

A History of the Work of Redemption

By Jonathan Edwards

Lesson 16 - Period 3 – Introduction - Section 1

“The work of redemption is a work that God carries on from the fall of man to the end of the world”

“We are now come to the third and last period, beginning with Christ’s resurrection; and would show, that the space of time from the end of Christ’s humiliation to the end of the world is all taken up in bringing about the great effect or success of Christ’s purchase.”

Before Edwards jumps into the history of this final period, he first gives an introduction looking at the big picture. He provides us with a four-section introduction to help us think through this time in redemptive history. The first section deals with the “scriptural representations of this period.”

“The proper time of the success or effects of Christ’s redemption is after the purchase has been made, as the proper time for the world to enjoy the light of the sun is the daytime, after the sun has risen, though we may have some small matter of it reflected from the moon and planets before. And even the success of Christ’s redemption while He Himself was on earth, was very small in comparison of what it was after.”

In Scripture this period is commonly called the _____.

“The times of this period, for the most part, are in the Old Testament called the latter days...They are called the latter days, and the last days; because this is the last period of the series of God’s providences on earth, the last period of the great work of redemption; which is as it were the sum of God’s works of providence; the last dispensation of the covenant of grace on the earth.”

Scripture also calls this period the “end of the world” or “_____ of the _____”.

“The whole time of this period is sometimes in Scripture called ‘the end of the world’...This space of time may well be called the end of the world; for this whole time is taken up in bringing things to their great end and issue. Before, things were in a kind of preparatory state; but now they are in a finishing state. An end is now brought to the former carnal state of things, which by degrees vanishes, and a spiritual state begins to be established more and more.”

“The gospel dispensation is a finishing state: it is all spent in finishing things off which before had been preparing, or abolishing things which before had stood...Now all the old types are fulfilled, and the predictions of all the prophets from the beginning of the world shall be accomplished in this period.”

Edwards postmillennial view of eschatology begins to come into full view here as he discusses the coming of the new heaven and new earth. Edwards sees the world as _____ advancing (meaning the world as a whole becoming more and more in-line with the spiritual world) as the second coming of Christ approaches. He sees this kingdom of heaven on earth advancing through four stages.

“Now this kingdom of heaven is that evangelical state of things in the church and in the world, wherein consists the success of Christ’s redemption in this period. There had been often great kingdoms set up before; as the Babylonish, the Persian, the Grecian, and the Roman monarchies. But Christ came to set up the last, which is not an earthly kingdom, but a heavenly...This kingdom began soon after Christ’s resurrection, and is accomplished in various steps from that time to the end of the world.”

The four “steps” or stages that he understands the world to advance through in these last days are: the destruction of Jewish _____ (destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD), the destruction of world-wide pagan _____ (in the victory of Constantine and his rule-starting in 312AD), the destruction of the rule of the _____, and the coming final _____.

All of the first three stages can be understood as images or _____ for the last great stage. In each of these stages there was a great and terrible _____ and a wonderful _____.

“The first is Christ’s appearing in those wonderful dispensations of providence in the apostles’ days, in setting up His kingdom, and destroying its enemies, which ended in the destruction of Jerusalem.”

“Each of the three former of these is a lively image, or type, of the fourth and last, viz. Christ’s coming to the final judgment, as the principal dispensations of providence before were types of His first coming. As Christ’s last coming to judgment is accompanied with the resurrection of the dead, so is each of the three foregoing with a spiritual resurrection.”

Not only do we see the themes of judgment and resurrection in all of these stages, but we also can see the theme of the Lord _____ the saints from times of great “degeneracy”.

“Before each of them is a time of great opposition to the church: before the first, by the Jews; before the second, in Constantine’s time, by the heathen; before the third, by Antichrist; and before the last, by Gog and Magog, as described in Revelation.”

“By each of these comings of Christ, God works a glorious deliverance for His church. The first, which ended in the destruction of Jerusalem, was attended with bringing the church into the glorious state of the gospel. The second, which was in Constantine’s time, was accompanied with an advancement of the church into a state of liberty from persecution, the countenance of civil authority, and her triumph over heathen persecutors. The third, which shall be the downfall of Antichrist, will be accompanied with an advancement of the church into that state of the glorious prevalence of truth, liberty, peace, and joy, which we so often read about in the prophetic parts of Scripture. The last will be attended with the advancement of the church to consummate glory in heaven.”

All of these stages are simply advances of the _____ kingdom of Christ. These are not various kingdoms but one great and final kingdom being established by various steps. In each of these steps there is an advance in the glory of Christ’s kingdom.

“Thus it appears, that as there are several steps of the accomplishment of the kingdom of Christ, so in each one of them the event is accomplished in a further degree than in the foregoing...so that the kingdom of Christ is gradually prevailing and growing by these several great steps of its fulfillment, from the time of Christ’s resurrection, to the end of the world.”

The progression of Christ’s kingdom through these four stages is for the dual purpose of increasing the _____ of Christ and also to increase the _____ of the church.

Before closing out this opening section to his introduction for period 3, Edwards presents an _____ that he anticipates. Some might wonder, “Why the setting up of Christ’s kingdom after His humiliation, should be so gradual, since God could easily have finished it as once?”

1. The gradual progression of Christ’s kingdom declares more visibly the glory of God’s _____

“If it had been done at once, or in a very short time, there would not have been such opportunities for creatures to perceive and observe the particular steps of divine wisdom, as when the work is gradually accomplished and one effect of His wisdom is held forth to observation after another...If all that glory which appears in these events had been manifested at once, it would have been too much for us; it would have overpowered our sight and capacities.”

2. The gradual progression of Christ’s kingdom shows more clearly His glorious _____ over Satan

“God destroys and confounds him, and sets up Christ’s kingdom time after time, in spite of all his subtle machinations and great works, and by every step advances it still higher and higher, till at length it is fully set up.”