

“Apocalyptic Spirituality in the Early Middle Ages”
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Abstract

The fall of Rome, the constant pillaging from barbarian tribes, and the general instability of Europe in the early middle ages propelled Christians of that time to give much attention to details of eschatology, including the burning up of the present heavens and earth. This essay explores the question they posed of how the elect will be saved from the “fire of doomsday,” that grand conflagration distinguished from eternal hellfire. Many early medieval Christians articulated that it would be through a rapture. When the Lord returns and “a fire goes before Him” (Ps 97:3), God’s elect, they said, will be lifted above the earth so that the fire does not harm them. This early medieval view of the rapture, which may be called a pre-conflagration rapture, has parallels with views of famous Protestant theologians like Cotton Mather and John Gill.