

## **Transcript: Chapters 2-3 Middle Ages to Renaissance**

The term “Middle Ages” is a term made up by people who didn’t like the era. Middle Ages isn’t as bad as “the Dark Ages,” but it carries the same idea. It’s the idea you have one period that’s great, and then another down the road that’s great, but then you have this period in the middle—the “Middle Ages—something you have to deal with but isn’t much fun. The art was bad, the only thing that passed for science was alchemy, and then you have this heavy-handed Catholic church that combined both religion and government into this massive hierarchy that crushed all opposition.

Like I said, it was a term made up by people who didn’t like the era. =]

The earliest stages of the Middle Ages was heavily influenced by Plato, and there were a lot of arguments about art not being worth anything—that was called “iconoclasm”—and while realistic art and interest in science continued for a while after the fall of Rome, there was a growing sense that both should be discouraged, largely from the influence of Plato.

Then around 500ad there were manuscripts discovered, signed by someone calling himself “Dionysius.” They seemed to be written by the disciple of Paul mentioned in Acts 17, where Paul met with the Stoics and the Epicureans on Mars Hill, and Dionysius the Areopagite was mentioned as being a convert in the last couple verses of Acts 17. It turns out his ideas were actually from Plotinus, not Paul—you might want to review the ideas of Plotinus. It took a while for the ideas of Dionysius to catch on, but when they did, they had a radical impact on everything. Art was suddenly important—but only as far as it was useful to the church and meditation. Science became something you did with mystical incantations and spiritual forces. Their understanding of how the entire universe worked had changed.

And then around 1100ad, when the crusaders went to the Holy Land, they brought back something that changed Europe almost as much as the Black Plague did—the manuscripts of Aristotle. As you probably figured out from last chapter, the ideas of Plato and Aristotle were very different when it came to the physical world: one hated it, and the other liked it.

Well, when the followers of Plato came to power, they thought Aristotle’s ideas were dangerous, so they systematically destroyed almost all the manuscripts of Aristotle in Europe. But when the crusaders went to the Middle East, they discovered there were

manuscripts of Aristotle still in existence, some in Greek, some in Arabic. So they brought back those manuscripts to Europe and gave them to the universities to study.

As a result, the professors started finding the ideas of Aristotle about how the universe works interesting, They passed the ideas on to their students, and their students passed them on to others, and before you know it there became a whole group of followers of Aristotle. We call them the Scholastics.

Do you see how that worked? Ideas came to the universities, the professors at the universities began to follow those ideas, and then they began to spread those ideas to their students, who spread them to the culture. It still works that way today.

What ideas different from the culture America used to be can you think of being now spread by universities?

Well, the term “Middle” or “Dark” ages is bad, but on the other hand, the term “Renaissance” means revival, renewal, the return, the rebirth, and is generally accepted to be a good thing. The revival of Greek thought—Aristotle in particular—hailed a new era and a new attitude toward art and technology. If you recall, Aristotle favored studying nature, and when you study nature, you figure out how it works and how to use that for both art and technology.

The Medici were very important to this new era, partly from their own desire to use the arts to support their popularity, and partly because the explosion of art in Florence pushed the Pope in Rome to want an explosion of art of his own. Michelangelo was a Florentine sponsored by the Medici. As you know, he painted the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel of Rome and helped design St. Peter’s Basilica, as well.

It was building St. Peter’s Basilica that had a tidal wave of ripple effects in 1517. The Pope needed more money for St. Peter’s and decided indulgences were a good way of raising money. That caused a certain Augustinian friar named Martin Luther to question whether indulgences were Biblical.

Do you see how that worked? Absolutely everything is connected.

The Renaissance was such an amazing time, full of discoveries, inventions, as well as artistic and architectural triumphs. I want to give you a glimpse of some of those things, and the best way to do it is just give you a slide-show.

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Read on.