



A History of the Work of Redemption

Jonathan Edwards

(Preached, 1739; first published, 1774)

Jonathan Edwards was a white Congregational minister from Connecticut who became famous for his theological writings; he served briefly, before his sudden death, as president of the college that later became Princeton University. The book from which these excerpts come—a history of the world from Adam and Eve to the prophesied end times—was compiled from a series of sermons that Edwards preached in 1739. The book was published posthumously, two decades after Edwards’s death, and was republished repeatedly through the 19th, 20th, and into the 21st centuries.

In this section from near the end of the book, Edwards draws on biblical prophecies to paint Christ’s future millennial kingdom on earth as a global Christian empire (more precisely, a Protestant empire), which will destroy Catholicism, Islam, and every non-Christian religion. Edwards envisions this empire being established, in part at least, through human activity—certainly through Christian missionizing worldwide; perhaps also through violent conflict waged by literal Christian armies, though the text is ambiguous on that latter point.

I come now to show how the success of Christ’s redemption will be carried on, from the present time, till Antichrist is fallen and Satan’s visible kingdom on earth is destroyed. [...]

I. I would observe some things in general concerning it. [...]

There is no reason, from the word of God, to think any other than that this great work of God will be wrought, though very swiftly, yet *gradually*. [...A]ll will not be accomplished at once, as by some great miracle, like the resurrection of the dead. But this work will be accomplished by *means*—by the preaching of the gospel and the use of the ordinary means of grace—and so shall be gradually brought to pass. Some shall be converted and be the means of others’ conversion. God’s Spirit shall be poured out, first, to raise instruments, and then those instruments shall be used with success. And doubtless one nation shall be enlightened and converted, and one false religion and false way of worship exploded, after another. [...]

II. I now proceed to show how this glorious work shall be accomplished.

1. The Spirit of God shall be gloriously poured out for the wonderful revival and propagation of religion. [...] We know not where this pouring out of the Spirit shall begin, or whether in many places at once, or whether what hath already taken place be not some forerunner and beginning of it. This pouring out of the Spirit of God, when it is begun, shall soon bring great multitudes to forsake that vice and wickedness which now so generally prevails [...T]he gospel shall be powerfully preached and propagated in the world [...and] we may suppose that it will be gloriously successful to bring in multitudes from every nation, and shall spread more and more with wonderful swiftness [...]

2. This pouring out of the Spirit of God will not effect the overthrow of Satan’s visible kingdom till there has first been a violent and mighty opposition made. [...] When the Spirit begins to be

so gloriously poured forth, when the devil sees such multitudes flocking to Christ in one nation and another, [...] all hell will be greatly alarmed. [...] It seems in this last opposition all the forces of Antichrist, and Mahometanism, and Heathenism will be united—all the forces of Satan's visible kingdom through the whole world of mankind. [...]

We know not particularly in what manner this opposition shall be made. It is represented as a battle; it is called the battle of the great day of God Almighty. There will be, some way or other, a mighty struggle between Satan's kingdom and the church, and probably in all ways of opposition that can be, and doubtless great opposition by external force. The princes of the world who are on the devil's side shall join hand in hand [...] The devil now doubtless will ply his skill as well as strength to the utmost; and those who belong to his kingdom will everywhere be stirred up and engaged to make a united violent opposition against this holy religion, which they see prevailing so mightily in the world. But—

3. Christ and his church shall in this battle obtain a complete and entire victory over their enemies. They shall be totally routed and overthrown in this, their last effort. When the powers of hell and earth are thus gathered together against Christ, and his armies shall come forth against them by his word and Spirit, in how august and glorious a manner is this advance of Christ with his church described (Rev. 19:11ff.). And to represent how great the victory they should obtain, and how mighty the overthrow of their enemies, it is said that all the fowls of heaven are called together to eat the great supper given them, of the flesh of kings, and captains, and mighty men, etc. (vv. 17-18) [...] The devil [...] now sees his Antichristian, Mahometan, and Heathenish kingdoms, through the world, all tumbling down.^a [...]

III. [...] Concerning this overthrow of Satan's visible kingdom on earth, I would show wherein it will chiefly consist, with its extent and universality. [...]

1. Heresies, infidelity, and superstition among those who have been brought up under the light of the gospel will then be abolished; and particularly Deism, which is now so bold and confident in infidelity, shall be driven away and vanish to nothing. [...]

2. The kingdom of Antichrist shall be utterly overthrown. His dominion has been much brought down already by the vial poured out on his throne in the Reformation; but then it shall be utterly destroyed. [...] The idolatrous Roman government, that has for so many ages been the great enemy of the Christian church, first under Heathenism, then under Popery, [...] shall be thrown down with violence [...]

3. Satan's Mahometan kingdom shall be utterly overthrown. [...] Though Mahometanism has

^a *It is unclear how literally or figuratively Edwards interprets this war imagery from Revelation; he himself professes uncertainty about how the prophesied battle will be waged. There is precedent, though, for thinking he imagines that literal wars between Protestants and their foes could provide natural means through which Christ will gradually bring about the church's victory. Shortly before these excerpts, Edwards had referred to England's so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688-89 as a means by which "God wonderfully appeared for the deliverance of his church" (p. 249).*

been so vastly propagated in the world and is upheld by such a great empire—this smoke, which has ascended out of the bottomless pit, shall be utterly scattered before the light of that glorious day, and the Mahometan empire shall fall [...]

4. Jewish infidelity shall then be overthrown. However obstinate they have been now for above seventeen hundred years in their rejection of Christ, and however rare have been the instances of individual conversions ever since the destruction of Jerusalem—but they have, against the plain teachings of their own prophets, continued to approve of the cruelty of their forefathers in crucifying Christ—yet when this day comes, [...] the Jews in all their dispersions shall cast away their old infidelity and shall have their hearts wonderfully changed and abhor themselves for their past unbelief and obstinacy. [...]

5. Then shall also Satan's Heathenish kingdom be overthrown. Gross Heathenism now possesses a great part of the earth, and there are supposed to be more Heathens now in the world than of all other professions taken together. But then the Heathen nations shall be enlightened with the glorious gospel. There will be a wonderful spirit of pity towards them, and zeal for their instruction and conversion put into multitudes, and many shall go forth and carry the gospel unto them. [...]

It is promised that Heathenism shall thus be destroyed in many places. [...] Then shall the many nations of Africa—who now seem to be in a state but little above the beasts, and in many respects much below them—be visited with glorious light and delivered from all their darkness, and shall become a civil, Christian, understanding, and holy people. Then shall the vast continent of America, which now in great part is covered with barbarous ignorance and cruelty,^b be everywhere covered with glorious gospel light and Christian love; and instead of worshipping the devil, as now they do, they shall serve God, and praises shall be sung everywhere to the Lord Jesus Christ, the blessed Savior of the world. So may we expect it will be in that great and populous part of the world, the East Indies, which are now mostly inhabited by the worshipers of the devil. Then the kingdom of Christ will be established in those continents which have been more lately discovered towards the north and south poles, where men differ very little from the wild beasts [...] The same will be the case with respect to those countries which have never yet been discovered. [...]

The visible kingdom of Satan shall be overthrown, and the kingdom of Christ set up on the ruins of it, everywhere throughout the whole habitable globe. [...] Now the kingdom of Christ shall, in

^b Earlier in the book, Edwards had offered this theory about the origin of America's indigenous peoples:

[T]he devil, being alarmed and surprised by the wonderful success of the gospel the first three hundred years after Christ, and by the downfall of the Heathen empire in the time of Constantine—and seeing the gospel spread so fast, and fearing that his Heathenish kingdom would be wholly overthrown through the world—led away a people from the other continent into America, that they might be quite out of the reach of the gospel, that here he might quietly possess them and reign over them as their god. Many writers intimate that some of the Indian nations, when the Europeans first came into America, had a tradition among them that their god first led them into this continent and went before them in an ark. (p. 238)

the most strict and literal sense, be extended to all nations and the whole earth. [...] Terrible judgments and fearful destruction shall now be executed on God's enemies. There will doubtless, at the introducing of this dispensation, be a visible and awful hand of God against blasphemers, Deists, obstinate heretics, and other enemies of Christ, terribly destroying them with remarkable tokens of wrath and vengeance. More especially will this dispensation be attended with terrible judgments on Antichrist; the cruel persecutors who belong to the church of Rome shall in a most awful manner be destroyed [...] This shall put an end to the church's suffering state and shall be attended with their glorious and joyful praises.

Source: Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption* [...], in *The Works of President Edwards, in Eight Volumes*, ed. Edward Williams and Edward Parsons, vol. 5 (Leeds [Eng.]: Edward Baines, 1809), 254-268 (period 3, part 7), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31175018400377>. Public domain, Google-digitized.

The 1809 edition was used as the source of these excerpts because of the readability of that edition's outline formatting. The 1809 edition simplified and refined the style of the writing, compared to earlier editions; but those alterations are inconsequential for the teaching purposes that these excerpts, themselves edited for readability, are meant to serve.

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