though we are truly told that the kingdom of God will be full of light, and gladness, and felicity, and glory, yet the things meant by these words remain most remote from sense, and as it were involved in enigma, until the day arrive on which he will manifest his glory to us face to face (1 Cor. 15:54).”

Of the wicked after the judgment, he wrote (*Institutes*. 3, 25, 12): “Moreover, as language cannot describe the severity of the divine vengeance on the reprobate, their pains and torments are figured to us by corporeal things, such as darkness, wailing and gnashing of teeth, unextinguishable fire, the ever-gnawing worm (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; Mark 9:43; Isaiah 66:24). It is certain that by such modes of expression the Holy Spirit designed to impress all our senses with dread, as when it is said, ‘Tophet is ordained of old; yea, for the king it is prepared: he hath made it deep and large; the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it (Isaiah 30:33). As we thus require to be assisted to conceive the miserable doom of the reprobate, so the consideration on which we ought chiefly to dwell is the fearful consequence of being estranged from all fellowship with God, and not only so, but of feeling that his majesty is adverse to us, while we cannot possibly escape from it. For, first, his indignation is like a raging fire, by whose touch all things are devoured and annihilated. Next, all the creatures are the instruments of his judgment, so that those to whom the Lord will thus publicly manifest his anger will feel that heaven and earth, and sea, all beings, animate and inanimate, are, as it were, inflamed with dire indignation against them, and armed for their destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power’ (2 Thess. 1:9). And whenever the prophets strike terror by means of corporeal figures, although in respect of our dull understanding there is not extravagance in their language, yet they give preludes of the future judgment in the sun

and the moon, and the whole fabric of the world. Hence unhappy consciences find no rest, but are vexed and driven about by a dire whirlwind, feeling as if torn by an angry God, pierced through with deadly darts, terrified by his thunderbolt, and crushed by the weight of his hand; so that it were easier to plunge into abysses and whirlpools than endure these terrors for a moment. How fearful, then; must it be to be thus beset throughout eternity! On this subject there is a memorable passage in the ninetieth Psalm: Although God by a mere look scatters all mortals, and brings them to nought, yet as his worshippers are more timid in this world, he urges them the more, that he may stimulate them, while burdened with the cross, to press onward until he himself shall be all in all.”

B. Calvin’s Criticism of Millennialism.

Calvin classifies Chiliasm under such titles as “fiction,” “error,” “insult,” and “dream.” He attacks this “intolerable blasphemy” because he understands the Chiliasts to teach that the joys of heaven for the saint or the torments of hell for the wicked are limited to only one thousand years! He wrote (*Institutes*. 3, 25, 5): “Shortly after the Chiliasts arose, who limited the reign of Christ to a thousand years. This fiction is too puerile to need or to deserve refutation. Nor do they receive any countenance from the Apocalypse, from which it is known that they extracted a gloss for their error (Rev. 20:4), since the thousand years there mentioned refer not to the eternal blessedness of the Church, but only to the various troubles which await the Church militant in this world. The whole Scripture proclaims that there will be no end either to the happiness of the elect, or the punishment of the reprobate. Moreover, in regard to all things which lie beyond our sight, and far transcend the reach of our intellect, belief must either be founded on the sure oracles of God, or altogether renounced. Those who assign only a thousand years to the children of God to enjoy the inheritance of future life, observe not how great an insult they offer to Christ and his kingdom. If they are not to be clothed with immortality, then Christ himself, into whose glory they shall be transformed, has not been received into immortal glory; if their blessedness is to have an end, the kingdom of Christ, on whose solid structure it rests, is temporary. In short, they are either most ignorant of all divine things, or they maliciously aim at subverting the whole grace of God and power of Christ, which cannot have their full effect, unless sin is obliterated, death swallowed up, and eternal life fully renewed. How stupid and frivolous their fear that too much severity will be ascribed to God, if the reprobate are doomed to eternal punishment, even the blind may see. The Lord, forsooth, will be unjust if he excludes from his kingdom those who, by their ingratitude, shall have rendered themselves unworthy of it. But their sins are temporary (see Bernard. Epist. 254). I admit it; but then the majesty of God, and also the justice which they have violated by their sins, are eternal. Justly, therefore, the memory of their iniquity does not perish. But in this way the punishment will exceed the measure of the fault. It is intolerable blasphemy to hold the majesty of God in so little estimation,

as not to regard the contempt of it as of greater consequence than the destruction of a single soul. But let us have done with these triflers, that we may not seem (contrary to what we first observed) to think their dreams deserving of refutation.”

C. Calvinism and Eschatology.

The Reformed Creeds speak sparingly to the issue of eschatology; indeed, it is broached in few of the statements and then only the final judgment with the eternal destinies to follow. The Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 simply states:

“Q. 52. What comfort does the return of Christ ‘to judge the living and the dead’ give you?

“A. That in all affliction and persecution I may await with head held high the very Judge from heaven who has already submitted himself to the judgment of God for me and has removed all the curse from me; that he will cast all his enemies and mine into everlasting condemnation, but he shall take me, together with all his elect, to himself into heavenly joy and glory.”

The Belgic Confession of Faith, 1561, has perhaps the most detailed explanation:

“Finally, we believe, according to the Word of God, when the time appointed by the Lord (which is unknown to all creatures) is come, and the number of the elect complete, that our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, corporally and visibly, as he ascended with great glory and majesty, to declare himself Judge of the quick and the dead, burning this old world with fire and flame to cleanse it. And then all men will personally appear before this great Judge, both men and women and children, that have been from the beginning of the world and to the end thereof, being summoned by the voice of the archangel, and by the sound of the trumpet of God. For all the dead shall be raised out of the earth, and their souls joined and united with their proper bodies in which they formerly lived. As for those who shall then be living, they shall not die as the others, but be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and from corruptible become incorruptible.

“Then the books (that is to say, the consciences) shall be opened, and the dead judged according to what they shall have done in this world, whether it be good or evil. Nay, all men shall give an account of every idle word they have spoken, which the world only counts amusement and jest; and then the secrets and hypocrisy of men shall be disclosed and laid open before all.

“And, therefore, the consideration of this judgment is justly terrible and dreadful to the wicked and ungodly, but most desirable and comfortable to the righteous and the elect; because then their full deliverance shall be perfected, and there they shall receive the fruits of their labor and trouble which they have borne. Their innocence shall be known to all, and they shall see the terrible vengeance which God shall execute on the wicked, who most cruelly persecuted, oppressed, and tormented them in this world; and who shall be convicted by the testimony of their own consciences, and, being immortal, shall be tormented in that everlasting fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels.

“But on the contrary, the faithful and elect shall be crowned with glory and honor; and the Son of God will confess their names before God his Father, and his elect angels; all tears shall be wiped from their eyes; and their cause, which is not condemned by many judges and magistrates as heretical and impious, will then be known to be the cause of the Son of God. And, for a gracious reward, the Lord will cause them to possess such a glory as never entered into the heart of man to conceive.

“Therefore we expect that great day with a most ardent desire, to the end that we may fully enjoy the promises of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

“Even so, come Lord Jesus. Rev. 22:20.”

The Westminster Confession, 1647, reads:

- “I. God hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father. In which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged, but likewise all persons, that have lived upon earth, shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds; and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.
- “II. The end of God’s appointing this day, is for the manifestation of the glory of his mercy in the eternal salvation of the elect; and of his justice in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient. For then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fullness of joy and refreshing which shall come from the presence of the Lord: but the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.”

IV. THE DOCTRINE OF “LAST THINGS” AND THE REBIRTH OF MILLENNIALISM.

The purpose of this final section of the lesson plan is to demonstrate the rebirth of Chiliasm after some thirteen centuries, after the time of Origen and Augustine.

A. The Background for the Rebirth of Millennialism

1. The birth of Hebrew studies in Protestant universities was pivotal beginning at Cambridge in 1549. As the seventeenth century progressed, the interest in the Hebrew language produced no less than nine different grammars between 1648–53.
2. The optimistic eschatology of Reformation Triumph. The reformers’ victory over the “Anti Christ” caused a great groundswell of optimism, that the church was on the verge of a righteous era; hence, a great interest in revisionist eschatology and most naturally a vague postmillennialism.
3. The rise of eschatological revisionists and biblical commentators. **Thomas Brightman (1562–1607)**, a Calvinist Presbyterian in England, produced the first major revision of Origen-Augustinian eschatology, *A Revelation of Revelation*. Although his interpretation borders at points on the fantastic, he does postulate a literal earthly reign. Toon wrote (*Puritan, The Millennium*, 31): “It is obvious that Brightman has revised the Augustinian position so much that his own eschatological scheme is radically different from that of the Bishop of Hippo. First, he has dropped the equating of the millennium with the whole age in which the Gospel is preached and adopted instead the scheme of two millennia, the first of which corresponds with the notion of the one millennium found in many sixteenth century writers. Secondly, unlike Augustine, but in accordance with current thinking, he has taken an historical view of the contents of the Apocalypse making them portray the whole history of the Church from the time of the Apostles until the Second Coming of Christ, and having special reference to God’s dealings with Rome, the Turks, and Roman Catholicism. Thirdly, developing a growing conviction in Reformed circles, he held an optimistic view of the last period of world history with Jerusalem the centre of a restored, converted Jewish nation and of a world ‘filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea.’ Augustine felt that the age would end with a short period of tribulation for the Church but Brightman placed this tribulation at the time of the destruction of the Papacy and the Turks and thus before the latter-day glory of the second millennium.”

Brightman's influence became immediately apparent in Henry Finch's *The Calling of the Jews* (1621) and the writings of America's John Cotton (later, Jonathan Edwards). John Owen, the architect of the Savoy Declaration of Faith, a classic statement of puritan congregationalism, wrote (Article XXVI, 5): "As the Lord in his care and love towards his church hath in his infinite wise providence exercised it with great variety in all ages for the good of them that love him and his own glory; so according to his promise we expect that in the latter days Anti-Christ being destroyed, the Jews called, and the adversaries of his dear Son broken, the churches of Christ being enlarged and edified through a free and plentiful communication of light and grace, shall enjoy in this world a more quiet, peaceable and glorious condition than they have enjoyed."

To a jubilant House of Commons in October 1652, Owen outlined the main characteristics of the forthcoming time of Zion's glory, the emergence of the millennium in a glorious era of the reign of the church (i.e., postmillennialism).

"1. Fullness of peace unto the gospel and the professors thereof, Isa. 11:6, 7; 54:13; 33:20, 21; Rev. 21:25.

"2. Purity and beauty of ordinances and gospel worship, Rev. 11:2; 21:3. The tabernacle was wholly made by appointment, Mal. 3:3, 4; Zech. 14:16; Rev. 21:27; Zech. 14:20; Isa. 35:8.

"3. Multitudes of converts, many persons, yea, nations, Isa. 60:7, 8; 66:8; 49:18–22; Rev. 7:9.

"4. The full casting out and rejecting of all will worship, and their attendant abominations, Rev. 11:2 [i.e., Arminianism].

"5. Professed subjection of the nations throughout the whole world unto the Lord Christ, Dan. 2:44; 7:26, 27; Isa. 60:6-9; the kingdoms become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ, Rev. 11:15, amongst whom his appearance shall be so glorious, that David himself shall be said to reign.

"6. A most glorious and dreadful breaking of all that rise in opposition to him, Isa. 60:12, never such desolations, Rev. 16:17–19,"

B. The Rebirth of Millennialism

In the 1620s not a few English Puritans were moving both by the logic of their biblical exegesis and the signs of the times in the direction of Chiliasm. Yet, they hesitated to take the final step and to advocate the ancient doctrine of the future millennium because they were conscious that it had been often branded as

heretical by the reformers. But when chiliasm received support of a leading German Calvinist divine, Johann Heinrich Alsted, they began to forget their inhibitions.

1. **Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588–1638)** was the first major Calvinist scholar to advance a premillennial eschatology. Clouse wrote of his views (*Influence of John Alsted*, 49–50):

“Alsted considered his method of Bible study to be applicable to every chapter and every verse of Scripture. When applied to Revelation 20, one must notice first that the author of the Book of Revelation is Jesus Christ working through the Apostle John and the subject is the Church. The Church to Alsted consisted of all people who have trusted in the true God. He proceeded to trace its history on earth beginning with Adam and Eve. One of the great events in this record was the Church contracting into the posterity of Abraham. It continued to be limited to Abraham’s seed throughout the Old Testament and again branched out to the Gentiles in the New Testament.

“There were four periods of Church history in the administration of the New Covenant. The first was from the time of John the Baptist to the Jerusalem Council (A.D. 50); the second lasted from the year 51 to the beginning of the thousand-year reign of Christ. There are four divisions within this second period: one under heathen Rome which lasted until the time of Constantine the Great (51–323); another from Constantine the Great until Phocas (323–606); a third under the Popes of Rome (606–1517); and the final period under the Papacy after the time of the Reformation (1517–1694).

“The third period of Church history was to be the thousand years when the martyrs for Christ will be resurrected and will reign on earth. The Church would increase greatly through the conversion of the Gentiles and the Jews during this time. There was to be no persecution during this period and this happy condition would be accompanied by a reformation in life and in doctrine. The fourth period of Church history would last from the end of the thousand years until the Last Judgment and would be a time of misery for the Church because of the war of Gog and Magog which will only end by divine intervention. After this judgment those who are members of the Church will share Christ’s company and happiness in heaven forever.”

N.B. The reasons for a shift from the earlier Reformation optimism of postmillennialism to this premillennialism are important to grasp; they are contextual. Clouse wrote (*Influence of John Alsted*, 49): “As the Thirty Years’ War was devastating his land, Alsted felt that he was witnessing the horrors of the end of the age. He admonished: ‘Let us sail therefore in the Name of God, and comfort the desolation of Germany with this pious meditation.’ The war was particularly severe in Alsted’s home province of Nassau, and it has already been noticed that he was forced to leave his teaching there and move to Transylvania. Indeed, the horrors of the war seemed to hold the key for the shift of Alsted’s thought from that of Augustinian eschatology to a strong premillenarian position. He quoted a statement by Irenaeus that every prophecy before it is fulfilled is a riddle, but when fulfilled it can be easily understood. Thus the trouble in Germany helped to explain the statements of the Revelation and pointed toward the end of the age.”

Further, he wrote (*Influence of John Alsted*, 55): “Whilst Alsted saw and experienced the effects of the War in Germany, the English Puritans were feeling the effects of a government religious policy which sought to crush their influence. Puritan clergy who refused to wear surplices or who omitted parts of the Prayer Book were reprovved, suspended or deprived. Preachers who put forward Puritan views on worship and discipline had their licenses withdrawn. Magistrates who favoured the Puritans were referred to the Court of High Commission. So the exodus of Puritans to the comparative safety of Holland, or the wilderness of New England, began. It must have seemed to those who left and to those who were able to remain behind that there was little hope of England and Europe becoming the kingdoms of the Lord Jesus Christ and experiencing the full blessings of God’s grace unless God Himself did something dramatic to root out the influence of Antichrist. Perhaps the personal appearance of Christ to establish His kingdom was the only answer.”

2. **Joseph Mede (b. 1582)** was the first English Puritan millenarian to strongly put forth his views in a 1627 book, *The Key of the Revelation*. Of the importance of this Christ College, Cambridge scholar is captured by Clouse (*Influence of John Alsted*, 62): “The work of Mede was used by a host of English writers in the seventeenth century. Most of them were influential during the 1640s and 1650s but others after this time still admitted a debt to the Mede-Alsted millennial view. Indeed, it is perhaps not an exaggeration to claim that Mede was the father of the premillennialism (which has still many disciples) in the English-speaking

churches. For the seventeenth century we may mention the names of John Milton, Samuel Hartlib, Jeremiah Burroughes, Nathaniel Holmes, Henry More, William Sherwin, Isaac Newton and virtually every Independent minister in England and Wales. Not a few Presbyterians also followed Mede's exegesis of Revelation 20. For example, William Twisse, who was elected prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly in 1643, never wrote a book of eschatology but his views were expressed in the prefaces which he wrote for the English translation of Mede's *Clavis Apocalyptica and The Apostasy of the Latter Times*. In these he indicated that Mede found the writings of Alsted most helpful and that he himself agreed with Mede and Alsted in their doctrine of the future millennium. As an example of a divine who followed Mede's general viewpoint we may take Thomas Goodwin."

C. A Radical Expression of Millennialism—The Fifth Monarchy

1. A radical exception of millennial fervor in contrast to the reserve of Mede are the now-infamous Fifth Monarchy Men which emerged after the execution of Charles I in 1649 and flourished prior to the days of the Restoration. The movement derived its name from Daniel 7 and the four empires, the last to be destroyed by the reign of Christ and the advance of the Fifth and last monarchy. It was the fusion of millennial theology and political extremism (i.e., the millennium was seen in political and social terms; not spiritual, ecclesiastical terms!).
2. The Fifth Monarchy Men understood that they had to take an active political part in the establishing of Christ's Kingdom. Oliver Cromwell once remarked that "though they had the tongues of angels, they had cloven feet." "Though," according to Cromwell, "we all honour the notion of the reign of Christ, their justification of violence and their radical social and economic objectives seem to many more like hell than heaven on earth." In short, misapplied millenarian zeal thrust the movement in chaotic political activities.
3. The Protectorate of Cromwell and the Restoration of the Stuarts in 1660 sounded the decline and, later, the deathknell of these radical politico-millennarians.

D. Early Rapture Views

Critics of the pre-trib Rapture doctrine frequently trot out old canards about the doctrine being invented by John Nelson Darby in the 1830s and they also seek to connect it to the mystical ramblings of thirteen-year-old Margaret McDonald, or an earlier statement by the Roman Catholic Jesuit Immanuel Lacunza, which was later picked up by Edward Irving and communicated through the young Margaret. Various studies have demonstrated that not only is all of this false, but at best

McDonald's statement was post-Tribulation. As we have noted, recent scholarship has discovered references to forms of pre-tribulationism as early as Pseudo Ephraem (4th–7th century) and in the medieval church.

Once premillennialism is restored it should not surprise us to find various statements related to the Church's removal prior to the Tribulation. These statements though are not analytical or systematized.

1. Claims of a Pre-Trib Rapture among the Puritans
 - a. Increase Mather demonstrated that the "that the saints would 'be caught up into the Air' beforehand, thereby escaping the final conflagration—an early formulation of the Rapture doctrine more fully elaborated in the nineteenth century." (Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992), p. 75).
 - b. Paul Benware (*Understanding the End Times*, 197–198) notes:
 - b. Peter Jurieu in his book *Approaching Deliverance of the Church* (1687) taught that Christ would come in the air to rapture the saints and return to heaven before the battle of Armageddon. He spoke of a secret Rapture prior to His coming in glory and judgment at Armageddon. Philip Doddridge's commentary on the New Testament (1738) and John Gill's commentary on the New Testament (1748) both use the term *rapture* and speak of it as imminent. It is clear that these men believed that this coming will precede Christ's descent to the earth and the time of judgment. The purpose was to preserve believers from the time of judgment. James MacKnight (1763) and Thomas Scott (1792) taught that the righteous will be carried to heaven, where they will be secure until the time of judgment is over.
 - c. Thomas Collier makes a reference to the pretribulational rapture in 1674, only to reject the view.
 - d. John Asgill wrote about the possibility of translation of the church without seeing death (1700). For his views he was removed from the Irish parliament in 1703 and the English parliament four years later. Bramely Moore (*The Church's Forgotten Hope: Or Scriptural Studies on the Translation of the Saints*)
 - e. Morgan Edwards, a Baptist preacher and founder of Brown University, wrote in 1744:

“The distance between the first and second resurrection will be somewhat more than a thousand years.

“I say, *somewhat more*, because the dead saints will be raised, and the living changed at Christ’s ‘appearing in the air’ (I Thes. iv. 17); and **this will be about three years and a half before the millennium**, as we shall see hereafter: but will he and they abide in the air all that time? No: they will ascend to paradise, or to some one of those many ‘mansions in the father’s house’ (John xiv. 2), and **disappear during the foresaid period of time**. The design of this retreat and disappearing will be to judge the risen and changed saints; for ‘now the time is come that judgment must begin,’ and that will be ‘at the house of God’ (I Pet. iv. 17) . . . (p. 7; The spelling of all Edwards quotes have been modernized.) (Morgan Edwards, *Two Academical Exercises on Subjects Bearing the following Titles; Millennium, Last-Novelties* (Philadelphia: Self-published, 1788). This entire book is available on the Internet at the following: <https://www.pre-trib.org/dr-robert-thomas/message/two-academical-exercises-on-subjects-bearing-the-following-titles-millennium-last-novelties>.)

Notice that Edwards makes three key points that are consistent with the pre-trib view.

1. He clearly separates the rapture from the second coming by three-and-a-half years.
2. He uses modern pre-trib rapture verses (1 Thessalonians 4:17 and John 14:2) to describe the rapture and support his view.
3. He believed the judgment seat of Christ (rewarding) for believers will occur in heaven while the tribulation is raging on earth.

V. CONCLUSION.

The purpose of this lesson has been to trace the history of eschatological development in the era of the great sixteenth century Reformation. Both Luther and Calvin continued the Origen-Augustinian tradition advocating the allegorization of prophecy with a present reign of Christ in the hearts of the saints. The triumph of Protestantism, coupled with a renewal of attention to the study of the Bible in the original languages led to a stress on literal eschatological fulfillment resulting in the rebirth of millenarianism; first, within the context of an immediatist postmillennialism and, second, through Alsted and Mede in an historicist premillennialism. Chiliasm was returned to orthodoxy! Developments since its rebirth is the object of our final lesson.

THE DOCTRINE OF “LAST THINGS” Part III: The Modern Church

Summary:

- I. INTRODUCTION.**
- II. THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF POSTMILLENNIALISM.**
 - A. Postmillennialism and Daniel Whitby.
 - B. Postmillennialism and Conservative Theology in America.
- III. THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF PREMILLENNIALISM.**
 - A. The Development of Premillennialism in Britain.
 - B. The Development of Premillennialism in America.
- IV. CONCLUSION.**

I. INTRODUCTION.

The focus of this final class shall be upon Chiliasm since its renewal in the era of the Reformation. Focus shall first be placed upon the development of Postmillennialism through Whitby to a host of scholars from John Cotton and Jonathan Edwards to Charles Hodge as well as the development of the same position within Liberal Theology. Then focus shall turn to the premillennial position and the crucial importance of John Nelson Darby.

II. THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF POSTMILLENNIALISM.

The clue to the systematic development of postmillennial thought, which occurred in England, is captured by Sandeen who wrote (*Fundamentalist Movement*, 5): “In reaction to the excesses of the Puritan revolution, millenarianism fell into disfavor in the eighteenth century, but churchmen did not return to the Augustinian period; “that is, England in reaction to such millennialists as the Fifth Monarch Men a severe reaction against it in the restoration era. In harmony with the Lockean tradition of rationalism and optimism, a new eschatology, most influentially stated by the Salisbury rector Daniel Whitby became popular.” Sandeen states that Postmillennialism begun with Whitby is overstated; Puritan divines, such as John Owen, of the Cromwellian era, appear to be postmillennial in eschatological perspective.

A. Postmillennialism and Daniel Whitby.

- 1. Daniel Whitby (1638–1726)**, a major popularizer of postmillennialism was born in Northamptonshire, England, and educated at Trinity College, Oxford (B.A., M.A., and D.D.). Afterwards, he served as chaplain to the bishop of Salisbury then as rector of St. Edmund’s in Salisbury. Not only a

popular preacher and a writer (39 volumes), he was primarily a controversialist. His most noted work was *Paraphrase and Commentary on the New Testament* (2 vols. 1703), which continued to be used throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is the source of his views.

2. **Whitby and Postmillennialism.** In the latter part of the *Paraphrase* he wrote a twenty-six page essay on a “new hypothesis” that “I shall now offer it to the consideration of the Learned” (688). His thoughts can be constructed as follows:

Present Age	Millennium (Gradual Improvement of World)	Eternity
Judgment of Antichrist		
Conversion of Jews		
Spiritual Resurrection		

3. Whitby begins spiritualizing the resurrection prior to the millennium understanding it as individualized, spiritual resurrection at the new birth (i.e., the experience of redemption). The title of his work explicates his view (*Paraphrase*, 687): “A Treatise of the True Millennium: showing that it is not a reign of persons raised from the dead, but of the church flourishing gloriously for a thousand years after the conversion of the Jews, and the flowing-in of all nations to them thus converted to the Christian Faith.”

Again, (*Paraphrase*, 708): “This Chapter contains Arguments against the literal Resurrection, and the Reign of Martyrs upon Earth a thousand Years. First, From the Inconsistency of it with the happy State of Souls departed. I. Secondly, From the accurate Description of the Resurrection in the Holy Scripture, without any mention of a first and second Resurrection, and with such Descriptions of the Qualities of the Bodies raised, the efficient Cause, of the Time, Circumstances, and Consequents of it, which suit not with the Doctrine of the Millennium, II. Thirdly, From the Inconsistency of it with the Genius of the Christian Faith, and the Nature of the Gospel Promises.”

4. Whitby then argued that the fall of Antichrist precedes the millennium as does the binding of Satan. He wrote (*Paraphrase*, 696): “How far I differ from the ancient and modern Millenaries, and in which I agree with them, I. The Proposition that the true Millennium is only a Reign of the converted Jews, and of the Gentiles flowing in to them, Ibid. Where it is noted, 1. That all spiritual Blessings have been still conveyed from the

Jews to other Nations. 2. That there will be a glorious Conversion of the Jews to the Christian Faith, II. That the Description of this Conversion of the Jews, made by their own Prophets and Writers, answers fully to the Millennium of St. John, which he speaks of in the very Words of the said Prophets, III. The Characters which the Patrons of the Millennium give to those Times, accord exactly with the Characters given by the Prophets of the Conversion of the Jews, IV. The Prophets seem to intimate, that this Conversion shall be effected by a full influence of the Holy Ghost upon them, V. All the Passages cited to this Effect, from the Jewish Writers, speak only of the Millennium, the Resurrection, the New Heavens and Earth belonging to the Jewish Nation, VI.”

5. Of the earthly millennium, he wrote in glowing terms (*Paraphrase*, 700):

“IV. Add to this, that all the Characters which the Patrons of the Millennium give of those Times, exactly accord with the Characters given by the Prophets of the Conversion of the Jews, and many of them are taken from the very Words of the Prophets, foretelling those Times: For Instance,

“First, Indolence and Plenty, saith Dr. Burnet, [B.4. cap. 7. 183.] seem to be two Ingredients of this happy State. Accordingly the Prophets every where speak, how the Riches of the Gentiles shall then flow into them, Isaiah 60:5, 11 and they shall eat the Riches of the Gentiles, chap. 61:6. That there shall be then no Hunger nor Thirst, no Heat nor Sun to finite them, no Voice of Crying or Weeping. See Isaiah 49:10.

“Secondly, That is shall be a Time of universal Peace, and Freedom from War and Persecution, [Ibid., 184] and this he proves from the Words of the Prophets declaring, That at the Day, that Time when God shall create New Heavens and New Earth, the Lamb and the Lion shall lie down together, and the sucking Child shall play with the Basillisk, and they shall not hurt in all my holy Mountain, as it is written, Isaiah 11:6, 7, 8, 9 and chap. 65:25 and saying, That the Nations shall beat their Swords into Plough-shares, and their Spears into Pruninghooks; Nation shall not lift up a Sword against Nation, neither shall they learn War any more, Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3 as appears also from the Promises, that God will then make her Officers Peace, Isaiah 60:17 and will extend Peace to her as a River, chap. 66:12.

“Thirdly, That is shall be a Kingdom of Righteousness, [Ibid.] Accordingly of this holy City, Jerusalem, it is said, There shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and unclean, Isaiah 52:1.

“An Highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness, the Unclean shall not pass over it, chap. 35:8 which exactly answers to those Words of St. John, Into the holy City shall nothing enter that is polluted or unclean, Rev. 21:27. And again, Thy People shall be all righteous, chap. 60:21. See Zeph. 3:9; Zach. 14:20, 21.

“Moreover, this faith [185] will be a State under a peculiar Presence and divine Conduct, because the Tabernacle of God will be with Men, and He will dwell with them; and this we see was promised at the Conversion of the Jewish Nation, Ezek. 37:27.

“The last Character, saith he, that belongs to this State, or rather to those that enjoy it, is this, that they are Kings and Priests unto God;”

Again it is to resemble the effusion of the Spirit at Pentecost (*Paraphrase*, 700): “V. Nor is it to be wondered that there should be then such a glorious Conversion of them, and such a flowing-in of the Nations to them, seeing the Prophets seem to intimate there shall be then a full Effusion of the Holy Ghost upon them, somewhat resembling that which was vouchsafed to the first Ages of Christianity. So the Prophet Isaiah speaks of the Desolation of the City, until the Spirit be poured upon them from on high, Isaiah 32:15 which is the very Phrase in which our Lord promiseth the Spirit to His Apostles, Luke 24:49. St. Paul proves their Conversion from those Words of the Prophet Isaiah, The Delivered shall come out of Zion, and shall turn away Inquiry from Jacob: with which these are immediately connected, And this is my Covenant with them, saith the Lord, My Spirit that is upon thee, and My Words which I have put into thy Mouth, shall not depart out of thy Mouth, nor out of the Mouth of thy Seed, not out of the Mouth of thy Seed’s Seed from henceforth for ever, chap. 59:20, 21. And again, chap. 54:3. I will pour Water upon him that is thirsty, and Floods upon the dry Ground; I will pour my Spirit upon thy Seed, and my Blessing on thy Offspring.”

6. After this “literal” reign of saints in peace, Christ returns (*Paraphrase*, 707–708):

“Hence then I argue thus against this Doctrine: Since Christ is to continue in Heaven till the Completion, or Consummation of all Things, spoken by the Holy Prophets, if the Millennium were any of them, Christ must continue in Heaven till the Consummation for that also, and therefore is not to come down from Heaven to reign on Earth till the Millennium be ended; nor can that be

contemporary with our Lord's Second Coming, which is from Heaven.

“The Arguments produced in favour of this Millennium, from Rom. 8:19, 20, 21, from 2 Thess. 2:1, from Heb. 1:6 and 2:5, and from 2 Peter 3:8–12 are sufficiently answered in the Notes upon those Places.”

B. Postmillennialism and Conservative Theology in America.

The inroads of the Owenite/Whitby eschatological scheme were profound both in England and America. The point is simply that Owen's teachings were embraced by some Puritans, who, through Jonathan Edwards of Northampton, passed it on to such Presbyterian stalwarts as Charles Hodge.

1. **John Cotton (1585–1652)**, the Cambridge-trained Puritan, became the giant among early colonial clergy. Through the publication of *The Churches Resurrection, or the Opening of the Fifth and Sixth Verses of the 20th Chap. of the Revelation* (1642), he argued a Owenite, immediatist eschatology.
 - a) The resurrection is not a literal event, but a rather the appearance of men who possess the same spirit as the martyred saints by the Antichrist. He wrote (*Churches Resurrection*, 6): “What? shall they rise again in their bodies? No, that is not the meaning, but there shall be men of the same spirit; as John the Baptist is said to come in the Power and Spirit of Elijah.” The resurrection is a quickening, an awakening of the church from apostasy and Israel of blindness; it is spiritualized.
 - b) Christ does reign directly for the subsequent one thousand years, but mediately through the instrumentality of the saints and the church. He notes for example, that during the millennium wickedness will be held in check, “chiefly by Church censures, and partly also by punishment from Civil Magistrates as need shall be” (*Churches Resurrection*, 6).
2. **Jonathan Edwards (1703–58)** argued strongly for a postmillennial eschatology (See Yale Edition of his collected works, *Apocalyptic Writings* [v. 5]). He understood that the Millennial Kingdom would be preceded by a very dark period of religious interest. He wrote, “Whether the times shall be any darker still, or how much darker, before the beginning of this glorious work of God we cannot tell.” It is quite obvious that to Edwards the next scheduled event was the fall of Antichrist. This he felt would be accomplished by the preaching of the gospel.

- a) He argues for an imminent kingdom by identifying the drying of the Euphrates as a judgment on the papal Antichrist (i.e., loss of revenues); the sixth vial (“broke to history within the last twenty years”) as the ruin of French and Spanish commerce by England and the cutting off of revenue to the pope by Spain and Portugal. He wrote (*Works*. 3, 502): “These things duly considered, I imagine afford us ground to suppose, not only that the effect of this sixth vial is already begun, but that some progress is already made in it, and that this vial is now running apace. And when it shall be finished; there is all reason to suppose that the destruction of Antichrist will very speedily follow; and that the last two vials will succeed one another more closely than the other vials.”
- b) Thus, a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit will bring about a renewal of religion on a universal level. He wrote (*Works*. 3, 503): “A great outpouring of the Spirit accompanied that dispensation that was preparatory to Christ’s coming in his public ministry, in the days of his own flesh: so, much more with a great outpouring of the Spirit accompany the dispensation that will be preparatory to Christ’s coming in His kingdom.”

Again (*Works*. 3, 493): “There is not the least reason to think that all this will be brought to pass as it were at one stroke, or that from the present lamentable state of things, there should be brought about and completed the destruction of the church of Rome, the entire extirpation of all infidelity, heresies, superstitions and schisms, throughout all Christendom, and the conversion of all the Jews, and the full enlightening and conversion of all Mahometin [sic] and Heathen nations, through the whole earth, on every side of the globe, and from the north to the south pole, and the full settlement of all in the pure Christian faith and order, all as it were in the issue of one battle, and by means of the victory of the church in one great conflict with her enemies.”

Christianity’s victory thereby will be universal in extent. Heresy will be abolished, the papacy overthrown, Islam destroyed, and Jewish and pagan infidelity vanquished; this is the first resurrection. Above all else, the millennium is chiefly the time of the church’s prosperity, the principal fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. He wrote (*A Humble Attempt*, 2, 288):

“A time approaches wherein this whole great society shall appear in glorious beauty, in genuine amiable Christianity and excellent order, as ‘a city compact together, the

perfection of beauty, an eternal excellency,' shining with a reflection of the glory of Jehovah risen upon it, which shall be attractive and ravishing to all kings and nations, and it shall appear 'as a bride adorned for her husband.' A time of great temporal prosperity; of great health; (Isa. 33:24) 'The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick' of long life; (Isa. 55:22) [sic] 'As the days of a tree, are the days of my people.' A time wherein the world shall be delivered from that multitude of sore calamities which before had prevailed, (Ezek. 47:20) [sic] and there shall be an universal blessing of God upon mankind, in soul and body, and in all their concerns, and all manner of tokens of God's presence and favour, and 'God shall rejoice over them, as the bridegroom rejoiceth over his bride, and the mountains shall as it were drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk' (Joel 3:18).

"A time of great and universal joy, we are taught to expect, will take place through all the earth, when 'from the utmost ends of the earth shall be heard songs, even glory to the righteous,' and God's people 'shall with joy draw water out of the wells of salvation.' God shall 'prepare in His holy mountain a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined,' which feast is represented, Rev. 19, as the marriage supper of the Lamb. Yea, the Scriptures represent it not only as a time of universal joy on earth, but extraordinary joy in heaven, among the angels and saints, the holy apostles and prophets there; (Rev. 18:20 and 19:1-9) Yea, the Scriptures represent it as a time of extraordinary rejoicing with Christ Himself, the glorious head, in whom all things in heaven and earth shall then be gathered together in one; (Zech. 3:17) [sic] 'The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save; He will rejoice over thee with singing.' And the very fields, trees, and mountains shall then as it were rejoice, and break forth into singing; (Isa. 60:12) [sic] 'Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.' (Isa. 44:23) 'Sing, O heavens, for the Lord hath done it; shout, ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains; O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel."

- c) The end of the “glorious reign of righteousness” will result in a general apostasy (i.e., Gog and Magog). Christ will return, put down the rebellion, judgment follows, and the world destroyed. Christ, then, delivers up the Kingdom to the Father. He wrote (*Works*. 1, 497): “And then will come the time when all the elect shall be gathered in. That work of conversion which has been carried on from the beginning of the church after the fall through all those ages, shall be carried on no more. Then never shall another soul be converted. Every one of those many millions, whose names were written in the book of life before the foundation of the world, shall be brought in; not one soul shall be lost. And the mystical body of Christ, which has been growing since it first begin in the days of Adam, will be completed as to number of parts, having every one of its members. In this respect the work of redemption will now be finished. And now the end for which the means of grace have been instituted shall be obtained. All that effect which was intended to be accomplished by them shall now be accomplished.”

3. **Princeton and Charles Hodge.** Postmillennial eschatology became dominate through Edwards among the New England divines: Congregationalists such as Bellamy, Hopkins, and Taylor; among Baptists such as A. H. Strong: (Strong states his dependency on Whitby [*Systematic Theology*, 1014]; “Our own interpretation of Rev. 20:1–10, was just given, for substance, by Whitby”); and the Presbyterians such as the Princeton scholars. Charles Hodge, since he has given us a *Systematic Theology*, is perhaps a good example of Presbyterian Postmillennial Eschatology. He wrote (*Systematic Theology*. 3, 792):

“The common Church doctrine is, first, that there is to be a second personal, visible, and glorious advent of the Son of God. Secondly, that the events which are to precede that advent, are

- “1. The universal diffusion of the Gospel; or, as our Lord expresses it, the ingathering of the elect; this is the vocation of the Christian Church.
- “2. The conversion of the Jews, which is to be national. As their casting away was national, although a remnant was saved; so their conversion may be national, although some may remain obdurate.
- “3. The coming of Antichrist.

“Thirdly, that the events which are to attend the second advent are:

- “1. The resurrection of the dead, of the just and of the unjust.
- “2. The general judgment.
- “3. The end of the world. And,
- “4. The consummation of Christ’s kingdom.”

Of a literal resurrection prior to the millennium Hodge is adamant in his statements (*Systematic Theology*. 3, 843-44):

“The common millenarian doctrine is, that there is to be a literal resurrection when Christ shall come to reign in person upon the earth, a thousand years before the end of the world, and that the risen saints are to dwell here and share with Christ in the glories of his reign. But this seems to be inconsistent with what is taught in 1 Corinthians 15:50. Paul there says: ‘Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.’ It is here expressly asserted that our bodies as now constituted are not adapted to the state of things which shall exist when the kingdom of God is inaugurated. We must all be changed. From this it follows that the spiritual body is not adapted to our present mode of existence; that is, it is not suited or designed for an earthly kingdom. Luther admits this. He admits that the renovated, or transfigured, body of necessity supposes a renovated earth. He admits also that when the bodies of believers are thus changed they are to be caught up from the earth, and are to dwell with Christ in heaven. When Christ appears, His people are to appear with Him in glory, by assuming that risen saints are to rule this kingdom, not from the literal Jerusalem, but from heaven. This, however, is to introduce an extra-scriptural and conjectural idea.

“It has already been said, when speaking of the restoration of the Jews to their own land, that this whole theory of a splendid earthly kingdom is a relic of Judaism, and out of keeping with the spirituality of the Gospel.”

He concluded (*Systematic Theology*, 3, 866): “It seems therefore that the torch of the literalist is an ‘*ignis fatuus*,’ leading those who follow it, they know not whither. Is it not better to abide by the plain doctrinal teaching of the Bible, rather than to trust to the uncertain expositions of unfulfilled prophecies? What almost all Christians believe is: (1.) That all nations shall be converted unto God. Jesus shall reign from the rising to the setting of the sun. (2.) That the Jews shall be reingrafted into their own olive-tree and acknowledge our Lord to be their God and Savior. (3.) That all Antichristian powers shall be destroyed. (4.) That Christ shall come again in person and with great glory; the dead shall be raised, those who have done good unto the resurrection of life, those who have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation; and (5.) That the righteous clothed in their glorified bodies shall then inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world; and the wicked be consigned to their final doom.”

N.B. It must also be noted that the German Liberals of the nineteenth century (the Ritschlians particularly) were postmillennial. This, in part, explains the decline of this eschatological opinions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries! Another factor was the failure of the “Benevolent Empire” and the catharsis of the Civil War.

III. THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF PREMILLENNIALISM.

Events of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth did not make postmillennialism appear consistent with world history. A pessimism began to prevail that subverted prevalent optimism and resulted in a renewal of prophetic excitement.

1. The French Revolution was directly responsible for the revival of prophetic concern. Sandeen wrote (*Fundamentalist Movement*, 7), “The identification of the events of the 1790s with those prophesied in Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 provided biblical commentators with a prophetic Rosetta Stone.” Nineteenth-century converts to millennialism looked upon the French Revolution as the frustration of hopes built on faith in man’s abilities.
2. Also, a renewed interest in the state of the Jews emerged through the influence of Lewis Way, a wealthy lay-Englishman and the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews (1809). Way published a series of articles in the society’s journal (*Jewish Exposition*) under the name “Basilicus.” Sandeen wrote (*Fundamentalist Movement*, 12): “The doctrine of the premillennial advent, the third aspect of the millenarian

revival, seemed novel, probably mistaken, possibly heretical to most Anglicans of the day. In keeping with the standard Whitbyan eschatology. Christians had not been taught to expect the second coming during their own lives. The second advent, they felt, would occur only after the millennium and, therefore, must be more than one thousand years away. Many of the clergy had never troubled themselves over this kind of bewildering eschatological question or were frankly skeptical of the divine import of the apocalyptic mysteries of Daniel and Revelation. The tracts of 'Basilius' seemed to catch fire, however, among many of the evangelical party. This series of letters was given credit, years later, by leaders of the millenarian movement for having first turned their attention to the doctrine of the premillennial advent."

A. The Development of Premillennialism in Britain.

1. **Edward Irving (1792–1834)**, a Scottish preacher and disciple of Thomas Chalmers, was deeply influenced by the emerging English Prophetic movement. He not only translated Manuel Lacunza's *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty*, an early preterist millenarian treatise, but advocated the emerging Bible prophetic conferences, such as the Albany Conferences, 1826–28. Irving's notoriety as a result of "tongues" in his London church was detrimental to millenarianism and fatal to himself.
2. Interest in prophecy in the 1820s mounted with the founding in 1826 of the Society for the Investigation of Prophecy, followed by the Albany Park Conferences (e.g., Horatius Bonar came to premillennial convictions after hearing Irving there in 1828!). The eschatological scheme set forth at Albany is given by Drummond (*Dialogues*. 1, 2-3):
 - "1. This 'dispensation' or age will not end 'insensibly' but cataclysmically in judgment and destruction of the church in the same manner in which the Jewish dispensation ended.
 - "2. The Jews will be restored to Palestine during the time of judgment.
 - "3. The judgment to come will fall principally upon Christendom.
 - "4. When the judgment is past, the millennium will begin.
 - "5. The second advent of Christ will occur before the millennium.

“6. The 1260 years of Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 ought to be measured from the reign of Justinian to the French Revolution. The vials of wrath (Revelation 16) are now being poured out and the second advent is imminent.”

The Powerscourt Conferences continued prophetic investigations into the 1830s where the emerging Brethren Movement became heavily involved.

3. **John Nelson Darby**, an early leader in the Brethren Movement (founded 1831), participated at the Powerscourt Prophetic Conferences in the 1830s and solidified his opinions on eschatology by the 1840s. Darby adopted not only premillennialism, but Modern Premillennialism, dispensationalism, and the concept of a “secret rapture.”
- N.B.** At this point the secularist Sandeen wrote of the origin of Darby’s rapturist teaching [*Fundamentalist Movement*, 64–65]: “Darby never indicated any source for his ideas other than the Bible—indeed, he consistently affirmed that his only theological task was explicating the text of Scripture. The secret rapture was a distinctive development, however, and considerable interest has been aroused about the source of the doctrine. As late as 1843 or possibly even 1845, Darby was expressing doubts about the secret rapture. In later years he seemed to have felt that he was convinced about the doctrine as early as 1827. Darby’s opponents claimed that the doctrine originated in one of the outbursts of tongues in Edward Irving’s church about 1832. This seems to be a groundless and pernicious charge. Neither Irving nor any member of the Albury group advocated any doctrine resembling the secret rapture. As we have seen, they were all historicists, looking for the fulfillment of one or another prophecy in the Revelation as the next step in the divine timetable, anticipating the second coming of Christ soon but not immediately. After Irving’s death the Catholic Apostolic church continued to teach historicist doctrines. It is true that among the English phrases pronounced by one or another of the illuminati in Irving’s church there occurred fragments such as ‘Behold the bridegroom cometh,’ and ‘count the days one thousand three score and two hundred—1,260—. . . at the end of which the saints of the Lord’s should go up to meet the Lord in the air; but such utterances can scarcely be considered as evidence for any doctrine and have, in any case, little reference to the secret rapture as Darby taught it. Since the clear intention of this charge is to discredit the doctrine by attributing its origin to fanaticism rather than Scripture, there seems little ground for giving it any credence.”

Darby’s organizational and oratorical gifts brought both himself and his doctrines to a place of prominence; his incessant travels both in Europe

and America (seven trips, 1862–77) brought many influential pastors and teachers to his opinions.

B. The Development of Premillennialism in America.

The impact of British Premillennialism was not felt in this country until after 1845 although Premillennialism is nowhere more evident in the elaborate teachings and fatal error of William Miller (1782–1834), though his brand of premillennialism was preterist. After his conversion to Christ from Deism, Miller became a zealous student of prophecy. His study led him to the exact day of the premillennial advent which, of course, failed to be realized. On 22 October 1844 the sun sank as it had every other day since creation and Christ had not come. In retrospect, the Millerite movement appears to have given premillennialism an onus of sorts in America for a generation!

1. In the 1840s some periodicals of a preterist millennialist orientation emerged such as the *Literalist* (1840), the *American Millenarian and Prophetic Review* (1842), and *Millenarianism Defended* (1843); the latter was edited by George Duffield pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Detroit.
2. The incessant travels of J. N. Darby and events in the post Civil War era provided a basis for the renewal of studies in premillennialism. James H. Brooks of St. Louis the founder of *The Truth* and a leader in the Niagara Bible Conferences; perhaps he influenced Cyrus Ingerson Scofield, D. L. Moody of Chicago, Robert Cameron of New York, and Adoniram Judson Gordon of Boston. A more accurate interpretation might be that the Brethren (i.e., Darby) was less influential than traditionally supposed. The influence of various periodicals, obscure figures such as James Inglis and George Needham, as well as native cultural and intellectual factors influenced pastors to see the bibliocentricity of the view.
3. In 1863, *The Prophetic Times* was begun and was destined to have a major leadership role in the renewal of Premillennialism. In the first edition this creed was set forth by the editors.
 - “1. That we are living in the last periods of the present dispensation.
 - “2. That Christ will soon reappear upon earth, to avenge His elect, and fulfill His covenant to them.
 - “3. That the expectation of a Millennium of universal righteousness and peace before the return of the Saviour, is an unchristian delusion.

- “4. That the Church will remain under the cross until Christ comes; and that the present dispensation is only preparatory to another.
- “5. That the personal return of the Lord Jesus is the great hope of the Church, to which, and not to the triumph of present institutions, we are to look for the fulfillment of the great promises of the world’s ultimate blessedness.”
4. It was the emergence of the early Bible conference movement in America that brought premillennialism a degree of acceptance.
- a) The Believers Meetings for Bible Study (Niagara Bible Conference) began in New York in 1869 and continued until 1900. The idea of such meetings originated in Ireland through George C. Needham, a Darbyite. The annual meetings stressed the “imminent advent of Christ,” which became widely popular.

N.B. The conference declined over a rift among the Premillenarians over the validity of the Rapture (“pre” or “post” tribulationism). Robert Cameron, a Canadian Baptist and Nathaniel West, a Presbyterian, disputed Darby’s opinions. Indeed, Cameron wrote (*Scriptural Truth About the Lord’s Return*, 145–46):

“About the year 1883, the writer was pastor of Park Baptist Church, Brantford, Canada, and having attended the Clifton Springs, afterwards Niagara Conference, was appointed one of the committee of nine to take charge of subjects, speakers and other matters. At the 1884 Conference it came to be the ‘fashion’ of every speaker to ‘ring the changes’ on the possibility of Christ Coming any moment—before the morning dawned, before the meeting closed, and even before the speaker had completed his address. Feeling that this was utterly unscriptural and dangerous, the writer opened his heart to the late Dr. Nathaniel West, the greatest and most exhaustive student of the bible and of historic theology, among the teachers participating in the Conference. When pressed for the reason, it was frankly made known, and this led the Doctor to accompany the writer to his room in the ‘Annex.’ We talked and prayed until beyond two o’clock in the morning. After walking the floor backwards and forwards in silence, the great man stopped, pointed his finger at me and said: ‘Cameron, I begin to think you are right. I will give these matters

careful and exhaustive attention, and if I find that the Scriptures teach contrary to what is taught in this Conference, I will reverse myself and boldly defend the truth'.”

They were strongly reprovved by C. I. Scofield and Arno C. Gaebelein and, with the popularity of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, the “post” position lost favor. Recently it has gained a rich renewal of interest through the writings of Robert Gundry (*The Church and the Tribulation*, 1973).

- b) The American Bible and Prophetic Conferences met periodically (1878, 1886, 1895, 1901, and 1914) with wide interest, but it kept to the major features of premillennialism.

IV. CONCLUSION.

The purpose of this lesson plan has been to trace with the major developments in Chiliasm since the Protestant Reformation. Although Amillennialism was advocated by the great reformers (Luther, Calvin), the traditions that they initiated did not remain in their Augustinian construct. Postmillennialism was popularized through the influence of John Owen and Daniel Whitby and had a significant impact upon American Congregationalism (Cotton, Edwards), Baptists (Strong), and Presbyterianism (Hodge). In the nineteenth century interest in Premillennialism experienced a resurgence through Irving and Darby in England, Brookes and Scofield in America in the context of the popularity of the Bible Conference Movement.