Genealogy of a Doctrine: How the Kingdom Became Now

Paper 9 in a 12 Part Series

by Escape the Mustard Tree

Introduction

A common objection meets any presentation of Word of the Kingdom theology before a single verse is even discussed: this sounds new. A future, literal kingdom with a heavenly portion and an earthly one; a Judgment Seat that decides rulership rather than admission; a salvation secure in spirit but still being worked out in soul and body — critics often assume this must be a modern invention, assembled from proof-texts by people unfamiliar with historic Christian teaching.

The historical record says otherwise. What follows traces two related stories, set against the institution they both happened inside. The first is how the early church's *eschatology* — its expectation of a literal future kingdom — was reshaped by two men, Origen and Augustine, centuries before the Reformation ever touched *soteriology* — how a person is saved. The second is what happened after the Reformation: soteriology got overhauled, but the inherited eschatology wasn't, and when eschatology was finally revisited three centuries later, the doctrine of salvation didn't get revisited along with it. The result is the fractured landscape of mainstream Christianity today.

Running underneath both stories is a third: what the assembly of the New Testament became over those same centuries — who came to decide what was true, and what happened to an ordinary person's access to the text. That structure is what allowed a doctrinal shift to become a settled assumption and stay one. Two other questions were settled in the same few decades and by the same forces — what man is, and which books belong in the New Testament — and both are tracked here, because they show the relocation of the kingdom was no one-off.

Against that backdrop, the closing sections show that the specific framework this project teaches — a 6,000-year present age followed by a 1,000-year kingdom, tied to Genesis's own seven-day structure — is neither a recent invention nor a fringe reading. It has an unbroken paper trail stretching back nearly two hundred years in published Christian scholarship, and behind that, a document written within decades of the apostles. Nor is it only a Christian position. The same structure is recorded in the Talmud and held within Judaism to this day, entirely apart from Christian influence.

The assemblies the letters were written to

Before tracing how a doctrine was reshaped, you need a clear picture of the body it was reshaped inside. Two questions run underneath everything that follows, and they are the ones to keep in hand century by century: who decides what is true, and how does an ordinary person get at Scripture? In the apostolic period both answers sit on the surface of the text.

Start with the word "church" itself. The Greek behind it is *ekklesia*, and the word carries no built-in religious content. It names a summoned assembly, and the context decides which assembly is

meant. Luke uses it three times in a single chapter of a rioting pagan mob packed into the theater at Ephesus — a crowd in which "most of them did not know why they had come together" (Acts 19:32, 39, 41), where the NKJV renders it "assembly." Stephen uses the same word of Israel gathered at Sinai, rendered "congregation" (Acts 7:38). Nothing in the word predicts a building, a clergy, a hierarchy, or an institution. What changed across the following centuries was not the word. It was the thing the word came to name.

The assemblies met in houses. Paul greets "the church that is in their house" at Rome (Rom. 16:5), sends greetings from Aquila and Priscilla "with the church that is in their house" (1 Cor. 16:19), names Nymphas "and the church that is in his house" at Laodicea (Col. 4:15), and addresses Philemon's letter in part "to the church in your house" (Philem. 2). There's no purpose-built structure anywhere in the New Testament, and no budget for one.

Leadership was plural and it was local, and the English titles hide how few offices there were. Two Greek words carry nearly all of it. *Presbuteros* means an elder, a senior man, and English Bibles render it "elder" consistently. *Episkopos* means an overseer, and English Bibles render it two different ways: the NKJV has "overseers" at Acts 20:28 and "bishop" at Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:1, and Titus 1:7. Those two English words descend from the one Greek word — "bishop" is *episkopos* itself, worn down through Latin *episcopus* into Old English *biscop*. Meet "elder," "overseer," and "bishop" across a few pages and you'll easily count three ranks where the text has two words for one group of men.

That they are one group is plain on the page. Paul and Barnabas "appointed elders in every church" (Acts 14:23), and Paul left Titus in Crete to "appoint elders in every city" (Titus 1:5). Paul sends to Ephesus and calls for "the elders of the church" (Acts 20:17), then tells those same men that the Holy Spirit has made them "overseers" (Acts 20:28). Titus slides from "elders" in one verse to "a bishop" two verses later (Titus 1:5, 7). And Peter gathers the whole vocabulary into four verses: he exhorts "the elders who are among you" to "shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers," then points them to "the Chief Shepherd" (1 Pet. 5:1-4). Elder, shepherd, and overseer, all of the same men — and the one title standing above them, Chief Shepherd, held by Jesus alone. Several elders in one city, and no elder holding office over another city.

Where a second office appears, it arises from a practical need and it arises from the ground up. When Greek-speaking Christians complained that their widows "were neglected in the daily distribution," the Twelve declined to take the problem on themselves: "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables" (Acts 6:1-2). They told the company to "seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom," and kept themselves to "prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:3-4). The assembly chose the men; the apostles prayed and laid hands on them (Acts 6:5-6). Luke never calls the seven *diakonoi*, deacons, though the office is customarily traced to this passage. What he does use is the related noun *diakonia*, plain service — and he uses it on both sides of the division, for the "daily distribution" in verse 1 and for the apostles' "ministry of the word" in verse 4. One kind of service, two assignments. By the time Paul wrote to Philippi the two offices stood side by side, and both were plural: "the bishops and deacons" (Phil. 1:1). The division of labor existed to keep the apostles on the word.

Two words that loom large in later church vocabulary are barely there. *Poimen*, a shepherd, is the word behind "pastor," and as a title for a man in the assembly it appears exactly once in the New Testament, inside a list of gifts: "some pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11). That pair is often read as one office, pastor-teacher, and the Greek gives some ground for it — apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors each get their own article, and teachers is added under the one already covering pastors (Wallace). A tie is not a merger, though. Paul ranks teachers as a standing category on their own, with no pastor anywhere in the list (1 Cor. 12:28), and Antioch had "prophets and teachers" with no pastor among them (Acts 13:1). What the tie most likely says is that pastors sit inside the larger company of teachers: every pastor teaches, not every teacher pastors. Which leaves the verse where it stood — a list of gifts, naming a work rather than a rank. Everywhere else the shepherding is a verb, something elders are told to do (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2), never a rank they hold.

And *hiereus*, the word for a priest who offers sacrifice, is used of Israel's priests, of pagan priests, of Jesus as High Priest, and of Christians together — "a holy priesthood," "a royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). It is never used of an officer in an assembly. No man in the New Testament holds a priestly office over other Christians.

Scripture was public property. Paul charges the Thessalonians "by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren" (1 Thess. 5:27) and tells the Colossians to trade letters with Laodicea so both assemblies have both (Col. 4:16). And the Bereans "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11), and are called more fair-minded than the Thessalonians for it. Note what they were searching. The New Testament didn't exist yet; the Scriptures in Berea were the Old Testament, and Paul had been reasoning from them that the Christ had to suffer and rise (Acts 17:2-3). His preaching was checkable against a text already closed and already public. The hearers audited the apostle, and Luke commends them for it.

That's the baseline: truth carried by apostolic word, tested against a text anyone present could hear read. Three changes moved it.

The first change put one bishop over the elders. Ignatius of Antioch, writing seven letters around 107 to 110 while under guard on his way to execution at Rome, is the earliest witness to a single bishop presiding over the elders rather than standing among them, and he presses the arrangement hard: "Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop," and "wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude also be" (*Smyrnaeans* 8) — the same passage in which the phrase "catholic church" appears for the first time on record. Historians dispute whether Ignatius was describing an arrangement already common in his region or pressing for one he wanted adopted. The evidence points to the second: the single bishop was not yet the usual arrangement when he wrote. Forty years later the *Shepherd of Hermas*, written at Rome, still has its author told to read his book "along with the presbyters who preside over the Church" there, and it uses "bishop" only in the plural (*Shepherd of Hermas*, Vis. 2.4; 3.5; Sim. 9.27). Ignatius's own letter to the Romans names no bishop of Rome at all. By Irenaeus's day, around 180, single-bishop succession lists for Rome are being published as a matter of course. So the change took roughly a century to spread — and that's the point to hold onto. It was not a decree. It was a *drift*, and it can be watched happening.

The second located authority in a lineage. Around 180, Irenaeus faced the gnostics — teachers who claimed the apostles had passed down a body of secret instruction, handed on privately to a chosen few. His answer was to point at what the apostles had handed on in the open. If they had taught anything in secret, he reasons, they would have entrusted it to the men they left in charge of the churches — and those men can be named. So he names them, listing the bishops of Rome in order from the apostles down to his own day, and pointing out that the churches at Smyrna and Ephesus teach the same thing (*Against Heresies* 3.3). It was a test anyone could run: go to the churches the apostles founded, find what has been taught there without a break, and compare. But the test turns on who has taught a thing, and in what line — not on going back to the text. The gnostic crisis passed. The habit of settling a disputed question that way did not.

The third gave the church a priesthood and a professional readership. By the middle of the third century Cyprian of Carthage was describing the bishop in the sacrificial, priestly terms the New Testament never applies to an officer in an assembly and writing that "there is no salvation outside the church" (*Epistle* 73.21; numbered 72 in the Ante-Nicene Fathers). In the same decades, interpretation itself became a trained discipline. The catechetical school at Alexandria — Pantaenus, then Clement, then Origen — was the most prestigious center of Christian learning in the Greek-speaking world, staffed by men schooled in Greek philosophy and equipped with a scholarly method.

By the middle of the third century, then, the answer to who decides what is true had begun moving away from the assembly and toward the office and the school. What the assemblies still expected hadn't moved with it.

Origen: the hermeneutic that made the shift possible

Through those same centuries the expectation itself held steady: a literal future kingdom following Jesus' return. Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, and Tertullian of Carthage all defended some form of chiliasm (the term then in use for a literal thousand-year reign, from the Greek *chilioi*, "a thousand") in the second and third centuries, and their own words show how mainstream, and how concrete, this expectation was.

Justin Martyr (c. 100–165), in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, told his Jewish interlocutor plainly that he and many other Christians expected "a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem" (*Trypho* 80), rebuilt and enlarged as Isaiah and Ezekiel had foretold — though he also acknowledged that many “who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise. Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–202), the same bishop who answered the gnostics by naming successions, had a direct link to the apostolic generation through his teacher Polycarp, who had himself been taught by John; he devoted much of the fifth book of his *Against Heresies* to the same expectation, arguing that creation itself would be "restored to its primeval condition" (*Against Heresies* 5.32.1) under the dominion of the righteous — and tying that restoration explicitly to Paul's language of the creation waiting for "the revealing of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:19), the same passage this project leans on for its own teaching on a future, conditional glorification (see Paper 1). Tertullian of Carthage (c. 155–220), writing against Marcion, was just as direct: "we do confess that a kingdom is promised to us upon the earth" (*Against Marcion* 3.24), to be realized after the resurrection, for a thousand years, in a New Jerusalem "let down from heaven."

Origen of Alexandria (c. 185–254) changed the trajectory. Trained in Greek philosophy and heavily influenced by the allegorizing methods already used on Homer and by the Jewish philosopher Philo, Origen developed a spiritualizing hermeneutic that read prophetic and apocalyptic texts as symbols of inward, spiritual realities rather than as descriptions of future, earthly events.

The order of that inheritance matters. The method wasn't devised for Scripture and then extended outward to other literature. Greek readers had been allegorizing Homer since at least the sixth century before Christ, and a good deal of that work was defensive: educated men found the behavior of Homer's gods indefensible, and reading the offending passages as figures for natural forces or moral qualities made the difficulty go away. Philo of Alexandria applied the same technique to Moses in the first century, more than a hundred years before Origen was born. So what Origen inherited was a proven tool whose purpose was to make a text mean something other than what it plainly said, in cases where the plain sense was unacceptable to an educated reader. He turned that tool on the prophets.

Applied to Revelation 20's thousand-year reign, this method dissolved the millennium into an allegory rather than a coming event on the historical timeline. The nineteenth-century church historian Adolf von Harnack put the shift starkly, in words this line of writing has quoted ever since: Alexandrian theology "superseded" the earlier chiliastic hope, and "Neo-Platonic mysticism triumphed over the early Christian hope of the future" (quoted in Showers). The method didn't spread on its persuasive force alone. It came out of the catechetical school described above, the leading teaching institution of the Greek-speaking church, at the moment when the question of who decides what is true was already moving toward the office and the school — and most of the Greek-speaking church followed its lead. A literal future kingdom stopped being the default Christian expectation in the East well before it did so in the West.

Augustine: the kingdom relocated to the present

Augustine of Hippo (354–430) delivered the decisive blow in the West. He tells us in his own *Confessions* that he spent close to nine years, from about age nineteen to twenty-eight, as an "auditor" — a lay hearer — within Manichaeism, a dualistic religion founded by the Persian teacher Mani that framed the universe as a battleground between opposing forces of light and darkness (Brown). Augustine eventually grew disillusioned with Manichaeism's inability to answer his questions, took up Neoplatonism, and was converted to Christianity in Milan in 386 under the influence of Bishop Ambrose, being baptized the following Easter.

It's sometimes claimed that Augustine's conversion was coerced — that it lines up with, and was pressured by, Emperor Theodosius I's Edict of Thessalonica (380), which made Nicene Christianity the Roman Empire's official religion. The chronology doesn't support this. The empire's coercive measures against paganism — banning sacrifices, closing and destroying temples — came mostly in the 390s, well after his own conversion and baptism. By then Augustine had already converted (386), been ordained a priest (391), and been consecrated bishop of Hippo (395). He was already a churchman by the time real state coercion against paganism escalated, not a target of it. A sharper irony comes further along in his life: the same Augustine who had once belonged to a minority, occasionally persecuted sect became, decades later as bishop, the theological architect of a doctrine that justified state coercion against another such group — the Donatists, a rival North

African church — appealing to the parable's line "compel them to come in" (Luke 14:23) as scriptural warrant (Brown, "Religious Coercion").

Augustine's more consequential legacy for this genealogy is doctrinal. He tells us plainly that he had once held a form of chiliasm himself, but came to regard it as "carnal" (*City of God*, Book XX). His own words make the confession explicit, and they show him working through the same premillennial logic this project's own Paper 3 uses — the seven-day creation pattern, the "day as a thousand years" equation, a coming Sabbath rest for the saints — before ultimately setting it aside:

> "For the Apostle John says in the foresaid book, And I saw an angel come down from heaven.... Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. Those who, on the strength of this passage, have suspected that the first resurrection is future and bodily, have been moved, among other things, specially by the number of a thousand years, as if it were a fit thing that the saints should thus enjoy a kind of Sabbath-rest during that period, a holy leisure after the labors of the six thousand years since man was created... so that thus, as it is written, One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day [2 Pet. 3:8], there should follow on the completion of six thousand years, as of six days, a kind of seventh-day Sabbath in the succeeding thousand years; and that it is for this purpose the saints rise, viz., to celebrate this Sabbath. And this opinion would not be objectionable, if it were believed that the joys of the saints in that Sabbath shall be spiritual... for I myself, too, once held this opinion. But, as they assert that those who then rise again shall enjoy the leisure of immoderate carnal banquets, furnished with an amount of meat and drink such as not only to shock the feeling of the temperate, but even to surpass the measure of credulity itself, such assertions can be believed only by the carnal." (*City of God* 20.7)

Augustine doesn't present this as a position he's refuting from the outside. He presents it as a position he once held himself, described in enough sympathetic detail — the seven-day pattern, the 2 Peter 3:8 equation, a literal Sabbath-rest reign of the saints — that a reader could mistake the paragraph for a defense of it, right up until his own closing admission that he's since moved past it. Then note what he moves past. The objection he states is to a grossly carnal version of the thing — banquets of meat and drink, in quantities to shock a temperate man — and not to the seven-day structure he has just laid out so carefully. That combination, a former adherent's fair and detailed restatement of the position, followed by rejection, is precisely what makes the passage significant for this project's genealogy: the shift away from a literal future kingdom was not simply imposed on the Western church from without by an unsympathetic outsider; it was a change of mind within a single, formidable theologian who understood the position he was leaving as well as anyone who held it.

In its place he offered a reading in which the millennium of Revelation 20 is not a future era but the present age of the church: "The Church even now is the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of heaven" (*City of God* 20.9). *City of God* became one of the most influential books in Western Christian history, and its amillennial reading of the kingdom remained the dominant view in the West for the next thousand years and more (Showers).

The path from Origen's method to Augustine wasn't a direct one. The two were never contemporaries — Origen died a century before Augustine was born — and Augustine's Greek was never strong enough to read Origen with ease. The bridge between them was Ambrose of Milan,

fluent in Greek and, by the account of his contemporaries, deeply shaped by Origen's way of reading. Augustine sat under Ambrose's preaching in Milan in the years leading up to 386, and hearing the Old Testament read figuratively there resolved the objections Manichaeism had taught him to raise against it — a turning point he credits in the *Confessions* with opening the way back to the church (*Confessions* 5.14). By the time he wrote *City of God* decades later, though, he was rejecting Origen by name. In the book immediately following his amillennial reading of Revelation 20, he takes up Origen's teaching that even the devil and his angels would eventually be released from punishment and restored to the company of the holy angels, and he endorses the verdict against it: "the Church, not without reason, condemned him for this and other errors" (*City of God* 21.17). The allegorical method had, by then, already done its work. Augustine could use the tool decisively in Book XX while repudiating the toolmaker's most famous conclusion in the very next book.

Ambrose supplied Augustine with the general method. The specific reading of Revelation 20 that Augustine built with it has its own, more direct source: Tyconius, a North African lay theologian of the generation just before Augustine's own, nominally Donatist but eventually censured by his own party for holding the church to be universal rather than confined to North Africa. Tyconius wrote a commentary on the Apocalypse — since lost as an independent text, though substantially reconstructed by modern scholars from how later medieval commentators quoted it — that read Revelation's imagery non-literally, well before Augustine took up the same book. Augustine's debt isn't merely inferred: he endorses Tyconius's exegetical method by name in *On Christian Doctrine*, and in a surviving letter tells a correspondent plainly, "read Tyconius, whom you know well." Specialists differ on exactly how far the dependence runs. Augustine's own philosophical commitments led him to adapt some of what he took from Tyconius instead of reproducing it outright, and their two ecclesiologies aren't identical. But the broader hermeneutic — and the specific move of reading the millennium as something other than a literal future reign — is well documented as flowing from Tyconius into Augustine (Bright).

The two systems Augustine passed through on his way to Christianity left their own marks on the theology he built once he arrived. He tells us directly, in *Confessions* Book VII, that reading "the books of the Platonists" — almost certainly Plotinus and Porphyry, encountered in Milan through Ambrose's circle — gave him the conceptual tools he had been missing: a way to conceive of God as immaterial, incorporeal being, instead of the subtle physical substance Manichaeism had taught him to imagine. From the same source he drew the idea that evil has no substance of its own but is a privation of good, which became his direct theological answer to Manichaean dualism. Whether Manichaeism itself left a deeper, unacknowledged mark is a live and legitimate question among specialists, not merely a modern accusation: in Augustine's own lifetime, the Pelagian bishop Julian of Eclanum charged him with smuggling Manichaean dualism back into Christian doctrine through his teaching on concupiscence — the idea that sexual desire itself transmits the stain of original sin — and Augustine wrote several books answering the charge. The debate continues today; the Dutch patristics scholar J. van Oort has argued at length that Augustine's mature doctrines of concupiscence and the *massa damnata* (the "mass of the damned," his bleak default judgment on unbaptized humanity) still bear a Manichaean shape even after their cosmology was discarded,

while other scholars find his later, more careful treatment of the body sufficient to clear him of the charge (van Oort).

The dispute is unresolved. What stands either way is that the man who gave the Western church its reading of the kingdom also gave it a doctrine of human nature that his own contemporaries, and a fair number of modern specialists, have suspected never fully left Mani's dualism behind.

By Augustine's time, the mechanism that could turn a theological argument into settled, universal orthodoxy was already in place, and it had nothing to do with the merits of biblical exegesis on its own. Two emperors built it, and both should be named.

Constantine (emperor 306–337) ended the persecution of Christians in 313, in the settlement with his co-emperor Licinius known as the Edict of Milan, and twelve years later did what no Roman ruler had done before: he summoned the bishops of the empire to one meeting to settle a question of Christian doctrine. The First Council of Nicaea (325) met to resolve the Arian controversy over the nature of Christ. An emperor called it, moved the bishops there on the imperial post, sat through its sessions, and exiled the men who lost the vote. It produced the church's first empire-wide, binding creed. Constantine himself wasn't baptized until he lay dying in 337, and the bishop who baptized him was an Arian.

Theodosius I (emperor 379–395) went further, and this is the hinge. On 27 February 380, together with his co-emperors Gratian and Valentinian II, he issued the edict known from its opening words as *Cunctos populos*, and its terms read as law rather than as theology. It ordered every people under imperial authority to hold the faith professed by Damasus, bishop of Rome, and by Peter, bishop of Alexandria. It authorized those who complied to take the title of "Catholic Christians." And it declared everyone else — "foolish madmen," in Bettenson's rendering — heretics, forbade their gatherings to be called churches at all, and left them to divine condemnation first and imperial punishment second. That last provision lands on the very word this paper started with. *Ekklesia* had named any summoned assembly, and context had decided which one. After 380, in the Roman world, law decided which one.

A single, empire-wide, state-backed church dates from that edict, and "catholic" turns from a descriptive word Ignatius had used two and a half centuries earlier into a legal title an emperor grants. One thing the edict didn't do, though, is found the Roman Catholic Church. That communion, under a supreme pontiff, doesn't date from 380. That comes centuries later. What dates from 380 is the state church of the Roman Empire, and both Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy descend from it.

The following year Theodosius convened the First Council of Constantinople (381), which expanded the Nicene creed into the form still recited today (First Council of Nicaea; First Council of Constantinople). Neither council addressed the millennium. Together they set the precedent Augustine's own kingdom-now reading would later benefit from: doctrine settled by imperial council and creed, binding on the whole church rather than left open to ongoing debate among regional bishops. By the time *City of God* appeared, the West already had the institutional habit of treating conciliar definition as final — conciliar meaning simply that a council of bishops had ruled on it. Augustine's relocation of the kingdom didn't need to win the argument congregation by

congregation; it needed only to become the West's default assumption, and the same mechanism that had already done that for Trinitarian doctrine stood ready to do it again for eschatology.

Two other settlements in the same decades

The same two forces that relocated the kingdom did comparable work on the church's view of man himself, and the parallel runs close. For roughly the first three to four centuries, the tripartite view of man as spirit, soul, and body — the view this project's own argument assumes throughout (see Paper 1) — was effectively the church's default. Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tatian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Didymus of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and Basil of Caesarea all held some form of it, differing only on the finer definitions of soul and spirit. Irenaeus states it almost as a formula, taking the three one at a time — the moulded flesh is "the body of a man, and part of a man," the soul by itself is "the soul of a man, and part of a man," and the spirit "is called the spirit, and not a man; but the commingling and union of all these constitutes the perfect man" (*Against Heresies* 5.6.1).

The turn came when Apollinaris of Laodicea used trichotomist vocabulary to argue that the divine Logos replaced Christ's human spirit outright, denying Him a complete human nature — a Christological error condemned, in the same year the expanded Nicene Creed was finalized, at the Council of Constantinople in 381. Because Apollinaris had built his heresy on trichotomist language, the whole three-part view of man fell under suspicion by *association*, and theologians such as Athanasius and Theodoret explicitly repudiated it, even though the actual error concerned Christ's nature, not man's constitution generally (Berkhof). Augustine then gave the West its lasting answer, arguing that "spirit" and "soul" name the same immaterial reality rather than two distinct things; given his dominance over Western theology, historians credit his position with deciding the matter for the entire Western church from that point forward (Heard). The two-part view of man most Christians simply assume today, in other words, is not the church's original position. It's a byproduct of the same fourth- and fifth-century upheaval, centered on the same council and the same theologian, that relocated the kingdom.

Another consolidation was underway in these same decades, alongside the Creed and the shift in anthropology: the New Testament's own canonical boundary. The process didn't begin in the 380s — the core of the New Testament, the four Gospels, Acts, and Paul's letters, was already functioning as authoritative Scripture by the mid-second century, and Irenaeus is already quoting all four Gospels by name around 180. What changed in this window was the closing of a handful of disputed margin books, and it happened by the same mechanism already at work on the Creed and on anthropology: reactive definition, followed by conciliar ratification.

The earliest explicit canon list on record came not from the orthodox church but from Marcion, a mid-second-century (c. 140) teacher who rejected the entire Old Testament and trimmed the New down to a mutilated Luke and ten Pauline letters. Marcion's own truncated list is widely credited with forcing the broader church to begin articulating its own canon more explicitly in response — the same pattern of doctrine defined reactively against a rival claim that recurs throughout this genealogy, here in its earliest appearance. The earliest surviving orthodox response is the Muratorian Fragment (commonly dated c. 170–200), and Origen, followed by Eusebius in the 320s,

sorted the books then in circulation into three tiers: universally accepted, disputed but widely used, and spurious.

The first document to list exactly the twenty-seven books now recognized as the New Testament, with nothing added and nothing missing, is not a council at all — it's Athanasius's thirty-ninth Festal Letter, written in 367, closing with his own instruction that "no one add to these." Formal conciliar ratification of that same list followed close behind, at the Synod of Hippo (393) and the Council of Carthage (397, reaffirmed 419). That lands within a decade or two of Theodosius's edict, the Council of Constantinople, and Damasus's own Council of Rome in 382 — the same window in which doctrine and institutional authority converged. The New Testament's own boundary, in other words, was being formally closed by the same generation of churchmen, under the same institutional climate, as the Creed's finalization.

Two of this genealogy's own sources illustrate just how open that boundary still was, right up until this window closed. Both the Epistle of Barnabas and the *Shepherd of Hermas* — each of which returns later in this paper, one as a witness to the 6,000-plus-1,000-year structure and the other to differentiated reward — were genuine contenders for a place in the canon well into the fourth century. Both are bound directly into Codex Sinaiticus, one of Christianity's oldest and most important biblical manuscripts, placed immediately after the book of Revelation. The *Shepherd* in particular was quoted as Scripture by Irenaeus and called "inspired" by Origen — the same two figures this genealogy has already relied on, one for the early chiliasm, the other for the hermeneutical shift that unmade it. The line between what belonged in the canon and what did not was still being drawn, by real people making real judgments, within living memory of the same councils (Metzger).

So inside a few decades, by the same machinery, the church settled what man is and which books are Scripture. The relocation of the kingdom was not an isolated event. It was one piece of a general settling — and the piece that held longest.

What the assembly became: 313 to 1517

City of God held the West for a thousand years, and that's a long time to pass over in a sentence. The same two questions carried through the apostolic period answer the obvious follow-up — if a literal future kingdom is what the text teaches, how did it stay buried that long? Track who decides what is true, and how an ordinary person gets at Scripture, and the answer stops being mysterious.

313 to 381: what establishment paid for

Constantine and Theodosius are treated above for what they did to the way doctrine got decided. Establishment had a material side as well, and it moved fast. Basilicas went up at public expense. Clergy were exempted from civic taxes and from compulsory public service. Bishops were granted jurisdiction to hear and settle civil suits, which gave a bishop's ruling the force of a magistrate's.

Inside seventy years the assembly went from a body the state executed to a body the state funded, and holding a minority doctrine went from a private conviction to a civil liability. The answer to who decides what is true now had an enforcement arm and a payroll.

The fifth century: a seat and a text

Leo I, bishop of Rome from 440 to 461, taught that the bishop of Rome inherits Peter's own commission — primacy attached to an office rather than resting on the personal weight of the man holding it. In the same era the West's Bible was fixed. Damasus had commissioned Jerome in 382 to produce a reliable Latin text, and the result, the Vulgate, became the Bible of the Western church for the next eleven centuries. That was no restriction at the time; Latin was the working language of the Western empire, and Jerome was giving people Scripture in the tongue they spoke. It became a restriction later, when Latin stopped being anyone's mother tongue and the text wasn't moved again.

The sixth through eighth centuries: monasteries carry the load

The Western empire collapsed, and with it went civil administration, schooling, and the ordinary machinery of literacy. Monasteries absorbed the work of copying and preserving manuscripts. Gregory the Great, bishop of Rome from 590 to 604, took on the civil governance of Rome largely because no one else remained to do it, and sent missions north into England and beyond. Reading Scripture, copying Scripture, and teaching Scripture became the occupation of a professional class living apart from ordinary households.

The ninth through eleventh: consolidation, then rupture

On Christmas Day in the year 800, Pope Leo III set a crown on the head of Charlemagne, king of the Franks and the strongest ruler in western Europe, and named him emperor. The gesture ran both directions. The pope handed the king legitimacy; the king's armies stood behind the pope. From there the bishop of Rome held real territory and real soldiers, and in the West spiritual and civil authority underwrote each other as a matter of course.

The rupture came in 1054. East and West had been drifting apart for centuries over language, worship, and above all how much authority the bishop of Rome held over anyone outside Rome. That summer, representatives sent by the pope laid a decree of excommunication on the altar of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. The patriarch of Constantinople — the senior bishop of the East, the nearest thing the Greek-speaking church had to a counterpart for the bishop of Rome — excommunicated them right back. The two halves of Christendom separated, and they've never fully reunited.

One detail matters for this genealogy: both halves kept the kingdom-now reading. The East had arrived at it through Origen's own lineage, the West through Augustine. The largest institutional split in Christian history left that particular question untouched on both sides. A doctrine can be that settled only when no one is examining it.

The twelfth and thirteenth: doctrine becomes law

Canon law is the church's own internal legal code. It isn't the civil law of kings and emperors; it governs clergy, sacraments, marriage, discipline, and property. The word comes from the Greek *kanon*, a measuring rod, and from there a rule.

By the twelfth century the church had accumulated a thousand years of such rules — rulings from councils, decrees from bishops of Rome, judgments from different centuries and different men — and a good many of them contradicted each other. Around 1140 a monk named Gratian, teaching at Bologna, gathered them into one volume and worked through the contradictions case by case. He titled it the *Concordance of Discordant Canons*; everyone since has called it the *Decretum*. It turned a heap of accumulated rulings into a working legal system, and canon law became a subject taught in the universities alongside theology, with its own degrees and its own professional lawyers.

Then the system was put to work. The Fourth Lateran Council met at Rome in 1215 under Innocent III, drew some twelve hundred bishops and abbots, and is the most consequential church council of the Middle Ages. It opened by declaring that there is one universal church of the faithful outside which no one at all is saved. It defined transubstantiation, the teaching that in the Mass the bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Christ. And it required every layman to confess his sins to his own parish priest at least once a year and to receive communion at Easter, on penalty of being barred from the church while he lived and denied Christian burial when he died.

Put those together and the first of the two questions has its finished answer. What is true is settled by a council. The settlement is written into law. And the ordinary layman receives it through sacraments he is legally required to attend, from a priest he is legally required to confess to.

The same centuries, the second question

While doctrine was being fixed by council and codified as law, lay access to Scripture was being narrowed. It happened in particular places, by particular rulings, each one answering a particular movement.

The Council of Toulouse met in 1229, in the wake of the Albigensian crusade, and forbade the laity of that province to possess the books of the Old and New Testaments. It allowed two exceptions, both devotional rather than instructional: the Psalter, the book of Psalms bound on its own for private prayer, and the Breviary, the book of set prayers appointed for the hours of each day. Even those it permitted only in Latin, strictly forbidding any translation of them. The Council of Tarragona in 1234 went further, ordering any Scripture in the vernacular handed over to the bishop within eight days and burned. Vernacular means the everyday spoken language of a place, not the Latin of the church: Catalan and the other Romance tongues of Spain in Tarragona's case, French in Toulouse's, English in England's — whatever a man actually spoke at home. In England, Arundel's Constitutions, issued at Oxford in 1408, forbade anyone to translate Scripture into English on his own authority, or to read such a translation without approval from his diocese, on pain of being treated as a heretic.

One qualification belongs with that list. No pope and no general council ever issued a universal ban on lay Bible reading — the *Cambridge History of the Bible* states it flatly. Toulouse bound one ecclesiastical province. Tarragona bound another. Arundel bound England. Every one of them was provincial, and not one of them spoke for the whole church.

Read together, those measures form a pattern rather than a policy — and it's the same pattern that runs through this whole genealogy. Doctrine and discipline both got defined reactively, against a

rival: canon lists against Marcion, a creed against Arius, and now restricted access against lay reading movements. Wherever ordinary people started reading Scripture in a language they thought in, a ruling followed limiting their access to it.

The men who tried anyway

Valdes of Lyons, a merchant, commissioned vernacular translations in the 1170s and began preaching without license; he and his followers were excommunicated in 1184, and the Waldensian communities that survived did so in Alpine valleys under intermittent persecution for the next three centuries. John Wycliffe, an Oxford theologian, drove the first complete English Bible in the 1380s; he died in his bed in 1384, was condemned at the Council of Constance in 1415, and had his bones exhumed and burned in 1428. Jan Hus, who took up Wycliffe's writings in Bohemia, was burned alive at that same council in 1415 after being promised safe conduct to attend it.

Which answers the question this section opened with. Locating a reading of Scripture that runs against the settled account takes three things at once: a man reading the text in a language he thinks in, free to reach a conclusion his teachers did not hand him, and able to put it in front of others without being killed for it. For most of the medieval West those three conditions didn't hold together in one place for long. No hidden remnant is needed to explain the silence. The men who came closest are named above, and the charge against each had less to do with any single doctrine than with putting the text into hands that would then reach their own conclusions about everything else.

Two developments broke the arrangement within a century of Hus's death. Gutenberg's press, running from the 1450s, made a text cheap to reproduce and impossible to recall once distributed. And translation resumed: Luther's German New Testament in 1522, Tyndale's English New Testament in 1526, printed abroad and smuggled in by the barrel. For the first time since Jerome, an ordinary person could hold Scripture in his own language and read it for himself.

What was done with that recovered text is the subject of the next section. And there the pattern running through this genealogy repeats one last time. The men who pried open the question of how a person is saved never reopened the question of the kingdom.

The Reformation: salvation overhauled, the kingdom inherited unexamined

The Protestant Reformation is rightly remembered as a soteriological revolution. Martin Luther's *sola fide* — justification by faith alone — was a direct and necessary answer to a corrupt system of works-based merit, indulgences, and a "treasury of merit" administered by the institutional church. Justification became something received instantly, by grace, apart from works (Eph. 2:8–9).

John Calvin systematized the doctrine further, and in doing so, tied justification to unconditional election and made the perseverance of the elect a guaranteed, unbreakable consequence of that election — a doctrine formalized a century later in the Westminster Confession's chapter "Of the Perseverance of the Saints" (WCF XVII). Once this move is made, good works can no longer function as anything more than *evidence* that a person was elect to begin with; they can't carry independent, conditional weight toward some other, separable outcome, because the ultimate

outcome was never actually contingent on them. This is, plausibly, the specific mechanism by which mainstream Protestant soteriology came to collapse justification, sanctification, and glorification into a single undifferentiated package — precisely the flattening this project's first two papers take apart.

What the Reformers did not revisit was the kingdom. They weren't indifferent to prophecy — they read Daniel and Revelation hard against their own century and found the Turks and the papacy in them — but whether Revelation 20 describes a reign still to come was a question they answered, when they answered it at all, by restating Augustine.

The confessions put that answer in writing. The Augsburg Confession of 1530 condemns "others who are now spreading certain Jewish opinions, that before the resurrection of the dead the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed" (Augsburg Confession, Art. XVII). Note the tense. The article is answering men who "are now spreading" these opinions, and it condemns them in the sentence right after it condemns the Anabaptists by name. That's a verdict on contemporaries, and it comes with no reading of Revelation 20 attached.

The Reformed and English churches wrote the same verdict into their own standards. The Forty-Two Articles of the Church of England (1553) gave the matter an article of its own, "Heretics called Millenarii": "They that go about to renew the fable of heretics called Millenarii be repugnant to holy Scripture, and cast themselves headlong into a Jewish dotage" (Forty-Two Articles, Art. 41). The Second Helvetic Confession (1566) condemns "Jewish dreams that there will be a golden age on earth before the Day of Judgment, and that the pious, having subdued all their godless enemies, will possess all the kingdoms of the earth" (Second Helvetic Confession, ch. 11). Neither offers a reading of Revelation 20 either.

Calvin is the one Reformer who answered the chiliasts directly, and one sentence of his has done most of the work ever since. Writers in this general position have quoted it on its own for a century — the millenarian reading is "too puerile to need or to deserve refutation" (*Institutes* 3.25.5) — and quoted that way it makes him sound like a man who never looked. He looked. Here is the heart of what he says:

> "...shortly after the Chiliasts arose, who limited the reign of Christ to a thousand years. This fiction is too puerile to need or to deserve refutation. Nor do they receive any countenance from the Apocalypse, from which it is known that they extracted a gloss for their error, since the thousand years there mentioned refer not to the eternal blessedness of the Church, but only to the various troubles which await the Church militant in this world. The whole Scripture proclaims that there will be no end either to the happiness of the elect, or the punishment of the reprobate. Moreover, in regard to all things which lie beyond our sight, and far transcend the reach of our intellect, belief must either be founded on the sure oracles of God, or altogether renounced. Those who assign only a thousand years to the children of God to enjoy the inheritance of future life, observe not how great an insult they offer to Christ and his kingdom. If they are not to be clothed with immortality, then Christ himself, into whose glory they shall be transformed, has not been received into immortal glory; if their blessedness is to have an end, the kingdom of Christ, on whose solid structure it rests, is temporary. In short, they are either most ignorant of all divine things or they maliciously aim at subverting the whole

> grace of God and power of Christ, which cannot have their full effects unless sin is obliterated, death swallowed up, and eternal life fully renewed." (*Institutes* 3.25.5, trans. Beveridge)

He closes by catching himself, telling the reader to pass over these triflers lest he seem to think them worth refuting.

Read through, the quoted part is an argument, and a specific one. Calvin's complaint is that the men he is answering hand God's children a thousand years and stop — they "assign only a thousand years to the children of God to enjoy the inheritance of future life." Both of his reasons run off that cap. If the saints are not to be clothed with immortality, then Christ, into whose glory they are to be transformed, has not Himself been received into immortal glory. And if their blessedness has an end, then the kingdom resting on it is temporary. He's defending a happiness with no end, and he thinks the thousand years are being offered as a substitute for it.

Which is why the argument misses this reading entirely. Nothing here caps the saints' future at a thousand years. The thousand years are the seventh day of a seven-day week (Gen. 1:1–2:3; 2 Pet. 3:8; Rev. 20:4-6), not the sum of what lies ahead, and a reign inside an endless life takes nothing away from the life. Calvin and this paper agree that the happiness of the elect has no end. What they divide over is whether a bounded reign stands inside it — and his reasons, taken at full strength, never reach that question.

What he does say about the text itself is the one line that gets no defense: the thousand years of Revelation 20 "refer not to the eternal blessedness of the Church, but only to the various troubles which await the Church militant in this world." That's Augustine's reading, restated as a known result. The famous dismissal sits on top of an exegetical claim Calvin never argues at all. He examined the chiliasts. The reading he answered them with, he inherited.

Luther followed the same pattern with Revelation itself. His 1522 preface to the book doubted that it belonged in the canon at all. By 1530 he had replaced it with a new preface that reads Revelation as a map of church history, with the Turks as Gog and Magog — and with the thousand years already over, running from the time John wrote the book down to the coming of the Turks (Vogel). He worked through the book in detail and never questioned the part of Augustine's reading that matters here: that the thousand years belong to the church's own history, not to a reign still to come. So a doctrine that had entered the church through a Greek philosopher's hermeneutic and a former Manichaean's *magnum opus* was carried forward as settled fact, while the men carrying it were overturning thirteen centuries of accumulated teaching on nearly everything else. It's the same failure the project's own hermeneutics warns against from the outset: doctrine settled by the weight of inherited authority instead of by the patient, verse-by-verse work Scripture itself calls for (see the companion paper, "Let God Be True").

The nineteenth century: the kingdom returns, mostly alone

Eschatology didn't stay frozen forever. English apocalyptic writing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had already begun reviving interest in a future, earthly kingdom (Watson). The idea of a distinct rapture prior to Jesus' visible return wasn't itself unprecedented — Morgan Edwards (1722–1795), a Welsh-American Baptist historian and one of the founders of what is now Brown University, described in a 1788 work a rapture of the church roughly three and a half years

ahead of the final advent, citing John 14:2 and 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and explicitly separating the two events, some four decades before Darby (Edwards).

The decisive figure, though, is John Nelson Darby (1800–1882), a leader within the Plymouth Brethren movement, who in the 1830s systematized this and related ideas into a full dispensational premillennialism: a literal future kingdom, a series of distinct dispensations, and a rapture of the church prior to a future tribulation period, all worked into a single coherent scheme. Darby's teaching spread through the Niagara Bible Conferences in the late nineteenth century and then, decisively, through the *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909), whose extensive interpretive notes made dispensational premillennialism the default lens through which much of American evangelicalism read the entire Bible for most of the twentieth century (Marsden; Mangum and Sweetnam; Sutton).

The detail most relevant to this project's argument is easy to miss: Darby revived the church's expectation of a literal, future kingdom, but his system rested on an otherwise thoroughly Calvinistic soteriology. Darby held to unconditional election and appealed to the Church of England's own articles on justification and predestination in defending it; the standard recent treatment concludes that what he offered was a variation on the Calvinist account of salvation rather than a replacement for it (Gribben; Stevenson). In other words, the recovery that reached the mainstream corrected one of the two things the Reformation had left wrong — the *timing* of the kingdom — and left the other exactly where the Reformation had tightened it, with reward flattened into assurance. That's why so much of modern American evangelicalism can hold a futurist, premillennial kingdom expectation and, at the very same time, treat "eternal life," "salvation," and "reward" as functionally interchangeable terms describing one unconditional outcome. The kingdom came back into view; the distinctions within salvation did not come back with it.

Darby wasn't the only man reconsidering the kingdom in those decades. Robert Govett published *Entrance into the Kingdom* in 1852 and *The Kingdom of God: Reward According to Works* the following year, teaching both halves together: a literal future kingdom, and a place within it granted according to faithfulness rather than handed to every Christian alike. G. H. Pember took up the same line, and D. M. Panton and G. H. Lang carried it into the twentieth century — Lang describing the faithful as sharing the administration of the kingdom, "associated with the King of glory" (Lang). The reward structure was recovered in the nineteenth century, in the same decades as the timing. What it never did was reach the mainstream.

The result is the landscape mainstream Christianity occupies today. Reformed and Catholic traditions largely retain Augustine’s amillennialism outright, and Orthodoxy holds one of its own, reached through Origen’s line rather than his. None of the three distinguishes the salvation of the soul from the spirit’s standing. Dispensational evangelicalism restored a futurist kingdom timeline while keeping the Reformation’s collapsed soteriology underneath it. The full structure — a real future kingdom *and* a conditional, future-tense reward for those found faithful — was reassembled by neither of them. It was reassembled elsewhere, by a line of writers working at the edges of both.

Not a new belief

Word of the Kingdom theology is often met with the assumption that it's a recent, marginal invention. Three independent lines of evidence say otherwise.

The framework itself is quickly stated. Scripture sets a day against a thousand years in God's reckoning — "For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past" (Ps. 90:4) — and Peter takes the equation up: "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8).

Peter's use of it carries more weight than the psalm alone, because of where he puts it. He had already staked his credibility on having seen the thing in question: "we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Pet. 1:16). Then he names the men he is answering, and gives the answer in the same stretch:

> "knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.”... But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2 Pet. 3:3-4, 8-9)

The scoffers' case is that nothing has changed, so nothing is going to. The day-as-a-thousand-years equation is the answer to that case, and the sentence straight after it says what the answer is for: the Lord is not slack. This is not a general remark about God and time. It's an apostle explaining why a coming that hasn't arrived is still coming.

Read the seven days of Genesis 1 against that equation and a shape of history appears: six thousand years of man's labor, then a seventh day of rest, which is the thousand-year reign of Revelation 20. Paper 3 works that structure out from the text itself. The three witnesses below converge on it.

An unbroken publishing line, 1840 to today

Govett, Pember, Panton, and Lang weren't the end of that line. Schoettle Publishing Company exists for one purpose: republishing and selling commentaries on the Judgment Seat of Christ and the coming Millennial Kingdom (Schoettle Publishing, "Home"). Its author list runs from Govett's generation to the present day, and it reaches well past the four men already named:

- Robert Govett (1813–1901) — an Oxford man, Fellow of Worcester College and an ordained Church of England priest. His curate's licence at Norwich was revoked in 1844, after he told his bishop he could no longer conscientiously baptize infants; he opened Surrey Chapel in Norwich in 1854 and pastored there until his death. He published from 1840 onward, with a sustained focus on the Bema and the necessity of sanctification following justification (Schoettle Publishing, "Our Most Popular Authors"). He came up through the Church of England and not out of the Brethren, and he wrote decades before Scofield made dispensationalism the popular framework — which tells against treating this position as a dispensationalist offshoot.

- G.H. Pember (1837–1910) — a Cambridge-trained classicist among the British Brethren, best known for *Earth's Earliest Ages* (1876) and for his multi-volume *The Great Prophecies of the Centuries*, which treats the church's prospects separately from Israel's.
- D.M. Panton (1870–1955) — succeeded Govett as pastor of Surrey Chapel in 1901, published the periodical *The Dawn* from 1924 until his death in 1955, and mentored Margaret E. Barber, who in turn mentored Watchman Nee in China — carrying this line of teaching well beyond Britain.
- G.H. Lang (1874–1958) — author of fourteen major books following decades of itinerant ministry across Europe and the Middle East.
- Dr. R.E. Neighbour (1872–1945) — a Baylor-trained Southern Baptist minister and author of over fifty books.
- Kenneth F. Dodson (1908–1976), author of *The Prize of the Up-Calling*; Earl D. Radmacher (1931–2014), president of Western Baptist Seminary from 1965 to 1990; Gary T. Whipple (1929–2009); and J.D. Faust, a currently active pastor and editor of *The Kingdom Alert*.

That's a documented line of ordained ministers, seminary presidents, and published scholars running continuously from the 1840s to the present day — hardly the profile of a belief invented in living memory.

A second-century witness: the Epistle of Barnabas

The Epistle of Barnabas is not Scripture, was not written by the Barnabas of Acts, and is not treated here as inspired — it's cited purely as a historical data point. Scholarly consensus dates it to roughly 70–132, within decades of the apostles themselves. Its fifteenth chapter reads Genesis's six days of creation, followed by God's rest on the seventh, as a template for history itself:

> "This implieth that the Lord will finish all things in six thousand years, for a day is with Him a thousand years... Therefore, my children, in six days, that is, in six thousand years, all things will be finished... And He rested on the seventh day: this He meaneth; when His Son shall come, and shall abolish the time of the Lawless One, and shall judge the ungodly... then shall he truly rest on the seventh day" (Epistle of Barnabas 15, trans. Roberts and Donaldson).

Note what Barnabas places before that seventh day. Not a gradual improvement, and not a rest already underway, but the Son arriving, the lawless one ended, and the ungodly judged. The seventh day begins on the far side of an intervention.

And the chapter doesn't stop at the seventh day. Barnabas goes on to speak of an eighth day, a beginning of another world, and ties Christians' observance of the eighth day to the resurrection. What that eighth day is, and whether the thousand-year measure still applies to it, is a separate question this paper does not take up. It leaves the two things being claimed here untouched: that the six-thousand-plus-one structure was in circulation this early, and that Barnabas expected the seventh to begin with the Son's coming and a judgment.

So the structure this project draws from Genesis (Gen. 1:1–2:3) was already circulating as an accepted framework for reading Scripture within a lifetime or two of the apostles — not something assembled by nineteenth-century dispensationalists, and certainly not by this project.

A living Jewish tradition

The same structure survives, independently, inside Judaism, and it's taught there now, not filed away as a curiosity. The Talmud records it in the name of the School of Eliyahu and Rav Kattina:

> "Six thousand years is this world: two thousand desolation, two thousand Torah, and two thousand years the days of the Mashiach... Six thousand years shall the world exist, and one thousand years it shall be desolate." (Sanhedrin 97a; the passage is reproduced at Rosh Hashanah 31a and Avodah Zarah 9a)

The principle underneath it is the one this project has used throughout — "a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday" (Ps. 90:4; cf. 2 Pet. 3:8). And the structure turns up in every stream of Jewish thought, not in one corner of it. The midrash *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* gives six ages "for going in and coming out, for war and peace," and gives the seventh entirely to Shabbat (ch. 18). The *Zohar*, at the mystical end of that thought rather than the legal one, places Israel's redemption in the sixth millennium and the Shabbat in the seventh (*Zohar*, Vayera 119a). And it's live teaching, not archive: Chabad's published material lays out the six millennia followed by a seventh as the cosmic Shabbat, and rests it on the same Talmudic passage (Chabad.org, "Does Judaism Believe in the Apocalypse?").

Three independent witnesses, then — an unbroken chain of published Christian scholarship stretching back nearly two centuries, a document written within a generation or two of the apostles, and a living tradition inside Judaism completely apart from Christian influence — all converge on the same underlying structure: a bounded present age, followed by a coming reign, patterned after the seven days of creation itself. Word of the Kingdom theology did not invent this framework. It recovered it.

The reward structure is not new either

The three strands above establish that a future kingdom's timing is not a modern invention. The same is true of a second, related claim this project makes: that entering the kingdom does not guarantee identical standing within it, and that reward is measured out according to faithfulness. This too has roots reaching back to the second century.

Irenaeus, in the same *Against Heresies* already cited, teaches an explicit three-tier gradation of reward among the saved, tied to the parable of the sower's differing yields:

> "there is this distinction between the habitation of those who produce a hundred-fold, and that of those who produce sixty-fold, and that of those who produce thirty-fold: for the first will be taken up into the heavens, the second will dwell in paradise, the last will inhabit the city" (*Against Heresies* 5.36.2)

Three yields, three destinations, and every one of them inside the company of the saved. He grounds it in Jesus' own words, "In My Father's house are many mansions" (John 14:2), and he doesn't claim the teaching as his own discovery — he attributes it to "the presbyters, the disciples of the apostles," received tradition rather than invention. Scholars have long debated whether it comes from Papias, who Irenaeus says was "the hearer of John, and a companion of Polycarp" (*Against Heresies* 5.33.4).

The *Shepherd of Hermas*, one of the most widely read Christian texts of the pre-Nicene era — read publicly in some congregations and recommended for reading by Athanasius — makes a related

point through an extended allegory. Its ninth similitude pictures the Church as a tower under construction from stones representing Christians: some fit perfectly and are set in place at once; some are usable but require trimming — a purification process — before they can be fitted in; and some are set aside altogether, including specifically "the wealthy of the world" and those who had become apostate, though repentance and eventual inclusion remain open to at least some of the rejected.

Tertullian, writing around 210 in *De Anima* (ch. 55), drew a related distinction more sharply still: all the departed saved except martyrs remain in Hades awaiting the resurrection, while martyrs alone receive immediate entrance into Paradise, a privilege tied specifically to the manner of their faithfulness. (Some modern scholars read this claim as more rhetorical — aimed at refuting a Valentinian opponent in the same treatise — than as Tertullian's fully settled position elsewhere.)

The theme didn't stop there. Jerome, writing near the end of the fourth century, gave a long stretch of his second book against Jovinian to refuting the proposition that everyone saved receives the same reward, and he did it by piling up passage on passage — the sower's thirty, sixty and hundredfold; the mansions in the Father's house; the laborers called into the vineyard at different hours; and Paul on the men who build gold or stubble on the one foundation (*Against Jovinianus* 2.18-34). That last is 1 Corinthians 3:12-13, the passage central to this project's own reading of the Judgment Seat (see Paper 2). Jerome puts what God will not do in a single line: He does not "assign equal rewards to unequal deserts." A doctrine of differentiated, faithfulness-contingent standing within the kingdom, in other words, was not a stray second-century opinion but a recognized and recurring theme running from the generation after the apostles through to the threshold of the medieval church.

Conclusion

The story this paper has traced is not one of decline followed by a sudden modern correction. It's a story of two doctrines that were reshaped at different points, by different pressures, and were never fully reassembled. Origen bent the church's hermeneutic away from a literal future kingdom; Augustine relocated that kingdom into the present age and made the relocation orthodox for a millennium; the Reformation, in fixing how a person is justified, inherited that relocated kingdom without examining it, and in the same stroke tightened salvation and reward into a single unconditional outcome; and the nineteenth century gave the mainstream back the kingdom's timing without the reward structure the Reformation had flattened, while the men who recovered both in those same decades were followed by comparatively few. What Word of the Kingdom theology teaches is not a new addition to Christian doctrine but the reassembly of two pieces — a real future kingdom, and a real, conditional reward for those found faithful in reaching it — that history separated but Scripture never did.

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