

A History of the Work of Redemption

By Jonathan Edwards

Lesson 22 - Period 3 - Part 4 - From the rise of Antichrist to the time of the Reformation

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

In the centuries after the rise of Constantine the church was greatly troubled. From the 6th century onward Satan sought to attack the church in two primary ways. The rise of _____ and the rise of Roman _____ both had a big impact on the history of the church.

“I come now to the darkest and most dismal days that ever the Christian church saw, and probably the darkest that ever it will see; from the rise of Antichrist till the Reformation by Luther and others...Satan had done great things against the Christian church before, but had been baffled once and again...The two great works of the devil, in this space of time, against the kingdom of Christ, are his creating his Antichristian and Mohametan kingdoms.”

Rise of _____ -In previous centuries the church was troubled by heresies, direct attacks on doctrine, but during this period a more subtle attack on the church came from within and led to much turmoil. Slowly the church’s worship and doctrine began to change. The clear teachings of the apostles were gradually laid to the side and the ideas of men were exalted. A form of _____ began to creep into the church.

“With respect to the kingdom of Antichrist. This seems to be the masterpiece of all the contrivances of the devil against the kingdom of Christ...He is called Antichrist, which signifies the opponent or adversary of Christ, not because he is the only opponent of Christ; for the apostle John observes, that in his days there were many Antichrists. But yet this is called the Antichrist, as though there were none but he, because he was so eminently, and above all others.”

“This is a contrivance to turn the ministry of the Christian church into a ministry of the devil, and the angels of the church into fallen angels. In the tyranny, superstition, idolatry, and persecution, which he sets up, he contrives to make an image of ancient paganism, and more than to restore what was lost by the overthrow of paganism in the time of Constantine.”

Edwards does not try to put a fixed date upon the rise of this Antichrist but says that its rise took place _____. Worship slowly started to change. The Scriptures were slowly removed from the laity. The bishop of Rome slowly gained more and more power. All of these factors led to a church that did not resemble anymore the church of the apostles.

“The Christian church corrupted itself in many things presently after Constantine’s time; growing more and more superstitious in its worship, and by degrees bringing in many ceremonies into the worship of God, till at length they brought into the worship of saints, and set up images in their churches. The clergy in general, and especially the bishop of Rome, assumed more and more authority to himself...he claimed the power of universal bishop over the whole Christian church.”

“He claimed more and more authority, till at length, as Christ’s vice-regent on earth, he claimed the very same power that Christ would have done, if He was present on earth reigning on His throne; or the same power that belongs to God, and was used to be called God on earth; to be submitted to by all the princes of Christendom...kings and emperors used to kiss his feet. The emperors received their crowns at his hands; and princes were wont to dread the displeasure of the pope, as they would dread a thunderbolt from heaven.”

“As the pope and his clergy robbed the people of their ecclesiastical and civil liberties and privileges, so they also robbed them of their estates, drained all Christendom of their money.”

“During this time also superstition and ignorance more and more prevails. The Holy Scriptures by degrees were taken out of the hands of the laity, the better to promote the unscriptural and wicked designs of the pope and the clergy; and instead of promoting knowledge among the people, the industriously promoted ignorance. It was a received maxim among them, ‘Ignorance is the mother of devotion’: and so great was the darkness of those times, that learning was almost extinct in the world.”

Rise of _____-Muhammed was born in the late 6th century after our Lord had _____ from the _____. At about the age of 40 (so in the early 7th century) he began to promote a new teaching which he claimed he received from the angel Gabriel. This was the beginnings of the Islamic religion and it spread very _____.

“About the year 700AD dreadfully wasted the Roman empire. They overran a great many countries belonging to the empire, and continued their conquests for a long time...They began their empire about the year of Christ 1296AD; began to invade Europe in the year 1300AD; took Constantinople, and so became masters of all the Eastern empire in the year 1453AD. And thus all the cities and countries where stood those famous churches of which we read in the New Testament, as Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, etc. now became subject to the Turks.”

A _____ Remained-Although this period of several centuries was very hard for the history of the church, there were still those within the church who held to faith.

“In every age of this dark time, there appeared particular person in all parts of Christendom, who bore a testimony against the corruptions and tyranny of the church of Rome. There is no one age of Antichrist, even in the darkest times, but ecclesiastical historians mention many by name who manifested an abhorrence of the pope, and his idolatrous worship, and pleaded for the ancient purity of doctrine and worship.”

As an example of perseverance during this time, Edwards focuses on the Waldensians and writes, *“Their doctrine and worship appear to be the same with the protestant doctrine and worship.”* He also briefly mentions the forerunners of the Reformation: John Wycliffe and Jon Huss.