

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 *Ecclessia 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 7 Tribulations in the history of the Church related to the 7 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, 1000 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. Lemer, *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 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"

70th Week

DARIUS

33 A.D.

"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 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 there 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 a 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 back. 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 (41 A.D.). 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.

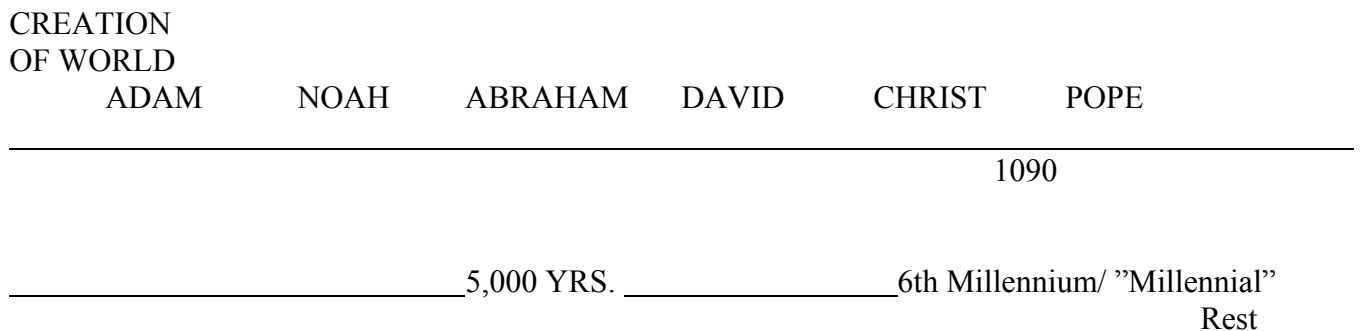
The next event in the Reformer's mind was the return of Christ at the last judgment. For Luther, the hope of the Advent of Christ was a very imminent reality. He wrote (quoted in Froom, *Prophetic Faith*. 2, 275): "We have reached the time of the white horse of the Apocalypse. This world will not last 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 the 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:



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 ore 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 exclude 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 he 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 equation 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 (50 A.D.); 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 seven 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 Darb 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 Pretrib 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:

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*

e. Morgan Edwards, a Baptist preacher and founder of Brown University, wrote in 1744:

II. *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: www.pre-trib.org/article-view.php?id=178.)

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.